



Unlocking Potential: Strengthening the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program for Students with Experience in Foster Care



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this review and analysis of federal Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program implementation across the country is to explore and highlight promising strategies in policy implementation and practice that are likely to lead to the removal of barriers for students with experience in foster care (SEFC). The ETV program allows students with experience in foster care attending an accredited institution of higher education to receive up to \$5,000 annually for up to five years until they reach age 23 (or 26 in some states) to support students' postsecondary participation.



The federal policy language is broad and has remained largely unchanged since 2002, however, how the program is implemented and managed by individual states differs dramatically from state to state. The ETV program is enormously effective in improving graduation rates for youth with experience in foster care, yet large numbers of these youth do not have access to the program due to a combination of underfunding and program rules that create barriers to access.¹ Both elements must be addressed for this program to realize its full potential and for youth with experience in foster care to have comparable access to college opportunities as their peers.

Information was collected from websites and available documents from all 50 states and the District of Columbia over four months between May 2021 and August 2021 to develop an understanding of common implementation practices, strategies for providing clear information to eligible students on the process to receive ETV, and any additional resources available in each state to aid ETV recipients. A survey was also developed and disseminated to all ETV state-level contacts collected through the website scan as well as contacts identified by the US Administration for Children & Families Children's Bureau. The survey yielded 24 state responses, with the respondents representing about 55% of the federal funding.

FINDINGS

1. Management of ETV programs varies widely by state.
2. Thirty percent of states lacked clear information or had no information on their websites.
3. Many states impose barriers to access beyond federal eligibility requirements.
4. Stringent academic requirements may limit ETV usage.
5. More than half of states require students to verify expenses as a condition of payment.
6. A disconnect exists between states' perception of their ability to meet local need and the number of students who do not receive funding.
7. Many states do link ETV funding to additional student supports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the availability and impact of the ETV program, changes should be made by both states and the federal government.

STATE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Align the distribution mechanism to that used for the Pell Grant program so that funds are issued as direct cash payments to students (after any institutional withholding for tuition, fees and housing costs) without any requirements related to verification of expenses that are not similarly imposed for Pell Grant receipt.
2. Eliminate eligibility restrictions beyond those articulated in federal laws and regulations.
3. Connect with statewide and local community-based organizations to maximize potentially eligible students' awareness about the program, including maintaining information about the program and application process on a user-friendly and regularly updated website.
4. Revise academic progress requirements.

FEDERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase the program funding level to \$100 million annually.
2. Raise the maximum award amount to \$12,000.
3. Enact new rules that align more closely to Pell Grant standards such as limitations on whether states can impose additional eligibility restrictions and requiring direct disbursement of funds without expense verification. To create consistency, have no age cap and allow students to receive a grant for six years instead of five to align with the Pell Grant.
4. Create a more flexible academic progress standard.
5. Require all jurisdictions that receive ETV allocations to provide comprehensive data to the Children's Bureau.
6. Explore opportunities for convening state ETV administrators to come together and share their knowledge and expertise.



The recommendations within this document are based on the findings from this report, and combined, could significantly change the trajectory for students with experience in foster care—not only in their educational journey but throughout all life domains.

INTRODUCTION

The evidence is clear that youth with experience in the foster care system hold the same dreams and ambitions for their transition to adulthood as their non-foster care peers, and with robust support, can be just as successful. The experiences that these young people face, however, leave them vulnerable to a range of negative life trajectories including homelessness, poor educational outcomes, chronic unemployment and justice-system involvement. In recognition of this reality, the federal government created the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee Program) to help these youth instead transition from foster care to stability, self-sufficiency and fulfilling adulthoods. The Chafee Program provides grants to states to offer flexible services to youth ages 14 to 23 (or up to 26 for ETV) who are or were in foster care designed to support high school completion, college access, career exploration, employment access and skills development, including financial management skills. The purpose of this review and analysis of ETV implementation across the country is to highlight promising strategies in policy implementation and practice that have resulted in removing barriers for students with experience in foster care (SEFC) as well as to highlight recommended changes to federal policy.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHER PROGRAM

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) component of the Chafee Program allows SEFC attending an accredited institution of higher education to receive up to \$5,000 annually for up to five years until they reach age 26 to support postsecondary participation. The ETV program is one of the most successful interventions available to transitioning SEFC and has strong evidence to support its positive impact on educational outcomes for students with experience in foster care; **SEFC who receive an ETV grant are almost 2.4 times more likely to graduate from college than those who do not.**ⁱⁱ Other research has found that SEFC who receive financial aid are more than 40% more likely to accrue 15 or more credits in one year than those who do not.ⁱⁱⁱ

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Funding for the ETV program was initiated in 2001 and is authorized in law up to \$60 million annually. Actual appropriations amounts have never reached this threshold, however; FY2020 funding for the ETV program was \$43.3 million. ETV funds are distributed to each state based on its proportion of the nation's children in foster care. States must provide at least a 20% match (in-kind or cash) to receive their full federal ETV allotment.

