



GUIDE TO THE FCSI / DORM PROJECT

SUMMARY

The Fostering College Success Initiative (FCSI), also known around NYC as the Dorm Project, is a year-round program that provides housing, tutoring, coaching, and financial support to students in NYC foster care attending The City University of New York and beyond.

It is a collaboration between ACS, CUNY, and The New York Foundling:

- ACS funds and oversees the program.
- CUNY provides dorm spaces for CUNY students and connects students with its support programs.
- The Foundling provides tutoring, coaching, and career development support to participating students.

The goal of the program is to increase the college graduation rate for students in care while supporting them toward success as independent adults. Starting in 2020, students need not be dorming or attending CUNY in order to participate in the program; the tutoring, coaching, and career support elements will be open to students in NYC foster care attending any college. Dorm spaces remain available to CUNY students only.

This guide will outline the main components and benefits of the FCSI/Dorm Project, describe what students need to do to apply to the program and maintain their eligibility, and answer some common questions.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE FCSI/DORM PROJECT?

STUDENTS MUST:

- Be currently in foster care
- Enrolled or planning to enroll full-time at in an accredited bachelor's or associate degree program (students in certificate programs are not eligible)
"Full-time enrollment" means having at least 12 credits or credit equivalents. This includes remedial courses (Example: if a student has 9 credits + 1 remedial that meets for 4 hours/week, that student is full-time). Students should contact the registrar at their college if they are unsure whether they are scheduled for full-time classes.
- Aged 17 to 24
- Have applied to all financial aid sources including TAP, Pell, and ETV
- If planning to dorm, attend/plan to attend CUNY with no outstanding balances on their CUNY account

FCSI DORMITORY SITE

Students who dorm in the FCSI can live in one of three CUNY dorms (City College, John Jay, Queens College) but can attend any CUNY school including 2-year colleges.

Total size of the program is approximately 170 students, divided as follows:

Queens College: 52 students | Hunter College: 50 students | Non-Dorming: 68 students

The number of spaces available at each of these sites is subject to change each year.

HOW DO STUDENTS GET INTO THE FCSI / DORM PROJECT?

Students start by applying to the FCSI website at fosteringcollegesuccessinitiative.org.

To apply for the FCSI / Dorm Project, students must have applied to college and filed FAFSA and TAP. Students should keep a copy of their Student Aid Report from the FAFSA application in order to prove that they have completed their financial aid application. If attending CUNY, they should also know their CUNY EMPLID and have their CUNYFirst login information.

Once the student has applied, the FCSI team will request a set of supporting documents including:

- The student's high school transcript
- Proof of college application or acceptance (depending on the time of year)
- Proof that the student has completed their financial aid applications
- Proof that the student is registered for classes full-time
- A separate application for dorming, if the student would like to dorm

Prospective students are required to participate in an interview along with a representative from their agency. FCSI staff reach out to set interview times after the student's application is received. Students should check their email regularly for communications from the FCSI team and should inform the FCSI team if their email address changes.

TIP! ACS + the FCSI / Dorm Project team will provide an updated timeline with admissions requirements to the agencies each year.

WHAT ARE THE ONGOING REQUIREMENTS OF STUDENTS IN THE FCSI / DORM PROJECT?

STUDENTS IN THE FCSI / DORM PROJECT ARE EXPECTED TO:

- Maintain good academic standing
- Remain enrolled full-time in CUNY
- Follow the rules of their host dorm, if dorming
- Re-apply for all available financial aid every year
- Meet with their CSC and tutor weekly

TIPS & FAQs

If a student is in care when they're accepted to the Dorm Project, but then leaves care due to adoption or KinGAP, would they still be eligible for the Dorm Project?

It depends on whether the student had moved into their dorm before leaving care. *Students must be in care at the time of their Dorm Project move-in to be part of the Dorm Project.* If a student leaves care before move-in, they would lose their eligibility for the Dorm Project. However, a student who has already moved into the Dorm Project and is subsequently adopted or leaves care via kinGAP would be able to stay in the program and would receive the same supports and funding as any other student.

