



FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

**A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL SERVING FOSTER YOUTH
IN BUFFALO AND ERIE COUNTY**

The Center For
FAIRFUTURES ➤

The Center For
FAIRFUTURES 

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FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTIONS 1-4

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MANUAL OVERVIEW & CONTRIBUTIONS

BACKGROUND: THE FAIR FUTURES NYC STORY

Fair Futures is a youth-led advocacy movement in New York City (NYC) and a coalition of over 100 non-profit organizations and foundations advocating for young people who have experienced foster care to have access to the long-term supports they need to achieve their potential. The Fair Futures NYC advocacy is fully youth-led by the Youth Advisory Board.

Fair Futures is also a youth-centered, comprehensive model that serves young people who have been in the foster care system from 6th grade through age 26. The model includes a robust middle school program that prepares students for success in middle and high school and a long-term coaching program from 9th grade until age 26 that includes professional coaching, tutoring, and comprehensive social-emotional, academic, career development, employment, housing, and independent living supports.

The Fair Futures model was developed through a 1.5 year-long research project that included the expertise of NYC's executive and program-level leadership in child welfare and youth development. The model's services and service-delivery are based on best practice programs in NYC and nationally that serve young people in foster care and have achieved strong results at scale. The model also infuses best practices at critical junctures derived from other NYC-based foster care agencies, educational and workforce development organizations, and evidence-based national models.

In NYC, the youth-led advocacy was successful in securing \$10 million in City funding for 2019-2020 to implement Fair Futures across the child welfare system in NYC. In Year 2 (2020-2021), \$12 million was received; in Year 3 (2021-2022), \$20 million was secured; and in Year 4 (2022-2023), \$30.7 million was baselined in the City budget to make Fair Futures sustainable. FY23 was also the first year that Fair Futures expanded to serve young people ages 21-26 who left foster care, making NYC the **first in the nation to serve young people through age 26 on the public dollar**. NYC funding was also allocated to expand Fair Futures to the juvenile justice sector.

In 2018, the NYC Administration for Children's Services formed a **public private partnership** with the Foster Care Excellence Fund foundations to ensure quality implementation of the model systemwide. These foundations pooled over \$4 million in funding over three years (2019 – 2023) to fund the infrastructure needed to implement the Fair Futures model. The infrastructure includes the creation of this manual and the accompanying materials, robust trainings and technical assistance for all Fair Futures staff, the development of an online resource directory that is regularly updated, and the creation of an online platform (Care4) to track youth progress and house materials/resources.

Katie Napolitano and Emil Ramnarine have overseen the implementation of the model in NYC since its inception, and in 2022 launched what is now called the **"Center for Fair Futures."** The Center for Fair Futures provides implementation and professional development supports to organizations implementing the Fair Futures model, including a series of trainings, 1:1 technical assistance, 1:1 coaching, workshops, and learning communities. All staff have access to an online platform that tracks young people's goals/progress and houses materials and resources to support staff with "how to" help a young person on their journey. These materials are regularly updated and publicly available to on the Fair Futures [website](#).

FAIR FUTURES PILOT IN BUFFALO/ERIE COUNTY

Following the success in NYC, several key stakeholders encouraged the Center for Fair Futures team to embark on its first expansion to a new region – Buffalo and Erie County. To fund and pilot the model, a public-private partnership was formed between Erie County Department of Social Services, [Say Yes Buffalo](#), the [Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo](#), the [Redlich Horwitz Foundation](#), Bank of America, and Casey Family Programs. The pilot will be implemented by [Say Yes Buffalo](#), a non-profit with deep community roots and a commitment to a wide range of high-quality services.

To tailor the model to Buffalo/Erie County, the Center for Fair Futures and the Say YES Buffalo team spent 1.5 years engaging and partnering with local organizations in the education, workforce development, housing, and child welfare space. The Fair Futures manual, materials, and resources were refined with local partners and will be publicly available (and regularly updated) [here](#).

All local organizations are invited to attend the Fair Futures/Say YES trainings and learning communities. Please reach out to Sylvia Lloyd at slloyd@sayyesbuffalo.org. We are honored to partner with the Buffalo and Erie communities to provide Fair Futures to young people in foster care!

A MODEL THAT MEETS YOUNG PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

The model, and this manual, are **fully centered around meeting the needs of current/former foster youth**, regardless of their academic status or life situation. As such, this manual and the Fair Futures “Goals & Steps” framework can apply to any young person.

This manual serves as a guide on how to engage young people, help them gain academic and career development experiences in line with their interests and goals, and support them through the challenges they commonly face in the transition to adulthood. The Fair Futures manual offers evidence-based strategies for effectively engaging youth in a long-term coaching relationship and helping youth develop and make progress towards their academic, career development, and housing/independent living goals.

The manual maps out, step by step, how to support young people based on their current situation. It also links to a comprehensive set of tools, materials, and vetted resources that staff can use to assist young people throughout their journey.

MODEL FLEXIBILITY AND STRUCTURE

There is inherent flexibility to the Fair Futures model, as it is centered around young people’s needs and meets a youth where they are. However, it also provides a lot of structure to assist staff with “how to” help a young person at every juncture on the journey they choose. It maps out the steps on how to navigate various systems and access the academic, career, and housing resources, programs, and opportunities available to youth in Buffalo/Erie, based on where they are and where they want to go.

Innovation is always encouraged! Organizations adopting this model can continue to use or develop their own program branding, infuse additional program components or best practices, or slightly alter staff titles/roles, as long as they deliver all of the key components of the model.

MODEL LIMITATIONS & POTENTIAL ADDITIONS

While Fair Futures is not a clinical model, Coaches help facilitate access to any mental health or supportive service a young person needs and help ensure follow-through. As Coaches build strong relationships with young people, they often become aware (or informed) of any mental health, health, or substance abuse challenge(s), as these issues often get in the way of academic and career development progress. Thus, Coaches can help ensure young people are accessing Medicaid Care Management services and are meeting with their Care Managers and/or Case Planners to address any needs or challenges.

The Fair Futures model also is designed to integrate enhancements. Examples of additional components that could be infused into the Fair Futures model through private funding include, but are not limited to:

- Additional on-site job readiness and/or internship programs
- “Gap-year” programming or other academic/vocational bridge programs
- Professional mentors for students in a post-secondary setting
- Wellness activities, such as yoga, meditation, and healing circles
- Credible messenger leadership programs
- Youth advocacy/organizing activities (beyond participation in the FF Youth Board)

THE ONLINE PLATFORM – CARE4

CARE4 IS A USER-FRIENDLY, CLOUD-BASED, PROGRAM MANAGEMENT TOOL THAT SERVES THREE KEY FUNCTIONS:

#1. Tracking youth progress using the Fair Futures “Goals & Steps” framework.

In this framework, **Goals** are standardized and represent positive outcomes and **Steps** represent progress towards goals. Steps also serve to help guide Coaches on how to help a young person achieve that particular goal.

The Online Platform will allow Coaches to work with young people to develop academic and career development goals, based on where they are and where they want to go, and track progress in a visual way. For young people aging out of care, it can be used to track progress in obtaining and maintaining housing and building independent living skills.



#2. Generating automated reports on a youth-level, Coach-level, program-level, and aggregated-level that show progress towards Goals and other key academic and career development data.

#3. Housing codified materials, tools, and vetted resources in the areas of education, career development, and housing & life skills. These materials were developed collaboratively by the Center for Fair Futures in each topic area. These materials are updated twice each year, and as needed. These materials are incorporated into all of the “Goals & Steps” Worksheets on Care4 so that they can guide staff as they are working on a particular step.

TIP! Throughout this manual, the functions associated with the Online Platform are outlined. *Please note that these may change slightly as the platform continues to be improved.*

CONTRIBUTIONS

This expansion was made possible through a public-private partnership between several key foundations, Say Yes Buffalo, the Erie County Department of Social Services, and several additional organizations providing high-quality youth development, academic, workforce development, and other services in the Buffalo and Erie County area. We are grateful for the contributions made by this group.

The Buffalo/Erie Public-Private Partnership key partners:

[Say Yes Buffalo](#)

Erie County Department of Social Services

Buffalo Futures

[Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo](#)

[Redlich Horwitz Foundation](#)

Casey Family Programs

Bank of America

The following individuals made significant contributions to the development, revision, and/or review of the Fair Futures Manual and materials:

Katie Napolitano & Emil Ramnarine, Center for Fair Futures

Liz Nellis, Consultant

Amanda Paul, [Say Yes Buffalo](#)

Sylvia Lloyd, [Say Yes Buffalo](#)

Michael Zink, [At The Table](#)

[Parent Network of Western New York](#)

[Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo](#)

In addition to the key partners listed above, representatives from the following local organizations were interviewed so that their expertise could inform the Fair Futures Manual, materials, and model:

[Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education](#)

[Erie1 BOCES](#)

[Fostering Greatness](#)

Gateway-Longview

[Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo](#)

[New Directions Youth & Family Services](#)

[Northland Training Center](#)

[Parent Network of Western New York](#)

[The Service Collaborative](#)

[SUNY Erie Community College](#)

The Youth Employment Coalition

PART 1: FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM SUMMARY

SECTION 1. BACKGROUND AND NEED

All young people need long-term, healthy relationships with caring adults and access to resources and opportunities to succeed. The Fair Futures model upholds the notion that young people in the child welfare system, most of whom have experienced trauma and loss, have the same capabilities as children without such experiences, but can face multiple obstacles to reaching their full potential. Additionally, when foster youth “age out” of the system, typically at age 21, they – like most young people – are often not prepared for independent living.

Youth in foster care who do not have access to long-term, comprehensive support have significantly lower rates of high school graduation, post-secondary persistence and completion, and employment. Without a high school degree, young people are at high risk of facing chronic unemployment and/or system involvement. Youth who age out of foster care are among the populations at greatest risk for becoming homeless, incarcerated, or experiencing early pregnancy/parenthood.

However, outcomes for young people who receive access to long-term coaching and quality academic and career services are significantly stronger.

Foster youth are incredibly resilient. They have dealt with more adversity and trauma that most adults will ever experience, and when they are equipped with consistent, caring, authentic adult relationships and the individualized supports that every young person needs, these youth can make tremendous strides in their social/emotional, academic, and career development.

SECTION 2. GOALS

The overarching goal of the Fair Futures model is to provide young people with the long-term coaching, social/emotional, academic, and career development supports they need to:

- Develop relational skills and a strong network of positive peer and adult supports;
- Prepare for and graduate high school;
- Connect to and persist in post-secondary settings;
- Build progressive career development experiences in line with their interests and academic/vocational plans that will help them navigate onto a living wage career pathway;
- Access and maintain affordable housing (for young people who age out of foster care) and gain independent living skills.



SECTION 3. FAIR FUTURES STAFF & KEY MODEL COMPONENTS

At scale, Fair Futures serves young people in foster care starting in the 6th grade and sticks with young people until age 26, regardless of their permanency status. (Note: Current Buffalo/Erie funding is for ages 11-21. The middle school model has not yet been implemented.)

There are no eligibility criteria and coaching is voluntary; a young person can choose to leave and return to the program at any time. The model is all about meeting young people where they are, believing in them, and helping them reach their full potential.

The model includes the following positions at scale:



Program Director



Middle School Education Specialist (maximum 1:50 ratio)



Coach Supervisors (1:4 – 1:5 ratio)



Coaches (1:15 ratio)



College Specialist



Tutors[†] For 6th–12th graders (1:18 ratio)



Career Development Specialist



Housing Specialist



Outreach Coordinator

A best practice that agencies could adopt is to have an **Outreach Coordinator** who was previously in foster care and received support. They can serve as a Credible Messenger and help recruit young people to the program who have not engaged (or who have disengaged).

[†]Tutors are for students in grades 6-12. Agencies can to sub-contract with a quality tutoring vendor or create their own tutoring program; see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 6](#).

Key components of the model include:

A ROBUST MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM PREPARES STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS IN HIGH SCHOOL

In middle school, Fair Futures students will receive educational advocacy, access to in-home, weekly tutoring, individualized assistance with the high school selection process, and connections to extracurricular activities.

Two key components of the middle school program include the Middle School Education Specialist and in-home, quality tutoring:



The Middle School Education Specialist:

The Middle School Education Specialist oversees up to 40 students at a time.

The key duties of the **Middle School Education Specialist** are to:

- Proactively monitor the academic performance of all middle school students;
- Provide educational advocacy to middle school students, as needed, and ensure students are receiving the supports they need to succeed;
- Connect middle school students to trauma-informed, weekly, in-home tutoring by a quality tutoring provider
- Connect students to extracurricular activities afterschool and in the summer;
- **Provide individualized assistance with the high school selection processes to all 8th grade students and their families.** The Specialist will ensure that all students apply to quality, best-fit schools.

In-home Tutoring:

From 6th to 8th grade, students will receive weekly, in-home tutoring from a Tutor (at a 1:15-18 ratio) who works from a strength-based, youth development lens and provides the individualized academic and social-emotional support students need to excel in middle school and prepare for high school. Tutors will report academic progress, needs, and concerns to the Middle School Education Specialist and also work with the Specialist to help ensure young people are connected to extracurricular activities.

To implement the tutoring component, agencies can subcontract a quality third party tutoring provider or build their own tutoring program.

COACHING FROM 9TH GRADE THROUGH AGE 26 BY FULL-TIME, TRAINED, PROFESSIONAL COACHES



Starting in the 9th grade, young people are matched with a Coach who works from a caring, authentic, trauma-informed, strength-based approach and builds a trusting relationship with the young person.

Coaches are full-time, trained professionals that receive significant training and professional development supports from the Center for Fair Futures.

The relationship between the Coach and the young person is the central part of the model; without this relationship, Coaches cannot help young people achieve their goals.

COACHES ARE NOT CASE PLANNERS OR CASE MANAGERS

Case Planners are required to focus on keeping the young person safe, making diligent efforts towards permanency planning, and working according to court-mandated timelines. The primary job of a Coach is to form a trusting, authentic, and transformational relationship with the young person (one that is not protocol-bound). Coaches are able to meet young people wherever they feel most comfortable and with greater frequency than mandated by a Case Planner. Coaches collaborate with young people on their level and always use a strength-based, youth development approach. Overall – the Coach’s focus is on meeting the young person where they are, building a trusting relationship, believing in them, helping them achieve their academic and career development goals, and sticking with them – no matter what.

Coaches receive weekly supervision and support from Coach Supervisors, and a Program Director supports the Supervisors and oversees the program.

At a high level, Coaches perform the following activities:

(See [Appendix A: Fair Futures Staff Screening & Hiring Toolkit](#) for a full job description)

- **Build relationships** with up to 15 young people
- Provide **ongoing social/emotional support**
- Work 1:1 with young people to **develop goals** based on their interests and take measurable steps towards their goals
- Connect young people to best-fit schools/programs, career development experiences, and opportunities in line with their goals;
- **Help young people persist in academic/career development settings** by checking on them weekly, visiting the school/program, forming a relationship with the Primary Person at the school/program
 - Help them navigate any challenges that arise and celebrate their successes
- Help young people **plan/prepare** for the next step on their journey
 - Should a youth not be successful in any particular school/program setting, Coaches help young people reflect on the experience, provide support, and work with them to set new goals and transition to the next opportunity
- **Collaborate** with Say YES colleagues, foster care agency staff, the school, and foster parents/parents, as needed, to help youth achieve their goals and ensure their overall well-being
- Connect young people to **peer group supports** and build positive relationships
- Ensure young people who are aging out can access and **maintain stable, affordable housing** and **build independent living skills**

TUTORS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NEED



At scale, the Fair Futures middle school tutoring component continues throughout high school. High school students in need of individualized support should be connected to quality, weekly tutoring (in-home or in the community, wherever the young person prefers).

Tutors, like Coaches, should work from a strength-based, youth development lens and build a positive relationship with the young person. Tutors provide the support students need to improve their academic skills and post-secondary preparedness. Tutors should report to Coaches on a monthly basis and inform them of student progress, needs, and any concerns.

(See [Fair Futures Program Manual, Section 19](#))

CAREER DEVELOPMENT, COLLEGE, & HOUSING SPECIALISTS



After Coaches build a relationship with young people and help them develop goals, they connect youth to Specialists to assist them in conducting specific tasks to achieve their goals. These usually include assistance with identifying and applying to a best-fit school/college, program, or housing opportunity in line with their goals.

All Specialists receive additional training in their respective areas of focus and provide **three key benefits**:

1. Supporting the Coach with some of the more time-consuming aspects of educational advocacy, college application, financial aid, job and housing applications, etc.
2. Ensuring that at least one person is well-trained and knowledgeable about the resources and pathways available for foster youth in Buffalo/Erie
3. Expanding the young person's network of positive staff/adult support

Specialists can also provide one-off, "targeted services" (specific services, such as assistance with filling out an application) to young people who do not want to participate in longer-term coaching but still need supports in certain areas.

THE BUFFALO/ERIE PILOT WILL NOT INCLUDE SPECIALISTS.

While Specialists provide critical supports, the Buffalo/Erie pilot will not include this role for the foreseeable future. Instead, Coaches will collaborate with the Career Coaches at The Hub to do deep career exploration and help them connect to best-fit career pathways. Coaches can also collaborate with Say YES Guidance Counselors to help young people with college applications. For housing, Coaches will work with the young person's foster care agency to submit applications if they are aging out and need housing.

PEER GROUPS

Peer groups are an important component of the Fair Futures model. To stick with the program over the course of years, young people need to feel connected not only to their Coach, but to the program itself and other adult and peer supports.

Peer groups help young people develop positive relationships with their peers and serve as important motivational and skill-building forums. They are often a space that allows young people to start or continue the process of healing by learning about managing stress, healthy communication and self-expression, and mental/physical wellness.

Peer groups are not typical workshops; they have a Facilitator (not an Instructor) who lets the young people drive the discussion/activity. Coaches (or other Fair Futures staff) should take turns organizing and facilitating peer groups. Coaches can learn a lot about young people's thoughts, concerns, and challenges through these groups, which can help them in their coaching sessions. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 25](#))

SECTION 4. SUMMARY OF SUPPORTS YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVE THROUGH COACHING

Coaches work with Specialists and Tutors, as needed, to provide young people with robust social/emotional, academic, career development, and housing/independent living supports.

1. SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SUPPORT & EMPOWERMENT THROUGH COACHING

Coaches build a trusting relationship with young people and provide ongoing emotional support. Without this supportive relationship, Coaches cannot help young people set goals or make progress toward their goals.

To build a strong relationship, the model emphasizes consistency, constancy, and creativity. Be consistent in reaching out at least once per week, and when one approach does not work, try another! And when you do connect, remember to be your authentic self. Suggest fun activities in line with their interests to get to know them better.



Coaches should be in touch with young people regularly (minimum once/week), and not always about their academic or career development progress! They should engage young people in activities and have conversations about various aspects of their life – their concerns/fears, relationships with others, interests, challenges, etc. If there is a crisis situation or something to celebrate, Coaches should be there for the young person and provide the support that they need.

Once Coaches have built a positive rapport with young people, they can help them set goals, based on their interests and where they are. They play a critical role in helping young people regain control over their own lives and their future.

2. ROBUST ACADEMIC SUPPORT



Coaches help oversee a young person's academic journey and progress – they ensure they are enrolled in a best-fit school, attending school, and have the supports and resources they need to be successful, graduate, and enter and persist in a post-secondary setting.

ROLE OF A COACH AS IT RELATES TO ACADEMIC SUPPORT:

For young people who are disconnected and without a high school degree/GED, Coaches help them re-engage and reconnect them to a best-fit academic setting. However, they do not simply tell the young person why they should go back to high school – the young person knows this, *and* has likely heard it from many other adults in their lives. Coaches try to understand the drivers as to **why** that young person may have disconnected, and perhaps first help that young person connect to experiences in line with their interests. This could include any type of extracurricular activity, job, or other type of career development experience where they can build their self-esteem, sense of self, and start to envision success. Coaches meet them where they are, and when they are ready they can help them enroll in a best-fit high school setting. For more creative, innovative approaches see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 20](#).

For students in high school or a GED program, Coaches review transcripts and academic data when it becomes available, visit the school with the young person at least 1x per semester, and discuss graduation and post-secondary plans (and include other adults in these conversations). If/when needed, Coaches provide educational advocacy, connect students to quality tutoring, and assist with transferring students into a better-fit high school or high school equivalency (HSE) program. Coaches also coordinate with the student's Case Planner, tutor, teachers, and parents to support their academic needs and plans. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18](#))

Coaches help all young people explore post-secondary opportunities, including college and/or vocational programs, starting in the 9th grade, or as early as possible if the young person joins the program at an older age. Even if the young person is not interested, it is the role of the Coach to make sure they are aware of all of the opportunities available to them. For example, they should know that SUNY colleges are not only free for them, but that the financial aid will cover most (if not all) of their living expenses.

If the young person is not interested in college, they should know about all the free sector-based training programs in Buffalo/Erie that could lead to a higher-wage career path. The young person will make the decision, but they need to know all of the possibilities. For young people who are interested in a post-secondary setting, Coaches will often work in conjunction with Specialists to help young people develop plans. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21](#))

For students on a college-bound pathway, the Coach (and Say YES Guidance Counselor) will help the young person explore and identify best-fit colleges, complete college and financial aid applications, access opportunity programs, re-enroll each semester, and reapply to all forms of funding each year. The Coach will play an important role in providing persistence support at critical junctures before, during, and after each semester. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21](#))

For students on a vocational or direct employment pathway, the Coach will connect the youth to the Career Coach at The Hub to identify and apply to best-fit vocational/workforce programs, civil service pathways, internships, employment, and/or apprenticeship opportunities. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21](#) and [Section 22](#))

Once a young person is enrolled in a post-secondary setting, the Coach helps the young person persist by following up during critical junctures, connecting them to resources, and providing ongoing social/emotional support.



TO PROVIDE POST-SECONDARY SUPPORT, A COLLEGE SPECIALIST SHOULD:

- Meet with young people interested in college to have an exploratory and informational session and discuss what that roadmap/timeline would look like at their particular high school or GED program
- Monitor PSAT/SAT scores of those students who do take them, and meet with them to discuss/refine college options
- Organize college tours
- Help young people apply to colleges in line with their interests, preferences, and performance
- Assist students with college essays and personal statements, where needed
- Review any college applications or financial aid forms filled out by the student's school/guidance counselor to ensure they are correct
- Ensure that students apply to any Opportunity Programs available to them
- Sit with students and help them apply to FAFSA, TAP, ETV, Say YES and all applicable scholarships, including reviewing their essays and helping with letters of reference
- Ensure students are signed up for any entrance interviews/exams
- Fill out all of the required paperwork for Room & Board, if applicable
- Reach out to students to ensure they are enrolled in the proper classes each semester, and assist with enrollment, if needed
- Help young people reapply to all forms of financial aid and scholarships each year
- Assist students with transferring colleges, if needed

3. CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS

Coaches ensure **all young people engage in at least one career exploration activity each year**, either with them or the Career Coach at The Hub. All young people, regardless of their situation, are also encouraged to engage in **at least one career development experience/activity** each year based on their interests, strengths, needs, and academic situation.

It is extremely important for young people to start building their resumes at any early age, including through extracurricular, leadership, and community service activities. Engaging in career development experiences can also help young people build their self-esteem, sense of belonging, network of adult and peer supports, and the soft skills required for success in life. It can also help young people re-engage in school and improve their performance, as these experiences can help them envision pathways to success and why a degree is so important.

Both the Coach and Career Coach can help young people make progress toward their career development goals.



ROLE OF A COACH IN PROVIDING CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT EACH YEAR:

- ❑ Conduct career exploration activities with young people (a required Goal – see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#));
- ❑ Ensure the young person has working papers, if needed, and has an updated resume each year (a required Goal – see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#));
- ❑ Work with the young person and/or refer the young person to a Career Coach to engage in a discussion at least 1x each year around potential career development experiences that young person could have that year based on the their interests, strengths, and academic plans (a required Goal - see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#));
- ❑ Assist all young people in selecting at least one career development experience each year that is in line with their interests and academic situation/background (a required Goal – see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#));

To do so, the Coach can:

- Expose youth to extracurricular, youth development, community service, and/or leadership activities, which help youth build their resumes, self-esteem, and develop critical soft skills needed in the workplace;
- Refer young people to on-site opportunities at Say YES, such as internships and apprenticeships;
- Help young people apply to workforce programs or employment opportunities;
- Refer young people to the Career Coach to help them apply to vocational programs;
- Provide persistence coaching to young people employed or enrolled in any external program by checking in with them regularly and building a relationship with the “primary person” at that program.

