It's My Life:
Postsecondary Education and Training

A Guide for Transition Services from Casey Family Programs

casey family programs

fostering families. fostering change.

About Casey Family Programs

Casey Family Programs' mission is to provide and improve—and ultimately to prevent the need for—foster care.

Established by United Parcel Service founder Jim Casey, the Seattle-based national operating foundation has served children, youth, and families in the child welfare system since 1966.

The foundation operates in two ways. It provides direct services, and it promotes advances in child welfare practice and policy.

Casey collaborates with foster, kinship, and adoptive families to provide safe, loving homes for youth in its direct care. The foundation also collaborates with counties, states, and American Indian and Alaska Native tribes to improve services and outcomes for the more than 500,000 young people in out-of-home care across the United States.

Drawing on four decades of front-line work with families and alumni of foster care, Casey Family Programs develops tools, practices, and policies to nurture all youth in care and to help parents strengthen families at risk of needing foster care.

Contents

It's My Life Guides

In 2001 Casey Family Programs—working with young people in foster care, alumni of care, families, and other stakeholders—published *It's My Life*, a framework to develop services for young people preparing to make the transition from foster care to successful adulthood. *It's My Life* promotes a holistic approach to transition services. It is based on the belief that the domains of our lives are interconnected.

It's My Life guides build on that framework, offering specific strategies, tactics, and resources for youth and the adults who guide and support them. *It's My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training* is the third guide in this series. It follows *It's My Life: Housing*, published in 2005, and *It's My Life: Employment*, published in 2004.

The Seven Life Domains in *It's My Life*

| Cultural and personal identity formation | Supportive relationships and community connections | Physical and mental health | Life skills | Education | Employment | Housing |
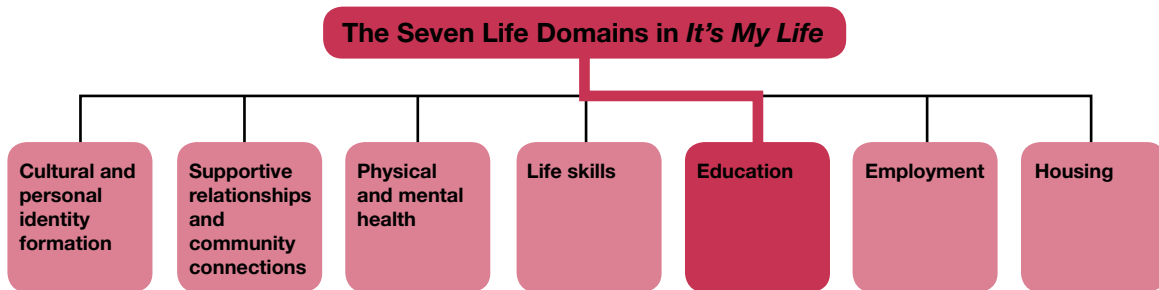
About the resources we suggest

Many resources in this guide are found on the Internet. They are good examples of what you can find by typing your topic—for example, *student housing* or *college scholarships*—into a search engine such as www.google.com. We encourage you and the young people you work with to continue to search the Internet for other resources. And when you get to any Web site (including the ones we've recommended), explore the site. Most offer a range of information and links to other Web sites. Many, however, are commercial sites that, in addition to free information and tools, promote commercial services and products.

Keep an eye out for scholarship and financial aid scams. Companies that guarantee free money for tuition or require payment for scholarships are probably not credible. For more information, see "Be aware of scholarship scams!" on page 113.

Please make sure that young people are Internet savvy before suggesting that they use such sites. They need to be aware that suggestions to visit sites for free information are not endorsements for products and services sold there. And, more important, they need to know how to use caution in divulging personal information and in using adequate safeguards when making personal contacts through the Internet. Several good resources for teaching young people about Internet safety and security are:

- Safe Teens: www.safeteens.com

- Get Net Wise: www.getnetwise.com

- Internet Safety 101: www.about.com. Click **Parenting & Family**; then click **Family Internet**. Under **Essentials**, click **Online Safety Tips**.

Introduction

Introduction

For many young people, the road to higher education and self-sufficiency begins in childhood. The expectations and support of family members nurture their career and educational aspirations. Access to consistent, effective education as they grow enables them to realize these aspirations. Many youth in foster care, however, lack this family support and these educational opportunities.

Fortunately, knowledgeable adults working with young people can play a significant role in guiding them to successful experiences after high school. The purpose of this guide is to give child welfare professionals the information and tools they need to help youth successfully prepare for and complete postsecondary education or training. The guide will also be useful to other adults working with youth in foster care, including teachers, counselors, mentors, CASA (court-appointed special advocate) volunteers, caregivers, and birth parents.

College students speak out

On the role of caseworkers

"I had a great caseworker from the time I was 15 until I turned 18. His name was John. When the time came to start thinking about college he took me to any university I wanted to go to—NYU, University of Maryland, PSU. When it was time to fill out any paperwork, FAFSA, registration or financial aid information, he was always there to help and if he couldn't, he found someone who could.

"If I could give any advice, it would be to be more like him. If I ever needed anything, he was there to answer my questions, give me advice, or just talk. He's a large part of the reason I'm in school now. Yes, my "advice" would be to be like him; always have an ear handy and a heart to answer."

—Therese, Pennsylvania State University, Wilkes-Barre

The importance of postsecondary education or training to a successful adulthood is clear. In addition to personal benefits, such as improved self-worth and confidence, there are economic advantages. A 1999 U.S. census report showed that workers over the age of 25 with only a high school diploma had a median income of $23,233. The median for workers with associate's degrees was $31,684 and for those with bachelor's degrees, $53,043. Workers who completed postsecondary certificate programs also earned more than those who had just completed high school.[1] The job outlook for

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1   Venezia, A., Kirst, M., & Antonio, A. (2003). *Betraying the college dream: How disconnected K–12 and postsecondary education systems undermine student aspirations* (Final report from Stanford University's Bridge Project). Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University.

young adults in the 21st century has been depicted as a barbell, with higher-wage jobs with a continuing career path at one end and low-wage jobs with little career advancement at the other end.[2]

Youth who enroll in higher education typically follow a series of steps: they develop aspirations for more education, engage in academic preparation, research and assess postsecondary options, take entrance exams, apply for admission and financial aid, and enroll.[3] Students who start preparing for postsecondary education late in their high school careers, as is the case with many youth in foster care, are at a disadvantage but should not be discouraged from pursuing postsecondary education. In fact, the average age of college students continues to increase, and strategies and resources are also available for these students.

Youth in foster care face many educational challenges during their K–12 schooling. Their placements change, and home support for education may be unavailable. They move from school to school, their attendance at school may be inconsistent, and they often experience interference from emotional and mental health issues. These difficulties are reflected in the lower grades and standardized test scores that they, on average, earn. Numerous studies show higher dropout rates as well, with a recent study finding that only 56.3 percent of students in foster care in the study earned a high school diploma.[4] These outcomes, and the academic challenges that underlie them, call for focused, long-term educational support beginning in middle school.

Statistics on postsecondary educational outcomes for youth formerly in foster care are also cause for concern. In general, only about 55 percent of all students entering college receive a degree, but these figures are even lower for students of color, first-generation college students, and students without parental support.[5] By way of contrast, in a recent study of youth who had been in public and private care in Washington and Oregon, by the age of 25 only 1.8 percent had completed a bachelor's degree.[6] These young adults are coping with the combined stresses of living on their own and adjusting to higher education without the support systems of home and family. Many are coping with financial worries, childcare needs, mental health issues, and even such specific concerns as where they are going to stay during school vacations. On top

2   Alssid, J., Gruber, D., & Mazzeo, C. (2000). *Opportunities for expanding college bridge programs for out of school youth.* Brooklyn, NY and San Francisco, CA: Workforce Strategy Center.

3   Horn, L. (1998). *Confronting the odds: Students at risk and the pipeline to higher education.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Studies.

4   Pecora, P., Kessler, R., Williams, J., O'Brien, K., Downs, A., English, D., White, J., Hiripi, E., White, C., Wiggins, T., & Holmes, K. (2005). *Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study.* Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

5   Venezia et al. (2003).

6   Pecora et al. (2005).

of these concerns, many students from foster care enter college with barely adequate academic or study skills and with a negative sense of their own abilities—the sense that "college is not for foster kids."

In this guide, we recommend practical strategies and resources to give youth in foster care the secondary education, academic guidance, and support they need to complete postsecondary education or training. (Throughout this guide, postsecondary education refers to four-year colleges offering a bachelor's degree; two-year colleges, offering both associate's degrees and certificate programs; and career and technical programs that usually offer certification in a particular skill, such as culinary arts or computer repair.)

We offer these recommendations, based both on the research on access to postsecondary education for under-represented youth in general and on research and practice with youth in foster care:

1. **Foster high academic aspirations**

2. **Encourage long-term planning for postsecondary education**

3. **Stress rigorous academic preparation**

4. **Support students in taking standardized tests**

5. **Support students in choosing, applying for, and enrolling in postsecondary education**

6. **Help students apply for and get adequate financial aid**

7. **Engage young adults who have missed out on postsecondary preparation**

8. **Help students adjust to and complete their college or training program**

Recommendation #1

Foster High Academic Aspirations

Recommendation #1: Foster High Academic Aspirations

Aspiring to higher education—having a strong desire or ambition for postsecondary education—is an important first step in getting there. Combine that desire with long-term academic planning, and young people greatly increase their chances of enrolling.

Unfortunately, the aspirations of youth in foster care are often not grounded in the necessary academic preparation and postsecondary planning. Also, many youth may want to go on to higher education but don't believe it can be a reality for them. This may be because they haven't grown up with a positive achievement message, because they assume that a postsecondary education will be too expensive, or because they have internalized a message that higher education is not for them.

One survey of youth in foster care found that 75 percent said they wanted to go to college, but few had actually taken the necessary coursework.[7] Another report states that only 15 percent are likely to be enrolled in college preparatory classes versus 32 percent of students not in foster care.[8]

College students speak out

On promoting aspirations

"Most students think they are too poor to go to a university or tech school. Set the expectation. Educate them that there is hope."

—David, University of Central Oklahoma

"Tell them the benefits: earning more money, meeting friends, and getting more time to decide what they want to do with their life."

—Zoe, Winona State University

"Have former foster youth that have gone to college meet with the foster students. It helps to get rid of the fear of not being able to pay for college and overcomes the thought that it could never happen because they are foster kids. Show them that foster kids do go to college and that it is very important in reaching their goals in life."

—Kimberley, University of Iowa

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7   Zanghi, M., Oldham, E., Sheehy, A., & Reibman, D. (1999). *Maine study on improving the educational outcomes for children in care.* Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, Institute for Child and Family Policy.

8   Sheehy, A., Oldham, E., Zanghi, M., Ansell, D., Correia, P., & Copeland, R. (2000). *Promising practices: Supporting the transition of youth served by the foster care system.* Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

STRATEGY #

1

Hold high academic expectations

Adults' expectations, whether high or low, send a message to students about their potential for success. Low expectations—often arising from biases regarding ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, foster care placement—are internalized by young people and can result in self-fulfilling prophecies. Expectations are conveyed both through what we say to youth and how we respond to and support them.

- Make clear to all students that you expect them to achieve academically—to do their best and make significant academic progress each year.

- Especially from middle school on, consistently express the expectation that the student will graduate from high school and go on to some form of postsecondary education or training. Encourage all adults involved with the student, including teachers, to give this message and to use such phrases as, "When you go to college…."

- Show students that there are concrete steps to make postsecondary education a reality for them and explain the financial aid that is available to students from foster care. (See pages 73 and 108.)

STRATEGY #

2

Help students take charge of their own education

Youth in foster care need support and guidance from adults, but they will have much greater "buy-in" to both short- and long-term academic goals if they've been involved in setting goals and making decisions about the future.

How you can help:

- Beginning in middle school, do an informal "aspiration assessment" with youth, to clarify what they want in their lives, not what they think you want to hear. *Possible Selves* is an effective tool.

- No later than middle school, involve youth in all case planning and transition planning. Use a self-determination model such as person-centered planning.

- Train students to speak out on their own behalf. Introduce them to the National Foster Youth Advisory Council (NFYAC) Web site, which has a model for teaching self-advocacy.

- Teach goal-setting and problem-solving strategies that students can use in their daily lives. *Surface Counseling* gives a straightforward, step-by-step process for teaching these strategies.

- Make sure that students with disabilities include self-determination and self-advocacy training as a goal on their IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) and IEP/Transition Plans, explain their disability effectively so they can advocate for classroom accommodations in school, and actively participate in their IEP meetings.

- Use the checklists in Appendix B on page 155 as a guide for postsecondary planning activities at each grade level.

College students speak out

On promoting aspirations

"Talk to the student about what they would like to do, what they're interested in, and how they might see their future. So many students today lack purpose. They don't know what they want to do, and they don't know how to find out. Parents should encourage learning more about themselves to find this."

—Cherish, State University of West Georgia

Defining self-determination and self-advocacy

Self-determination refers to everyone's right to have power over his or her own life and to make choices and decisions without undue outside influence. **Self-advocacy** refers to the right of individuals to speak out or "advocate" for their rights and needs.

📖 Self-determination and self-advocacy resources

Self-determination and decision-making

- ***Self-Determination: Assuming Control of Your Plans for Postsecondary Education.*** Although written for parents of students with disabilities, this gives a list of self-determination skills and why they are important for transition-age youth.

  Go to www.heath.gwu.edu. Click the **Publications** tab, and then click **Fact Sheets**.

- ***Possible Selves***, a strategy for helping students envision their future and clarify goals, was designed especially for unmotivated students and has been used successfully with youth in foster care. It works well with younger students. For training for adults working with youth, contact Mike Hock (mhock@ku.edu), University of Kansas, Center for Research on Learning, (785) 864-4780, or visit www.ku-crl.org/. Order the manual (about $17) from Edge Enterprises, Inc., (877) 767-1487.

- **Person-Centered Planning** is a process for identifying student goals and helping students, families, and professionals craft plans to help students reach these goals. Go to www.pacer.org. Enter *person-centered planning* in the **search** box.

- ***A Student's Guide to the IEP*** is a self-determination guide for youth in special education.

  Visit www.nichcy.org/stuguid.asp.

- ***Surface Counseling***, a "first aid" tool, helps adults without counseling skills guide youth effectively in goal setting and decision-making. Order the guide (about $9) from Edge Enterprises, Inc., (877) 767-1487.

Self-advocacy

- **"The Six Steps to Effective Self-Advocacy,"** sponsored by the Foster Youth Advocacy Council, a group composed of young people who are or have been in foster care.

  Go to www.fyi3.com. Click **Sitemap**. Under **Involved**, click **Advocacy**.

- **Postsecondary Innovative Transition Technology (Post-ITT)** gives a self-advocacy training model for students with disabilities. Go to www.postitt.org/teachcourse/. Click **Post-ITT Teacher**, and then click **Self-Advocacy**.

3

Encourage students to connect career dreams with postsecondary education plans

It's important for students to see the connection between the careers they dream about and the education they need to get there. It's also important for youth to understand the economic incentives of getting more education and training after high school, as well as the importance of job satisfaction to overall well-being.

Starting in middle school, here's how you can help students begin to think about life after high school:

- Help students explore careers and their educational requirements.

- Talk with students about the economic and personal benefits of postsecondary education and training. Show students the average salaries for various levels of education.

- Develop academic plans for middle school and high school students that will lead to enrollment in a program after high school. (See page 44 for more information on building an academic plan.)

- Encourage students to enroll in a college preparation program such as the TRIO Upward Bound and Talent Search programs, or help them find a program. (See page 31.)

- Take students to postsecondary campuses—for example, to an open house at a technical training program, an athletic event at a local college, or a multicultural celebration at a community college.

- Urge students to take the EXPLORE assessment in 8th grade, if their school offers it. This familiarizes them with the kind of questions that are in the ACT (a college admissions test), and includes a career and academic planning section. (See page 63.)

📖 Resources

Postsecondary planning tools to use with middle school students

- **Dream to Reality** is a pencil-and-paper activity packet to get middle school students started on linking career goals to an education plan. Go to www.collegezone.com. Enter *Dream to Reality* in the **search** box, select **Counselor Zone**, and select the first option.

- **Mapping Your Future** (English and Spanish), written to appeal to middle school students, gives comprehensive, concise information on selecting a career and on planning and paying for postsecondary education. Go to www.mapping-your-future.org. Click **middle and high school students**.

- *How to Go to College: The College and Career Planning Handbook for Grades 6 and 7 and for Grades 8 and 9*. Although these clear, readable publications are directed to students in Washington state, most of the information applies to students everywhere. Print out documents to have on hand to go over with youth. Go to www.hecb.wa.gov/collegeprep. Click **GEAR UP**, and scroll down for **Other Student Handbooks**.

- *Getting Ready for College Early: A Handbook for Parents of Students in the Middle School Years* discusses the economic benefits of postsecondary education, how to plan to pay for postsecondary education, and so on. Go to www.ed.gov/pubs/GettingReadyCollegeEarly.

Postsecondary information and self-assessments for both middle and high school students

- *It's My Life: Employment* gives a wealth of information on preparing youth in foster care for employment: information on assessing interests and abilities (pages 12–15), as well as resources for exploring careers (pages 26–27) and developing career plans (pages 31–32).

  Go to www.casey.org. Click **Resources**, and then click **Publications**.

- The **mycoolcareer** site gives students several online self-assessments to explore their interests, skills, and values, and then match these to careers. Especially useful for high school students. Go to www.mycoolcareer.com/explore.html. Look for **3 STEPSs to Your COOL Career!**, and then click the **self-knowledge** tab.

- **"Why Go to College?"** gives a brief overview of the benefits of college and supporting economic data. Go to www.actstudent.org. Click **College Planning**.

Postsecondary information and self-assessments for both middle and high school students *(continued)*

- *Cool Women, Hot Jobs… And how you can go for it, too!,* T. Schwager and M. Schuerger. (About $11.) This book combines strong role models in a variety of jobs with sound career-planning advice for girls (8th grade and above).

- *Occupational Outlook Handbook* describes what workers do on the job, working conditions, the training and education needed, earnings, and expected job prospects in a wide range of occupations. Visit www.bls.gov/oco.

- **Career Voyages** offers information similar to that in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. The Web site's format is more appealing to youth than the book, but the information is not as comprehensive. Go to www.careervoyages.gov.

STRATEGY #4

Introduce youth to role models and encourage positive peer relationships

Connecting with adults of similar backgrounds who've overcome odds can inspire youth with the knowledge that the future they dream about is possible. You can help by introducing youth to successful role models.

- Connect young people early and often with foster care alumni who are enrolled in college or who have completed postsecondary education or training.

- Enroll young people in mentoring programs that match at-risk youth with mentors, including foster care alumni, who have achieved academic and career successes. (See mentoring resources on page 27.)

- Take youth to hear speakers who have inspiring stories about "beating the odds." Sometimes just one person is enough to change a youth's thinking and attitude.

- Provide books that feature role models students can relate to.

Peers can also affect aspirations for postsecondary education in both positive and negative ways. Researchers have found that students with friends planning to enroll in a four-year college were far more likely to enroll themselves.[9] On the other hand, one

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9   Horn, L., Chen, X., & Adelman, C. (1998). *Toward resiliency: At-risk students who make it to college.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/resiliency.pdf

study found that one in five adolescents reported that students made fun of those who did well in school, especially within African American and Hispanic communities.[10]

You can help students associate with peers who will support their dreams for a successful future:

- Help them understand how friends can influence their academic achievement both positively and negatively.
- Encourage them to participate in extracurricular activities and enroll in classes that will prepare them for postsecondary education. (See page 31.) This will have the added benefit of connecting them with peers who are academically oriented and using nonschool time productively.

📖 Role models through reading

In our work with young people, we've found these books to be particularly helpful and inspiring:

- *First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students* is a not-to-be-missed resource for developing aspirations, especially for high school students. Go to www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/firstinthefamily.html.
- *Letters for Our Children: Fifty Americans Share Lessons in Living*, Erica Goode. (About $1.) Suitable for middle and high school students.
- *Gifted Hands: A True Story of Healing and Inspiration,* Ben Carson. (About $6.) Recommended for middle and high school students, especially African American youth.
- *Life Lessons for My Black Girls: How to Make Wise Choices and Live a Life You Love!,* Natasha Munson. (About $5.) Highly recommended for young women in their teens.
- *First Person, First Peoples: Native American College Graduates Tell Their Life Stories*, Andrew Garrod and Colleen Larimore, editors. (About $20.)
- *Learning from Successful Latino Students!* Students talk about how they are succeeding in high school or college and their career plans. Visit www.coedu.usf.edu/zalaquett/ls/ls.html. Click **Latino Students Success Stories**.

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10 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2001). *Paving the way to higher education: K–12 intervention plans for underrepresented youth*, NCES 2001-205, prepared by Patricia Gándara with the assistance of Deborah Biel for the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative Access Working Group. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001205.pdf

Encourage Long-Term Planning for Postsecondary Education

Recommendation #2: Encourage Long-Term Planning for Postsecondary Education

Youth in foster care are often out of the college-information loop, lacking stable family and school connections to help them get the information they need. Studies of low-income students and youth of color in general have shown that they and their families are often misinformed about how students should prepare for postsecondary education. They often hold misconceptions such as, "Meeting high school graduation requirements will prepare me for college," "I don't have to worry about my grades or the kind of classes I take until my sophomore year," or "Postsecondary education is too expensive for me." (See Help Students Apply For and Get Adequate Financial Aid, on page 93.)

To dispel these myths and give students a head start on postsecondary planning, connect students with mentors and college preparation programs, and involve them in concrete planning activities.

College students speak out

On long-term planning

"Provide high schoolers with packets informing them about their options…. visiting the various schools they are interested in."

—Zoe, Winona State University

"I was lucky that I was able to join the Upward Bound program, which gives students assistance while they are in high school."

—Jen, University of Texas, San Antonio

STRATEGY # 1

Help students connect with a mentor

It is so important to find mentors to provide long-term, knowledgeable guidance for students' postsecondary education and planning. School counselors can be a valuable resource in preparing students for postsecondary education, but not the sole resource. Mentors work with students to plan for their postsecondary education, keep a close eye on academic progress, and advocate for educational support when young people need it. Mentors for youth with disabilities also champion their special education needs.

College students speak out

On long-term planning

"Get them a mentor that will help them dream and fill out applications. Having someone to talk to about your dreams can make a big difference."

—David, University of Central Oklahoma

In identifying a mentor, consider the following:

- The youth's caregiver.

- Natural mentors—adults with whom the youth already has a connection, such as a teacher, tutor, coach, or youth leader.

- An education advocate within the child welfare system. (For example, some states have education advocates for secondary students and some have Independent Living (IL) programs with adolescent outreach workers whose jobs include education advocacy.)

- The youth's caseworker or IL coordinator.

- A mentor from a community or school mentoring program.

- The youth's court-appointed special advocate (CASA), if the youth has one. Some CASA programs provide education advocacy training for their CASAs.

- For youth with disabilities, the youth's IEP coordinator or special education teacher.

The role of the child welfare professional—collaboration is key

We don't recommend that you try to carry out the strategies in this guide on your own. Instead, draw in the students, their foster and birth parents, teachers, mentors, and other adults. Put students in charge, gradually decreasing levels of support as they assume responsibility for their education. Engage mentors to serve as guides and advocates.

📖 Mentoring resources

Finding a mentor

- **Chafee IL programs** may sponsor mentoring programs for transition-age youth, starting at age 16 and sometimes younger. To find out if your state has a program, go to www.nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd. Click **State by State**, then your state on the national map.

- **Orphan Foundation of America (OFA) vMentoring Program** uses e-mail to connect students from foster care with mentors who have achieved career and academic success. For more information, go to www.orphan.org. To find out if your state Chafee IL program offers OFA mentoring, call (800) 950-4673 or e-mail vMentor@orphan.org.

