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Postsecondary Programs and Services for Current and Former Foster Care Youth in California

Chequita S. Brown, Nidia Ruedas-Gracia, and Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher

OCCRL
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Postsecondary Pathways
for Former Foster Care Youth

Introduction

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The Postsecondary Pathways for Former Foster Care Youth (PP-FFCY) study is a research project that focuses on the transitions of foster care alums to and through postsecondary institutions. Through the Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL), the PP-FFCY project team is conducting a comprehensive needs assessment report that 1) provides a descriptive profile of Illinois foster care alums; 2) examines postsecondary access, opportunities, and supports for Illinois foster youth; and 3) addresses disparities in career and technical education (CTE) programs.

Although the PP-FFCY project focuses on Illinois foster youth, it is beneficial to examine programs and resources for foster care alums in other states. Consequently, in this research brief, we highlight California postsecondary programs and services that support youth in care, in addition to young adults aging out of foster care. Outlined below is a comprehensive review of the general and foster youth demographic profiles in California, followed by an overview of various forms of student aid (e.g., national-, state-, and campus-level support) available for individuals with foster care backgrounds, as well as a synopsis of foster youth CTE program enrollment.

California's General Population

As the nation's most populous state, California has more than 39 million residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Since the early 1900s, California has experienced unparalleled growth. Between 1920 and 1950, California's total population more than tripled, growing from less than 2 million to 10 million people (Johnson et al., 2020). Over the years, California's population continued to experience steady growth. Through local demographic shifts such as increased births and fewer deaths, as well

as international migration, over three million residents were added to California's population within the past 10 years (Johnson et al., 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

California is also one of the most diverse states in the nation. Recognized as a minority-majority state, California's population includes over 10 million immigrants representing more than 60 countries (Johnson et al., 2020; Johnson & Sanchez, 2019). According to the 2021 United States Census QuickFacts, 40.2% of the residents were Latino, 35.2% were White, 15.9% were Asian, 6.5% were African American, 4% were multiracial, 1.7% were American Inidan and Alalska Native, and less than 1% were Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (U.S. Census, 2021). During the next three decades, projections indicate that California's population will continue to increase, with an average

annual upsurge of at least 300,000 people between 2020 and 2030 (Johnson et al., 2020).

California's Foster Care Population

California's child welfare system has an equally distinctive demographic. With more than 391,098 children registered in foster care nationwide (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021), California serves roughly 59,000 children in foster care, making its child welfare system the most populated in the nation (Webster et al., 2019a). In 2018, youth of the ages 16 through 20 represented 22% (n= 13,269) of all children receiving services and support through the California child welfare system. Ages 11 through 15 (n=12,573) and ages 6 through 10 (n=12,402) were both approximately 21%, ages 3 through 5 were 15% (n=8,761), ages 1 through 2 were 14% (n=8,087) and under age 1

representing 7% (n=4,080) (Websteret al., 2019a).

Despite being recognized as a state with no racial majority, racial disproportionality exists in the foster care system. In 2018, Latinx children represented 50% (n=29,771) of all children in foster care, followed by White children at 23% (n=13,305), then by African-American/ Black children who represented 22% of the population (n=12,866). Of the remaining youth in care, 2% (n=1,195) of the population were Asian/Pacific Islanders and 1% were American Indian/Alaska Native (Webster et al., 2019b).

Federal- and State-level Financial Supports

Over 70% of fomer foster youth aspire to earn a college. However, research suggest 32%-45% foster youth enroll in college compared to 63% of students within the general population (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Of those who successfully matriculate

at a postsecondary institution, 3%-11% of foster youth earn a college degree (Dworsky, 2018; Havlicek et al., 2021). To address the educational gap between foster youth and their non-foster peers, policymakers at the federal and state levels established various financial support programs to increase postsecondary access and retention among foster care alums (Cochrane & Szabo-Kubitz, 2009; Dworsky, 2018; Geiger et al., 2016; Wolanin, 2005). Below is a list of financial-aid programs available to foster care youth in California. While this summary is not exhaustive, it highlights many notable programs available in the state.

The Federal Pell Grant

Pell Grants are the largest federal, need-based grant program for low-income students. Funding is distributed based on 1) a student's expected family contribution (EFC); 2) the cost of attendance at selected institutions; 3) a student's enrollment status (full-time or part-time); and 4) the amount of time a student is enrolled for the semester. Individuals must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form to receive funds. Students with foster care backgrounds can apply for student aid as an independent student and are eligible to receive up to $6,345 per year in Pell Grant funds for postsecondary education expenses (Federal Pell Grant, 2020).

