



Building Bridges:

How State Policies Can Support Postsecondary Education Success for Students with Experience in Foster Care



JOHN BURTON
Advocates
for Youth



FAAN FOSTERING ACADEMIC
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THE ISSUE

According to the US Administration for Children & Families Children’s Bureau (2021), at any single point in 2019, there were approximately 423,997 youth in foster care. These youth can face significant uncertainty as they experience numerous transitions, many of which can negatively impact their educational trajectories. Despite these barriers, there are youth who do succeed in postsecondary education.

However, students with experience in foster care (SEFC) must display tremendous resilience as they navigate complex and often significant barriers to postsecondary education success. As a result of these barriers, annually only 3 to 11 percent of youth who experience time in foster care will obtain a college degree (Children’s Bureau, 2021).

The value of obtaining a college degree extends through an entire lifetime, and research shows its multiple professional and personal benefits while positively contributing to the social and economic fabric of communities. Postsecondary completion is directly linked to sustaining financial and career stability and overall personal wellness (Assadi et al., 2020). While the benefits of earning a college credential are well documented, they rest on the premise that all individuals have adequate supports to achieve postsecondary success. Yet, the reality remains that SEFC are not always afforded the universal supports needed for that success.

Access and persistence continue to be pressing concerns in the field of higher education as systemic factors create barriers for certain groups to attaining postsecondary enrollment (Espinosa et al., 2019). While many students can face a myriad of barriers on their path to college completion, this reality can be particularly stark for SEFC (Tobolowsky et al., 2019). Time marked by frequent or prolonged episodes in the child welfare system during formative high school transition years most often results in high academic mobility, disjointed academic preparedness and compounding feelings of low self-efficacy. Additionally, SEFC are often further marginalized as they are more likely to be first-generation college students, of a minoritized race or ethnicity, or of a lower socioeconomic status. This can lead to insufficient college-going knowledge regarding important processes and tools necessary to navigate the complex postsecondary system. These experiences, coupled with a lack of familial support, intensify barriers for students as they seek access to—and through—college (Dworsky, 2018). This makes efforts to support access and persistence even more paramount and calls for a diverse and broad policy agenda.



In addition to a long history of federal legislation governing the welfare of those in, and recently exiting, foster care (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2018), there have been various federal efforts focused on impacting the disparate postsecondary success rates for these students.

Federal Initiatives

[John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program \(CFCIP\)](#) provides states approximately \$140 million annually to pay for services to help students with experience in foster care prepare for successful transition into adulthood, including postsecondary success. Services can include housing and employment assistance, financial literacy training, services to facilitate postsecondary education access, and life coaching.

[Educational Training Vouchers \(ETVs\)](#) were added to CFCIP in 2002 to directly address the college-going needs of students aging out of foster care. This law authorizes up to an additional \$60 million for states to provide vouchers up to \$5,000 per year for postsecondary education and training for eligible students; however, actual allocation amounts have only been around \$43 million annually.

The [Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund \(HEERF\)](#) was created as part of the government's COVID-19 virus response and was funded in three rounds from various pandemic response measures for a total of \$76 billion. These funds were designed to mitigate any disruption in students' enrollment, housing or programs of study or instruction, and institutions were required to use half of the funding to provide direct student aid.

The [Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act](#) (P.L. 116-260) passed in 2020 as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 and provided state child welfare agencies with \$400 million in time-limited funds to support individuals under the age of 27 who spent time in foster care after the age of 14. Of this, \$50 million was reserved for the ETV program. This act created certain program flexibilities and allowed child welfare agencies to provide eligible youth with direct cash support and other assistance to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.



While these federal initiatives promote students' educational progress, they do not fully address the intersectional needs of the SEFC population. These students not only deserve access to "traditional" college-going supports, which can sometimes be elusive, but often need additional wraparound efforts to help mitigate the gaps in support left by disjointed systems (Johnson & Strayhorn, 2019).

STATE POLICIES

State-level policies can play an influential role in supplementing federal initiatives to improve postsecondary education outcomes. Efforts vary broadly given the relative autonomy individual states have in how they develop, fund and deliver SEFC postsecondary assistance (Font & Gershoff, 2020), which has resulted in a range of diverse state-level policies that address a variety of key issues related to college success.

