

# TRANSITIONING FROM FOSTER CARE & POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES



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**POSTCARD:** Provided by Foster Care Alumni of America - "How to move forward."

# CHAPTER 13

## Transitioning from Foster Care & Post-Secondary Education Opportunities

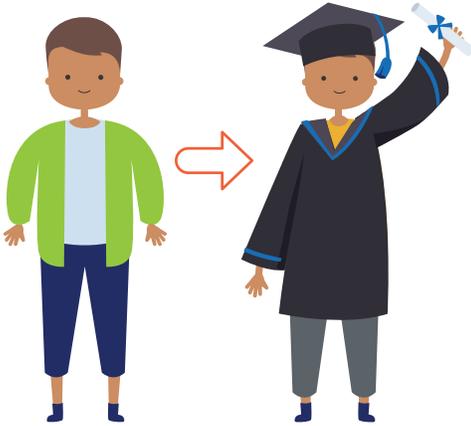
There are many supports and services available to help students in foster care prepare for a successful transition to adulthood. Linking students with these benefits ensures students and caregivers can take advantage of them. LEA Foster Care Liaisons can play a pivotal role in connecting students with Higher Education Foster Care Liaisons and encouraging a successful transition from high school to college. This section provides a high-level overview and brief descriptions of programs and services available. Contact your DFPS regional office and local service providers for more information.

LEA Foster Care Liaisons can play a pivotal role in connecting students with Higher Education Foster Care Liaisons and encouraging a successful transition from high school to college.

### TRANSITIONAL LIVING SERVICES DESCRIBED

**Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Staff:** PAL staff support foster youth by coordinating and providing services that help youth and young adults ages 16 to 21 prepare for their successful transition to adulthood. Life skills training, case management services, and some financial assistance is provided to eligible youth up to age 21. Refer youth and young adults to regional [DFPS PAL staff](#) for more information.

**Transition Centers:** Transition Centers provide a central clearinghouse of one-stop services to serve the diverse needs of youth and young adults currently or formerly in foster care, youth experiencing homelessness, or other at-risk youth from age 15 1/2 to age 25. Transition Centers are designed to serve as host locations for services such as PAL, job readiness and job search assistance, career exploration, higher education enrollment assistance, food and housing assistance, and mentoring. Transition Centers are an excellent place for community partnership for local colleges, Texas workforce solutions, and others to collaborate in serving youth in foster care. These centers are located throughout Texas. Contact and location information can be found on the [DFPS Transition Center](#) webpage.



**Circle of Support (COS):** Students in foster care usually participate in a Circle of Support meeting at age 16 and older but may start as early as age 14. Circle of Support meetings allow students to meet with supportive and caring adults to discuss the student’s goals and future plans for adulthood. The student may invite teachers, school counselors, family members, foster care providers, and mentors to attend the [Circle of Support meeting](#). Counselors and educators are encouraged to participate in Circles of Support when invited by students in foster care, as education-related supports, resources, and goals are important elements for discussion for a student transitioning to a successful adulthood. Ask students in foster care about their circles of support and let them know you are available and willing to attend.

**Extended Foster Care:** This is a voluntary program that allows eligible students enrolled in an education or career training program to extend their stay in foster care (up to the age of 22 to complete high school, or up to age 21 to complete college or vocational/technical training). Youth can discuss options with their PAL staff. More information can be found on the [DFPS Extended Foster Care](#) webpage.

**Supervised Independent Living (SIL):**

[Supervised Independent Living](#) is voluntarily extended foster care placement where young adults live on their own while still receiving casework and support services to help them become independent and self-sufficient. There are different SIL housing options contracted by DFPS and may include apartment settings, college and non-college dorm settings, shared housing settings, and host home settings.



There are a number of colleges and universities that are SIL locations. This partnership between DFPS and local colleges and universities assists students with their post-secondary goals by providing housing and transitional living support and assistance. [Education Reach for Texas](#) maintains a list of Texas colleges that participate.



DFPS [Transitional Living Services](#) - Visit DFPS Transitional Services for general information about the services, resources, and information available to youth currently or formerly in foster care.