Additional funding was appropriated as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 and the maximum award raised to \$12,000 to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These additional funds were appropriated, however, as one-time funds only and the increase to the maximum award amount expires in 2022. Excluding the 2021 temporary pandemic increase, the funding for the ETV program has remained flat, resulting in a 32% decline in real dollar value over time. Exacerbating the loss of value of the ETV benefit is the even greater increase to the cost of attending college relative to the general inflation rate.^{iv} These funding shortfalls make it challenging for SEFC to meet the ever-increasing cost of

college, as the \$5,000 maximum they are eligible for each academic year continues to leave many short of funding to cover the full cost of attendance. As discussed in more detail below, it is also likely that many SEFC are currently missing out on funding.

An inability to pay for college can have lifelong repercussions. Access to postsecondary education—whether a vocational certificate, associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree or beyond—is key to lifelong self-sufficiency and quality of life. Over time, postsecondary education has become increasingly essential. Between 2010 and 2017 the US economy lost 5.6 million jobs that require only a high school diploma or less and gained 8.4 million jobs that require a bachelor’s degree.^v In 2019, workers with a bachelor’s degree earned on average 67% more than those with a high-school diploma and were 60% less likely to be unemployed.^{vi} During the economic downturn triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, workers with less education have fared far worse than those with a college education, exacerbating these trends even further.^{vii}

SERVICE NEED

Data regarding how many young people from foster care are unable to access the ETV program are not readily available, however, evidence points to the likelihood that the number is significant. Child Trends conducted an analysis for this report by merging Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data from 2009 to 2020 to identify the number of youth who were 18–25 as of the end of fiscal year 2020 and who spent at least one day in foster care after the age of 14. This analysis found that 512,575 youth fit these criteria. Youth who exit to guardianship or adoption prior to age 16 are not eligible for ETV, which based on 2019 exit rates to guardianship or adoption,^{viii} could reduce this number by up to 95,000 for a total of 417,575.

To further refine this number, two pivotal studies, the *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth* (Midwest Study) and the *California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study* (CaYOUTH) can be used to estimate college enrollment rates.

Table 1: College Enrollment Rates^{ix}

	Midwest Study	CaYOUTH Study
Enrolled at age 19	32.5%	37.6%
Enrolled at age 21	20.1%	26.2%
Enrolled at age 23	12.3%	20.8%
Average point-in-time enrollment rate	21.6%	28.2%

Based on these data, it is likely that across the age spectrum, 20 to 25% of the eligible population are enrolled in college during any given year. This means that as many as 80,000 to 100,000 students may meet the basic age eligibility, school enrollment and foster care experience requirements. The current federal allocation can fund just 8,660 awards at the full award amount, or 10,392 when the 20% state match is included. The actual number of awards made each year is around 15,000, as some states do not provide the full maximum award amount of \$5,000 and others contribute beyond the 20% match. While there are other factors that may reduce the number of eligible students, such as compliance with academic progress requirements, maximum time frame limits, and other financial aid reducing the need for ETV funds, the amount of available funding likely falls far short of meeting the need.

It is clear that students with experience in foster care desire the same access to educational opportunities as their non-foster care peers: at age 19, 96% of foster care aspire to complete college.^x And yet, the Midwest Study found that by age 26, just 8% of foster youth have obtained an associate's or bachelor's degree as compared with 46% of the non-foster care population.^{xi} With the cost of attendance far outstripping the availability of financial aid, the ETV program provides a critical resource, enabling thousands of youth with experience in foster care who otherwise would have been shut out of postsecondary education to attend college. In 2003, ETV funds covered approximately 50% of the average cost of tuition, while in 2017 the funds covered only approximately 21% of tuition costs, and this does not address non-tuition costs such as housing, food, books, transportation and childcare.^{xii}

Young people who have experienced foster care may take more time to graduate, may not be as willing to seek help, may be working full- or part-time, and may be discouraged by overly cumbersome documentation requirements.^{xiii} In order to help states structure their programs in ways that maximize access, this report seeks to better understand the differences across states and which practices are most likely to promote access and increase positive outcomes. The federal policy language is broad and has remained largely unchanged since 2002, however, how the program is implemented and managed by individual states differs dramatically from state to state. The ETV program is enormously effective in improving graduation rates for youth with experience in foster care, but, as stated earlier, large numbers of these youth do not have access to the program due to a combination of underfunding and program rules that create barriers to access.^{xiv} Both elements must be addressed for this program to realize its full potential and for youth with experience in foster care to have comparable access to college opportunities as their peers.

