



# NRC-FAHE: National Research Collaborative for Foster Alumni and Higher Education

## WELCOME!

The National Research Collaborative for Foster Alumni and Higher Education (NRC-FAHE) is a network of researchers and practitioners whose aim is to improve practice and influence policy related to foster care youth/alumni and higher education by creating and advancing a clear research agenda and facilitating communication and collaboration among interdisciplinary scholars and practitioners to promote postsecondary access and retention of youth in care and foster care alumni. The NRC-FAHE promotes innovative ways to use research and best practices to inform and influence policy making and values practice-informed research and the voice of youth in care and foster care alumni in improving access and outcomes in higher education.

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# Introduction and Welcome

Happy new year and hope your semester/quarter is off to a good start. I am pleased to share with you our 14th edition of the NRC FAHE newsletter. It was wonderful to see so many of you at SSWR, and thank you all again for your dedication and getting up so early to make the SIG meeting. At that meeting we had some wonderful conversation and updates for you. Specially, formalizing our partnership with Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN) and to our practice partners who oversee campus support programs across the nation, and increased opportunities for skill building and engagement in the policy arena. Many NRC-FAHE members had the opportunity to tour Arizona State University's campus support program. For those of you who didn't get a chance to join that tour, we have brought ASU to you in this edition's newsletter. We are very grateful to the Bridging Success Program for their thoughtfulness in allowing us to physically see and learn about their space, and for providing us an interview for this newsletter.

This edition of the newsletter includes many important lessons learned garnered from the latest findings and happenings in research, practice, and policy. First Dr. Royel Johnson shared some critical information for your consideration on how to select theory and how to use it to guide our work. Also highlighted in this newsletter is an article, I had the great honor and privilege of joining Dr. Svetlana Shpiegel in coauthoring, that highlights the unique challenges and experiences of young adults with lived experience in foster care who enter college as parents. Many campus support programs are not fully prepared to support parenting students pursue their post-secondary goals. There are many important

lessons learned from this important research.

The 117th Congress officially ended in December 2022, and much legislation was passed at the 11th hour via the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023. This piece of legislation increases funding for the implementation and expansion of targeted pre-college programs for foster youth and other vulnerable populations to prepare high school students for the college journey. For currently enrolled college students, the bill contained increases in maximum awards for need based financial aid and work study programs. We also include some additional policy guidance published by policymakers in the executive branch. Some very important policy highlights that I want to draw your attention to are language clarifications in administrative policy related to FAFSA Dependency, and new legislative mandates that take affect January 2023 that impact college going foster youth within the SUPPORT Act. The NRC has additional policy agenda items that we pushed for but did not get signed into law before the end of the 117th Congress, so we will be working hard to get those pieces of legislation reintroduced in the 118th and will be calling on your support as we work on implementing our policy agenda for the 118th congress.

In addition to tracking federal efforts, we are also trying to keep you abreast of state policy efforts that have the potential to positively impact college going young adults with lived experience in foster care that we could be working towards replicating in each of our respective states. In this newsletter, we highlight CA's foster youth tax credit program.

Finally, our newsletter concludes with information on community announcements. These includes opportunities our members have had with engaging with media to share our research findings, upcoming webinars we would like to encourage you to participate in, and finally to ask for your help in supporting PhD students in our network who need your help to complete their research projects. I greatly appreciate the NRC community and the support we give one another to move our collective work forward.