4. HOUSING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS

For young people aging out of foster care, Coaches work closely with the **Case Planner** to help them access stable, affordable housing.

While Coaches often help facilitate permanency by helping young people build trusting relationships with adults, the roles/responsibilities associated with permanency are in the domain of the Case Planner. **The goal is always to help the young person find a safe, stable, loving family and a broad network of supportive adults.**

If full funding for Fair Futures is available through age 26 in Buffalo/Erie, Coaches will help them navigate the difficult transition into independent living.

ROLE OF A COACH IN PROVIDING HOUSING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING SUPPORTS:

- ❑ Coaches the young person on ALL of the types of housing available to them. Reach out for technical assistance if needed! Encourage the young person to apply to all, or at least to two different kinds so that they have options - remind them that they can always turn it down;
- ❑ Helps the young person coordinate with a Case Planner to ensure that all young people’s housing applications are submitted as early as possible (by age 19 if their goal is to age out);
- ❑ Accompanies the young person on any housing interviews;
- ❑ Helps young people move in and obtain furniture; reaches out every day that first week to provide emotional support during this often scary transition;
- ❑ Helps young people obtain public assistance, if/when needed;
- ❑ Helps young people maintain their housing by providing independent living supports such as budgeting, obtaining a bank account, and advocating with landlords, if needed.

5. CONNECTIONS TO POSITIVE PEER GROUPS

Coaches should connect young people to peer groups, whenever possible. As mentioned above, peer groups help young people develop positive, supportive relationships with their peers. A best practice is for agencies to convert their PYA (Preparing Youth for Adulthood) workshops into peer groups, if applicable. The difference between a workshop and a peer group is that peer groups are youth-led/co-facilitated. The young people decide the topics and help lead the discussion, versus having an Instructor lead the workshop. This also helps with empowerment and buy-in!

Peers also serve as credible messengers. If a young person is disconnected or struggling and one of their peers talks about how they went through the same experience and were able to overcome it, that can be incredibly motivating. Agencies have often found that peer group forums can be the source of breakthroughs and “ah-ha” moments; literally one conversation can help a young person reframe their situation and start moving forward with their goals.

Peer groups can also help young people improve their job readiness by helping them improve critical soft skills (listening, responding respectfully, etc.).

To recap, peer groups help young people to:

- Form positive peer relationships and build their support network
- Avoid involvement in negative peer groups
- Be heard, feel that they are not alone, and part of a larger community
- Meet credible messengers that they can relate to and be inspired by
- Learn about topics related to wellness and stress management
- Build and reinforce critical soft skills
- Gain leadership/community service experiences that they can include on their resumes
- Stay connected to the Fair Futures program
- For agencies who do not have enough young people to implement peer groups, the Fair Futures Youth Board Director will be organizing and forming system-wide Youth Board events with young people.

FAIR FUTURES ***PROGRAM MANUAL*** ***PART 2***

SECTION 5

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SECTION 5. COACHING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS



This section summarizes the role of the Coach working with students in middle school. The Coach should also review the educational advocacy materials developed by Parent Network on the Fair Futures website under “Middle and High School Education.”

A. OVERVIEW OF ROLE OF A COACH SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

At a high level, the role of the coach supporting middle school students is the same as a coach supporting students in high school and beyond, with some nuances. For example, instead of connecting the young person to an internship or job training program, they may instead connect them to an extracurricular activity in line with their interests. One other key difference is that the coach will provide individualized assistance to all 8th graders with the high school selection process so they can enter a quality, best-fit high school.

OVERALL, THE ROLE OF A COACH SUPPORTING A MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT IS TO:

- Build a trusting relationship with the young person and their parent(s)/family.
- Build a collaborative, supportive relationship with the other key adults in their life, including the Guidance Counselor, key school staff, etc.
- Provide weekly, ongoing emotional support and continue to build the relationship by engaging in fun, recreational activities with the young person.
- Assist the young person with any goals they have.
- Monitor the student’s academic performance and visit their school at least once per semester (ideally with their parent(s) to meet with key school staff, discuss performance, needs, etc.
- Provide educational support (and advocacy, when needed) to help the student obtain any services they need to succeed in school, such as an IEP, 504 Plan, a tutor, a school transfer, etc.
- Attend the annual IEP meeting (if applicable) along with the parent(s) to ensure they are receiving the services and accommodations outlined in their plan.
- Work with the student and family to refer the student to quality tutoring, if needed, and follow up with tutors regarding the student’s performance, needs, and any concerns.
- Provide individualized assistance with the high school selection processes to all 8th grade students and their families so the student can enter a best-fit, quality high school.
- Help young people explore their potential career and academic interests through conversations, tools, and assessments.
- Partner with the student and family to help the student connect to afterschool and summer extracurricular/career development opportunities in line with their interests. These could include sports, arts, leadership, and/or academic enrichment programs, as well as the Summer Youth Employment Program, if eligible.
- Expose young people to post-secondary opportunities that will be available to them following high school; start having exploratory conversations.

Common educational advocacy services provided by the Middle School Education Specialist include:

- **Special education support and advocacy**, including requesting that the school make a referral for evaluations, participating in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, monitoring service implementation, and helping families exercise their due process rights;
- **Disciplinary support and advocacy**;
- **Truancy prevention and support**;
- **Tutoring referrals**;
- **School enrollment and transfers**, including attending best interest determinations and securing transportation when students enter foster care or move between foster care placements;
- **Referrals to other services/supports**, as needed

B. COORDINATING WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Collaborating with stakeholders allows the Coach to create a team of support and advocacy for students.

PARENTS/GUARDIANS:

It is imperative to engage the student and their family, including both parents, as these are the people that will benefit most from the advocacy. **Parents** should be invited to all school events, and their consent is required for many special education decisions. It is the responsibility of the Coach to contact parents for discussion about issues such as special education services, attendance concerns, behavioral issues in school, and school transfers

COORDINATING WITH CASE PLANNERS:

In addition to direct work with students and families, the Coach should coordinate and collaborate with any other organization staff (e.g., Case Planners) on the student's academic progress and follow up on any needs/concerns.

COORDINATING WITH THE SCHOOL

School staff and community resources are other stakeholders that the Coach will work with. Teachers, counselors, social workers, school psychologists and the school administration all have a direct interest in the student's success, as their success contributes to the overall mission and goals of the school. As a result, the Coach will collaborate with the school and parent(s) to explore options for students to improve and benefit from services offered such as academic intervention services, afterschool programming, special education services, and other supports.

The Coach should schedule school visits (with the parents, ideally) to meet with the student's guidance counselor and/or teachers and services providers, when possible. It is a best practice to visit at least once a semester. Here is a document that summarizes everything you need to know about conducting an effective school visit.

[See Appendix C5: Effective School Visits.](#)

If the student has a special education teacher for multiple periods of the day, it would be ideal for the Coach to meet with them. If there are concerns about how the student is doing in a particular class, it is best to meet with that teacher instead of the guidance counselor, and/or observe the student in that class (after first letting the student know they will be doing an observation).

Before the visit, the Coach should request the student's most recent records (including updated attendance, progress reports, latest report card, and latest IEP, if applicable). The Coach should then get the students' report cards again in November and March (after parent teacher conferences) and at the end of June.

Students in 8th grade should attend any meetings with the Coach, parent(s), and guidance counselor. At these meetings, the Coach should discuss the student's progress as well as any issues occurring in the school. The team can then collaborate on a plan (with knowledge/ approval of the parent, who remains the primary decision-maker) to address any needs including improving attendance, grades, and behavior as well as ensuring that IEP services are being appropriately provided.

Once these initial meetings have occurred and records have been obtained, the Coach should maintain regular contact with school staff and parent(s) to ensure the continued success of the students as well as follow up on progress towards goal achievement. Coaches may want to attend parent-teacher conferences with some families.

COORDINATING WITH EXTERNAL PROVIDERS.

The Coach will also work with community resources including tutoring programs, mental health services, and afterschool programs. Collaborating with these stakeholders allows students and families to receive assistance and services on a broad spectrum that can foster continued success educationally as well as emotionally.

C. MIDDLE SCHOOL GOALS & STEPS – USING THE ONLINE PLATFORM

OVERVIEW

The Coach can use the Online Platform to:



- Track academic performance
- Track educational advocacy services and supports provided
- Enter contact notes
- Document the list of high schools the student selected
- Track tutoring and extracurricular referrals

There are four Middle School Academic Goals in the Online Platform that the Coach should work with middle students on each year.

THE FOUR MIDDLE SCHOOL ACADEMIC GOALS INCLUDE:

- [Complete school year promoted](#) and better prepared for high school by monitoring performance, providing educational advocacy, and referring them to tutoring and other services, as needed
- [Help all 8th graders enter a best-fit, quality high school](#) by providing individualized assistance with the high school selection process
- [Connect students to extracurricular activities](#), ideally both afterschool and in the summer;
- [Ensure all students with an IEP or 504 Plan are receiving appropriate special education services or accommodations](#)

Each Goal has a series of **Required** and **Potential Steps** which represent progress towards those Goals. The Coach should check off the Steps in the Online Platform as they are completed.

D. MONITORING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

USING THE ONLINE PLATFORM.

The Coach can use the Online Platform to monitor progress towards the four Middle School Academic Goals and their associated steps.

The **Required Steps** for the “[Complete school year promoted](#)” Goal include:

- Monitor attendance (monthly, or as frequently as provided)
- Monitor NYS exam scores when they become available
- Monitor grade promotion status (in March and in June)
- Monitor grades (as frequently as provided)
- Visit the school at least once per semester

The Coach should check off each of these steps as they are completed for every student each year. There is also space to record the attendance rates, grades, and promotion status in the platform.

The following sections provide guidance around what to look for when monitoring academic data, and what follow-up steps could be taken if support is required.

MONITORING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: ATTENDANCE

Attendance is a key piece of academic data.

There are two particular categories to focus on when monitoring academic performance:

1. Students that have a major drop in attendance from one month to the next
2. Students with less than 90% attendance

Coaches should ensure that they follow up with the family with regards to both categories of students. Coaches should follow up to determine why there was a drop-in attendance and/or what is causing students to miss an excessive amount of school.

EXAMPLES OF ATTENDANCE-RELATED ISSUES AND STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN TO RESOLVE THEM INCLUDE:

Medical issue: The Coach should work with the family on getting medical documentation to the school in order to excuse the student absences.

Transportation/busing issues: If the student has an IEP that includes transportation or otherwise qualifies for busing, check with the school and family to ensure that busing is being provided and that the bus is arriving on time. If busing is not on the IEP but is needed, follow up with the school and the parent (who must consent to the service) to see if it can be amended to include busing.

Issues with school climate or program: Sometimes a student's attendance drops because of a problem going on in the school, such as bullying, the school's failure to provide mandated special education or English as a New Language services, or the student's need for a different type of school environment entirely. If a student's attendance difficulties do not appear to be related to medical, transportation, or other easily identifiable issues, the Coach will need to discuss any concerns with the student to determine the reason behind their school refusal before coming up with a plan to address those needs.



Any steps taken should then be checked off - or created - in the Online Platform.

MONITORING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: GRADE PROMOTION

The district provides a list of students whose promotion is in doubt to families early each year; many schools send out lists as early as the last week in January. These are the students that are in danger of being retained in their current grade. Schools are also required to inform families if students are at risk of not meeting standards during Fall parent-teacher conferences.

Often times, these students should not be retained but promoted to the next grade level with the appropriate academic supports in place. Once students reach second grade, research shows that grade retention is almost never beneficial to students, and in fact, being retained a grade is by far the greatest single predictor of high school dropout.

Whenever the Coach learns that a student is at risk or promotion may be in doubt, they should collaborate with the family and key adults around developing an effective plan to assist the student. They should also contact the school to ensure that an appropriate plan is put into place for each student to assist in successfully promoting them to the next grade level.

Any student who is at risk of not meeting grade level standards is entitled under NYS regulations to

Academic Intervention Services (AIS).

Schools have discretion as to what form the AIS will take, but it must be targeted to address the area(s) in which the student is struggling.

AIS can include:

- Before school, after school, or Saturday tutoring;
- Small group and/or individual teacher instruction;
- At risk speech, counseling, or SETSS services;
- Remedial small-class instruction

Aside from mandated AIS, Coaches may consider requesting make-up or extra-credit work for the student, including additional homework packets and projects, referring the student for additional tutoring, applying to a summer program for the student that includes academic supports, or referring the student for special education services. If the student already has an IEP, they may need a re-evaluation to determine if additional or more intensive special education services are needed. As always, parental consent is required.

Once these supports are put into place, Coaches should closely monitor the student's progress and follow up with schools in June to determine if the student has been recommended for summer school or if the student was successfully promoted.

If the student was recommended or mandated for summer school, Coaches should contact the family immediately to ensure the student enrolls in summer school, confirm their attendance on the first day, and monitor their attendance throughout the summer. When summer school concludes in August, Coaches should follow up with schools on final promotion decisions and, if a student is retained, consider appealing the holdover decision.

MONITORING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: GRADES

A student's grades are key pieces of academic data. Typically, schools give out elementary and middle school report cards in the fall (November) and spring (March) parent-teacher conferences, as well as at the end of June (and if the student attends summer school, at the end of the summer). There are interim grades as well, but those are the most important junctures.

After reviewing grades, the Coach should complete the following **Steps**:

- Follow up on any failed classes and the drivers;
- Inquire what happened if a grade is below 75 or if there was a 10+ point drop in the grade from one period to the next.

Potential Steps the Coach could take if a student has low grades include:

- Refer students to a tutor, especially if grades are below 75 (or mostly 1s and 2s for those schools with a 1-4 system);
- Consider afterschool programming or Response To Intervention support;
- Speak to/meet with the school staff to discuss performance, progress, and any needs;
- Speak to/meet with the student's family to discuss performance, progress, and any needs;
- Help young person enroll in summer school;
- Help student obtain IEP or 504 Plan;
- Conduct advocacy with DOE/school to help student obtain particular service or accommodation.

MONITORING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: NEW YORK STATE EXAMS

In the Spring each year, students in grades 3 to 8 take the New York State Common Core exams in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. Fourth and 8th grade students also take science exams.

Scores range from 1-4 and reflect the following performance:

- 1:** Far below grade level standards
- 2:** Approaching grade level standards
- 3:** At grade level standards
- 4:** Exceeding grade level standards



After NYS Exam scores are released the Coach should enter these in the Online Platform. If students are receiving low scores, supports should be put into place (see above Potential Steps).

To accomplish the Goal of being promoted each year, the Coach may have to perform educational advocacy and/or connect students to tutors, as needed.

Once the school year is complete, the Coach will close out the Goal and indicate whether it was completed successfully or not. If the student attends summer school, the Goal should be closed out after the final grades/promotion status have been obtained (likely by mid-September).



E. GENERAL EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM ADVOCACY

The Coach offers both **long-term individualized interventions** for students with complex or ongoing educational needs and **targeted short-term supports** to ensure every student has access to a particular service or opportunity.

A **long-term** or **caseload intervention** is generally defined as *any educational intervention that progresses toward a goal that will require more than one week or 4 contacts to accomplish*. An example of a case that would qualify a long-term intervention would be following up on a student who is being denied IEP services or improperly excluded from the classroom. An example of short-term assistance could include connections to advocacy or referrals to supports, as needed.



Coaches should use **Progress Notes** to formulate action plans for students and document the advocacy steps taken. **Progress Notes** can be submitted in the Online Platform and can be inputted with specific Goals or Steps. Progress Notes for each student can be downloaded from the Online Platform by generating a Report.

SUSPENSION ADVOCACY

A student may receive a **Principal's Suspension** of 1 to 5 days. During a Principal's Suspension, students remain in their school but are removed from their classroom for the duration of the suspension. When a Principal's Suspension occurs, the school must hold a Principal's Suspension conference with the parent to discuss the events that led to the suspension and develop a plan to avoid future suspensions. Coaches should participate in these meetings with families whenever possible, work with schools to develop plans to address student behaviors, and advocate for additional supports when needed.

During a **Superintendent Suspension**, a student may be suspended for more than 5 days (up to 1 year). A Superintendent Suspension is served outside of the student's school at a designated suspension site. A Superintendent Suspension requires a formal hearing.

In the event of a superintendent suspension, the Coach needs to:

- Obtain a copy of the suspension letter, which will include the date and time of the suspension hearing, the charges, and the location of the suspension site. The parent should receive the suspension letter within 24 hours of the suspension, however, if they do not, request a copy from the school or the suspension office.
- Obtain the suspension packet from the school. This will include any witness statements, occurrence reports, and other information the school will use as evidence at the hearing.
- Speak with the student, parent, and/or case planning team to get the student's side of the story.
- Confirm with the family and suspension site that the student is attending consistently and receiving school work.
- Contact the school to find out the length of suspension they will be recommending to the hearing office. Try to assess if they might consider a shorter suspension if the student pleads no contest and/or agrees to engage in services.
- Review the suspension packet. Considering the available evidence and the student's version of the events, think about how to argue for a shorter suspension or dismissal of the charges altogether, where appropriate. Consult with one of the above resources if unsure or would like to obtain representation for the child.
- Provide the suspension packet to the representation team and meet with all parties so the student can provide their account of the event to the representation team.
- Attend the hearing with the student, parent, and representation present. *Note: In the event that one or all parties are unable to attend the hearing, it can be adjourned to another date so that representation can be secured before the hearing.*
- If the student has an IEP, the school will conduct a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) meeting to determine if the infraction was the result of the student's disability. The date of the meeting will be included in the suspension letter. Specialists should participate in the MDR, along with the parent/foster parent and student, when appropriate.



NOTE: If it is determined that the infraction was a result of the student's disability or the school's failure to implement the student's IEP, the student must be reinstated to their school immediately.

F. ADVOCACY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students in care can struggle academically for many reasons including experiencing significant gaps in school attendance and transferring multiple times, as well as mental health and behavioral concerns. Due to these issues, Coaches often find themselves advocating for students to receive academic intervention services to help bring them up to speed and bridge any gaps in their education.

Some students may just need an **afterschool program, Response to Intervention, or 504 accommodation**. In other cases, it may be in the student's best interest to be referred to an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** right away.

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI)

One way to collaborate with school stakeholders on assisting students is to advocate for **Academic Intervention Services (AIS)**.

One form of AIS is **Response to Intervention (RTI)** services. RTI services are to be implemented whenever a student is at risk of not meeting grade level standards. Schools are required to provide RTI services prior to referring students for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). However, if a parent wants to refer their child for special education services, the school district is required to move forward with the evaluation, while also implementing RTI for the student.

Examples of RTI Services include

- Individual and Group Counseling
- Speech Therapy
- Small group instruction
- Before school, after school, or weekend tutoring

The Coach should advocate for students to receive the most appropriate services available. At times, students may need extra assistance to bridge gaps in their education prior to receiving a more comprehensive evaluation or an IEP. This is why it is important to have schools support students with RTI services first before evaluating for an IEP due to a suspected learning disability.

A student may be found ineligible for an IEP. In this case, the school can also offer RTI services in place of Special Education Services. The student may also qualify for a 504 Plan.

504 PLANS

A student may have a disability that does not necessitate special education services. **This can occur when the student has a medical or mental health diagnosis that requires accommodation**, but their grades and academic progress are on track. **Accommodations** could include testing accommodations, extended time to complete homework or classwork, schedule breaks, or large print books or materials. In these instances, a 504 plan can ensure that the student receives needed accommodations and serves as a preventive measure to inhibit future academic issues.

THE SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRAL PROCESS

Only the parent or the school can refer a student for a special education evaluation. The Coach should recommend (or request) that a parent or school refer a student for a Special Education Evaluation if it is believed that the student has a learning or other disability that interferes with their ability to progress in school.

To refer a student for a Special Education Evaluation, the parent or school must submit a referral letter to the school-based support team at their school. If the student attends a charter or private school, the letter should go to the Committee on Special Education (CSE) where the school is located.

Whenever possible, the Coach should write the referral letter on behalf of the parent and have the parent sign the letter. *School districts are required to accept referrals from a student's parent but can decline referral requests from other sources.*

EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY AT INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP) MEETINGS

Coaches can be powerful advocates for students with disabilities. Students often do not have an effective advocate on their side with regard to IEP development and services. Coaches can ensure an IEP focuses on the best interest of the student and that the student is receiving the services they need to be successful.

Effective advocacy includes working with the student (if age appropriate), family, and any case planning team to determine a course of action that would be in the best interest of the student. Once a plan is developed, Coaches should attend the meeting well informed of their student's needs in order to work with the school IEP team on developing an appropriate IEP. Coaches should be present at all IEP meetings for students along with the parent(s), and any Case Planner.

Upon completion of the IEP meeting, Coaches should follow up with the school and/or CSE to obtain a copy of the finalized IEP, confirm that the services are being implemented, and monitor the student's progress.

Once a student has been found eligible for an IEP, effective advocacy can also include **requesting new evaluations or a re-evaluation, requesting an independent educational evaluation, and requesting mediation or an impartial hearing:**

Requesting new evaluations: If a student is not progressing despite receiving special education services, the Coach can request additional evaluations, such as an assistive technology, auditory processing, speech/language, functional behavioral assessment, or other specialized evaluation, as well as an updated psycho-educational evaluation, to determine if the IEP needs to be amended or additional services need to be provided in order to meet the student's needs. The student's parent would need to consent to the evaluation for it to take place.

Requesting an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE): If the student is not demonstrating progress and the evaluation that the school district conducted is not accurate or adequate, a Coach can request an independent evaluation at the school district's expense. The student's parent would need to initiate and consent to an independent evaluation as well.

Requesting an impartial hearing: In the event that the district is not providing the student with appropriate evaluations, programming or services, the parent/guardian can request mediation or an impartial hearing. An effort should be made to work with the teacher, principal, IEP team, and CSE first before pursuing an impartial hearing.

GOALS & STEPS



The Coach should monitor progress toward the Goal: "[Ensure that all students with an IEP or 504 plan are receiving appropriate special education services or accommodations](#)," and its associated steps using the Online Platform.

Required Steps, based on the guidance above, include:

- Obtain copy of most recent IEP/504 Plan and ensure it is current within the last year
- Participate in annual IEP meeting and/or 504 meeting; try to ensure the student and student's parent participates in meeting
- Confirm student is receiving all accommodations and services mandated by 504 or IEP, and is in the right classroom setting

Potential Steps, based on relevance and/or need, include:

- Renew 504 Plan
- Obtain copy of most recent psycho-educational evaluation and ensure it is current within the last 3 years (required for students with IEPs but not 504s)
- Request new accommodation(s), if needed (requires parent's consent)
- Request that the school conduct a new IEP or 504 evaluation, if needed (requires parent's consent)
- Request that the school make changes to IEP, if needed (requires parent's consent)
- Request an independent educational evaluation if student is not demonstrating progress and the school evaluation is not comprehensive (requires parental consent)
- If needed, work with educational decision-maker to exercise due process rights on behalf of student (e.g., request mediation or an impartial hearing. This should only happen after talking with the student's teachers, principal, IEP team, and case planning team (and when needed, the District Superintendent).

G. MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL SELECTION PROCESS

HISTORICALLY, LOW-INCOME STUDENTS AND STUDENTS OF COLOR HAVE BEEN OVERREPRESENTED IN THE LOWEST PERFORMING SCHOOLS.

The Fair Futures model upholds that in addition to better supporting students in middle school, ALL students and their families should be provided with **individualized assistance with the high school selection process**. High school fit and quality are important drivers of graduation and post-secondary readiness. If a student starts off in a best-fit high school environment, they will be more likely to succeed.

The high school selection process can be extremely challenging and confusing, and students who are system-involved do not get the individualized assistance they need from guidance counselors (due to very high ratios and other factors). As a result, students often end up in local, lower-performing schools.

INDIVIDUALIZED ASSISTANCE TO ALL STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

In the Fair Futures model, the Coach provides guidance to all 8th grade students around the high school selection process and ensures that the final list of schools submitted does not contain any low-performing schools. Coaches can also assist 9th grade students who are unhappy with their high school placement with

School fairs and tours begin in early fall; students receive access to their online applications in October; and they must submit a list of up to 12 high schools by early December. The Coach should assist as much as possible with developing that list and must ensure that all eligible students submit a completed application.

To provide the best guidance possible, the Coach will receive comprehensive training from Parent Network and be equipped with a guide to the high school admissions process (*coming soon!*).