METHODOLOGY

Information was collected from websites and available documents from all 50 states and the District of Columbia over four months between May 2021 and August 2021 to develop an understanding of common implementation practices, strategies for providing clear information to eligible students on the process to receive ETV, and any additional resources available in each state to aid ETV recipients. Key search terms utilized for the scan included: Chafee, Chafee/ETV, older youth, foster care, and higher education. Three websites commonly serve as hubs for information about services for youth in each state and were helpful in completing information for states that had little to no online presence; [FosterClub](#), [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#), and [The University of Washington](#). The full listing of the review and analysis variables from the scan can be viewed in Appendix A.

A survey was also developed and disseminated to all ETV state level contacts collected through the website scan as well as contacts identified by the US Administration for Children & Families Children's Bureau. The survey yielded 24 state responses, with the respondents representing about 55% of the federal funding. The highest number of students served of those who responded was 4,191 (California)¹ and the lowest was 54 (Vermont). The survey responses provided information beyond that which was available from the website scan and are included in the learnings section where appropriate. The survey contained 22 questions and the full list of questions can be found in Appendix B, in addition to the listing of states that responded to the survey.

¹ This number includes students served through an additional \$10 million contributed by the State of California to the program beyond the required state match.

FINDINGS

1. MANAGEMENT OF ETV PROGRAMS VARIES WIDELY BY STATE.

While ETV funds are directly awarded to state child-welfare agencies, these agencies can manage the program directly or contract with an outside third party to manage some or all of the ETV program. The type of management entity was categorized as a state child welfare agency, other state agency or independent organization. Foster Care to Success (FCS), a private nonprofit organization that manages ETV programs for several states, was also distinguished from other independent organizations.

Table 2: Organization Type Managing ETV

	Number	Percent
State child welfare agency	25	49%
Other state agency	7	14%
Foster Care to Success (FCS)	6	12%
Independent/outside organization	13	25%

ETV programs are managed by the state child-welfare agency in 25, or about half of the states. Other state-level agencies manage the ETV funding for seven states, or 14%, and those agencies include state student financial-aid departments, departments of workforce services, or offices of the child advocate. Foster Care to Success manages ETV for six states. The remaining 13 states independently contract their ETV to an outside organization that is either part of the state’s higher education system or an independent nonprofit organization (Table 2). In some cases, leveraging community-based organizations (CBOs) allows states to expand the resources available to young people experiencing foster care. The flexibility to meet student needs in real time is an ability that CBOs often have that state agencies may struggle with. Creating collaborations with real-time feedback loops, both to address the needs of the young people and improve coordination, can help to strengthen the transition services provided to young people as they exit care into adulthood.

2. THIRTY PERCENT OF STATES LACKED CLEAR INFORMATION OR HAD NO INFORMATION ON THEIR WEBSITES.

It is essential for anyone, but especially for a young person, to find the information that they are seeking online quickly and easily. All 51 available and active ETV websites were reviewed to determine how information was made available to students and the ease of navigating and utilizing that information. A rating of *very clear* meant the sites were visually engaging, informative, easy to navigate and required less than two





clicks to get to the online application and contact information. A *clear* ranking meant the site met most of these criteria but might be lacking in one area. Those rated as *unclear* were difficult to find, navigate or contact anyone through. Three states had no website that could be found. While most sites (70%) were found to be either *clear* or *very clear*, close to a third have significant room for improvement (Table 3).

Table 3: Clarity of Website Information

Very clear	25%
Clear	45%
Unclear	24%
No info	6%

Twelve states (24%) did not have an online ETV application, while the rest had either a downloadable/fillable PDF form located on their website, or an online password-protected portal to complete the application. Nine states require the creation of a password to gain access to the application and all provided clear language

for how to do so. Contact information was accessible on 45 of the states' websites, however, 16 states list a generic email address rather than a specific name and phone number. While listing a generic "etv@" address can be helpful if there is staff turnover or more than one person managing the email traffic, such generic emails may feel less useful to students seeking information than an actual contact name.

More than half of the sites, 67%, were updated with recent changes to ETV student eligibility, including COVID-19 relief options. Examples of sites that were found to be particularly user-friendly that could serve as models for other states can be found in Appendix C. Students with experience in foster care are often navigating these websites without support from a knowledgeable caregiver, so it is critical that the language be as clear and direct as possible with instructions that are youth friendly and easy to follow.

3. MANY STATES IMPOSE BARRIERS TO ACCESS BEYOND FEDERAL ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS.

Federal law specifies that the ETV program is generally available to current and former SEFC who were in foster care after the age of 14 and who are under age 23, or age 26 in states that choose to expand foster care eligibility.^{xv} Students must also be attending an institution of higher education as defined by the Higher Education Act (HEA) and cannot receive an award that exceeds five years. Finally, the award amount cannot exceed the total Cost of Attendance (COA).² However, some states have imposed additional eligibility requirements for students to qualify and to keep their ETV funding.