ANGELIQUE DAY, PH.D., MSW



Angelique Day, PhD, MSW, is an Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Washington-Seattle. Much of her research focuses on foster care youth, including examining the differences in college retention rates between foster care youth and other low-income first-generation college students, and examining "youth voice" and its impact on child welfare, [education](#) and health policy reform. Dr. Day leads the Policy Review team for the NRC-FAHE. Questions about the policy section of this newsletter can be directed to her, [dayangel@uw.edu](mailto:dayangel@uw.edu)

# Higher Education Highlight:

## Centering Theory in Research on Young People with Foster Care Experience

### COLUMN AUTHOR



Dr. Royel M. Johnson is Associate Professor of Education and Social Work at the University of Southern California (USC), where he is also Director of Student Engagement at the USC Race and Equity Center. Dr. Johnson is a nationally recognized scholar, whose interdisciplinary research addresses issues of educational access, racial equity, and student success. His work has an unapologetic focus on racially/ethnically minoritized and other institutionally marginalized populations including young people with foster care experience and justice-involved youth. Dr. Johnson maintains a highly active program of research with over 40 academic publications, in addition to three forthcoming books/monographs. Moreover, he is principal investigator (PI), or Co-PI, on grants and contracts exceeding \$5.1 million. He has delivered over 100 talks, lectures, and workshops for various stakeholders, instantiating his commitment to connecting research to policy and practice to improve the material conditions of underserved populations. He holds a B.A. in Political Science and Ed.M. in Educational Policy Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; and Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs, with a cognate in Race and Social Policy from Ohio State.

Research on the educational experiences and outcomes of young people impacted by foster care is limited by scholars' inattention to theory. In a systematic review of literature that I published in the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* two years ago (see Johnson, 2021), I found that 37 of the 46 studies I reviewed, made no explicit mention of their guiding theoretical or conceptual framework. Among the few that did engage theory, they primarily relied on resiliency as a framework.

Theory, a set of interrelated propositions that help to explain or predict phenomena, is an essential ingredient in research that has yet to be maximized in studies on youth with foster care experience. Much like prescription eyeglasses, theory can provide clarity and focus to a study, and connect otherwise disparate factors and experiences. Atheoretical research (and practice) is insufficient for understanding and addressing the very complex lived experiences of young folks impacted by foster care.

In this brief, I describe three promising frameworks that scholars and practitioners should consider in their work. In addition, I refer to literature and studies that offer more insight into the theory/concept, and that may serve as useful models.

**1) Sense of Belonging:** This concept refers to the extent to which one feels connected to, respected by, and important to a community or group. Motivational psychologists have described belonging as a basic human need that all people are motivated to meet (Maslow, 1943). One's desire to belonging takes on heightened importance in social contexts where one is vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. Terrell Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) book, *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students* outlines seven key propositions that constitute his working theory of college student belonging. Drawing on insight from his past empirical work, he uses the framework to examine the educational experiences of several subgroup populations. I've also written about sense of belonging from a socio-ecological perspective (Johnson, 2022) and have drawn on the framework to qualitatively examine the educational experiences high school youth in foster care (Johnson, et al., 2020).

**2) Intersectionality:** The term was coined by critical legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) as a way of framing how systems of oppression and domination (e.g., racism and gender discrimination)

intersect to structurally marginalize Black women. Since its introduction to the academy, scholars almost every field and discipline have drawn of the concept. It has been particularly popular in postsecondary educational research (Museus & Griffin, 2011) to examine the experiences of multiply marginalized groups. For instance, Jennifer Geiger and colleagues (2022) used it to examine how the multiple marginalized identities of immigrant-origin Latinx young adults with foster care background shape their experiences.

**3) Community Cultural Wealth:** Introduced by Tara Yosso (2005), community cultural wealth challenges perspectives of people of color that construct them culturally deficient. Instead, it recognizes the vast array of cultural knowledge, skills, and networks that often go unrecognized. Yosso identifies five forms of devalued capital that are present among communities of color: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. Numerous scholars have employed a community cultural wealth perspective to study the experiences of Black youth (e.g., Jayakumar et al. 2013), Latino college students (e.g., Luna et al., 2013) and even formerly incarcerated students (e.g., Johnson & Manyweather, 2022).

Obviously, this list is not meant to be exhaustive. Instead, what I want to underscore is that it is important the scholarly community take more seriously the role and potential of theory in our study of young people with foster care experience. There are numerous frameworks, especially in sociology and applied fields like higher education. I hope that scholars reading this will consider the three frameworks described above in their future work and commit to learning others that might inform their scholarship.