The following brief highlights the college-going barriers SEFC face and examples of state policy efforts in key areas of support that are designed to increase their postsecondary success.¹ This includes policies related to access and enrollment, financial assistance, campus-based support services, housing support, workforce development, and the development of system infrastructure and advocacy initiatives.



POSTSECONDARY ACCESS SUPPORTS

The college-access field is understood most broadly as facilitating marginalized—and all—students' entry into and participation within postsecondary education (Moon Johnson, 2014). Inequities in access appear when certain groups of individuals are disproportionately not included or prevented from participating. Students with experience in foster care are among those who lack equitable access to postsecondary enrollment.

Despite growing awareness and development of institutional practices to rectify how postsecondary education systems marginalize certain groups of students, environmental and structural barriers still remain for countless students. Many campuses are given the individual freedom to discern and implement what policies are afforded to which students, leaving great variability in anticipated supports, especially for marginalized student groups such as SEFC. Increasing access requires institutions to provide additional services or remove any actual or potential barriers that might prevent some students from equitable participation or enrollment. State policies can help ensure there are intentional supports aimed at increasing enrollment opportunities for SEFC (Font & Gershoff, 2020).

Academic mobility not only has negative impacts on academic performance but also can often place highly transient students at a disadvantage when preparing for college. As a result of multiple school changes, SEFC may not have been afforded the consistency in guidance-counselor support that is

¹The brief is not an exhaustive list of state policies that support postsecondary success, but rather is meant to be representative of the types of policies in place.

shown to be instrumental in cultivating a college-going culture (Stewart et al., 2014). They often miss out on traditional pro-college recruitment experiences such as college visits, admission interviews, or early preparation courses and programs. As a result, and in concert with multiple other barriers SEFC face, they have much lower postsecondary enrollment in comparison to their non-foster care peers (Courtney & Okpych, 2019).

College outreach and social engagement are salient factors related to the academic retention of all college students but can be particularly impactful in supporting postsecondary attainment for SEFC (Skobba et al., 2018). States can implement policies that sustain direct outreach to SEFC that heighten their opportunities and likelihood for postsecondary enrollment. The most promising access and outreach policies understand the unique gaps SEFC face and craft broad yet intentional responses to close those gaps. The following examples demonstrate some of these broad policy efforts.



[Washington Revised Code of Washington \(RCW\) 28B.77.250](#) (2007): This legislation established the [SETuP Program](#), which facilitates **high-school-to-college and career-transition supports for SEFC** and unaccompanied homeless youth. The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) serves as the managing body and currently contracts with five organizations to provide case management to increase high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment, support access to additional education or apprenticeship resources, and network with diverse stakeholders across child welfare and education systems.



[California Assembly Bill 194](#) (2011): This legislation provides **priority registration to SEFC** for courses at all public colleges and universities. Eligibility for this benefit was subsequently expanded by [Senate Bill 906](#) (2016) and [Senate Bill 512](#) (2021).



[California Senate Bill 12](#) (2017): This policy requires county child welfare case workers to **identify a person to assist young people in foster care** aged 16 and older with college applications and financial aid. This is significant as it addresses postsecondary access and designated college-going support as a **social work case-management priority**.



[Nevada Senate Bill 147](#) (2019): This legislation, which makes a variety of changes to state law to better assist SEFC and students experiencing homelessness to complete high school, supports postsecondary success by requiring schools to **identify students living in foster care** or who are homeless and to **review these students' academic plans** as appropriate to maximize the pupil's accrual of credits and progress towards graduation. Academic plans are required for all students and include provisions related to career planning, FAFSA® support, and advising around admissions requirements and applications.



[Pennsylvania House Bill 1615](#) (Section 25)(2019): This state policy enacted the Fostering Independence Through Education Act, which in addition to authorizing a tuition waiver program, mandates that every postsecondary institution **designate a point of contact** to help eligible students identify and apply for services such as financial aid and scholarships, gather verification documents, and access campus and community resources and support services.

POSTSECONDARY PERSISTENCE SUPPORTS

Through their own perseverance, supplemented by policies that promote postsecondary access, students with experience in foster care can overcome the odds and enroll in college. However, like their non-foster peers, the path to successful postsecondary degree completion does not end at the point of access. Consistently low graduation rates indicate that programs and policies that directly address college completion are even more necessary for SEFC. There are many factors that drive a student's likelihood to persist, including adequate funding, academic advising, a sense of belonging and wraparound supports. While SEFC benefit from traditional student services, policies that factor in their unique needs left by gaps in family privilege (Unrau et al., 2012) and other scaffolded assets, create the best chance at maximizing their odds for completion.

