

# 1-page summary: Does education pay for youth formerly in foster care?

**Article Title** Okpych, N. J. (2012). Policy framework supporting youth aging-out of foster care through college: Review and recommendations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(7), 1390-1396.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.02.013>

## Purpose

1. To review federal legislation enacted in the past 25 years to support postsecondary education access and completion among youth aging out of foster care
2. To identify gaps in the laws and make recommendations about how policy can be strengthened to better support youths' postsecondary education success

## Summary of laws

The article critically reviewed five federal policies:

1. The **1986 Independent Living Initiative** (amended in 1990 and 1993), which allocated \$70M to states to implement independent living programs to youth between 16 and 21 years of age.
2. The **Foster Care Independence Act of 1999**, which replaced the previous law by allocating \$140M for independent living programs, gave states the option to provide services to youth under age 16, and extended Medicaid eligibility to age 21.
3. The **Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program** was added to FCIA as part of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001. It allocated up to \$60M annual to fund \$5,000 ETVs for postsecondary education expenses for older youth in foster care.
4. The **2008 Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act** gave states the option to raise the foster care age limit from 18 up to age 21.
5. The **2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act** amended an earlier version of the law so that children in foster care (including those who were in-care beyond the age of 13) are eligible to participate in federal TRIO programs and to file as an independent student when completing their FAFSA.

## Main Findings

Policy discussion: two areas of needed improvement

- **Variability in available support:** While some programs and benefits are universally available to all youth aging-out of care in the U.S. (e.g., applying as an independent student on FAFSA), there is enormous variation in the constellation of supports and services available to a given youth depending on which state they happen to live in.
- **Premature expiration of support:** Simply put, the laws cut off support too early. Young people with foster care experience often start postsecondary education later than their peers, so age limits in early-20s means that critical supports will stop right in the middle of youths' postsecondary education journey.

## Implications

Three recommendations to improve policy supporting postsecondary education for foster youth include:

1. **Extending FCIA services to age 25.** The years between 18 and 25 are an integral time for youth to ready themselves for future self-sufficiency through education, training, and early workforce engagement. However, most youth are not prepared to be fully self-sufficient by their early 20s, and many non-foster youth continue to receive support from their families well into their 20s. Extending FCIA funding to age 25 would provide youth with a more normative and sufficient timeframe to complete their degree without experiencing the drastic cessation of support and services in the middle of their education.
2. **Establish a national framework to fund campus-based support programs for students with care backgrounds.** These programs would be designed to address the unique needs of college students with foster care experience and provide an array of services to promote college persistence.
3. **Adjust ETV funding to reflect the rising cost of college.** The maximum ETV amount of \$5,000 per year has remained fixed as the cost of attending postsecondary education has increased. With each year that the cost of postsecondary education rises, the ETV disbursement becomes proportionately less effective at meeting financial need of youth with foster care backgrounds. Rather than remaining as a fixed disbursement amount, it is recommended that the ETV allocation be adjusted to reflect changes in the annual costs of college, similar to Pell Grants.