

# College Transitions Framework

**A guide for child welfare and  
probation agencies to embed  
college-going practices into  
policies and procedures**



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**April 2020**

## Introduction

While California's foster care system has made important strides in recent years for older youth, one area where it continues to struggle is post-secondary achievement. In California, foster youth are 29% less likely than their peers to persist at least one year in community college. By age 26, just four percent of former foster youth have obtained a 4-year degree, compared to 36 percent of same-age young adults.

Without a college degree, foster youth have a much lower likelihood of long-term economic security. The median weekly earnings of an individual with a bachelor's degree are almost double those of a worker with only a high-school diploma. Opportunities for individuals without some form of post-secondary credential continue to diminish over time. Between 2008 and 2016 the U.S. economy lost 5.6 million jobs that require only a high school diploma or less while gaining 9.7 million jobs requiring a post-secondary credential.

In recognition of this reality, the California legislature adopted Senate Bill 12 (SB 12), which went into effect January 1, 2018 and included a requirement of child welfare and juvenile probation agencies that the case plans of all foster youth aged 16 or older identify who will assist the youth with applications for college and financial aid. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) issued [ACL 18-104](#) on September 12, 2018 which provides additional details regarding how to implement the law.

This College Transitions Framework is a practical guide for child welfare and juvenile probation agencies for how to implement the SB 12 requirement such that it has the maximum impact on foster youth educational outcomes. The guide additionally offers suggestions for how these agencies can adopt complementary college-going practices in addition to those required by SB 12 to transform practices even further to support college success outcomes among foster youth. The adoption of these practices will create a supportive network of well-informed adults to guide foster youth through the college application and financial aid processes and support their successful college matriculation.

The guide includes eight specific recommendations that can be incorporated into current agency policy and practices. Within each broad recommendation area are specific practices that can be undertaken to implement the recommendation. The first four recommendations are designed to support the implementation of SB 12 directly and the remaining four are ways in which a county can go above and beyond the requirements of SB 12 to further support educational success. By adopting these recommendations, the child welfare system can transform long-term outcomes for the youth that it serves.

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## **Basic Senate Bill 12 Implementation**

### **1. Ensure consistent implementation of Senate Bill 12 requirements.**

When youth are supported by adults through the college matriculation process, they are more likely to enroll and succeed in college. In recognition of this, the legislature adopted SB 12, which requires that the case plans of all foster youth aged 16 or older identify the person or persons who will assist the

youth with applications for college and financial aid, unless the youth states that he or she does not want to pursue post-secondary education, including career or technical education.

The law further prescribes that if a youth expresses that they do not wish to pursue post-secondary education, if at any point in the future, the youth expresses that they wish to pursue post-secondary education, the case plan shall be updated to identify an adult individual responsible for assisting the youth with applications for post-secondary education and related financial aid.

**Ensure that all social workers have the necessary training regarding SB 12 requirements and how to identify an appropriate individual or individuals in the case plan.** Identifying the appropriate individual should be initiated in collaboration with the youth. This could include either identifying individuals currently in the youth's life who can provide this support or connecting them to community-based resources that can support them. Identifying the individual can begin with the question; *Is there a person already in the youth's life who can reliably play this role?* Leveraging pre-existing relationships can allow youth to engage with an individual with whom trust has already been established. This could include the following:

- Resource parent or relative caregiver
- Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)
- Staff from a college preparation or mentoring program (such as TRiO, AVID, or community-based programs)
- High-school counselor
- Education rights holder
- A family member, extended family member or mentor

If the youth does not have a reliable and consistent individual already in their life to play this role, social workers and probation officers should make a referral to an external resource. It is crucial to connect foster youth with a program that has the capacity to provide individualized assistance, rather than only group workshops. The case plan should identify by name, the individual within the agency who will take on this role. Available resources will vary by county, but could include:

- Independent Living Programs (ILP)
- County Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs (FYSCP)
- College foster youth support programs such as NextUp or Guardian Scholars (*visit [CA College Pathways](#) to find support programs*)
- College preparation or mentoring programs (such as TRiO, AVID, or community-based programs)
- High-school counselors and college and career counselors

**Conduct regular reviews of case plans to monitor compliance with SB 12 requirements and identify training needs.** Supervisors should regularly review case plans for compliance. Case plans should always name an actual individual or individuals to support the youth through the college matriculation process. Identification of a program name (for example, ILP) rather than a specific individual is unlikely to have the desired effect and is not in compliance with SB 12 requirements.