² Cost of Attendance is defined by each institution and can include the costs of tuition and fees, room and board (or living expenses), books, supplies, transportation, loan fees, and miscellaneous expenses (including a reasonable amount for the documented cost of a personal computer), allowance for childcare or other dependent care, costs related to a disability, and reasonable costs for eligible study-abroad programs. While not yet implemented, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020 amended 20 USC 1087vv-2 to specify that the value of vouchers for education and training authorized under part E of title IV of the Social Security Act shall not be treated as other financial assistance towards the cost of attendance.



Additional requirements found on ETV websites include the following:

- Requiring a minimum duration of time in care; this included requirements of at least 30 days in care, six months or 12 months.
- Narrower criteria for age in care, for example, a requirement that a youth was in care after the age of 16 rather than 14.
- Must have a high-school diploma or GED.
- Not be in default on a federal student loan or owe a refund on other Title IV aid.
- Completion of an interview or orientation session with the ETV administering entity.
- Resident and/or US citizen.
- Submission of an application that includes required essay questions.
- Requirements to apply for private scholarships as a condition of receiving ETV.

Such state-based eligibility restrictions can create additional barriers for young people in need of support. While states may need to develop criteria to prioritize access to funding when the available funding does not meet the full need, blanket eligibility restrictions that go beyond those in federal law, particularly in states where the funding is not oversubscribed, can be problematic. When states do need to develop prioritization criteria, they should avoid doing so based on criteria that may screen out students with the greatest level of need such as requiring cumbersome applications, imposing high-school diploma/GED requirements, or excluding students who owe a refund on Title IV aid.

4. STRINGENT ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS MAY LIMIT ETV USAGE.

Making satisfactory progress toward completion of a postsecondary education or training program is a requirement for continued ETV usage, however, implementation of this requirement varies by state. The most common language utilized on websites concerning academic progress and continued ETV eligibility includes *meeting institutionally defined Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)³ standards and maintaining a 2.0 GPA* (Table 4). A 2021 study found that a full third of foster youth do not meet SAP in their first year of college^{xvi} and other research points to this number being even higher.^{xvii} In most cases, these students lose access to other forms of financial aid and therefore how states operationalize the progress requirements has major implications on the accessibility of ETV funding to those with the greatest need. The survey asked for a response to how satisfactory progress is determined for ETV eligible students and 16 of the 24 respondents indicated either SAP or GPA is the measure.

³ Students must meet SAP requirements to maintain eligibility for federal financial aid authorized under Title IV. These standards consist of a minimum GPA standard, minimum course completion standard, and maximum time frame and are governed by federal law and regulation.

California is unique in its definition of satisfactory progress. Senate Bill 150,⁴ while similarly linked to institutional SAP standards, allows for young people to continue receiving ETV for up to two years before they are penalized for not making SAP as opposed to the one-year limitation that is modeled after Pell Grant restrictions and is more typical.

Table 4: Academic Progress Requirements

Student maintains SAP as defined by their institution	31%
Student maintains a 2.0 GPA	12%
Other (most often indicated as “progress towards a degree” without specific details)	22%
No information posted on website on academic progress or grade requirements to maintain ETV	35%

Additional requirements that were found on ETV websites included: losing access to funding for a defined number of semesters if a student does not meet the requirements for their state ETV before they are eligible to reapply, a maximum number of classes a student can drop before losing ETV (regardless of how many they had initially registered for), and differences in eligibility for full-time versus part-time students. Some states impose requirements beyond those typically seen for other forms of financial aid, for example, requiring a student to maintain a 2.0 GPA in each *term* in addition to meeting their institution’s SAP standard for cumulative GPA.



5. MORE THAN HALF OF STATES REQUIRE STUDENTS TO VERIFY EXPENSES AS A CONDITION OF PAYMENT.

Unlike other federal financial aid sources, including the Pell Grant, many states indicated that they require proof of how funds will be used before they disburse payments. Of respondents, 52% indicated that students were required to provide verification of expenses, such as receipts, bills or lease agreements in order to receive funding, which may pose a significant obstacle for many youth. While a Pell Grant is based solely on the amount of the student’s financial eligibility for aid, ETV recipients have the additional burden of proving specific expenses.

These practices create additional barriers for ETV recipients in need of funds and hold these students to a higher standard than students without experience in the foster care system. Identifying receipts and/or coordinating payments to third-party vendors can be extremely onerous for anyone, and particularly for a young person who may be simultaneously transitioning out of the foster care system and working to get their bearings as a college student. Students who receive other forms of aid, such as the Pell Grant and Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, receive funds not held for institutional costs such as tuition payments and on-campus housing as direct payments without requirements to prove how funds are being used.

⁴ California’s SB 150 went into effect on January 1, 2020. Colleges are responsible for implementing this provision by adapting their SAP policies as needed. See <https://www.csac.ca.gov/post/chafee-foster-youth-program-reference-tool> for more information.

6. A DISCONNECT EXISTS BETWEEN STATES' PERCEPTION OF THEIR ABILITY TO MEET LOCAL NEED AND THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO DO NOT RECEIVE FUNDING.