If a student in foster care wants to dorm but doesn't want to do the FCSI / Dorm Project, is that possible?

Yes! The foster care room and board pass-through (for students under 21) and Exceptional Payments process (for students over 21), as well as a \$30.93/day stipend, are available for students in care until the age of 23 who dorm away. *However, the Dorm Project is an important option for students who want to dorm while attending community college or who want to dorm while attending a CUNY school.*

Does the FCSI / Dorm Project provide dorm supplies for participating students?

No. Basic furnishings like desks, chairs, bed frames, and mattresses are provided but otherwise students need to bring their own supplies (including twin XL bed sheets) to the dorm. Agencies are responsible for helping students move in and making sure they have the college supplies they need.

A good college packing list can be found here:

bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/making-a-decision/off-to-college-checklist

How strict are the CUNY dorms about substance use in the dorms?

CUNY dorms are very strict about their behavioral and substance abuse policies and will remove students for repeated violations or even for a single severe violation. The dorming component of the Dorm Project is not for everyone! Students who might struggle with substance use in the dorms may be better served by addressing these issues before moving into the dorms - especially given how difficult it can be to get back into the dorms once you have left.

Is it really necessary for a student in the program to meet with their tutor and CSC every week?

Meeting regularly with Dorm Project staff is one of the most important aspects of being successful in the program. Students in the Dorm Project who meet their tutors for the required number of tutoring sessions, for instance, have academically outperformed students who did not in every semester that the program has operated.

What should a student in the Dorm Project do if they think they need to withdraw from a class?

The Dorm Project has an official Withdrawal Policy for participating students that involves working with Dorm Project staff before withdrawing from classes. Students in the Dorm Project should never withdraw from classes without first informing their Dorm Project tutor or CSC. Students in the Dorm Project who withdraw all their classes in the middle of the semester will have to move out of the dorms.

When a student in the Dorm Project turns 21, does their agency need to submit a CCS21+ application for the student to continue in the program?

No. Youth 21 and over will continue to receive college room and board payments through the Fostering College Success Initiative Office of College Bound and Support Program (OCBSP) directly to City University of New York (CUNY) central office. In this situation, there is no need for either a CCS21+ or CRB Exceptional Payment. ACS will continue to send youth's monthly stipend allocation to agencies and agencies should continue to transfer the weekly stipend into youth direct deposit accounts.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THAT FOSTER CARE AGENCY STAFF CAN DO TO SUPPORT STUDENTS IN THE FCSI?

- Help students apply to colleges before November and ensure that they have their CUNYFirst, FAFSA, and ETV information organized and easy to access. Assist with gathering the documentation required by ACS for students to join the program
- Be present at the Dorm Project interview.
- Make sure that before students move into the dorm, they have all of the dorm supplies that they need and that they've applied for the New Yorkers for Children Back to School Package so they'll have a laptop on the first day of class.
- Stay in regular contact with Dorm Project staff, read the Dorm Project weekly notes carefully, and set aside time to be present for any meetings called by the Dorm Project team. These meetings often coincide with very important moments for the student's college success and it is vital that agency staff attend. Not being able to schedule a team meeting or not having agency staff present is one of the biggest barriers for the Dorm Project team in supporting a student is struggling.
- Make sure that your finance department is disbursing the stipend to students regularly, and never hold back the stipend for any reason while the student is in the program.
- If there is a delay in the student's book check or meal stipend, it's good practice for the agency to step in and assist the student financially. Delays in the book voucher are not uncommon for students in the Dorm Project, and when students can't get their books, it can be disastrous to their academic progress. Be aware that many courses require online access and not everything can be found in the library.
- **Be an advocate for the student!** Because FCSI / Dorm Project staff work in partnership with CUNY and ACS, there are sometimes limits to when and how they can advocate for students in the dorms. Agency staff are not limited in this regard and should push for the student's best interests just as they would for a student not in the program.