Financial Assistance

With the rising cost of continuing education, financing the cost of a college education can be a burden for many students, but those having spent time in foster care may be at an additional disadvantage despite the availability of supplemental funding through Education Training Vouchers (ETVs) (Skobba et al., 2018). A persistent lack of parental financial support and insufficient academic access or participation often make these students ineligible for merit scholarships that can help cover expenses (Johnson & Strayhorn, 2019; Unrau et al., 2012). Further compounding matters is that SEFC are four times more likely than the general population to struggle with prolonged financial insecurity, and once they reach independence, 35 percent of their personal household incomes will be below the poverty line, making postsecondary enrollment less feasible financially (Stewart et al., 2014).

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Submission of a [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) (FAFSA) provides access to federal programs aimed at providing approximately \$150 billion dollars to more than 13 million college students for postsecondary education (The College Board, 2019). Historically, those exiting the foster care system have had lower FAFSA submission rates (Gross & Geiger, 2019), despite the fact that those in foster care after their 13th birthday qualify for independent status and therefore do not need to provide financial information from parents or guardians. While there may be personal or environmental factors that contribute to disparate rates of application completion, many child welfare advocates assert that the FAFSA form previously had unclear language that most likely contributed to low submission rates (Gross & Geiger, 2019). As a result, the Department of Education altered the webform in 2015 to ask, "At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care, or were you a dependent or ward of the court?" in order to determine eligibility for independent status. Challenges remain due the complexity of the form, however, these challenges may be addressed with forthcoming changes resulting from the passage of the [FAFSA Simplification Act](#) in 2021. The Act makes major changes to the overall FAFSA form and for SEFC specifically, the Act allows institutions to use prior determinations of foster care status in subsequent years without additional documentation.

Tuition Support

State-based tuition waivers, scholarships and grants are the most common strategy used by states to address the high cost of college for SEFC but can vary widely across states. Tuition waiver programs can differ broadly regarding funding mechanisms, eligibility criteria, application processes, implementation methods, and in the supports they offer; as well, they most often have age restrictions, time limits, and may only provide funds when tuition is not covered by other forms of aid. Thirty-seven states currently offer tuition waivers or grants, however, this publication does not address these policies as they are described in great detail in a separate publication issued as part of the Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN) research series. The report on state tuition waivers and grants can be found [here](#).

Despite the availability of federal financial aid and ETV grants, there are still financial hazards SEFC must navigate. States have discretion regarding how ETV programs are implemented and many impose barriers to access (Tiller et al., 2022). Insufficient access to benefits that accrue from family privilege (such as economic support, savings accounts and other markers of financial stability to adequately fund their college aspirations) may force SEFC to rely on loans to fund their postsecondary education. In addition to the burden that loan debt can impose upon a population that often lives close to the margin economically, this can leave SEFC vulnerable to predatory lending or mismanaged financial assistance (Salazar et al., 2021) that can negatively impact their likelihood of being able to afford their program of study through degree completion. States' efforts to develop policies that offer students additional resources such as expanded coverage and broad financial literacy are especially paramount. Below are some state policy examples that address these needs.



[California Assembly Bill 2506](#) (2016): This policy restricts the use of Chafee ETV funds only to schools that qualify to participate in the Cal Grant Program. This **safeguards students' funding** from being used at institutions that have unsatisfactory graduation or loan default rates.



[California Senate Bill 150](#) (2019): This bill broadens the ETV program's Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) standards to allow students to **receive a Chafee ETV grant for up to two years before losing access due to inadequate academic progress**. To retain access after one year of not meeting SAP, students must complete a plan to improve academic progress. A student who disenrolls for one or more terms regains eligibility for a Chafee ETV grant upon reenrollment.



[Minnesota House File 7](#) Subd. 36. (2021): Minnesota allocated \$3.759 million annually to create the [Fostering Independence Higher Education Grant](#) (FIG) program. This program goes beyond a typical tuition waiver to **cover the full cost of attendance** (including housing, food, books, transportation and personal expenses) for up to five years for full-time students who were in foster care after the age of 13 and are under age 27.