Respondents were asked “if they were able to serve all eligible students” in their state. While 18 of the 24 states answered “yes,” some states indicated that they can serve all eligible students only by reducing the award amount that each student receives. The three states who answered “no” both indicated they serve students on a first-come, first-served basis and when the funding runs out, they are not able to serve additional students.

The percentage of state administrators who believe that they are meeting the needs of their students is contradictory to what is known about the number of youth with experience in foster care who are likely eligible for the program. As described in more detail in this report’s introduction, data submitted by states through the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) consistently show around 15,000 ETV awards being made nationwide, which is likely just a fraction of the eligible population, which could be as great as 100,000 students (Diagram 1).

Given this significant disparity, these responses may point to a need for more robust outreach and a removal of barriers to access. In California, for example, a state which has invested state funding to create a statewide outreach program, the program is severely oversubscribed. New York noted that the state enhanced its marketing efforts during the 2021–22 academic year and saw a significant increase in applicants, which will likely force a reduction in award amounts.

In some cases, an ability to serve all eligible students may also be the result of states contributing additional funding to the program. Respondents were asked to consider how much state funding is contributed to their ETV program each year. While 33% of respondents did not provide this information, one in five of the states indicated that they contribute beyond the minimum required 20% match (Table 5).

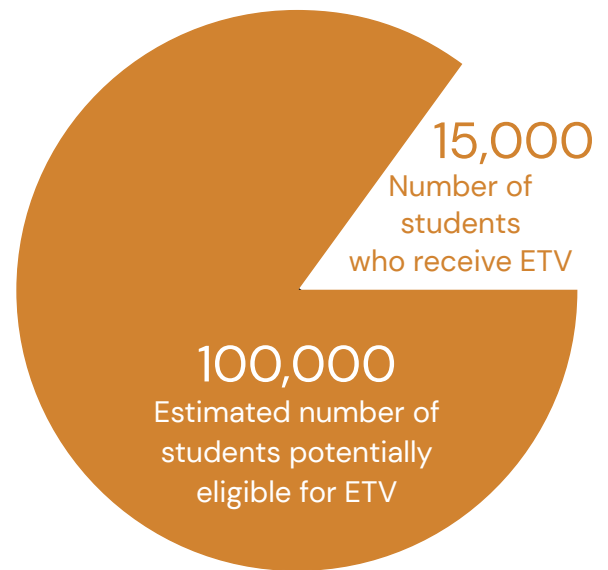
Table 5: How Much State Funding is Contributed to Your State Chafee/ETV Each Year?⁵

Our state contributes the 20% match	46%
Our state contributes more than the 20% match	21%
Did not answer/unsure	33%

As noted above, this may also be a factor of states awarding less than the full maximum amount of \$5,000 per year. For example, Hawaii’s website indicates that funds are limited to \$2,000 per year because of limited federal funding, Nebraska limits awards to \$2,400 per year, and Vermont informs students that award amounts generally range from \$1,000 to \$3,000. Of those states who responded to a question regarding average award amounts, the average yearly award was \$3,227 per student.

⁵ Excludes 8 respondents who did not answer this question or indicated that they did not know their state’s contribution.

Diagram 1: Disparity Between ETV Eligibility and ETV Receipt



7. MANY STATES LINK ETV FUNDING TO ADDITIONAL STUDENT SUPPORTS.

The survey asked about additional resources ETV students may receive and 57% of the respondents shared students receive some form of coaching and/or case management services throughout their time in the program. Most of those indicated the services and resources were not mandatory but were available as needed. General Independent Living Program (ILP) services were also mentioned, along with financial literacy and life skills development courses. Researchers have found that SEFC experience the greatest success when they receive a combination of financial resources and support services.^{xviii} When states are able to leverage other resources such as other federal funds, state funding or private dollars to supplement the direct financial resources available through the ETV program, the value of ETV dollars is likely to be magnified.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the availability and impact of the ETV program, changes should be made by both states and the federal government. The recommendations below are based on the findings from this report and combined, could significantly change the trajectory for students with experience in foster care—not only in their educational journey but throughout all life domains.

STATE RECOMMENDATIONS

States can move to remove locally imposed requirements that create barriers that limit the availability of this program.

- 1. Align distribution mechanism with other federal aid.** Some states have established distribution mechanisms that require students with experience in foster care to provide evidence of specific expenses, and funds are issued either as a reimbursement or direct to third-party vendors, as described in Finding #5. This level of scrutiny of expenses applies a different standard to ETV than other forms of financial aid, such as the Pell Grant. Most aid is issued as a cash payment to institutions, which deduct any funds owed for tuition or housing and release the remaining funds to students. In addition, these requirements impose an onerous documentation burden on students that limits access to funding.