- **Mentor/National Mentoring Partnership** lists programs throughout the United States To get a list of mentoring programs in your area, visit www.mentoring.org. In the **search** box titled **Become a Mentor**, type your ZIP code.

- **Do-It**, an exemplary program for youth with disabilities, offers online career and college mentoring. For an application, call (888) 972-DOIT (3648) or e-mail doit@u.washington.edu. For more information, visit www.washington.edu/doit.

- **Big Brothers Big Sisters** has agencies across the United States and has documented excellent results with their mentoring programs. To find an agency in your area, go to www.bbbsa.org. Click **find your local agency**.

- **Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)** state offices will be able to tell you if their CASAs offer education advocacy. To find CASA programs in your area, go to www.casanet.org. Under **Program Services**, click **Find CASA Programs**.

- **100 Black Men of America, Inc.** has mentoring programs for African American youth and lists chapters in your area. Go to www.100blackmen.org. Click **Chapter Info & Events**, and then click **Chapter Locations**.

- **New York City residents:** Mentoring USA (MUSA) has a program for youth in foster care age 5 to18. For more information, go to www.mentoringusa.org/fostercare.htm. Or contact the program manager at (212) 400-8294.

Mentoring resources

Finding a mentor *(continued)*

- **California residents:** The Foster Youth Mentoring Project provides mentors from AmeriCorps (many of whom were formerly in foster care) to young people age 14 to18. To get a list of participating community colleges, go to www.ccco.edu. In the **Search box**, type *foster youth mentoring,* and click **This Site**. On the list that appears, click the project name.

Information for mentors

In addition to giving mentors a copy of this guide, you can suggest that they look at these resources:

- *Preparing Your Child for College: A Resource Book for Parents*. This comprehensive resource gives concrete advice that would be useful to mentors. Visit www.ed.gov/pubs/Prepare/index.html.

- *College Is Possible, A Guide for Parents: Ten Steps to Prepare Your Child for College.* This guide is more concise than the previous guide and focuses on students from underserved communities. Go to www.collegeispossible.org.

- The **Postsecondary Innovative Transition Technology (Post-ITT) curriculum** has a Web training module for educators that will also help mentors working with students with disabilities. Go to www.postitt.org.

STRATEGY # 2

Help students build an academic portfolio

Lack of complete academic records can be a real roadblock in applying for postsecondary programs and financial aid. From middle school on, students should be in charge of keeping an academic portfolio with school-related records, a copy of their long-term academic plan, and other documentation, including the following:

- **Social Security number.** Youth should apply for this in 7th grade if they don't already have one.

- **Official record of all health immunizations.** Many secondary and postsecondary schools will refuse admission to students lacking a record of required immunizations.

- **Official transcripts** from each middle and high school the student has attended. The transcript should include courses taken, credits, grades, and GPA.

- **Report cards** (as a backup to any missing transcripts).
- **Records of any standardized test** the student has taken, both group and individual tests, including dates, where the tests were taken, and results.
- **Records of any honors** the student has received.
- **Records of all extracurricular activities** in which the student has participated, with any offices held, including dates.
- **Records of part-time and summer jobs, internships, any other career-exploration experiences, and community service work.** Include a description of each job, the name of the supervisor (and contact information), dates, and copies of any evaluations.
- **For students with disabilities,** copies of all IEPs and 504 plans, and accompanying testing.

📖 Finding important documents

Some of these sites may ask for a written request or require a fee.

- **Social Security card**

  Go to www.ssa.gov, and click **Your Social Security Number & Card**.

- **Transcripts**

  Go to www.ordertranscripts.com.

- **Immunization records**

  Go to www.cdc.gov/nip. Click **Immunization Registries**.

- **Special education records**

  Request the file from the special education central office of the student's school(s).

Help students start exploring options for postsecondary education

No later than 10th grade, encourage students to:

- Attend college fairs and participate in tours of local colleges. Having a mentor or caregiver along would be a plus.

- Meet with representatives of postsecondary schools who come to school. The school guidance office should have a schedule of these visits.

- Start browsing the postsecondary education guides in their high school guidance office and explore the many guides to colleges and training programs on the Internet. (See page 79 for a list of Web sites.)

Make young people familiar with community postsecondary education and training programs. Arrange to hold trainings for youth in foster care, IL events, and similar gatherings on postsecondary campuses in your community. Throughout the year, use a variety of venues—technical schools, community colleges, and large and small four-year colleges and universities. If possible, combine the meetings with a campus tour.

College students speak out

On long-term planning

"I would advise students to take advantage of their resources and academic counselors. I was lucky enough to have a school that went on college field trips monthly and I made sure I always went just so I could explore my options and get a feel for what type of environment I would want to go to college in."

—Jennessa, California State University, Fullerton

STRATEGY #4

Help students enroll in college preparation programs

One study of students who made it to college found that those who participated in a college outreach or preparation program while in high school had almost double the odds of enrolling in a four-year college than their peers who did not participate.[11]

In college preparation programs, such as the TRIO Talent Search and Upward Bound programs, students research college and technical programs, visit campuses, and learn about such things as courses they need to take in high school and how to apply to schools. Many programs offer summer activities, instruction in study and test-taking skills, and tutoring in other basic skills and skills students will need to succeed in a demanding high school curriculum.

Some college preparation programs start in elementary school or middle school, while others target high school dropouts and graduates who have not gone directly into postsecondary education. Some are integrated into the structure and curriculum of the school, and others are extracurricular or summer programs.

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11 Horn et al. (1998).

In choosing a program, look for academic support for a rigorous academic curriculum, knowledgeable counselors, mentoring, cultural sensitivity, and encouragement of family involvement.

📖 Finding college preparation programs

Check for programs at the student's school, and ask at clearinghouses of community services, such as United Way. Or, search for programs in your area through the Pathways to College Network. Go to www.pathwaystocollege.net/outreach. Tailor your search for particular features, such as summer or culturally based programs.

In addition, look for these or similar programs in your area:

Federal TRIO and GEAR UP programs

TRIO programs include:

- **Talent Search.** Academic, career, and financial counseling for students age 11 to 27, including high school dropouts.
- **Upward Bound.** Basic skills instruction, tutoring, mentoring, postsecondary education information and counseling, and preparing for entrance exams for students age 13 to 19.
- **Upward Bound Math–Science.** Summer and year-round counseling program for students grade 8 and up with an interest in math and science programs.

For a nationwide directory of TRIO programs:
Go to www.trioprograms.org/linkstoprograms.html. Scroll to your state, or click **Directory of TRIO Programs** and download the PDF.

GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) serves groups of students from 7th grade through high school. The program provides counseling, mentoring, tutoring, and other support services to help students plan and prepare for college. GEAR UP funds are also used to provide college scholarships to low-income students. To find a program near you, go to www.ed.gov/programs/gearup. Under **About ED**, click **Contacts**.

National College Access Network has community-based, drop-in programs for middle and high school students. To find a program near you, go to www.collegeaccess.org. Click **NCAN Membership Directory**, and then click **Supporting Member Profiles**.

Math, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) targets students in grades 7 to 12 interested in math, science, and related fields. It includes college preparatory courses, career planning, counseling, tutoring, and field trips. For more information and to find a program near you, go to http://mesa.ucop.edu/home.html.

The Posse Foundation (New York City, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles) identifies promising underrepresented and low-income high school students, gives them an eight-month precollege training program, and admits them as a group to a collaborating university. Visit www.possefoundation.org.

College Horizons offers summer precollege workshops for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian high school sophomores and juniors. Go to www.collegehorizons.org.

In-school programs

These programs combine a rigorous school curriculum with supplementary academic supports, such as tutoring.

- **Project GRAD** is a K–12 program that aims to increase college access for economically disadvantaged children. It is available in more than 200 schools across the United States. To find out if there is a program near you, go to www.projectgrad.org.
- **AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination),** located in 1,900 U.S. schools in 30 states, places and supports academically average students (grades 5–12) in advanced classes. To locate a program, see www.avidonline.org.

STRATEGY #5

Discuss preparation for postsecondary education at IEP and Section 504 meetings for students with disabilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that schools develop transition plans as part of each student's annual Individualized Education Plan (IEP) starting at age 16. This planning process must result in a set of activities that achieve the specific post-school outcome identified by the IEP committee. It is essential that students, their caregivers, and mentors participate in these meetings and that representatives from appropriate agencies, such as child welfare, mental health, and vocational rehabilitation, be invited to participate.

Note: Your state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) helps people with disabilities become employed. Locate your local office on the Internet by searching under your state's name plus DVR (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation).

📖 Getting the most out of IEP meetings

To get the most out of IEP meetings, visit the following Web sites:

- To understand the IEP process, visit www.nichcy.org/resources. Click **I** for IEP in the alphabetical listing. Under the **I** listings, click **Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)**. Click **IDEA and the IEP**.

- Find practical guides for parents and professionals at www.nichcy.org. Click **A-Z Topics, T**, then **Transition: Adulthood.**

- *A Student's Guide to the IEP* explains how a student can actively participate in the IEP process. Download a free copy at www.nichcy.org/pubs/stuguide/st1book.htm.

- Get specific information on a model IEP/Transition Team planning process with explanations of topics such as how the plan is developed, how to find community resources, and how to engage students in the process. Go to www.nichcy.org. Click **Our Publications**. In the **search** box, type *Transition Planning: A Team Effort.*

Help youth keep their focus when "life" intervenes

Life events can take over the lives of youth in foster care and derail their educational aspirations. For youth who have not yet emancipated, a new placement, school changes, a breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend, problems with birth families, and mental health issues can put educational planning on hold and make it difficult to keep up with school at all. For emancipated youth, housing and financial worries or a broken car can add to other concerns, and relegate education to the background.

When such events become an overriding concern, it's helpful to make sure young people have clear educational and career goals. In addition to ongoing conversations about the importance of education to their ultimate well-being, you can guide them to plan their time so they're able to deal with the unexpected and still stay on track. Of even greater importance is making sure that youth have consistent adult support for educational aspirations throughout their secondary schooling, and that they learn how to use the resources available.

The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA), Levels I–IV, with the accompanying *Guidebook*, is a valuable resource for keeping youth on track. The Inventory has four age levels, from age 8 to adult, and assesses nine areas: career planning, communication, daily living, home life, housing and money management, self-care, social relationships, work life, and work and study skills. Supplements to the ACLSA include Education Supplements, Levels I–IV (grades 4 to postsecondary), which assess school success factors.

ACLSA has both youth and caregiver versions, which may be taken online and scored for free. Students and caregivers receive a report and have access to the *Guidebook*, which has a wealth of free and low-cost resources to address any needs that emerge in the assessment.

Go to www.caseylifeskills.org. Click **Assessments**.

Stress Rigorous Academic Preparation

Recommendation #3: Stress Rigorous Academic Preparation

Strong academic preparation is the single most important factor in enrolling and succeeding in a postsecondary program. However, in the United States, studies have found that:

- Only 32 percent of all students leave high school qualified to attend a four-year college.

- Only 20 percent of all African American and 16 percent of all Hispanic students leave high school college-ready.[12]

- Approximately 50 percent of students entering both two- and four-year colleges have to take remedial classes.[13]

Weak academic skills and high school graduation standards that fall short of postsecondary entrance requirements contribute to these statistics. Youth in foster care have their own set of academic challenges, making it especially likely that they will be unprepared. A study of youth in foster care in Washington state found that they scored 15 to 20 percentile points below other youth on standardized tests, and that a youth's foster care status alone accounted for a 7 to 8 percentile point decrease in scores.[14]

Challenges for students in foster care include frequent school changes, lost or delayed school records, lack of educational advocacy, poor basic skills or gaps in skills, and lack of coordination among the child welfare, judicial, and education systems. Youth in care also have a high incidence of disabilities and experience disparate educational outcomes—especially for youth of color, who are over-represented in foster care.

Research indicates that students who follow a rigorous high school curriculum are more likely to enroll in and complete postsecondary education than those who do not.[15] Studies also show that low-achieving students do as well or better in more challenging classes than they do in less demanding coursework.[16]

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12 Greene, J. & Winters, M. (2005). *Public high school graduation and college-readiness rates: 1991–2002.* The Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute. Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_08.htm

13 Conley, D. (2005). *College Knowledge: What it really takes for students to succeed and what we can do to get them ready.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

14 Burley, M. & Halpern, M. (2001). *Educational attainment of foster youth: Achievement and graduation outcomes for children in state care.* Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Retrieved December 6, 2005, from www.wsipp.wa.gov/auth.asp?authid=24

15 Warburton, E., Burgarin, R., & Nuñez, A. (2001). Bridging the gap: Academic preparation and postsecondary success of first-generation students. *Education Statistics Quarterly, 3* (3). Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001153.pdf

16 Barth, P. & Haycock, P. (2004). A core curriculum for all students. *Harvard Education Letter, 20* (3). Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://www.edletter.org/past/issues/2004-mj/corecurriculum.shtml

STRATEGY # 1

Help students reach grade-level skills in reading and math

A growing number of people cannot read, write, or do the math necessary for postsecondary education and higher-wage jobs. Approximately 25 percent of American high school students read below basic levels (usually defined as 4th to 5th grade).[17]

Here's what you can do to help students bring their math and reading skills to grade level:

- Encourage students to read for pleasure and make books available to them.

- Encourage caregivers to read to children at an early age, and often, and to discuss books with older youth. Find adults who can provide this support to families where English is not the primary language or where the literacy level is low.

College students speak out

On academic preparation

"I think that social workers need to be more involved with academics, monitoring the student's progress."
—Brittney, University of Maryland

"My suggestion is quite simple. Individualized tutors for youth who are behind academically are your most potent tool. I have had some tutors who made the difference between a B and an F in a class."
—David, University of South Carolina

"I recommend while students are still in high school that they should take a few Advanced Placement classes. They help prepare students at an early stage for what teachers at the college level are expecting."
—Jennessa, California State University, Fullerton

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17 Joftus, S. (2002). *Every child a graduate: A framework for an excellent education for all middle and high school students.* Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education.

- Monitor the reading and math progress of students with particular care. If the student is not at grade level, work with the student's school on interventions such as:

  - Supplementary instruction within the regular classroom or placement in a developmental reading or math class with proven results.

  - Summer school basic skills programs.

  - Individual or group tutoring through free school or community tutoring programs. If free tutoring is not available, it may be paid for through Chafee IL funds. (See Appendix A, page 151.)

  - Community literacy programs, such as those offered by libraries or YMCAs.

  - For students more than two years below grade level in math or reading, request individual diagnostic testing from the school district to identify possible learning disabilities and to pinpoint specific areas of weakness.

  - For students in special education, monitor progress in reading and math very carefully. Use IEP meetings to look at the effectiveness of approaches being used and, if need be, to discuss more effective alternatives.

- In 10th or 11th grade, suggest to students interested in community colleges or technical programs that they take the reading and math placement exams for practice. This can be an excellent way to identify strengths and weaknesses and can guide plans for remediation.[18] (See page 64 for specific information on placement exams.)

- Advocate with students' schools and tutoring programs for research-based approaches to reading instruction, including teaching comprehension strategies, building fluency and vocabulary, providing intense, individualized instruction where needed, and assessing progress on an ongoing basis.

Maintaining student confidentiality as you work with schools

Whenever the child welfare system and school systems intersect, questions about confidentiality arise. How much information about a student can you disclose to schools? How much information can schools disclose to foster parents and other adults working with the students? Both federal and state laws regulate confidentiality, so you may need to find out what laws apply in your state.

A good resource for understanding how confidentiality laws apply to children in the education and child welfare systems is *Mythbusting: Breaking Down Confidentiality and Decision-Making Barriers to Meet the Education Needs of Children in Foster Care* by the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues. It is available at www.abanet.org/child/rclji/education.

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18 Clapper, A., Bremer, C., & Kachgal, M. (2002). Never too late: Approaches to reading instruction for secondary students with disabilities. *NCSET Research to Practice Brief, 1* (1). Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=274

📖 Tutoring resources

*Safety Note***:** Make sure that any tutor or program, whether in person or online, is reliable and trustworthy for the student. Criminal background checks are recommended.

To get lists of community tutoring programs, check out United Way and other community clearinghouses. University students will sometimes tutor. Also check with the student's school. We also suggest these resources:

- Find out if **Chafee funds** are available for tutoring in your state by going to www.nrcys.ou.edu. Click **National Child Welfare Resource Center**, and then click **State by State** for a state directory. You can also contact your state Chafee IL coordinator for information on tutoring.

- **Community agencies** offer tutoring programs in reading, writing, math, and English as a second language, some of them at no cost. For a useful source of community tutors, visit www.literacydirectory.org or call (800) 228-8813.

- TutorNation has a list of **individual tutors** near you or online tutors.

  Visit www.TutorNation.com.

- Best Sites for Tutoring gives a list of **commercial tutoring programs**, such as Sylvan Learning. Go to www.giantexplorer.com/result/tutoring.

- **The Strategic Tutoring Program** combines study strategies with homework tutoring to help students become more independent learners. To find a tutor trained in this approach, e-mail PostSecondaryEdGuide@casey.org.

  To buy a manual of the strategies ($16.50), call Edge Enterprises, Inc., (877) 767-1487.

📖 Resources for students with reading difficulties

- **"Never Too Late: Approaches to Reading Instruction for Secondary Students with Disabilities"** is a good article to use in developing IEP reading goals for adolescents with disabilities. The approaches also apply to most struggling adolescent readers.

  Go to www.ncset.org/publications. In the **Enter items to search** box, type *Never too late*.

- **"Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy"** gives the most recent findings on effective reading instruction for adolescents. See page 22 for a list of approaches. This is a good article to use in advocating with the school for research-based reading instruction. Visit Alliance for Excellent Education at www.all4ed.org/publications. Click **Reports**.

STRATEGY # 2

Make sure students develop good study skills

Managing time, taking notes, developing strategies for memorization and comprehension, and other such academic skills are crucial to college success. But students don't always acquire these on their own, and these skills are not always taught in school.

To help students develop good study and time management skills, you can:

- Assess a student's study skills using an inventory, such as the LASSI (Learning and Study Strategies Inventory) or the Casey Life Skills Education Supplement, Levels II and III (which will also assess other academic behaviors related to school success).

- Give students a list of study tips from the guides in the resources and discuss those that work best for them. To help a student see the relevance of these skills, discuss specifically where, when, and how they could use them.

- Encourage students to enroll in a study skills program.

- Encourage students to use resources, such as the library, the Internet, and school counselors and other adults, to get needed information, whether finishing homework assignments or researching college admission requirements. As one youth formerly in foster care noted, learning to read and knowing how to find information in the library were the two most important factors leading to her success as an adult.

- Work with students on daily and weekly planning and on budgeting time for school, homework, a job, extracurricular activities, and fun. Teach them how to use a weekly planner.

- Make sure that developing good study skills are part of the IEP goals of students in special education.

📖 Study skills assessments, guides, and strategies

Assessments

- **Casey Life Skills Education Supplement** to the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment measures factors related to school success, including study skills. Youth may take it online and have it scored for free. Go to www.caseylifeskills.org. Click on the **Assessments** tab, and then click on **Assessment Supplements**. Scroll down to **Educational Supplements**.

- **LASSI,** a low-cost study skills assessment, is available in print or online. Visit www.hhpublishing.com. Click **LASSI** in the **Choose a Product** option.

Study guides and strategies

- **Homework/Study Tips** from About.com is an excellent source of study tips and links to study skills information and homework help. Go to http://homeworktips.about.com.

- **Study Guides and Strategies** is a comprehensive source of information on studying, managing time, taking tests, developing reading and writing basics, and more for success in school. Go to www.studygs.net.

- *How To Go To College: The College and Career Planning Handbook for Grades 6 and 7* and *for Grades 8 and 9*. For a very concise study skills section, see pages 22–23 (grades 6 and 7) and pages 30–31 (grades 8 and 9). Go to www.hecb.wa.gov/collegeprep/index.asp. Click **News and Publications**, and then click **Financial Aid Programs (Manuals, Forms, Presentations)**. Scroll down to **College/Career Preparation**.

STRATEGY #3

Help students develop rigorous academic plans

At the end of 8th grade, students, with the help of their school counselors, caregivers, and mentors, should plan their high school curriculum, using the recommended curricula given below as a guide. This academic plan should become part of the youth's case plan.

Proposed academic plan[19]

	English	Math	Science	Social Studies	Foreign Language
"New Basic" core curriculum (National Committee for Excellence in Education)	4 years	3 years, including Algebra I & II	3 years	3 years	
College prep curriculum (U.S. Department of Education)	4 years	3 to 4 years, including Algebra I & II, plus advanced math	3 to 4 years of a lab science: biology, chemistry, earth science, physics	2 to 3 years, including history, government	2 to 4 years
Rigorous college prep curriculum, should include at least one AP or honors class	4 years	4 years	3 to 4 years	3 years	3 years

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19 This table is based on the following resources:

- American College Testing (2005). Crisis at the core: Preparing students for college and work. *Activity, 43* (1). Retrieved on December 6, 2005, from www.act.org/activity/winter2005/crisis.html

- American Council on Education. *Preparing for college. Recommended middle and high school courses.* Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://www.collegeispossible.org/index.php?module=ContentExpress&func=display&ceid=10&meid=12

- Pathways to College Network (2005). *College readiness for all toolbox: Developing a challenging, engaging curriculum.* Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://www.pathwaystocollege.net/collegereadiness/toolbox/plan_curric.asp (login required)

As you help a student develop a four-year academic plan, make sure that the plan:

- **Is grounded in the student's dreams and goals.** Using a person-centered planning approach, students can identify realistic goals that will help them realize their career and life aspirations.

- **Meets high school graduation requirements and postsecondary entrance standards.** Some schools (such as technical education programs, for example), call for strong preparation in math, science, and technology.

- **Includes challenging courses.** What's challenging is different for every student. For some students, this might mean taking two years of algebra. For others, it might mean precalculus, calculus, or an Advanced Placement (AP) class. For some special education students, it could mean inclusion in a regular classroom.

- **Includes honors classes; challenging electives such as computer classes, economics, or a business class; and AP classes for motivated students.** These students should also think about enrolling in an International Baccalaureate Diploma program or taking dual enrollment classes, in which they take college-level classes while still in high school (and get college-level credit too).

- **Includes any supplementary learning opportunities such as tutoring or distance learning.**

- **Is consistent with the IEP and Transition Plan for students who are in special education.** (See page 50 for more on educational planning for special education students.)

- **Includes a career and technical program for interested students.** Some students may want an academic plan that leads more immediately to a job; they may find a career and technical program more motivating and relevant than a general postsecondary diploma.

  In some high schools, students may complete both a technical certificate program and a high school diploma at the same time, and then continue on to a more advanced level in a postsecondary program. Other districts offer Tech Prep, a program of study which begins in high school and continues at a postsecondary institution, culminating in an associate's degree, certification in a technical field, or even a degree at a four-year college. For these students, suggest the following:

  - Before 9th grade, inquire about career and technical classes and programs in the high school they will attend.

  - Get information about Tech Prep by contacting the school or the state coordinator.

  - Make sure courses should include at a minimum those listed in the "New Basic" core curriculum. (See page 43.)

📖 Resources for building a four-year academic plan

- **"What Can My Child Do to Prepare Academically for College?"** This article suggests what high school courses to take, what standardized tests may be required, and what activities outside the classroom may help prepare a student for a four-year college. Go to www.ed.gov/pubs/Prepare/pt2.html.

- **College Readiness for All Toolbox** is a planning template that will help students design a four-year postsecondary curriculum.

  Visit www.pathwaystocollege.net/collegereadiness/toolbox/.

