

SECTION 21D - SECTION 21G

D. COLLEGE EXPOSURE & PREPARATION

TIP! See [Appendix G2_College Exposure, Planning, Enrollment and Persistence Flow Chart](#).

COLLEGE EXPOSURE/EXPLORATION

Coaches help expose students to post-secondary pathways starting in 9th grade (or as early as possible, if they come into foster care at a later age). Sometimes, young people cannot envision themselves attending or succeeding in college or a post-secondary setting, as they may not have performed well in school and/or they may not know many (or any) adults who graduated.

Early post-secondary exposure, combined with career exploration and career development activities, can help young people envision success and start to plan and prepare for their post-secondary journey.

If **“Conduct Post-Secondary Exploration and Exposure”** is selected as a Goal*, some of the associated Steps include:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Young person to meet with College Specialist and/or Coach to learn more about college | <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss college experience with current/former student or credible messenger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attend peer group related to college | <input type="checkbox"/> Engage foster parent/parent and/or significant adult figure(s); encourage them to provide support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Explore colleges online | <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss college options with other adults involved in the young person's life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attend a college fair | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visit college(s) | |

*If youth is still in high school/GED program, Coach to meet with the high school guidance counselor and student to discuss options, progress towards graduation, and a plan for the remainder of high school.

(see [Appendix F6_High School Graduation Checklist](#)).

If the young person is interested in a trades, vocational, or other post-secondary pathway, the Goal **“Engage in Career Development Experience”** should be selected.

In this case, the next step would be:

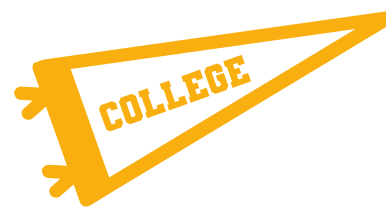
- ☐ Meet with Coach and/or HUB Career Coach (and high school counselor, if applicable) to explore other post-secondary pathways. (Then proceed to the [Career Development Goals Roadmap](#) in [Appendix E: Goals & Steps Guide and Worksheets](#).)

If after this meeting a vocational or other career pathway seems to be the best fit, then the appropriate goals should be selected in the Career Development section (e.g., enrolling in a workforce or vocational program, etc.).

PREPARATION/PLANNING FOR COLLEGE

If the young person is in a high school and wants to attend college, the goal [“Conduct College Preparation”](#) should be selected. It is the Coach’s role to ensure that students have the supports they need to succeed in high school and are enrolled in the proper coursework in order to graduate and pursue their post-secondary goal.

In the 9th grade, the student should be meeting with their Coach, Guidance Counselor. These meetings can take place separately, but all parties should be on the same page.



Key preparation/planning activities include:

- ☐ **Review the student’s current (or most recent) transcript** with them to determine what their college roadmap could look like, based on their performance and the high school that they are enrolled in. For students in the 9th grade, even if performance was not strong in previous years, it should be emphasized colleges only look at grades from high school (not middle school) and they will have a wide range of great college options if they remain on-track with their studies.
- ☐ **Provide an overview of 2-year vs. 4-year college pathways**, and what each would entail in terms of their high school performance. See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22E](#) for additional guidance.
- ☐ **Review the financial resources available to foster youth and a typical college budget.**
This is important, as some students may be under the impression that they cannot afford college. In reality, as long as the student maintains good academic standing and attends a CUNY or SUNY school, in almost all cases the student will have to pay little or nothing toward the cost of college. If they and their Coach/College Specialist follow all of the application and financial aid steps appropriately, the student will likely be able to cover most or all of their living expenses (food, transportation, etc.) without having to earn additional income.
- ☐ If appropriate, discuss out-of-state and private college options, and their pros and cons. The most competitive private colleges (like Vassar and Harvard) have “100% of need met” financial aid policies that cover the full cost of attendance. Out-of-state public schools and private schools without 100% of need met financial aid are much more expensive.