\*\*All references are available through this citation:

Johnson, R. M. (2021). The state of research on undergraduate youth formerly in foster care: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 14(1), 147.

# Practice Highlight: Bridging Success ASU

## COLUMN AUTHORS



Justine Cheung is the Program Director for Arizona State University's Bridging Success – a campus-based support program for students with a foster care background. She implemented Bridging Success in the spring of 2015 and has since welcomed and worked with eight cohorts of students. Justine has an undergraduate and graduate degree in social work, is a faculty associate for ASU's School of Social Work, and researcher. Before working at ASU, she worked in the public mental and behavioral health field advancing peer-support practices as a pathway to mental health recovery. Research interests include mental health recovery and higher education outcomes for students who have experienced foster care.

### Can you give us some background on your program and how it got started?

**Justine:** In the State of Arizona, in 2013, the Arizona State Legislature passed an unfunded mandate that provided a tuition waiver for anybody who was in care on or after their sixteenth birthday. It was originally piloted, then it was made permanent in 2018 and the eligibility requirement was changed, so now it's available to anyone who was in care on or after their fourteenth birthday. So that was the launching place for Bridging Success. We had some people within ASU that were already serving young people who had experienced foster care, but it was a very loose network of people. They realized, that if we're removing one of the biggest barriers for young people to come to the University - finances -then we needed to recognize them as a unique

population and provide support. From there, long story short, we developed a program, presented it to a funder. Our funder said, they're doing something similar at the community college level and if you partner, we'll fund both of you. So, we partner with the community colleges. We want to empower young people to make the best choice for themselves. If I'm presenting, and they are like I hate Arizona State I want University of Arizona, then I have a person that I can connect the youth with. Our community partners appreciate that approach.

### How is the program funded?

**Justine:** Our funder is the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust. They provide roughly \$100,000 per year for programming, and then the University nearly matches that and provides the stuff to run the physical office. We're working to be a line item in the University's budget, but in higher ed it takes a while. We also have funding from The Kiita Foundation for our ASuPIRE program, which is the mental health intervention we provide.

### What is your role in the program?

**Justine:** Our team is made up of myself, the full-time program director. We also have a part-time social worker, sometimes an intern, and peer mentors. Right now, we have three peer mentors.

My math won't add up, but just roll with it. The job description itself is twofold. Half of my time is recruitment and half is on-campus support. Recruitment is being out in the community talking to young people and supportive adults who can help youth achieve their higher ed aspirations. When I talk about post-secondary, we're counting anything post high school, certificates, vocational programs, two-year, four-year, etc. Some of this work is changing the messaging around youth going to college. I can't tell you how many times in front of me a group home manager, a foster parent, whoever would tell a young person you're not going to college.

That was super disheartening and super frustrating.

The on-campus piece is figuring out how we wrap around students to support them all the way through their schooling. We have a lot of programming, including an early start program where we bring about 30 young people to campus ten days early. They move into dorms early, get oriented to campus, meet key people, and most importantly meet and find each other. We also have our academic program with 1:1 coaching based on the seven Casey Life Domains and we have a licensed therapist who runs our ASuPIRE mental health intervention and meets only with our students. We also host a lot of social events throughout the year.

So I said the math isn't going to work out; half in the community, half campus-based support program, and then there's another half in there. My unofficial term for it is parenting or preadmission support versus the post admission support. If they don't have a supportive adult in their life or don't have someone to help them walk through the application process, FASFA, someone to go to orientation with, help pick housing, a meal plan etc. I will help with that. I tell people all the time, I have helped many of my own children, plus myself as I came back to college much later in life, apply to college. It's complicated every time, never a smooth path, so it's important that we acknowledge that.

