



POLICY BRIEF – COMPLETION OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Former foster youth are most able to succeed in higher education and training programs when they receive supports tailored to the unique challenges they face. According to the Institute for Higher Education Policy,¹ the obstacles that foster youth face to completing a higher education or training program can include:

- A lack of independent living and study skills,
- Financial strain and the resulting preoccupation with these concerns,
- Mental health challenges,
- A lack of information about assistance that is available or resistance to taking advantage of it out of a desire to put the “system” behind them,
- A lack of familiarity within the educational systems about the unique concerns facing foster youth, and
- The need for stable, year-round housing (often in the absence of family supports or other alternatives).

The little data that is available indicates that without comprehensive supports, foster youth’s rates not only of enrollment, but also of college completion are dramatically lower than their peers. Again according to the Institute for Higher Education Policy, five percent or fewer of foster youth complete their degrees, compared to 20 percent of their peers.² On the other hand, one example of a comprehensive support program for former foster youth called Guardian Scholars has had a retention rate of nearly 70% for its former foster youth participants.³

LAWS THAT ADDRESS THE NEED FOR SUPPORT OF FORMER FOSTER YOUTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

As a result of Assembly Bill (AB) 2463 (Caldera, 1996), Cal. Educ. Code § 89342 requires the Trustees of the California State University (CSU) and Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges (CCC) to assist emancipated foster youth by:

- (a) reviewing housing concerns for youth living in college dorms to ensure housing during the school year, including vacations and holidays,

¹ *Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth, A Primer for Policymakers*, Thomas R. Wolanin, The Institute for Higher Education Policy (December 2005), p. 44, available online at: <http://www.ihep.com/Pubs/PDF/fosteryouth.pdf> (last retrieved January 2, 2007).

² *Id.* at p. vii.

³ See the website of the Orangewood Children’s Foundation, link to “Guardian Scholars Brief Program Description,” for more information, available at: http://www.orangewoodfoundation.org/programs_scholars.asp (last retrieved January 3, 2007).

- (b) providing technical assistance and advice to campuses on how to improve the delivery of services to emancipated foster youth, and
- (c) tracking the retention rates of students who voluntarily disclose to the university or community college their status as emancipated foster youth.

Further, as a result of AB 2463 Cal. Educ. Code § 89344 requires that the appropriate CSU Advisory Councils include at least one former foster youth who is a current or former student at the university. Finally, Cal. Educ. Code § 89345 requires the State University Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and California Community College Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) to ensure that identified emancipated foster youth are informed of their services, including mentoring.

Additionally, there are multiple sources of federal and state-level, as well as privately funded, financial aid available to support former foster youth in their pursuit of post-secondary education or training. One federal aid program specifically created for the benefit of foster youth is the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) component of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, which provides qualifying former foster youth with up to \$5000 in grant-based aid per year.⁴ In 2006, the California Legislature and Governor allocated an additional \$5.7 million to supplement the federal funds available to meet the needs of qualifying youth who would otherwise have been turned away from this program.

Unfortunately, however, many foster youth do not receive all of the aid for which they are eligible. As the legislature stated in Cal. Educ. Code § 89341(a)(3) when it passed AB 2463, only 10 percent of foster youth who apply for a Cal Grant, California's need-based financial aid award, actually ever receive that grant. Still other foster youth receive the maximum aid for which they are eligible, but do not receive it in a timely manner or find that it is insufficient to meet their needs.

PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT FORMER FOSTER YOUTH AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Some comprehensive support programs, such as the Guardian Scholars Program in the greater Orange County area mentioned above, provide academic advising, housing assistance, job assistance, tutoring, financial aid assistance and mentoring.⁵ The Orangewood Children's Foundation offers guidance on the commitment that is required of an educational institution to replicate the success of this program, including: 1) a financial aid specialist to serve as a liaison to

⁴ "Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001," PL 1-7-133, Sec. 477 (i) of Part E of Title IV of the Social Security Act (2001).

⁵ See Orangewood Children's Foundation website, *supra*.

program participants, 2) a dedicated program director, 3) assistance for year-round housing, and 4) a mentorship component of the program.⁶

Possible Courses of Action:

- Prioritize former foster youth for existing on-campus support programs and ensure that those programs tailor their services to the unique needs of former foster youth (e.g. EOP/EOPS);
- Provide state support for replication of comprehensive on-campus support programs for former foster youth (tailored by each school);
- Gather and analyze postsecondary education and training enrollment and completion data (including education-related retention data required by laws described above);
- Clarify and/or increase financial aid eligibility for postsecondary education to more fully meet the needs of former foster youth (e.g. via tuition waivers);
- Create policies to ensure that foster youth receive needed financial aid and training vouchers for postsecondary educational pursuits in a timely manner;
- Implement requirement that CSU advisory councils include at least one former foster youth student; and
- Address housing concerns for former foster youth in postsecondary educational programs by developing housing options.

For example:

- Allow foster care payments to be made for on-campus housing of youth who are enrolled in college while still in foster care;
- Create preferences for on-campus housing for former foster youth, similar to those that frequently exist for student-athletes;
- Ensure that existing housing is available to former foster youth year-round.

⁶ *Id.*