Arizona Use of Federal Funding (2021): The Arizona Department of Child Safety authorized the use of supplementary Chafee Education and Training Voucher funds provided under the [Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act](#) (2020) to **pay off financial enrollment holds**, so that these students could attend their programs of study.



[Nevada Senate Bill 188](#) (2021): Nevada promotes financial literacy and stability for SEFC through its Individual Development Account (IDA) Program, under which low-income individuals and those in foster care can open a **savings account with up to a 5-to-1 matching program** for up to \$3,000 in savings that can be used for postsecondary education. The bill also requires any foster care agency that receives funds for an IDA to ensure that **instruction in financial literacy** is provided to the child for whom the IDA is established.



[California Assembly Bill 132](#) Section 56 (2021): The California state budget for FY 2021/2022 allocated funding to offer every low-income K-12 student a **college savings account seeded with \$500**. Children in foster care or experiencing homelessness were provided an additional \$500 for a total of \$1,000.

Campus-Based Support Programs

Supporting students to and through college means addressing the totality of the factors that may keep them from being successful. Nonacademic barriers such as a lack of transportation or childcare, food or housing insecurity, and workforce instability issues can negatively impact students’ readiness and capacity for learning, ultimately decreasing retention and persistence rates (Skobba et al., 2018). SEFC with a smaller social safety net are managing a broader array of responsibilities than their non-foster care peers. These additional circumstances can inhibit or deter academic progress.



Programs such as [Federal TRIO Programs](#) (TRIO) exist on college campuses to address both academic and nonacademic barriers. These programs offer student services including admissions assistance, academic counseling and coaching. Federal law names “students who are in foster care or are aging out of the foster care system” as one of several populations for whom services are to be provided and programs are authorized to use funds to operate supports that are specially designed for these groups. Additionally, many colleges and universities offer programs through their Student Affairs or Campus Life departments that offer similar services (Sarubbi, 2019). A growing number of campuses are also now offering support to students experiencing basic needs insecurity, including challenges with food and housing access.

While these types of assistance can be helpful for SEFC, wraparound supports that offer direct relationship-building have been shown to be particularly beneficial for SEFC as they traverse new educational environments. Faculty, staff and even other students can often serve as important campus contacts who offer deep, caring relationships that time spent in foster care may have negatively impacted. Having someone believe in them and take initiative to encourage their success can be transformational in SEFC’s educational trajectories. This personal mentoring or coaching helps bolster

students' feelings of belonging and overall self-efficacy, which is directly linked to their propensity to persist (Bennett et al., 2020).

This scaffolded approach to student success is important for all students but is proven especially vital for foster care alumni enrolled in college (Whitman, 2018). State policies are critical in scaling these efforts. Examples of comprehensive wraparound support policies and those that directly create valuable interpersonal contacts for SEFC are detailed below.



California Senate Bill 1023 (2014): This state policy created **foster youth postsecondary support programs at community colleges** that include broad education-specific services such as academic and career advising and transfer guidance. As well, personal counseling, mental health services and wraparound support are covered. Grants are made available to pay for housing, childcare assistance, transportation, emergency needs or to fill gaps in financial aid. The initial state ongoing allocation was \$10 million and was later increased to \$20 million; funds are disbursed based on the number of students needing assistance on campus. Currently, the program serves students at 46 community colleges across the state.



New York Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI): This program was initiated in 2015 under the Arthur O. Eve Higher Education Law (Education (EDN) Title 7, Article 130 (6451-6456) (2015)) and started with an initial investment of \$1.5 million. As of Fiscal Year 2022, this has risen to a \$7.2 million investment. The New York State Education Department administers FYCSI to allow for participation from State University of New York (SUNY), City University of New York (CUNY), and private sector colleges with NY Higher Education Opportunity (HEOP) programs that target the financial needs of historically underserved students. FYCSI offers a **combination of support services and financial resources** that can be used to cover SEFC's tuition expenses, housing, transportation, medical costs and personal expenses. The program has served more than 2,000 individual students at more than 100 public and private colleges and universities across New York State.