### Who does your program serve? And how many students does the program currently serve?

**Justine:** We serve anybody who walks in my door and says I was in foster care at some point in my life. I don't look for any paperwork. I don't go and verify with DCS. I do make sure that they're aware that there are possible financial supports to their foster status, but I will serve anybody.

We have about 220 undergrad students. If we were to count our online students, we're probably pushing 300. I don't do direct outreach to online students simply for capacity reasons. Now, if online

students find me of course I work with them. It just it's a lot for one person, but I do my best to support as many as I can. I've only had a part time person for just over a year. That's not unique to us. I'm connected to all kinds of programs across the country, and it's often one person trying to do the work of three.

Our Early Start program, can serve 20-30 students.

### **Which components of your program do you feel are especially unique or impactful?**

**Justine:** There are a lot of programs that use peer mentors. We've just had really great success with the peer mentors. They are a nice conduit back to the program. Peer mentors are able to connect with others and when it's beyond their capacity, encourage students to speak with myself or another team member. Mentors help normalize being a student and the common challenges that may arise.

The students also have access to me pretty much 24/7. I have laid some boundaries like don't text me after 8 pm and expect an immediate response. I'll get back to you in the morning. But I have made the choice to be available even on weekends. For some reason, Sunday seems to be the day that students reach out in crisis. I feel strongly that it is important that they get support in the moment. Almost always it is just a matter helping them calm down and talking things through to make a plan for moving forward. Usually, we are addressing concerns with finances, housing, or difficult relationships. Sometimes it might be mental health concerns. I have a background in in public mental and behavioral health and am comfortable in that space. However, I'm not a therapist and I make that clear to our Bridging Success students, we work together to make a plan that often includes them connecting with our ASuPIRE clinician or other mental health services. There are a lot of programs that just don't do that or have the capacity to do that. A lot of programs are situated in student affairs

and maybe not familiar with the unique challenges these students face or strategies and networks to meet their needs. They are also limited by the 8-5, M-F framework of traditional student support. This isn't a critique! We are all doing what we can given our institutions approach to serving students who have experienced foster care.

As far as unique, I think ASuPIRE is very unique. ASuPIRE is a counseling program where students can receive up to 15, one-hour sessions and go as often or as infrequently as they like. It's built on a resiliency framework and about recognizing trauma how it might be impacting the students. And how do we either activate or cultivate our resiliency tools to keep us going and focused on school.

### **What impact has the program had on the students?**

**Justine:** This year we completed an external evaluation of the Bridging Success program. The Morrison Institute spent a year gathering data and conducting the analysis. This was a huge undertaking! I had spent 6+ years running the program and wondering if we were making a difference. The main findings found that Bridging Success participants have a 53% graduation rate, students who were eligible to participate in our program but did not graduate at a rate of 44%. We also have an 82% retention rate from year one to year 2, which is right on track with the University overall. Qualitative data collected from student participants reflected an ongoing message I hear firsthand all the time, that it meant so much to students that at least one person at ASU knew they were there, and that they matter to someone.

### **What changes to laws or policy would you like to see?**

**Justine:** I would like to see the age limitations shift. I think ETV is getting better and more flexible. The Arizona tuition waiver must be accessed by the time they are 21. I use my foster daughter as an example, with her permission. She

wasn't ready to go to school post high school. She's 24 and she's just now, like Mom, I think I want to go to school. If she was in Arizona, she wouldn't be able to access the tuition waiver. Let's push it out to 30, give them some time to figure out life and what they are passionate about.

Back to the mental health thing, and this isn't just unique to this student population. Colleges and universities are not equipped to provide ongoing mental health services. Most on-campus counseling services are focused on stress reduction in the immediate future and that's basically their role. I feel like, especially with what the world has been through in the past three years we need more mental health services for college students.

Institutions should automatically have a line item in their budget for a program like this. We shouldn't be spending so much time wondering how we get more funding. We've been fortunate (a) that we are a large university and (b) we have a lot of philanthropic interest around the program. But we still need more. We need more staff to provide coaching and to reach out to our online students. And we definitely need to hire a second clinician for ASuPIRE. But those things cost money and it's just not in the budget right now.