GOALS & STEPS

For students whose Goal is to [“Conduct College Preparation”](#):

Required Steps include:

- ☐ Meet with high school counselor, Coach, and/or College Specialist to put a plan in place; ideally engage parent/foster parent
- ☐ Develop a college list (4+ SUNY, and others if eligible)

Potential Steps include:

- ☐ Enroll in A.P. classes
- ☐ Take PSATs
- ☐ Work with school to request needed accommodations on PSATs, SATs and A.P. exams
- ☐ Receive PSAT or SAT tutoring (or enroll in prep program)
- ☐ Take SATs
- ☐ Re-take SATs
- ☐ Re-take Regents exams to bring scores up to target college’s college readiness standards
- ☐ Register and prep for college placement exam (if needed)

TIP! Students with disabilities should refer to [Appendix G3 College Planning for Students with Disabilities](#).

E. COLLEGE APPLICATION & SELECTION

COLLEGE ADVISING



The College Specialist* should assist the student in applying to colleges at the appropriate juncture, typically in the summer/early fall of that student's final year of high school. However, if students are applying to 4-year colleges, they should be preparing their materials in their Junior year. *Coaches can also collaborate with Say YES Guidance Counselors to help young people with college applications.*

Whether they are planning to attend a 2-year or 4-year college, all students should aim to have their college applications and the FAFSA completed by the end of October ideally, and by the end of November at the latest - they should not wait until the school's admissions deadline to apply. This will put them in the best position to be accepted into opportunity programs, receive school-based financial aid, and more. It also allows them to spend time mentally preparing for college and decreases the likelihood that they will need to spend the early part of their semester resolving incomplete administrative tasks, such as financial aid verification, that could have been done prior to the start of classes.

If students are applying to selective 4-year colleges that will require essays and recommendations, it is especially important that they begin preparing these materials in the summer prior to their senior year, or earlier.

FOUR KEY QUESTIONS THAT STUDENTS SHOULD THINK ABOUT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS:

Question 1: Is the student qualified for and interested in attending a 4-year college directly out of high school, or is a 2-year college more appropriate?

Generally speaking, 4-year colleges should be the starting point for students who are academically eligible to attend, as students attending 4-year schools tend to experience better on-time graduation outcomes than students who start at 2-year schools. (It also often takes high performing students 2.5 to 3 years to earn an Associate's degree, and another 2+ years to transfer and finish a Bachelor's degree.) Students with GPAs in or above the 75-80 range can feasibly begin to look at 4-year schools, particularly if they also have SAT scores above 400 per section. If the student is considering four-year schools that are test-blind (for instance, most SUNY programs during the pandemic), then the SAT score can be disregarded.

That said, many students enter their senior year without the academic credentials needed to obtain admission to a four-year college, or with developmental needs in reading, writing, or math. These students should be matched with a two-year college and great care should be taken to ensure that they are connected with a support program such as EOP.

Question 2: What majors/fields of study is the student interested in?

This will help narrow down potential colleges.

Question 3: Where does the student want to live during college, and what is the student's housing situation right before entering college? This may be informed by the student's housing/permanency status.

The major categories are: dorming away and commuting to school from home.

Question 4: Are there other aspects of a potential school that are especially meaningful to the student?

These might include prestige, demographics/diversity of the student body, proximity to family, size of the school, and more. It's vital that everyone involved in the college coaching process listen carefully to what the student considers to be important in evaluating a school match.

For each potential school match, it is important to consider the graduation rate and cost of attendance of the school.

Graduation rates differ widely between schools; some graduate just 10 or 20% of their students, while others have graduation rates of 98 or 99%. Some of this has to do with the preparedness and affluence of the students who attend those schools, but the level of support available at the school is also an important factor in graduation rate.

Resources for assessing graduation rate and cost of attendance include:

[College Scorecard](#), a publicly available resource from USDOE that includes information about annual costs, timely graduation rates, long-term outcomes for students who enrolled as freshmen, and socio/economic and racial diversity at the school.

[College Results Online](#), which offers a deeper dive into graduation rates for specific student demographics, as well as information about collateral statistics such as first-year retention and transfer rates.