## HELPING STUDENTS PREPARE FOR THE TRANSITION TO SUCCESSFUL ADULTHOOD

This section lists and describes important documents students must have as they prepare to transition to a successful adulthood. LEA Foster Care Liaisons and school personnel who work with students on life skills and post-high school planning can help prepare students currently or formerly in foster care by being informed of the following provisions.

**Insurance:** All children and youth in the conservatorship of DFPS are enrolled in STAR Health, a Medicaid program. This program provides continuous medical coverage to young adults ages 18 to 25 who remain in extended foster care at age 18 (see above section on extended foster care). Remind students to update their STAR Health coverage with address changes upon leaving foster care for continuing benefits. For more information, visit [Star Health](#).

**Driver's License:** Students in DFPS conservatorship, and those 18–21 living in a DFPS-paid foster care placement, are eligible for waived driver's license and state identification fees, provided there are funds in the dedicated Department of Public Safety (DPS) account for this purpose. Encourage students to contact their primary caseworker or Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) staff to find out more about this opportunity. Visit [DFPS Personal Documents](#).

### IDENTIFICATION CARD



#### ID CARD



### Make Sure Students Have Obtained Certified Copies of Birth Certificate, Social Security Card, and a Personal I.D. Card:

Youth should receive certified copies (or the original) of these documents before their 16th birthday. School personnel can follow up with students to make sure they have received copies of this important paperwork.

### Documents students should receive or have no later than 30 days before exiting foster care:

School personnel who work with older youth can follow up with students to make sure they have received copies (or the original, if appropriate) no later than 90 days before the youth turns 18:

- ▷ Birth certificate
- ▷ Social Security card
- ▷ Personal identification (ID) card
- ▷ Immunization records
- ▷ Information contained in youth's Health Passport
- ▷ Proof of enrollment in Medicaid, if appropriate (i.e. Medicaid card)
- ▷ Any existing medical power of attorney regarding the youth.



### RESOURCES: Preparing for a Successful Transition to Adulthood

DFPS, "[Access Granted — Texas Foster Care Handbook for Children, Youth & Young Adults](#)" — A youth-friendly guide that provides a general overview of the foster care system and guidance on resources and supports available for youth in Texas. Making this information available in school counseling centers is important for increasing awareness and supporting the unique needs of students in foster care ([English version](#)) ([Spanish version](#)).

DFPS, [Texas Youth Connection](#).

DFPS, [Youth Take Flight Instagram page](#) - Follow this page to receive updates and information.

DFPS, [Transitional Living Services](#).

Texas Foster Youth Justice Project, "[A Guide for Those "Aging Out" of Foster Care in Texas.](#)"

[Texas Foster Youth Justice Project](#).



## HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE & CAREER – CREATING POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS

### TEXAS COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

[Texas College and Career Readiness School Models \(CCRSM\) Network](#) exists to close opportunity gaps and equalize access to high-quality education. Within the CCRSM Network, there are three unique models (listed below) that create a pathway to post-secondary education. Students in foster care benefit greatly from being connected to these types of programs and opportunities to acquire specialized skills, hands-on training, knowledge, and experience to support their post-secondary goals and career preparation.

#### EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL:

[Early College High Schools \(ECHS\)](#) initiative is an open-enrollment program that blends college and high school coursework, enabling students to earn up to two years of college credit (60 hours), tuition-free, while enrolled in high school.

#### PATHWAYS IN TECHNOLOGY EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS (PTECH):

The [P-TECH initiative](#) offers an open-enrollment program that creates workforce pathways aligned with high-demand, high-wage fields throughout the state. Students enrolled in the P-TECH program work toward an associate degree while gaining hands-on work experience. Students who graduate from the P-TECH program

enter the workforce with proven, in-demand skillset, making them top candidates in their chosen industry. Connecting students in foster care to these types of opportunities is highly encouraged.

## TEXAS SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATHEMATICS (T-STEM)

The [T-STEM](#) initiative is an open-enrollment program that engages students in a rigorous STEM curriculum, preparing them for the global marketplace. Students apply what they learn in real-world contexts with campus leaders leveraging business partnerships and STEM enrichment activities, such as clubs and competitions, to promote problem-based thinking.

### CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION:

[Career and Technical Education Programs of Study](#) offer a sequence of courses that provides students with coherent and rigorous content. CTE content is aligned with challenging academic standards and relevant technical knowledge and skills needed to prepare for further education and careers in current or emerging professions. CTE provides work-based learning and on-the-job training opportunities. Students in foster care benefit greatly from being connected to these types of learning and enrichment opportunities. Additionally, students in foster care are a priority student group to be served by the program.



### VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

It is encouraged to link students to vocational education opportunities and create avenues where students may receive specialized training in specific careers or trades. Students often benefit from hands-on training and skill-based instructional environments. Vocational education is a positive pathway for successful student transitions. Take the time to explore a student's interests and goals and connect them to available opportunities.

### DUAL CREDIT

[Dual credit](#) provides the opportunity for an eligible high school student to enroll in college course(s) and receive credit for the course(s) from both the college and high school. Dual credit courses may be taught on the high school or college campus, and course options include both academic and technical subjects.



**Note:** Enrollment in a dual credit course activates a student's lifetime Tuition and Fees Waiver (see *Financial Supports for Post-Secondary Education*, on page 143)

### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS - WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS:

[Workforce Solutions Offices](#) throughout Texas offer vocational education, job training and certificate programs, job preparedness, career exploration, and other resources to teach students skills in preparation for entering the workforce. These types of job-based resources and skill-building opportunities are especially useful for students who plan to enter the workforce immediately or are unsure of their next steps following high school.

### JOB CORPS

[Job Corps](#) is the largest nationwide residential career training program in the country. The program helps eligible youth ages 16 through 24 complete their high school education, train for meaningful careers, and obtain employment.

### TEXAS LOCATIONS INCLUDE:



- » [North Texas Job Corps](#) (McKinney, TX)
- » [Gary Job Corps Center](#) (San Marcos, TX)
- » [Laredo Job Corps Texas](#) (Laredo, TX)
- » [David L. Carrasco Job Corps Center](#) (El Paso, TX)

### ACT AND SAT – COLLEGE PREPARATORY TESTS

LEA Foster Care Liaisons, high school counselors, and others should encourage and assist students with taking college entrance exams, such as the SAT or ACT. Remind students of these exams and help them meet necessary timelines by making a plan to prepare for these tests. Additionally, help students troubleshoot any barriers with the exam fees and ensure they receive any eligible fee waivers due to their foster care status.



### POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES



Remind students of college entrance exams and help them meet necessary timelines by making a plan to prepare for these tests.

There are many financial resources and college campus supports available to help foster youth access and succeed in higher education.



**LAW:** Each public institution of higher education must designate a Higher Education Foster Care Liaison and report the name and contact information for the liaison to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board also has a designated Foster Care Liaison.

LEA Foster Care Liaisons, school counselors, and others working on behalf of the student can significantly support the student's post-secondary planning and transition by connecting them with the [Higher Education Foster Care Liaison](#). This intentional planning and linking between high school and college Foster Care Liaisons helps to ensure that necessary supports and resources are provided and basic needs of the student are met. These connections go a long way in creating a successful transition from high school to college, as positive relationships can help the student feel supported and provide them with the necessary know-how to navigate the college environment.

Some college campuses in Texas have specific support programs for alumni of the foster care system. School personnel should inform students of these resources and link them to higher education opportunities.



**LAW:** State law requires that school staff provide information to all students in grades 11 or 12 in substitute care about the tuition and fee waiver, dual credit, or other courses where a student may earn joint high school and college credit.



**TIP:** LEA Foster Care Liaisons are encouraged to link with local colleges and campus-based support programs to develop connections and facilitate effective transitions into post-secondary learning for students in foster care.



## FINANCIAL SUPPORTS FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

### COLLEGE TUITION AND FEE WAIVER

Some individuals formerly in the Texas foster care system qualify for a lifetime tuition and fees waiver at any Texas state-supported institution of higher education, as long as a student enrolls in at least one college or dual credit before turning 25.