The overall goal is for the Coach to optimize the chances that students will enter best-fit, quality high schools by strategically selecting a list of 12 schools.

To do so, the Coach will be trained and supported on:

- The key metrics of high school quality (e.g., safety, academic outcomes, graduation rates, etc.) and admissions criteria and what constitutes a realistic match based on a student's interests, performance, and preferences;
- How to research high schools based on student's interests, performance, needs, and geographical preference;
- How to navigate potentially challenging conversations with parents and collaborate with guidance counselors.

GOALS & STEPS

For the "[Help all 8th graders enter a best-fit, quality high school!](#)" Goal, the Required and Potential Steps include:

Required Steps:

- Meet with the student/family to explain the process and develop preliminary list of schools in line with the student's interests, preferences, and performance
- Visit at least one high school with student, or coordinate visit with case planner/family to ensure student's attendance
- Check student's online application as soon as available to ensure demographic information is accurate
- Review student's application and list of schools before it is submitted
- Ensure student/family submits completed application by the December deadline
- Check in with student/family when they receive their offer letter in March

Potential Steps:

- Attend high school fair with student, or coordinate visit with case planner/family to ensure student's attendance
- Meet with student's guidance counselor to discuss their application
- Arrange tutoring for the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT) prep in the spring/summer
- Ensure student signs up for the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT) with their guidance counselor in September and attends testing date in October
- Help the student complete their portfolio (if applying to a visual arts school)
- Help student prepare, sign up for, and attend an audition (if applying to a performing arts school)
- Schedule school interview and/or assessment (if required)
- Complete charter school application(s)
- Monitor student's placement on waitlists
- Submit timely appeal (if needed)
- Celebrate acceptance into desired school/program



List all 12 high schools that 8th graders applied to in the second tab of the Goal Worksheet. Once a school is selected, make sure to record it!

H. CONNECTIONS TO EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

As discussed in the Career Development section, career development experiences include extracurricular activities, community service, and youth leadership programs. It is important for students to gain these types of experiences as early as possible, as they help build critical social/emotional skills, self-esteem, and a sense of purpose/belonging. Research also shows that it is especially important for middle school students to stay active after school and during the summer.

The Coach should help students explore their academic/career interests and connect to afterschool and summer programs in line with their interests. This will also entail parent buy-in and collaboration. Coaches can use exploratory tools such as Hats and Ladders (a training will be provided by Fair Futures) to conduct early career exploration.

Keep in mind that applications for summer programs, including scholarships and free programs, become available in January-February and often fill up quickly.

Coaches should track in the Online Platform which students are involved in afterschool and summer activities.

I. CONNECTION TO WEEKLY, IN-HOME TUTORING

A Potential Step of the Goal "[Complete school year promoted](#)" is to "**Refer student to a tutor, as most students can benefit from tutoring**". Quality, 1:1 tutoring is an important part of the Fair Futures middle school model.

If there is not enough capacity to provide ALL students with a tutor, those who have **Promotion in Doubt** or with grades under 75 should be prioritized.



The Coach should track all tutoring sessions attended by the student in the platform.

The Coach should read the progress reports from the Tutor and provide follow-up educational advocacy support with the school, if required.

FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTION 6

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SECTION 6. WEEKLY, IN-HOME TUTORING

A. OVERVIEW



An important component of the Fair Futures model is one-on-one, weekly, in-home tutoring from 6th – 12th grade for those students in need. **If resources are limited, critical junctures for tutoring are grades 7-9.** Tutors should use a trauma-informed, strength based, youth development lens and track student progress.

Agencies can choose to implement their own in-house tutoring program or contract with a quality provider.

B. ROLE OF THE TUTOR VS. OTHER AGENCY STAFF

Regardless of whether the Tutor is in-house staff or contracted, Tutors are responsible for:

- Building a collaborative relationship with the student;
- Helping them to improve their academic skills and grades;
- Reporting progress and any needs or concerns to the Middle School Education Specialist (for students in grades 6 to 8) and Coaches (for students in grades 9 to 12).

It is the Middle School Education Specialist's role, for students in 6th-8th grade, and the Coach's role, for students in 9th-12th grade, to make records requests to schools, check in with guidance counselors, and perform interventions (e.g. suspension advocacy, requesting evaluations, etc.) on behalf of students.

Should a need arise that the Tutor flags, The Specialist or Coach can then provide necessary advocacy with the school and/or connect the student to services.

In addition to regular progress reporting, Tutor should inform the Middle School Education Specialist (for students in 6th-8th grade) or the Coach (for students in 9th-12th grade) immediately if:

- The student displays signs of depression, suicidal thoughts, severe anxiety or other mental health problems.
- The Tutor is aware of concerning behaviors or activities a student is participating in (e.g. drug use, involvement in gangs, unhealthy relationships, etc.). Tutors should inform their Supervisor about troubling behavior as well.
- The Tutor learns of a potential medical issue that may be affecting a student (including needing glasses). This should be reported to the Specialist and Case Planner.



The current pilot in Buffalo utilizes tutoring supports, but not in-home supports, and does not currently employ middle school specialists

FAIR FUTURES ***PROGRAM MANUAL*** ***PART 3***

SECTION 7

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PART 3: FAIR FUTURES COACHING MODEL (9TH GRADE THROUGH AGE 26)

SECTION 7. JOB DESCRIPTIONS & SCREENING/HIRING COMPETENT STAFF

A. STAFF ONBOARDING

Once a new Fair Futures staff is hired, they should follow the **Onboarding Process** (in addition to an onboarding process your organization follows). See [Appendix C18: Onboarding Process for New Staff](#)

This includes:

1. The Supervisor of the new staff should [email Emil Ramnarine](#) and provide the new staff member's name, title, and email. He will support the onboarding process and add them to the listserv so they can receive updates and opportunities. *You will be emailed your username and password to access our Fair Futures Learning Management System.*
2. [Email Cashay Haffoney](#), for an **onboarding session**, ideally your first week. During this session we will welcome you to the Fair Futures community, provide an overview of the model and background, and discuss your specific role and how it fits into the broader program. We will also walk through all of the training, technical assistance, and professional development supports available to you.
3. Sign up for all [mandatory Fair Futures trainings](#), based on your role. This should be done your first week. All mandatory trainings can be found [here](#).
You can also sign up for [additional \(and optional\) trainings, workshops, learning communities](#), etc. where you can meet your peers from other and hop into the learning.
4. While you are waiting for your onboarding session, read the [Fair Futures Manual](#). At a minimum, we recommend that new staff read the Manual Summary and the section(s) of the Manual that relate to your role. If you are unsure, please ask your Fair Futures Relationship Manager.
5. If you are a Coach, please set up a 1:1 TA session BEFORE you reach out to your young people/families. Our team will help you practice your intro and develop language to use so that you feel comfortable making that first call! To schedule a 1:1 TA session, [email Cashay Haffoney](#).
6. After your onboarding session and before using Care4, follow these steps:
 - o Email Nadine at info@fairfuturesny.org to set up your Care4 username and password.
 - o Sign up for a Care4 Platform Training with Matt.

B. KEY PROGRAM STAFF

The key program staff for the Coaching component of the model (9th grade through age 26*) includes, at scale:



Program Director



Coaches
(1:15 ratio)



Coach Supervisors
(1:4 – 1:5 ratio)



College Specialist



Tutors
(During high school)



Housing Specialist



Career Development Specialist



Outreach Coordinator**

*Buffalo funding is only for young people up until age 21.

A best practice is also to have an **Outreach Coordinator help recruit young people to the program who have not engaged (or who have disengaged). Ideally, this should be a young person who was previously in foster care and received support so that they can serve as a **Credible Messenger**.

THE BUFFALO/ERIE PILOT WILL NOT INCLUDE SPECIALISTS, IN-HOUSE TUTORS, OR OUTREACH COORDINATORS

Instead, Coaches will collaborate with the Career Coaches at The Hub to do deep career exploration and help them connect to best-fit career pathways. Coaches can also collaborate with Say YES Guidance Counselors to help young people with college applications. For housing, Coaches will work with the young person's foster care agency to submit applications if they are aging out and need housing. Youth will also be connected with tutoring programs.

The **interpersonal qualities of Coaches and all Fair Futures staff**, and the specific approaches they take to engage with young people, **are paramount to the success of the program**. When hiring for any Fair Futures staff position screen for interpersonal skills first, before screening for professional or organizational skills.

All Fair Futures potential staff should have the following interpersonal qualities:

- Ability to adopt a non-judgmental, strength-based, trauma-informed, collaborative approach to working with young people
- Warm, compassionate, and empathetic
- Genuine care for young people and a love of working with them
- Believe that change is possible, and be able to express genuine care while maintaining healthy boundaries
- Strong ability to relate to young people and engage them in conversation
- Ability to remain calm during moments of tension and in stressful situations
- Consistent, patient, and reliable

It can be difficult for adults to screen for some of these qualities, particularly for how well they would be able to engage young people. Therefore, it is strongly recommended – and a best practice – **to have a young person present on interviews, particularly with Coaches**. Young people have a radar, an innate sense as to whether that adult genuinely cares.

TIP! See [Appendix A Fair Futures Staff Screening & Hiring Toolkit](#) for guidance on how to prepare young people and listen to their feedback, as well as a list of other best practice hiring/screening tips.

After screening for interpersonal and Fair Futures-specific qualities, there are other educational and professional requirements, depending on the specific staff position. A full job description and hiring/screening techniques for each position can be found in [Appendix A Fair Futures Staff Screening & Hiring Toolkit](#).

For each Fair Futures position, the Fair Futures Staff Screening & Hiring Guide includes:

- An overview of the role;
- A description of desired qualities and competencies for the role;
- A detailed job description, in line with the Fair Futures manual/model;
- A synthesis of best practice screening and interviewing techniques, which have been implemented and refined over decades of combined practice across NYC non-profit organizations that have coaching programs for foster youth.

The relationship between the Coach and the young person is the central component of the model. Without a trusting relationship, the Coach cannot help the young person set and achieve their goals, and the Coach will not be the person that the young person turns to when they need assistance. **The relationship between the Coach and the young person is both the backbone and the glue to the model, and what often drives youth progress.**

FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTION 9

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SECTION 9. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Important tips and best practices for implementing a successful, sustainable Fair Futures program.

CHECKLIST FOR IMPLEMENTATION SUCCESS: PHASE 1

BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTING A SUCCESSFUL, SUSTAINABLE COACHING PROGRAM & CULTURE

- Identify a champion within the senior ranks of your agency/organization;** the Fair Futures program should be housed within their branch.

- Do not create silos within the Fair Futures program; all coaching, education, career development, and housing services for youth should be housed under the same program umbrella.**

While your agency may be delivering the Fair Futures model in different geographies and settings (e.g., residential and family foster care), it is important to have a cohesive program model with streamlined communication and a shared culture. There should ideally be a dedicated director overseeing the work across multiple sites that helps convene teams periodically. All existing education, youth development/PYA, or Specialist staff serving young people should be a part of the Fair Futures program.

- Hire the right staff. Staff should use a strength-based, trauma-informed, youth development lens.**

- Have a young person help screen/interview staff, particularly the Coaches.
- Use the [Fair Futures Staff Screening & Hiring Toolkit](#) for best practice interview questions/tips.

- Create shared program language to use with youth - do this as a team, and share it with all Fair Futures staff.**

It is very important for all Fair Futures staff to be using the same language to describe the program and its goals – both with young people and with adults (foster parents, Case Planners, etc.). That way, there will be no confusion as to what your program does and does not do. Staff need to be able to clearly describe to young people how the program can benefit them, including both emotional benefits as well as specific services, and emphasize that the program is all about THEM. The language should be “real” and resonate with young people. It is also important for staff to be able to describe what their role is within the broader program.

Technical assistance is available to take your team through this important exercise. Including all critical parties is important. After developing language, share this language in a workshop/peer group with young people to introduce the program and develop a name, if you haven't already. Also have a senior leader distribute the language organization-wide so that all staff know what the program does (and does not do).

- Create a program name - ideally with young people.**

For staff and youth to feel connected to a program, it has to have a name that resonates with them. Agencies do not have to call the program “Fair Futures;” they can develop a name and branding that is meaningful to their stakeholders and reflective of that agency's culture/community. To do so, a best practice is to convene key stakeholders, including young people, to develop/vote on a program name - this should help build team spirit and buy-in!

- Technical assistance sessions with Fair Futures Technical Assistance providers.**

These sessions are tailored to your staff needs and help build team cohesion. Best practice approaches are shared across agencies.

TIP! THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS TAKES TIME... TRUST THE PROCESS, AND STICK WITH IT!

FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

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SECTION 10. YOUTH RECRUITMENT

A. NO EJECT, NO REJECT MODEL

Fair Futures has a “no reject, no eject” model. The Fair Futures program is voluntary and serves any young person who is interested, as long as they meet the age/funding requirements.¹ **Fair Futures funding in Buffalo/Erie is currently for young people in preventive or aftercare services, ages 14-21. Should that young person enter/return to foster care, they will be able to keep their Coach. In time, Coaches will begin serving young people ages 14-21 who are actively in foster care.**



There are no screening mechanisms or requirements to participate, and young people cannot get ejected from the program based on engagement or performance. This is a very intentional component of the model. If there were requirements (such as academic criteria or mandatory minimum engagements), the program could inadvertently screen out the youth who are most in need of support and/or not be able to assist youth during times of crisis.

Once the Fair Futures program is fully funded, the young person is eligible to receive supports until they reach the age of 26. The young person can decide whether and to what extent to engage, whether it be through long-term coaching or receiving targeted services. Making services voluntary is empowering and allows the young person to be in control, which often results in greater willingness to engage.

The young person can also leave the program and return at any time, and young people who decide to leave the program for any reason are welcomed back.

B. RECRUITING PRIORITY POPULATIONS

FOSTER CARE STUDENTS IN THE 6TH GRADE SERVE AS A KEY PIPELINE TO THE COACHING PROGRAM

A best practice is for all 6th grade students to be invited to a Fair Futures Orientation in the summer before 7th grade. While students do not have to participate in Fair Futures, the Orientation helps encourage enrollment prior to 7th grade. The Orientation should include staff, young people, food, and relationship-building activities. This will help facilitate connection to the program and allow staff to meet with young people.

OTHER PRIORITY POPULATIONS

Until there is full funding, it is up to agencies to determine what populations should be served. In addition to the upcoming cohort of 7th graders, providers may also wish to focus on other critical populations who might benefit from coaching, including:

- Young people without a strong adult connection in their life
- Students repeating the 9th or 10th grade, or at risk of not being promoted
- Youth disconnected from school/work and without a high school degree/GED
- Seniors in high school seeking assistance with post-secondary enrollment
- Older youth aging out
- Young people who are pregnant/parenting and in need of support or at risk of being involved in the justice system

OPT-OUT METHOD

Once a program reaches scale, a best practice to ensure maximum participation in the coaching program is the “opt-out” approach. In this approach, a young person is automatically assigned a coach and has to opt-out of coaching.

¹ However, services may be discontinued if the young person threatens a staff member or is violent.

FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

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SECTION 11. INTAKE AND ENROLLMENT

A. INTAKE

In the Fair Futures model, there are no mandated intake or enrollment processes - Say YES Buffalo can implement whatever approach is most effective. **Below is a recommended best practice, which can be adopted and/or tweaked.**

See [Appendix C2 Recommended Recruitment, Intake, and Enrollment Pathways Flow Chart](#) for a visual map of the recommended Recruitment, Intake, and Enrollment pathways described below.



Coach Supervisor(s) should meet with all new young people coming into the program before assigning them a Coach.

Before meeting with the young person, the Coach Supervisor should reach out to the Case Planner (or key adult via DSS) to learn more about the young person.

Questions the Supervisor should ask include:

- What are this young person's strengths? Have there been any educational or vocational needs or challenges they have faced?
- Are there any challenges/barriers to working with youth and/or family?
- What is the best form of communication for the youth?
- Who are the youth's permanent resource or support system?

After speaking with the Case Planner and/or other key adults in that young person's life, the Supervisor can reach out to the young person to set up the first meeting. If the young person has a strong, trusting relationship with one of the adults involved, that adult should attend if possible.

INITIAL ENGAGEMENT SESSION

The young person and Coach Supervisor will be in this initial meeting. The meeting will be held at whatever location the young person feels most comfortable, whether that be at the Say YES office, in their home, or in the community.

During that first meeting, the Supervisor gets to know the young person, provides him/her with an overview of the program (what it is, what it is not, using youth language developed – see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 9](#)), and answers any questions. **The Coach Supervisor's primary job during this meeting is to make the young person feel comfortable and welcome, and infuse the session with cheerful, optimistic, and positive energy; it should not feel transactional or like an actual "intake" session.**

The Coach Supervisor should gauge whether the young person is interested and ready to be assigned a Coach.

AFTER THE INITIAL MEETING, THE COACH SUPERVISOR PROCEEDS AS FOLLOWS:

If the young person expresses interest in Coaching, the Supervisor will assign the young person a Coach,

Where possible, young people should be matched with Coaches based on gender preference and personality fit. However, sometimes a match will have to be driven by caseload/availability.

If the young person expresses interest only in receiving a specific service, such as getting documents, applying to a job, or college (for example), then the Supervisor will channel that young person to the appropriate Specialist* to provide targeted services.

Please note that the Buffalo/Erie pilot does NOT yet contain Specialists. Young people should be referred to other Say YES programs/resources or partners organizations, as appropriate.

TIP!

Some programs may choose to skip all of the Intake and Initial Meeting steps and assign a Coach to a youth in need. If that young person does not respond to their Coach or engage, the Coach should practice consistent, relentless engagement and try new approaches – see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 12](#).

B. ENROLLMENT

Once the Supervisor assigns a Coach, the young person is considered Enrolled. The Supervisor should assign them to the Coach in the Online Platform. The Coach can then fill out the “Coached Youth Enrollment Form,” which captures where that young person is when they begin coaching.



I'm your Coach!

The Coach should make contact with the young person (ideally within 1 business days, as a best practice) to set up a meeting. That first meeting ideally happens within a week of the initial contact between the Coach and the young person, or as soon as feasible, so that the young person feels engaged. See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 12](#) for tips on how to engage young people!

However, before reaching out to the young person, the **Coach should set up a Technical Assistance session** to ensure they feel comfortable with how to introduce themselves and their role. The Coach needs to be able to clearly describe to young people how the program can benefit them, including both emotional benefits as well as specific services, and emphasize that the program is all about THEM. The language should be “real” and resonate with young people.

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SECTION 12. EFFECTIVE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & THE FIRST 90 DAYS OF COACHING



Following enrollment, the next 90 days begins a period of relationship building between the Coach and the young person. If Coaches cannot build relationships with youth, they cannot help them make progress with their goals! The Coach will also start the process of building relationships with the key adults in the young person's life – his/her Case Planner, the parent(s)/family, and school/program staff. During this period, the Coach should also visit the young person's school/program and start to collect key data.

TIP! *This time period does not have to be exactly 90 days – it is just a general guideline!* Some young people may form an instant relationship with their Coach, and others may be struggling with life/other issues and take much longer to build trust.

See [Appendix C3 First 90 Days of Coaching](#) for a summary of the first 90 days of coaching.

A. EFFECTIVE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Young people in the child welfare system are often more accustomed to transition than stability, and they lack a consistent, positive support system. Older youth who are still involved in the foster care system are also more likely to have lived in multiple homes and experienced a higher level of caseworker turnover. As a result, it is not uncommon for these young people to feel uncomfortable with new relationships; some feel that the system has let them down and that the adults who they have been mandated to interact with do not truly care about them and/or will not be there for them in the long term.

Therefore, Coaches need to be patient, compassionate, consistent, and trauma-informed. They should engage the young person in a strength-based, positive youth development approach that focuses on **what youth are able to achieve, not past behaviors**.

Sometimes, trust is established once the young person sees that the Coach is helping them in a way that no one ever has before. Thus, the Coach should be proactively engaging with the adults in that young person's life, asking questions, expressing interest, and reassuring that young person that they are there for them.

IMPORTANT ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES INCLUDE:

Coaches make communication comfortable and meet youth where they prefer. Coaches travel to meet young people wherever they feel most comfortable — in the community, their home, a pizza joint, etc. This facilitates a more casual conversation and allows the young person to begin the process of building trust.

TIP! The best conversations tend to happen over food!

Coaches should also use whatever form of communication that young person is most comfortable with, including texting and various forms of social media.

TIP! Texts/messages should be casual and engaging, not transactional.

Meet them where they are. Coaches get to know the youth's interests, listen carefully, and are always strength-based. Don't ask the young person about their academic performance or career goals on their first conversation, unless they bring this up. Get to know who they are as an individual, what they like to do in their free time, etc. If they are hesitant to open up, open up to them and share your own interests.

TIP! If you are struggling to engage them in conversation, share something about yourself - relationships are a two-way road. Open up to them as you hope they would open up to you, and try to find a common bond. If you don't have one – create one! Learn more about whatever it is that interests them (a particular game, sport, activity, TV show, etc.).

Coaches are consistent and don't give up! Many young people in foster care have suffered from inconsistent and/or disrupted adult supports, which can make it challenging to form trusting, long-term relationships. Coaches should reach out at least once a week to young people – whether they are responding or not. They should also try new approaches – if reaching out by phone or text does not elicit a response, then try social media. If that does not work, find out their schedule and run into them – engage them in conversation, or ask if you can bring them to lunch.

Coaches show up consistently, even if the youth doesn't! For youth who do not engage after multiple attempts, Coaches should continue to reach out and visit them. Some youth take time to trust that the adult is truly interested in their well-being, and they will seek assistance once they know the intentions are coming from a genuine, caring place.

TIP! Coaches should use “out of the box” approaches to engaging that young person – send them a GIF, a TikTok video, send along a credible messenger, bring them on a trip, etc. New experiences can serve as conversation-starters and can help facilitate relationship-building (keep reading).

Coaches should always be their authentic self. If we want young people to open up to us and allow us to assist them, we have to be genuine and open with them, too! What we hear most from young people is that they appreciate when we are “real” and do not put up our walls.

Validate their feelings. An important step in engaging a young person – or any person – is to validate their feelings, regardless of whether or not you agree with them. This includes:

- Finding the kernel of truth in another person's perspective or situation, verifying the facts of a situation;
- Acknowledging that a person's emotions, thoughts and behaviors have causes and are therefore understandable;
- Not providing solutions or problem solving;
- Not necessarily agreeing with the other person or validating what is actually invalid.

THE FIRST MEETING BETWEEN THE COACH AND THE YOUNG PERSON:

As discussed above, the first meeting should take place wherever the young person feels comfortable – in their home, school, agency, or community. Typically, a first meeting over food is a good way to start building the relationship.

Meet the young person on their terms, letting them drive the direction of the conversation, and expressing genuine interest about who they are. Be open and engaging, and mindful of your body language to not appear closed off. Share things about yourself as well.

Learn about their interests - the first meeting is NOT meant to focus on goal-setting (unless they are ready).

Sometimes, if a Coach inquires about the young person's academics or career goals, the young people could disengage at that point, as they may not fully believe in their potential and do not want to disappoint. It is easier to disengage and push away than it is to fail to meet expectations.

- **The initial conversations should include casual discussions around what the young person's interests are, what they enjoy and do not enjoy, and where they see themselves.** This is both fact-gathering – information that will be helpful with goal-setting – as well as a useful process for the young person to start doing some self-reflection. It is also helpful for the Coach to understand the extent/depth (or lack thereof) of that young person's vision for themselves and understanding of their own skills, abilities, and interests.
- **It is not uncommon for a young person to have been so consumed by trauma and survival (the day-to-day), that he/she has little-to-no vision for the future, or even what opportunities could be plausible for them.** They may also have not had much exposure to potential career pathways or seen what is possible. Some young people may even need to start from a much more basic place – forming their identity and interests. The Coach can help them explore and identify their interests (see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 15](#)).

Should the young person start talking about their academic, career, or personal goals, **the Coach should be ready to start the goal-setting process and move at their pace!**

If there is some hesitancy on the part of the young person during the first meeting, that is completely normal. This is because many young people with foster care histories will be hesitant to commit to any sort of long-term engagement with a new adult in their life. It is the responsibility of the Coach and the program to change that mindset, and help the young person know that the Fair Futures program will stick with them through the ups and downs.