Action>> *States should align the distribution mechanism to that used for the Pell Grant program, so that funds are issued as direct cash payments to students (after any institutional withholding for tuition, fees and housing costs) without any requirements related to verification of expenses that are not similarly imposed for Pell Grant receipt.*

- 2. Remove eligibility barriers.** A survey of state ETV rules found that many states limit eligibility by imposing restrictions beyond those required by federal law, as stated in Finding #3. This includes minimum standards for the length of time in foster care, high-school graduation requirements, completion of an interview, and others. Such requirements create obstacles that limit the availability of funding well beyond the restrictions intended by federal policymakers.

Action>> *States should eliminate eligibility restrictions beyond those articulated in federal laws and regulations. Because of a cap on federal funding, states may still need to implement a prioritization system if available funding is oversubscribed.*

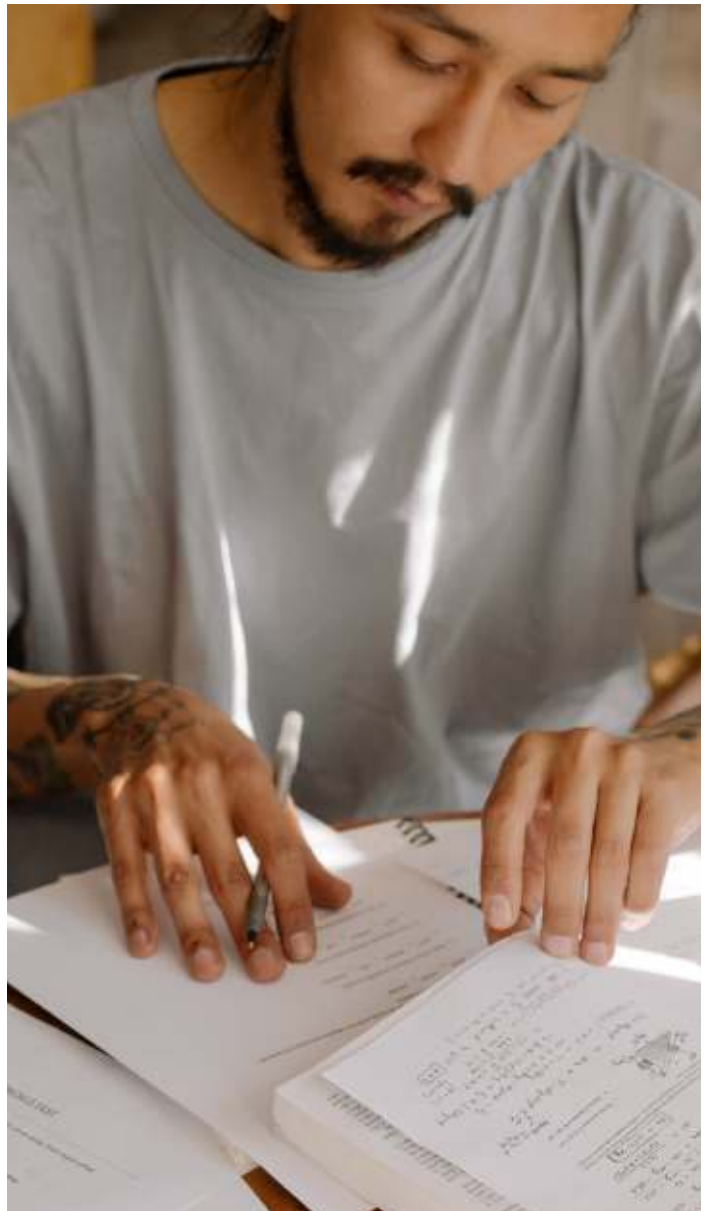
- 3. Maximize outreach and awareness.** For students to receive an ETV award, they must first know that it is available. Information is not always readily accessible or easily understandable as evidenced by the lack of website information noted in Finding #2. For youth who have already exited the system in particular, proactive outreach is necessary to ensure that these students are aware of the program and are able to easily complete the application process. This report shares several websites that are models for how to enhance awareness and ease of access to information.

Action>> *States should connect with statewide and local community-based organizations to help potentially eligible students become aware of the program. Information about the program and the application process should be maintained on a user-friendly and regularly updated website. States should also review and update their application process, in collaboration with young people, to ensure that it is streamlined and easy to access and complete on all types of devices. Partnering with CBOs can help increase the footprint of ETV programs.*

4. **Revise academic progress requirements.**

Federal law requires that students make “satisfactory progress toward completion” of an academic program to receive continued funding. How this is defined is left to states but is not consistent across the country, as noted in Finding #4. When a student fails to meet the standards for their state or institution, they are often unable to maintain their ETV funding, and this sudden loss of income dramatically decreases the likelihood that they will successfully complete college. One study found that 34% of SEFC at community colleges are losing access to financial aid after their first year because of these requirements and that few are able to maintain enrollment.^{xix} When these students do attempt to return at a later date, they are generally denied access to ETV upon their initial term of re-enrollment because of prior failure to meet academic standards.