Youth are eligible to have college tuition and fees waived at Texas state-supported colleges or universities, public medical schools, public dental schools, public junior colleges, and public technical institutes (as defined by TEC § 61.003, § 54.001, and § 54.002). This refers to a youth who:

- Was in the conservatorship of DFPS the day before their 18th birthday;
- Was in the conservatorship of DFPS on the day they graduated from high school or received their GED;
- Is in the conservatorship of DFPS and in high school and enrolled in a dual credit course, or other course for which a high school student may earn joint high school and college credit;
- Was in the conservatorship of DFPS on or after their 14th birthday, if the youth was also eligible for adoption on or after that day;
- Was in the conservatorship of DFPS the day before they were adopted, if the adoption occurred on or after September 1, 2009;
- Was in the conservatorship of DFPS the day before permanent managing conservatorship (PMC) was given to an individual who is not the child's parent, if PMC was given to the individual on or after September 1, 2009;
- Has an adoption assistance agreement with DFPS that provided both monthly payments and medical assistance; or
- Was age 14 or older in PMC or age 16 or older in TMC and subsequently exited conservatorship to the legal responsibility of a parent.



**Note:** The tuition and fee waiver is verified in the form of a letter from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services provided to the youth to present to their institution of higher education. Schools may require that the student provide a new letter each academic year.

If after exiting the foster care system the youth returns to DFPS conservatorship, the youth's eligibility will be based on their current foster care circumstances.

A youth or child must have been in DFPS conservatorship before an adoption or PMC was granted to be eligible for the college [tuition and fee waiver](#). Students in foster care who do not enter college immediately after high school may return to college in later years. The Texas lifetime tuition and fee waiver is the only financial resource for foster care alumni that does not expire once it is activated. Therefore, school staff should help students to activate the college [tuition and fees waiver](#) while they are still in high school.

### EDUCATION & TRAINING VOUCHER (ETV) PROGRAM

The Education & Training Voucher (ETV) program is a federally funded and state administered program for youth in foster care or those adopted from DFPS after turning age 16. It is available to youth starting at age 16 up to the age of 23. Expenses like books, transportation, and other school-related costs are covered through ETV. Students may be eligible to receive up to \$5,000 in financial assistance per year to support them in reaching their post-secondary education goals. Visit the [DFPS ETV Program](#) page for more information and eligibility requirements.



### FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FAFSA)

It is important that students applying for college fill out their FAFSA accurately to qualify for the maximum number of scholarships and financial resources available. There are specific questions which ask prospective students to identify themselves as having been in foster care. Former foster youth qualify for the greatest amount of need-based financial aid available. School staff, LEA Foster Care Liaisons, and other partners can help students receive these benefits by assisting students as they complete their FAFSA applications. Students should also be aware that, while the federal government does not have a firm deadline for completion of the FAFSA application, Texas has a priority deadline of January 15th of their senior year of high school. Students applying for financial aid in Texas should submit their FAFSA applications by the priority deadline in order to maximize the amount of aid they may receive. It is also important for the student to be aware of their responsibility to maintain the required Grade Point Average (GPA) and course completion rate in order to maintain financial aid. There are financial penalties for students who do not complete their courses within the semester.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

In accordance with TEC § 28.0256, beginning in the 2021-2022 school year with students enrolled in the 12th grade, each student must do one of the following in order to graduate:

- ✓ Complete and submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
- ✓ Complete and submit a Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA); or
- ✓ Submit a signed opt-out form.



**TIP:** It is helpful for school counselors and liaisons to be aware of the foster care specific questions on the FAFSA, as they assist students in filing their application:

[Free Application for Federal Student Aid, Foster Care Questions.](#)

### OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

There are additional foster care specific scholarships that may be available through non-profit and private sector organizations. Additionally, there are other types of scholarships that students may qualify for. Foster Care Liaisons, school counselors and others are encouraged to assist students with seeking out and applying for other types of scholarships for which students may qualify.

## PREPARING STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE



All students need to feel successful and confident when preparing for college. School personnel can play a key role in encouraging students in foster care to believe college is possible!