During the 90 day period, Coaches should build-in and prioritize their time to participate in relationship-building activities with young people, and focus on creating a positive, healing, and/or inspiring environment. Activities could include a walk in the park, playing sports, having lunch, listening to music, or any sort of activity that the young person is interested in. New experiences can also serve as conversation-starters and can help facilitate relationship-building.

Examples of free activities in Buffalo include:

- Visit [Canalside](#), a 21-acre park that offers free programs such as outdoor yoga or concerts as well as a great place to walk or lounge Adirondack chairs by the Erie Canal.
- Check out the [murals](#) transforming Downtown Buffalo. The mural styles range from scenic, like “Wildflowers for Buffalo,” to geometric and modern, like “Optichromie” and “Noodle in the Northern Lights”, while others are iconic, such as “Greetings from Buffalo.” More murals are being painted each year, so there’s always something new to see!

WHEN THERE ISN'T A CONNECTION



Sometimes coaching is about the chemistry (or lack thereof) between the Coach and the young person.

After the 90-day period, the Supervisor should have a conversation with the Coach and the young person, separately, about how it's going.

Some signs of potential lack of a connection between a young person and a Coach are if the young person is difficult to reach, non-responsive, not showing up, or not following through.

During the meeting with the young person, the Supervisor should let them know that if they want, they can request another Coach. The Supervisor should reiterate that the program is there for them no matter what, and that young person knows what is best for them, including if they want to switch Coaches. **This is critical, as many young people have gone from home to home with no input; empowering the young person to make this decision is important.** However, it should be done in a very delicate manner – it may be the case that the young person likes his/her Coach but is still warming up to them. The Supervisor should not make the young person feel like the Coach no longer wants to coach them.

If the young person wants to try out another Coach, the Supervisor should try to re-assign a Coach, if possible, based on the young person's interests and personality. The Supervisor can change the Coach assignment in the Online Platform, and the new Coach should ideally reach out within 1-2 days (and repeat the above steps).

B. COACH'S ROLE IN INTERACTING WITH CASE PLANNERS

Within first week after the initial enrollment (the first face-to-face session), the Coach should be in touch with the Case Planner at the foster care agency. Building a positive rapport with the Case Planner is important as there needs to be open lines of communication. It's important that the two work together as a team.

In the first interaction with the Case Planner, the Coach should:

- ❑ **Establish clarity on the goals of the program.**
For those Case Planners that may be new to the agency or not have a strong background in Fair Futures, it may be helpful for the Coach to briefly touch on the goals of Fair Futures and how their role is to work with the young person on their academic goals, career development goals, and the transition to independent living.
- ❑ **Discuss any helpful background information**, including that young person's current home situation, permanency goal, and any school-related information they have.
- ❑ Ask for copies of the young person's documentation, including copies of their birth certificate, social security card, state ID/license, working papers, etc.
- ❑ Let the Case Planner know that the Coach looks forward to working with him/her that the Coach can provide them with a monthly update and progress notes. This is helpful for the Case Planner's records and Family Court process.

TIP! A monthly contact report can be automatically generated from the Online Platform –it will include all progress notes and contact dates.

It is important to note that if the young person's case file is requested, it may contain incomplete information, and in some cases, statements of opinion as opposed to fact. To this end, the case file is simply additional context to be considered and to further inform the Coach's trauma-sensitivity.

After the first interaction, Coaches and Case Planners should work together not only when there is a crisis but should collaborate to celebrate the young person as well.

The Coach should also attend the Family Team Conferences and build a rapport with any other adults in the young person's life – including his/her therapist, or health care coordinator. If there is regular communication between the Coach and the various adults in that young person's life, then these adults can work together as a team, surrounding the young person with a network of support. It can also help prevent crises from happening; if a Case Planner or other staff has important information related to that young person's safety, mental health, physical health, or well-being that they can share with the Coach, the Coach can use that information to help address the situation and provide social-emotional support to the young person.

C. COACH'S ROLE IN INTERACTING WITH PARENTS

Within the first month of enrollment, the Coach should reach out to the young person's parent(s)/foster parent(s) and have an in-person meeting. Ideally, the young person is present to create a circle of support.

TIP! In instances where the young person does not have a positive relationship with the parent(s)/foster parent(s), the Coach can build relationships with them individually.

The first meeting can include an explanation of the program and what supports the Coach provides – this is another reason why it's important to have program language prepared (see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 9](#)). Often, the parent(s)/foster parent(s) are very happy to hear that someone is helping the young person with his/her academic progress and career path.

After the initial engagement, the Coach should follow up with the parent(s)/foster parent(s) as needed. If there is no information to gain, the Coach can inform them of the young person's progress, share information, and celebrate the young person, whenever possible.

D. COACH'S ROLE IN ENGAGING WITH THE YOUNG PERSON'S SCHOOL/PROGRAM

Within the first month of enrollment, the Coach should make a visit with the young person to their high school, GED program, or any other program he/she is enrolled in. If the young person is already enrolled in college, the Coach should visit the college with that young person (if possible).

The purpose of the visit is to:

- Show support; show the young person that the Coach cares about them and is there for them on their journey
- Ensure that they are in a “best fit” high school environment and making progress towards graduation (see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18](#))
- Ensure that they are accessing available supports
- Form a relationship with any key staff that the young person interacts with at the school (e.g., a guidance counselor, school therapist, etc.), so that the school staff know to reach out to the Coach if any challenges, issues, or opportunities arise as it relates to that young person.

On the first visit, the Coach should obtain, if possible/available:

- Any permissions to access the student's data (a FERPA agreement)
- A copy of the current or most recent transcript
- Attendance records
- Any disciplinary or other records
- The student's IEP or 504 Plan, if they have one

See [Appendix C5 First School Visit](#) and [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18](#)) for more detailed information on how to conduct the visit, key questions the Coach can ask, what to look out for.

If the young person is no longer enrolled in an academic setting, the Coach should obtain that young person's most recent high school transcript and any records. This data provides important information once the young person is ready to re-engage in an academic setting. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18](#))

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SECTION 14. COACHING FRAMEWORKS & ONGOING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

“As coaches, we help turn the vision into reality, the dream into an achievement and the goal into an accomplishment.”

- International Coach Academy

A. WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching¹ is a method of interacting and supporting that helps others:

- Focus on self-discovery
- Articulate their goals
- Learn how to problem solve
- Safely make mistakes and learn from them
- Develop healthy patterns
- Achieve personal growth
- Achieve incremental progress toward their goals
- Ultimately achieve long term life goals

B. THE BENEFITS OF COACHING

Coaching can provide a multitude of benefits including helping a person articulate their goals, focus on self-discovery, and learn how to problem solve. This should be done in a safe, caring environment.

When coaching is done with intentionality and focus, coaching can:

- Build self-awareness, empower choice, and lead to change.
- Supports a person in becoming who they want to be.
- Helps a person achieve their personal best and to produce the results they want in their lives.
- Help people set S.M.A.R.T. goals and follow through with their goals.
- Increase hope, focus, and self-esteem.

Creating a warm, engaging culture centered around a coaching framework is critical to program success. It will also help with staff retention and youth engagement, as both staff and young people need to feel connected to the program and its culture.

Some of the most effective Coaches in the work are the ones that are self-aware, have an understanding of who they are and value learning about the WHY and the WHAT of each of their young people.

WHY is my youth making the choices they make?

WHY are they struggling in school?

WHY are they struggling with work?

WHAT are their dreams and aspirations?

WHAT motivates them?

Great Coaches are constantly working to understand their own WHY and WHAT.

WHY am I being triggered?

WHY do I carry this bias or judgment?

WHY Am I Talking (W.A.I.T.), when I could do more listening?

WHAT can I do to be a better Coach?

WHAT more can I do to be a support in this young person's life?

¹From *Disability and Rehabilitation*, an international, multi-disciplinary journal, “Client-centered coaching in the pediatric health professions: a critical scoping review,” October 7, 2014, “The International Coach Federation (ICF) provides the following definition: coaching is “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential” (ICF webpage). This definition of coaching is quite open to interpretation, but it does highlight four key components that are deemed necessary to coaching. According to this definition from the ICF, coaching consists of a client-centered partnership, where the client and the coach work collaboratively. The definition highlights the need for creativity and self-discovery (reflective), and it focuses on future growth and development (capacity) of the client's potential.

C. THE 4 CORE COMPONENTS OF COACHING

In Coaching there are 4 core components. In each of these components you will find the 4 P's to help you remember how to show up your best when in your coaching conversations:

#1. Establish Understanding & Purpose

- Clearly communicate what coaching, and your coaching program, is and isn't. The Coaching Agreement helps with this.
- Refer to other support professionals when out of your scope of practice. *For example: a therapist, medical professional, Case Planner*

#2. Establish a Trusting Relationship - Understand the past, focus on the present and have a future-oriented mindset

- Be present and flexible.
- Show genuine concern.
- Admit when you don't know something.
- Champion new behaviors, be aware of light bulb moments.

#3. Facilitate the Learning

- Set S.M.A.R.T. Goals & Plans: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely.
 - The Goals & Step framework is comprised of all S.M.A.R.T Goals!
- Celebrate successes and growth. Acknowledge what has been accomplished.
- Provide gentle accountability.

#4. Communicate Effectively – Stay focused on changing needs and goals.

- Use active listening to understand the meaning of what is being said.
- Ask open-ended questions that promote discovery, action and insight.
- Remind the youth of their goals and objectives.

REMEMBER THE 4 P'S

- Maintain your coaching **P**resence
- Practice **P**ower Listening
- Ask **P**owerful Questions
- Practice coaching as much as possible

The four key components of Coaching and the 4 P's are reviewed in the [Fair Futures training](#) in greater detail.

D. CREATING A COACHING AGREEMENT

The Coaching Agreement allows the Coach and Coachee to come to an understanding of what the partnership will look like. It also helps a Coach, and the Coaching program, know what bounds or parameters they are working in.

According to the International Coach Federation a Coaching Agreement can help with the following:

1. The Coach helps the Coachee identify, or reconfirm, what s/he wants to accomplish in a coaching session.
2. The Coach helps the Coachee to define or reconfirm measures of success for what s/he wants to accomplish in the session.
3. The Coach explores what is important or meaningful to the Coachee about what s/he wants to accomplish in the session.
4. The Coach helps the Coachee define what they need to address or resolve in order to achieve what they want to accomplish in the session.
5. The Coach continues the conversation in direction of Coachee's desired outcome unless Coachee indicates otherwise.

To see a sample Coaching Agreement please see [Appendix C6 Sample Coaching Agreement](#).

E. COACHING FRAMEWORKS

The ability to guide young people through the process of goal achievement requires working within a coaching framework. While there are numerous coaching frameworks in existence, the **G.R.O.W. Model** is one simple yet powerful framework for structuring coaching sessions. For another coaching script please see [Appendix C7 Sample Coaching Script](#).

The acronym **G.R.O.W.** is as follows. It is accompanied by sample questions that can be used in a coaching session:

G

GOAL

- What goal, or goals, do you want to achieve?
- Why is this important?
- What do you want to get out of your time in this Coaching program?
- What would you like to work on?
- What are the benefits of you achieving this goal?

R

CURRENT REALITY

- Where are you now in relation to your goals?
- What steps have you already taken, if any?
- What challenges have you faced in trying to reach your goals?

O

OPTIONS

- What are your options?
- What would you like your first step to be?
- What is the first step you'd like to take?
- Who in your life is supporting you?

W

WILL, OR WAY FORWARD

- When will you start?
- What support do you need?
- When would like to get started?
- How will you know when you've been successful?
- How committed to this goal are you on a scale from 1-10?

Sometimes, young people may not know what their academic or career development goals are. They may not know any adults who attended a post-secondary setting or know of what career pathways are available to them. **A Coach's role is to help them explore their interests, inform them of different pathways, expose them to opportunities, and ultimately help them build a series of academic/career experiences that are in line with their interests.**

Other times, young people may have goals that may seem counter-productive to their longer-term success (e.g., a young person may have a goal of dropping out of high school to get a job) or may not seem feasible (e.g., becoming a famous sports athlete or rapper). A Coach's role is not to critique/dismiss their goals - **Coaches should meet youth where they are, try to understand the drivers of their goals/interests and any considerations, and help connect them to opportunities in line with their interests.** [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 20](#) provides a detailed example of how to coach a young person who is disconnected from high school and does not want to re-enroll.

The Goals & Steps framework allows Coaches to track young people's progress towards their goals (see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 15](#)).

ADDITIONAL COACHING TOOLS & TECHNIQUES

Different structured models can be used to train and support coaching techniques. These include but are not limited to:

Motivational Interviewing:

This includes specific engagement strategies for maximizing the chances that individuals will choose adaptive behavior change. MI takes advantage of the natural tendency of human beings to choose what is best for them in the long run by working collaboratively to identify individuals' desire for change within apparently destructive behaviors. ACS' Motivational Interviewing is a required course.

Collaborative Problem Solving:

This is a behavior management model that focuses on a central philosophy that people want to meet expectations and do well. A primary goal of the model is to build staff/adult empathy by helping them understand the root of what can get in the way of people meeting expectations and being successful.

F. PROVIDING ONGOING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

CONSTANCY & CONSISTENCY

To reiterate - young people in foster care have experienced trauma and instability, and their relationships with adults have often been inconsistent and/or abruptly disrupted. To begin to heal from trauma and trust others, young people need to experience consistency and constancy in their relationships. It is the role of the Coach to provide that consistency and constancy, even if the young person does not initially engage or always respond. By calling them on the same day or repeatedly showing up, the young person will begin to realize that they can trust their Coach. This may happen immediately, or it may take weeks or months.

Because of the consistency and constancy that a Coach models, is not uncommon for the Coach to be the first adult in a long time - or perhaps ever - that the young person trusts.

Once the Coach and the young person have established a trusting relationship, a primary role of the Coach is to continue to provide emotional support, as needed, through the critical junctures and transitions in their lives, and also the day-to-day issues that arise. It is important that the Coach not only be in touch with the young person to discuss progress towards their goals, but also be there to discuss their relationships, fears, concerns, interests, dreams, and challenges. It is also often the social-emotional challenges young people face that can inhibit the progress they make towards their goals! Also, if there is a genuine personal connection, the young person will be more likely to allow the Coach to help them progress. They will also be more likely to turn to their Coach for guidance and support when a challenge arises (and therefore possibly help prevent a situation from escalating further).

Some other important tips:

- It is important that Coaches continue to be reliable – if they say they are going to show up, they show up. If they speak to a young person every week, they should not go two weeks without being in touch.
- If the Coach is going on vacation and for some reason cannot be in touch, they should communicate this to the young person in advance and provide them with their Supervisor's contact information.

FREQUENCY OF CONTACTS

Coaches should reach out to **all young people on their coachload at least once a week** - even if it is just to send an encouraging/supportive text message.

Beyond that, the frequency of contact between the Coach and the young person should be **driven mostly by making progress towards their Goals and Steps, providing ongoing emotional support, and addressing any issues that may arise.**

TIP! A best practice is a minimum of 2x in person each month, with weekly contact by phone/social media. Some young people may require weekly in-person meetings, or more, during critical transitions or crises.

The Coach should be flexible with the frequency of engagement, but also draw appropriate boundaries, when needed.

CELEBRATING SUCCESSES

It can take time before a young person starts to realize their potential, and how their hard work is paying off and changing their life. Therefore, it is important for Coaches (and the program) to celebrate a young person's success, praise their effort, and encourage them to reflect on how their actions are helping THEM make progress towards their goals.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH CRISIS SITUATIONS

With a crisis situation arises, the Coach may be the first person the young person contacts, before his/her Case Planner, due to their relationship with the young person. It is the Coach's responsibility to follow agency protocol and inform both their Supervisor and the Case Planner of the situation, and to work together as a team to address the issue. A Critical Incident Report should be filled out.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH, HEALTH, OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE CHALLENGES

While Coaches do not provide clinical/mental health services, Coaches can help facilitate access to needed services and follow-through. Coaches also provide social-emotional support over a long period of time, which can be healing.

As Coaches build strong relationships with young people, they are often become aware (or informed) of any mental health, health, or substance abuse challenge, as these often get in the way of academic and career development progress. Coaches can help ensure young people are connected to the services/supports they need. Coaches will continue to provide social/emotional support to young people and stick with them, no matter what.

If a young person's situation is severe, the Coach can hold off on helping the young person with their Goals until they are in a better state to proceed. The support they receive from a Coach during this period could help speed up that process.

SELF-REGULATION & SHIFTING BELIEFS

Supporting young people – or people in general – can be challenging at times. It is important to practice self-care and to be able to debrief with your Supervisor.

It is important for Coaches and all Fair Futures staff to be aware of their body language and how they are feeling, and to gauge where they are on this spectrum (and try, whenever possible, to work from the left side).



It can also difficult at times to understand why our young people are making the decisions they make, but it is important that we do not place our own belief system on them. Be intentional about shifting and changing language to remove judgment, spark curiosity about the young person and gain understanding. Here are some examples:

OLD JUDGMENTS

She lied about...

He was angry so he...

She doesn't seem motivated to...

She is not interested so she missed the appointment....

He says one thing and does another...

NEW BELIEFS

I will work to gain her trust.

I will acknowledge his past and learn how it impacts him today.

I will seek to understand what drives her.

I will be curious about her dreams and aspirations.

I will be patient while walking this path with him.

FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTION 15

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SECTION 15. GOAL-SETTING & TRACKING PROGRESS WITH THE GOALS & STEPS FRAMEWORK

A. ENGAGING THE YOUNG PERSON AROUND GOAL-SETTING

The Coaches should make it clear to the young people from the start that they – and the program – are there to support them in making progress towards their goals. Some young people may be ready to engage in goal setting immediately upon enrolling in the program, even before developing a relationship with their Coach and gathering data. For these young people, working with their Coach towards their goals may be what helps build the relationship and establish trust over time.

Other young people may need to first establish a trusting rapport with their Coach. The Coach can build that trust simply by continuing to engage them and being consistent. The Coach can take a number of approaches to gauge their readiness – inquiring about their interests, their school, their dreams, in a way that does not invoke pressure or expectations. ***It may be the case that the young person is not ready or willing to discuss their progress in school because they do not believe in their potential, and/or they are afraid of failing and disappointing their Coach.***

An important part of the role of a Coach is to be flexible and able to discern a young person's needs, and gauge when they are ready to take that next step on their journey.

B. OVERVIEW OF GOALS & STEPS FRAMEWORK & PURPOSE

Coaches will work with young people in a variety of situations (e.g., not enrolled in high school, doing well in high school, in college, disconnected, etc.). Each young person will also have their own unique aspirations/goals, and may also change their minds many times about what they want to do (or not do) with their lives. ***The Goals & Steps framework allows Coaches to track a young person's journey based on where they are and where they want to go, regardless of where that is! It also provides support to the Coaches on "how to" help young people with each specific goal and at every critical juncture.***

AND if they do not know what career path they are interested in yet, the Goals & Steps framework helps them explore options, make progress towards earning a degree(s) that will be helpful regardless of the pathway they choose, and build a series of career development experiences based on their interests and life situation.

WHAT ARE "GOALS" AND "STEPS"?

Goals:

- All goals are considered a "positive outcome."
- Goals are standardized. Goals cannot be added, or it would not be possible to aggregate outcomes.
- The goals are designed to be broad enough so that any young person's goal falls into one of the buckets.
- Having standardized goals also provides a map for the Coaches and young people to see what the next goal could/should be.

Steps:

- A way to track progress towards goals.
- A guide for Coaches (particularly new Coaches) around what steps they can potentially take – and what steps they should take – to help a young person reach any given goal.
- A way give credit to Coaches and young people for all of the hard work they do!

STEPS ARE EITHER:

Required Steps, which are based on best practices/critical junctures; or **Potential Steps**, which are based on need and the young person's situation.

TIP! Coaches can also add/create their own steps to allow for innovative approaches to reaching goals.

PURPOSE: GOALS & STEPS ARE A FRAMEWORK THAT ALLOWS COACHES AND STAFF TO TRACK A YOUNG PERSON'S PROGRESS.

Goals & Steps are based on the key principles of **Motivational Interviewing**: an approach of meeting a young person “where they are” and taking small steps toward their goals.

They are also based on **SMART plans**, as they are: Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

Note: Goals & Steps are often, not always, time-bound.

- Some goals are naturally time-bound: the goal “[Complete school year promoted](#)” will take an academic year.
- Other goals are more open ended: the goal “[Re-engage and re-enroll young person in a best-fit academic setting](#)” may take weeks or it may take many months to complete.

The aim is to achieve goals as soon as feasible and continue on to the next goal.

As many steps will be taken as needed to reach that goal in as short or long a timeframe as needed. Most Goals can be accomplished in less than a year.



The Online Platform systematically tracks Goals & Steps so that at any given time, Coaches, Supervisors, and the Program Director can see where young people started the program, where they are now, what goal(s) they have accomplished, and what steps have been taken. For a new Coach adopting an existing coaching group of young people, that Coach can see the profile of each young person and what goals/steps they have taken to date.

C. GOALS & STEPS DO NOT DRIVE THE RELATIONSHIP

Tracking Goals and Steps should not interfere with the relationship dynamic between the Coach and the young person.

The Coach should continue to be the engaging, supportive figure that they are, and let the young person drive the conversation. If the young person needs to discuss a personal issue or an emotional concern, the Coach should not immediately redirect the conversation toward goals. It is easier for a young person to refocus on their goals after they release their stress, anxiety, pain, or trauma. Often times, providing emotional support and constancy is the most important way a Coach can help the young person move forward.

Helping young people develop goals and take steps is important, but it should not feel transactional. There is an artful way of engaging a young person in a conversation around goal-setting – through coaching (see above). Helping the young person tap into their innate interests and strengths, envision what success could look like for them, and helping them take that next step is what it's all about. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 15G](#) for a concrete example.)

In practice, tracking Goals & Steps in the Online Platform is usually what should happen after the conversation/meeting. Some young people may want to see what their Youth Profile page looks like, how far they have come, and visualize their next steps. Other young people may be turned off by this tracking of progress. It is part of the Coach's role to discern what the best approach is for that particular young person.

D. TYPES OF GOALS & DETERMINING GOALS USING THE ROADMAPS

In the Goals & Steps framework, there are academic, career development, and housing/independent living goals and associated steps with each goal. See [Roadmaps of the Academic, Career Development, and Housing/Independent Living Goals](#), based on a young person's situation [here](#).

ACADEMIC GOALS

- Middle School Goals (*applies only to the Middle School Education Specialist*)
- High School Goals
- Post-Secondary Exploration/Exposure Goal
- College Goals

CAREER DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Each year, all young people (regardless of their academic situation) should:

- Complete the annual “[Conduct Career Exploration & Planning](#)” Goal, which includes doing at least one career exploration activity, creating/updating a resume, and doing career development goal setting with their Coach. The career exploration activity should be tailored to their interests.
- Complete at least one [Career Development Experience](#) each year. Ideally, young people have at least one meaningful career development experience during the school year and one during the summer. The selected experience should be in line with that young person’s interests, developmental stage, academic situation, needs, and longer-term goals.

A career development experience can include participating in, for example:

- An on-site career program at Say YES
- An external internship program (e.g., Summer Youth Employment Program)
- A leadership/youth development program or community service experience
- A workforce development program
- An accredited vocational, sector-based program, or apprenticeship
- A civil service exam
- Part-time or full-time employment

HOUSING & INDEPENDENT LIVING GOALS

These goals will only apply to young people who are aging out or who have already aged out of foster care.

- Applying for housing
- Obtaining housing
- Maintaining housing
- Building independent living skills
- Transitioning into permanent housing (if needed)

TIP! All young people aging out of foster care with an **APPLA** permanency planning goal should apply for all forms of housing for which they are eligible by age 19, as it can take a couple of years to obtain housing.

Once the young person obtains housing, they will no longer have a Case Planner, and it becomes the responsibility of a Coach to assist them with maintaining housing (e.g., asking if they are paying their rent each month) and building basic independent living skills (e.g., creating a budget). This is important because if a young person does not have a stable housing situation, it will greatly impact their academic performance and/or career development.

[Fair Futures Program Manual Section 23](#) discusses Housing & Independent Living and the role of a Coach in more detail.

It is important for Coaches to help young people with their academic, career development, AND housing/independent living goals each, while providing social-emotional support, because they are all intertwined.