New York City also offers the **Foster College Success Initiative** (FCSI), which is a year-round program that provides housing, tutoring, coaching and financial support to students in NYC foster care attending the City University of New York (CUNY) in collaboration with [New York Foundling](#). This program is funded by the New York Administration for Children's Services and dorm rooms are provided by CUNY. In addition, the [CUNY ASAP | ACE Foster Care Initiative](#) offers additional supports to student with experience in foster care attending CUNY campuses.



Virginia Great Expectations: This is a **system-wide community college model** that provides coaching, academic and career guidance, and financial literacy support to students with foster care experience on campus. The program boasts a graduation rate that is three times the national average.

Single Points of Contact

Other state policy initiatives have required the identification of designated points of contact for SEFC on campus. Single points of contact are able to work collaboratively and network across disciplines to connect students to campus-based supports, as well as federal, state and local foster care support initiatives (Unrau et al., 2012). These individuals can also offer important continuity of care and interpersonal relations for the student as someone who has already worked with them and knows their lived experience. Their efforts across human services, child welfare and education enhance the wraparound support efforts of traditional higher education staff who may not have the expertise in how to navigate complicated systems outside of higher education. The positions, responsibilities and staff costs can be embedded within child welfare agencies or postsecondary institutions.



[Michigan](#) (2012): The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services allocates over \$800,000 of Chafee funding per year to fund contracts at postsecondary institutions to have independent living skills coaches who assist students entering college who are or were in foster care. Coaches work with students in all areas of independent living skills, including education, employment, housing, parenting, mental health, financial management and daily living. In 2022, there are 10 Michigan institutions with contracts.



[Florida Chapter 409.1452](#) (2013, 2014): The State University System of Florida and the Florida College System provide postsecondary educational **campus coaching positions** that are embedded into Florida College System institutions' and university institutions' general support services structure to provide SEFC with dedicated, on-campus support. All of Florida's 28 colleges and 12 universities have designated an individual to serve in this position.



[Texas Education Code Sec. 51.9356](#) (2015): Lawmakers amended the Education Code to require each Texas public institution of higher education (IHE) to appoint at least one employee to serve as a foster care liaison for SEFC. Liaisons serve as a **direct point of contact** and are responsible for disseminating information about available support services and other resources available to the students at the institution and any other relevant information to assist the students.



[California Assembly Bill 801](#) (2016): California mandated the designation of a **Homeless and Foster Student Liaison** at all public college and university campuses. Institutions must designate a staff member who is employed within the financial aid office, or another appropriate office or department of the institution, to serve as a homeless and foster student liaison and to inform current and prospective students about student financial aid and other available assistance.

Extended Foster Care

The Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351) amended the Title IV-E program to give states the option of allowing youth to remain in foster care beyond age 18 and up to age 21. While most states offer some form of extended foster care, the eligibility criteria and program rules vary by state. Studies have shown that extended foster care can lead to greater rates of postsecondary enrollment for youth who remain in care beyond age 18 (Okpych et al., 2019).

HOUSING

Housing expenses are a major part of students' living costs, and they have steadily increased during the past 25 years (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015). For many college students, living costs can be even greater than tuition and fees. In 2021, the average cost for room and board at a public four-year institution was \$11,620 and \$13,120 at private institutions (The Education Data Initiative, 2022). Recent research conducted by The Hope Center found that 48 percent of all college students experienced housing insecurity, and 14 percent were homeless at some point in 2020 alone (Koppish & York, 2021).

The threat of not being able to cover living expenses can significantly impact students' chances of education stability and persistence. For a student with a history of foster care, this is particularly profound. Time in foster care is often marked by frequent residential transitions and unpredictable housing placements. Further distressing is that one in three young adults transitioning from foster care and one in two alumni of foster care will experience housing insecurity (Johnson & Strayhorn, 2019). While campus housing may or may not be a feasible option for a variety of reasons (cost, child dependents, geographical proximity), additional community housing supports are vital to bridging these gaps in assistance. To date, state legislatures have relied on both institutional efforts and federal initiatives to meet students' housing insecurity but are well positioned to develop more policy efforts that embed accessible and affordable residential assistance.



Federal Housing Programs

Foster Youth Independence (FYI) Program: This Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program provides on-demand housing vouchers to public housing authorities to mitigate homelessness among those from foster care under age 25. As of 2020, 25 states have provided more than 650 vouchers.