**Confirm that the identified individual(s) can provide adequate assistance.** The college and financial aid application processes are complicated and in order to be successful, adult supporters may require training. Understanding how to support students to maintain their motivation to persist through this process is also essential. In some cases, individuals will have the knowledge they need in place already,

for example, if the individual is an ILP staff person or a counselor from the college campus support program.

In other cases, the individual might need training, for example a resource parent or CASA. Making training available will help these individuals to be successful. Recommendation #3 below provides more information regarding how to accomplish this.

**Utilize the Child Family Team (CFT) process to identify the individual(s).** While CFT meetings are often used to make decisions during times of crisis, they are not the only times a CFT can be valuable. The CFT meeting can be utilized for non-emergency planning including long-term college and career planning. The meeting can be an opportunity to identify an individual for the case plan in collaboration with the youth as well as set expectations for the identified individual.

Once an individual has been identified, caseworkers should invite the identified individual to attend the CFT meetings to track progress, identify what additional resources the youth may need to be successful and support the youth should their post-secondary goals shift.

**Conduct regular follow-up with both the youth and the identified individual(s) to check in on progress.** Applying for college and financial aid is not a one-time event, but is rather a process. At a minimum, a review should be conducted every six months to ensure that the identified individual continues to be an appropriate person to fill the role and that activities are on track. If the person identified can no longer fill the role, identifying a new individual should be initiated as quickly as possible.

If the youth had previously stated that they did not want to pursue post-secondary education, regular check-ins should be conducted to determine if this has changed. Per the requirements of SB 12, if at any point the youth expresses that they wish to pursue post-secondary education, the case plan should be updated to identify an adult individual responsible for assisting the youth with applications for post-secondary education and financial aid.

## **2. Implement protocols to ensure social workers and probation officers are trained on college-planning and post-secondary matriculation processes.**

Providing social workers and probation officers with training regarding the basics of the college planning and matriculation processes will both enable them to identify the individuals most appropriate to support youth and effectively monitor if the support being provided is adequate. While it is not expected that social workers and probation officers become college experts, understanding the basics will enable them to effectively support older youth on their caseloads.

**Offer in-person training on post-secondary planning and matriculation for social workers and probation officers.** John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) has created a training curriculum that can be used to train social workers, probation officers and supervisors. Ideally, this training will be offered at least annually to both case workers and supervisors and will become a required component of the training curriculum for social workers, probation officers and supervisors. The JBAY curriculum, which can be implemented in collaboration with a county's local Social Worker Training Academy, includes the following topics:

- understanding the range of education options, including Career and Technical Education at California Community Colleges;

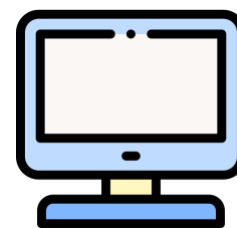
- understanding the matriculation and enrollment process;
- financial aid basics, including how to apply for and how to maintain aid;
- the range of on-campus supports and resources for current and former foster youth; and
- important timelines and deadlines associated with the college matriculation process

Child welfare and probation agencies can also partner with their local Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP), colleges and universities, ILP, college access programs such as Upward Bound and AVID, and community-based organizations for post-secondary training needs.

**Provide accurate and up-to-date resources to child welfare social workers and probation officers.** To support the guidance of college planning and the post-secondary matriculation process caseworkers should be equipped with the tools and resources needed to effectively engage in the college planning and college enrollment process. JBAY has created a set of checklists and other short resource guides that can be distributed to case workers.

**Ensure that training addresses college planning and educational opportunities for foster youth participating in special education and attending non-traditional high schools.** Youth who are in non-traditional school settings and/or participating in special education programs are not exempt from the SB 12 requirement. Many assume that youth placed in non-traditional school settings or who have disabilities may lack either the desire or skills to pursue post-secondary education. It is crucial that these assumptions be avoided and that these students are engaged in conversations about their educational aspirations and long-term career goals. If a youth is not interested in a traditional academic path, it is important to make them aware of the range of post-secondary pathways such as career and technical education (CTE) or paid apprenticeships.

It is also important that both adults and youth are aware of the resources available for students with disabilities at colleges and universities that can help these students to be successful. Students participating in these programs can receive specialized services such as additional counseling support, access to note-takers, additional test-taking time, assistive technology and other accommodations to help them through their courses. Many California community colleges also offer adaptive courses specifically targeting students with disabilities that offer modified curricula in a variety of topics from physical education to basic English and math.



