



Office of Children and Family Services

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Informational Letter

Transmittal:	24-OCFS-INF-11
To:	Local Departments of Social Services Commissioners Voluntary Authorized Agencies Executive Directors
Issuing Division/Office:	Division of Youth Development and Partnerships for Success
Date:	July 25, 2024
Subject:	Higher Education Financial Aid Resources for Youth Currently or Formerly in Foster Care
Suggested Distribution:	Independent Living Coordinators Education Training Voucher Coordinators Child Welfare Supervisors Foster Care Supervisors Adoption Supervisors Voluntary Agency Program Directors Detention Program Directors Runaway and Homeless Youth Services Programs Community Multi-Services Offices Youth Bureau Directors
Contact Person(s):	See section IV.
Attachments:	None

Filing References

Previous ADMs/INFs	Releases Cancelled	NYS Regs.	Soc. Serv. Law & Other Legal Ref.	Manual Ref.	Misc. Ref.
24-OCFS-INF-03		8 NYCRR Part 152	The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001, PL 107-133; Family First Prevention Services Act, PL 115-123; 42 U.S.C. § 677(i); 42 U.S.C. § Education Law § 667, § 6456		19-OCFS-LCM-08

I. Purpose

The purpose of this Informational Letter (INF) is to inform local departments of social services (LDSSs), voluntary agencies (VAs), and service providers about post-secondary financial aid resources available to assist current or former foster care youth.

II. Background

National research shows that individuals with experience in foster care graduate from college at a lower rate than the general population. Youth in foster care may be unaware of all the resources available to them that can assist with paying for higher education and unsure how to access those resources they have heard about. LDSSs and VAs have the responsibility to inform the youth they serve of all available financial aid resources.

Any student considering applying for post-secondary education or training should be encouraged to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and receive appropriate assistance to do so. The completed and submitted FAFSA is often the first requirement for any financial aid for post-secondary education and training programs. The FAFSA may provide students with financial support, and the information from the FAFSA is often used by education and training programs to determine eligibility for both grants and scholarships. Individuals who were in foster care at the age of 13 or older should answer “yes” when asked on the FAFSA form if they have foster care experience, as this may also provide the student with additional supports and resources.

The three financial resources that will be highlighted in this INF are the Tuition Assistance Program, the Foster Youth College Success Initiative, and the Education Training Voucher.

1. Tuition Assistance Program

The New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) supports New York State residents attending eligible schools located in New York State. The TAP award is up to \$5,665 annually.

Eligible individuals who were in foster care at the age of 13 or older may receive the maximum amount of the TAP award.

2. Foster Youth College Success Initiative

The Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI) was established in 2015 to help support students currently or formerly in foster care. This includes students who were in foster care in another state or are determined to be an orphan based on the New York State Education Department’s (SED) definition. The funds can support students’ tuition and fees, books, transportation, housing, and meals.

To be eligible, a student with foster care experience must also be attending a State University of New York (SUNY),¹ a City University of New York (CUNY),² or a New York State-based private college institution with a Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP).³ The FYCSI program is administered by SED with support from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) regarding verification of foster care status. Once an individual’s eligibility is determined, SED provides funds directly to the student’s higher education institution.

¹ <https://www.suny.edu/attend/visit-us/complete-campus-list/>.

² [Colleges & Schools – The City University of New York \(cuny.edu\)](https://www.cuny.edu/colleges-schools/).

³ <https://www.nysed.gov/postsecondary-services/heop-projects-and-contact-information>.

3. Education Training Voucher

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program is intended to help current and former foster care youth make the transition to self-sufficiency by receiving the education and training necessary to obtain employment. The ETV award will be the lesser of \$5,000 or the total cost of attendance minus any other financial resources (e.g., TAP award, Pell Grant, and scholarships) available to the youth. Youth enrolled in the state's ETV program must attend a Title IV accredited college or vocational/technical training program.⁴

OCFS administers the ETV program. OCFS currently contracts with WRI Solutions to serve as New York State's fiscal agent for the ETV program.

III. Eligibility Criteria

TAP, ETV, and FYCSI programs are all financial aid resources with different eligibility and application requirements.

1. Tuition Assistance Program

College students who were in foster care on or after their 13th birthday may be eligible for the maximum TAP award until their 24th birthday. This program requires an annual recertification to continue funding.