Family Unification Program (FUP): The Family Unification Program (FUP) is a program also sponsored by HUD under which Housing Choice Vouchers are provided for up to 36 months to youth who have exited foster care and are between the ages of 18 and 24. Public housing authorities administer the vouchers in collaboration with child welfare agencies.

*On January 24, 2022, HUD provided [guidance](#) extending the time limits for vouchers through FUP and FYI by an additional 24 months. Youth with FUP or FYI vouchers are now entitled to receive assistance for up to five years if they enroll in the [Family Self-Sufficiency](#) (FSS) program or meet certain exceptions.



California Assembly Bill 1119 (2001):

The Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus) was created by the California State Legislature in 2001 in response to the alarming rate of homelessness among former foster youth. The program provides **safe, affordable housing and supportive services** for up to 24 months to youth who have aged out of foster care up to age 24. The law has been modified several times, including by [Senate Bill 1252](#) (2014), which allows youth enrolled in school to access THP-Plus for up to 36 months and up to age 25. As of Fiscal Year 2021/22 the state provides \$51.9 million annually for this program.



California Assembly Bill 1393

(2009): This policy requires public universities to give SEFC **priority for uninterrupted, year-round on-campus housing**. This law was modified in 2015 by [Assembly Bill 1228](#) to require that students with experience in foster care be allowed to remain in housing that is available during academic breaks at no extra charge.




WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Economic stability for SEFC is directly linked to employment. Historical trends show that 48 percent of these individuals are likely to be unemployed at age 21 (Barnow et al, 2015). Employment is often necessary for SEFC to fund their own way through college, so a lack of employment negatively impacts not only students' overall livelihood and residential stability, but also greatly impacts their probability of postsecondary success. State efforts to increase workforce pipelines is vital, not only for SEFC livelihood, but also for overall regional economic vitality (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013).


Federal programs such as Education Training Vouchers (ETVs) provide those leaving the foster care system critical access to traditional education programs as well as career training and workforce development credentialing programs. Additionally, passage of the [Strengthening Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) for the 21st Century \(Perkins V\) Act](#) reserved federal

dollars to create new career pathways for historically underserved student populations that include SEFC (Lufkin, 2019). There are also numerous programs at the state and regional level that address ways to help transitioning youth receive assistance with job training, job acquisition skills and career planning (US Department of Education, 2016).




 [Washington Senate Bill 6274](#) (2018): Following the 2007 adoption of The Passport to College Promise Scholarship program, this 2018 amendment renamed and expanded the existing program to [Passport to Careers](#). The program expansion introduced two programmatic pathways for students: College or a registered apprenticeship. The goals of this robust policy initiative are to increase postsecondary access through targeted foster youth outreach and case management. It also addresses degree or **apprenticeship completion** by offering planning, institutional support and financial assistance. The two programming pathways not only support **career development**, but also offer wraparound services such as housing, transportation and other educational expenses.

Another important aspect of this policy initiative was the establishment of a data sharing agreement between the WSAC and the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) used to verify foster care status, eliminating the need for students to provide their postsecondary institution with court records or other documentation of their experience with foster care.


 [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) (2021): Several states including [Ohio](#), [Nevada](#) and [California](#) requested and received a waiver from the Department of Labor that will allow local Workforce Development Boards to serve a greater number of SEFC through WIOA waiver programs. The waiver reduces the percent of funding that a local Workforce Development Board must spend on *out-of-school* youth in order to **allow these programs to serve a greater number of youth with experience in foster care**, juvenile justice systems or homelessness who are *in school*.


INFRASTRUCTURE & ADVOCACY SUPPORT

Policy development and implementation do not happen without strategic infrastructure and engaged stakeholders across sectors. The policy efforts below serve to raise awareness about the needs of SEFC and provide a framework for advocacy.

 [Indiana House Enrolled Act 1314](#) (2018): **Data sharing** is the focus of this legislation, which requires the Department of Child Services (DCS) to share disaggregated information regarding youth in foster care with the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) at least monthly. It also mandates the DCS and IDOE prepare annual reports on educational outcomes for students in foster care and those who are experiencing homelessness to be submitted to the Indiana State Board of Education each spring. HEA 1314 also required that a **remediation plan** outlining better supports for students be submitted in year one.