### **What future goals do you have for the program?**

**Justine:** Going forward, I'm rethinking, and referencing our recent evaluation. It really showed us where we were doing well, and where all the gaps were. I'm digging in more and lining up our logic model and the resiliency framework with everything we do. So, for the next evaluation we can learn more. Figure out what student's biggest concerns are, and how much time am I spending with each student on average. I want to do more evaluation and program development so I can hand it off to other programs. We want to help. Whoever is doing the work do the work better.

# Student Highlight: Bridging Success ASU

## COLUMN AUTHORS



Samantha Sahagun is a senior at Arizona State University and started August of 2019. She is majoring in Social Work with a minor in Parks and Protected Area Management.

Samantha is part of the 2019 Bridging Success cohort program and has been interning with Bridging Success since Spring of 2022. She has loved being a part of the program and making connections. Samantha is passionate about ensuring that student voices are heard and advocating for whatever their needs may be. Some of her hobbies are going on hikes, reading books, and trying out new recipes to cook.

### How did you get connected with the bridging success program?

**Samantha:** It was in 2019, my freshman year at ASU. I was getting ready to start, getting all my stuff ready for orientation, and I got emails about Early Start. I believe they were able to identify that I had been in the foster care system through my FASFA. Through my FASFA it notified the Bridging Success program and they sent out emails about a program called Early Start. Early start is a weeklong program that ASU does for students who were in the foster care system. Students stay at the ASU campus for a week and get acclimated to being at a university. I was super excited because I thought it was the perfect fit and a great opportunity since I didn't know anybody else going to ASU at the Tempe campus. Being able to meet other students who I have similar backgrounds with was really nice and

comforting. It was nice knowing that I wasn't alone at such a big university.

### How has your experience been with the bridging success program?

**Samantha:** This is my fourth year, I'm a senior now graduating this May. In the past four years it's been super great. There's such a great support system. We're able to turn to Bridging Success for most things: if we have any academic concerns, questions about financial aid, or need help with housing. Housing has been a big part of the program for me. Bridging Success made sure that we had housing at ASU over the summer if we weren't able to go home. They really make sure that we're being taken care of at ASU.

### What aspects of the program do you feel have been the most impactful for you?

**Samantha:** Being able to make connections and meet other students that I have similar backgrounds with. I'm able to make friends easier. It great to be able to be a part of all the celebrations that they have. For example, there are things like Friendsgiving. So if students can't go home with their families Friendsgiving is something that the program offers during finals week and after finals week. There are a lot of things students can come to since most students aren't able to go home. Students can also just hang out and just be together in the office at times.

### What elements do you think would be great to see more of or see at other universities based on what you know?

**Samantha:** I actually applied to the other three universities in Arizona, and so my FASFA was the same for all of them, and the other universities never reached out and told me how they support foster youth. Versus ASU sent those emails right away, calling me

seeing if I was interested in being a part of the program. That's really what drew me to ASU. I knew that I had a support system there versus when I applied to the other three it wasn't something that they really put out there.

It would be helpful if universities voiced or marketed that there is a program for students that have been foster youth.

### You mentioned being an intern, what is your role with Bridging Success?

**Samantha:** I absolutely loved being an intern for Justine and the Bridging Success program I was able to help plan and coordinate events throughout the year and meet with students. My first semester of interning was more shadowing and seeing what I would be doing with the students. Then second semester I was able to do one on one with students. During these I would ask how their classes are going, how it was with their roommates, and with ASU overall. Then, of course, when there were more difficult questions that I wasn't able to answer or support with. I would guide them to my supervisors.

### What recommendations would you have for either researchers, practitioners, or policy makers around campus support programs?