- The **A–G requirements** specifies the courses that high schools students must take for admission to California state schools. Go to www.universityofcalifornia.edu. Click **A–Z index**, and then under **A**, click **Guide to A–G Requirements** to download a copy. Alternately, click **A–G Requirements** on the left to view online.

📖 Programs offering rigorous college preparation

These programs target low-income youth and youth of color.

The **Early College High School Initiative** combines high school and postsecondary courses with credit at both levels. By 2005, 67 schools had opened in 24 states, with 166 schools anticipated by 2011. Visit www.earlycolleges.org/Index.html. Click **The Initiative By the Numbers** to find out if there's a program in your area.

AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) is an in-school academic support program that places average students, particularly low-income youth and youth of color, in advanced classes. More than 1,900 schools in 30 states currently offer it. For a good overview of the program, its results, and where it's offered, visit www.avidonline.org.

The Puente Program provides Hispanic youth with academic preparation with a strong cultural, family, and community component. To learn about this program and to find a list of schools offering it, go to www.puente.net.

Programs for American Indian Youth. In "Indian Teachers and School Improvement," the *Journal of American Indian Education* discusses the characteristics of effective schools for American Indian youth and lists successful schools. Download the article at jaie.asu.edu/v39/V39I2A5.pdf.

Advanced Placement (AP). This Web site gives information on the program and AP courses and exams. Go to http://apcentral.collegeboard.com.

International Baccalaureate (IB). To find out about this program and its benefits, go to www.ibo.org.

STRATEGY # 4

Monitor students' academic progress closely

Caregivers, mentors, caseworkers, and high school counselors should carefully monitor students' academic progress. This means consistently checking all report card grades and standardized test results, and closely monitoring the grades on a monthly or weekly basis—even daily, if the student is struggling. School counselors can help set up a reliable means of home-school communication.

Also, use the checklists in Appendix B (see page 155) to help monitor progress and keep students on the path to postsecondary education.

College students speak out

On academic preparation

"At least when I was in high school, there was poor monitoring of my progress. I knew I could get away with lower grades, so I did. However, had someone been sending papers for each of my teachers to sign, I think I would have been more motivated to do well."

—Sean, University of California, Berkeley

STRATEGY #5

Advocate for stable, high-quality educational placements for students

To increase the chances that students in foster care go on to postsecondary education, they should have as few changes in schools as possible and attend schools with high standards and a comprehensive curriculum.

Keep students in stable school placements

One of the most serious educational roadblocks for youth in foster care is frequent changes in school placement. One study found that high school students who changed schools even once were less than half as likely to graduate.[20]

To keep school transfers to a minimum:

- Consider the effects of a school change when deciding whether to make a placement change. Discourage changes in school placements for students, especially towards the end of the school year or the end of high school.

- If a placement change is necessary, try to keep the student in the same school at least until the end of the school year—find a foster home within the same school district, or make transportation arrangements so the student can continue in the same school. Students may be able to draw on Chafee IL funds for transportation or use McKinney-Vento funds for transportation to help them stay in their home school, if the proposed home placement is temporary. (See Appendix A on page 151 for details on using Chafee IL funds for education assistance.)

- Educate the school on the negative effects of school changes and ask if they have resources to keep a student in the same school.

- Advocate with the youth's judge for support in keeping the student in the same school.

- If students do have to transfer schools, help them keep up a challenging curriculum with a minimum loss of credits. To do this:

  - Make sure they keep copies of their school records and academic plans (see pages 28–29) in their academic portfolio. This ensures that if the new school needs a copy, students can provide it in a timely manner.

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20 Rumberger,R., Larson, K., Ream, R., & Palardy, G. (1999). *The educational consequences of mobility for California students and schools.* Berkeley, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE).

- Ensure that a knowledgeable adult accompanies students to the new school and arranges a meeting with a school counselor to get students in the courses that fit their academic plans.

- Arrange for prompt transfer of special education or 504 documents for students with disabilities. Set up a meeting between students and teachers and other professionals to review students' previous schoolwork, show their portfolio, and discuss goals and accommodations.

📖 Resources for promoting stable school placements

- *A Road Map for Learning,* Section 1, provides information, strategies, and resources for keeping youth in stable school placements.

  Go to www.casey.org. Click **Resources**, and in the **search** box at the upper-left of the screen, type *Road Map for Learning*.

- *K–12 School Placement Guide* (2003) provides a protocol for thoughtful, team-based decision-making on school placement changes.

  To get a copy, e-mail PostSecondaryEdGuide@casey.org.

- **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act**

  To get information on using these funds for transportation and for a list of state coordinators, visit www.nichcy.org. Click the **Search for Info** option, check the **Resource Library** box and enter *McKinney-Vento* in the **search** box to access *Homelessness and Students with Disabilities: Educational Rights and Challenges*. Contact your local school district to get the name of the McKinney-Vento coordinator for your school district.

Champion high-quality educational placements for students

Youth in foster care too frequently find themselves in alternative schools or schools in group homes. These schools may offer little challenge and hold educational expectations that lead to graduation but not postsecondary enrollment. Also, these programs often have limited course options and do not offer access to enrichment classes, extracurricular activities, and the social opportunities available to students in traditional high schools.

For students in group homes, advocate for public school placements when appropriate for the student, and for access to the academic resources and services, and the extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to other youth in the district. When someone proposes an alternative school or a group home school for a student, consider the following:

- What are the school's test scores, graduation rates, and the percentage of students who go on to a postsecondary education? The school's "report card," often listed on its Web site, will give you answers to these questions.

- The course offerings: is there a basic core curriculum (see page 43) plus electives?

- What enrichment and extracurricular opportunities are offered?

If the alternative school or group home school is the only option for the youth, ask the school district to supplement the curriculum with more challenging courses. This could be through part-time attendance at a traditional school in the district or through online learning and correspondence courses. (See page 125 for more information on distance learning.)

Also consider early college high schools (sometimes called "middle college high schools"). These programs allow a student to complete a high school program and take college courses at the same time on either the high school or the college campus. (See page 45 and page 125.)

> ### 📖 Resources for improving the quality of high school for alternative school and group home school students
>
> In addition to the suggestions below, refer to "Resources for high school completion" on page 126 for suggestions about where to find distance learning and early/middle college high school programs.
>
> - **Edutools** provides independent reviews of online Advanced Placement courses. Go to www.edutools.info.
>
> - **Virtual Schools and Online Learning Manual** from Casey Family Programs gives professionals and caregivers guidance on how to set up high-quality, effective online learning experiences for youth. Includes lists of accredited programs. E-mail PostSecondaryEdGuide@casey.org.

Enlist the court's assistance

Of all the adults working with youth in foster care, juvenile and family court judges may have the most authority to affect positively the education of the young people who come before them. To enlist the help of the court:

- Provide the judge with information on the youth's educational plans and progress at each court appearance.

- Engage the court's support in such matters as maintaining school stability, expediting transfer of school records, and getting needed evaluations.

> 📖 **Resources for working with judges**
>
> **Asking the Right Questions: A Judicial Checklist to Ensure That the Educational Needs of Children and Youth in Foster Care Are Being Addressed,** from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ). This publication helps judges monitor the educational progress of youth in their jurisdictions. Use this as a guide in your work with judges, but do not hand it directly to a judge because each jurisdiction must follow its own formal process for adoption of the checklist. Discuss this checklist with your local CASA office to see if it is being used or how it can best be introduced.
>
> Get a copy of the Judicial Checklist at www.ncjfcj.org/content/view/572/432/.

STRATEGY #6

Promote appropriate, rigorous educational programs for students with disabilities

Students with behavioral difficulties or disabilities that range from mild learning disabilities to physical disabilities must be qualified for their college program. This means that, just like their general education peers, they must build strong academic plans that guide their preparation (see page 43).

High-quality educational programming for all students with disabilities also requires active involvement in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings or 504 meetings. To do this, consider the following:

- A knowledgeable adult advocate, preferably the student's mentor, should attend each IEP meeting.

- For students with learning disabilities, behavioral disorders, health impairments, physical disabilities, and vision or hearing impairments, the IEP should prescribe a challenging curriculum directed at both high school graduation and enrollment in a postsecondary college or training program. The student should take regular education classes, with accommodations as needed, but without "watering down" the content. Replacement courses offered by special education teachers will most likely not be rigorous enough.

- For students with more severe cognitive disabilities, ensure that the IEP prescribes high school classes that develop academic skills as much as possible. It should also prepare the youth for some kind of training and employment after high school, usually with the support of an adult services program such as Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

- At the IEP or 504 meeting, request an evaluation of the student's need for assistive technology. (Assistive technology is any supportive tool, equipment, or software that can enhance the student's ability to function.)

> ### 📖 Resources that promote rigorous programs for students with disabilities
>
> - **National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY).** The U.S. Department of Education funds this comprehensive information center. Go to www.nichcy.org/index.html.
>
>   Especially helpful are the links to the many local resources listed by state at www.nichcy.org/states.htm.
>
> - **Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers.** Each state has at least one such center that helps families get appropriate education and services for children with disabilities, resolves problems between families and schools, and so on. Visit www.taalliance.org/index.htm.
>
> - **Secondary Special Education and Transition Online Information.** The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) offers a comprehensive list of best-practice resources for high school students with disabilities. Go to www.ncset.org/.
>
> - **"The Family Guide to Assistive Technology"** gives straightforward information on such topics as defining assistive technology and making assistive technology a part of a child's education.
>   Go to www.pluk.org/AT1.html#2.
>
> - **Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education.** "Know your Rights and Responsibilities" gives a detailed summary of laws relevant to postsecondary education of students with disabilities and practical action steps for youth and their advocates.
>
>   Go to www.ed.gov. In the **search** box, type *Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education*.

Recommendation #4

Support Students in Taking Standardized Tests

Recommendation #4: Support Students in Taking Standardized Tests

Although standardized tests are a fact of student life in the United States, taking them is daunting to many students. You can help students understand the reasons for these tests and the benefits, such as feedback on skills and opportunities to get credits, and you can help them prepare to take the tests.

Look for detailed information on the following tests as well as resources you can turn to as you help students prepare for them:

College students speak out

On preparing for standardized tests

"The ACT and SAT exams are really intimidating to high school students. Try to get the foster youth involved in programs to prepare for these exams. They will help test scores considerably…. Encourage foster youth to take the SAT and ACT early (junior year) so that, if they don't do as well, they can take it again in their senior year."

—Justyn, University of Kentucky

"Help students find materials to study from and help them in studying. Make sure that they have the funding to take these tests and transportation if needed."

—Kim, Louisiana State University

STRATEGY # 1

Help students prepare for standardized tests

The best preparation for standardized tests is a strong academic background. It always helps if students enroll in a challenging sequence of math classes and read as much as possible for pleasure to build vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. In any case, most students will want to build up vocabulary, hone existing math ability, develop test-taking skills, and prepare for the specific idiosyncrasies of each test.

Preparing for the SAT and ACT

The SAT and ACT are the two most widely used admissions tests for four-year colleges and universities. Since some colleges require the SAT and others the ACT, it's important for students to know which is required by the schools to which they are applying and prepare accordingly. To prepare for the SAT and ACT, refer to the resources for the SAT on page 68 and for ACT on page 61, and encourage students to:

Take pretests or practice tests.

- Take the ACT pretests—the EXPLORE (8th grade) and the PLAN (10th grade).

- Take the pretest for the SAT—the PSAT/NMSQT (11th grade).

- Take ACT and SAT practice tests that are available online and in preparation booklets. (See practice resources on page 61 and page 68.)

Enroll in ACT and SAT preparation classes at the high school (offered for free), in professional preparation classes, or hire an experienced tutor.

Follow a self-study program, using one of the online programs or a commercial text.

Take the SAT or ACT at least twice—once in the spring of 11th grade and again in the fall or winter of 12th grade. Students may take the ACT as many times as they wish and may choose which score to be sent to colleges. Students may also take the SAT as many times as they wish; however, all scores are automatically sent to the colleges designated by the students.

Preparing for AP and CLEP exams

The AP and CLEP exams are designed to assess whether the student has achieved college-level mastery of a given subject area. Colleges grant college credit or waive entry-level college classes for students who get a specified score. The best preparation for these tests is for students to put maximum effort into their AP and honors classes.

Students who feel they need additional preparation or who want greater familiarity with the test format of either tests can take the practice tests listed on page 61 (for AP exams) and 62 (for CLEP exams).

STRATEGY # 2

Help students register for and get to standardized tests

One report shows that, even when students who are most at risk academically are prepared for postsecondary education, they're likely not to take required entrance exams.[21] This may be for a variety of reasons—lack of parental support in registering for the exam, inability to get to the exam, or even test anxiety.

Mentors and caregivers can help students register for and get to standardized tests, such as the ACT, AP, CLEP, and SAT exams. Mentors and caregivers should also be aware of test dates, registration deadlines, fee waivers, and so on. For complete test registration details, refer to pages 60–69. Use the checklists in Appendix B (starting on page 155) to help students be aware of testing timelines.

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21 Horn et al. (1998).

How to help students register for and get to the ACT or SAT tests

- Check all dates, not only for the tests themselves, but also for registration deadlines. If a student with disabilities needs testing accommodations, the student and the mentor should work with the school on this, ideally starting six months in advance of the test.

- Make sure that the student gets and completes the application to register for the test.

- Apply for a fee waiver. For some tests, the high cost may be a barrier. Review the guidelines and deadlines for fee waivers. Chafee Independent Living (IL) funds may be available for testing fees. (See Appendix A on page 151.)

- Help students get to the tests. Check that student has registered to take the test, knows where the test is being given, and has a plan for getting there. About a week before the test, make sure the student has transportation to the test.

How to help with AP tests

- In February, encourage students to register for AP tests for any AP classes they're taking. Review with them the information on AP test registration given in The Basics of Standardized Tests on page 60.

- The high cost of AP tests may be a barrier. Review the guidelines for fee waivers on page 61 and check into the possibility of using Chafee funds. (See Appendix A on page 151.)

How to help with CLEP tests

- Encourage the student to contact the postsecondary school's admissions office or to find a test center online. (See page 62).

- If a student decides to take a CLEP test, check about the possibility of using Chafee IL funds to pay for it.

- Make sure the student knows where the test is being given and has a plan for getting there.

STRATEGY #3

Track student performance on state high school exit exams

Exit exam requirements vary from state to state and within districts. See page 68 for details on state high school exit exams.

What you, the mentor, caregiver, and student, can do:

- Check on the exit exam guidelines for your state. For youth qualifying for testing accommodations because of disabilities, make sure their IEP or 504 plan specifies the kind of accommodation they'll need. Students should work with their schools in advance of the test to ensure that accommodations are met.

- Have students find out when the exam is given. Make sure students register for and take the exam. Then follow up on whether the student passed the exam.

- If the student did not pass, work with the student and the school on remediation before retaking the exam or explore other options for getting a diploma or GED.

STRATEGY #4

Get an updated educational assessment for students in special education

Students who have IEP and 504 plans will need to document their disability to qualify for accommodations and support when they go on to college or a training program. To meet the requirements of these programs, assessments must be normed on an adult population and be no more than three years old. (Postsecondary institutions are not obligated by law to provide or pay for assessments.)

- In 11th grade, formally request a reassessment and ask the school district to pay for it.

- Seek funding from Chafee IL or other child welfare funds if necessary. (See Chafee IL information in Appendix A on page 151.)

- Follow up to make sure the reassessment takes place and discuss the results with the IEP or 504 plan coordinator, the student, and the student's caregiver and mentor.

The Basics of Standardized Tests

ACT (American College Test)

Purpose of test: Admission test for many four-year colleges and universities, and some career and technical training programs.

Age given: 11th and 12th grades.

What the test measures: Reasoning, problem solving, analytical skills, and knowledge and skills in English, math, reading, and science. The optional writing test is a 30-minute essay.

Testing dates and times: Six times per year. Students may take the test as many times as they wish. Go to www.actstudent.org. Under **When and Where** enter the name of your state and city. Testing usually begins at 8 a.m. and dismissal is around 12:15 p.m. More information is at www.actstudent.org under **FAQs**. Click **How many questions are asked and how long will the test take?**

Registration: Sign up by mail or online approximately four weeks before the test date. Applications are available in the school guidance office. *Note:* Students requesting a fee waiver or testing accommodations cannot register online.

Fees (2005): $29 for the basic test; $14 additional for the optional writing test.

Fee waivers: A limited number of fee waivers are available. Contact the school guidance office or go to www.actstudent.org. Click **FAQs**, and then click **See all FAQs**. Scroll down and click **What if I can't afford the registration fee. How do I apply for a fee waiver?**

Testing accommodations: Accommodations for procedures, test format, and test dates vary with the need. Start gathering the required documentation four to six months in advance and submit the request by the registration deadline. Students can inquire in the school guidance office for more information and go to www.actstudent.org. Under **Hot Links,** click **Students with disabilities.**

Scoring: Composite score (average of all four test scores) and individual test scores for each subject range from 1–36. In 2004, the average composite score was 20.9. Students may choose which score to send to colleges.

Web site: Go to www.act.org.

To introduce students to the ACT, they can take the EXPLORE test (page 63) in 8th grade, and the PLAN test (page 65) in 10th grade. These pretests also report the skills or subject areas that need improvement.

Students can also take a professional preparation class, such as the Princeton Review or Kaplan, which start at about $199, or study on their own or with a tutor using the following:

- **Practice tests.** *Preparing for the ACT* is free in the school guidance office or at www.ACTStudent.org/pdf/preparing.pdf.

- **Free online test preparation.** Go to www.number2.com. Click **Free ACT Prep**. Or go to www.march2success.com.

- **Comprehensive test preparation books** such as *The Real ACT Prep Guide* (about $20) and *Kaplan ACT* (about $19).

Advanced Placement (AP) Exams

Purpose of tests: Students who have enrolled in AP courses in high school may take the standardized AP exams for those classes. These exams are designed to assess whether high school students have achieved college-level mastery in a given subject area. Colleges grant college credit to students, if they get a score designated by the college.

Age given: Usually 11th and 12th grades.

What the tests measure: Achievement levels in the 19 subject areas covered by AP courses.

Testing dates and times: Various dates in May. Each exam lasts two to three hours.

Registration: Contact the school's AP coordinator in mid-February to sign up. If students are taking an AP course online, by correspondence, or as a homeschooler, they should call the AP coordinator at (888) 225-5427 for registration information because the AP test must be taken at a school facility.

Fee (2005): $82 per exam.

Fee waivers: Students with demonstrated need should contact their AP coordinator about a waiver by March 1. The College Board will reduce the fee by $22; most schools will waive an additional $8. In addition, most states offer subsidies to cover all or part of the cost. Information on each state is offered at apcentral.collegeboard.com. Click **THE EXAMS,** and then click **Federal and State AP Exam Fee Assistance.**

Testing accommodations: The College Board has a Common Eligibility form that students with disabilities can use for the AP, PSAT/NMSQT, and SAT tests. Students complete and submit this once during high school (unless they change schools). Counselors have the required forms.

The form requires documentation of the disability by a qualified diagnostician. The existence of an IEP or 504 plan does not guarantee that the student will be eligible for accommodations. Ideally, students would start working on the application about six months ahead of the test date. For complete information go to www.collegeboard.com/testing. Under **Tools,** click **Students with Disabilities.**

Scoring: Scores range from 1–5. Each college sets its own standard for credit, ranging from 3–5.

Web site: Go to www.collegeboard.com/testing. Click **AP.**

> ### 📖 Preparing for AP exams
>
> For a list of free preparation tips and materials for sale:
>
> Go to www.collegeboard.com/testing. Click **AP**, and then click **Preparing**.

College Level Examination Program (CLEP)

Purpose of tests: Given at approximately 3,000 four-year colleges, these exams are designed to assess whether incoming students have achieved college-level mastery in a given subject area. Colleges grant college credit or waive entry-level college classes for students, if they get a score designated by the college.

What the tests measure: Achievement levels in English composition and literature, foreign languages, history and social sciences, science, math, and business.

Testing dates: Given throughout the year. Exact dates vary with the test center or college.

Registration: Inquire about registration at the college before the school year starts or find a test center online. Go to www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/reg.html. To register online, go to www.collegeboard.com/testing. Click **CLEP,** and then click **Registration.**

Fee: $70 ($55 for each test, plus $15 for administration. *Note:* The administration fee may vary with each college.)

Fee waivers: Not available. Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds may be available for youth formerly in foster care for these tests. Contact your state or regional Chafee IL coordinator. (See Appendix A on page 151.)

Testing accommodations: Students with disabilities should inquire at the college *several months in advance of the test date*. Each college test center sets its own deadline for submitting documentation.

Scoring: Scaled scores range from 20–80.

Web site: Go to www.collegeboard.org/testing. Click **CLEP.**

📖 Preparing for the CLEP

- For sample questions, go to www.collegeboard.org/testing. Click **CLEP**, and then click **Preparing**.
- For complete sample tests (about $20), go to www.petersons.com. Click **Site Map** at the bottom of the page, and scroll down to **Prepare for Tests**. Click **CLEP.**

EXPLORE

Purpose of test: This pre-ACT assessment gives students feedback on their academic strengths and weaknesses while they're still in middle school.

Age given: 8th grade.

What the test measures: English, reading, math, and science knowledge and skills. The test also includes a career interest inventory and information on making a transition from high school to college.

Testing dates and times: Given once a year at the school's convenience. The test is given during the school day and takes two hours.

Registration: Only certain schools offer this exam; ask at the school guidance office.

Fee (2005): Approximately $9 per student; some schools do not charge the students.

Fee waivers: Inquire at the school guidance office.

Testing accommodations: These are based on accommodations listed in the student's IEP or 504 plan. Work with the student's school and the testing school several weeks ahead of the test date to ensure that accommodations are met.

Scoring: Scores range from 1–25.

Web site: Go to www.act.org/explore.

Placement tests for two- and four-year colleges and training programs

Purpose of tests: Two- and four-year colleges and some career and technical training programs give placement tests (such as ASSET, ACCUPLACER, and COMPASS) to determine if students are ready for postsecondary work or if they first need remedial courses.

What the tests measure: Most test skills levels in reading, math, and written language. Some include an advanced math assessment that tests skills in geometry and basic, intermediate, and college algebra.

Testing dates and times: Some schools may require one or more of these tests when the student applies. They're frequently given to incoming students during orientation, but inquire at the school for exact dates. The tests may last two or more hours. Some tests may be taken online.

Registration: When students apply at the postsecondary school, they should ask about placement tests.

Fees: Variable. Ask at the college regarding the cost of each test.

Fee waivers: Inquire at the school. Education and Training Voucher funds may be available for youth formerly in foster care for these tests. Inquire with your state or regional Chafee IL coordinator. (See Appendix A on page 151.)

Testing accommodations: Inquire at the college or training program two to three months in advance of the test date.

Scoring: Each school sets its own standards. When taking a test online, students can generally get their scores immediately.

Web site: Look for placement exam information on the school's Web site.

📖 Preparing for placement tests

Students can inquire at the college or training program about taking practice tests in 11th grade. If the college or training program doesn't offer practice tests, students can practice using online versions of such common tests as the ASSET, ACCUPLACER, or COMPASS.

- **ASSET.** For test information and some practice questions, download *The Asset Student Guide*. Go to www.act.org/asset/pdf/guide.pdf.

- **ACCUPLACER.** *The ACCUPLACER Online Student Guide* gives test information and sample test questions. Go to http://cpts.accuplacer.com/docs/StudentGuide.html.

- **COMPASS.** To check out test information on COMPASS/ESL, go to www.act.org/compass. Click **Sample Questions** for practice in math, reading, and writing. You can also download practice questions in prealgebra, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry, as well as additional reading and writing skills.

PLAN

Purpose of test: This assessment serves as a practice test for taking the ACT and gives students feedback on their academic skills.

Age given: 10th grade.

What the test measures: English, math, reading, and science. It also includes a career interest inventory, and college and scholarship information related to the student's interests.