A student's permanency and housing status may influence their decision. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 23](#)).

EXPLORING 4-YEAR COLLEGES

For students exploring 4-year colleges, the major categories are: SUNY schools, CUNY schools, and private schools.

**FOR EVERY YOUNG PERSON IN CARE,
THERE IS OFTEN A SCHOOL THAT THE
STUDENT WILL BE ABLE TO
GRADUATE FROM WITHOUT DEBT.**

Guidelines for students applying to 4-year schools include:

Students are encouraged to submit, at a minimum, the full complement of free applications to SUNY schools. They may also apply to schools in the City University of New York (CUNY) system for free, should they wish to attend college in New York City. See [Appendix G5 Applying to CUNY Tip Sheet](#) and [Appendix G6 Tips for Applying to SUNY for Youth in Foster Care](#).

Students interested in 4-year CUNYs are counseled to include no more than one 2-year CUNY, ranked at the bottom of the application (since they will be accepted there automatically).

- They can always direct admit to a different 2-year CUNY later in the process if they want; 2-year CUNYs other than Guttman accept 100% of first-time applicants on a rolling basis.

Students are encouraged to apply for **Opportunity Programs**, which provide additional financial assistance, enhanced admissions considerations, and a range of supports. See [Appendix G8 Opportunity Programs](#) (and [Appendix G9 CUNY Support and Opportunity Programs](#), if the student is interested in attending college in NYC).

Students should consider non-profit private schools as long as these schools have **100% of need met financial aid policies** and/or are willing to commit to covering the student's tuition/room and board gap. Out-of-state public schools should generally be avoided unless the student has a clear plan for establishing residency in that state or is receiving a substantial scholarship (since public schools charge much higher tuition for out-of-state students and generally do not offer much financial aid).

Schools that students in care can attend for free (and have 100% of need met financial aid policies) include all of the Ivies (e.g. Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Cornell, Columbia), Barnard College, Georgetown University, Vanderbilt University, Union College, and more. There are also organizations such as the Posse Foundation that offer full tuition scholarships at some schools.

Other private schools, like Canisius College, Niagara University, and Mercy College, have high tuition costs and do not offer full financial aid to students in foster care. Students who wish to attend these private schools should be advised of CUNY/SUNY options which may, in many cases, be an equivalent or better fit and be far less costly to attend. Outside scholarships will usually not provide enough money to pay for private schools without 100% of need met financial aid policies.

Students should avoid applying to for-profit schools! In almost every case, these schools require students to take on student loan debt while also offering a lower-quality education and credential than the student could get at a college that they could attend without taking loans.

GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS PLANNING TO ATTEND 2-YEAR/COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

Incoming 2-year college students will generally want to start at a local college such as Erie Community College, which offers an open admissions policy, meaning that anyone with a high school diploma or high school equivalency will be admitted as a first-time freshman (that is, if they have not attended another school previously – students who have previously been academically dismissed from college, for instance, may need to submit additional documentation or an appeal to be considered for admission even to a school with an open admissions policy).

We typically do not recommend that students dorm far away from their home city and support system while attending a 2-year college, though it may make sense to do so once they transfer to a 4-year college.

Students interested in online study should consider SUNY's [Empire State College](#), which offers flexible class scheduling, a range of fully-online 2- and 4-year degree programs, and the tuition affordability of a SUNY public college.

ESC also has a unique system for awarding college credit for college-level learning attained through “life or work experience” that may accelerate degree completion particularly for older students.

While 2-year colleges offer rolling admissions, we highly recommend that students applying to 2-year colleges complete the application process in the Fall, and in the early Spring at the absolute latest. Waiting until June or July to start the college admissions process for students in foster care hampers their chances of being successful in their critical first year of college.

Students in the Erie County area who could use additional support with the college application and financial aid process can connect with the [Independence Bound](#) program at [Erie County Community College](#), and should likewise do so early in their senior year of high school, or in the year before they plan to attend college. See [Appendix G24 Independence Bound Program](#) for more information and the referral form.