Eligible college students under age 24 will be funded on the dependent student schedule for TAP, which increases the maximum award they would be eligible for under TAP. Therefore, eligible foster youth may receive a maximum award of up to \$5,665.

To qualify for an increased TAP award due to foster care status, students must:

- Have been in foster care any time after their 13th birthday,
- Be a resident of New York State,
- Attend a New York State school and be a matriculated student in an approved program of study, and
- Maintain full-time student status (at least 12 credits per semester).

For more information or to apply to TAP, please visit <https://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/apply-for-financial-aid/nys-tap.html>.

2. Foster Youth College Success Initiative

Individuals with foster care experience attending college may be eligible for FYCSI funding. Eligible students must be enrolled at a SUNY or CUNY institution or at a private college or university located in New York State that hosts a HEOP program.

Who is an eligible applicant?

- Individuals who were in foster care on or after their 13th birthday.

⁴ Youth attending vocational and training programs may qualify for ETV program funds, provided the vocational or training program meets the federal definition of institution of higher education as found in 20 U.S.C. §§ 1001 and 1002; see also section 102 of the federal Higher Education Act of 1965.

- Individuals living with a relative or kin under a Kinship Guardianship agreement or adopted on or after age 13.
- Individuals who have aged out of or are still in foster care.

More information related to funding eligibility is listed below:

- a. An eligible individual includes any student — *including undocumented youth* — who is currently a resident of New York State and spent time in foster care at any time after their 13th birthday. There is no maximum age limit required of applicants for this program.
- b. An eligible individual includes a student who is an orphan, which SED defines as a student whose parents have both died and who, if subsequently adopted, was adopted at the age of 13 or older and qualifies as an orphan for the purposes of federal student financial aid programs authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965
- c. Institutions of higher education (IHEs) are to award FYCSI funds to eligible individuals based on their need, as determined by the IHE.
- d. The funds can be used for costs necessary for eligible youth to attend college, as listed in Education Law § 6456 and 8 NYCRR Part 152, including but not limited to the following:
 - Tuition and fees
 - Books and supplies
 - Transportation
 - Meals and housing, including intermission breaks
 - Advisement, tutoring, and academic support

To qualify for funding, a student must consent to their foster care eligibility status being shared with SED and their college by completing a consent form. For information on accessing these funds, please visit <http://www.nysed.gov/postsecondary-services/foster-youth-college-success-initiative>.

3. Education Training Voucher

Eligible individuals with foster care experience may apply for the ETV program to assist with paying for post-secondary education. OCFS will review all ETV applications and determine the eligibility of the applicant. This program requires annual application submission.

The criteria below describe the *initial* eligibility requirements for an ETV award. An applicant applying for the first time for an ETV award must:

- Be below the age of 21 to be eligible for the ETV program; and
- Be a U.S. citizen or qualified or unqualified non-citizen; and
- Be enrolled in or attending a post-secondary education or vocational training program at an “institution of higher education,” as defined in 20 U.S.C. §§ 1001 and 1002.

In addition, an applicant for ETV must have been:

- In foster care on or after their **14th** birthday and otherwise eligible for services under the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (CFCP); or

- Adopted or entered kinship guardianship from foster care at age 16; or
- In the custody of OCFS, attained at least 14 years of age, and placed in non-secure OCFS operated facilities of 25 beds or less (in other words, a youth who is placed in a facility that would allow the youth to be eligible for Title IV-E funding), or on aftercare status.

A youth participating in the ETV program on the date they attain 21 years of age may remain eligible until they attain 26 years of age, so long as the youth is enrolled in a post-secondary education or vocational or training program at an institution of higher education, and the youth is making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program. However, in no event may a youth participate in the ETV program for more than five years, whether or not those years are consecutive. ETV requires the applicant to reapply online annually and demonstrate eligibility to continue to receive an ETV award.

Individuals may complete the ETV application online at: <https://etv-nys.smapply.org/>.

LDSSs and VAs are encouraged to utilize the New York State Transition Plan to assist youth with understanding all available financial aid resources. Any individual who thinks they may be eligible for a resource is encouraged to apply.

IV. Contact Person

If you have any questions about the higher education resources listed in this INF, please email ETV.Coordinator@OCFS.NY.GOV or FCY4College@OCFS.NY.GOV.

/s/ Nina Aledort, Ph.D.

Issued by:

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Title: Deputy Commissioner

Division/Office: Division of Youth Development and Partnerships for Success