Testing dates: Typically the PLAN is given in the fall, but the exact date is determined by the school.

Registration: Only certain schools offer this test. Ask the school's guidance office if it is offered.

Fee (2005): Approximately $6; some schools pay for the test.

Fee waivers: Ask the school guidance office.

Testing accommodations: These are based on accommodations in the student's IEP or 504 plan.

Scoring: Scores range from 1–32.

Web site: Go to www.act.org/plan.

PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test)

Purpose of test: Pretest for the SAT and qualifying test for the National Merit Scholarships. After taking the test, students have free, online access to answers to every test question, additional practice for the SAT, and information on careers, majors, and colleges. Students who score within a certain range will qualify to enter the National Merit Scholarship competition (www.nationalmerit.com).

Age given: 11th grade.

What the test measures: Analytical and problem-solving skills in math, reading, and written language; similar to the SAT Reasoning Test.

Testing dates: Given once per year, usually in October.

Registration: Contact the school counselor in early September of the 11th grade.

Fee (2005): $12 (schools may charge an additional administrative fee.)

Fee waivers: Schools are allotted a limited number of fee waivers; youth in foster care are eligible. They should contact the school counselor in early September of their junior year if they need a waiver.

Testing accommodations: See "Testing accommodations" under AP tests on page 62.

Scoring: On a scale of 20–80 for each section. The average section score for juniors is 49. The total score, called the Selection Index, ranges from 60–240, with an average of 147.

Web site: Go to www.collegeboard.com/testing. Click **PSAT/NMSQT.**

SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test)

Purpose of test: Admissions test for many four-year colleges and universities, and some career and technical training programs. Some schools require only the SAT Reasoning Test.

Age given: 11th and 12th grades.

What the test measures:

- SAT Reasoning Tests: analytical and problem-solving skills in math, reading comprehension, and written language (including an essay).

- SAT Subject Tests: knowledge of subject areas (English, history, social studies, math, science, and foreign languages).

Registration: Sign up by mail or online approximately six weeks before the test date. Applications are available in the school guidance office.

Testing dates and times: Reasoning Tests are given seven times per year, on Saturday mornings. (If students need to request exceptions, direct them to the Web site). Subject Tests are given six times per year, also on Saturday mornings. For exact dates and times, visit the Web site or get the *SAT Registration Booklet* from the school guidance office. Tests last approximately four hours and 15 minutes. Students may take the test as many times as they want.
Go to www.collegeboard.com/testing. Under **SAT & Subject Tests,** click **Calendar.**

Fees (2005): SAT Reasoning Test—$41.50; SAT Subject Tests—basic fee of $19 plus $8 per test. (Usually three subject tests are required.)

Fee waivers: A household of one with an income of $17,224 and under qualifies for a waiver. Youth in foster care usually qualify as household of one. Guidance counselors can help students apply for the waiver. Go to www.collegeboard.com. Click **For Students.** Under **College Board Tests,** click **SAT.** Click **Calendar & Fees,** and then click **Fee Waivers.**

Testing accommodations: See "Testing accommodations" under AP tests on page 62.

Scoring: The scale ranges between 200–800 for each of the SAT Reasoning Tests. In 2004, the average SAT total score was 1026. (This does not include the writing section, which was first given in 2005. Average scores for this section are not yet available.) Average scores for the SAT Subject Tests vary widely for each subject.

All scores are sent to the colleges and scholarship programs selected by the student. However, some colleges will use the student's best test score, even if they are from tests taken at different times.

Web site: Go to www.collegeboard.org.

📖 Preparing for the SAT

Students can take a professional preparation class, such as the ones offered by the Princeton Review or Kaplan, which start at about $199, or they can study on their own or with a tutor using the following:

Practice tests

- Practice the test online including the essay question, with scoring and answers.

  Go to www.collegeboard.com/testing. Under **SAT & Subject Tests**, click **SAT Preparation**.

- Or get the *SAT Preparation Booklet*, available in high school guidance offices.

Tips and strategies for SAT Subject Tests

Go to www.collegeboard.com/testing. Under **SAT & Subject Tests**, click **SAT Subject Tests Learning Center**.

Free online test preparation

- Go to www.number2.com. Click **Free SAT Prep**.

- Go to www.march2success.com.

Comprehensive test preparation books

The Official New SAT Study Guide, College Board (about $20); *The New SAT— 2005 Edition*, Kaplan (about $19); *New SAT Prep Kit*, ARCO (about $30).

State high school exit exams

Purpose of tests: To determine whether the student has met the state's standards in given subjects and qualifies for a high school diploma. As of 2004, 20 states had exit exams; five more plan to have them by 2009. In several other states, it is a school district's decision to require exit exams for graduation. To find out if your state has an exit exam, ask at the school or go to www.ctredpol.org/highschoolexit.

Some states requiring exit exams still give diplomas to students who fail the exam, or states may offer alternative ways to get a secondary education completion credential—a lower-status diploma, a GED (General Educational Development), an exam waiver, an alternative assessment, or scores on SAT or ACT. All states offer opportunities to retake the exam, and some states allow students to retake the exam after 12th grade. Remediation courses may be available to students before retesting.

Age given: Varies by state and district. Some states give the test for the first time in 10th grade. Students may take the exam before their senior year.

What the tests measure: Varies with the state. Competency in language arts and math (usually including algebra and geometry and, in some cases, statistics and trigonometry). Social studies and science may also be tested.

Testing dates: Varies with the state. Some states offer the test every two months throughout the school year.

Registration: Contact the school guidance office.

Fees (2005): No test fees. There may be fees for remediation classes for students preparing to retake the exam.

Fee waiver: Chafee IL funds may be available for remediation classes for students who do not pass the exam. (See Appendix A on page 151.)

Testing accommodations: All states allow students with disabilities to use testing accommodations as specified by state guidelines. Some states allow students to earn a regular diploma through alternatives to the exam, and others grant students with disabilities an alternative kind of diploma. For youth needing testing accommodations because of disabilities, make sure the IEP or 504 plan notes the kind of disability-related accommodations required.

Some states will also allow English Language Learners (ELL) special testing accommodations based on their language needs.

Scoring: Varies according to the test the state uses. Most states have initial pass rates of between 65 percent and 85 percent.

Web site: Go to the Center on Education Policy at www.ctredpol.org/highschoolexit. Scroll down to the report **"State High School Exit Exams: A Maturing Reform."**

Recommendation #5

Support Students in Choosing, Applying for, and Enrolling in Postsecondary Education

Recommendation #5: Support Students in Choosing, Applying for, and Enrolling in Postsecondary Education

For students choosing a postsecondary program, applying for admission and then enrolling requires attention to timelines and completion of tasks on top of their regular schoolwork and other obligations. It involves serious self-assessment, wide-ranging research of options, and a commitment to moving on to new challenges, both educational and social. Students need strong practical and emotional support during this process, whether they're considering a four-year college or a short-term technical program.

College students speak out

On choosing a school

"Visit the institutions with the student. Help them fill out the paperwork. Let them know what you did and how you handled college. Share your own experiences."
—Zoe, Winona State University

"Find out which universities the youth is considering. Help them obtain applications and just go kind of step-by-step in showing them how to apply for college."
—Rachael, University of Northern Iowa

"Make a list of possible colleges that could be beneficial for the student and help them write out what they like or don't like. Picking a school can be a really difficult decision."
—Cherish, State University of West Georgia

STRATEGY # 1

Discuss with students the wide range of postsecondary education and training opportunities

Too often students drift into a postsecondary program without having explored—or at least become aware of—the variety and scope of education and training programs.

Help students understand the different academic choices

- **Four-year universities** offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees, have a research focus, and a large choice of majors. They may have graduate students teaching some of the undergraduate classes.

- **Four-year colleges** offer a liberal arts curriculum. They offer more faculty-to-student interaction (often including smaller class sizes) than do universities.

- **Professional and career colleges,** including two- and four-year colleges, offer very specialized curricula in a given career field, such as fine arts, music, nursing, pharmacy, engineering, computer sciences, and so on.

- **Community and two-year colleges** offer certification and two-year associate's degree programs, which include both training in particular skills areas and the first two years of a liberal arts curriculum.

- **Technical training programs** lead to certification in a particular skill, such as cosmetology, nursing assistantship, computer repair, and others. These programs are generally shorter than those of two-year college career programs.

- **Apprenticeships** combine on-the-job training and classroom instruction in specific skills, such as welding, carpentry, plumbing, and other trades.

- **Colleges for students with disabilities** include such colleges as Landmark College for students with learning disabilities and Gallaudet College for those with hearing impairments.

Help students understand the social and cultural differences in programs

- **Public versus private schools**
  - Public schools, funded by state governments, are generally cheaper for in-state students than private schools and offer an admissions advantage to state residents.
  - Private schools rely on tuition, grants, endowments, and a variety of private sources for their funding. They generally cost more than public schools, and some have more selective admissions standards; many, however, offer generous scholarships.

- **Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).** More than 100 postsecondary schools have African American student majorities. In these schools, African Americans are also well represented in the faculty and administration, and African American studies are offered. These schools are public or private, small or large, urban or rural, and may either be very selective or have open admissions. Although only 18 percent of African American postsecondary students attend these schools, they account for more than one-third of African American college graduates.

- **Hispanic-serving colleges.** At least 25 percent of the students are Hispanic at these colleges, thereby creating a strong Hispanic campus culture.

- **Tribal colleges.** Located primarily on reservations but also in some cities, tribal colleges offer two- and sometimes four-year degrees, certificate programs, and college-preparatory and remedial classes. The language, culture, and history of the tribe(s) associated with the college are a central part of the college curriculum.

- **Single-sex schools.** Few all-male colleges still exist, but a number of all-women colleges continue to thrive. These colleges graduate more women with degrees in math and science, and more women go on to graduate school from them than from coed schools. They also count among their alumnae high percentages of women in Congress and women employed in traditionally male-dominated professions.

📖 Exploring postsecondary schools and programs

These resources give an introduction to different types of postsecondary options. Be sure also to look at the resources listed on pages 79–81.

- **Compare different programs.**

  Go to www.princetonreview.com/college/. To the left of the screen, click **Advice**, and then scroll down to **Specific School Types**.

- **"Is a Historically Black College or University Right for You?"** Go to www.princetonreview.com/college. Click **Advice**, and then scroll down to **Specific School Types**.

- **For information on the benefits of community colleges.** Visit www.collegeanswer.com. Click on the **Selecting** tab, and then click **Identify Your Criteria**. Click **Types of Schools**, and then click **Community Colleges**.

- *I Am Somebody: College Knowledge for the First-Generation Campus Bound,* Anna Leider. (About $10.) Addressed especially to students who don't think of college as an option, this book clarifies admissions and financial aid.

- **Preparing for College: An Online Tutorial** for students with disabilities explains how to choose types of degrees and schools, consider accommodations, and use technology to maximize students' participation in a postsecondary curriculum.

  Go to www.washington.edu/doit. Click the **search** tab, and then type the title.

- *African American Students' Guide to College: Getting In, Staying In, and Graduating,* Marisa Parnham and Marnie Barrow. (About $10.) Helps students find out what schools offer, how to choose the right college, and get accepted. Available from online booksellers.

Help students match postsecondary programs with their goals and skills

During their junior year in high school, students need to start researching their postsecondary options seriously. This process begins with self-assessment of their interests, goals, and values. Students then start selecting schools that match their preferences and qualifications, gradually paring down their list. No later than the fall of their senior year, they'll make visits, if possible, to the schools that interest them the most.

How to choose a postsecondary program

Step 1: Students assess themselves

Students identify their strengths and interests, their personal and career goals, and their cultural, social, and spiritual needs. (Ideally, students will have started this self-evaluation process in middle school.) On pages 19–21, we have listed some assessments for use in the early stages of college preparation that may also be helpful at this stage.

Step 2: Students list what they want in a college or training program

Based on their self-assessments, students need to identify the kind of college or training program they want, considering the following:

- **Kind and quality of academic program.** Students learn about two- or four-year colleges, career or technical training programs, highly selective or less selective schools, and so on.

- **School location.** For youth in foster care, this may be an especially important consideration. Unless young people are certain that they can receive support in an unfamiliar location, they may feel more confident and secure within a familiar community or region.

- **School size and ethnic makeup.** How large is the campus? What is the student body like?

- **School costs.** Students should be aware of available financial aid, including aid specifically for youth formerly in foster care. (See pages 108–117 for details.)

- **Availability of support.** Consider what resources and support services are available for youth formerly in foster care, students of color, first-generation college students, students with disabilities, and GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) students.

- **Campus life.** Lifestyle choices may include housing, part-time work, social and spiritual life, athletic programs, and other extracurricular activities.

- **Any other special features.** Is the preferred school single-sex or coed? Does it have a specific religious orientation?

Step 3: Students consider their own qualifications and how these match program requirements

Students next look at themselves and how their skills and achievements suit the schools they most prefer. Things to include:

- Their GPA and class rank

- Their SAT or ACT scores

- The courses they've taken

- Any special talents, qualities, or achievements

- Involvement in the school and community, including jobs and volunteering

Step 4: Students research a list of schools or programs that are attractive to them

Students may already be aware of schools or programs that match what they're looking for. They can also:

- Use one of the online matching programs, such as the College Board's College Matchmaker or Peterson's College Search. These programs give students a list of schools based on their preferences in categories such as type of school, location, campus life, admissions, costs, and financial aid.

- Go through one of the many print and online directories of postsecondary programs.

- Talk to high school counselors and use information centers in high school guidance offices.

- Meet with representatives at college fairs. (See page 31 for information on college fairs.)

- Communicate with current students in foster care or alumni, particularly recent graduates.

Step 5: Students narrow their list of schools

Students cut their list to five to ten schools or programs that appear to be a good match and explore these in depth. They may need adult guidance particularly with this step.

Step 6: Students get more detailed information on selected programs

Students contact admissions offices for information, visit school Web sites, take virtual tours if available, and talk to current students or alumni. Once students have narrowed their lists further—to three or four schools—they can try to schedule a campus visit for schools that are nearby. Chafee IL funds may be available to pay for this. (See Appendix A on page 151.)

> ### 📖 Information on specific postsecondary programs
>
> **Two- and four-year colleges and universities**
>
> - You can search on the Internet for any particular program by name.
> - To find colleges by region, cost, class size, and so on, go to www.mycollegeguide.org. Click **College Search,** and then specify the criteria.
> - Get one of the numerous print guides to U.S. colleges, such as *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*. ($25 to $30).
>
> **Community colleges**
>
> - For a listing of community colleges by state, go to www.community-college.org.
>
> **Career colleges, technical programs, and apprenticeships**
>
> - For information on career colleges and technical programs, go to www.college-finder.info.
> - To get an extensive list of apprenticeship training resources, go to www.khake.com, and then click **Apprenticeships**.
>
> **African American colleges**
>
> - For a list of African American colleges, including contact information, size, and cost, go to www.edonline.com.
>
>   Click **Black Colleges**, and then click **Alphabetical**.
> - The United Negro College Fund lists additional colleges and universities for African Americans and links to their home pages. Visit www.uncf.org and click **Member Colleges**.
> - ***Black Excel African American Student's College Guide,*** Isaac Black. (About $22.) This guide gives in-depth profiles of the Top 100 colleges for African American students, with scholarship lists, sample admissions essays, and more. Available from online booksellers.

📕 Information on specific postsecondary programs *(continued)*

Hispanic colleges

- ***The Latino Student's Guide to College Success,*** Leonard A. Valverde. (About $27.) This book includes an excellent chapter on "How to Choose a College," and a college directory that lists the top universities and community colleges in the United States that serve Latino students.

- To find Hispanic-serving colleges, go to www.chci.org. Point to **Education Center**, and then click **Educational Resources**. To the right of the screen, click **Hispanic-Serving Institutions**.

Native American colleges

- ***Journey to College*** is a highly recommended pamphlet on culturally embedded approaches to college preparation for American Indian students; it includes information on tribal colleges and tips for parents, elders, and youth. Call the American Indian Graduate Center for a free copy at (800) 628-1920.

- **The American Indian College Fund** Web site gives links to the 33 tribal colleges in the United States. Go to www.collegefund.org. Scroll to **Tribal Colleges**, and then click **Tribal College Map**.

- ***Winds of Change College Guide for American Indians*** lists 202 postsecondary schools that have a nucleus of American Indian students and success in graduating them.
  Go to www.wocmag.org for sample articles and to order the complete guide.

- ***Developing Your Vision while Attending College*** is a series of four excellent handbooks to help American Indian students plan for and choose a college. To download all four, go to www.collegefund.org/scholarships/guides.html.

Women's colleges

- For a list of all women's colleges in the United States, go to www.univsource.com/womens.htm. You can sort the list by **Type** or **State**.

GLBTQ resources

- ***The Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students' Guide to Colleges, Universities, and Graduate Schools.*** Jan-Mitchell Sherrill and Craig Hardesty profile 179 institutions, noting campus goodwill toward homosexual and bisexual students. (About $22.)

- **The American University Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Ally Resource Center** gives guidance to all youth on finding a comfortable college climate. Go to www.american.edu/ocl/glbta. Click **Prospective Students**, and then click the **How to Choose a College** tab.

📖 Information on specific postsecondary programs *(continued)*

Guides to schools for students with disabilities

- **Post-ITT** has a good series of activities that help students to compare the disability support services at various schools. Go to www.PostITT.org. Click **Enter**, and then click **Enter as Visitor**. Click **Guidance Activities**, and then click **Section 5: Accessing Support at College**.

- **"Selecting a College for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)"** is available at www.heath.gwu.edu. Click **Publications**, and then click **Fact Sheets**.

- *Learning How to Learn: Getting into and Surviving College When You Have a Learning Disability,* J. Cobb. The author, a successful former student with a learning disability (LD), provides numerous tips on college preparation and college success and includes a guide to LD-friendly colleges and universities. To get a copy, go to www.cwla.org/pubs.

Matching a student to a college

Here are some good tools to help students narrow their choices:

- Go to www.foothill.edu/fac/shaner/sab. Click **How to Choose a College**, and then scroll down and click **College Choice Worksheet**.

- Go to www.collegeboard.com. Click **For Students**, and then, under **College Quick Finder**, click **College Matchmaker**.

- For a checklist to help students decide if a community college is for them, go to www.aspireoregon.org. Click **Students & Families**, under **Exploring Your Options**, click **Postsecondary Options**, click **Community Colleges Today**, and then click **What to Consider When Deciding Whether to Attend a Community College**.

Learning from the research: What works for low-income college students

A 2004 Pell Institute study of 20 four-year universities found that those with high graduation rates among low-income students offered the following:

- An admissions policy that was "modestly selective," admitting students with at least a C average and "decent" ACT or SAT scores.

- Financial aid for high achievers

- Focused educational planning for students

- A rural or small-town location

- Small classes

- Activities for residential students

- Shared cultural values within the college

- A dedicated, accessible faculty

- Special advising and academic programs

- Innovative support programs for freshmen, remedial courses to develop students' skills to college level, and other specific policies and programs aimed at keeping students in school.[22]

Also, for first-generation college students, especially those from foster care, choosing a school with a structured first-year support program is considered a key factor in completing their education. These programs are labeled in various ways—First-Year Experience Programs, Summer Bridge Programs, Intrusive Advising and Mentoring, Freshman Seminars, Learning Communities, and so on. Equal Opportunity Programs (EOPs) are especially successful in helping students weather the first year and continue to graduation. Also, a growing number of schools are creating programs specifically for students formerly in foster care. To find out if a school offers such a program, check the school's Web site or ask at the admissions office, office of special or support services, or office of minority affairs.

Make the most of college visits

Before going on a campus visit, students should contact the admissions office to find out about campus tours and make an appointment with an admissions counselor and a financial aid counselor. They should also make an appointment with the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), if there is one on campus. EOPs are an outstanding source of support for students of color, first-generation students, and independent students.

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22 Muraskin, L., Lee, J., Wilner, A., & Swail, W. (2004). *Raising the Graduation Rates of Low-Income College Students.* Washington, DC: The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. Retrieved December 08, 2005, from http://www.pellinstitute.org/gradrates/Pell_Web.pdf

If the school is too far away to visit in person, students can schedule interviews with alumni or have a phone interview with a college admissions counselor. Many school Web sites also offer virtual tours.

As students plan college visits, talk with them about how to make the most of their visit. They should know what to look for, questions to ask, how to dress appropriately, and what information about themselves they need to bring along. If possible, an adult, such as the caregiver or academic mentor, should accompany the student on campus visits or participate in phone conferences.

What to look for in a campus visit

A tour should include visits to classrooms, dining halls, dorm rooms, recreational and sports facilities, and libraries. Students should try to pick up a copy of the campus newspaper, talk to students about campus life, look at the course catalog, and attend a class or two, if possible. Some schools arrange for prospective students to spend a night in a dorm.

Questions to ask of an admissions counselor or on a tour

- Does the school have a structured support program for first-year students or for students from foster care?
- What is the faculty-to-student ratio? What are class sizes, particularly for freshmen?
- Are faculty accessible to students? Do they have regular office hours? Do they teach basic classes?
- Are there mechanisms in place for creating smaller communities within the larger campus?
- What kind of computer access is available for students?
- What does the school do to keep students safe? Is security a problem on the campus?
- What are the school's strongest areas of study? Do they offer classes and programs the student is interested in?
- What advising and academic support services are available?
- How many students live on campus?
- How many students finish in the expected time (for example, get a bachelor's degree in four years)? What percentage of students graduate from their college?
- How diverse is the student body?

Additional questions to ask at a career and technical training program or college

- What kind of certificate or license is given at the end of the program?

- What two- and four-year colleges accept credits from the program?

- What are the instructors' qualifications?

- What percentage of students graduate from the program?

- What is the job-placement rate of graduates, and what are their starting salaries?

Questions to ask the financial aid counselor at all schools and programs

- What is the total cost of the program?

- What kinds of financial aid are available?

- Are they familiar with financial aid for students from foster care, such as tuition waivers, scholarships, or Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs)?

- For how many years can students be assured financial assistance?

- Does the school require any financial aid forms other than the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)?

Questions to ask for students with disabilities at all schools and programs

- How does a student request services? What documentation is required and who determines if the services can be provided?

- Are classrooms, dorms, dining halls, libraries, and stadiums accessible?

- What kind of accommodations will be provided? (For example, can students use guide dogs, personal-care aides, or interpreters? Are ITT and books on tape available?)

- Are tutoring services available, and is there a fee?

- Is there any flexibility in the admissions criteria for students with a learning disability?

📖 Resources for college interviews and visits

- **"College Interview Tips"** gives a list of questions commonly asked of students, tips on scheduling an interview, advice on how to dress, and so on.

  Go to: www.collegeapps.about.com. In the **search** box in the upper-right screen, type *interview tips*.

- For a **"Campus Visit Checklist,"** go to www.collegeboard.com/apply. Click **Find a College**, and then point to **College Visits**. Scroll to **Plan Your Visit**, and then click **Campus Visit Checklist.**

Disclosure of disability

By law, high schools cannot release any information to postsecondary schools about a student's disability without a signed release from the student (if 18 years of age or older) or from the student's parent or guardian (if the student is under age 18). It is up to the student to decide whether to disclose a disability, either when they apply or after admission. Many students with learning disabilities make the mistake of waiting until they are behind in their coursework to disclose their disability and seek help. This is often too late.

For a good discussion of disclosure and what it involves, go to www.postitt.org/studentcourse.

STRATEGY #3

Help students submit a strong application

Early in the fall of their senior year, students should begin to apply to schools. School admissions policies vary greatly, from schools with open admissions, which admit everyone who has the basic qualifications on a first-come, first-served basis, to very selective schools that have only a limited number of spots for a large pool of highly qualified applicants.