Action>> *States should update their academic progress standards to allow students who are struggling academically to receive funds for two years before a loss of benefits, provided that they have developed a plan to improve academic progress. States should allow students who previously did not meet academic progress requirements who have disenrolled to have ETV grants reinstated upon subsequent re-enrollment without precondition.*



FEDERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

For the ETV program to have widespread impact on the educational outcomes of youth with experience in foster care, the federal government must revise the program to make it more accessible to students.

1. **Address funding shortfalls.** As noted in Finding #6, current ETV funding falls short of the existing need. In states that do not impose programmatic barriers and where robust outreach is conducted, available funding has proven to be woefully inadequate. For example, in California, the state with the largest ETV allocation, the 2019/2020 federal allocation for the ETV program plus the required 20% state match allowed the state to provide an ETV award to roughly 1,500 youth. An additional 4,000 eligible students were identified who could not be funded through the federal allocation.

Action>> *Increase the program funding level to \$100 million annually.*



- 2. Align limitations on award amounts to need.** Each campus establishes a Cost of Attendance (COA), which reflects the costs for a student to attend full time including tuition, books and supplies, room and board, transportation, etc. The amount of financial aid that a student can qualify for is based on the COA and the amount the student is expected to contribute based on their income. Often the aid that is available does not equate to the established need, leaving a funding gap. Students are then forced to take on crippling loan debt or increase work hours, which can lead to academic declines. For others, this gap leads to homelessness or food insecurity, further diminishing the likelihood of successful postsecondary completion.

The ETV benefit has remained capped at \$5,000 since its inception and has never been adjusted for inflation. Exacerbating the loss of value of the ETV benefit is a significant increase to the cost of attending college. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, between 2007–2008 and 2017–2018, prices for undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board at public institutions rose 31%, after adjustment for inflation.^{xx} The average cost of attendance across all public institutions ranges from \$18,550 to \$26,820. The current maximum Pell Grant award is currently \$6,495, leaving a gap that approaches \$20,000 for some students, depending on the type of institution and the availability of other types of financial aid. Rising inflation rates are likely to further exacerbate this disparity moving forward.

Action>> *Raise the maximum award amount to \$12,000. A significant increase to the federal allocation would be needed to accommodate such an increase.*

- 3. Create rules that promote greater consistency across states and more closely align with other federal funding sources.** To have equitable access to the ETV program nationwide, greater uniformity across states is necessary, as evidenced by Findings #3, #4 and #5. A common set of standards could be adopted at the federal level, similar to that which is in place for other forms of federal financial aid.

Action>> *Enact new rules that align more closely to Pell Grant standards, such as limitations on whether states can impose additional eligibility restrictions and requiring direct disbursement of funds without expense verification. To create consistency, have no age cap and allow students to receive an award for six years instead of five to align with the Pell Grant. Additional funding would be necessary implement a change to age eligibility or the duration of funding.*

- 4. Create a more flexible academic progress standard.** Federal rules currently provide states with flexibility regarding how to measure satisfactory progress, however, most default to institutionally defined Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) standards (see Finding #4). These standards disqualify more than one-third of students annually, with the greatest burden falling on students of color.

Action>> *Create a federal standard that allows students who are struggling academically to receive funds for two years before a loss of benefits, provided that they have developed a plan to improve academic progress. Allow students who previously did not meet academic progress requirements who have disenrolled to have ETV grants reinstated upon subsequent re-enrollment without precondition.*

- 5. Ensure accountability.** Currently, little access to data exists to better understand how ETV funds are utilized, and what are existing unmet needs or disparities across populations. States are required to report only the total number of awards made and the number of new ETVs awarded through their Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) to the US Administration for Children & Families Children's Bureau. They must also report a description of services provided, program updates, and how the program ensures that the total amount of educational assistance to a youth under this and any other federal assistance program does not exceed the total COA and avoids duplication of benefits.

Action>> *Require all jurisdictions that receive ETV allocations to provide data on the following metrics to the Children's Bureau to be made publicly available: Number of applications, number of awards made, number of applicants rejected and reasons for rejection, and average award amount. To monitor for equity considerations, metrics should be disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender.*

- 6. Build a community of practice for ETV administrators both inside and outside child welfare.** Given how differently states approach the administration of ETV, there is much that could potentially be learned from one another about alternative approaches and the consequences of different choices. Communication across different states could lead to learning which could in turn increase the support for young people and remove barriers states may not be aware they are imposing on this population. The Children's Bureau has convened ETV managers in the past, with a focus on the child welfare agencies who are the direct recipients of funds. These meetings should be reinstated and expanded to include partners with contracts to administer the program to facilitate learning and the adoption of best practices.