For example:

- A young person's career interests/aptitudes could influence their academic/post-secondary pathway;
- If a young person does not have progressive career development experiences on their resume, it will be challenging to obtain/maintain employment and navigate onto a living-wage career path;
- A young person's academic performance/situation could influence what types of career development experience(s) they can have that year;
- If a young person is not stably housed, that could easily impact their academic/career performance;
- Because if a young person does not have someone that they can count on that can provide social/emotional support, any area of their life could unravel.

REQUIRED GOALS FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

The aim is for 100% of coached young people to have completed, by the end of the year, a set of goals based on where they are:

For young people who do not yet have a high school degree or GED (including those who are disconnected):

- 1+ high school academic goal(s) - use the High School Roadmap to find the specific goal!
- 1+ post-secondary exposure/exploration goal(s);
- 1+ career development experience(s), along with the yearly required "Career exploration & preparation" goal

For young people enrolled in college:

- 1+ college goal(s) - - use the College Roadmap to find the specific goal!
- 1+ career development experience(s), along with the yearly required "Career exploration & preparation" goal

For young people enrolled in a non-college post-secondary setting (such as a vocational program):

- 1+ career development experience(s), along with the yearly required "Career exploration & preparation" goal

For young people with a high school degree/GED who are not enrolled in college:

- 1+ post-secondary exposure/exploration goal(s);
- 1+ career development experience(s), along with the yearly required "Career exploration & preparation" goal

Review the Goal Roadmaps and select specific Goals in each category above, based on a young person's situation and interests. Once a Goal is selected, go to that Worksheet to see the specific steps.

E. SETTING GOALS COLLABORATIVELY

Goals should be set collaboratively with young people, and eventually (ideally) young people should drive this process on their own. Goals & Steps can be tracked/checked off in the Online Platform whether it was the Coach or the young person completing any particular Step.

If the young person is at a stage where they are not yet ready to talk about their goals, the Coach can sometimes move forward with selecting Goals and following Steps, based on the young person's situation and interest. You never know what may spark a youth's interest and get them engaged!

While a Coach should never decide that the young person should participate in "XYZ Program" or apply to "XYZ College", they can select the following Goals and proceed with the Steps, regardless of whether a formal conversation happens with the young person:

□ **Re-engage and re-enroll in a best-fit high school/GED program Goal**

For any young person who is disconnected without a high school degree/GED, the Coach should be selecting this goal, even if the young person says they never want to go back to school. We know that the young person will have a very bleak future without a degree.

Instead of pushing them to go back to school (that never works!), there are other, much more effective approaches outlined in the "potential steps" associated with this Goal. For example, the Coach could connect the young person to a credible messenger, an extracurricular activity, or a new experience that could eventually help them realize why a degree is important. Review a real-life example in [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 15G](#).

□ **Any Goal related to high school/GED persistence**

(e.g., "[Complete school year promoted](#)," "[Advance 1 grade level/Pass a section of the GED exam](#)", etc.).

Any young person enrolled in school can always have a persistence goal. The Coach will need to monitor the academic performance regardless, and there are many potential steps associated with supporting the student's success.

□ **Post-Secondary Exposure/Exploration Goal**

Even if a young person thinks they will never graduate high school and they don't like school, there are ways to explore post-secondary pathways that can be eye-opening and inspiring. For example, a college trip to another city or a visit to a construction site can be no-pressure, fun experiences that enable the young person to *envision* themselves in a post-secondary setting.

□ **Career Exploration**

Same thinking as above – a fun trip, an inspiring career panel, or an online tool are all career exploration activities that can help young people *envision* potential career pathways and build self-esteem.

□ **Enrolling in any extracurricular, youth development, or community service activity**

Even if a young person says they are not interested in school or work, they will likely be interested in some sort of activity, whether that be music, art, sports, etc. The Coach can help them find an activity based on their interests, which can help them build soft skills, self-esteem, a sense of purpose, and supportive peers – all things that studies show lead to increased participation in school and work.

F. USING THE ONLINE PLATFORM TO TRACK GOALS & STEPS

HOW TO SELECT GOALS & STEPS

- ❖ **STEP 1: The Coach adds Goals to the platform, based on the young person's situation.**
[Use this visual as a guide.](#)
- ❖ **STEP 2: Step(s) are checked off as they are completed, whether by the Coach, young person, or other staff.**
Some steps are Required; other steps are Potential Steps, or examples of common/potential actions that can be taken to achieve that goal, and may depend on the young person's situation. A new step can always be created, and a note can always be added next to each step, if more information is needed.
- ❖ **STEP3: Repeat Step 2 until Goal is "Completed" or "Not Completed" and close out the Goal on the Online Platform. If a Goal changes, it would be marked as "Did Not Complete" and the reason selected.**

After a meeting or a conversation with a young person, the Coach should reflect and ask themselves:

Did that young person's goal change for any reason?

Was a step taken (progress made), either by the young person or the Coach, that should be entered in the system and checked off?

What else does the young person need to reach their goals, and how does that translate into a step?

The Online Platform should be updated accordingly after each meeting or conversation with a young person.

ULTIMATELY, THE AIM IS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO ACCOMPLISH GOALS ON THEIR OWN AND THE COACH JUST TRACKS THEIR PROGRESS!

Let's imagine: One day, that young person texts their Coach that they got an internship. Even though the Coach may not have directly helped the young person obtain that internship, a positive outcome was achieved. The Coach should log into the Online Platform, select the "[Engage in Career Development Experience](#)" Goal and mark the Goal as "**COMPLETED**" with a note that the young person obtained it themselves.

USING THE ONLINE PLATFORM TO TRACK CONTACTS PROGRESS NOTES & STATUS.

There is space to add a note under each Goal or Step in the Online Platform. For notes that are not necessarily tied to a goal/step (e.g., related to a crisis situation, mental health, or another issue), then they can enter it under the "Contacts" section.

G. REAL-LIFE SCENARIO APPLYING GOALS & STEPS

MEET ANTHONY: A young person who has a Coach. When he joined the program, he was 19 years old.

UPON ENROLLMENT, THIS WAS HIS SITUATION:

Academic

Anthony was disconnected from school and had no high school degree/GED. He had not attended school since he was 17 years old.

Career development

Anthony held a series of minimum wage, odd-jobs and tended to lose them after 1-2 months. He had not participated in any extracurricular/ community service activities, except for in middle school, where he did an art program that he loved.

Housing

Anthony was aging out of foster care and his agency had not yet helped him apply for housing. He did not have a good relationship with his Case Planner and often did not show up for mandated housing meetings. He wanted to get his own apartment, but did not want public housing.

Interests

Anthony expressed a strong disinterest in school and did not want to go to college. Upon further probing, the Coach found out that Anthony loves boxing, art, and music, and often wrote lyrics and recorded in a music studio. Other than the art program in middle school, where he learned some graffiti techniques, he did not have any formal training/experience in any of these areas.

Needs

Anthony wanted to be Coached because he wanted assistance getting a job, ideally a higher paid job, in one of his areas of interest (boxing, MMA, music, or art). He was adamant that he did not have to first get a high school degree to be successful in these areas and pointed out many famous individuals who never got their degree or went to college.

THE COACH FIRST FORMED A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP WITH ANTHONY BY DOING THE FOLLOWING:

- He discussed his interests in boxing/MMA and they debated the results of the recent tournaments;
- They went out for some wings, and then the Coach showed Anthony around a part of the City he had never been to;
- The Coach listened to some of the music Anthony had created, provided positive feedback, and shared his own music interests with Anthony;
- The Coach told Anthony about the long-term supports of the program and how they would stick with him, no matter what, to help him achieve his goals;
- The Coach helped him update his resume and include the art program he participated in, which Anthony never thought to include. He had actually gotten a certificate through the program, so the Specialist had him add a section called "Certificates & Awards." The Coach also added his music studio experience as an extracurricular activity on his resume.

ONCE HE FELT HE HAD BUILT A SOLID RAPPORT WITH ANTHONY, THE COACH LOOKED AT WHAT GOALS HE SHOULD HELP ANTHONY ACCOMPLISH FOR THE YEAR.

Given that he was aging out, disconnected, and without a high school degree/GED, the following Goals applied:

- 1+ high school academic Goal(s);
- 1+ post-secondary exposure/exposure Goal;
- 1+ career development experience(s), along with the yearly required "Career exploration and preparation" Goal;
- Housing Goals (Applying to as many forms of housing as possible).

[Refer to the High School Roadmap.](#) Based on Anthony's situation, interests, and expressed needs, the Coach selected the following Academic Goal:

["Re-engage and re-enroll young person in a best-fit high school/GED program."](#)

Even though Anthony was adamant about not getting a high school degree/GED, the Coach knew that the chances of becoming famous in music, boxing, or MMA are very slim. Even if that is the eventual goal, a degree is always needed and will always provide the young person with additional career flexibility.

THE COACH TOOK THE FOLLOWING STEPS TO HELP ANTHONY MAKE PROGRESS TOWARDS THIS GOAL:

Potential Step: Help young person understand why a degree is important through coaching; motivate them to re-enroll.

- The Coach walked through how a degree could help Anthony get a higher-paid job while he was exploring his fields of interest.
- The Coach also shared a number of career pathways in line with his interests that require a degree, including a boxing/MMA trainer, an Art Program Coordinator, and many positions within the music industry.
- While Anthony listened and absorbed, he was still hesitant, and the Coach could sense that perhaps he had some self-esteem issues when it came to school and his academic performance.

Potential Step: Help young person understand why a degree is important by connecting them to an extracurricular program or experience; motivate them to re-enroll.

- The Coach connected Anthony to a boxing program and got funding for it through the agency.
- Anthony loved it and built a relationship with his boxing trainer and some of the other young men at the gym.
- The Coach built a rapport with the boxing trainer and asked the trainer to help support him in getting back into high school.
The trainer had some conversations with Anthony about the steps he could take to become a trainer someday, which included getting a high school degree.
- *Anthony was feeling really good about the positive affirmations and relationships he made at the boxing gym.*

AT THIS POINT:

The Coach checked off the Career Development Goal "[Engage in career development experience](#)" in the Online Platform. The Online Platform prompted the Coach to input the **type** of experience. The Coach wrote "extracurricular – boxing."

While this would not be Anthony's only career development experience for the year, the Coach was excited that connecting Anthony to boxing both helped him with his resume and helped him become closer to re-engaging in school.

Potential Step: Help young person have a "breakthrough" by taking them on a trip or engaging in a new experience that broadens their horizons.

- The Coach felt like now that Anthony was engaged in a productive activity and had a greater sense of self-esteem, he should approach the conversation about re-enrolling in school again. The Coach took him to waterfront in Buffalo and they walked around and then sat on bench by the water.
- The Coach asked him to reflect on his future, and whether he was ready to re-engage in school. Anthony agreed it would be a good idea but said he did want to first make some money. The Coach shared with him that he could help him get a paid internship or part-time job while enrolled in a high school or GED program. Anthony agreed to explore some options with the Coach.

AT THIS POINT:

Anthony was re-engaged, so the Coach could start taking the Required Steps toward re-enrolling Anthony in a best-fit academic environment.

After discussing with the youth's foster parent and Case Planner, THE COACH TOOK THE FOLLOWING **REQUIRED STEPS**:

Required Step: Obtain transcript and records from previously attended school and review them.

- The Coach got the necessary permissions and obtained Anthony's transcript and records from the previous high school.
- The Coach found out that Anthony had obtained only 3 credits and did not pass any Regents exams.
- Anthony had been evaluated for an IEP and did not need one.
- His lack of credits seemed to be due to poor attendance (below 50%).
- The Coach also noticed that while Anthony failed all of his math classes, he passed some English classes with an 85+. He asked Anthony about his high marks in English, and Anthony said that he loved writing and channeled this love into his music lyrics.

Required Step: Explore/identify high schools or programs with young person (and their family, if applicable)

- The Coach helped him assess what type of high school environment would be best based on various factors. ([See Appendix F8 Alternative High School Selection and Application Guide](#))
- As Anthony would likely not be able to graduate from a traditional high school or transfer high school by age 21 given his lack of credits and Regents exams, the Coach thought it was best to explore GED programs with Anthony. Specifically, ones that also had career development offerings.
- Anthony and his Coach went through the [GED programs](#) and found one that had stipends and career offerings.

Required Step: Visit potential schools/programs with young person once some are identified (and/or have parent visit with young person).

- The Coach reached out to Anthony's foster parent and Case Planner to discuss this potential plan, and both agreed and were supportive. The foster parent very much wanted Anthony to be engaged in a productive activity, and she said she would attend the GED program with Anthony and the Coach.
- The Coach arranged a visit to the GED program and debriefed with Anthony beforehand.
- Anthony, the Coach, and the foster parent visited the top GED program they identified together. The Coach was able to get the contact information of his Primary Person/Counselor at the program.
- While Anthony wanted to enroll right away, the Coach convinced him to visit one more program. The second visit only reconfirmed to Anthony how much he liked the first one, so the Coach helped him through the application process.

Required Step: Apply/Enroll in best-fit school or GED program

The GED program required Anthony to take a **TABE exam** to determine his grade level.



The Coach then checked off that **Potential Step** on the Online Platform as well.

It turns out Anthony had a 9th grade ELA (GED-level) and 6th grade Math (pre-GED level).

For the GED program application, Anthony did not have access to the documents he needed, so the Coach reached out to his Case Planner to obtain copies.

Anthony found out that he could not enroll in the paid internship program right away, as it was reserved for students who had 90%+ attendance for a 3-month period. However, once he qualified, he could get an internship!

The Coach reiterated that it was important to attend every day so that he could get into the internship program.

The Coach finished the enrollment process with Anthony and informed his Case Planner and foster mother that he was officially enrolled and would start classes in another month.

Required Step: Follow up with the young person before the first day, after the first day, and after the first week.

A week before Anthony's classes started, his birth mother was hospitalized. Anthony was taking it really hard and fell into a spell of depression. The Coach took Anthony out for pizza and listened to him talk about his relationship with his mother. They also discussed how it was important to stay focused on his goals and moving forward.

- **The Coach called or texted Anthony every day that week** to provide support.
- **The night before the first day**, the Coach texted Anthony a reminder about when to leave the next day. Anthony responded that he wasn't sure he was up for going the next day. The Coach said to get some sleep and that he'd call in the morning.
- **That next morning**, the Coach called Anthony and heard him out. He reminded Anthony of their conversations, of the music recording studio opportunity, and told him how proud of him he was for taking these steps. Anthony then opened up more and shared that he was afraid of failing, especially in math, like he always had in school. The Coach reassured him that it was natural to feel that way, and that all he should focus on for now was showing up, on time, every day, and trying his best. It didn't matter how he did, because he would get the support he needs. The Coach said that showing up was all he cared about, and asked Anthony if he could start with that. The Coach reminded Anthony that he had also been nervous about starting the art program (see Career Development section below), but now he was rocking it. Anthony said that was true and he promised to show up on time to his first class.
- **That evening**, the Coach texted Anthony asking how it went. Anthony said he showed up and that it went well!
- **After the end of the week, Anthony was still attending.**

AT THIS POINT:

The Academic Goal "[Re-engage and re-enroll in a best-fit high school/GED program](#)" was complete. Yay!
The Coach closed out this Goal in the Online Platform and marked it as Completed Successfully.

The Online Platform prompted the Coach to select the next Academic Goal. The Coach looked at the Roadmap of High School Academic Goals to verify. As Anthony was not ready to take the GED exam yet, the Coach selected the Goal, [Advance grade level in GED Program and/or pass section of GED exam](#)

ANTHONY'S CAREER DEVELOPMENT GOAL(S)

The Coach took the following actions to help Anthony conduct the yearly required Career Development Goals.

CAREER EXPLORATION & PREPARATION GOAL

This includes three **Required Steps**:

- Conduct Career Exploration.** The Coach knew Anthony loved art, writing, music, and boxing/MMA, so the Coach suggested sitting down together to do a career assessment online. They did an assessment together using the Hats & Ladders tool and also met with the Career Coach at The Hub to do deep career exploration. They found out that there were different pathways that incorporated Anthony's interests, particularly in the human services/non-profit field. Becoming a boxing or personal trainer or involved in the music industry were also potential options.
- Create or refine/update a resume**
Anthony already sat down with the Career Development Specialist to do this, but now Anthony had new things to add to his resume: the GED program, a summer internship, and boxing! After these were added, the Coach checked off this Step.
- Discuss career development goals for the year, and potential activities and opportunities in line with these goals.**
Even though Anthony was still boxing, which counted as a career development (extracurricular) experience, the Coach wanted to help him explore other opportunities in line with his other interests so he could stay engaged, motivated, keep building his resume, and earn some money. The Coach figured that it would be a good idea to try to help enroll Anthony in some sort of non-profit program where he could explore his interests and get something on his resume that was directly in line with his artistic and/or writing interests.

AT THIS POINT:

The Career Development Goal "[Conduct Career Exploration & Preparation](#)" was complete. Yay!
The Coach closed out this Goal in the Online Platform and marked it as Completed Successfully.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE/GOAL

The Coach sat down with Anthony to discuss some activities he could engage in over the next month while he waited for classes to begin. The Coach also reminded Anthony that once he started classes, he needed three months of 90%+ attendance before he could start the paid internship at the music studio. That meant that Anthony would have his days free for the next 4 months, possibly more.

The summer was coming up, so the Coach thought a good approach would be to enroll Anthony in the **Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)** and try to link him to an arts-based non-profit program. Anthony and the Coach went to the SYEP website together and also searched for youth development programs. They found one and he was accepted!

AT THIS POINT:

The Coach added the Goal, "[Engage in Career Development Experience](#)" and selected "summer internship."

ANTHONY'S POST-SECONDARY EXPLORATION/EXPOSURE GOAL

While Anthony had never discussed college or a post-secondary certificate, and even seemed initially opposed to it, his Coach knew that exposure to post-secondary opportunities can help young people with envisioning a pathway. The Coach also knew that many of the career pathways that Anthony was interested in required one and that Anthony would have more options with a post-secondary credential/degree.

One day, the Coach had Anthony meet him close to SUNY Erie Community College. He brought Anthony on a tour and he loved the feel. While Anthony was still insecure about his academic skills, the Coach assured him that if he worked hard to get his GED, college would be within reach. AND - that as long as he maintained a 2.0 GPA, it would be free given all the financial aid. Anthony was shocked to learn that not only would he not have to pay a dime for college tuition, but that he could actually earn money through various scholarships and grants to help with his living expenses!

The Coach helped create a supportive environment, and for the first time in his life, Anthony felt like college could be a reality.

AFTER THIS EXPERIENCE

The Coach closed out the Goal, "[Conduct Post-Secondary Exploration/Exposure](#)" and marked it as successful.

ANTHONY'S HOUSING/INDEPENDENT LIVING GOAL(S)

Section coming soon.

SUMMARY OF ANTHONY'S COMPLETED GOALS

Despite starting off the year not motivated to re-engage in school, by the end of the year, through coaching, Anthony had significantly **exceeded** the minimum goals and accomplished the following goals:

- ❑ **2 High School Goals:**
 - ❑ [Re-engage and re-enroll in a best-fit high school/GED program](#)
 - ❑ [Advance a grade level in a GED Program and/or Pass a section of the GED exam](#)
Anthony advanced a grade level in Math!

- ❑ **1 Post-Secondary Exploration/Exposure Goal**

- ❑ **1 Career Exploration & Planning Goal**

- ❑ **3 Career Development Experience Goals:**
 - ❑ [Participate in extracurricular, youth development program, or community service experience](#)
Anthony completed a full year of boxing
 - ❑ [Participate in summer internship program](#)
Anthony completed the SYEP program
 - ❑ Participate in [External Internship](#)
Anthony was accepted into the GED's internship program after 3 months of near perfect attendance

FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTION 18

EDUCATION: COACHING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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SECTION 18A & 18B

A. BACKGROUND

Young people in foster care are incredibly resilient. However, some young people in foster care can struggle academically due to a variety of factors, including school/home instability (moving from home to home and/or switching schools, which can cause gaps in learning and credit obtainment) and experiencing trauma (which could impede executive functioning associated with academic success).

For a young person who may have academic gaps, a learning disability, and/or be several grade levels behind, obtaining a high school degree/GED can be very challenging.

However, when young people receive the supports and guidance they need, the sky is the limit. Resilience can translate into grit and determination.

No matter the academic challenges or gifts a young person has, the **Coach's role is to ensure that young person is enrolled in a best-fit school/program, persists in that setting, and has the supports and resources they need to reach their full educational potential.**

B. COACH'S ROLE IN HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE ACHIEVE THEIR ACADEMIC GOALS

The aim is to help all young people graduate high school and eventually navigate onto a living wage career path. In today's economy, with some exceptions, a living wage career requires a college degree and/or vocational credentials.

Without a high school degree, there is little-to-no chance that a young person will be able to be economically self-sufficient. These young people will be at very high risk of further system involvement. **Therefore, it is the role of a Coach to ensure that all young people get their high school degree or GED, no matter how long that takes!** From there, Coaches help young people navigate onto a best-fit post-secondary pathway and persist in that setting.

Should a young person not be ready to enroll, Coaches can help them connect to career development experiences and/or academic remediation supports to help build their resumes, skills, and post-secondary preparedness.

Should a young person not persist in any particular school/program, the Coach helps them to reflect on the experience, explore other opportunities, and re-engage in a better-fit setting.

Very few young people will transition right from high school onto a living-wage job without any post-secondary credentials. Having some sort of post-secondary degree/ credentials will ultimately help the young person advance, earn more, and/or have more mobility and overall economic stability.

Therefore, Coaches also expose all young people to post-secondary options as early as possible, including college and accredited vocational programs, to help them start to plan and prepare. See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21](#).

WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE ENROLL IN THE FAIR FUTURES COACHING PROGRAM, THEY WILL COME IN WITH VARYING LEVELS OF ACADEMIC SKILLS AND CREDENTIALS. COACHES MEET YOUTH WHERE THEY ARE AND HELP THEM ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL, WHETHER THEY ARE DISCONNECTED OR A STAR STUDENT.

A COACH'S ROLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITHOUT A DEGREE, BASED ON WHERE THEY ARE, INCLUDES:

FOR STUDENTS ENROLLED IN HIGH SCHOOL:

Coaches help young people persist with the overall goal of helping with grade promotion.¹ They do so by providing emotional support, visiting the school, connecting them to needed services/resources, checking in at critical junctures, and helping them to navigate challenges, as needed.

FOR STUDENTS ENROLLED IN A GED PROGRAM:

Coaches help them persist with the overall goal of helping them obtain their GED. They do so by visiting the program, providing emotional support, connecting them to needed services/resources, checking-in at critical junctures, and helping them to navigate challenges, as needed. [See Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18D.](#)

FOR DISCONNECTED YOUTH WITHOUT A HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE/GED:

The Coach helps reconnect them to an appropriate academic setting. Even if a young person is initially not interested in getting a high school degree/GED, the Coach's role is help them understand why they need their degree. While a young person should always be driving his/her own goals and a Coach should be supportive of whatever pathway they choose, a high school degree is a necessity for their success. It is the Coach's responsibility to find ways to help them realize this in a way that is motivating and supportive. **Telling a young person that a degree is important usually doesn't work – they know that!** There are other effective, innovative approaches to use. [See Fair Futures Program Manual Section 20.](#)

OVERALL, FROM AN EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, COACHES:



- **Ensure young people are enrolled in a best-fit school, college, or program** (and connect them to one if they are not)
- **Help young people persist in that academic setting**
- **Build relationships** with the primary people at the young person's school/program, and work with the young person's family/adult figures to support them
- **Plan and prepare** for the next step on their journey

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¹ Students with intellectual disabilities who are alternately assessed will have a modified persistence goal. See Goals & Steps framework.

SECTION 18C

C. COACHING 9TH GRADE STUDENTS/1ST YEAR OF COACHING

COACHING 9TH GRADE STUDENTS

Coaching should ideally begin in the summer before the 9th grade. This is a critical transition year for all young people, as it can be overwhelming both academically and socially. High school students have to adjust to a new school environment, are expected to perform more independently in their academic work, and also start feeling increased social pressures and influences.

For students in foster care, who often enter 9th grade academically behind or over-age, these academic expectations, combined with the social pressures, can lead them to repeat 9th grade. It doesn't feel good to fail. At this juncture, the desire to be accepted by their peers, the pull of the streets, and/or the allure of getting a job and earning money, can lead them to negative outcomes, such as dropping out and/or experiencing early parenthood.

Students who enter the 9th grade on/above grade level can also get deterred if they do not have the right supports or if they are in an under-performing school. Instead of getting on a 4-year graduation, college-bound or vocational track, they can also slip through the cracks.