Chafee Grants

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independent Program was authorized under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act by the Foster Care Independent Act of 1999 (P. L. 106-169). Chafee programs provide federal and state funds to current and former foster youth, specifically youth who are considered a ward of the state between the ages of 16 to 18 and who have a financial need. Eligible youth can receive up to $5,000 per year for postsecondary education (e.g., academic or vocational) expenses such as tuition, room and board, transportation, books, and other related expenses.

Foster youth are eligible for Chafee Grants until the age of 26. However, to qualify for Chafee grant, foster youth must submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Foster youth without a social security number can submit California Dream Act Application (CADAA). Students enrolled at least part-time at a college, university or technical school in California or out of state are elibile to receive Chafee funds. Also, student must consistently make satisfactory progress toward completing their selected educational program (CSAC, 2022a; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019; Wolanin, 2005).

Cal Grants

Cal Grants is a state-level program designed to provide low- and middle-income Californians with financial support while earning a postsecondary education. These grants are accepted at the University of California and California State University, as well as at California Community College campuses and qualifying independent and career colleges or technical schools in the state (CSAC, 2022b). Eligibility is based on students' Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act Application (CADAA). There are three types of Cal Grants (Cal Grants A, B, or C), and funds are awarded based on students' FAFSA and the postsecondary institution type noted on the FAFSA form (e. g., four-year, two-year, and vocational). For example, students attending a University of California institution may be eligible for Cal Grant A, which provides up to $12,570 toward tuition and fees. Students enrolled at a California community college (CCC) will receive smaller grant amounts such as Cal Grant C, which allots $1,094 for books and other required equipment for students enrolled in an occupational or technical program at a CCC.

Other grants and financial resources

Although California does not offer a statewide tuition waiver program, various postsecondary institutions in the state provide tuition assistance to eligible students. For example, California State University offers the Foster Youth Tuition Wavier program for eligible current and former foster youth enrolled in an undergraduate program (the California State University, 2022). Orginating from a state legislative bill in 2018 (Senate Bill 967), eligible students are provided with a waiver of tuition and mandatory system-wide fees at any of the 23 campuses within the CSU system. To be eligible for the CSU Foster Youth Tuition Waiver, students must meet the following requirement:

1. Be a current or former foster care youth;
2. Be a California resident;
3. Be enrolled in a CSU undergraduate program;
4. Submit a FASFA form to demonstrate financial need;
5. Be under the age of 26 at the beginning of the academic year

If eligible, the CSU Foster Youth Tuition Wavier covers the cost of tuition and mandatory system-wide fees at any of the CSU campuses. Additionally, the waiver may cover the cost of books and housing in some cases. To maintain eligibility, students must maintain good academic standing with the university.

The California Promise College grant, formerly known as the Board of Governors Fee Waiver, is a tuition waiver program for low-income students enrolled at a community college. The grant is designed to help cover the cost of tuition and other mandatory fees at California Community Colleges. Eligibility for the California Promise Grant is based on financial need and other criteria such as being a California resident, meeting academic progress requirements, and not having a bachelor's degree. Students who qualify for the grant will have their enrollment fees waived and may be eligible for additional financial aid to cover the cost of textbooks, transportation, and other educational expenses at any of the CSU campuses.

California Campus-based Resources and Services

There are several campus-based programs at both two- and four-year institutions purposed to increase postsecondary access, retention, and educational attainment among foster youth in California. At the helm of this mission is California College Pathways (CCP), a statewide public-private partnership that provides resources to campuses and community organizations with the goal of helping improve foster youths' postsecondary outcomes. Through college and community collaborations, advocacy, and research, CCP serves as a catalyst of change for foster youth by increasing postsecondary enrollment and promoting academic success. Over the years, CCP has accomplished various policy initiatives such as fee waivers, priority registration for homeless students, and priority access to on-campus housing. Below is a list of some notable campus-based programs that target foster care youth in California.