**Samantha:** I would recommend they be more involved and ask more questions. I feel like foster youth is a topic that is not really talked about. I also think they need to provide more mental health services for foster youth. I know that a lot of students seek out therapy and counseling. But if the students didn't have the financial means they can't see someone, or ASU could only let them see someone for a certain number of sessions, and then after that they weren't able to see them anymore. Some students would like to continue therapy. The University does what they can to help, but it's not enough. Especially after the pandemic.

# Article Highlight

## PAPER AUTHORS



Lead Author Svetlana Shpiegel is an Associate Professor at the Department of Social Work and Child Advocacy at Montclair State University in New Jersey. Her research focuses on the functioning of adolescents and young adults involved with the foster care system, with a particular emphasis on youth who are pregnant and parenting. Dr. Shpiegel has expertise working with large administrative datasets, such as the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). Her research has been published in several leading journals, such as *Child Abuse and Neglect*, *Children and Youth Services Review*, and others. She has conducted a number of studies on early parenthood and higher education among youth in foster care.

### Study Summary

It is well known that obtaining a college degree has tangible benefits for youth in foster care. However, these youth face many barriers that can derail their plans to pursue higher education. One commonly-overlooked barrier is childbirth and the responsibilities of parenthood. Research shows that young women in foster care are likely to have children early, with as many as 40% giving birth by age 21. The demands of motherhood, especially in the early years of a child's life, may prevent young women from enrolling in and completing postsecondary programs,

bringing cascading negative effects for them and their children.

Despite the high rates of early parenthood among youth in foster care, virtually no studies have examined the link between childbirth and postsecondary education access in this population. Our study addresses this gap and examines the relationship between childbirth in early adolescence (by age 17), late adolescence (ages 17-19), and early adulthood (ages 19-21) and young women's access to postsecondary education at age 21.

Data for this study comes from two national, administrative datasets: the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). Current analysis was based on a sample of 2,207 young women who obtained a high school diploma or GED by age 19, and who participated in the NYTD surveys in years 2014, 2016, and 2018 (i.e., at ages 17, 19, and 21). We defined postsecondary education access at age 21 as having a vocational certificate or license, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree or higher; or being actively enrolled in a postsecondary program.

### Key Findings

About 45% of the young women in the current sample reported access to postsecondary education at age 21. These rates are relatively high, primarily because our sample was restricted to educational "high achievers" - i.e., young women who obtained a high school diploma or GED by age 19. Most young women in our sample were actively enrolled in a postsecondary program at age 21, but a small minority (about 10%) already obtained a credential, primarily a vocational certificate or license. Predictably, childbirth had a negative effect on access to postsecondary education - while nearly 50% of young women without children reported accessing postsecondary programs, only 30% of young mothers did. The timing of birth was influential in this regard - giving birth before age 19 had little impact on postsecondary education access at age 21.

However, a more recent birth between ages 19 and 21 significantly decreased the odds of accessing postsecondary programs.

### Implications

Young mothers with foster care backgrounds are a particularly disadvantaged group with respect to higher education access. If these young mothers are to successfully pursue postsecondary programs, they will require significant supports, especially when their children are young. Among the most critical supports are financial assistance, housing, and childcare:

1. Comprehensive Financial Aid - young mothers who have experienced foster care need financial aid packages that cover not only their tuition and fees, but also daily expenses, such as housing and childcare. In the absence of substantial financial assistance, young mothers may decide to abandon their pursuit of postsecondary education and focus on supporting their families.
2. Stable and Affordable Housing - young mothers need stable and affordable housing on campus or close to campus in order to pursue postsecondary education. Family housing, where young mothers can live with their children, should be available year-round on the college campuses or in campus-adjacent neighborhoods.
3. Safe and Inexpensive Childcare - Giving young mothers priority access to high quality, campus-based or campus-adjacent childcare could go a long way toward increasing their ability to pursue postsecondary education. Without consistent childcare, young mothers may not be able to pursue postsecondary programs or struggle with degree completion.