Selective schools look at courses taken and the rigor of the courses, teacher and counselor recommendations, grades and class rank, essays and responses to application questions, personal interviews, extracurricular activities, admissions test results, special talents and skills, and so on. If students are applying to four-year colleges with selective admissions, they should identify at least three to five schools, including one as a "safety" school where their chances of getting in are good.

In this strategy we list the steps in the application process and suggest how mentors and caregivers can help students stay on track in this challenging, sometimes confusing, process. Review these steps with the students, make sure they understand each step, and check in with students regularly on their progress throughout the fall of their senior year. The checklist in Appendix B on page 155 is a good guide to help students with the application process.

Step 1: Gather application forms

Encourage students to download college application forms and guidelines or to have these mailed by the colleges they are applying to—no later than September of their senior year.

Students need to find out whether the schools have their own forms or use the Common Application form. There are 276 four-year schools that accept the Common Application (www.commonapp.org), although some of these may require supplemental information. Other four-year schools, community colleges, and career and technical programs have their own application forms.

Step 2: Get a calendar and mark on it all application pre-deadlines and deadlines

Dates include registering for admissions tests and test taking, submitting essays and school applications, requesting and sending letters of recommendation and transcripts, sending forms for financial aid, and other tasks.

Step 3: Set up an application filing system

Students should keep a file containing all college information, copies of applications as they complete them, and financial aid information.

Step 4: Take (or retake) required admissions tests and make sure scores are sent to schools

For information about admissions tests, see pages 60–69.

Step 5: Prepare the application

- **Write the college essay.** Make sure an adult proofreads any essays (without crossing ethical boundaries by giving too much help). Sometimes the student's English teacher will help with this.

How the applicant overcame adversity to succeed in school and establish college and career aspirations may be a very appropriate and compelling subject for the essay.

- **Complete the application form.** Make sure all questions are answered. Strongly suggest that students have at least one adult check their application for accuracy and completeness before they submit it, whether online or by mail.

- **Ask for letters of recommendation and make sure these are submitted on time.** Students should mark on their calendars a date early in the fall for getting teachers to write recommendations, a follow-up date to check that teachers have written them, and a final date to make sure they've sent them. It is a courtesy for the student to give the teacher a self-addressed stamped envelope in which to mail the recommendation.

- **Have the high school send a certified transcript to all schools by the deadline.** Students should check several weeks ahead of time to see how long it will take the school to do this and allow plenty of time.

Step 6: Submit all completed applications on time

- Discuss with the student how to pay the college application fees—the average fee is about $25, although some schools charge up to $60, and some have no fees. Fee waivers are usually available to students with financial need; they should check with the school's Web site or admissions office about application fee waivers. Chafee IL funds may also be available to pay fees for youth in foster care. (See Appendix A on page 151.)

- When students are ready to submit their applications, suggest they keep copies for their application files.

- If they mail their applications using regular mail, suggest they request a return receipt.

- Encourage students to call or e-mail colleges to make sure they received the complete application, including recommendations, transcripts, and test scores. Some colleges have a link on their Web site where students can check the status of their applications.

Step 7: Attend any required interviews

Some schools may require interviews with alumni of the schoool or other persons.

Step 8: Submit all financial aid applications as early as possible

Help students complete the FAFSA and apply for Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) and other scholarships by January. For details on the financial aid application process, see pages 101–105.

- **The College Board** has a good, straightforward guide to the application process. It gives information on how to download application forms and submit them online, write essays, and so on. Go to www.collegeboard.com, Click **For Students**, and then click **Apply to College**. Click **The Application**.

- **College Zone** has a good, one-page checklist and an accompanying financial aid checklist. Go to www.collegezone.com. Click **Publications**, and then click **Financial Aid**. Click **College Selection/Financial Aid Checklist**.

- College preparation **TRIO** programs, such as **GEAR UP, Upward Bound,** and **Talent Search** can help students apply. (See pages 31–33.)

- **For tips on writing a college essay** and some sample essays, go to www.collegeboard.com/apply. Click **Essay Skills**.

- **Post-ITT Guidance Activities and Senior Checklist** is geared to students with disabilities. Visit www.postitt.org/studentcourse/index.htm. Click **Guidance Activities**.

STRATEGY #4

Assist students in making acceptance decisions and enrolling

The student's mentor or caregiver can help the student make a decision and conclude the application and admissions process.

Make a decision about what to do next

Students who have difficulty deciding between schools or programs could make a list of the pros and cons of each. If the schools are close by, help arrange for another tour that includes visiting classes, talking with current students who share similar interests, and perhaps spending a night in a dorm.

Another deciding factor may be the financial aid offered. Evaluating the financial aid package is crucial for students who have been accepted at a school. The aid offered will be detailed in the award letter. See page 107 for information on award letters.

Students who are wait-listed can enroll in schools where they have been accepted. Or they can hope they will be admitted off the wait list of their preferred school and start looking for other schools or programs in the meantime. These students will need some extra encouragement.

Students who have not been accepted anywhere will also need extra support, and particularly some concrete problem-solving. This may be a time when youth in foster care especially may be tempted to give up. Instead, here are several options:

- Send the student to their school guidance counselor for some direction.
- Suggest that the student look for a college or program with rolling admissions (as described on page 86).
- Suggest that the student apply to a community college or another program with open admissions and then plan to transfer to a four-year school later.
- Suggest that the student contact the admissions office to appeal the decision.
- Stay in touch with the student!

Respond to letters of acceptance and finish enrolling

- Remind students of the importance of replying immediately to the school they plan to attend. They should also write a letter accepting the financial aid package. (See page 107 for more on accepting financial aid.)
- It's courteous for students to send prompt letters of regret to the schools where they've been accepted but will not be attending.
- Make sure students complete any required enrollment forms for the school they plan to attend.
- Be sure students who plan to live on campus apply promptly for housing. Sometimes housing is made available on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Make sure the student sends in enrollment and housing deposits. Chafee IL funds may cover this if scholarship monies are not yet available. School financial aid counselors may also have information about how to cover these costs.
- Help the student get adequate health insurance through Medicaid (see page 90), the school, or a private plan. Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) can be used to purchase private health insurance. Also, if students are still on Medicaid coupons, remind them of the date these expire in their state or county and plan for providing another form of coverage at that time.
- Make sure students sign up for and attend summer bridge or new student orientation programs. These usually take place over the summer or at the beginning of the school year and often provide free housing.

- Direct students to Internet resources about campus life—how to study, living with roommates, and making the most of the experience. (See page 139.)

- Remind students to check with their school about when they need to register for courses. They may not realize that registration could take place before the first day of classes.

- Refer to Recommendation #8, for other ways to help students over the summer as they make the transition to their postsecondary life. (See page 133.)

📖 Resources for enrolling in school

- **For advice on how to respond to acceptance and rejection letters.**
  Go to www.collegeboard.com/?student. Click **Apply to College**, and then click **The Letters Are In**.

- **Information on Medicaid.** Some states extend Medicaid to emancipated youth, while others do not. To find out about your state, go to www.nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd. Click **State by State**. Click your state name, and then click **Medicaid Option**.

- **See Appendix A on page 151**, for information on Chafee IL funds and Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) for postsecondary students.

- The **National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities** publishes a partial list of preenrollment programs for college students at www.heath.gwu.edu. In the **search** box, type *Summer Pre-College Programs*.

Help Students Apply for and Get Adequate Financial Aid

Recommendation #6: Help Students Apply for and Get Adequate Financial Aid

College or a postsecondary training program may seem beyond the financial reach of many youth in foster care who face emancipation from the foster care system with limited prospects for economic independence. However, with proper planning and support, students from foster care can combine financial aid awards from a number of sources to pay the full cost of attendance for most programs. It has been reported that half of all undergraduates who may have been eligible for federal money didn't receive any for one reason—they didn't apply.

The financial aid process is complex and confusing. Educating students from foster care about their financial aid opportunities is critical, as is timely planning and continuous guidance every step of the way.

College students speak out

On financial aid

"Get students to start filling out scholarship and Chafee ETV applications their junior year so it's not such a shock…. Make sure they can find all tax forms and other information necessary to apply for financial aid ahead of time."

—Kim, Louisiana State University

"The best way to understand financial aid is to go to the Web site www.fafsa.ed.gov. It explains all about the different types of financial aid available. Also, the Upward Bound program is another good financial aid source. You should help students apply for the FAFSA as close to the beginning of the year as possible."

—Rachael, University of Northern Iowa

STRATEGY # 1

Make sure students have a mentor to help them apply for financial aid

Young adults are not expected to apply for postsecondary financial aid by themselves—parents, relatives, and counselors usually help. Students from foster care are no different. They, too, need a trusted, knowledgeable adult to help, a mentor. Students who try to go it alone could assume unnecessary loan debt, leave school early because of inadequate financial resources and stress, or not be able to go at all because they couldn't pull together enough money.

A dedicated mentor is not expected to be an expert financial aid counselor, but should be generally knowledgeable about financial aid and skilled at guiding a student. For suggestions about how to identify a mentor and ideas about what community organizations might be a source of mentors, see pages 26–28.

If a student cannot find a suitable mentor, assistance can also come from high school counselors, caregivers, and college financial aid counselors (even when the student is in the application stage). Many community organizations offer such assistance to first-generation or under-represented college applicants. In addition, every postsecondary education and training program has financial aid professionals who are experts at putting together student financial aid packages. Some even have a single person dedicated to students from foster care who is an expert at meeting their unique financial needs.

Common financial aid myths debunked

As the College Board notes, "Literally billions of dollars in financial aid is available to those who need help paying for college. Yet lots of misinformation clouds the facts about what type of aid is available and who is eligible." Here's our take on their discussion as it applies to students from foster care.

"College is just too expensive for me to attend." A college education is more affordable than people think. The EdFund reports that students from foster care may have as much as $17,000 per year available from federal and state sources without loans. (See page 110 for a breakdown.) In addition, there are private scholarships and tuition waivers available for some students. (See page 108.) And when students consider that college graduates may earn an average of $20,000 more annually than high school graduates, the cost of not going to college or a training program is alarmingly high.

"I don't have any financial support from my family, so I can't afford to go to college." Students are classified as "independent" if they can answer "yes" to the FAFSA question: "Are both of your parents deceased, or are you (or were you until age 18) a ward/dependent of the court?" Financial aid administrators take lack of family contributions into account as they develop the student's financial aid package. Independent students may qualify for additional or increased federal and state aid, and financial aid specifically for youth from foster care is available.

"There's less financial aid available than there used to be." In fact, student financial aid in 2002–2003 rose to a record level of more than $105 billion, as reported by the College Board.[23] With Chafee ETVs, tuition waivers, private scholarships targeting youth in foster care, state need-based grants, and Pell grants, students from foster care have more financial aid available to them than ever before.

"Private schools are too expensive for students from foster care." In fact, students from foster care may have a better chance of getting a scholarship because these schools may have more financial aid to offer low-income students. Private school financial aid counselors are experts in making sure their students have adequate funding.

"If I have to work, it will hurt my academic success." Students who juggle full-time work and full-time studies do struggle; but research shows that students who work a moderate amount (10–15 hours per week) often do better academically. Most schools offer on-campus jobs through work-study programs or paid internships, that not only help pay college costs and provide experience, but can also be a way to broaden a student's social network.

"If I apply for a loan, I have to take it." Students are not obligated to accept any loan awarded to them. In fact, loans should remain a last resort for students from foster care. Students and their mentors should always consult with the school's financial aid counselor before taking on any loan-based debt.

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23 CollegeBoard (2004). *Trends in college pricing 2004.* (Trends in Higher Education Series.) New York, NY: Author. Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/press/cost04/041264TrendsPricing2004_FINAL.pdf

A mentor can help the student to:

- Keep orderly online and paper financial aid information records.

- Review financial aid information presented by school and program Web sites and by handbooks offered through financial aid offices.

- Research scholarship possibilities, student loans, and all other kinds of financial aid.

- Look into or enroll in a college preparation outreach program such as Talent Search, Upward Bound, and GEAR UP. These programs typically also help students apply for financial aid. (For more on these programs, see pages 31–33.)

- Contact the financial aid counselors at all schools of interest no later than their senior year of high school. When students and mentors visit these schools or programs together, they should always meet with a financial aid counselor. If the programs are too far away to visit, students should set up phone conferences instead.

- Complete the FAFSA and other financial aid forms.

- Review the financial aid packages that schools offer.

You can help mentors fill their role:

- Give them a copy of this guide or direct them to resources recommended in this guide. Point out the checklist in Appendix B on page 155, which will help them keep track of financial aid timelines.

- Direct them to financial aid information and workshops at local high schools, community colleges, and universities.

- Partner new mentors with experienced mentors or financial aid professionals. Set up a regular time for mentors to get together or establish a way for them to communicate online.

📖 Finding a school's financial aid office on the Web

Search The SmartStudent Guide to Financial Aid's national directory to find the school's financial aid office. Go to www.finaid.org/otheraid/fao.phtml.

2

Help students explore their financial aid options

Exploring financial aid for a postsecondary education begins with finding out what the costs might be, researching the financial aid that may be available to cover these costs, and then building a financial plan that outlines anticipated expenses and how they will be covered.

Research the costs of a postsecondary education

The costs of going on to postsecondary education or training differ by state and institution, but national averages are shown in the table below:

Average Costs for College Attendance
(2004–2005)[24]

	Tuition & Fees	Books & Supplies	Room & Board	Trans- portation	Other/ Personal	Total
4-year public colleges						
Resident	$ 5,132	$853	$6,222	$ 774	$1,659	$14,640
Commuter	$ 5,132	$853	$6,177	$1,109	$1,943	$15,214
Out of state	$12,423	$853	$6,222	$774	$1,659	$21,931
4-year private colleges						
Resident	$20,082	$870	$7,434	$ 671	$1,238	$30,295
Commuter	$20,082	$870	$6,617	$1,031	$1,524	$30,124
2-year public colleges						
Commuter	$ 2,076	$773	$5,747	$1,146	$1,608	$11,350
Public career/technical programs						
Because these programs vary in length, tuition estimates are based on the number of credits the student takes each term. For example, a 12-credit term at one public technical college costs about $600. (Materials, tools, fees, and living expenses are extra.) That means tuition for a four-term year would cost about $2,400.						

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24 This table is based on the following resources:

- *Average College costs 2004–5.* (2005). *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *LII* (1), 32. Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://chronicle.com/weekly/almanac/2005/nation/0103203.htm

- College Board (2004).

> ### 📖 Resources for calculating total school costs
>
> - **To find the average undergraduate college costs in your state**, go to www.ed.gov. In the **search** box, type *average college costs*. Click **Think College Early: What Does College Cost?**, and then click your **state**.
>
> - **To get attendance costs for a specific school,** use the **College Quick Finder**. Go to http://apps.collegeboard.com/search/index.jsp. In the **search** box, type the school's name you're interested in. Or, click a letter to see a list and then find the school. Click **See Profile**, and then click **Cost & Financial Aid**.
>
> - If you cannot find a school on the **College Quick Finder**, try using the terms **costs, cost of attendance**, or **student budget** in a school's home page search engine to research financial aid options.

Help students research financial aid options

Here are some suggestions for helping students and their mentors learn about the full range of financial aid options:

Give students, mentors, and caregivers a copy of "The Basics of Scholarships, Vouchers, Waivers, and Grants" on page 108 of this guide. We've built a comprehensive list of scholarships and grants for under-represented college students, including students from foster care.

Encourage students to use the resources at their high schools—for example, attend high school college nights which can provide valuable information; all too often students from foster care do not attend because they lack parent support. Meet with the high school's counselor who specializes in college financial aid.

Encourage students to use the resources of the postsecondary school's financial aid office. They are the experts not only on federal aid (and the required Free Application for Federal Student Aid or FAFSA), but they also are knowledgeable about other grant, scholarship, work-study, and loan programs. Most colleges and training programs publish annual financial aid bulletins that list the different types of aid and how to apply for them.

Research scholarships thoroughly.

- Teach students how to use scholarship search engines that create lists of scholarships tailored to their personal profiles by screening thousands of scholarship sources.

- Talk to the experts to gather scholarship ideas—school financial aid counselors, county or state Independent Living (IL) workers, case managers, education foundations, or the state's higher education board's financial aid office.

> ### 📖 Financial aid resources
>
> - **Especially for Students, Portal for Student Aid,** provides information on all scholarships, loans, financial aid planning, and portals to all federal financial aid Web sites. Go to www.ed.gov/students. Click **Portal for Student Aid**, and then click the **Funding** tab.
>
> - **Fund Your Future, Student Financial Aid Brochures,** provides an overview of the major financial aid programs, including eligibility, how to apply, and deadlines. Go to www.edfund.org/students. In the **Financial Aid Planning** box, click **Publications**.
>
> - Refer students and mentors to a state's higher education office Web site to get information on scholarship or grant opportunities and programs that target students from foster care. Look for the **Financial Aid** or **Information for Students and Parents** option.
>
> **Need help with financial aid terms?**
>
> The financial aid field has its own vocabulary and acronyms. For a translation, try one of these Web sites:
>
> - View the College Board's Financial Aid Glossary at www.collegeboard.com/prof/counselors/pay/2.html.
>
> - The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) also has a glossary at www.nasfaa.org/SubHomes/DoItAffordIt/glossary.asp.

Build a postsecondary education budget

Once students have an idea of the expenses and how they might pay them, it's time to put together a financial plan that includes a detailed list of expenses and a sketch of the funding sources to cover them.

Students and their mentors can use average costs of postsecondary programs they're interested in as the starting point. Remember, however, that they'll need to develop a 12-month budget, not the academic year and nine-month plan that are usually listed.

One common myth about paying for college is that living on campus will be too expensive. However, students need to weigh the costs of commuting (gas, parking, car maintenance, and insurance) against the benefits of on-campus living, such as opportunities for work-study jobs and access to social and academic support. Also, dorm living may solve the acute housing needs of students from foster care, especially if there are options to live in dorms during breaks and over the summer.

Loans are another issue. Whenever possible, rely on aid that doesn't have to be repaid—scholarships, vouchers, waivers, and grants. In fact, loans should remain a last resort for students from foster care. Sometimes they are necessary, but students and

their mentors should always consult with the school's financial aid office before taking on any student loan debt.

The student should also consider a part-time (not a full-time) job, preferably on campus, or through the work-study program. Working on campus can actually be a factor in helping students stay in school.

Finally, the plan should include a backup—anticipating changes in student financial needs (which can happen suddenly), and considering alternative forms of financial aid.

As students get closer to choosing a school or program, they'll want to compare the total costs of attendance at several schools and make application decisions based in part on how all costs will be met, with or without loans.

📖 Financial aid planning

- **Cost of Attendance Comparison Worksheet.** Direct students and mentors to this detailed worksheet developed by financial aid professionals at www.nasfaa.org. Click the **Parents and Students** tab. Scroll down to **NASFAA Financial Aid Tools**, and then click **Cost of Attendance Comparison Worksheet**.

- **"Develop a Plan," "Types of Aid,"** and **"Financial Aid Resources."** These articles help students find money to pay for college or vocational training. They offer tips on how to apply, tools for organizing finances, and descriptions of the many ways to pay for education or training. Go to www.iseek.org. Click **plan your education**. Under **Explore and plan** to the left of the screen, click **Financial Aid**.

- **"Your Future, Your Education, Your Money."** This article is a useful source for financial aid and financial education information, including goal setting, understanding financial aid options, FAFSA, and information for mentors. Go to www.collegesummit.org/nefe/index.html.

- **"African Americans: Top Five Financial Aid Myths and How to Conquer Them."** This article dispels five common financial aid myths that may prevent students from accessing adequate college aid. Go to www.princetonreview.com. Enter the title in the **search** box, then click to read it.

- *Repaying Your Student Loans* (English and Spanish) is the official federal resource on how to pay back U.S. DOE student loans. Get a free copy from http://studentaid.ed.gov. Enter *Repaying Your Student Loan* in the **search** box.

3

Help students apply for financial aid, including scholarships

The process of applying for financial aid can be difficult—each application requires different information, has different deadlines to track, and must be completed accurately. All students will need to accomplish the following:

- Complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

- Apply for Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (Chafee ETVs).

- Submit any financial aid applications required by individual schools, any applications for state aid, and applications for private scholarships. Although the FAFSA and accompanying Student Aid Report (SAR) are the basic means of applying for financial aid, some programs require additional applications. Help students keep track of the deadlines for each of these and complete the forms.

Completing the FAFSA is the first step in applying for financial aid. It is required for federal, state, and school financial aid consideration, and even for most private scholarships, to determine the amount of aid the student may qualify for. All students from foster care who plan to attend a postsecondary education or training program must complete the FAFSA accurately and on time.

The FAFSA determines the amount families are expected to contribute toward the student's college expenses. Students who emancipate from foster care can be classified as "independent students," because they receive no parent financial support. This makes them eligible for increased aid, such as the maximum Pell grant, Chafee ETVs, some scholarships, and state need-based grants. Students will need to submit a renewal FAFSA each year they remain in school.

Here are the steps students need to take to submit an accurate, timely FAFSA and suggestions on how you, mentors, and caregivers can help.

Help students submit the FAFSA

Step 1: Mark all financial aid application deadlines on a calendar, and apply early

To help give structure to the application process and to keep on top of deadlines, encourage students to use financial aid checklists. We've included a couple of particularly useful checklists in the resources following this section, but when students

decide where they're going to apply, use the school's checklist (ask for it at financial aid offices, or find it on the school's Web site), as it will include the school's specific deadlines.

- **We recommend that students submit the FAFSA annually in January or early February,** but no later than June 30, the final deadline. Individual schools and states set their own financial aid deadlines, and some financial assistance is provided on a first-come, first-served basis. If the student's financial picture changes, the FAFSA can always be revised, but there are no exceptions to published FAFSA deadlines.

Step 2: Get a PIN at www.pin.ed.gov

The PIN (Personal Identification Number) is an electronic access code students will need to submit the FAFSA (and the annual renewal application), make FAFSA corrections, or request duplicate copies.

Help students set up a stable e-mail account so they can get their PIN and other FAFSA-related e-mail (such as a confirmation of submission).

When students receive their PIN, ask them to write it down and also give the number to someone they trust, such as their mentor or IL worker, but instruct them to keep it otherwise confidential. If students lose or forget their PIN, they won't be able to access their FAFSA, and applying for a new PIN is time-consuming.

Step 3: Collect the financial documents needed to apply

These include the student's Social Security number, W-2 forms and other records of money earned, most recent federal and state income tax returns, bank statements, and verification of independent student status (a letter from the state or county child welfare agency or social worker verifying that they were in state foster care).

Step 4: Complete the FAFSA form at www.fafsa.ed.gov

Go to www.fafsa.ed.gov, and click **Filling out A FAFSA**. File online if at all possible because it's the fastest way to file and it's easiest to amend if changes need to be made. Students can submit their FAFSA from any computer with Internet access.

- **Important:** Direct students to attend carefully to the FAFSA question in Step 3: "*Are both your parents deceased, or are you (or were you until age 18) a ward/ dependent of the court?*" Answering "yes" to this question allows the applicant to skip the section on family income and will establish the applicant as an "independent student."
- Help the student check the form carefully before submitting it. This will be most accurate if they check it on a printed version and then transfer corrections to the

online version. Use the checklist mentioned in the resources to avoid common errors.

- Make sure that students print hard copies of every document they complete online and keep this documentation in their financial aid file. It's not a bad idea to give an extra copy to their mentors as well.

Step 5: Review the Student Aid Report (SAR) and make any needed corrections

Within two weeks after students submit the FAFSA, they can expect the Student Aid Report (SAR), which states the amount of aid for which they are eligible. The Department of Education also sends the SAR to all schools the applicant designated on the FAFSA.