To access college and career planning resources visit [jbaforyouth.org/sb-12](http://jbaforyouth.org/sb-12)

### 3. Ensure the identified individuals have the necessary support and resources.

Access to information will empower the identified individual(s) to motivate youth through the college enrollment process and stay on track to reach their higher education goals.

**Ensure the identified individuals understand their responsibilities.** Once an appropriate individual is identified for a youth, the individual may need guidance about the scope of their responsibilities. If the identified supporter does not have the necessary expertise to assist the youth directly, they should be encouraged to link the youth to other community resources. Their responsibility remains, however, to monitor progress and ensure that all required steps have been completed.

**Facilitate a warm handoff if the identified individual is from a program, rather than someone with a pre-existing relationship with the youth.** It is crucial that rather than just offer a referral, social workers and probation officers actively connect youth to the appropriate program staff, make staff aware of their responsibility, and follow up to verify that the youth made initial contact with the program and remains in contact throughout the matriculation process. When a referral is provided to a program, it is critical that the name of the individual from the program who will be working directly with the youth is documented in the case plan and updated as needed.

**Provide accurate and up-to-date resources to the identified individual.** Providing resource guides, checklists and other tools will help adult supporters to be effective in this role. This is particularly essential if the individual does not have pre-existing knowledge regarding post-secondary planning and matriculation. The individual will need the information to effectively support the youth with college planning and the financial aid and college application process steps. Resources can be found at [jbafor youth.org/sb-12](http://jbafor youth.org/sb-12)

#### **4. Develop training and compliance and review processes with dependency judges and attorneys.**

Including a role for the personnel involved in the dependency court system in your county in your protocols for SB 12 compliance will increase the likelihood that the requirement will be consistently met.

**Provide training to attorneys and judges.** It is crucial that both minor/NMD attorneys and dependency judges understand the legal expectations related to post-secondary preparation and support. A training for these partners can include not only information about the legal requirements but also an overview of how they can play a role in reinforcing a college-going culture and ensuring that financial aid is maximized. The local Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program and Independent Living Programs can be potentially valuable partners for providing training.

**Request that attorneys monitor case plans for compliance.** Attorneys can function as an additional set of eyes to ensure that the SB 12 requirement is consistently implemented. Given how extensive the scope of responsibilities is for social workers and probation officers, it is easy to miss this requirement and engaging attorneys can help ensure that all youth have the opportunity to receive support with post-secondary planning and matriculation.

**Engage judges in supporting post-secondary education.** As a position with a tremendous amount of authority, engaging judges to emphasize to youth the value of education during court hearings at which youth are present can be impactful. Judges can also play a role in enforcing compliance with SB 12 requirements.

### **Advanced Recommendations**

#### **5. Strengthen Independent Living Program (ILP) referral processes and partnerships.**



Independent Living Programs (ILP) are a valuable resource for college and career planning. Gaps in the ILP referral process can unintentionally lead to otherwise eligible foster youth missing out on valuable resources, services, and financial support through the college enrollment process.

**Ensure all social workers and probation officers are regularly informed about the services ILP has available to youth and the ILP referral and follow-up process.** While services may vary by county, ILPs typically provide workshops, training, and benefits that assist foster youth to achieve self-sufficiency when they leave the child welfare system. Many ILP programs throughout the state host workshops on career exploration and college and financial aid application workshops. Youth participation in ILP is voluntary and programs are dependent on referrals from social workers and probation officers. Child welfare caseworkers may be uninformed of the extensive services ILP provides to youth or unaware of the existence of the program entirely.

**Child welfare agencies should develop and/or enhance referral and communication processes between caseworkers and ILP to include a consistent feedback loop.** A user-friendly referral process is essential for ensuring that youth are fully utilizing ILP. Equally crucial are feedback mechanisms whereby ILP programs report back to social workers whether referred youth accessed services. When a referred youth does not make contact, having that information allows the social worker or probation officer to follow up during the next home visit to identify any barriers to access and support the youth to make contact.

## **6. Provide caregiver training on college and career planning, financial aid and college matriculation processes.**

Regardless of who is identified as the lead supporter for any given youth, caregivers play a crucial role as the individual with daily contact with a young person. When caregivers are provided with the tools and resources necessary to support the college and career goals for the youth in their care, youth will in turn be better equipped.

