Maximizing
Access &
Success
for Special
Populations

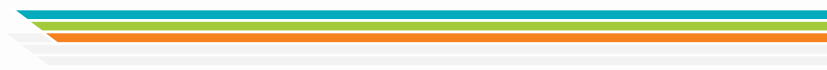# Supporting Foster Youth
in Career Technical Education

Career Technical Education (CTE) policies and programs have increasingly focused on supporting the needs of historically marginalized learners and closing access and performance gaps among learner groups. Perkins V, the latest iteration of federal CTE legislation known as the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, is part of this trend. The law defines nine learner groups as special populations and includes a number of provisions that address expanding access to and supporting success within CTE programs for special populations. This brief will describe strategies for supporting one of these special populations: foster youth.

SPECIAL POPULATIONS IN PERKINS V

LEARNER GROUPS DEFINED AS
SPECIAL POPULATIONS IN PERKINS V:

- Out-of-workforce individuals
- English learners
- Individuals experiencing homelessness
- Individuals with disabilities
- Single parents, including single pregnant women
- Youth who are in/have aged out of the foster care system
- Individuals preparing for careers that are non-traditional for their gender
- Youth with a parent who is a member of the armed forces and is on active duty
- Individuals from economically disadvantaged families, ex. low-income youth and adults

*CTE educators are developing strategies to support learner groups who, while not special populations under the law, may need additional supports, including **migrant and undocumented, LGBTQ+ and justice-involved learners**.*

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DEFINING FOSTER YOUTH

Foster youth are defined in Perkins V as youth who are in, or have aged out of, the foster care system. This learner group is also identified in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as a population of interest, and ESEA regulations provide additional details about the types of placements that should be considered when identifying this population. Each state ultimately determines how long after aging out of the foster system individuals will be included in this learner group for the purposes of data reporting and services.

CTE policies and programs support foster youth because these learners are much less likely than their peers to graduate from high school, pursue postsecondary education and find fulfilling careers.[1] In fact, one of the eight stated purposes of Perkins V legislation is to increase "employment opportunities for populations who are chronically unemployed or underemployed," including foster youth.

STRATEGIES FOR FOSTER YOUTH

Foster youth were first defined as a special population in Perkins V, so states and local CTE leaders are in the early phases of implementing strategies to support this learner group. Potential state (🏛) and local (📍) approaches include:

Proactive communication 📍

On the local level, CTE educators and counselors can be proactive about connecting with newly enrolled foster youth and their caregivers, especially those enrolling in the middle of the school year, and keeping track of placement changes. Using a single point of contact can streamline communications.

Self-disclosure 📍

Self-disclosure on the postsecondary level can unlock many resources for former foster youth. CTE educators at community and technical colleges can advocate for self-disclosure at discrete points such as enrollment and connect learners to support structures.

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[1] Youth.gov (n.d.). *Youth adults formerly in foster care: Challenges and solutions.* https://youth.gov/youth-briefs/foster-care-youth-brief/challenges

Support structures 📍

Regional and local networks of school counselors, advisers, student support specialists and other school or college staff can assist foster learners with needs such as transportation, housing, financial aid and more. States can facilitate this effort by enabling local recipients to reduce or eliminate out-of-pocket expenses for special populations, which is an allowable use of funds under Perkins or can be covered by other federal or state funding streams.

Coordination of supports across special populations 🏛 📍

Many learners qualify under multiple special population designations. As many as half of all foster youth are identified as having a disability,[2] and many former foster youth experience homelessness.[3] Connecting with special education coordinators and McKinney-Vento liaisons on the state and local levels can help CTE programs deliver coordinated, comprehensive supports.

Standardized course sequencing 🏛

State systems can help foster youth and former foster youth transition more seamlessly between institutions and across learner levels by developing standardized course names and sequences, including state-developed programs of study. This standardization can help foster youth who have changed districts or colleges to pick up where they left off without losing credits or momentum.

Cross-agency coordination and partnership 🏛 📍

On the state and local levels, foster and child welfare agencies, guardian ad litem groups and foster youth clubs can help CTE educators understand the needs of this learner group. State agencies may also be able to securely match data to identify CTE learners who are or have been foster youth, while protecting learner privacy.

For additional resources, visit the *Perkins V Section* and the *Maximizing Access and Success for Special Populations in Career Technical Education series page in the Learning that Works Resource Center*

[2] Bass, G. (2017). *The role of foster parents in improving educational outcomes for youth in foster care.* https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_2/862

[3] Youth.gov (n.d.). *Youth adults formerly in foster care: Challenges and solutions.* https://youth.gov/youth-briefs/foster-care-youth-brief/challenges

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The strategies described above are not mutually exclusive and not all will be appropriate based on the needs of your foster youth population. Before enacting new strategies, assess the current state of foster youth in your CTE programs and dig into root causes of barriers and challenges:

- What do current foster youth or alumni who were in the foster care system tell you about their needs, challenges and successes?

- What does your data show about the CTE participation and concentration of foster youth?

- What does your data show about the performance of foster youth?

- On the secondary level, what dual enrollment opportunities are available? How many foster youth take advantage of these opportunities?

- On the postsecondary level, how do you encourage former foster youth to self-disclose so they can be eligible for services?

- How do you communicate with foster youth and, if applicable, their caregivers?

- What support services are available for foster youth and caregivers? How are they made aware of these services?

- Which agencies or community organizations could you connect with to support foster youth?

- How do your career exploration, guidance and planning processes encourage foster youth to develop agency over their postsecondary and career planning?

CASE STUDY

To tackle the challenge of foster care youth who have aged out of services without a high school credential or a plan for further education or employment, East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT) in Arizona is leveraging $10 million from the state Legislature to develop a coordinated package of underlined programming, supports and housing for this population. Former foster youth ages 17-22 will be able to earn a high school diploma or GED, participate in a CTE program and earn an industry credential, and live on campus in a dedicated residential hall opening in July 2024. Among the supports available will be job placement assistance and mentors who will teach skills such as opening a bank account.

In addition, EVIT staff are planning to enable former foster youth to stay in the residential housing for several months after they complete their program and find a job so that they can save money for their own housing. EVIT is also launching its first associate degree program in 2024, which will enable former foster youth and others to continue into postsecondary education.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT FOSTER YOUTH

- **Dual Enrollment for Foster Youth: Toward Effective Practice** (Career Ladders Project, 2022)
- **Outcomes of Youth Transitioning From Foster Care to Adulthood: A Literature Review** (Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, 2019)
- **Guide to Supporting Students in Foster Care, 2nd edition** (Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction and Treehouse, 2017)
- **The Role of Foster Parents in Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care** (Bass, 2017)
- **Foster Youth Education Toolkit** (Alliance for Children's Rights et al., 2016)
- **The Role of Schools in Supporting Children in Foster Care** (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, March 2010)
- **Educational Supports for Older Youth in Foster Care** (Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

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