If the FAFSA information is complete, the **Expected Family Contribution (EFC)** will be printed in the upper right-hand corner of the SAR. This is the amount of money that families are expected to contribute to college expenses. Most applicants from foster care will be classified as independent students, and their EFC will be zero. The EFC also determines how much federal aid students are eligible for, and how schools will determine the students' total financial aid packages.

At this stage in the financial aid process, you can help students:

- Make sure they've received the SAR.
- Make sure they check the data summary on the SAR. If the information is not accurate, the student can make any needed changes to the FAFSA and submit it again for reprocessing.
- Make sure students keep a copy of the SAR.

Step 6: Contact the school's financial aid office

After students submit the FAFSA, they should make sure the schools have all the information they need to build a financial aid package.

Make sure students note the **Data Release Number (DRN)** in the bottom left-hand corner of the first page of the SAR. Having ready access to this number is important. The student will use this four-digit number if they need to change any SAR information by telephone. With student permission, schools can use the DRN to access the student's application information. The DRN is different from the PIN, which is the student's personal code and should not be shared with anyone (except perhaps a mentor).

- If asked, students can verify their independent student status by completing the Independent Federal Verification Worksheet. (They'll most likely need help doing this.) To see a sample of this form, go to www.fafsa.com/downloads/Verif/independent0304.pdf.

📖 FAFSA assistance

FAFSA completion sites

- The primary U.S. Department of Education FAFSA site is at www.fafsa.ed.gov.

- To apply for, reestablish, or request a duplicate PIN, go to www.pin.ed.gov.

Financial aid checklists

These checklists help students know what they need to do to apply for financial aid and to keep on top of deadlines.

- **National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.**

  Go to www.nasfaa.org. Click the **Parents & Students** tab. Scroll down to **NASFAA Financial Aid Tools**, and then click **Financial Aid Application Checklist**.

- **FinAid's SmartStudent Guide to Financial Aid.**
  Visit www.finaid.org/students/checklist.phtml.

Help completing the FAFSA

- **Free FAFSA application workshops** are often available at high schools, community colleges, and four-year colleges. To find one in your area, ask the high school guidance counselor or search the Internet by typing *FAFSA workshops* and the name of your city or state into a search engine.

- For **FAFSA assistance** with very helpful experts and short wait times, call: **(800) 433-3243 (800-4-FED-AID).**

- **College Goal Sunday** gives free, in-person professional help filling out the FAFSA application. To find a program in your area, go to www.collegegoalsundayusa.org. Click your state.

- **Avoiding common errors on the FAFSA** is a handy, thorough checklist to use before submitting the FAFSA. Go to www.finaid.org/fafsa/errors.phtml.

- *Completing the FAFSA* (English and Spanish) is a good introduction to the FAFSA for students and their advocates. Read online or download a copy at http://studentaid.ed.gov. Enter *Completing the FAFSA* in the **search** box.

- For reliable FAFSA information, tips, and links go to www.finaid.org/fafsa/fafsa.phtml.

Help students apply for a Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV)

All students from foster care, mentors, and their caregivers need to know about Chafee ETVs and each state's application process. Chafee ETVs can provide up to $5,000 per student per year for many youth currently in foster care youth who are participating in qualifying postsecondary education and training programs.

How students apply: Contact your local Chafee Independent Living (IL) coordinators or program for information on application procedures and deadlines in your state. Many states have their Chafee ETV applications available online. Students need to reapply each year to be considered for continuation of Chafee ETV funding.

For more information: See Appendix A on page 151 for more complete details about eligibility and resources for the Chafee ETVs.

> ### 📖 Chafee ETV contacts
>
> - **For a list of state IL coordinators** who will know about Chafee ETVs at the state level, go to www.nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd/resources/ilcoords.shtml.
> - **State Voucher National Site** provides Chafee ETV contact information for all states and offers information on other financial aid options, study skills, and career planning for several states. Go to www.statevoucher.org. Click your state.
> - **FYI3.com** provides general information on Chafee ETVs and tuition waivers. Go to www.fyi3.com/education/index.cfm.

Help students submit other applications for financial aid and private scholarships

Although the FAFSA and accompanying SAR are the basic means of applying for financial aid, some postsecondary schools and programs may require that the student complete an additional financial aid form for their school. Additionally, state grants and scholarships, and private scholarships also will have separate application forms. Students will need guidance in keeping track of the deadlines for each of these and in completing the forms.

Help students finalize their financial aid packages

Once the SAR is sent to the schools or programs the students have applied to, the schools can begin to formulate financial aid packages for the students. Students and their mentors should meet with the schools' financial aid counselors to go over the SAR and discuss their needs. Following this, if students are accepted at a particular school or program, they will receive a financial aid award letter, to which they will need to respond.

Meet with financial aid counselors

After students receive their Student Aid Report (SAR), have them make an appointment at the financial aid office for each school they're applying to or the one where they plan to enroll. The purpose of the meeting is to answer any questions the school might have about the student's needs and discuss the financial aid package the school might be able to offer the student.

- Make sure students bring their SAR to the meeting along with any other financial information they've gathered in their financial aid file. This should include a letter from the state or county child welfare agency or social worker verifying that they were in state foster care.

- Make sure that students openly discuss personal situations that have an impact on their overall financial needs—for example, their independent status, living costs during vacations and school breaks, special health, medication or therapy needs, child support, or any other special financial circumstances.

- Note that students are not obligated to accept any loan awarded to them. In fact, loans should remain a last resort for students from foster care. If loans are necessary, make sure students fully understand the specifics of loan repayment, timelines, and the repayment of obligations if they drop out. Review all loans with the school's financial aid office before committing to any loans.

- This is a good time to ask for a sample of the school's award letter. Becoming familiar with how the school presents their financial aid in award letters is recommended. Ask the financial aid counselor to go over a sample award letter and answer any questions.

Review financial aid award letters

Once a school or program has accepted a student, the school or program will send the student a financial aid award letter. This letter will give the total cost of attendance and details on the financial aid offered. Before accepting a financial aid package, students should meet with their mentor and the school's financial aid counselor, in person or by phone, for a careful review of award letters. It may be possible to modify a student's financial aid package, especially if certain nondiscretionary costs, such as unusually high medical bills, have been overlooked. Although most colleges adhere to specific award guidelines, they can adjust an award for students if there is a compelling case for doing so.

Accept a financial aid package

To accept a financial aid package, students need to:

- Circle "YES" to the financial aid types they want on the award letter, and "NO" to the ones they do not want.

- Read the financial aid booklet or bulletin that comes with the award letter. (Their mentor should read it too.) It will tell students what they need to do to keep getting financial aid, including annual financial aid application requirements. (See page 148 for more information about renewing your FAFSA annually.)

- Read the certification statement, sign, and return the financial award letter by the deadline, and remind students to keep a copy in their financial aid file and give a copy to their mentor.

College students speak out

On financial aid

"Financial aid can be such a burden because of all the paperwork, and it's essential for caretakers to help students. Tell the student to find out what paperwork is needed and you can work together to get it. Financial aid is essential in college and the sooner you fill out applications the better!"

—Cherish, State University of West Georgia

The Basics of Scholarships, Vouchers, Waivers, and Grants

Students from foster care will usually receive a financial aid package reflecting a range of sources. Some of their aid package will draw on resources available to the general population of postsecondary students and part will come from funds designated expressly for students who have been in foster care. Students might also be eligible for a variety of scholarships—scholarships for academic merit, athletic scholarships, or scholarships for students from a particular ethnic background. Students, their mentors, and caregivers need to be familiar with these resources.

Financial aid for all students

In general, all college students use the following options in varying degrees to fund their education:

- Personal or family savings
- Need-based aid—loans, grants, and work-study funds
- Merit-based scholarships given for high achievement or talent

State-based financial aid programs vary greatly from state school to state school but may include:

- Need-based grants
- Educational opportunity grants
- Work-study programs
- Need- and merit-based scholarships
- Tuition and fee waivers or assistance to targeted students

Federal aid programs and services include:

- Pell grants
- Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOGs)
- Work-study programs
- Perkins Loans
- Subsidized and unsubsidized Stafford Loans
- Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students (PLUS) Loans

📕 The best sources of general financial aid information

Of the wide variety of free resources available, we recommend the following:

The **SmartStudent Guide to Financial Aid** is an award-winning site that has one of the most comprehensive annotated collections of information about student financial aid on the Internet, including a financial aid calculator for determining costs. Go to www.finaid.org.

The **College Board Pay for College** site offers a wide range of general financial aid information with links to important financial aid sites, as well as tools that let you search for and compare scholarships and calculate loans. Visit www.collegeboard.com/pay.

Federal financial aid information

Counselors and Mentors Handbook on Federal Student Aid: A Guide for Those Helping Students Prepare for Postsecondary Education. Mentors and caregivers will find important information including an extensive section on completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and lists of useful telephone numbers, publications, and Web sites about student aid. It also includes choosing a school and opportunities for under-represented students. Available in English and Spanish. Go to www.fsapubs.org. Click **Browse Products**, and then click the book title.

The Student Guide for High School Seniors/College Students describes every federal program and how to apply. It's updated each award year, and is available in English and Spanish. Go to http://studentaid.ed.gov. Enter *Student Guide* in the **search** box.

Finding Out About Student Aid provides information on all federal student aid programs, the largest source of college financial assistance. These programs include Pell grants, the Stafford, PLUS, Consolidated, Perkins loan programs, federal work-study, and Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOGs). Go to www.ed.gov/offices/OSFAP/Students/student.html.

The **U.S. Department of Education (DOE) Student Aid** information site provides students with essential information related to preparing, choosing, applying for, getting, and repaying financial aid. It includes information about FAFSA and the FAFSA application.
Go to http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/index.jsp.

Financial aid packages for students from foster care

Most financial aid packages rely on a combination of state and federal programs. In 2005, 33 states had laws or policies that offered state-funded financial aid to youth from foster care who were making the transition to independence. Scholarships may also be a part of students' financial aid packages.

Sample Financial Aid Package

Former foster students attending a four-year public university may receive as much as $17,000 in financial aid per year, and those attending a community college and living off campus may receive as much as $12,000 annually from federal and state sources, excluding any loans or scholarships. This aid may include the following, with the lower dollar amounts for community colleges and the upper for colleges:

- Federal Pell grant: $4,000

- Chafee Education and Training Voucher (Chafee ETV): up to $5,000 (Youth formerly in foster care may also get Chafee IL–funded supports, private scholarships, and foster care payment transfers.)

- Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG): $1,000

- Federal and state work-study programs: $2,000–$4,000

- State need-based grant (varies by state): $2,000–$3,000[25]

25 Emerson, J. & Lovitt, T. (2003). Encouraging news for college-bound foster youth. *FOCUS, 2003* (3), 1, 6–7. Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://www.edfund.org/pdfs/focus2003_third.pdf

Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs)

Students from foster care may be eligible to receive up to $5,000 annually in Chafee ETVs to apply to costs associated with attending a postsecondary education or training program.

- **Who is eligible.** Youth eligible for services under a state's Chafee Foster Care Independent Living program are eligible to receive a Chafee ETV. This includes youth who are likely to remain in foster care until age 18 and young people who've aged out of foster care. Youth adopted from foster care after age 16 are also eligible for Chafee ETVs. See Appendix A on page 151, for more complete eligibility information.

- **What students may use the funds for.** Chafee ETV funds may be used to pay for any expenses used to compute the total cost of attendance. Allowable expenses include tuition, application fees, books and supplies, room and board, dependent child care, transportation, and health insurance. States may restrict the use of Chafee ETVs for certain expenses and will determine the amount awarded to each student. See Appendix A on page 151 for more complete information on allowable expenses.

John H. Chafee Foster Care Independent Living Program (Chafee IL program)

Chafee IL funds can be used to provide Chafee ETV recipients with needed supplemental services, such as career assessment and guidance; academic assessment, including assessment for disabilities; and computer purchase. See Appendix A on page 151 for more complete information on the Chafee IL program and its supports for postsecondary students.

Privately funded scholarships

A limited number of scholarships for students from foster care are offered by colleges, private foundations, advocacy organizations (such as the National Foster Parent Association), businesses, and individuals.

📖 Resources for students from foster care

Chafee IL and Chafee ETV resources

- **For resources,** see Appendix A on page 151. You will find the *Frequently Asked Questions III* especially useful.

- **For a list of state IL coordinators** who will know about Chafee ETVs at the state level, go to www.nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd/resources/ilcoords.shtml.

Scholarships for students from foster care

- **To find local or state programs,** try typing *foster care scholarships* in a scholarship search engine (such as www.college-scholarships.com) or go to the Web site for the state's higher education office.

- **FYI3.com** provides financial aid options for every state and general information on Chafee ETVs, tuition waivers, and the FAFSA. Go to www.fyi3.com/fyi3/Independent/scholarships/index.cfm.

- **Orphan Foundation of America (OFA)** provides information and applications for their scholarships for students from foster care. Go to www.orphan.org. Click **Scholarships**.

- **Guardian Scholars Programs** provide a listing and links to the growing number of colleges with support programs and scholarship assistance for students from foster care. Go to www.orangewoodfoundation.org/programs/GScholars.asp

- **National Foster Parent Association (NFPA)** offers application information for their national scholarship and awards. Go to www.nfpainc.org/. Click **Scholarships & Awards**.

- **Casey Family Scholars** provides scholarships to students who have been in foster care. Visit www.orphan.org. Click **Scholarships**, and then click on **Casey Family Scholars Scholarships**.

State tuition waiver and assistance programs

In 2005, 17 states and the District of Columbia had some form of tuition waivers or assistance for students who were in foster care or adopted from foster care. These programs vary with the state but commonly waive all or some tuition and fees for these resident students enrolled in public colleges or universities. Some states, like Texas, allow an unlimited number of students to participate in their waiver programs, while others, like Alaska, have a designated number of annual waivers available. State higher education offices and child welfare programs can provide information on how tuition waiver and assistance programs work. As of 2005, the following states offer some form of tuition waiver or assistance: Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

Scholarships for under-represented students

Public and private scholarships for under-represented students—such as students of color, GLBTQ students, or students with disabilities—represent another pool of financial aid for which students in foster care are often eligible.

Your state may offer scholarships, student assistance programs, grants, or waivers available to low-income students, first-generation college students, independent students, or students coming from foster care. Ask your state IL coordinators, Chafee Postsecondary ETV program manager, or school financial aid counselors for information on these programs.

Be aware of scholarship scams!

Several hundred thousand students and parents are defrauded by scholarship scams to the tune of more than $100 million annually. Scam operations often imitate legitimate government agencies and grant-giving foundations, requesting money up front in the form of an application or advance fee. In fact, charging a fee is often a tip-off that it's a scam. In addition, stay on your guard if the service suggests that the scholarship is guaranteed, or that they will apply on your behalf. (Everyone must submit his or her own application.) If they claim a high success rate, note that around 1 percent of those who pay for such services actually get a scholarship.

More information

The sources below give examples of common scholarships scams and how to identify one, information about how to protect applicants, and steps scam victims can take:

- Read "Scholarship Scams" on The SmartStudent Guide to Financial Aid. Go to www.finaid.org/scholarships/scams.phtml.

- Advice from the U.S. Department of Education is on www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oig/misused/sscams.html.

- Information for students and parents from the Federal Trade Commission can be found on www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/edcams/scholarship/.

📖 Scholarship search engines that are (really) FREE

The following free scholarship search engines are recommended by FinAid (The SmartStudent Guide to Financial Aid). Avoid scholarship search services that charge any fees.

- **FastWeb** is the largest, most up-to-date, and most-used scholarship search site, with more than 25 million registered users. Students can sign up to receive automatic e-mail notifications of new scholarships that match their profiles. Go to www.fastweb.com.

- **College Board Scholarship Search** lists scholarships and other types of financial aid programs from more than 3,000 national, state, and other public and private sources. The database is updated annually. Go to www.collegeboard.com/?student. Enter *scholarship search* in the **search** box.

- **SRN Express** is a free Web version of the Scholarship Resource Network (SRN) database which features private-sector, non–need-based aid, and includes information about awards from more than 1,500 organizations. See the database at www.srnexpress.com/index.cfm.

- For other scholarship search options, review FinAid's list of free search sites at www.finaid.org/scholarships/other.phtml.

📖 Scholarships for students with disabilities

- **"Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities"** includes information on scholarships and fellowships. Go to www.finaid.org/otheraid/disabled.phtml.

- **Information on Disabilities and Gifted Education** lists special funding sources for students with disabilities. Go to ericec.org/faq/finance.html.

- **"College Funding Strategies for Students with Disabilities"** offers general funding strategies using Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS), and state Vocational Rehabilitation support services.
  Visit www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/financial-aid.html.

Scholarships for under-represented students of color

- **Financial Aid for Minority Students** lists scholarship databases, award programs, and other assistance options. Go to **FinAid** at www.finaid.org/otheraid/minority.phtml.

- **200 Free Scholarships for Minorities** describes Black Excel's top 200 scholarships with links to sponsors. Go to www.blackexcel.org/200-Scholarships.html.

- **Grants for Minorities** is an excellent list to search by ethnic group, academic level, or subject area. Go to www.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/3specpop.htm.

- **NAACP** provides links to more than 200 scholarships as well as information about the NAACP college scholarship. Go to www.naacp.org. Enter *scholarship program* in the **search** box.

Scholarships for African American students

- **College Scholarships for African American Students** lists scholarships for African Americans and for students of color. Go to www.abetterchance.org. Enter **Scholarships for African American Students** in the **search** box.

- **United Negro College Fund** provides information on scholarships, fellowships, and internships primarily at historically black colleges and universities. Go to www.uncf.org/index.asp.

- *Financial Aid for African Americans,* Gail A. Schlachter and R. David Weber. (About $40.) This exceptional directory describes more than 1,400 scholarships, fellowships, loans, grants, awards, and internships. For more information, go to www.rspfunding.com/catalog/item/1414261/877929.htm.

Scholarships for American Indian students

- **Financial Aid for Native American Students** provides eligibility for and sources of financial aid. Go to www.finaid.org/otheraid/natamind.phtml.

- **American Indian College Fund (AICF)** focuses on scholarships and financial aid information for students attending one of the 33 tribal colleges. Go to collegefund.org/. Click on **Scholarships & Students**.

- **Association of American Indian Affairs (AAIA)** offers seven scholarship programs. Go to www.indian-affairs.org/.

- **American Indian Graduate Center** offers scholarships and administers the Gates Millennium Scholarship for American Indian students. Go to www.aigc.com/.

- **American Indian Education Foundation Scholarship Fund** sponsors a challenge grant program, a memorial scholarship, and a scholarship fund. Go to www.aiefprograms.org. Under **Higher Education**, click **Scholarship Fund**.

📖 Scholarships for Asian American and Pacific Islander students

- **Asian and Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund** is a new organization that awards more than $300,000 in scholarships annually. Visit www.apiasf.org.

- **Gates Millennium Scholarship for Asian American students** has information available on the Gates Millennium Scholars site at www.gmsp.org.

- **College Scholarships for Asian American Students** lists a variety of scholarships at www.abetterchance.org. Enter *scholarships for Asian American students* in the **search** box.

📖 Scholarships for Hispanic students

- **Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF)** administers the Gates Millennium Scholarships for Hispanic students and offers scholarships to those attending community or four-year colleges, including transfer students from community colleges. Go to www.hsf.net.

- **Scholarships for Hispanics** offers an excellent scholarship search directory. Go to www.scholarshipsforhispanics.org.

- **Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) Scholarship Awards** includes financial aid and essay-writing tips along with links to scholarships. Go to www.chci.org/chciyouth/scholarship/scholarship.htm.

- The **Hispanic College Fund** provided almost $2 million in scholarships in 2004. For application information go to www.hispanicfund.org/.

- **College Scholarships for Hispanic/Latino Students** gives students access to national scholarships. Go to www.abetterchance.org. Enter *scholarships for Hispanic students* in the **search** box.

📖 Scholarships for GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students

- **"Financial Aid Guide for GLBT Students"** gives general, athletic, campus, regional, federal, and state scholarships, and financial aid information for GLBT applicants. Go to www.finaid.org/otheraid/gay.phtml.

- **GLBT Scholarship Resources** lists scholarship databases for gays and lesbians, and for the children of GLBT parents. Go to www.washburn.edu/sobu/broach/glbt-scholar.html.

- **GLBT-friendly scholarships** are listed at www.unt.edu/ally/resources/scholarships.htm.

Recommendation #7

Engage Young Adults Who Have Missed Out On Postsecondary Preparation

Recommendation #7: Engage Young Adults Who Have Missed out on Postsecondary Preparation

Young adults who may be too late to benefit from some of the recommendations in this guide fall into two broad groups:

- Those who have struggled academically—dropped out of school, are in their late teens and have minimum high school credits, or are reading at below high-school levels.

- High school graduates who have gone right to work, often ending up in entry-level jobs.

The disadvantage for these students is that they have missed out on a stable, sequenced high school curriculum and long-term planning for postsecondary education. They may also bring with them the responsibilities of children and jobs and a negative sense of their ability to succeed academically. On the other hand, the advantage for these students—especially for those who've worked and realized their need for postsecondary education—may be heightened motivation and valuable skills they've acquired at work. These students may now be ready to consider the advantages of postsecondary education or training.

STRATEGY # **1**

Help young adults see the importance of postsecondary education and how it can be a reality

Young adults may not be fully aware of the personal and economic benefits of postsecondary education and may feel that it can never be a reality for them. You can help by having conversations about the advantages of postsecondary education and by giving them information that may help change their perspectives:

- Provide specific data on the economic and career benefits of postsecondary education. Arrange meetings with successful alumni of foster care who can discuss the how higher education helped them find a satisfying job. Visits to technical or career training programs can provide compelling evidence of the economic benefits of advanced training.

- Talk about the importance of job satisfaction to a person's emotional well-being and the self-fulfillment that comes in pursuing a career that matches one's interests and abilities. Again, meeting with successfully employed adults may provide important role models.

- Discuss the intrinsic value of education—the excitement of learning and the boost to one's self-confidence. Give them articles about young adults who are thinking of resuming their education, such as "Some Good Reasons to Go to College."

- If their career goals are undefined, consider giving them a career inventory, help them set career goals, and then discuss the education they'll need to reach those goals.

- Give specific information on the steps they need to take to enroll in postsecondary education and the specific financial support that may be available to them, especially financial support under the Chafee IL funds, the Chafee Education and Training Vouchers, and scholarship programs for youth formerly in foster care. (See pages 110–112 and Appendix A on page 151.)

- Connect these young people with adults, especially alumni of foster care who ultimately succeeded in postsecondary education. It is rare that students can identify someone from foster care who is in college or a college graduate.

📖 Information on the importance of postsecondary education

Refer to page 20 for articles and online resources on the importance of postsecondary education. Also consider these resources which are especially applicable for older students:

- **College Is Possible** gives links to such information as **Preparing to Return, Choosing the Right Program, Applying Yourself,** and other selections. Go to www.collegeispossible.org. Click **Lifelong learning**.

- At the **Gathering Place for Adult Students**, young adults will find information on topics, such as Getting Started, Applying, Financial Aid, Develop Study Skills, and other selections. Go to www.adultstudent.com/welcome.shtml. Click **Resources** and **FAQs**.

- **"Some Good Reasons to Go to College,"** an online excerpt from the book, *Guerrilla Manual for Adult College Students*. Mike Doolin includes personal testimonials and relevant economic data. Go to www.educationforadults.com. Under **Student Resources**, click **Help Center**.

Career inventories and planning

In addition to the information on page 20, see:

- **"Career Planning Tips"** is a good start in helping young adults examine their interests, explore career possibilities, and match both to educational requirements. Go to www.actstudent.org. Click **Career Planning**, and then click **Career planning tips**.

2

Help young adults improve basic skills and study skills

For some young people, poor reading, writing, or math skills are roadblocks to completing high school or continuing their education. To strengthen their basic skills, young adults can take advantage of one of these options:

- **An adult basic education program,** usually offered by local school districts or community colleges, that provides basic skills instruction.