**Equip caregivers with knowledge to support youth through the college matriculation process.** The college matriculation process is complex, and many caregivers may not have first-hand knowledge of the college and career planning process. They may also be unaware of the financial aid, resources, and programs that are available to foster youth in higher education. It is critical to provide caregivers with ongoing training on these processes. JBAY has developed training curricula, *Turning Dreams to Degrees*, to address the growing need for caregivers to be more involved through the college-planning process that can be found at [jbaforyouth.org/training-curricula](http://jbaforyouth.org/training-curricula).

Caregivers are required to undergo training each year and incorporating this training into the requirements of resource families with older youth in their care is a strategy for ensuring that they have the skills and information needed to support youth with these processes. This can be offered in coordination with the county's Foster Kinship Care Education (FKCE) program. In the future, this training will also be available online through Foster Parent College.

**Training should include information on local career and technical education (CTE) and paid apprenticeship programs.** The California Community Colleges provide opportunities for short-term certificates in a wide range of CTE fields. Programs exist in many well-paying sectors including the health



and medical industries, information technology, auto technology, and biological sciences. Youth and adult supporters can begin exploring these pathways and programs at [cccmypath.org](http://cccmypath.org). Some CTE programs are coordinated with the California Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS) Apprenticeship programs, which allow students to get paid while they learn. These programs provide individualized mentoring while learning on the job and in the classroom. DAS apprenticeships include the traditional building trades and are continuing to expand into areas such as information technology and careers in the health and medical industry. Paid apprenticeship programs by trade or county can be found at [dir.ca.gov/databases/das/aigstart.asp](http://dir.ca.gov/databases/das/aigstart.asp).

**Ensure caregivers are provided with up-to-date resources to guide youth through the college enrollment process.** There are a number of resources that caregivers can use when providing support through the college matriculation process. Resources should include information about college admissions processes, financial aid, and college support programs and services. JBAY has curated an extensive library of resources including a detailed Educational Planning Guide and Financial Aid Planning Guide. These guides are also available in Spanish and can be accessed at [jbaforyouth.org/sb-12](http://jbaforyouth.org/sb-12).

**Case workers should refer caregivers to the variety of free college planning tools available.** Caregivers can engage youth in college and career planning by using tools such as career assessments, major exploration, and college searches. Using these tools will help both youth and caregivers to have meaningful conversations around the college options beyond traditional educational pathways and consider alternative pathways such as career education at local community colleges and paid apprenticeship programs. John Burton Advocates for Youth has gathered helpful college and career planning websites that can be accessed at [jbaforyouth.org/sb-12](http://jbaforyouth.org/sb-12)

## 7. Engage in long-term college and career planning with youth.

While identifying a single individual to support youth with college and financial aid applications is a start, when youth are surrounded by multiple adult supporters with the common goal of guiding them through their educational and career goals, they are more likely to overcome common barriers to college planning and college enrollment. Child welfare caseworkers and probation officers can do the following to directly support college and career goals.

**Engage youth in long-term college and career planning to motivate them through the college enrollment process.** Foster youth overwhelmingly express a desire to attend college, but often lack a support network to help them through the college planning process. When planning starts early, youth are more likely to have multiple college options and be more motivated to follow through on the college enrollment process.

**Do advance planning with the youth to help them determine their college and career goals.** There are a number of youth-friendly assessments provided by the [California Community College system](http://CaliforniaCommunityCollegeSystem.org) that can guide conversations around college and career options.

**Encourage the use of the CFT process to develop a realistic plan that includes the specific steps to be taken to achieve the youth's long-term goals.** Once these steps are identified, the identified adult supporter can provide direct support to ensure youth are held accountable to the goals they create during CFTs and address barriers should the youth be unable to complete the steps.

**Utilize the Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) as an opportunity to engage youth in long-term college and career planning.** The TILP must be completed every 6 months for youth 14 and older and can be a helpful tool for college planning. Utilizing the TILP can provide insight into the youth's goals, identify barriers to achieving their identified goals and determine a clear set of activities to be completed at each point along the journey. The TILP can also be used to identify the SB 12 post-secondary education support person when listing the college matriculation activities. The template below offers guidance on using the TILP for this purpose.