Regardless of a student's current academic achievement, participation in college-related coursework and activities increases a student's college readiness, thereby making college a more accessible and attainable goal. Linking students to college and developmental (if needed) courses allows them to engage with the college environment while still receiving emotional and academic supports from the high school, child welfare system, and the student's caring adult support network.

**School personnel can play a key role in encouraging students to believe college is possible!**



**Reminder:** When students complete their college application via [applytexas.org](http://applytexas.org), close attention should be paid when filling out their current or prior foster care status. These questions help colleges and universities identify students who may be eligible to receive additional financial and campus supports.



**TIP: Texas Lifetime Tuition and Fees Waiver**

- » The tuition and fee waiver is activated regardless of whether a student completes a course.
- » Contact the student's PAL Staff to make sure that the DFPS State Tuition and Fee Waiver Form has been provided to confirm that the student meets one of the criteria of the waiver.
- » The DFPS State Tuition and Fee Waiver Form is provided in a hard copy from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Requesting multiple copies of the letter and storing a copy for a student in the event the waiver becomes lost or stolen may help expedite college enrollment.
- » In the event a new copy of the DFPS State Tuition and Fee Waiver Form is needed, contact the Regional DFPS office Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) staff where the youth is from or DFPS state office.
- » Students must present a hard copy of the DFPS State Tuition and Fee Waiver Form when enrolling at a public Texas higher education institution. The university or college then decides whether to grant the waiver. Communicate with each college individually to determine their methods for applying the waiver and which department will accept and store the document.

## COLLEGE SUPPORT NETWORKS AND COLLEGE CAMPUS PROGRAMS

Education Reach for Texans is a statewide network focused on increasing college access and retention for foster care alumni. Education Reach for Texans works with colleges and universities statewide in establishing and promoting best practices in higher education for students formerly in foster care. College campus-based supports for foster care alumni are continuously expanding throughout Texas.

Visit the [Education Reach for Texans](#) website to learn more about their annual conference, college access, and other resources available for students in foster care.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Every higher education institution is required to have a designated foster care liaison who assists students in or formerly in foster care in navigating higher education. Visit [Higher Education Foster Care Liaison list](#) for more information.

## DO STUDENTS NEED A BACTERIAL MENINGITIS VACCINATION IN ORDER TO ENTER COLLEGE?

**Yes.** This is also called the meningococcal vaccine. Texas college or university students cannot start classes until they show documentation that their vaccination or booster dose is current. Vaccinations are good for five years and must be done, at the latest, 10 days before the start of classes. Ensure students and caregivers are aware of this information and help connect them with the appropriate resources to satisfy this requirement.

Note: Students in foster care receive free medical coverage through STAR Health (*see Helping Students Prepare for the Transition to Successful Adulthood, on page 139*).

Visit [Texas Department of State Health Services](#) for more information.



## RESOURCES: Planning for Post-Secondary Education

### State Foster Care Resources:

- [DFPS, "DFPS Higher Education Services/Information for Current and Former Foster Youth, Adopted Youth, and youth in PCA/PMC" — An informative DFPS brief describing college financial resources available for Texas students in foster care.](#)
- [DFPS Youth Connection - Information about financial resources available for students in foster care.](#)
- [Education Reach for Texans, Texas Post-Secondary Programs for Students Formerly in Foster Care.](#)
- [Texas Children's Commission, "Texas Higher Education Foster Care Liaisons Resource Guide." — Information to support college planning and access for students in or formerly in foster care in Texas.](#)

### National Resources:

- [U.S. Department of Education, "Foster Care Transition Toolkit."](#)
- [Free Application for Federal Student Aid, "Foster Care Questions."   
 <https://studentaid.gov/2122/help/foster-care>](#)
- [Casey Family Programs, "Achieving Higher Education Goals" – Tools and scholarship information to support students in foster care with accessing higher education.](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway, College Scholarships and Supports for Higher Education.](#)

### General State Resources:

- [College for All Texans – Great links and resources to navigate career and college planning.](#)
- [Own Your Own Future](#)
- [Texas Gear Up](#)
- [TEA Dual Credit FAQ](#)