

Best Practices: Higher Education for Children and Youth in Foster Care

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction: Foster Care Education Program

Introduction

College students coming from foster care require more attention than most other first generation students because of their background and their early independent status. Students can arrive at college in a survival mode, focused on basic needs such as safe and stable housing (especially during school breaks and summers), food, transportation, healthcare, and adequate financial aid. This document was created to address some general information around Foster Care and Higher Education access and resources.

Foster Care Definition

The Federal Student Aid (FSA) Application and Verification Guide (AVG) states the definition of foster care is a student who, at any time since the age of 13, was a foster child or a dependent/ward of the court is independent, for the purposes of Title IV financial aid, even if her status changed later.

A foster parent or a legal guardian is not treated as a parent for FSA purposes. When a dependency court creates a guardianship over a dependent child and “closes the court case,” the court still retains jurisdiction over the child. This is true even when the court-appointed legal guardian is not a relative. The child is therefore a ward of the court for purposes of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

What you Need to Know

If a young person has been in foster care at any time after turning 13, his or her classes will likely be paid for at most Washington State colleges. A young person turning 18 in foster care has even more resources available to them. A guide to maximizing financial aid resources for young people from foster care, including a scholarship eligibility quiz, can be found at www.readyssetgrad.org/fostercare. See below for other important resources.

1. FAFSA Question 53

At any time since you turned age 13, were both of your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?

A youth applying for FAFSA should answer yes to question 53. If they are unsure of their foster care status they can contact their [Regional Education Liaison](#) to find out. They should ask the liaison to fill out a “Dependent/ Ward of the Court Verification Letter.” The youth should be sure to print and keep several copies of this document because the college may ask for it to verify their status as a foster youth.

2. Educational Training Vouchers (ETV’s)

Students may receive up to \$5000 a year for qualified school related expenses. Funding is limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis to eligible students.

Students may be eligible for ETV if they meet any one of the following:

- They are 16 to 20, currently in a dependency action in a Washington State or Tribal Court, are in the care and custody of the Department of Social and Health Services or Tribal Child Welfare agency, and are in foster care.
- They are 18 to 20 and exited state or tribal foster care because they reached the age of majority.
- The student was adopted or entered a relative guardianship on or after the age of 16 to 20.
- If the student has participated and received ETV funds prior to 21, they are eligible to the age of 23.

Find out more here: <http://independence.wa.gov/programs/etv-program/>

3. Passport to College Promise Scholarship Program (Passport)

Passport is a comprehensive program providing support to students from high school through higher education completion. Three primary components are administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC): 1) a student scholarship, 2) campus incentive funding to provide recruitment and retention services, and 3) a partnership with the College Success Foundation to provide support to students and training and technical assistance to campus staff.

The primary purpose of the Passport program is to provide former foster youth with financial assistance beyond other state, federal, private, and institutional financial aid for which they are eligible. In addition, the program provides incentive funding to postsecondary institutions that designate campus support staff and take other steps to recruit and retain former foster youth.

In the 2014-15 academic year, 376 students were served. Since 2008, the Passport scholarship has been awarded to an average of 325 students annually.

A groundbreaking data exchange was developed between WSAC, DSHS, and colleges to enable verification of student eligibility. Intensive support services on college campuses assist student retention rates and postsecondary success. Currently, 50 institutions are participating in the “viable plan” to offer these support services.

More information about the Passport Scholarship can be found at readyssetgrad.org.

4. Supplemental Education Transition Planning Program (SETuP)

SETuP provides information to youth, foster families, and school staff about post-high school education and training opportunities for youth in foster care. Contracted SETuP providers in your region can help young people get SETuP for college by offering:

- Financial Aid application assistance.
- Transportation and Housing information and assistance.
- College Application coaching and assistance.
- Pre-College Testing guidance based on educational goals.
- Course planning to help achieve educational goals.
- Resource Links to programs and services especially for youth ages 14-21 in foster care.

For more information, visit <http://independence.wa.gov/programs/setup/>

5. Washington State Governors' Scholarship for Foster Youth

The Washington State Governors' Scholarship for Foster Youth is a scholarship program that helps young men and women from foster care continue their education and earn a college degree.

The program has been supported by the current and former governors in Washington State. Proceeds from the Governors' Cup – an annual golf tournament – provide funding for approximately 40 - 50 new scholars each year.

Scholarship award amounts range from \$2,000 to \$4,000 depending on the college of attendance. The scholarship can be accessed for up to five years to complete an undergraduate study. Students must be enrolled full time and maintain satisfactory academic progress in order to renew the scholarship each year.

You can find more information here:

<http://www.collegesuccessfoundation.org/wa/scholarships/governors>.

For More Information

Please contact Jess Lewis, Foster Care Program Supervisor at 360.725.6050 or by email at

fostercare@k12.wa.us. You can also visit the Foster Care Program website at

<http://www.k12.wa.us/FosterCare/>.