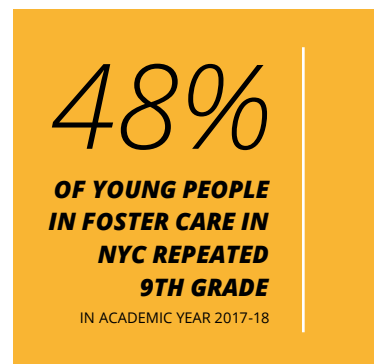


Coaches can play a critical role in helping students transition successfully to high school so that the first year does not feel as challenging. Ideally, Coaches will begin building a trusting relationship with the student in the summer before the 9th grade. During this period, Coaches can help students mentally prepare for what they may expect in high school and let them know that they will be there for them.

Coaches should follow up with students the day before their first day of high school, the first day after to reflect on the experience, and check in on them every week thereafter. If a young person knows that there is a caring, supportive adult in their lives who believes in their potential, cares about their emotional well-being, and monitors and supports their academic performance, the young person will often strive to live up to that adult's expectations. They often will not do it for themselves until a later developmental stage.

DURING THE 9TH GRADE, COACHES SHOULD:

- Set up the first school visit (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 19](#) & [Appendix C5: Conducting Effective School Visits](#))
- Check in with the student's guidance counselor each semester, or more frequently if needed
- Continue to build a trusting relationship with the young person, so that the young person comes to them before a challenge becomes a major issue
- Provide emotional support to young people, including helping them navigate new social dynamics (friends, relationships, etc.)
- Ask about homework assignments and tests, and attempt to connect them to a tutor (as most students could benefit)
- Connect students to afterschool and summer activities in line with their interests to keep them engaged, and/or to a paid internship (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#)).
- Connect them to summer school, if needed
- Start engaging youth in post-secondary exposure, career exploration, and career development activities. Even if a young person is struggling academically, these activities can help them envision a pathway and/or build self-esteem, which can lead to increased engagement in school. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21](#))



THE FIRST SCHOOL VISIT

For students in 9th grade, Coaches should set up a school visit as soon as possible, in September or October of their first term.

For those who come into the program in other grades or junctures, the Coach should visit the school/GED program (with the young person, whenever possible) ideally within the first 30 days, as discussed in the “Initial Engagement” section.

Coaches should visit the school at least once per semester for all students enrolled in high school; a best practice is monthly for struggling students.

To conduct an effective school visit, please [See Appendix C5 First School Visit](#).

The content of this document is summarized below, but it is recommended to read the attachment as it contains many specific tips!

The meeting should take place with the young person, the student’s guidance counselor and any other school staff, as needed, and the parent (if they are able to attend).

The purpose of the visit is to:

- Show the young person that the Coach cares about them;
- Ensure that they are enrolled in a safe, productive environment ([See Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18D](#));
- Help create a plan for graduation and post-secondary exploration;
- Ensure that the student is receiving any needed supports from the school/program;
- Form a working relationship with key staff, so that the school knows to reach out to the Coach if any challenges, issues, or opportunities arise as it relates to that young person.

Before the first visit

The Coach should obtain required documentation:

- For youth in foster care, it’s possible that coaches will need to obtain a signed release from the youth’s parent, legal guardian, or the youth (if they are over 18, on final discharge, or adopted) to access school records.
- Review the student’s most recent report card, attendance, transcript (if they are in their second year of high school or later), IEP (if they have one), and the Office of Disciplinary Referrals & Parent-Teacher Correspondence. Coaches should be able to access most of this information on “Infinite Campus” through a data sharing agreement between Say YES and the Buffalo Public School District, if parents have consented.
- Explain the purpose of the visit to the young person. By this point, the Coach should already have begun to develop a solid rapport with the young person and ensured that they understand that the Coach is there to support them. Find out how they feel about their guidance counselor, teachers, and school in general so you can be sensitive to these dynamics. If the young person has NOT yet responded to the Coach, the Coach should still do the school visit - it shows that they care about the student, and it may even be the reason why the student ends up engaging!
- Reach out to the foster parent/parent, as appropriate, to see if they can attend.
- If they have a good relationship with the student, invite the youth’s Case Planner, Socio-Therapist, or other relevant agency staff to participate.

During the first visit

The Coach should set the stage for the meeting, and try to create a warm, engaging, and supportive environment. Sometimes these visits can be traumatic, as some young people associate “school” with another “system,” and guidance counselors do not always take a strength-based approach, particularly if a young person is struggling academically or has behavioral concerns. The Coach should model the appropriate tone, try to create a “circle of support” around the young person, and empower the young person to participate in the discussion.

If the student does not have strong performance, **it is the role of the Coach to focus on their potential**, and what steps can be taken. It may be helpful for the Coach to meet with the guidance counselor or other school staff alone before asking the student to join the meeting, to ensure everyone is on the same page. This can be useful if there are sensitive topics to discuss.

The Coach should also be sure to:

- ❑ Let the student talk!
- ❑ Inquire about any needs the student has, particularly if they have an IEP or 504 Plan, and whether the appropriate support services are in place. Ask specific questions (e.g., “Is the student meeting twice each week with the speech therapist, as outlined in the IEP?”).
- ❑ Review the student’s attendance thus far, including timeliness and attendance in individual classes. It is common for students to attend school regularly but arrive late, skip academic classes, or leave school early. The students should be given a chance to express their thoughts and concerns as well.
- ❑ Review progress towards graduation and any post-secondary plans - see blue box below.
- ❑ Discuss any supports the school has (e.g., afterschool programs, Regents prep, extracurricular activities, etc.), and the student’s interests in these activities.

IF THE STUDENT IS IN 10TH GRADE OR ABOVE (OR A SECOND-TIME 9TH GRADER), THE COACH SHOULD ALSO:

- ❑ Discuss the high school graduation goal: What type of degree is the student hoping to earn?
Options include: Advanced Regents, Regents, Local Degree
An alternative degree called a **Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential (SACC)** is also available for students with significant disabilities. *Note: a SACC degree is not a high school diploma and cannot be used to apply to college, the military, or trade schools, as the other degrees can. Students with IEPs should earn a diploma whenever possible and the SACC should be a last resort. (See [Appendix F7 High School Graduation Options for Students with Disabilities](#))*
With a **Local Degree**, the young person can pass their Regents exams with a 55 (instead of a 65)
This should only be discussed as an option if the student is really struggling to pass and getting discouraged.
- ❑ **Review the young person’s transcript and progress towards graduation with the Guidance Counselor.**
Note: Coaches do not need to discuss the high school graduation goal or type of degree for first-time 9th graders, as all young people should start off aiming for a Regents degree (unless they are already being tracked for an alternative high school degree).
See [Appendix F6 High School Graduation Checklist](#).

After the first visit:

The Coach should debrief with the student and talk through any feelings the meeting may have produced, particularly if the student’s performance is not optimal. This is an important relationship-building moment – it will reinforce that the Coach is there for them, no matter how they are doing in school, and that they believe in the young person. The Coach should also help the student set goals based on the meeting.

The Coach should also send a warm thank you note to the school and summarize the visit and any next steps.

The Coach should also update the parent if he/she was not able to attend and notify the case planner of any relevant information.

Urgent concerns would include:

- If the student is already cutting classes;
- If there are concerns about bullying;
- If the student’s IEP isn’t being followed;
- If there’s a medication form that needs to be completed, etc.

AFTER THE 9TH GRADE

IF THE YOUNG PERSON COMPLETES THE SCHOOL YEAR AND IS PROMOTED:

The Coach should continue to provide coaching/persistence support going into 10th grade and beyond. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18E](#))

IF A YOUNG PERSON REPEATS THE 9TH GRADE:

The Coach should engage their Supervisor, the school guidance counselor, the case planning team, and the student's parent to gather additional information/input on the best course of action.

If the issue does not seem to be academic driven and related more to engagement, potential steps include:

- Help young person understand why school is important by connecting them to a peer group or credible messenger;
- Help young person understand why school is important by connecting them to an extracurricular program or experience in line with their interests to build self-esteem & help them envision pathway;
- Help young person have a "breakthrough moment" by taking them on a trip or engaging in a new experience that broadens their horizons;
- Work with young person to improve attendance; coach young person, text/call young person in the mornings.

If the student is engaged but struggling due to mostly academic reasons, common actions include:

- Refer the student to a tutor (and follow-up with tutor on performance);
- Help the student enroll in afterschool programming or Regents exam prep;
- Create a study plan;
- Advocate with the school/DOE to help the student obtain a particular service or accommodation;
- Request that the school submit an evaluation for an IEP or 504 Plan;
- Consider whether a school transfer may be appropriate ([See Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18D](#));

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SECTION 18D

D. TRANSFERRING STUDENTS TO AN ANOTHER HIGH SCHOOL

Students may need to transfer into another high school for a variety of reasons. Remember that this is an important and nuanced decision, and all stakeholders should be consulted before taking action – the young person, parent, school/guidance counselor, Case Planner, the Coach’s Supervisor, etc.

Should this become a goal, the Coach should select the “[Transfer student into a better-fit high school setting](#)” goal in the Online Platform and follow the Required Steps.

TYPES OF SCHOOL TRANSFERS

The local transfer process is limited and complicated. [Say YES representatives](#) can advocate for student transfers, or Coaches can visit the Student Placement & Registration Office. More information on transferring schools can be found [here](#).

Types of transfers include:

❖ **Transfer to another public high school:**

Students might request a school transfer for medical, safety, or travel hardship or if they are struggling with academics, behavior, social-emotional concerns or attendance, and a different school could address the problem. The local transfer process is limited and complicated but possible. Say YES representatives can help advocate for student transfers.

For general transfer-related questions, visit the Student Placement & Registration Office in Buffalo. Call 716-816-3717 or email BPSSchoolChoiceApplication@buffaloschools.org.

❖ **Transfer to charter high school:**

Charter schools are independent public schools founded by not-for-profit Boards of Trustees. They operate under a contract (or "charter") of up to five years. Many charter schools have unique educational approaches that may include longer school days, a longer school year, or themed programs. While many charter schools offer rigorous instruction and have high graduation rates, many also have strict discipline codes or promotion policies and may not be the right choice for some students in care. Similarly, some charter schools are designed to support students with special education needs, while others struggle to provide special education services and are not a good fit for students who need substantial supports. Before enrolling, make sure to visit charter schools with families to learn more about their discipline and promotion policies and their approach to providing special education services, to ensure the school is a good fit for your student.

There are 21 charter schools in the Buffalo area, seven of which serve high school-aged students. Most charter schools conduct admissions through a lottery. With support from Coaches, students can apply to multiple charters on the following site: enrollbuffalocharters.org. Seats are limited, and it is helpful to call schools individually to learn about their programs and about seat availability. See [Appendix F30 Charter Schools](#) for more information.

❖ **Transfer to an alternative high school setting: Alternative schools or a GED Program**

While limited, the region has a few alternative schools for students who are overage for their grade and/or behind in credits. These students might benefit from schools with expanded options such as flexible class structures/hours, the opportunity to gain work experience, and/or individualized counseling (note that not every alternative school offers each of those services). See [Appendix F8 Alternative High School Selection and Application Guide](#) for more information on these alternative high schools, the supports they provide, the application process, etc. *Also included in that document is more information on GED programs, which offer highly flexible prep courses for as long as necessary prior to a young person’s passing of the exam. Some of those programs also offer workforce development training.*

- Coaches should motivate the student and help them apply.
See “[Transfer student into a better-fit high school setting](#)” Goal for Potential Steps a Coach can take with the student.
- The Coach should visit the program with the young person

❖ **Transfer to an international high school**

If a student has newly arrived in the country and is an English Language Learner (ELL), they may want to consider an international high school such as [Buffalo's Lafayette International School](#). International schools are designed to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of newly-arrived immigrant students. See [Appendix F9 List of Alternative High Schools](#).

❖ **Transfer to a specialized setting including: Day Treatment Programs and non-public special education schools**

Students who require intensive special education supports beyond what is available in a traditional high school will need to consider a specialized setting. This should typically be the last-resort option, after considering a local diploma and an alternative high school (alternative school, GED program, etc.). In order to enroll in a specialized setting, students will need updated psychological testing and a current psychiatric or other specialized evaluation. They also likely will need a new recommendation on their IEP.

If a Coach is not sure which type of program to help a student pursue, they can connect with Say YES representatives, who can help advocate for student transfers. For general transfer-related questions, visit the Student Placement & Registration Office in Buffalo. For GED programs, it is best to contact each program directly to learn more.

SELECTING THE BEST-FIT HIGH SCHOOL/PROGRAM: REQUIRED STEPS

Review [Appendix F8 Alternative High School Selection and Application Guide](#) for information on alternative high schools, the supports they provide, the application process, etc.

Required Steps for the "[Transfer student into a better-fit high school setting](#)" goal include:

- Create a vetted list of specific high schools/programs to visit with the young person (based on [Appendix F8](#))
- Discuss plans with caregiver and Case Planner
- Reach out to potential schools/programs to ask about open houses, process, eligibility criteria, services offered, etc.
- Visit potential schools/programs with young person (and/or have parent visit with young person)
- Follow-up with school/program and young person after visit(s) to debrief and hear their thoughts
- Apply to a best-fit school or GED program; support young person through any interviews
- Enroll in best-fit school or GED program; complete any paperwork
- Celebrate acceptance into the new school/program
- Follow up with young person before the first day of school to provide support/encouragement
- Follow up with young person after the first day to debrief/reflect on experience
- Follow up with young person after the first week to debrief/reflect on experience (if still enrolled at this point, check off goal as "completed")

If the young person is not accepted to a particular school or program, keep repeating the above steps until the student is accepted.

Transferring schools sometimes requires some advocacy from the Coach! The fact that the Coach is not giving up and sticking with the student throughout the entire process will help strengthen their relationship.

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SECTION 18E

E. PERSISTING IN HIGH SCHOOL/GED PROGRAM

Once a student is enrolled in a best-fit school or program, the Coach will provide persistence coaching until a high school degree or GED is obtained.

Use the [High School Roadmap](#) to review the Student Situations and the corresponding goals.

See examples of student situations and goals below:

- ❖ **If the student is enrolled in high school**, the goal will be: [“Complete school year promoted”](#) if they are in grades 9-11. Once the student is a high school senior or have approximately one year left to graduate, the goal becomes: [“Obtain high school degree”](#)
- ❖ **If the student is in a GED program**, the goal will be: [“Advance a grade level in a GED Program and/or Pass a section of the GED exam.”](#) Once they are ready to take the full exam or are close to passing most of it, the goal becomes: [“Obtain GED”](#)
- ❖ **If the student is enrolled in an alternate assessment (non-degree) high school program**, the goal is: [“Complete school year with 85%+ Attendance and Mastery of IEP goals*IEP Goals.”](#) Once the student is one year away from graduating, the goal becomes: [“Obtain Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential”](#)

Depending on the **Goal**, there are some **Required Steps**, which are in line with best practice, and necessary to help student achieve their potential.

The Required Steps that apply to students enrolled in high school who have a goal of [“Complete school year promoted”](#) or [“Obtain High School Diploma”](#) include:

- Monitor attendance
 - This should happen at whatever frequency attendance data is provided.
 - If a student is in an alternative high school, the Coach should form a relationship with the student’s Counselor (who typically work at much lower ratios than traditional schools) and request a regular update.
- Monitor grades
 - This should happen on whatever frequency data is provided (typically quarterly).
 - Some alternative schools offer grades on a biweekly basis.
- Monitor student’s transcript
 - In February and July (for students on a semester schedule), and in December, March, and July (trimester schedule).
 - This ensures that Coaches are monitoring not just a student’s grades but their cumulative credits, the Regents exam that they have completed, and which exams are still needed to graduate.
 - For students with a GPA below 75, grades should be monitored ideally biweekly, if possible.
- Speak to/meet with the guidance counselor/staff regarding young person’s attendance or performance
 - The Coach should do this at least once per semester (or more if needed) to ensure the student is on-track for graduation and receiving the supports they need. These conversations will also be centered around planning and preparing for a post-secondary setting. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21](#))
 - The Coach should bring the [Appendix F6 High School Graduation Checklist](#) and ensure the student has the appropriate high school graduation goal (Advanced Regents diploma, Regents diploma, Local Diploma, CDOS, or SACC – see [Appendix F7 High School Graduation Options for Students with Disabilities](#)).

- Provide weekly coaching, support, and encouragement around school persistence: *Text, call, or meet student*
 - Regardless of the academic setting, the Coach should check in each week with the young person. If needed, this can include an in-person visit to discuss any concerns.
 - If they are doing well, it can be a weekly text message to send an encouraging, supportive message (e.g., “Good luck on that quiz today! You have been working so hard – let me know how it goes.”).
 - A weekly contact also helps with continuing to build the relationship, even if the young person does not respond, they will know that their Coach is still there for them. **Consistency and constancy!**

If the student is engaged in school but struggling academically, some common actions include:

(all are **Potential Steps** under the “[Complete school year promoted](#)” or “[Obtain high school Diploma](#)” goals)

- Refer the student to a tutor (and follow-up with tutor on performance);
- Help the student enroll in afterschool programming or Regents exam prep;
- Create a study plan;
- Advocate with the school/DOE to help the student obtain a particular service or accommodation;
- Request that the school submit an evaluation for an IEP or 504 Plan (requires parent's consent)
- Evaluate whether the school is a good fit with Supervisor (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18D](#))

If the student also needs support around engagement in school (not just academic support), effective suggestions/

Potential Steps include:

- Help young person understand why school is important by connecting them to a peer group or credible messenger;
- Help young person understand why a school is important by connecting them to an extracurricular program or experience in line with their interests to build self-esteem & help them envision pathway;
- Help young person have a “breakthrough moment” by taking them on a trip or engaging in a new experience that broadens their horizons.
- Work with young person to improve attendance; coach young person, text/call young person in the mornings.

If the student is in a GED program, the Required Steps to help them persist include:

See “[Advance a grade level in a GED Program and/or Pass a section of the GED exam](#)” goal

- Monitor attendance and performance biweekly (check-in with the young person's Primary Person at the program);
- Provide weekly persistence coaching, support, and encouragement to advance grade level (text, call, or meet).
- If the student is struggling, follow the Potential Steps listed above under the student situation “If the student is engaged in school but struggling academically”

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SECTION 18F

F. ADVOCACY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students who require accommodations to make sure their educational needs are met may have an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan. For these students, an additional required goal is "[Ensure receipt of appropriate accommodations or special education services.](#)" This is important because sometimes students can fall through the cracks and not receive the services they need to succeed academically.

The **Required Steps** that ensure students are receiving appropriate services include:

- Obtain copy of most recent IEP/504 Plan and ensure it is current within the last year. If it's not, contact the school to see if a more recent version exists; if needed, work with the school and family to schedule a new meeting as soon as possible
- Participate in annual IEP meeting and/or 504 meeting; try to ensure the student and student's parent participates
- Confirm student is receiving all accommodations and services mandated by 504 or IEP, and is in the right classroom setting

Some **Potential Steps** include (depending on the course of action needed):

- Renew 504 Plan;
- Obtain copy of most recent psycho-educational evaluation and ensure it is current within the last 3 years (required for students with IEPs but not 504s);
- Request new accommodation(s), if needed (requires parent's consent);
- Request that the school conduct a new IEP or 504 evaluation, if needed (requires parent's consent);
- Request an independent educational evaluation if student is not demonstrating progress and the school evaluation is not comprehensive (requires parental consent);
- Request that the school make changes to IEP, if needed (requires parent's consent);
- If needed, work with educational decision-maker to exercise due process rights on behalf of student (e.g., request mediation or an impartial hearing).
This should only happen after talking with the student's teachers, principal, IEP team, and case planning team (and, when needed, the District Superintendent).
- Work with school [to apply to ACCES-VR](#); proceed to [Career Development Goals](#).

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SECTION 18G

G. CONNECTING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO TUTORS



In most circumstances, tutoring would be beneficial for any high school student. If the student is behind, it will help bring them closer to being on grade-level. If the student is an A student, tutoring could help them prepare for the PSATs or SATs to become eligible for a better college and/or more scholarships.

However, if tutoring is not available to all students for whatever reason, students who are at risk of not being promoted or have below a 75 average should be prioritized.

After the Coach has formed a relationship with the student, the Coach should make this suggestion to the student and his/her parent. If the student is open to it, the Coach will refer the student to a Tutor. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 19](#))

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FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTION 19

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SECTION 19. TUTORING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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SECTION 19. TUTORING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Review [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 6](#) for an overview of how agencies can sub-contract with a quality tutoring provider or implement a quality tutoring program.

Regardless of whether the Tutor is in-house staff or contracted, **Tutors are responsible for:**

- Building a relationship with the student;
- Helping them to improve their academic skills and grades;
- Reporting progress and any needs or concerns to the Coach on a monthly basis.



It is the Coach's role (for students in grades 9 to 12) to make records requests to schools, check in with guidance counselors, and perform interventions (e.g. suspension advocacy, requesting evaluations, etc.) on behalf of students. Should a need arise that the Tutor flags, the Coach can provide necessary educational advocacy with the school and/or connect the student to services.



The number of tutoring sessions and dates of these sessions should be tracked in the Online Platform by the Coach (if they have one).

In addition to regular progress reporting, the Tutor should inform the Coach/agency immediately if:

- The student displays signs of depression, suicidal thoughts, severe anxiety or other mental health problems. All other mental health concerns should be reported within 24 hours of the Tutor learning of the concern.
- The Tutor is aware of concerning behaviors or activities a student is participating in (e.g. drug use, involvement in gangs, etc.). Tutors should inform their Supervisor as well.
- The Tutor learns of a potential medical issue that may be affecting a student (such as needing glasses). This should be reported to the Case Planner within 24 hours of the Tutor learning of the concern.

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SECTION 20

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SECTION 20. COACHING DISCONNECTED YOUNG PEOPLE WITHOUT A HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE/GED

If a young person is not enrolled in an academic setting, the Coach's role is to re-engage them and enroll them in an appropriate setting. The academic Goal should be "[Re-engage & Re-enroll in a best-fit high school/GED program.](#)"

If the young person does not want to go back to high school, follow the steps in [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 20A](#).

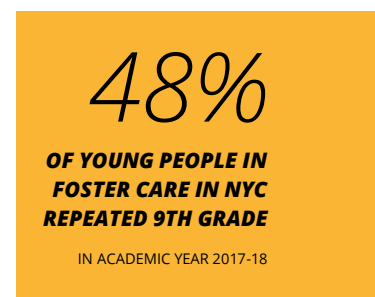
For those youth who are already motivated to re-enroll/re-engage in a high school section, skip to [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 20B](#) and follow the Required Steps to re-enroll them in a best-fit setting.

A. RE-ENGAGING/MOTIVATING YOUNG PEOPLE

All young people want to succeed. If a young person is disengaged/disconnected, it is often because they did not have the academic and/or adult support they needed and became discouraged, and/or due to the trauma and instability in their lives. As human beings, we need to be able to envision success and see a pathway that others have followed. It is not uncommon for foster youth to not have many – or any – adults in their lives who went to college; some may also be the first in their families to graduate high school.

Many students in foster care enter high school academically behind. If a student enters the 9th grade academically below grade level and they are not in a quality school and/or if there is not an effective intervention in place, they can become discouraged and disengaged.

Repeating a grade can take a big toll on one's self-esteem. That, combined with the trauma and instability young people in foster care often experience, can understandably lead them to want to engage in activities that help them "feel good." Going to school every day, when they may be struggling and/or cannot envision success in school, may not make them feel good. Interacting with peers, earning money, engaging in other behaviors to release endorphins, and/or isolating themselves are all common coping mechanisms.



Re-engaging young people who have disengaged from school usually entails helping them to:

- Believe in themselves and their potential
- Increase their self-esteem, sense of self, and sense of belonging
- Envision success in school and/or a potential career pathway
- Understand the critical importance of a high school degree for future stability

There are a variety of effective approaches a Coach can take to help young people believe in themselves, increase their self-esteem and sense of belonging, and envision a pathway.