Shpiegel, S., Dworsky, A., Day, A., Ludeke, R., & Ventola, M. (2023). Relationship between childbirth and access to postsecondary education among young women ageing out of foster care. *Child & Family Social Work*, 28(1), 147-159. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12949>

# Policy Updates

## FASFA Dependency Clarification

Youth who have experienced foster care may not be getting FASFA benefits they are entitled to. Many youth think they must currently be in foster care or have aged out to qualify as an independent. However, a student who was an orphan, foster child, or ward of the court at the age of 13 or older may file as an independent on their FASFA, even if their status changes later. This means that even if a child is adopted after the age of 13, they can still qualify as an independent. Young people who experience permanency on or after the age of 13 are underrepresented in campus support programs and it is critical we ensure they have equitable access to supportive services in higher education.

Aid Administrators may only override status from dependent to independent. If an independent student receives substantial support from others, a school may use its professional judgement to adjust the cost of attendance in the FASFA. For more detail reference the [Federal Financial Aid Handbook](#).

## The Substance Use-Disorder prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities (SUPPORT) Act

Under the Affordable Care Act Former Foster youth are eligible for Medicaid until they are 26, however that was only if they were enrolled in the state where they were in foster care. The SUPPORT Act includes provisions which standardize the delivery of medicine and expands access to health care. As of January 1, 2023 the SUPPORT Act requires states to cover youth under the former foster care category even if they were in foster care in another state. The law only impacts youth who reach the age of 18 on or after January 1, 2023.

## Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 (H.R. 2617)

One of the final acts of Congress was the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023, signed into law at the end of December 2022. The act provides several notable provisions for youth who have been impacted by the child welfare system. The act provides \$3.5 billion for higher education programs. This includes, but is not limited to, an additional investment of \$54 million more than 2022 for [Federal TRIO](#) programs which is designed to provide services for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to assist them through the academic pipeline of middle school to postsecondary programs. It also provides \$10 million more than the fiscal year of 2022 for [Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs \(GEAR UP\)](#) a pre-colligate grant program targeting low-income students. Additionally, \$40 million more than last year will be invested for [Post-Secondary Student Success Grants](#), which is a grant program to support individuals who have started, but not completed postsecondary education or training.

The act increases the Pell Grant to \$7,395, which is a \$500 increase from the 2022 fiscal year. The Act also increases Federal Work Study funding by \$20 billion and increases funding for the [Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant \(FSEOG\)](#), which is a grant for undergraduate students with "exceptional financial need."

The Consolidated Appropriations Act also included the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act reauthorization, which extends the previous Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act till 2027. This will increase funding to improve mental and behavioral health services in higher education.

## The Start of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congressional Session

Everything that was not passed in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congressional session must be reintroduced in the 118<sup>th</sup>. This is what has been introduced prior to this publication:

- H.R.309: To amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to require institutions of higher education to provide notice to students receiving work-study assistance about potential eligibility for participation in the supplemental nutrition assistance program, and for other purposes.
- H.R.221: To amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to expand eligibility for participation in the Federal Pell Grant program to certain trade schools.

## State Policy Updates

California has implemented the [Foster Youth Tax Credit \(FYTC\)](#) for the 2022 tax year. The credit provides up to \$1,083 per eligible individual. To be eligible, current and former foster youth must be between the age of 18-25 at the end of the tax year, have been in the California foster care system at the age of 13 or older and placed through the system, and have an income between \$1 and \$30,000. Additional details about eligibility and claiming the credit can be found on the State of California's [Tax Board website](#). Based on income, the number of youth being claimed on someone else's tax return, and tax filing rates, the California Department of Social Services estimates 20,000 youth could claim and receive the credit.

**We know that there may be legislation in your state that we have not listed here. If you know of a specific effort in your state that you would like us to mention in the next newsletter, please email Angelique Day at [dayangel@uw.edu](mailto:dayangel@uw.edu).**