COLLEGE SELECTION

Once the student receives letters of acceptance, the student should sit down with the Coach, College Specialist, Guidance Counselor, and parent/caregiver (if applicable) to discuss selection. If a meeting with all of these individuals cannot happen in one setting, separate meetings can occur; Coaches should ensure, however, that the advice given is consistent.

Key Factors for Selecting a Best-fit College:

LIFESTYLE CONSIDERATIONS:

- Housing options;
- Campus location;
- School size;
- Campus diversity & demographics;
- Food plans;
- Safety statistics.

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Majors offered;
- Academic standing requirements;
- Support Programs;
- Retention & graduation rates;
- National college rankings.

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

Once the student selects the college, they need to officially send their acceptance (typically by May 1st for selective 4-year colleges) and accept all financial aid grants (while rejecting all loans unless they are absolutely necessary to meet the cost of attendance). Schools typically request that students submit a “commitment deposit” in order to secure their space in the incoming class; this fee can often be waived by contacting the admissions office at the school and requesting a waiver due to the student’s foster care status.

F. FUNDING COLLEGE & FINANCIAL AID



There are many financial resources available to college-bound students in foster care. The key funding streams available to foster youth (some require maintaining a 2.0 or higher GPA) that students should apply for include:

Federal PELL Grant

New York State TAP grant

ETV (Education & Training Vouchers)

Opportunity Programs (SEEK/CD, EOP, HEOP)

Foster Youth College Success Initiative

The nsoro Scholarship

In-State Tuition

The Coach should ensure that the student is applying for all of the above forms of aid, either by working in partnership with the guidance counselor or college support program advisor, or by supporting the student directly.

Applying for all forms of aid is among the **Required Steps** to ensure that no student “falls through the cracks” due to a lack of staff knowledge about these supports.

TAP AND PELL GRANTS

The PELL grant is a federal grant and TAP is for students living and attending school in New York State. Both applications should be filled out as soon as the student applies to colleges. While TAP and Pell usually consider family income when determining financial aid eligibility, students who are in foster care, aged out of foster care, or were adopted out of foster care after reaching age 13 are considered independent students, which means that they do not need to submit financial information for their parents or foster parents, even if they were adopted. In practice, current and former youth in care almost always receive the full TAP and Pell awards. If a student is applying to an in-state public (SUNY or CUNY) school, these awards alone will fully cover their tuition and fees, and they will receive a \$2,000+ reimbursement per semester to use for dorming or other living expenses.

See [Appendix G7. Completing the FAFSA & TAP Applications](#) for detailed information on how to apply and important tips.

ETV

The Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) typically provides youth who are in foster care, or were adopted from foster care after age 16, were discharged to KinGAP after age 14, or aged out of foster care, with up to \$5,000 per year, depending on financial need. Students must receive their first payment by age 21 in order to be eligible. ETV funding can be used for accredited college or vocational/technical training programs. If students have outstanding balances on their college accounts, ETV will issue a check directly to the college; otherwise, students receive a monthly check in the mail, which helps them with income smoothing.

See [Appendix G10. Educational and Training Vouchers](#) for detailed information, how to apply, and key tips.

OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS (SEEK/CD, EOP, HEOP, CUNY ASAP)

First-time freshmen who enroll in college in New York State have access to a group of programs called **“Opportunity Programs”**.

These programs include benefits such as:

1. Admissions to the college for students whose applications would normally be rejected
2. Additional funding (type and amount varies by school)
3. Connections to supportive adults
4. Academic tutoring and career support
5. A summer program to help students get oriented to the school

Opportunity programs are very similar across colleges, but they have different names like SEEK, CD, EOP, or HEOP depending on the type of college where the program is located (see the table below).