To complete the [Re-engage & Re-enroll in a best-fit high school/GED program](#), the **Potential Steps** that a Coach should take if the young person needs to be motivated to re-engage in school include:

- Connecting the young person to a peer group or credible messenger**
Peers who have been in the same situation and have succeeded can help inspire and motivate the young person. See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 25](#) for more information.
- Connecting the young person to an extracurricular activity in line with their interests** (e.g., art, martial arts, a youth leadership program). This can help youth build the self-esteem, sense of purpose, and broader network of adult/peer supports they need to re-engage in school.
Buffalo has free youth development, extracurricular, and community service programs. Engaging in one of these activities can also help young people build their resumes and the critical soft skills needed for the world of work.
- Taking a trip or having a new experience**
Bringing a young person on a group trip or engaging them in a new recreational experience (e.g., a museum, hiking, a boat ride) can be transformative. Simply being in a new/different environment that is positive and peaceful can help them to broaden their horizons and reflect on their goals and potential. Trips and experiences can facilitate "breakthrough" moments.

Career exploration is also important in helping young people envision success and understand the importance of a high school (and advanced) degree.

Many young people are unaware of different career pathways. Like other young people, they are only aware of what they have been exposed to. Understanding what opportunities are available to them and what the academic requirements are can help them understand why they need to re-engage and persist in school. The Coach can engage the young person in Career Exploration activities.

As the Coach is re-engaging the young person, the Coach should also start thinking about what type of high school environment may be a best fit.

B. RE-ENROLLING YOUNG PEOPLE IN AN ACADEMIC SETTING

To complete the [Re-engage & Re-enroll in a best-fit high school/GED program](#), the following are the **Required Steps** a Coach should take if/once a young person is motivated to re-enroll in a high school setting:

- Obtain most recent transcript and records (including attendance records and IEP/504 Plan, if applicable) from the previously attended high school, and review them. *This will help the Coach understand the number of credits earned, any Regents completed, attendance patterns, and any special education needs.*
- Evaluate what type of high school setting may be a best fit based on youth's age, credits earned, student needs, etc. (e.g., a different high school, GED program, alternative school, etc.). Also consider whether the most recently attended school/program could be a good fit. Refer to [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18D](#) for an overview of the various types of schools/programs and key factors to consider.
- Once the type of high school setting is determined, create a vetted list of specific high schools/programs with the young person based on location, quality (graduation rate, school safety, etc.), student needs, and student interests and select some to visit. (Review [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18D](#)).
See [Appendix H0 GED Programs](#) and [Appendix F9 List of Alternative High Schools](#).
- Discuss plans with parent and Case Planner
- Reach out to potential schools/programs to ask about open houses, process, eligibility criteria, services offered, etc.
- Visit potential schools/programs with young person (and/or have parent visit with young person)
- Follow-up with school/program and young person after visit(s) to debrief and hear their thoughts
- Apply to a best-fit school or GED program; support young person through any interviews
- Enroll in best-fit school or GED program; complete any paperwork
- Celebrate acceptance into the new school/program
- Follow up with young person before the first day of school to provide support/encouragement
- Follow up with young person after the first day to debrief/reflect on experience
- Follow up with young person after the first week to debrief/reflect on experience

If young person is still enrolled at this point, close the Goal and mark as “completed” in the Online Platform.

If the young person is not accepted to a particular school or program, keep repeating the above steps until the student is accepted. Also refer to the [Appendix F8 Alternative High School Selection and Application Guide](#) for additional guidance.

Once a student is re-engaged and re-enrolled in a best-fit high school setting, the Coach should refer to the [Roadmap of High School Goals](#) to see what the next Goal is.

The Coach will then assist the student with persistence/graduation - review [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18E](#) for more information.

FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTION 21

POST-SECONDARY EXPOSURE, PLANNING, & PERSISTENCE

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SECTION 21A, 21B, & 21C

A. OVERVIEW

An important goal of the Fair Futures program is for young people to navigate onto a living wage career path that offers opportunities for growth and fulfillment. Many career paths that meet this standard require a college degree and/or other post-secondary credential(s), combined with career development experiences.

There are some specific careers where a high school degree may suffice; however, those opportunities are limited and can be extremely competitive (e.g., becoming a firefighter, certain union apprenticeships, etc.). Even with these positions, having some sort of post-secondary degree/credential can ultimately help the young person advance, increase their earning power, and/or have more career mobility.

Therefore, Coaches and Specialists should expose young people to various post-secondary options as early as possible, including college and accredited vocational programs, and help them start to plan and prepare.

This exposure and planning should begin in the 9th grade, ideally. College and career assessment tools can help youth to determine what post-secondary path may be best for them.

TIP! See [Career Exploration Tools](#) for more information.

B. POST-SECONDARY GOAL-SETTING

Unless a young person is already enrolled in a post-secondary setting, **all young people should have at least 1+ post-secondary exposure/planning goal each year.**

This includes young people who are disconnected and without a high school degree. For these young people, the goal could simply be exploration. For example, the Coach could take them to a college campus or vocational program. That exploratory experience could be what motivates the young person to re-engage in high school and/or visualize a pathway for themselves!

See [Appendix E: Goals & Steps Guide and Worksheets](#) to determine which post-secondary goal would apply to the young person based on their situation.

For those not ready to apply to a post-secondary setting, an exposure/exploration goal should be selected: "[Conduct Post-Secondary Exploration and Exposure.](#)"

IMPORTANT FACTORS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN SETTING POST-SECONDARY GOALS:

Students enrolled in a high school or GED program should engage in the "[Conduct Post-Secondary Exploration and Exposure](#)" Goal, even if they do not express a strong interest in college.

This is because for many young people, college was never on their radar (and/or they may not know any adults who attended college), so it may take some time for them to believe that it is a viable pathway.

To complete this goal, the Coach could take the student to visit a local college during one of their coaching sessions together, or work together to make a list of colleges that have majors matching up with the student's interests.

For students who express an interest in the trades or a vocational setting:

The Goal "[Conduct Post-Secondary Exploration and Exposure](#)" should be selected.

See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21J](#).

The College Exploration Goal could also be selected, too, however; many advanced careers in the trades require a college degree (e.g., Construction Project Managers typically need a Bachelor's degree in Construction Project Management or a related field).

For these students' Career Development Goal, the Coach could help them explore classes and internships so they can earn a credential(s) while enrolled in high school. Refer to [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#) for other pathways into the trades during and after high school.

Students with disabilities who are in an Alternate Assessment program and tracked toward a Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential (SACC) rather than a Local Diploma, Regents Diploma, or High School Equivalency will not be eligible to enroll in college, some trade schools, or the military. The first step in long-range planning for these students should always be to verify that the alternate assessment designation is appropriate (i.e. that the student has a severe intellectual or developmental disability that will prevent them from graduating from high school). Sometimes students are erroneously categorized as Alternate Assessment (due to outdated evaluations or evaluations conducted after a profound trauma) when in fact they have the potential to complete a high school course of study. If there is any doubt at all that a student should be on alternate assessment, then updated psychoeducational evaluations, and, if necessary, independent evaluations, should be sought for these students. For these students who are appropriately designated for Alternate Assessment, the Post-Secondary Goal should be [“Conduct Post-Secondary Exploration and Exposure”](#) and the Career Development Goal should be [“Apply to ACCES-VR”](#).

After graduation, some young people may need more time to develop their academic skills in a remedial setting or take a “gap year” before enrolling in a post-secondary setting.

Taking a gap year or gap semester between high school and college, as long as it is a productive one that allows that young person to develop skills/experiences in line with their longer-term goals, is a pathway that may work well for some young people. Young people could engage in a Career Development Experience (e.g., a workforce program) to earn money, build their skills, and/or earn a credential while brushing up on remedials. See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#) for pathways/options and refer to **Buffalo Futures Online** (*coming soon*).

Young people with a high school degree/equivalency who are not yet enrolled in any post-secondary setting should also have at least one exploration/exposure goal. Even if they are not yet ready to enroll (and want to work, for example), post-secondary exposure/exploration is important.

If they need to earn money, there are ways for them to get a paycheck while working on earning a post-secondary credential:

- The young person could attend college full-time (and likely receive significant funding - see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21F](#)) and also get paid \$15/hour to do work/study
- The young person could attend college part-time and have a part-time job or paid internship
- The young person could enroll in a workforce development program that offers sector-based training in their area of interest along with a paid internship (and work part-time, if needed/possible)

C. ROLE OF A COACH IN HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH POST-SECONDARY GOALS

The Coach’s role in helping young people explore their post-secondary goals will depend on where they are. Coaches should also involve birth and/or foster parents in the post-secondary planning process to ensure the young person is being supported.

AT A HIGH LEVEL, THE ROLE OF THE COACH BASED ON A YOUNG PERSON’S SITUATION

For young people in high school/GED program and interested in college:

- Coaches work with the student and their guidance counselor (or GED program staff) to ensure they are on-track for high school graduation and have a plan in place for college.
- The student will also meet with the coach to identify best-fit colleges, complete admissions and financial aid applications, apply to support and opportunity programs, reapply each semester, and renew all forms of financial aid each year.
- Coaches are encouraged to collaborate with parents/foster parents, Say Yes staff, high school guidance counselors, and college support program staff to support the student through this process.

For young people in high school/GED program and interested in a vocational/other post-secondary pathway:

- Coaches work with the student and their guidance counselor (or GED program staff) to ensure they are on-track for graduation and exploring post-secondary pathways.
- For youth who are not yet ready to enroll in a vocational program upon graduation, there are workforce bridge programs that help prepare youth to gain skills/credentials and take the next step toward their goals.
- The Coach will connect these students to the Career Coach to discuss best-fit programs and other options. See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21](#), [Section 22](#), [Appendix H9: Workforce Training Programs](#), and Buffalo Futures Online (*coming soon!*).

For young people already enrolled in college:

- The Coach helps the young person persist by following up during critical junctures, connecting them to resources on and off campus, providing emotional support, and ensuring they meet with the College Specialist to renew their financial aid and funding each semester.

For young people with a high school degree/GED but not enrolled in a post-secondary setting:

- The Coach will help them explore college or vocational pathways and connect them to the appropriate Specialist. If a young person is not yet prepared for the rigors of a post-secondary program, the Coach and Career Coach can assist the young person in identifying a work experience or a program that can help them earn money while gaining the skills they need to prepare for a post-secondary setting.

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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:

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

*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:

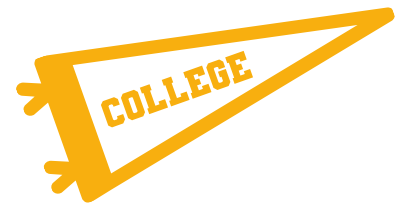
- Meet with Coach and/or HUB Career Coach (and high school counselor, if applicable) to explore other post-secondary pathways. (Then proceed to the [Career Development Goals Roadmap](#) in [Appendix E: Goals & Steps Guide and Worksheets](#).)

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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SECTION 21H

H. PERSISTING IN COLLEGE

The Coach plays a critical role in helping young people persist in college, from enrollment through graduation. See [Appendix G16. College Persistence Checklist](#).

PREPARING FOR THE FIRST SEMESTER

Once a student is enrolled in college and applied to all forms of funding, the Goal becomes: "[Prepare for and Complete College Semester](#)."

To complete this goal, the Coach should follow the **Required Steps** to ensure that the student:

- Ensure student has food, transportation, and basic minimum living expenses before stipends/financial aid comes in
- Check in with young person before AND after first day of the semester to debrief on experience
- Ensure student has a plan to purchase books
- Check student's financial aid balance after the first week of school to ensure there is nothing owed and no holds; *follow up with Bursar/Financial Aid office if needed*
- Ensure student understands how to use college systems (e.g., Blackboard, college student account, etc.)
- Ensure student's address is correct in the college system
- Ensure student understands consequences of attendance policies (e.g., after two missed classes a grade drops)
- Walk through all syllabi with student and put assignment due dates in calendar (*time management is a critical skill for success*)
- Check in with young person before "withdraw" period is over
 - If they need to withdraw from any classes, see Advisor. If failing a class is inevitable, it is usually better to receive a "W" than to get a failing grade, which can more significantly affect financial aid, scholarships, etc.
See [Appendix G17. How to Properly Withdraw from College Classes](#)
- Check in with young person during mid-terms (*a highly stressful time*)
- Provide emotional support to student; check-in on them weekly
- Check in with young person during finals (*another stressful juncture*)

**All of these Required Steps are based on best practices and align with critical junctures where young people tend to become discouraged/overwhelmed and drop-out.*

Potential Steps to help students persist and/or improve their GPA include:

- If the student attends a SUNY community college, ensure that they submit a certificate of residence once per year.
- Attend any orientation
- If student is enrolled in an Opportunity Program, ensure student attends any mandatory summer programs if needed
- Assist student with accessing mental health supports and/or peer group supports to emotionally prepare for college
- Visit college to get familiar with campus
- Apply to ASAP program if in CUNY (and if not already enrolled in Opportunity Program)
- Create study plan
- Connect young person to tutoring (most colleges have a tutoring center and some agencies have college tutors)
- If a student wants to withdraw from classes or drop out completely: discuss pros/cons, financial implications, and meet with an advisor. See [Appendix G17. How to Properly Withdraw from College Classes](#)
- Check in with college counselor as needed
- Connect youth with campus Disability Services office
- Enroll in work-study
- Celebrate finishing with 2.0 or higher GPA

Any student who had an IEP or 504 Plan in high school should be referred to the campus Disability Office.

Students can receive additional time to take tests or other needed supports, which can make a big difference in academic performance. As students can feel self-conscious entering the office and discussing their disabilities, the Coach or College Specialist should offer to accompany the student.

AFTER EACH SEMESTER

if the student wants to continue in college the Goal becomes "[Re-enroll in another semester of college](#)".

Required Steps include:

- Ensure student's grades are submitted to all scholarship providers and/or ETV upon completion of last semester (so that they continue to receive funding)
- Check student account to ensure there is no outstanding balance and no holds on the student account
- Apply to classes
- Submit class schedule to scholarship provider and/or ETV

ONCE RE-ENROLLED

The academic goal becomes: "[Prepare for and Complete College Semester with 2.0+](#)" until the student graduates.

See all associated steps in [Appendix E: Goals & Steps Guide and Worksheets](#)

EACH SEMESTER

Coaches should select the Goal "[Reapply to all sources of financial aid](#)" and check with the College Specialist to ensure that all financial aid (FAFSA & NYS TAP), ETV, and scholarships are reapplied to.

See [Appendix G16 College Persistence Checklist](#)

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SECTION 21J & 21K

J. EXPLORING A “GAP YEAR” OR DELAYING COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

Some youth may not be prepared to attend college immediately after graduating high school, and/or may want to take time to build skills through academic remediation and/or a career development experience (e.g., work, an internship, a workforce/training program, a meaningful volunteer experience(s), etc.).

In other cases, a young person might graduate over the winter or at the end of the summer and may not want to rush into college weeks after their high school graduation. If the time is spent productively, taking a semester or a year between high school and college can provide young people with time to mature, build skills and confidence, and be better prepared for post-secondary success. One option for this transition period is to participate in **workforce development programs**: some of which offer job readiness, sector-based training, college coursework in a specific area (often leading to a certification), internships, and/or job placement support.

K. EXPLORING VOCATIONAL & OTHER PATHWAYS

Some young people may be interested in another post-secondary pathway, such as the trades or another vocational, sector-based training program. The Coach should work with the young person and the Specialists to explore options. Using assessment tools can help youth to determine what post-secondary path is best for them.

For simplicity purposes, all vocational, workforce training, and direct-employment pathways fall under Fair Futures “Career Development” umbrella. [See Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22.](#)

Youth should be aware that **vocational programs can be just as challenging and time-consuming as college (as sometimes there is this misperception!)**.

For example, many accredited vocational programs in the trades require advanced skills/credentials just to apply. Union jobs in particular take several years of on-the-job experience (and/or a long apprenticeship) before one can apply and these exams are extremely competitive in themselves.

Young people should never be discouraged from embarking on a pathway in the trades, but they should exhibit a strong interest in the industry, as the credentials and experiences they earn will be mostly limited to that broader industry.

PROGRAMS TO EXPLORE (BOTH DURING HIGH SCHOOL AND AFTER GRADUATION) IF YOUNG PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED IN VOCATIONAL PATHWAYS OR DIRECT EMPLOYMENT:

There are a number of youth workforce training programs in Buffalo and Erie County.

These are free or low-cost programs that teach foundational skills (e.g., communication skills, how to interview, etc.) and/or provide sector-based, employer-recognized trainings in the trades/construction, IT, culinary, hospitality, healthcare, transportation, and other fields.

Some programs even offer stipends during training and/or internships. Programs typically have flexible schedules, and some support participants with childcare and transportation. Many employ best practices in youth development. Some also help participants gain work experience through placement into paid internships. Many have strong completion and job placement outcomes. While requirements vary, some programs require a high school diploma or equivalent and most require that the participant be unemployed, under-employed, and/or low-income. Some also offer on-site GED programs.

Consider exploring specific programs based on: sector, industry, eligibility requirements, job placement/retention rates, certificates earned, etc.

See [Appendix H9: Workforce Training Programs](#) for examples of workforce training programs.

College certificate programs offer young people with a high school degree/GED an opportunity to take courses and earn certificates and/or college credits in a specific area that can help them improve their employment credentials in that field. (It can also provide exposure to a college setting.)

Union Jobs and Apprenticeships: Union-affiliated career pathways are a time-tested opportunity for youth with a strong interest in the trades or considering an alternative pathway to college. Union careers offer sustainable wages and viable career-tracks that offer skill development, leadership opportunities, and upward mobility. Many jobs in New York City's economy have union affiliation and apprenticeship training programs leading to entry-level and middle-skills jobs. There are approximately 100 apprenticeship programs in NYC, and over 90% are in the trades. Most apprenticeship programs are 1-6 years and can be competitive.

- **The NYS Department of Labor** has general information on union apprenticeships [here](#).
- **Currently available union apprenticeships** are listed [here](#).

Civil Service: There are also career opportunities in city government for young people with at least a high school degree/equivalent. Young people must pass a competitive civil service exam before they can be hired to become permanent employees. These exams assess a candidate's qualifications for a particular Civil Service job title. The exams can be very competitive, and many require college credits and/or experience in that area – they are often not entry-level jobs.

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FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTION 22

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SECTION 22. CAREER DEVELOPMENT

A. OVERVIEW

One of the goals of the Fair Futures program is to help young people do **early career exploration and gain progressive career development experiences in line with their interests, strengths, and academic plans/goals** so that they can eventually navigate onto a living wage career path.

As such, via the Goals & Steps framework, we encourage **all young people who are coached to: 1) conduct career exploration each year; and 2) engage in at least one career development experience each year.** Career development experiences can include an internship, extracurricular, job training, employment, etc. These two Goals apply to all young people, regardless of their age or academic situation. That said, the type of career exploration they do and the type of career experience they engage in should always be tailored to their interests, academic situation, and developmental stage.

Why is it critical for young people to begin the process of **career exploration** early on? Most young people are unaware of the career opportunities out there and what skills and credentials are required. Career exploration is important to do as an ongoing activity (at least once/year), as young people's skills, interests, and credentials evolve.

Conducting career exploration with young people who have not yet developed many interests is important, as it can help them start to build their sense of self. With these young people, doing career interest assessments such as [MyNextMove](#) can be helpful. When young people do know what they are interested in, conducting career exploration activities such as job shadowing or holding an informational interview can help them learn more about that particular career pathway, what it entails, what skills/credentials are required, and what the day-to-day is like.

Why is engaging in career development experiences (ideally that are in line with their interests and academic situation) each year so important?

These experiences help young people:

- Build their resumes;
- Envision a potential pathway for themselves;
- Improve self-esteem and confidence;
- Gain soft skills that help them succeed in other areas of their life;
- Figure out what they like, what they don't, what they are good at;
- Develop a broad network of positive adult and peer supports;
- Reconnect/re-engage in an academic setting.

It is important to keep in mind that some foster youth can face a number of social-emotional challenges that can impede their ability to manage the demands/expectations of the workplace. For some young people, achieving "job readiness" will take time, experimentation, and multiple attempts. **If a young person experiences a setback, it can and should be used as a learning opportunity.** Losing a job or not completing a program is a natural part of the process, and best to learn these lessons while they are young and have the support of Fair Futures! While we never want to set a young person up for failure, an unsuccessful attempt in many ways can be a good learning experience, as long as **the Coach is there to help support them, reflect on the experience, and connect them to the next opportunity.**

BUFFALO FUTURES' HUB ("THE HUB")

Based on collective efforts of Erie County-area workforce and youth development nonprofits, a new initiative called Buffalo Futures will be available to youth in Fall 2022.

Buffalo Futures' Hub ("The Hub") will be a physical location open to all 16-24 year olds interested in meeting with Buffalo Futures coaches who will provide career development supports on site or at other locations convenient for youth. The Buffalo Futures also has an online portal component, through which youth and professionals can explore and navigate between career pathways, requirements, and specific training programs.

See [Appendix H11_Buffalo Futures Hub](#) for more information.

B. CAREER DEVELOPMENT GOAL-SETTING

At a minimum, every actively coached young person should complete the “[Conduct Career Exploration & Preparation](#)” Goal each year. Ideally, they also complete the “[Engage in a Career Development Experience](#)” Goal for the reasons outlined above.

Upon program enrollment, the Coach should select both Goals in the Online Platform and work with the young person on these goals throughout the course of the year

CONDUCT CAREER EXPLORATION & PREPARATION GOAL

This Goal includes doing at least one career exploration activity each year, either with the Coach or a Career Coach at The Hub. This activity can help identify potential career pathways for young people and ensure that their academic goals are aligned with these pathways.

Potential Steps/activities include:

- The young person should work with the Career Coach at The Hub to complete a career assessment such as [MyNextMove](#). The results of the assessment will help the Coach and Hub Career Coach set goals that are in line with the young person’s longer-term pathway, recognizing that this may shift over time.
- Discuss and explore career pathways with Career Coach at The Hub
- Participate in an informational interview in a career of interest
- Attend networking event
- Participate in a job shadowing experience in a career of interest
- Prepare for and attend a Career Fair/event

This goal also includes these two **Required Steps**:

- Create or refine/update resume with the Coach or Career Coach at The Hub to accurately and professionally reflect the young person’s experiences to date. Resumes should include a summary section upfront, an extracurricular/leadership/community service activity section, and any scholarships or awards.
- Discuss career development goals for the year, and select at least 1 Career Development Experience/Activity that is in line with the young person’s academic situation, interests, strengths, skills, and goals. The Coach or Career Coach at The Hub can then help the young person apply once they are ready.

All of the above steps and activities can also aid in the trust-building process. The young person will see that the Coach is taking an interest in his/her future and well-being.



Upon completing these activities, the above Steps can be checked off in the Online Platform.

1+ CAREER DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE GOAL

All young people should have at least one career development experience in line with their interests and goals/plans, if possible. Young people should complete as many career development goals as their school/college schedules, overall well-being, and life situations allow.

The major categories of career development experiences are outlined in detail in below, and can be reviewed on the [Career Development Roadmap](#).

C. CAREER DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES BASED ON A YOUNG PERSON'S SITUATION

Coaches and/or Career Coaches at The Hub should help young people select at least one experience each year, based on their academic situation/goals, interests, strengths, and needs.

There are five major categories of career development experiences. These can be viewed on the [Career Development Roadmap](#) and below. Some examples of progressive career development experiences can be viewed [here](#).

SAY YES BUFFALO CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Say YES Buffalo offers a range of onsite career development opportunities for students.

Two of these include the [Modern Youth Apprenticeship Program](#) and the [Say YES Buffalo internship program](#).

EXTERNAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES & PATHWAYS

Summer internship programs are great career development experiences for those who are disconnected, in high school, or in college and who would like to earn money and/or have a career development experience over the summer.

- Ideally, the internship should be in a field that the young person is interested in.
- Examples include:
 - Erie County's [Summer Youth Employment Program \(SYEP\)](#) employs youth ages 14-20, and youth in foster care are encouraged to apply.
 - [Northland Training Center's Summer Youth Academy](#) provides paid summer training towards OSHA certification and supports the college application process. See [Appendix H12 Northland Training Center](#) for more information.

Youth can also participate in an extracurricular, youth development/leadership program, or community service experiences, which research shows can help young people not only build their resumes and the critical soft skills needed for the world of work, but also the self-esteem, sense of purpose/belonging, and broader network of positive peer and adult supports they need to succeed in work and life.

- For young people who are disconnected, this type of program could be the motivating factor for re-engaging in school.
- For youth in high school or college, it is a great way to build their resumes with leadership experiences (and obtain college scholarships). It can also be the "foot in the door" for a paid position down the road.
- One example is [The Foundry](#) which offers exposure to STEAM fields and makerspace programs to youth.
- There are also Career & Technical Education (CTE) courses at most Erie County schools, which provide great exposure and training opportunities to youth in high school.