Action>> *Explore opportunities for convening state ETV administrators to come together and share their knowledge and expertise. Build an online community of practice where these professionals can share best practices throughout the year.*

CONCLUSION

As outcomes for youth with experience in foster care remain stubbornly flat across many domains, policymakers are understandably looking for interventions with a strong evidence base to move forward and improve these outcomes. The role of postsecondary education in influencing a range of metrics of well-being is well established, and the ETV program has a strong track record of positively impacting college completion. The degree to which this program can move the needle on SEFC college outcomes nationwide, however, is dependent on both the availability of adequate funding and the removal of barriers that reduce its reach. By adopting the recommendations included in this report, both states and the nation can change the narrative on college success for students with experience in foster care.



Appendix A

NATIONAL WEBSITE SCAN PROTOCOL

- Does that state have a statewide Tuition Waiver?
- Is the Tuition Waiver managed by the same site as the ETV?
- Ease of navigation (very clear, clear, unclear, no info)
- What entity manages ETV? (state child welfare, other state agency, independent, foster care to success)
- Website link for ETV information
- Contact name for ETV
- Contact email for questions
- How much funding is a student eligible for?
- Is payment awarded to students or institutions?
- Is there an online application?
 - ◊ If yes, please list requirements or link to them here
 - ◊ How many clicks to the application?
- ETV eligibility criteria for students
- Information on Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)
- When does it appear the site was last updated?
- What additional services are offered through ETV participation?

Appendix B

ETV SURVEY QUESTIONS

- Contact info
- What organization type manages ETV for your state? (state child welfare services, outside organization, or other state agency—please list below)
- How much state funding is contributed to your ETV program each year? (20% match, more than the 20% match, unsure)
- How many students received an ETV grant in the most recent FY? (approximate number is great)
- Are you able to serve all eligible students in your state?
 - ◊ If you are not able to serve all eligible students, what is your perception of the cause?
- Please describe how ETV students receive payment? (institution receives the funds, students receive the funds directly, both, or other)
- How is the funding amount determined, and what is the average amount received per student?
- Are ETV payments limited to verified expenses?
 - ◊ If yes, how do students show proof of need/funds spent?
- Please describe the ETV application process for your state.
- Is there an online ETV application for students to complete each year?
 - ◊ If yes, please insert link below:
- Please share the ETV eligibility requirements for your state, and if undocumented/DACA students are eligible.
- Please describe the process for verification of foster care status for ETV recipients in your state.
- Please share what the Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) requirements are for students receiving ETV funds in your state.
- Does your ETV program have any data-sharing agreements in place?
 - ◊ If yes, please share the agencies with which you have ETV data-sharing agreements.
- What, if any, additional services are ETV recipients eligible to receive? Please describe those services. (ex. coaching, workshops, etc.)
- Do ETV recipients have any additional requirements for receiving funds? (coaching, training etc.)
 - ◊ If yes, please describe those additional requirements:
- Any additional information you would like to share.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

1. California
2. Connecticut
3. Florida
4. Georgia
5. Hawaii
6. Illinois
7. Iowa
8. Kentucky
9. Louisiana
10. Maryland
11. Michigan
12. Minnesota
13. Montana
14. Nevada
15. New York
16. North Dakota
17. Ohio
18. Pennsylvania
19. Rhode Island
20. South Carolina
21. Utah
22. Vermont
23. Virginia
24. Wisconsin

Appendix C

WEBSITE HIGHLIGHTS

Following the review and analysis of all websites, nine states had websites that stood out as particularly helpful for students navigating the ETV application process. These sites were identified based on whether the site (1) is clear and easy to understand (including describing eligibility requirements, providing an online application, and showing evidence of having been recently updated), (2) provides a contact for more information, and (3) links to additional resources a student might need for postsecondary information. Additional noteworthy features above and beyond these three criteria are reflected in the table below.

State	Link	Noteworthy features
California	https://chafee.csac.ca.gov/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fillable form allows students to easily update their contact information. • Provides information on what happens after you apply.
Georgia	https://embarkgeorgia.org/etv/about	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Features an interactive “Am I Eligible” section. • Offers eleven videos with helpful tips for applying to college.
Indiana	https://fostersuccess.org/educational-success/education-and-training-voucher-indiana/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth-friendly design. • Breaks down what Chafee/ETV funds can be used for. • Comprehensive FAQs.
Michigan	https://mietv.samaritas.org/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A portal allows students to check their application status.
Minnesota	https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/children-and-families/services/adolescent-services/programs-services/education-and-training-voucher.jsp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website provides a short video that explains the ETV program.
Nevada	https://dcfs.nv.gov/Programs/CWS/IL/ETV/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has an option to submit the application by text.
Pennsylvania	https://www.pheaa.org/funding-opportunities/other-educational-aid/chafee-program.shtml	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A single application is used for both ETV and the state’s Tuition Waiver program.
Texas	https://discoverbcfs.net/texasetv/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers “Chafee/ETV success stories,” which allow young people to learn about others who have utilized the funds.
Virginia	https://www.dss.virginia.gov/fmf/educational.html	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flyer offers information in a quick, easy-to-read document. • Shares information about additional resources like the coaching support provided by Great Expectations.

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