Type of College	Name of Opportunity Program
City University of New York (CUNY) 2-Year Colleges	CD (College Discovery)
City University of New York (CUNY) 4-Year Colleges	SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge)
State University of New York (SUNY) All Colleges	EOP (Educational Opportunity Program)
Private Colleges (i.e. Colgate, Columbia, Cornell)	HEOP (Higher Education Opportunity Program)

It is critical for students going to schools in New York State to apply for the opportunity programs if they can, particularly if they are applying to competitive 4-year colleges; the opportunity programs at these schools can vastly increase the chances of being accepted, particularly when the school is an academic “reach”. Students interested in enrolling in an Opportunity program should check [Appendix G8 Opportunity Programs](#) for more information and make sure to apply well before the college’s regular admissions deadline: ideally, their application and any needed supporting documents should be submitted by the end of October of their senior year, as Opportunity Program spaces fill up quickly.

CUNY ASAP AND ACE

In addition to its Opportunity Programs, CUNY offers two key support programs to students attending its 2-year colleges and some of its 4-year colleges. They are called ASAP and ACE and are highly recommended to students in care.

ASAP is a program that focuses on helping students graduate from CUNY community colleges as soon as possible (in 3 years or less) through a combination of advisement, tutoring, early registration, block scheduling, free metrocards, book vouchers, and other resources. Students in ASAP have a 3-year graduation rate of 53%, which is more than double that of their peers who are not in a support program - students not in ASAP graduate in three years 25% of the time.

While ASAP is only available at 2-year colleges, a similar program called **ACE** is now available at several 4-year colleges in the CUNY system. Find a full list [here](#).

Students cannot participate in both ASAP/ACE and College Discovery/SEEK - they need to pick one of the two.

For more information on ASAP/ACE and on how to choose between the program offerings, see [Appendix G9 CUNY Support and Opportunity Programs](#).

Finally, students attending CUNY and enrolled in any support or opportunity program (including SEEK, CD, ASAP, ACE, or Start) can receive additional foster-care specific support and resources through CUNY’s Foster Care Initiative (FCI).

SCHOLARSHIPS

There are several scholarships available to students currently and formerly in foster care.

Two important scholarships to know about include:

- **[The nsoro Foundation scholarship](#):** Any current/former foster youth who is aging out or aged out of foster care and applying to college or in college is eligible (adopted students are not eligible). The scholarship requires a 2.0 high school/college GPA upon enrollment and encourages students to maintain above a 2.0. It provides a minimum of \$2,000 per student each year towards tuition, room, board, fees, books, and/or a laptop. Once accepted, students do not have to re-apply each year, and nsoro will fund them all the way through the completion of a Master’s program. Every year, two scholars are selected to receive a \$10,000 scholarship.
- **Say Yes Buffalo** offers tuition scholarships to qualifying graduates of Buffalo public schools that can help cover tuition gaps at a SUNY, CUNY, or private college. Eligibility criteria can be found [here](#) and more information on the scholarship is [here](#). Note that these scholarships cannot be used to cover room and board, and cover a percentage of each student’s tuition based on the length of time they spent attending Buffalo public schools.

THE FOSTER YOUTH COLLEGE SUCCESS INITIATIVE (FYCSI)

FYCSI is a program specifically for foster youth to provide them with additional financial assistance to help them succeed in college. Students are eligible if they were in foster care at/after age 13 and admitted and enrolled in a SUNY or CUNY college or university, or at a private college or university that has an HEOP program. They need to send a Consent Form to OCFS and follow up with their campus's financial aid office in order to secure the funding. Information about the program can be found [on the NYSED website](#). A direct link to the consent form can be found [here](#).

IN-STATE TUITION / SUBMITTING CERTIFICATES OF RESIDENCE FOR IN-STATE TUITION AT SUNY 2-YEAR COLLEGES:

This is not a funding source, exactly, but it is much less expensive to attend public colleges in your home state, because public colleges like CUNY and SUNY charge much lower in-state tuition rates to residents of the state.