- **An adult literacy center** can offer classes and one-to-one instruction in reading, written language, math, English as a Second Language (ESL), and GED (General Educational Development) preparation. Instructors are familiar with the needs of young adult learners.

- **A TRIO program**, many of which include basic skills as part of their preparation activities for older students.

In addition to basic skills, good study skills are essential for young adults who want to continue their education.

- For young adults completing high school, use the strategies and resources listed on page 41.

- As young adults go on to postsecondary education, be sure to make them aware of the study skills resources listed on page 143.

Some of the young adults you work with may have learning disabilities but have lost their special education documentation. Options for funding an updated assessment of these young people include using Chafee IL funds (see Appendix A on page 151) or going through state Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Also inquire at community literacy and Adult Basic Education programs about assessment and tutoring for students with learning disabilities.

STRATEGY # 3

Encourage young adults to evaluate the pros and cons of a GED

The General Educational Development (GED) test is for young adults who have dropped out of high school and who want a **General Education Development (GED) Certificate**—a certificate students receive if they've passed the high school equivalency test.

When considering a GED, young adults should know that:

- Research shows that, although a GED offers a modest improvement in labor market value, access to higher education, and improved self-esteem, a high school diploma provides greater economic, academic, and social benefits.

- While most postsecondary colleges and programs accept the GED for admission, many four-year colleges may also require the ACT, SAT, or a college placement test. (See pages 60–69 for a description of these tests.)

The GED tests language arts, social studies, science, and math skills, and requires the student to write a timed essay. It includes business-related text and stresses analytical ability and problem-solving skills. About 70 percent of youth who take the GED pass it. If permitted by your state, we recommend that students take one test at a time, rather than all five at once. This greatly relieves testing stress and allows time for feedback and counseling before taking the next test.

Some young adults have the skills and knowledge to take the GED tests right away while most need to first take a GED preparation course, available in most areas through the school district, community college, or a community agency. State and local GED preparation and testing programs have restrictions on enrolling or taking the GED

test. These restrictions may apply to a minimum age, a required wait period between dropping out of high school and taking GED tests, testing sequence (in one sitting or over several days), and prerequisite skill levels in reading and math.

The test is given at designated testing sites, and accommodations are available for those with disabilities. If the young adult has a disability that is documented in an IEP or 504 plan and needs testing accommodations, these can be arranged by staff at a GED testing center who are familiar with the process. This takes time, however, and requires the proper documentation.

📖 Resources for the GED

- For general information about the GED, go to www.acenet.edu. Point to **Program & Services**, and then click **GED Testing Service**.

- For GED preparation and testing centers in your area, call (800) 626-9433.

- Students with disabilities can find out about testing accommodations for the GED at www.acenet.edu. Point to **Programs & Services**, and then click **GED Testing Service**. Click **Special Accommodations for Documented Disabilities**.

GED preparation

- **Sample questions.** Go to www.acenet.edu. Point to **Programs & Services,** and then click **GED Testing Service**. Scroll down to **GED Sample Test Questions**.

- **Practice tests**.

  - Go to www.testpreview.com. Click **GED Practice**.

  - Go to www.4tests.com/exams. Click **GED**.

- **GED preparation materials.** There are many review guides for the GED, including practice tests, available from Steck-Vaughn, Kaplan, Princeton Review, ARCO, and other publishers of test preparation materials. Prices vary. Available at bookstores and at libraries.

4

Give young adults options for getting a high school diploma

Young adults have several alternatives for completing high school—credit retrieval programs, distance learning, and dual enrollment (early college) programs. Chafee IL funds may be available to pay for some of these programs. (See Appendix A on page 151.)

Credit retrieval programs

These programs, offered by many school districts, are for students who are behind in credits and are at risk of dropping out of school or who have already dropped out. They enable young adults to earn credits outside the traditional secondary school setting, usually using alternative curricula. Credit retrieval programs frequently offer supplementary services, such as career counseling and training, academic counseling, and childcare. There may be a fee for some programs. Young adults should contact the school district for information.

Distance learning

Distance learning, including online programs and correspondence courses, is a good option for students who need to juggle childcare or jobs with school, and who are good independent learners. Generally, however, educators recommend that students take distance learning courses with the active support of a mentor or educator.

Some schools offer online courses within the school, or students may enroll in an accredited online high school to earn regular high school diplomas. These courses are sometimes free to residents within a school district, but most are fee-based.

The more traditional correspondence courses offer another alternative for students who don't have regular access to a computer or who cannot find the course online.

Early college programs

Early college programs (sometimes known as "middle college" programs) started as a way for high-achieving students to take more rigorous courses while still in high school. Now, however, these programs also target youth at risk of dropping out of school or young adults who have already dropped out. Offered on both high school and college campuses, these programs allow students to take high school and college courses

integrated into a coherent four- to five-year curriculum. Students who successfully complete the program get both a high school diploma and postsecondary credit, often including an associate's degree.

📖 Resources for high school completion

Distance learning

- **Independent Study Courses by Correspondence** gives an annotated list of courses for high school students offered online, by correspondence, or through a combination. Go to http://users.erols.com/interlac. Scroll down to **Independent Study Courses**.

- **Brigham Young University Distance Learning.** This established, reliable provider of distance learning offers a range of both online and correspondence-type courses for students in grades 7–12. Visit http://ce.byu.edu/is.

- **PASS (Portable Assisted Study Sequence)** curriculum is a correspondence program in use in Washington, California, New York, and at least 26 other states. It offers a wide range of courses, including mentor kits and lab sciences with materials. Each course offers five units of credit, with each unit costing about $40. Students may take only the number of credits they need. To find out if PASS is used in your state, call (888) 727-7123. Go to www.semy.org.

- **Virtual Schools and Online Learning Manual** from Casey Family Programs helps professionals and caregivers set up effective online learning experiences for young adults. Includes lists of accredited programs. To get a copy, e-mail PostsecondaryEdGuide@casey.org.

Early college high school

The **Early College High School Initiative.** For a good introduction to early college high schools in general and to find out if the initiative has a program in your area, go to www.earlycolleges.org/Index.html. Click **The Initiative by the Numbers**.

Offer guidance and support for postsecondary enrollment

In general, the process of applying for college or career programs or for financial aid is the same whether students enter directly from high school or a few years later. So make sure to refer to the detailed information earlier in this guide, particularly in Recommendation #5 (Support Students in Choosing, Applying for, and Enrolling in Postsecondary Education page 73) and in Recommendation #6 (Help Students Apply for and Get Adequate Financial Aid on page 93).

In addition, we suggest the following options, which may be especially helpful to young adults who do not go directly from high school to postsecondary education.

Enroll in TRIO programs

TRIO programs are set up to prepare youth and young adults for postsecondary enrollment and include:

- **Upward Bound.** This program helps students up to age 19 prepare for postsecondary education through basic skills instruction, tutoring, mentoring, and planning for postsecondary education.

- **Educational Opportunity Centers.** These help young adults (usually age 19 and older) choose a postsecondary education program and apply for financial aid.

- **Talent Search.** This program offers academic, career, and financial counseling for students up to age 27, including high school dropouts. It also offers postsecondary education preparation.

Young adults can look for these programs in their area, using the directory listed in the resources. They can select the program that serves their age group and then contact the program to find out the specific services offered.

Get ahead with testing

Take Ability to Benefit Tests (ABTs). ABTs are for young adults without a high school diploma or GED who want to enroll in postsecondary education. The tests determine if a person has the basic skills to be successful in a postsecondary program.

Some colleges and programs will accept applicants directly into a postsecondary program if they get a certain score on an ABT; others will admit them, but also require remedial courses or even GED preparation and testing before students can enter a certificate or diploma course of study.

Young adults should check with the community college or training program they plan to attend to get such basic information as the name of the ABT the school uses, how to apply, the test dates, the cost, the score required for entrance, and accommodations that can be made for disability, where applicable.

To get an idea of the format and general content of an ABT, the student can take the practice questions for the ASSET, one of the ABTs used by colleges.

Take the CLEP (College Level Examination Program) for college credit. Through this exam students can get credit in a wide range of subjects. For example, bilingual students might be able to test for foreign language credit. (See page 62 for more information about the CLEP.)

Get postsecondary credit for work experience

Students should contact the admissions office of schools they are interested in attending to see if this is possible for them.

Explore postsecondary alternatives

Get postsecondary education online. Many postsecondary institutions offer online courses to supplement those on campus providing a flexible way of completing some or all of a postsecondary education. Students interested in this option should carefully explore the accreditation and quality of the institution and should consider their ability to complete coursework with a minimum of personal support.

Enroll part-time. Part-time enrollment, if offered, can be an excellent option for young adults balancing jobs and childcare with their education or for those who lack the organizational or study skills to assume a full course load.

Use TANF (Technical Assistance for Needy Families) funds

This is a potential source of funds to help pay for education for students with children. Local program guidelines vary.

📖 Resources to help engage young adults in postsecondary education

TRIO programs

- For more information, go to www.trioprograms.org.

- For a nationwide directory of TRIO go to www.trioprograms.org/nationaldirectory/nd.pdf.

Ability to Benefit Tests (ABTs)

- Get a list of approved Ability to Benefit tests and passing scores at www.ccdanet.org/a2btestlist.html.

- **ASSET Practice Test** for one of the approved Ability to Benefit tests. www.act.org/asset/pdf/guide.pdf.

Credit for work experience and learning

- **College Is Possible** gives links to a variety of resources related to getting credit for earlier learning. Go to www.collegeispossible.org. Under **References**, click **Lifelong Learning** and then click **Credit for Prior Learning**.

- **College Credit Recommendation Service** helps adults get credit for courses and exams taken outside of postsecondary degree programs. Go to www.acenet.edu. Point to **Programs & Services**, and then click **College Credit Recommendation Service**.

Postsecondary distance learning

- **Adult Online Learning** gives course descriptions and links for accounting, education, information technology, and nursing courses online. Go to www.adultstudentcenter.com. Click **Resources**, and then click **Discover Online Learning Resource Options**.

- **Accredited Online Degree Programs** has a comprehensive listing of online degree programs. They include information on how to check a program's accreditation. Search by subject area to find a program at http://worldwidelearn.com. Enter *Online Degrees* in the **search** box.

TANF

- *Helping Families Achieve Self-Sufficiency* gives general information on TANF. Visit www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/funds2.htm.

- To find a TANF program in your area, use the term *TANF* and the name of your state to search the Web.

Recommendation #8

Help Students Adjust to and Complete Their College or Training Program

Recommendation #8: Help Students Adjust to and Complete Their College or Training Program

Being accepted to and enrolling in a postsecondary program is certainly an accomplishment for young adults from foster care, but staying in school and eventually graduating poses an even greater challenge.

Statistics show how arduous it is for all students to complete their postsecondary educations, and especially for those who are first-generation students, postsecondary students, or students of color. But students from foster care confront additional obstacles—inadequate high school preparation, mental health issues, working more than 20 hours a week and consequently enrolling less than full-time, and a higher incidence of disabilities. On top of that, most lack the support of family.

The transition to postsecondary education can be overwhelming. In fact, the success of the first two weeks can have a strong impact on the quality of the higher education experience. However, research clearly shows that strong support can make all the difference. Support can come in many forms—adequate financial aid for every year in school; support services ranging from a stable place to live to a consistent e-mail account; a reliable and knowledgeable mentor; and the encouragement and support of family, friends, and peers both in college and from childhood. All of these can ease the difficult transition. Experts stress that this support must be consistent, individualized, and take into account a student's strengths and abilities to respond to the challenges posed by the college environment.

College students speak out

On college success

"The advice that I have that kind of covers it all, is just help students find and use the resources around them. If you cannot find it there, find someone who can help the student."

—Autumn, Metropolitan State College of Denver

"The thing that my social worker did that helped me the most was just being there as someone to talk to. He called to check on me as a friend who was actually concerned, not as a social worker who had to make sure I was still in school. Help the students by being their friend, ask how things are going in school and in their social life. Most of all support them and praise them when they do well!"

—Justyn, University of Kentucky

STRATEGY #

1

Help students transition to the postsecondary program

It's normal for students from all backgrounds to be anxious about the social, educational, and environmental challenges they face as they enter postsecondary education. They may be accepted at a school or program and then not register for classes or go to school on the first day. Students from foster care face the added challenge of knowing that they do not have a safety net of support to help them. Continued encouragement and support, especially during the enrollment process and first several weeks, is very important. Helping students connect to caring adults at the postsecondary program is critical.

Adult support to ease the transition will be most effective if it begins in the summer before students enter school, and continues regularly—by phone, e-mail, or in person—throughout the first weeks and months. Some things that the mentor and other supportive adults can do include:

- Encourage students to get summer jobs and start saving for college expenses.

- Help the student solve any transportation issues. This can include transportation to out-of-area programs as well as plans for commuting or getting to a job or daycare, if needed.

- If students are parents, help them get childcare with a backup plan including what they'll do if their child is sick. Some schools have on-site centers.

- Work with students on a list of items that they will need for campus life—(sheets, towels, computer, and so forth) or materials for career and technical training programs (items such as tools, equipment, work clothes, and uniforms). Most schools and programs have lists of what students should—and should not—bring. Help students find economical sources for items.

- Direct students to Internet resources about campus life— how to study, living with roommates, making the most of the experience.

Graduating from college is a challenge for all students

Overall, about 55 percent of all students who enter a four-year institution will graduate after six years. However, only 43 percent of college students whose parents did not attend college (first-generation college students) complete their programs after six years. For those with no parental financial support (independent students), only 22 percent eventually graduate.[26]

Students from foster care often start at community colleges or two-year programs because of their open enrollment policies, low cost, and convenient location. But completion statistics are even lower for these programs, as only 25 percent of students who enroll get a credential within six years,[27] and only 8 percent of independent students with no dependents (most students from foster care) get an associate's degree. Even the dream of community college as a stepping-stone to a four-year institution does not always materialize—only 25 percent of community college students eventually transfer to a four-year school.[28]

- Have students identify a mentor (see page 138) plus one or more adults they can turn to if they encounter problems in the first weeks and months of school. Make sure they have the phone numbers and e-mail addresses of these people, as well as those of their IL coordinator and academic advisor.

- Encourage students to find out in advance about campus support programs, especially programs for first-year students—and urge them to enroll. These programs help students develop a sense of belonging within the school, cultivate friendships among a diverse group of students, teach study and time-management skills, and connect students with a mentor. Participating students have a higher graduation rate than those who don't.[29]

- Students of color will want to learn about and access multicultural and support programs especially designed for them.

- Encourage students with disabilities to make an appointment with the office of disability services before the first day of classes to discuss their need for support and accommodations. Make sure they bring their disability documentation with them.

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26 United States General Accounting Office *(2003). College completion: Additional efforts could help education with its completion goals*. Retrieved December 6, 2005, from www.gao.gov/new.items/d03568.pdf

27 Student success: Understanding graduation and persistence rates, Issue Brief (2004). ACE Center for Policy Analysis, American Council on Education, August. Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://www.acenet.edu. Enter title in **advanced search**.

28 Hoachlander, G., Sikora, A., & Horn, L. (2003). Community college students: Goals, academic preparation, and outcomes. *Education Statistics Quarterly, 5* (2)*.* Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003164.pdf

29 Lotkowski, V., Robbins, S. & Noeth, R. (2004). The role of academic and non-academic factors in improving college retention. Retrieved December 6, 2005, from http://inpathways.net/college_retention.pdf

- Refer students to the college success guides in the resources listed below and to the study guides on pages 136–137.
- Make sure a mentor or another adult accompanies students when they move to campus or start classes.

📖 College success guides for the first year and beyond

- **To get a sneak preview about what to expect in college**, read such articles as "College Life: What to Expect," and "The Roommate Issue." Go to www.princetonreview.com/college/. Click **Advice**, and then click the article titles.

- **Navigating Your Freshman Year, Students Helping Students.** College students share advice and useful resources for a successful first year with articles about leaving home, living arrangements, working, partying, dating, and so on. Go to www.nataviguides.com.

- **Smart Start: A Survival Guide for First-Year College Students (and their parents too).** Go to www.collegesurvivalguides.com.

- ***Developing Your Vision while Attending College, Book Three: Managing Your Money.*** This highly recommended four-pamphlet series is written specifically for American Indian and Alaska Native students. Go to www.collegefund.org/scholarships/guides.html.

- ***Beginning College 101: How to Achieve Real Success in College.*** The author, a dean of first-year students, has drawn upon his many years of experience to write a practical and easy-to-understand guide. Go to www.oldmp.com/college101.htm.

- ***Surviving College: The Pocket Idiot's Guide,*** Nathan Brown. (About $10.) Written by a college student, this handbook is filled with the kind of insights only students themselves can offer. A good gift for any college student or high school senior.

- The **National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition** provides a national directory of first-year programs. Go to www.sc.edu/fye/resources/fyl/fslinks.html.

For Caregivers, mentors and advocates

- **Twenty Tips for Parents of First-Year College Students**. Important tips from an experienced college counselor to promote successful transitions from high school to college. Go to www.collegesurvivalguides.com/20tips.doc.

For African American students

- *The Black Student's Guide to College Success,* William J. Ekeler, editor. (About $49.) This step-by-step guide and reference tool gives students 14 steps to college success as well as brief stories of "How I Did It" from successful African American college students. It includes a directory of more than 900 colleges and universities with information of interest to African American students.

  Go to www.blacksuccessfoundation.org. Click **Info Clearinghouse**, click **Success Books**, and scroll to title.

- *Black College Student's Survival Guide.* This book is a blueprint for choosing the most appropriate college, making the right decisions while there, and marketing oneself after graduation. Topics include success habits, retention, Greek life, sexuality issues, and life after college.

  Go to www.blacksuccessfoundation.org. Click **Info Clearinghouse**, click **Success Books**, and scroll to **title**.

  Note: The African American Success Foundation offers useful resources and information including their Success Books bibliography.

For Hispanic students

- *The Latino Student's Guide to College Success,* Leonard A. Valverde. (About $27.) This book gives solid advice about getting through the first year, researching academic supports on and off campus, knowing student's rights and responsibilities, and participating in extracurricular activities.

  Go to www.greenwood.com. Click **Advanced Search** at the top of the page, and then type the title in the **search** box.

- **White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.** This government site gives numerous strategies for students and mentors for successful transitions to college, college success, and choosing a major.

  Go to www.yesican.gov/postsecondary/index.html.

For students with disabilities

- *100 Things Every College Student with a Disability Ought to Know.* Successful college students with disabilities offer advice related to campus life and the classroom experience.

  Go to www.cambridgestratford.com. Click **Students with Disabilities**.

2

Help students identify a mentor for their postsecondary education

Successful college students make connections with others who care about their success. Too many college students from foster care do not have an adult at school or in the community who cares deeply about their academic or career success; they soon feel isolated and too often drop out. In fact, the basis of effective college support programs that target first-generation and under-represented college students is that they make sure each student has the support of a reliable, knowledgeable, and caring adult.

For help in identifying a mentor, first consider the suggestions on page 26. In addition, consider someone in the young person's circle of trusted adults who has had some experience with college success; someone the student finds through student support services at the college, and other such places; or alumni of foster care who graduated from college.

Mentors will not only be a source of advice and encouragement, but they can also:

- Support the student's involvement in college life. A mentor can fill in for or augment family support by participating in parent or family weekends or other campus events, parent interest groups, and volunteer opportunities. These become natural ways to show interest in the student by on-campus visits and learning about school activities and services.

- Monitor students' academic progress regularly.

- Guide students to use the support services on campus.

📖 Resources for mentors and caregivers

Make sure to refer to the information for mentors earlier in this guide (page 26). In addition, we suggest the following as particularly useful to mentors of college students:

The **National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition** publishes three particularly useful publications to help trusted adults understand what students are experiencing and gives practical advice on how to help. Go to http://www.sc.edu/fye. Click **Publications**, then **Online Catalog**. Under **In-House Publications,** click **Books and Booklets** to find each publication.

- *Helping Your First-Year College Students Succeed: A Guide for Parents*

- *A Guide for Families of Commuter Students: Supporting Your Student's Success*

- *A Family Guide to Academic Advising*

- *Transforming the First-Year Experience for Students of Color (Monograph #38).* Click **Publications**, **Online Catalog**, **Monographs**, then **Monograph #38**.

Other resources

- ***Instructing and Mentoring the African American College Student: Strategies for Success in Higher Education,*** L. Gallien and M. Peterson. (About $37.) This book offers specific strategies and mentoring techniques that work well in the context of African American student culture.

- ***Internship and Mentoring Programs*** for both African American and Hispanic students. Go to www.fastweb.com. Click **Resources** at the very bottom of the page, and then under **Your Career**, click **Intern**.

- ***You're on Your Own (But I'm Here If You Need Me): Mentoring Your Child During the College Years,*** M. Savage. (About $13.) This book gives parents advice on staying involved with students on subjects such as staying in touch, credit loads, GPAs, sex, and drugs.

- The University of California at Santa Barbara offers a program with the needs of **GLBT students** in mind. The Web site provides useful information for mentors of GLBT college students (as well as program planners). Other schools may have similar programs. Go to www.ucsb.edu/. Enter *GLBT mentoring* in the **search** box.

- ***Parenting Postsecondary Students with Disabilities: Becoming the Mentor, Advocate and Guide Your Young Adult Needs.*** Go to www.ncset.org/publications. Click **Parent Briefs**, and then scroll to the title.

3

Make sure students know about support services and access them as needed

One hallmark of a successful student, especially first-generation college students, is the ability to take advantage of the many services that colleges and training programs offer. It can often make the difference between satisfactory progress toward graduation and dropping out.

Students who are already struggling in a new educational environment may be hesitant to seek help on their own, so a mentor may need to take the initiative, discuss what support might be needed, and encourage students to contact support staff. Mentors can find information about these services on school Web sites under "Information for Parents," "Family/Parent Affairs," or "Student Services."

Students can commonly get support in these areas:

- **Academic** services for new students and first-generation college students, such as Educational Opportunity Programs (EOPs) and TRIO, academic assessments, academic advising and tutoring, access to writing centers, and access to computers and other technology.

- **Career** assessment, career planning, employment services, and internships.

- **Financial** assistance, such as financial aid and work-study programs.

- **Basic living and health:** housing and food services, health and dental care and insurance, prevention and wellness services, childcare, and transportation vouchers and subsidies.

- **Social and personal:** counseling and psychological services, spiritual and religious services, sexual assault support, legal services, alcohol and drug abuse counseling, recreation and community volunteer options, and women's centers.

In addition, many schools offer services for specific populations, such as:

Students of color. Many schools promote culturally relevant programs designed to encourage college success. These include special orientations, peer advising and mentoring, academic monitoring and advising, study sessions, cultural programs, personal counseling and referral services, and alumni networking. Contact the Office of Minority Affairs, the counseling center, or student support services to find out if the institution offers these kinds of programs.

Students from foster care. A small but growing number of schools have dedicated programs that take a holistic approach to supporting students from foster care with mentoring, academic advising and tutoring, and help with housing, jobs, and financial aid. These programs usually provide a single-entry point—a "home base"—with a caring student advocate who is an expert on what students from foster care need. Ask the state Chafee ETV coordinator, higher education coordinating board, the institution, or the child welfare office's education specialist about such programs in your area.

Students with disabilities. All schools are required to provide eligible students with accommodations they need to be successful. Encourage any student with a disability to explore the following:

- Visit the disability services office on campus and meet the staff to learn about their services and eligibility criteria.
- Participate in organized events sponsored by the school's disability services office.
- Ask about assistive technologies in college even if the student did not have access to them in high school. Many colleges offer text-to-speech reading software or voice recognition and dictation software in their computer labs, among other technologies.
- Discuss with the Disability Services coordinator any problems the student may be having with supports.