Goal	Activities	Responsible Party	Planned Completion Date
<p><b>Actionable:</b> Is it something the youth can realistically do?</p> <p><b>Invested:</b> Is it something the youth <i>wants</i> to do?</p> <p><b>Meaningful:</b> How does this goal help the youth?</p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Is the goal too broad? Does it need to be broken down into smaller steps?</p>	<p>Identify specific steps to be taken to achieve the goal.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Meet with a high school counselor and review high school transcripts.</li> <li>● Tour a potential college campus</li> <li>● Complete the FAFSA</li> <li>● Submit the EOPS Application</li> </ul>	<p>Ensure that the responsible party is clearly identified for each task</p> <p>Try to engage both the support persons and the youth to take responsibility for specific tasks.</p>	<p>Set realistic completion dates and check in regularly on progress.</p> <p>When tasks are not completed by target dates, determine what the barriers were and how to remove barriers in the future.</p>

**Be cognizant that college planning should begin prior to a youth's senior year.** College planning can begin as early as the sixth grade. Having these discussions early with youth will begin to instill in them a belief that college is possible and will put them on track for being able to attend college. JBAY's [Educational Planning Checklist](#) can be used to develop goals that are grade-appropriate. Both CFT meetings and TILPs are tools that can be used to engage in this process on an ongoing basis.

**Use checklists during monthly visits to track the completion of college matriculation activities during the youth's senior year.** Monitoring progress during a youth's senior year is especially essential. Checklists provided by JBAY can be used to track progress and determine next steps. Resources such as the [Foster Youth Educational Planning Guide](#) can be a helpful resource to guide this process.

**Make sure that youth know about financial aid opportunities.** With proper planning, students can access a range of resources that can pay for them to complete a degree or certificate. Youth made aware of their financial aid options may be more motivated to follow through with college planning and the enrollment process. In California, post-secondary systems offer a variety of pathways including bachelor's and associate degree pathways as well as career and technical education (CTE) programs, most of which qualify for financial aid.

## 8. Engage Local Educational Agencies (LEA) and college programs to support college planning and college matriculation processes.

**Meet regularly with FYSCPs and other partners to develop and implement a strategy to support college preparation and planning.** The Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs (FYSCP) are housed within County Offices of Education. The FYSCPs interface with school districts, child welfare and probation agencies, and community partners to coordinate educational and college matriculation support services for foster youth in their county. When child welfare agencies and FYSCPs work together, youth are provided with cohesive messaging and support during the college matriculation process. Many counties have established regular workgroups that include other partners such as local colleges, CASAs, school district liaisons and community based organizations.

**Child welfare and probation agencies should develop data-sharing agreements with their County Office of Education to monitor financial aid application completion.** FYSCPs have the capability to provide specialized reports to child welfare and probation agencies that show which youth who are seniors in high school have submitted financial aid applications and which have not. This information allows for child welfare and probation agencies to provide targeted outreach to students who have not yet submitted an application. This information can also inform specific strategies to support the completion of financial aid applications.

**Caseworkers should request LEA partners to attend CFT meetings or other relevant meetings with youth, caregivers and additional child welfare stakeholders.** LEA partners such as FYSCPs, school district foster youth liaisons, school counselors and teachers can provide valuable insight on the college planning and college matriculation process with the youth. Caseworkers can leverage the expertise and knowledge of LEA partners to identify additional support the youth may need to successfully reach their college planning and career goals. [ACIN 1-71-18](#) provides additional information about strategies for incorporating educational partners in CFT meetings.

**Develop relationships with local college and university support programs.** All public colleges and universities in California are required to identify a foster youth liaison and many institutions have comprehensive foster youth support programs. Having relationships with point persons at each local campus can allow caseworkers to make warm handoffs to college staff and these programs can be leveraged to provide training and other resources. JBAY maintains a contact list of foster youth campus support programs at [cacollegepathways.org/find-campus-support-programs/find-campus-support-programs-for-foster-youth](https://cacollegepathways.org/find-campus-support-programs/find-campus-support-programs-for-foster-youth).

## **Conclusion**

The practices in this guide offer a roadmap to embedding a college-going culture into child welfare and probation agency practices. By adopting these practices, youth and adult supporters alike will have the support that they need as they navigate the college and career planning process together. The various recommendations outlined here are practical strategies that can be implemented simultaneously or in stages. Each agency should conduct an internal evaluation to map out a plan and timeline for adopting these recommendations into agency practices.

Adoption of the activities outlined in this College Transition Framework will enable the creation of a network of well-informed adult supporters who can in turn support foster youth to define their college and career goals, identify opportunities to move those goals forward and provide them with the tools to be successful. By utilizing the recommendations in this guide, child welfare and probation agencies can permanently and meaningfully transform the lives of foster youth in California.