One important thing to know about SUNY two-year colleges is that students attending colleges outside the county where they reside will need to submit a [Certificate of Residence](#) from their home county in order to receive in-state tuition, which is half the price of out-of-state tuition at SUNY. These certificates must be submitted in a specific window of time (60 days before the start of the semester to 30 days after the start of the semester) to be valid. [See Appendix G23 Proving Residency at SUNY Community Colleges](#) or visit the [Erie Community College website](#) for more information about certificates of residence.

Other colleges in New York only require in-state residency and typically verify this automatically. If a student wants to attend a school outside New York State, they should know that they will need to pay the much-higher out of state tuition rate unless they establish residence in the new state. State policies vary (and can be found online) but establishing residence in a new state typically requires a student to live in the state for at least a year for purposes other than attending college.

OTHER SOURCES OF POTENTIAL FUNDING FOR CURRENT/FORMER FOSTER YOUTH APPLYING TO COLLEGE INCLUDE:

Loans: Students are also eligible for subsidized and unsubsidized loans. However, given the abundance of resources, loans are strongly discouraged.

The NYS Excelsior grant is also available to students in foster care and covers any remaining gap for the cost of attendance at CUNY and SUNY schools after TAP and Pell grants are applied. However, given that the financial aid typically available to current/former students in foster care exceeds CUNY/SUNY's tuition cost, this is often not needed. The main group of students in care who benefit from the Excelsior scholarship is for undocumented students in care, since DREAM Act TAP doesn't always cover the full cost of college attendance.

The Excelsior Scholarship is very restrictive – for example, it requires students to stay on track to graduate from a bachelor's program in 4-years, which can be challenging for some.

G. REMEDIAL/DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES

When students enroll at a 2-year college, they may need to take a developmental or remedial course to bring their academic skills up to a “college ready” level. Because remedial courses are very time-consuming, do not offer college credits, and generally are associated with poor academic outcomes, students are advised to avoid remedial courses by placing out wherever possible.

At SUNY 2-year colleges students will generally need to pass a placement test OR already have passed a college course in the subject in order to place out of remedial classes. Remedial policies can vary somewhat based on the college.

At Erie County Community College, students can place out of remediation by:

- Earning a high score on the Regents exams (85 on ELA or 85 on Algebra 2/Trigonometry)
- Earning a high SAT or ACT score:
 - 530 or higher on SAT ERBW or an 18+ ACT English AND 21+ ACT Reading score
 - 500 or higher on SAT Math or 22+ on ACT Math
- Completing a college level course in the subject with a grade of C or higher
- Having an overall high school GPA of 80% or above in the subject
- If none of the above options apply, passing the ACCUPLACER exam given by the college.

At all CUNY schools, students can place out of remediation by:

- Scoring above the cutoff score on the Regents exam (70+ on Common Core Algebra and 75+ on Common Core English).
- Earning a high ACT or SAT score
 - 480+ on the SAT ERBW section or 20+ ACT English score to place out of Reading/Writing
 - 500+ on SAT Math or 21+ ACT Math score to place out of Math
- Passing a college-level course in the subject
- Being considered “college ready” by CUNY’s Proficiency Index, which weighs students’ GPA and standardized test scores to evaluate their chances of passing a college-level course in English or Math. Little is known about how the Proficiency Index is calculated, and coaches working with students in care should not count on the Proficiency Index as a way of waiving remedial requirements.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT COACHES CAN DO TO HELP STUDENTS AVOID REMEDIATION AT CUNY IS TO ENSURE THAT THEY PASS THE REGENTS EXAMS WITH SCORES ABOVE CUNY’S COLLEGE READINESS CUTOFF.

Students who want to attend CUNY but are scoring below the cutoff should be encouraged to retake the Regents exam as long as there is a reasonable chance that they will be able to earn a score high enough to place out of remedial courses. Students in NYC schools can retake the Regents exam as many times as the test is offered.

See [Appendix G9 CUNY Support and Opportunity Programs](#) for more information on applying to CUNY Start and Math Start and some key considerations.

Some colleges may incorporate remedials into their credit-bearing courses.

This is called a “corequisite course”. This is an effective way to provide the remedial support students may need while earning college credits.

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