Guardian Scholars

The Guardian Scholars program provides services and support to current, and former foster youth enrolled at postsecondary institutions. Through comprehensive programs and holistic advising, the Guardian Scholars program aims to improve the educational outcomes for foster youth by supporting their transition to and through higher education and helping students achieve their academic and personal goals. Program participants can receive a range of services to assist with their transition to campus life, such as:

- On-campus housing assistance
- Career/workforce advising, development, and support
- Counseling, advocacy, and personal support
- Priority registration
- Leadership development
- Financial advising and literacy

The Guardian Scholars program and services are offered at various two- and four-year college campuses throughout California, including River City College; City College of San Francisco; California State University, Fullerton; and University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

NextUp/CAFYES

The NextUp Program (formerly CAFYES) promotes the success of current and former foster youth who are enrolled at California Community College (CCC). The NextUp program assists students in balancing social, emotional, and financial needs through a broad web of support services such as:

- Counseling
- Priority registration
- Meal service
- Book grants
- Housing assistance
- Specialized workshops
- Academic, career, and personal advising
- Connections to on-campus and off-campus resources
- Financial aid application assistance (e.g., FAFSA, scholarships, and Chafee)

The NextUp program is currently available at 45 community college campuses in California (e.g., College of Alameda, Cerro Coso Community College, and College of the Sequoias, to name a few). The program is housed within existing community college programs for educationally disadvantaged students and is known as Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS). Inquiries about the NextUp program should be directed to the Next Up coordinator or counselor at the postsecondary institution of choice.

Renaissance Scholars

The Renaissance Scholars program increases college access, retention, and attainment among former foster youth, unaccompanied homeless youth, and other independent-status youth. The Renaissance Scholars program provides comprehensive support to incoming first-year, transfer, and continuing students as they navigate college life and pursue their academic and personal goals. The Renaissance Scholars program and services are offered at California State University, Fresno; California State Polytechnic University, Pomona; and the University of California, Santa Cruz. The program is available on other campuses throughout California as well.

Foster Youth and Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Over the years, career and technical education (CTE) has transitioned from a college alternative to an essential postsecondary education and training pathway. CTE programs aim to create an avenue for students to seamlessly transition from college to career by improving students' academic and technical skills. In 2018, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) were enacted to develop and enhance career pathway programs that increase academic and vocational skills among disadvantaged populations (Granovskiy, 2018; P.L. 115-224).

Within the CTE database, students are categorized based on gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as by special populations such as "Individuals with Disabilities" (ADA), "Single Parents," "Limited English Proficient," and "Economically Disadvantaged". Under the Perkins V reauthorization, the special populations category was expanded to include youth with parents in active military, homeless individuals, and current and former foster youth (Granovskiy, 2018; P.L. 115-224). Based on Perkins V enrollment data, roughly 11.7 million students were enrolled in CTE programs nationwide, of which foster youth represented less than 1% (n=45,944) of the total students participating in CTE programs (Perkins Collectve Resource Network [PCRN], 2022). Of the CTE students with foster care experience, 31.4% (n=14,449)

attended a California high school or postsecondary institution (PCRN, 2022).

In California, bridging high school CTE courses and community college programs plays an essential role in sustaining workforce needs and improving career outcomes (Bohn et al., 2018). During the 2020-2021 academic year, 21% (n=3,033) high school-aged foster youth and 79% (n=11,416) college students with foster care experience were enrolled in a California CTE course (PCRN, 2022). It is noteworthy to mention the data does not account for dual enrollment in postsecondary CTE prgrams. Nor is there a clear variation in CTE program enrollment and completion among California foster youth by demographic variables such as race and gender. However there is a saturation of data relative to foster youths' enrollment based on select industries. As indicated in Figure 1, Arts, A/V Technology and Commuications (n=859) programs are most popular among high school-aged foster youth, followed by Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources (n=431) and Hospitality and Tourism (n=347) (PCRN, 2022).