Other groups of students, such as commuter students, GLBT students, veterans, and so on. Suggest that the student check the school's Web site and school catalog for information.

> ### 📖 Resources for students from foster care
>
> The largest network of college support programs for students coming from foster care is the California-based Guardian Scholars programs, currently found in several California and Indiana community colleges and universities.
> For information, go to www.orangewoodfoundation.org.

4

Help students adjust academically

Many students need support in adjusting to the rigor of postsecondary coursework. Strongly encourage students to take advantage of academic support services the school offers. To decrease isolation and increase success at the same time, students can:

- Learn how to be a student. Postsecondary schooling is different from high school. Most schools and programs now offer free study skills or student success classes or workshops with names like College 101, College Success, or First-Year Seminar. Students who participate in these experiences have higher GPAs and are more likely to stay in school than those who do not.

- Sign up at a school writing, math, and tutoring center.

- Join or form study groups. Many programs serving first-generation or under-represented students arrange student study groups because they help students succeed.

Mentors should also check in with students often, particularly during their first semester. Are they going to all their classes regularly? What's been easy for them? What's been hard? How are they addressing the difficulties? Are they seeing their academic advisor regularly? What support services are they taking advantage of?

Identify problems at the first sign of academic difficulty

If mentors pick up on signs that a student is having academic difficulty, they might want to recommend an academic assessment to pinpoint the problems. Many schools and programs offer a wide variety of free assessments that can evaluate everything from reading ability and level of study skills to learning style and time management. Feedback from such evaluations can be invaluable in getting a student back on track. Students should follow up with academic advisors and mentors to discuss results and figure out what to do next.

Explore options for addressing academic difficulty

Besides suggesting an assessment, encourage students to:

- Meet with their academic advisor.

- Find tutoring as soon as they begin to struggle in a course.

- Participate in an Early Alert program if one is available. These structured programs continuously monitor student progress, identifying students with potential for academic difficulty before they fail. Instructors and advisors get regular updates about what support services the student is using. The student's academic advisor will be able to tell students how to enroll.

- Use one of the study guides listed in the resources.

📖 Resources

Assessments to identify academic difficulties

- **Casey Life Skills Education Supplement, Level IV,** of the Casey Life Skills Assessment. It can be taken online, is free, and is accompanied by a guide that can help students address the needs uncovered by the assessment. Go to www.caseylifeskills.org. Under **Assessments**, click **Assessment Supplements**.

- *The **College Student Inventory (CSI)** and the **Student Satisfaction Inventory**. These tools help identify students who are most at risk and focus retention efforts with an early-alert retention system. Go to www.noellevitz.com. Click the **Our Services** tab, and then click **Student Retention**.

Study guides

Make sure you refer to the study skills assessments, guides, and strategies on page 42. In addition, we suggest the following resources that are particularly appropriate for postsecondary students.

- **Academic Success Workbook and Success Plan** can help students identify academic obstacles and solutions. It can be modified for individual student use. Go to www.byu.edu/ccc/academic. In the **search BYU** box, type *academic success workbook*.

- **College Success.** Always reliable strategies from the College Board can be found on studying effectively, choosing college classes and professors, and writing papers. Go to www.collegeboard.com. Enter *college success* in the **search** box. Click **Plan for College: College Success.**

- ***Seven Secrets of How to Study,*** S. Jones. (About $20.) This highly recommended student study guide includes tips about how to study smart, plan time, write term papers, read college texts, and deal with instructors. Go to www.sevensecrets-books.com. Click **Order the Book**.

- **Study Skills**. Several study skills pamphlets are offered, such as "Seven Steps to Time Management of Your Study Time," "College Success—The First Week and Beyond" and "The Cornell Notetaking System: Seven Steps to Taking Useful Lecture Notes" are offered. Go to www.hhpublishing.com. Click **Textbooks** and scroll to **Study Skills Textbooks**.

- *Learning How to Learn: Getting into and Surviving College When You Have a Learning Disability,* Joyanne Cobb. (About $19.) Loaded with resources and practical tips, this inspirational book is easy to read and presented in a LD-friendly format. To get a copy, go to www.cwla.org/pubs. Click **Search by title**, and then type *learning how to learn.*

STRATEGY # 5

Help students adjust personally and socially

Isolation is the enemy of a successful college life, especially for students from foster care. Too many feel that they do not belong to a community that cares about their success. To be actively involved in campus life, students can:

- Take advantage of campus resources, especially support programs that help students stay in school.

- Join a club or an athletic team and participate in other social, recreational, and community services activities. This will also help students meet peers from diverse backgrounds.

- Join or form study groups. Many first-year or new student programs will help students find a study group.

- Make an effort to interact with their teachers, support staff, and other campus personnel. Take some smaller classes so they become known.

- Take a campus-based job through a work-study program or the student employment office.

- Find cultural and spiritual opportunities on campus and in the community that satisfy personal needs.

Despite these resources, some students might still have difficulty adjusting to campus life. It could be helpful for these students to take a college adjustment assessment through the college counseling office.

📖 Resources

Adjustment assessments

- ***College Student Experiences Questionnaire* (CSEQ)** and ***College Student Expectations Questionnaire* (CSXQ)**. This is a useful assessment that evaluates how students are using school resources, setting goals, and spending their time. These may be available through the school's counseling center. Go to www.indiana.edu/~cseq/index.html. Click the **CSEQ** or **CSXQ** tabs.

- ***Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire* (SACQ)**. This assessment can be very helpful in determining how well students are handling the demands of college. It assesses their academic, emotional, social, and institutional adjustments. It's often offered free at the student services or counseling centers. Go to www.wpspublish.com. In the **search** box, type *SACQ*, and then click **W-228**.

Adjustment guides

- **Advising Issues and Resources from the National Academic and Advising Association (NACADA)** is a comprehensive Web directory of advising resources for working with diverse populations. Go to www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/index.htm.

- ***Getting Through College: Voices of Low-Income and Minority Students in New England*** describes obstacles faced by currently enrolled low-income college students and what works for them in overcoming barriers. Strategies are provided that will help mentors support students. Go to www.nmefdn.org. Click **Minority High Achievement**, and then click **Resources**. Click **Publications** and scroll to the title.

Research indicates that more than 50 percent of college students report feeling so depressed that it is difficult for them to function in school.[30] Because students coming from foster care frequently have mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),[31] it's important that they know about and use mental health and counseling services. You can help by monitoring their adjustment and making sure they know about available services, which may include:

- On-campus and off-campus crisis lines

- Brief therapy, drop-in appointments, and phone consultations

- Peer counseling and group therapy

- Self-help programs (books, brochures, videos, and Web resources)

- Referrals to off-campus resources

- Information on help with prescription costs

📖 Mental health resources

School Web sites and school counseling centers are good places for students with mental health concerns to get information about available services and help with referrals. In addition, we suggest:

- *What Do These Students Have in Common?* This booklet includes helpful resources and how to find affordable treatment. Go to www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/students.cfm.

- **American College Health Association** gives the most accurate and up-to-date information about college health issues, such as alcohol abuse, stress, depression, general wellness, disease, nutrition, and sexuality. To see a list of brochures, go to www.acha.org. Click **Information & Resources**, click **Publications & Periodicals**, and then click **Brochures for Young Adults**.

- *College of the Overwhelmed: The Campus Mental Health Crisis and What to Do about It,* Richard D. Kadison and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo. (About $16.) This book explores the stressors that cause college students to suffer psychological problems and offers a hands-on guide for helping students deal with them.

- **Screening for Mental Health** provides in-person and online programs for depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide prevention, eating disorders, and other issues. Provides a tool for finding mental health services. Go to www.mentalhealthscreening.org.

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30 Kadison, R. (2004). *College of the overwhelmed: The campus mental health crisis and what to do about it.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

31 Pecora, P., Kessler, R., Williams, J., O'Brien, K., Downs, A., English, D., White, J., Hiripi, E., White, C., Wiggins, T., & Holmes, K. (2005). *Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study.* Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

Help students successfully complete their postsecondary programs

Although support in the first year is especially important for postsecondary students, they also need ongoing support—monitoring of their academic progress, help with academic and career planning, and advice on maintaining enough financial aid to stay in school.

Monitor student progress

- **Every college student should have a written plan** that outlines required coursework and electives and career exploration activities, such as internships. Students should develop this plan with their academic advisors. Mentors can help by monitoring the process and making sure a plan is developed.

- **Monitor the student's course plan and progress each term.** Students and their mentors should review the credits students have received, required coursework completed, and their GPAs. Chafee ETV recipients and scholarship recipients in particular are routinely required to submit their transcripts each term to stay eligible for financial support.

Help students adjust their college plans and build a career plan

It's not unusual for students to change their majors several times as they explore new academic and career areas. Also, some will transfer to another school or program at least once. So students need to adapt their plans to these changing circumstances.

Students need to carefully review with their academic advisors any proposed changes in their postsecondary plans to make sure they're on track to meet graduation as well as financial aid requirements. Academic advisors and career counselors must approve plan adjustments, and students should share them with other supportive adults, such as mentors.

It's also critical for young people from foster care to have a plan for employment during summers and after graduation, as most of them will not have financial resources, other than wages, to support them during these times. Young people can greatly enhance their employability after graduation by carefully selecting part-time or summer jobs, work-study opportunities, or internships while in school.

Early in the process, introduce the student to the career services center to help students match their personal attributes, experience, and education to a major and a job after graduation. Technical and career training programs are particularly strong in their placement services. These services can include career assessment, counseling and planning, internships, job search services and workshops, and access to job boards and career libraries. School Web sites will usually have links to the career center.

Help students keep financial aid during the postsecondary years

Any time students' financial situations change, they should meet with their financial aid counselors. Because students from foster care are on their own with fragile support systems, their financial needs may change quickly and dramatically. It's important for students to know that financial aid offers may be revised—or other sources of funding may be made available—based on extraordinary financial circumstances. Notifying the financial aid office in writing about these changes may result in a revised financial aid offer or referral to other resources.

Remind students that they need to resubmit the FAFSA annually as long as they are in school and need financial aid. Renewing the FAFSA is a much simpler process than applying for the first time.

📖 Information on renewing the FAFSA

Go to www.fafsa.ed.gov. Under **Filling out a FAFSA**, click **Fill out a Renewal FAFSA.**

Appendices

Appendix A—Chafee Programs

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and the Education and Training Voucher Program

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Chafee IL Program) and the Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program are two important federal resources for supporting the education needs of youth in foster care and youth formerly in foster care. Both programs are administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and state child welfare agencies.

Chafee IL Program

Chafee Independent Living (IL) funds are allocated to states based on the number of children and youth in state foster care. Each state develops a state Chafee plan and has some flexibility in determining specific Chafee activities, eligibility, and so on. It is important to consult your state or local Chafee coordinators to find out about Chafee-funded educational services in your state.

Who is eligible?

Youth who are likely to remain in foster care until age 18 and young people who have aged out of foster care under age 21. Eligibility may vary somewhat by state.

What educational services may be funded through Chafee IL funds?

For high school students. The program funds a range of services to help youth enrolled in the IL program get a high school diploma and plan for postsecondary education. Some of the Chafee IL services which might be available, depending upon the state, including the following:

- Enrichment or remedial academic programs such as tutoring or summer school
- For standardized tests (such as the ACT, SAT, AP): tutoring, preparation classes and materials, and exam fees
- Sending youth to computer camps and purchasing computers
- School advocacy for individual youth

- Helping students prepare for postsecondary education, including applying for financial aid, researching postsecondary programs, and completing applications
- Helping students attend college fairs or organizing college fairs and conferences
- College campus visits and tours
- Helping youth participate in mentoring programs or setting them up with a mentor

For postsecondary students. In addition to the Chafee Education and Training Voucher, postsecondary students have access to Chafee IL funds for supplementary educational services. These services will vary with the state, but could include career assessment and guidance; academic assessment, including a disability assessment; childcare; tutoring; or a computer purchase and training.

How does a youth apply for the Chafee IL program?

In general, youth who are still in foster care apply for Chafee IL services through their caseworkers. Young people who have emancipated from foster care may do so through an Independent Living (IL) coordinator in their area.

How does a student apply for these funds?

Both high school and postsecondary students may contact the state or regional Chafee IL coordinator.

Chafee Education and Training Vouchers

The purpose of the Chafee ETV Program is to help young adults aging out of foster care complete a postsecondary education or training program. Each year the federal government allocates up to $60 million of Chafee ETV funds, with awards to states based on the state's percentage of youth in foster care nationally.

College students from foster care may be eligible to receive up to $5,000 annually to apply to costs associated with attending a postsecondary education or training program.

Who is eligible?

- Youth eligible for services under a state's Chafee Foster Care Independence Program are eligible to receive a Chafee ETV. This includes youth who are likely to remain in foster care until age 18 and young people who have aged out of foster care. States may also provide ETVs to youth adopted from foster care after age 16.

- Eligibility for Chafee ETVs ends at age 21; however, students participating in the voucher program at age 21 and making satisfactory progress toward completing their course of study or training, may continue to receive vouchers until age 23.

- The student must be attending a qualifying institution of higher education, as defined by the Higher Education Act; these include two-year and four-year colleges and universities, and training and vocational or trade schools.

What educational expenses may be funded by Chafee ETVs?

Chafee ETVs may be used to pay for any expenses included in the total cost of attendance, as long as the total amount of aid under Chafee ETVs and other federal or federally supported programs does not exceed the total cost of attendance as published by the student's postsecondary school or program.

States may restrict the use of Chafee ETVs for certain expenses and may restrict the amount awarded to each student. Allowable expenses could include tuition, application fees, books and supplies, room and board, dependent childcare, transportation, or health insurance.

May a student receive other federal financial aid in addition to Chafee ETVs?

Yes. Chafee ETVs do not affect the student's eligibility for other federal financial aid. However, all financial aid, including the Chafee ETV, may not exceed the total cost of attendance as published by the student's postsecondary school or program.

How does a student apply?

Contact your local Chafee Independent Living (IL) coordinator or program for information on application procedures and deadlines in your state. Many states have their Chafee ETV applications available online. Students need to reapply each year to be considered for continuation of Chafee ETV funding.

📖 Chafee IL and Chafee ETV Resources

- The **National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development** is a good place to start for information about these funds. It lists contact information for state Chafee coordinators, information on the state's Chafee program, and links to state Chafee plans. Go to www.nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd. Click **State by State**, then click your state map.

- *Frequently Asked Questions I, II and III* give concise, complete information about the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program. These are useful resources. Go to www.natl-fostercare.org. Scroll to **FAQs**, and then click the titles.

- The **National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development** also lists state IL coordinators who will know about the Chafee IL and Chafee ETVs at the state level.
  Go to www.nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd/resources/ilcoords.shtml.

- The **State Voucher National Site** provides Chafee ETV contact information for all states. Go to www.statevoucher.org.

- **Implementing state ETVs.** You can read federal government instructions to the states on implementation of Chafee ETVs.
  Go to www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/pi0306.htm.

Appendix B—Checklists

Preparing students for postsecondary education or training

Data show that students who begin planning for postsecondary education as early as 8th grade are much more likely to enroll in higher education. To prepare adequately, students must follow certain prescribed time sequences and deadlines. For example, they must complete first-year algebra in time to take three more years of high school math. ACT and SAT tests must be taken on given dates. College and career and technical program applications all have deadlines for submission. And the list goes on.

Even if it's not possible to start this process in middle school, it's important to focus, in the time you have, on the same elements—academic preparation, test preparedness, information about postsecondary options, and guidance and coaching towards enrollment.

With this in mind, we give you a general timeline and checklists for preparing students for postsecondary education. Each activity in the checklists is keyed by page number to the strategies in this guide that give you the information you'll need to accomplish the activities.

Complete these activities every year

From 7th through 12th grade, work with the student on these activities:

☐ Actively involve students in postsecondary education planning. *Pages 16–18*.

☐ Connect students to a college preparation or outreach program. *Pages 31–33*.

☐ Connect the student with a mentor who can provide long-term academic guidance and advocacy. *Pages 26–28*.

☐ Monitor the student's grades and credits. *Page 47*.

☐ Maintain as much school stability and continuity as possible. *Pages 48–50*.

☐ Make sure that the student enrolls in a challenging sequence of courses leading to graduation and postsecondary enrollment. *Pages 44–47*.

☐ Refer the student to summer school when needed to make up credits or improve skills. *Pages 40–43*.

☐ Make sure that the student keeps an academic portfolio of grades, extracurricular activities, school transcripts, immunizations, Social Security number, and other important documents, and updates it every year. *Pages 28–29*.

☐ Actively involve students with disabilities in their IEP meetings or 504 plan development. *Pages 33–34*.

☐ Make sure that students with disabilities are enrolled in rigorous coursework that is appropriate to their needs and consistent with the goals identified in their IEP. *Pages 48–49*.

7th Grade

☐ Check the student's math and reading skills based on standardized test scores and work with the school to offer remedial classes, if needed. *Pages 40–43*.

☐ Assess a student's overall academic strengths and needs using the Casey Life Skills Education Supplement, Level II. Address identified weak areas using the accompanying resource guide. *Page 34*.

☐ Start discussions with the student about postsecondary education and about enrolling in a college preparation program, if available. *Pages 31–33*.

☐ Make sure that students are scheduled for algebra in 8th grade, assuming they've completed the prerequisites. *Pages 44–47*.

8th Grade

☐ Check again on reading and math if the student was not at grade level in 7th grade. Continue remediation where needed. *Pages 40–42*.

☐ Develop an academic plan with the student for 9th through 12th grades. *Pages 44–47*.

☐ Suggest that the student take the EXPLORE assessment, if given at the school. *Page 63*.

☐ Talk with the student about enrolling in a college preparation program, if available. *Pages 31–33*.

9th Grade

☐ At the beginning of the school year, meet with the student and school counselor to make sure the student is in appropriate classes, including math (preferably algebra or geometry), English, social studies, and science. *Pages 44–47*.

☐ Assess the student's need for tutoring in basic skills or for support with schoolwork, and help get it, as necessary. *Pages 40–42*.

☐ Talk with the student about paying for postsecondary education. Work together to set up a savings and financial aid plan and to begin a financial aid file. *Pages 98–101*.

☐ In spring, make sure the student is registered for the necessary courses for the following school year. *Pages 44–47*.

Students with disabilities

☐ Help students learn about their disability and how it affects their learning. *Pages 16–18*.

☐ Help students learn about their learning styles. *Pages 16–18*.

☐ Request an evaluation for assistive technology, if necessary. *Pages 51–52*.

☐ Discuss the need for a reevaluation of eligibility for special education using instruments normed on adults. *Page 59*.

☐ Request any necessary testing accommodations for the PLAN™ test, if the student will be taking this in the fall of 10th grade. *Page 65*.

10th Grade

Fall-Winter

☐ At the beginning of the school year, make sure the student is in appropriate classes and on track for postsecondary education. *Pages 44–47*.

☐ Make sure that the student registers for and takes the PLAN test, if available. Review the results with the student and guidance counselor. *Page 65*.

☐ Have the student complete the Casey Life Skills Education Supplement, Level III to identify academic strengths and needs. Address identified weak areas using the accompanying resource guide. *Sidebar, Page 34*.

☐ Encourage students to attend college fairs or begin researching higher education on the Internet or in the school guidance office (financial aid too!). Suggest that they use these experiences to start developing an academic and career portfolio. *Pages 28–29 and 30–31*.

Spring-Summer

☐ In spring, make sure the student is registered for the appropriate courses for the 11th grade, possibly including Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate Programs, Tech Prep, dual enrollment programs, and so on. *Pages 44–47*.

☐ When students turn 16, develop an IL/Transition plan that incorporates their academic plan and postsecondary goals. Inform the youth about postsecondary supports under the Chafee IL program and about Education and Training Vouchers. *Pages 44–47 and Appendix B, Pages 155-158*.

Students with disabilities

☐ Apply for any needed testing accommodations for the PSAT/NMSQT, to be taken in the fall. *Page 66*.

☐ Make sure to coordinate the student's IL/Transition Plan and the IEP/Transition Plan. *Pages 48–49*.

11th Grade

Fall-Winter

☐ Make sure that the student is in the appropriate classes. *Pages 44–47*.

☐ Find out when the student will take the high school exit exams, if any, and how to get the results. *Pages 59 and 68*.

☐ Make sure the student registers for and takes the PSAT/NMSQT. *Page 66*.

☐ Arrange for the student to attend college fairs, and visit colleges and career and technical programs of interest. Encourage them to make an appointment with a financial aid counselor and ask specifically about aid for youth in foster care. *Pages 30–31, 77–84 and 98–101*.

Spring-Summer

☐ Have the student take ACT or SAT tests for practice if they're applying to a two- or four-year college. *Pages 56–58, 60–61, and 66–68*.

☐ Refer the student to summer school if needed for credit, improving skills, or preparation for ACT or SAT tests. *Pages 40–43, 60–61, and 66–68*.

☐ Review the student's IL/Transition Plan and the supports available under Chafee programs. *Appendix A, pages 151-154.*

☐ In spring, make sure the student is registered for the necessary 12th grade courses and on track for postsecondary education. *Pages 44–47*.

☐ In summer, have the student request application materials and financial aid forms from schools or programs of interest. Discuss how to apply for ETVs. *Pages 85–88, and 102–106*.

Students with disabilities

☐ Schedule any needed reevaluation of eligibility for special education using instruments normed on adults. *Page 59*.

☐ Make sure that the student will have all the disability documentation they'll need for disability services at the postsecondary level. *Page 59*.

☐ Make sure that students with disabilities who need accommodations when they take SAT or ACT tests begin the application for them six months before they plan to take the tests. *Pages 60–63, and 66–67*.

☐ Help students with disabilities apply for any needed support from adult human services agencies, such as Vocational Rehabilitation Services. *Pages 48–49*.

12th Grade

Fall

☐ At the beginning of the school year, make sure that the student is in the appropriate classes, including English, advanced math, social sciences, science, and a foreign language. Recheck the academic plan to make sure the student is on track for postsecondary education. *Pages 44–47*.

☐ If the student has not already passed the high school exit exams, find out when the student will take them and how to get the results. *Pages 59 and 68*.

☐ Have the student register to take ACT or SAT tests in November or December. If a student is considering a community college or a career or technical program, see if he or she can take the required placement tests for practice while still in high school. *Pages 57–58, 60–61, and 66–68*.

☐ Work with the student on narrowing his or her postsecondary choices. If applying for a four-year college, make sure the student has a backup school. *Pages 77–88*.

☐ Encourage the student to get applications and research financial aid information and discuss financial aid options with the student. *Pages 85–88 and 98–101*.

☐ Make sure the student requests letters of recommendation and work with the student to complete program and financial aid applications and submit them on time. *Pages 85–88 and 102–106*.

Winter-Spring

☐ No later than January, help the student complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). *Pages 102–105*.

☐ Help the student apply for Chafee ETVs and other state aid. *Page 106 and Pages 109–117*.

☐ Review the SAR from the FAFSA with the student for accuracy; if any corrections are necessary, help the student resubmit to FAFSA. *Pages 102–105*.

Students with disabilities

☐ Discuss with the student the issue of disclosing their disability to the postsecondary institution. *Page 85*.

☐ Make sure that the student's disability documentation matches the requirements of the postsecondary school or program the student plans plan to attend. *Page 59*.

☐ Help students establish eligibility for services at the disability offices of their prospective postsecondary program or college. *Page 145*.

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We want to hear from you.

We welcome your comments and suggestions about the content, scope, and format of the Postsecondary Education and Training Guide.

Is it useful? Is there too much information? Not enough? Is it easy to use? Did you find any mistakes? What should we add—for example, do you know some resources that we should include in the next edition?

Please e-mail your comments or questions to: PostsecondaryEdGuide@casey.org.

Thank you.