Youth can also consider enrolling in a workforce program. These are best for a youth who:

- **Is disconnected without a high school degree/equivalency and wants to enroll in a GED program** that also offers other pathways such as internships, job readiness and employer-recognized training, part-time or full-time jobs, and credentials and certifications such as [UpSkill](#) (a.k.a. the Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education Division), which provides GED preparation and training in various industries. See [Appendix H10 UpSkill](#) for more information.
- **Is enrolled in an alternative school or GED preparation program** and is in need of job readiness training and/or is having difficulty finding a job and needs a program to assist them;
- **Has a high school degree/GED and is not on a college bound pathway**, but not yet prepared for an accredited vocational program or apprenticeship.
- Buffalo Futures online or its physical Hub are also great resources for coaches to explore with youth.

See [Appendix H9 Workforce Training Programs](#) for additional examples of workforce training.

For a young person in high school, college, or a vocational program, an internship is another great option those able to balance their schedules. An internship is also a useful stepping-stone for a young person who is attempting to obtain a part- or full-time job. The internship should ideally be in an area or organization of interest to the young person.

ACCREDITED VOCATIONAL, SECTOR-BASED TRAINING, OR APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Young people who have a high school degree/GED might determine with their Coach and Career Coach at the Hub, through assessment tools, career exploration, etc., that pursuing a trades or skills-based career is the best fit for them. In this case, youth might consider an accredited vocational, sector-based training, or apprenticeship program.



The Career Coach at The Hub should help the young person assess which program(s) they are eligible for, as many have grade-level or other skill-based requirements, and can help the young person prioritize which program(s) are the best fit based on interest area, structure (some programs require significant time commitment), quality of program (job placement/retention outcomes vary by program) and/or benefits (some pay stipends while others don't).

See [Appendix H9 Workforce Training Programs](#) for additional examples of workforce training.

CIVIL SERVICE

Youth might consider taking a Civil Service Exam.

It should be noted that many entry-level civil service positions require either college or a few years of experience in lieu of college. If a young person is interested in a particular position, the Coach and/or Career Coach at The Hub should help them read the qualification requirements very carefully and ensure they have those credentials before taking the exam.

It is also important to keep in mind that certain exams are only offered every few years, can be extremely competitive, and take a year or more to be graded/certify the individual. If a young person wants to take an exam, the young person should have other career development experiences throughout this period of time.

EMPLOYMENT

YOUTH MAY ALSO OBTAIN PART-TIME, SEASONAL, OR FULL-TIME WORK.

It is the Coach's role to help them determine if a job is the most appropriate goal.

If a young person does not yet have a High School degree/GED, a full-time job should only be the goal if absolutely necessary (due to their financial situation).

A better option would be for the young person to enroll in an alternative high school or GED program with a paid internship, or to obtain a part-time job while working toward their degree. If the young person is absolutely opposed to school, then sometimes working a full-time, low-wage job can be a good way for them to realize that it may not be what they want for the rest of their lives.

If a young person has a High School degree/GED and is not yet interested in college or a vocational program, working full-time can be a good goal to earn an income while they explore their post-secondary goals and options. If the young person needs assistance finding that full-time job, the Coach or Career Coach at The Hub can connect them to one of the youth workforce programs above (thus, the goal would be "[Conduct Career Exploration and Planning](#)" and "[Engage in Career Development Experience](#)").

Another option is to encourage the young person to get a part-time job while doing a youth leadership activity/community service or other unpaid experience part-time that is more in line with their career goals/interests. The Coach should continue to support the young person to develop a post-secondary goal that is appropriate for them.

If a young person is enrolled in high school or college and can balance the academic needs with a part-time job, the Coach can help them obtain one in a similar fashion to the above. A paid internship that is in line with their career interests is also a great resume-building experience that could potentially lead to a full-time job after college. Work-study is also a great way to earn money while staying focused on coursework.

If a young person has completed their post-secondary goals, then obtaining a living-wage job should be the goal.

D. USING THE ONLINE PLATFORM

The following actions are taken in the Online Platform:

- Coach adds Career Goals to the Online Platform.
- Steps are checked off as they are completed. Coaches can choose to enter a brief note, if needed or relevant, in the "Notes" section. Steps can always be created, too!
- The above bullet is repeated until the Goal is completed. At which point, the Goal status should be marked as "Completed" or "Not Completed"
- A new Goal(s) and Step(s) are selected and the process above is repeated.



Should a young person's goal change at any point, then the goal should still be closed out in the platform and marked as "Did Not Complete." The Coach should select one of the following reasons:

- "Could not complete due to attendance or performance"
- "Did not complete due to fit or continued interest"
- "Did not complete due to other opportunity/positive change in plans"
- "Did not complete due to other personal/health/family issues"
- "Other"

THREE EXAMPLE "GOAL CHANGED" SCENARIOS:

SCENARIO 1:

If a young person's goal changes from "Engage in Career Development Experience" to another goal, it could be because that young person decided to enroll in college mid-way through the program because they were inspired by one of their peers.

The Coach then would check off "**Did not complete due to other opportunity**".

Next, the Coach would either select the academic goal "**Conduct college exploration/ exposure**" or "**Apply to college(s)**" and would also select another career development goal.

SCENARIO 2:

If a young person's goal changes from "Engage in Career Development Experience" to another goal, it could be because the young person was not regularly attending the program and was kicked out.

In that case, the Coach should mark off "**Could not complete due to attendance or performance**" and help the young person select another goal.

SCENARIO 3:

If a young person's goal changes from "Engage in Career Development Experience" to another goal, it could be because the young person was hospitalized.

In this case, the Coach should mark off "**Did not complete due to other personal/ health/ family issues**" and help the young person select another goal (once they are no longer hospitalized and ready to resume working with their Coach.)

E. ROLE OF THE COACH IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The Coach and Career Coach at The Hub both play a role in helping the young person make goals and progress towards career development goals.

THE COACH'S ROLE, IN TERMS OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT INCLUDES:

- Assist all young people in obtaining working papers (if needed) and developing/ refining their resume within 90 days of program enrollment, ideally;
- Assist with career exploration on a general level and connect young person to the Career Coach at The Hub for a deeper career assessment using the online tool;
- Discuss the young person's career development interests, strengths, and experiences, and help them select a career development experience for the year (this could also be done in conjunction with the Career Coach at The Hub);
- Refer young people not interested in college to the Career Coach at The Hub to help them identify best-fit workforce/training programs (or for assistance with identifying the best-fit program);
- Visit any external programs with young people to assist with the enrollment and/or exploration process;
- Refer all young people enrolled in college to the Career Coach at The Hub to help them develop a career plan, and follows up accordingly;
- Provide weekly persistence coaching to young people enrolled in any on-site or external program, including checking in with them before and after their first day, and building a relationship with the primary person at the program to discuss attendance/performance.

Broadly speaking, the Say Yes Coach should support the young person in engaging with the training program (i.e., by attending orientations, meeting with program staff, and/or applying to the program), and the coach should support the young person's persistence in that program.

F. ROLE OF THE CAREER COACH AT THE HUB



- Conduct rigorous career exploration based on the young person's situation and interests
- Meet with young people to help them identify training programs
- Meet with young people who are not on a college-bound track (or who have left college) to explore other pathways/ programs and create a career plan that is in line with their track
- Meet with young people who are enrolled in college to create a career plan

FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTION 23

HOUSING & INDEPENDENT LIVING

COMING SOON!

FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTION 24

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SECTION 24. EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION & PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

A. ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR



The Supervisor's overall job is to empower, inspire and motivate their team of Coaches and/or Specialists to work together to achieve programmatic goals. This includes helping the team build and develop healthy relationships with the young people they serve. The recommended direct report ratio is 1:5 (one Supervisor to five direct reports).

Other key responsibilities included the following:

- Encourage** Coaches and Specialists to share effective engagement techniques
- Guide Coaches and Specialists in utilizing the coaching framework and coaching language to partner with the youth to develop and create action plans that lead to goal achievement
- Support Coaches and Specialists with the academic, career development, and post-secondary goal-setting processes, including walking through how to use the process maps and dashboards, and selecting goals based on that young person's situation
- Help Coaches navigate the DOE and other systems, as needed
- Help Coaches and Specialists prevent and navigate crises, as they arise
- Collaborate and communicate with co-workers from other departments, in particular the case planning teams. This includes advocating on behalf of your team when necessary.

As a Coach and Specialist job can be challenging and emotionally taxing at times, Supervisors should be available to provide emotional support and to their team to help them build resiliency. During Supervision the Coach/Specialist may need to decompress or may need reassurance that he/she is taking the right steps to help the young person.

Supervisors step in for Coaches when they are sick or on vacation and are a constant for young people in the program. When Coaches leave/move on, it is the Supervisor who is responsible for maintaining the relationship with the young person and helping to facilitate the transfer to a new Coach.

B. COACH SUPERVISOR COMPETENCIES AND QUALITIES

Like Coaches, the most effective Supervisors apply a leadership mind-set and coaching approach where they motivate and empower their team to work together to achieve programmatic success. Influence and inspiration separate leaders from managers, not power and control. Some of the key qualities in a supervisor include the following:

- Use a coaching approach to help empower your team to set goals and own their own performance.
- Create a trauma-informed environment by providing staff with the space and resources needed to manage any secondary trauma
- Be open to receiving feedback and giving your team a space to share. For example, using formal supervision (see Kadushin model of supervision below).
- Be empathetic and show genuine care, model pro-social behavior, and must be able to express empathy and genuine caring, while maintaining healthy boundaries. Supervisors should "coach" the Coaches!

Coach Supervisors are often promoted from the role of a Coach.

Supervisor qualifications should include the following:

- At least a Bachelor's degree.
- A minimum of three years of experience working with young people (ideally working with at-risk adolescents, preferably in the field of child welfare)
- A proven track record of at least one year of successful supervisory experience is preferred.

See [Appendix A Fair Futures Staff Screening & Hiring Toolkit](#) for a full list of best practices in hiring and screening Coach Supervisors.

C. SUPERVISION AND TEAM MEETINGS

SUPERVISION

Supervision, when conducted well, is a powerful opportunity for you to better understand your staff, empower them to own their own performance, provide a safe space for them to share any struggles or challenges and help boost their confidence. Additionally, this provides the supervisor with an opportunity to learn how the young people in their program are progressing.

Supervision sessions should take place on a recurring schedule. As a best practice this is typically weekly or biweekly for 1-hour. For newer Coaches, Supervisors should provide weekly supervision and assist them more closely.

To prepare for Supervision Sessions:

Coaches/Specialists should send their agenda to their Supervisor 2 to 3 days in advance of the meeting so they can be reviewed prior to the meeting. In return the Supervisor should also send their agenda items to their staff 2 to 3 days in advance of the Supervision meeting. The Supervisor will then combine their agenda items with those of their direct report.

Note: Some agencies use the [Kadushin model](#) of supervision and break down their meeting agendas accordingly.

The Supervisor should review reports from the Online Platform, which will contain contact notes and outline the goals/steps taken for each of the young people. The Supervisor should bring the reports to the meeting with any follow-up questions related to a particular young person's progress.

COACH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Supervisor should help Coaches:

- Acknowledge and celebrate their strengths and progress;
- Identify areas for growth;
- Provide appropriate skill development opportunities;
- Conduct team meetings with Coaches and facilitate relevant conversations, such as: Best-practice engagement and coaching techniques; Shared challenges across the team; Upcoming events, training, and/or group activities.

ADDITIONAL KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COACH SUPERVISOR INCLUDE:

- Meeting with young people and assigning Coaches;
- Matching young people to new Coaches, as needed;
- Work collaboratively with other professionals, such as foster care staff, school administrators, guidance counselors, etc.
- Participate in all Coach hiring;
- Work collaboratively with other staff and system providers driving towards similar goals in a coordinated fashion;
- Help staff facilitate therapeutic peer groups which can focus on skills such as healthy communication, positive peer relationships, dealing with peer pressure, and service learning
- Work with the Program Director to conduct outreach to outside community agencies and provide direction to all staff;
- Ensure that administrative and financial procedures are in place

D. SUPERVISION PHILOSOPHY

Some agencies use the **Kadushin philosophy and template**, which is based on three areas:

SUPPORTIVE

This has to do with the maintenance of harmonious working relationships, provision of support to reduce stress, and assistance with challenges that the Coach is unsure of how best to tackle. This could include struggles with how to support a young person or how to navigate a conflict or tension with another staff member.

EDUCATIONAL

This relates to the educational and professional development of staff. This could include addressing any skill gaps Coaches have, instruction around how to use Goals & Steps or teaching effective coaching practices. Supervisors help Coaches think through their professional development plans, what growth areas they want or need to focus on, and how the Supervisor can be supportive.

ADMINISTRATIVE

This relates to complying with policies of administration to ensure an efficient and smooth-running office. Specifically, this could include a discussion around any questions related to dates/meetings, fiscal procedures, technology issues, etc.

With this framework, supervision meetings start with the Supportive area, which can be the most challenging to discuss and often comprise about 50%-75% of the meeting. Administrative items do not comprise more than 10% of the meeting. *If there is not sufficient time to cover administrative items, the Coach and Supervisor can discuss over email.*

E. PROGRAM DIRECTOR QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALITIES



Program Directors should have a Master's in social work, education, or related field, significant experience working with at-risk or system-involved youth, and 3+ years of management experience, ideally.

Exceptions can be made for candidates with Bachelor's degrees who have significant managerial experience and who are credible messengers.

The Program Director should also:

- Have 4+ years management experience including oversight of staff, budgets and program outcomes;
- Be a self-directed, strategic thinker with ability to engage community and government stakeholders;
- Be a leader and able to work under pressure to meet deadlines;
- Possess excellent interpersonal, written and verbal communication skills.

The Program Director is responsible for creating a warm, inclusive, strength-based, non-judgmental, and trauma-informed culture. The Program Director models pro-social behavior with all staff and young people, and must be able to express empathy and genuine caring, while maintaining healthy boundaries.

F. PROGRAM DIRECTOR ROLE

When it comes to supervising and supporting staff, the role of the Program Director closely mirrors that of a Supervisor, but at scale. The Supervisors report to the Program Director and engage in weekly or biweekly supervision meetings.

The role of the Director is also to:

- Promote a youth development philosophy and framework and work cross-divisionally to infuse youth development principals and skills across the program and agency;
- Lead, manage, and directly supervise the Fair Futures staff;
- Provide direct, regular supervision to Supervisors;
- Ensure data is being entered into the Online Platform on a regular basis and review monthly reports;
- Ensure peer groups are in place and running effectively;
- Be the outward face of the program to both public and private stakeholders;
- Partner externally to develop workforce, internship, and career exposure partnerships;
- In concert with Human Resources, develop and/or reassess the staff recruitment plan;
- Ensure all Coaches, Supervisors, and Specialists receive the proper trainings;
- Ensure that efficient administrative procedures are in place within the program and that financial and physical resources are effectively used.

The Program Director is also responsible to ensure that the 4Ps are in place to ensure long-term sustainability and success of their Fair Futures program.

The 4Ps are: **People, Process, Program & Performance** – see [Section 26](#) and [Appendix C00: Checklist For Program Integration And Long-Term Success: Phase 2](#).

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SECTION 25. PEER GROUPS

A. BENEFITS

Peer groups are an extremely important component of the Fair Futures model. To stick with the program over the course of years, **young people need to feel connected not only to their Coach, but to other adult and peer supports.**

Peer groups help young people develop positive, supportive relationships with their peers and serve as important motivational and skill-building forums. They are often a space that allows young people to start or continue the process of healing by learning about managing stress, healthy communication and self-expression, and mental/physical wellness. Coaches and staff can learn a lot about young people's thoughts, concerns, and challenges through these groups, which can help them in their coaching sessions.

Peers also serve as credible messengers. If a young person is disconnected or struggling and one of their peers talks about how they went through the same experience and were able to overcome it, hearing about that can be incredibly motivating. Agencies have often found that peer group forums can be the source of breakthroughs; one conversation can help a young person reframe their situation and start moving forward with their goals.

Peer groups can help young people improve their job readiness by helping them improve critical soft skills (listening, responding respectfully, etc.). They can also help them build career development experiences by incorporating community service and leadership activities.

To recap, peer groups help young people to:

- Form positive peer relationships and build their support network;
- Avoid involvement in negative peer groups;
- Be heard, feel that they are not alone, and that they are part of a larger community;
- Meet credible messengers that they can relate to and be inspired by;
- Learn about topics related to wellness and stress management;
- Build and reinforce critical soft skills;
- Gain leadership/community service experiences that they can include on their resumes;
- Stay connected to the Fair Futures program.

PEER GROUPS ARE DISTINCT FROM WORKSHOPS.

Workshops can also serve as important skill-building forums where young people can learn about financial management, healthy eating, and other important life skills, and are strongly encouraged.

What makes a peer group a peer group, however, is that it is youth-centered and youth-driven. There is not an Instructor (as there often is in a workshop) – there is a Facilitator. It is collaborative and everyone has a voice. The focus is not the topic per se as much as it is the discussion, the relationship building, the inspiration, the healing, the self-expression.

TIP! Whenever possible, staff should encourage young people to join a peer group. There should ideally be enough peer groups to meet the varying interests/needs that young people have.

B. BEST PRACTICES IN FACILITATING PEER GROUPS

Peer groups can focus on a variety of topics.

Peer groups that have been popular/heavily attended and produced meaningful results include:

The Bengals Positive Peer Group, which is based on the Positive Peer Culture model.

Each young person completes an eight-session training on skills such as healthy communication, dealing with peer pressure, and service learning. The Bengals plan and complete community service and recreational activities.

Network, where Coaches facilitate peer groups focused on helping young people support each other in managing stress and their behavior (sharing challenges, practicing self-affirmation, etc.).

Male Forum, where all youth who identify as male come together to participate in activities and/or discussions around topics that they identify and lead.

Ladies that Lunch, a group of youth who identify as female who come together for lunch to discuss topics that they identify and lead.

College Crew, a peer group that shares stresses and concerns related to college, effective practices and coping mechanisms, etc. It is a space for students to recognize that others are going through the same things they are and to learn from their peers.

BEST PRACTICES AROUND FACILITATING PEER GROUPS INCLUDE:

- Offer food to recruit more young people to the group;
- Set up the room so that everyone feels a part of it (e.g., a circle – tables should not be separated);
- Welcome youth into an inviting space that is already set up;
- If there are two Facilitators, be clear on who is leading what aspect;
- Set ground rules for the community; the young people should be a part of creating the community rules and adults abide by them, too;
- Be upfront that what may be disclosed could be heavy, but that they are in a safe space/circle of trust and that things will not be shared outside of the group;
- Be transparent on how the adults will follow up on any concerns and reiterate the importance of each person's well-being;
- Have a topic to introduce and a curriculum prepared, but allow for flexibility when you are having a conversation; the topic is a guide but if something is happening that is rich and the young people are interested and engaged, do not change the subject to stick to an agenda;
- Let the young people lead and drive the conversation;
- Make it fun; incorporate movement and interaction;
- Bring questions to the group for their input on topics, etc.;
- If there are clinical issues discussed that are beyond the capacity of the staff, bring in mental health clinicians to consult with staff and talk with the young people (e.g. if a young person shares suicidal thoughts in a previous session);
- Follow up individually after the session with any young person who may have unleashed a lot and/or could have been struggling to ensure they are receiving the support they need.

FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTION 26

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SECTION 26. PROGRAM INTEGRATION AND LONG-TERM SUCCESS - THE 4PS

CHECKLIST FOR PROGRAM INTEGRATION AND LONG-TERM SUCCESS: PHASE 2

THE 4 P'S: PEOPLE, PROCESS, PROGRAM & PERFORMANCE

The final phase in making your Fair Futures program part of the "DNA" of your organization is Integration and Long-Term Success. We encourage you to review [Checklist For Implementation Success: Phase 1](#) prior to reading below.

In this next phase, your Fair Futures program is ideally operating with efficiency, hitting all or most of the key goals/objectives, and most importantly - making a positive impact on the lives of the young people served. In order to achieve this level of excellence, you will need the 4 P's:

1 THE RIGHT
PEOPLE
& CULTURE

2 A STRONG
PROGRAM
MODEL

3 EFFECTIVE
& CLEAR
PROCESSES

4 STRONG
PERFORMANCE
MANAGEMENT

PEOPLE & CULTURE

- Program leadership have created a culture where staff feel supported, safe, and empowered.**
This is reflected in low staff attrition rates, high staff morale, job satisfaction and strong performance metrics.
- Leadership fully understands and supports the needs, wants and goals of the program.**
They actively respond and collaborate in problem-solving challenges when they arise.
- The program champion recruited other champions (e.g. Executive Director) and collectively working on the program's goals.**
- The program champions have dissolved silos between the Fair Futures program and other programs.**
- The program actively hires staff who view the work from a strength-based, trauma-informed, youth development lens.** These staff are also the right "fit" for the work and program culture.
- Staff are able to build relationships with young people through employing consistency, constancy, and creative approaches**
- All program staff know their role and are able to execute with intention and purpose.**
This includes having a full understanding of the Fair Futures model and the continuum of services.
- All program staff, and most agency staff, are using a coaching framework. This includes:**
 - Using a coaching mindset
 - Engaging and always working to build trust with one another
 - Partnering with the young person when goal setting; working collaboratively with young people
 - Partnering with co-workers to problem-solve and support
 - Celebrating youth successes**

PROGRAM MODEL IS SOLIDIFIED

- There is one umbrella program (no siloed programs) that supports youth, middle schoolers to age 26, with all coaching, education, career, college and housing services.
- The Executive Director, board, and all agency staff know the name of your Fair Futures program, what your Fair Futures program does and does not do and understands the value in helping young people.
- The Fair Futures program staff are using the developed shared program language to communicate to the youth and other key stakeholders. This includes messaging on your organization's website and social media.
- There are peer-led peer groups (in addition to independent living workshops) led by Coaches or other FF staff.

PROCESSES IN PLACE

- Processes to ensure streamlined communication and collaboration:**
 - The full Fair Futures team meets minimally once per month.
 - Program leadership is meeting with, and presenting to, any other key departments on a consistent basis to inform them about any program changes, recruit and/or re-educate and educate new staff.
- Supervision processes are in place**
 - Weekly or biweekly as a best practice
 - A supervision structure is being used (e.g. [Kadushin model](#))
 - Review Care4 report in advance – contacts, goals
- A clear youth recruitment/referral process is in place.**
 - [Can use guidance in manual](#)
- All agency staff know who to contact in the Fair Futures program for any requests or referrals.**
- The [Fair Futures Staff Screening & Hiring Toolkit](#) is part of program practice/policy**
- Staff onboarding practices are being followed (see [Checklist for Implementation Success: Phase 1](#))**
 - All staff receive the Fair Futures manual, a Fair Futures onboarding session, and sign up for trainings first 1-2 weeks
- Staff coverage processes are in place**
 - How are youth supported when a staff person is out on PTO or leaves the agency?
- Program Director(s) and all Supervisors use Data to Inform Work – “Walking Dashboard”**
 - Run reports regularly to check on contacts and goal progress. Follow up with staff.
- All trained staff are demonstrating mastery of Care4**
 - Staff have completed all necessary platform trainings and are returning for refreshers, if needed.
 - Staff have mastered key functionality of the platform, based on their role.
 - Staff review reports applicable to their role.
- Fiscal management**
 - Program leadership knows and understands the program's budget.
 - Program leadership helps staff understand what can be spent on youth activities – trips, food, school, vocation programs, technology, travel and more.
- Staff have taken full ownership of their learning and professional development. This includes:**
 - All new staff have completed all Fair Futures trainings within 12 months.
 - Staff are proactively scheduling [Technical Assistance \(TA\)](#) and [1 on 1 coaching](#).
 - Staff are seeking out and participating in the [Learning Communities](#) for the purposes of self-care, networking and sharing.

□ **Create a program name - ideally with young people.**

For staff and youth to feel connected to a program, it has to have a name that resonates with them. Agencies do not have to call the program "Fair Futures;" they can develop a name and branding that is meaningful to their stakeholders and reflective of that agency's culture/community. To do so, a best practice is to convene key stakeholders, including young people, to develop/vote on a program name - this should help build team spirit and buy-in!

□ **Technical assistance sessions with Fair Futures Technical Assistance providers.**

These sessions are tailored to your staff needs and help build team cohesion. Best practice approaches are shared across agencies.