Figure 1: CTE Program Enrollment by Industry Sector and Institution Type
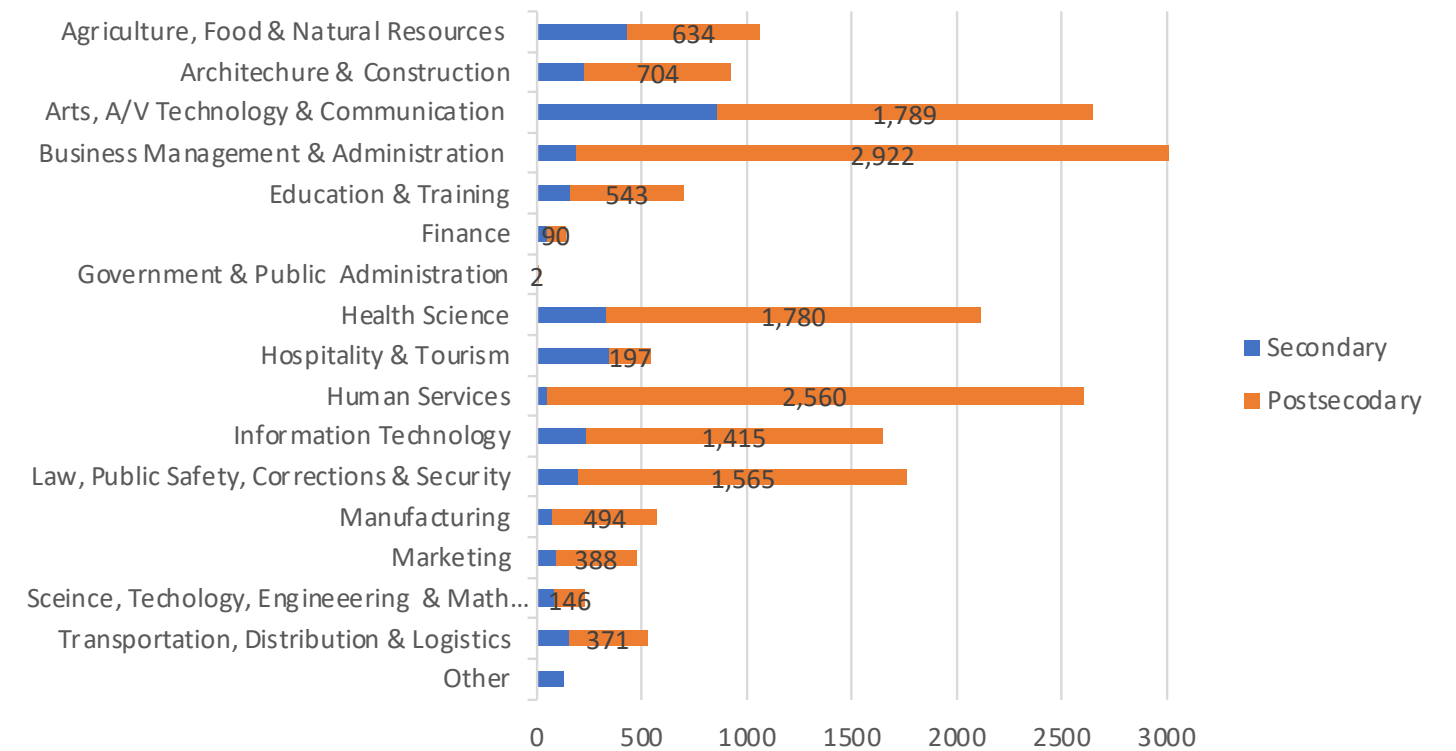
Note: Figure 1 is created based on data from Perkins V enrollment data: CTE participant report for program year 2020-2021 for all states by (Perkins Collectve Resource Network [PCRN], 2022).

At the postsecondary level, business management and admistration (n=2,922) and human services (n=2,560) are the most popular industry sectors among college students with foster care experience. Once again, enrollment data for foster youth indicate arts and media (n =1,789) is a sought-after industry, followed by health science (n=1,780) and law and public safety (n-1,565). While research suggest indivudals with CTE credentials in select fields (e.g., health services) can potentially yeiled signficanly higher employment and earnings than individuals with a bachelor's degrees (Carnevale et al, 2020), information related to foster youths' CTE program completion and employment outcomes across industry sectors is sparse.

Summary

There are roughly 59,000 youth in care in California ranging from under the age of 1 to 21. Federal and state aid is available in California that provides a range of support and services to strengthen postsecondary pathways for foster youth. In the state, foster youth are eligible for various grants and tuition waivers to attend two- and four-year institutions. Campus-based support programs such as Guardian Scholars and Renaissance Scholars provide foster youth with comprehensive programming and supports such as advising, priority registration, and housing assistance to support their transition to and through higher education and to improve their educational outcomes.

California foster youth represented 31% (n=14,449) of all foster youth in a secondary or postsecondary CTE program nationwide during the 2021-2022 academic year (PCRN, 2022). While the majority of high school-aged foster youth were enolled in arts and media CTE programs, human services and business management industry sectors were most popular among college students with foster care experience. Still, data relative to foster youth's CTE program enrollment and completion by demographic variables such as race and gender is sparse. Further, little is known about foster youth's employment and economic outcomes post earning CTE credentials. Thus, having a comprehensive view of foster youth's CTE program enrollment, persistence and completion according to their demographic variables is needed at the secondary- and postsecondary educational level.

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