



California Foster Youth Education Task Force

POLICY BRIEF – TRANSITION TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Many foster youth succeed academically and in other capacities despite the trauma they have been exposed to, a lack of family support, low expectations others and the youth themselves may have had, and frequent disruptions to their education. It is, however, no surprise that many youth in out-of-home care struggle greatly in the face of these challenges to not only succeed in secondary school but continue on and enroll in postsecondary education or training. In addition to the suggestions made in the Special Academic Needs and Assembly Bill (AB) 490-related Policy Briefs, we must better support foster youth *and* those who work with or care for them to have increased aspirations and information about how to access higher education and training opportunities.

Even among foster youth who are college-eligible (high school graduates), only 20 percent attend postsecondary education, compared with 60 percent of their peers.¹ Foster youth and those who work with them need to believe that they are “college material,” to make the connection between the youth’s career goals and postsecondary education or training, and to understand and tackle complex application and financial aid processes.

LAWS THAT SUPPORT INCREASED ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS

California’s leadership took steps toward addressing the needs of foster youth and their caregivers for greater access to information about postsecondary options in AB 2463 (Caldera & Alpert, 1996) and Senate Bill (SB) 1639 (Alarcon, 2004).

As a result of AB 2463, Cal. Educ. Code §§ 89346 & 89347 require the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and county welfare departments, in coordination with the California State University (CSU), the California Community Colleges (CCC) and the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), to communicate with foster youth at two grade levels designated jointly by the California State University and the California Community Colleges in order to facilitate outreach and technical assistance efforts for these prospective students.

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

As a result of SB 1639, Cal. Welfare & Inst. Code § 16001.9 (23) states that foster youth have the right at 16 or older to have access to information “regarding the educational options available, including, but not limited to, the coursework necessary for vocational and postsecondary educational programs, and information regarding financial aid for postsecondary education.” Cal. Educ. Code § 66019.3 (a) also encourages CSU and CCC to disseminate information about admissions requirements and financial aid to foster care agencies. Finally, Cal. Educ. Code § 66019.3 (b) requests that the Regents of the University of California and the Trustees of CSU explore methods of using the admissions-by-exemption category to assist the transition of students in foster care into four-year public institutions of higher education.

Possible Courses of Action:

- Designate two days each year that are designed for exposing foster youth to college. These days would include events that provide significant exposure to college life and enhance the opportunity for foster youth to make a successful application to college through the provision of activities such as; application workshops, FASFA workshops and college success workshops. These events would be implemented collaboratively at the local level with vested county partners i.e. universities, community colleges, FYS and AB 490 foster care liaisons, foster care providers, foster care youth, county child welfare departments, etc. Gather and analyze how these activities impact college awareness and college enrollment for those participating;
- Provide information to care providers and foster youth regarding the college application process and timelines;
- Train foster youth, caregivers and other professionals who work with them to know and share information on career and postsecondary education options available to youth, including the coursework necessary for vocational and higher education programs and information regarding financial aid;
- Provide technical assistance and training for care providers and foster youth in filling out college applications and other necessary paperwork;
- Educate foster youth and those who work with them i.e. foster parents, social workers, court personnel, etc in the knowledge and understanding that foster youth can be successful in pursuit of postsecondary education.
- Recruit advocates and mentors, including peer mentors who can support and guide foster youth toward their career and educational goals (e.g. through Court Appointed Special Advocate or local mentorship programs);

- Create mechanisms for better coordination of special education transition plans (IEP-related) and transitional independent living plans (TILP) for foster youth;
- Strengthen and expand the availability of services provided by Independent Living Programs (ILP) and Foster Youth Services (FYS) or other programs to help youth apply for and enroll in postsecondary education and training (e.g. tracking of secondary education progress, assistance and review of applications);
- Establish policies that ensure payment for examinations that provide an alternative to high school graduation as well as college entrance examination (ACT or SAT) registration fees and preparation costs; &
- Ensure that CDSS, county welfare departments, CSU, CCC and CSAC implement the laws created by AB 2463 and SB 1639 (including provision of outreach, information and technical assistance to foster youth, as well as the encouraged exploration of admissions by exemption).