 [Nevada Assembly Bill 150](#) (2019): This legislation requires the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) to establish a **strategic advocacy workgroup** responsible for developing policies and services to improve outcomes for transition-age youth exiting the Nevada child welfare system. DCFS must also submit a report to the Legislative Committee on Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice on the activities and recommendations of the working group.

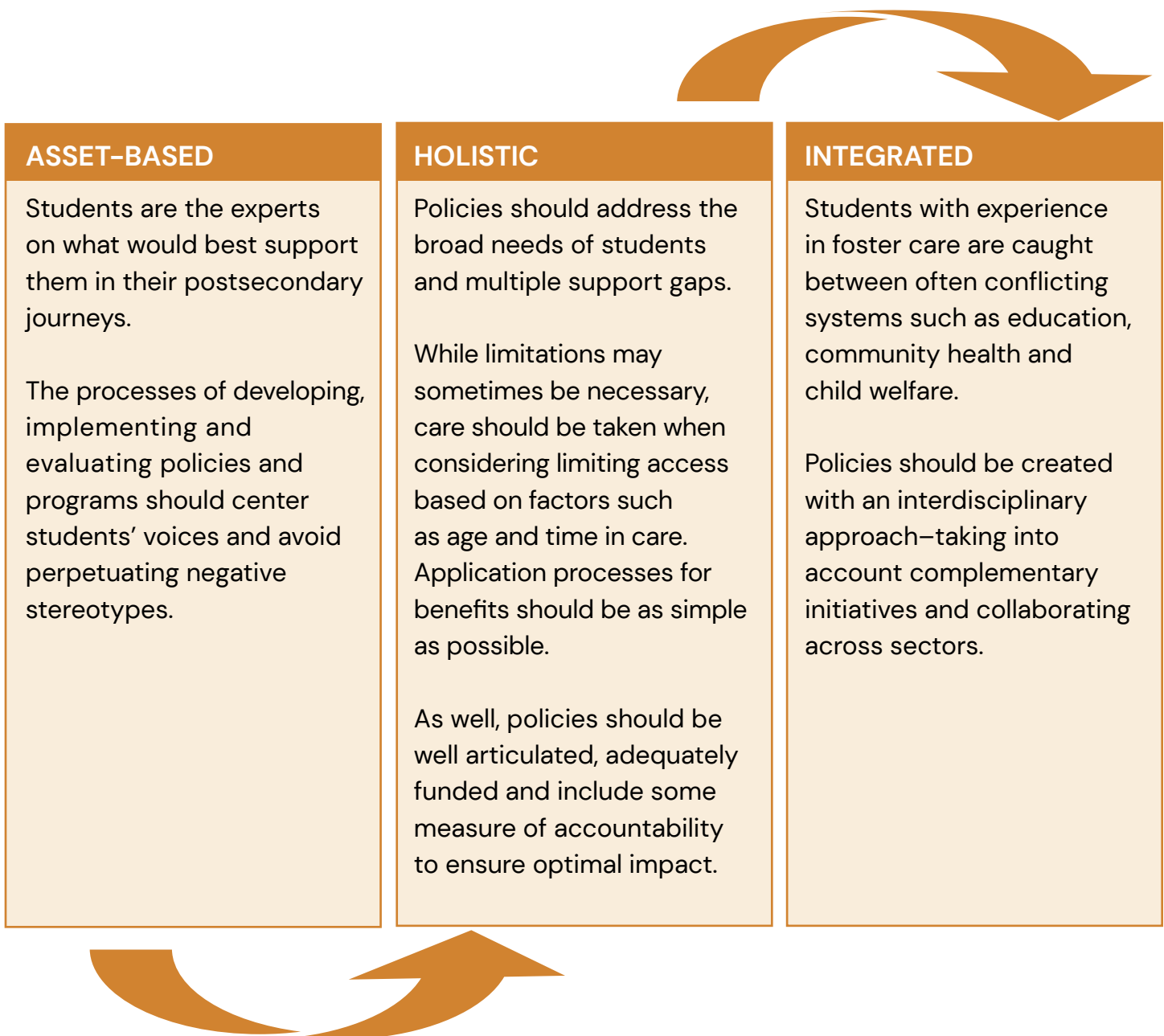
 [Indiana House Enrolled Act 1537](#) (2021): This state policy expands the current Commission on Improving the Status of Children (CISC) to **include two youth members with lived experience** in the foster care or justice systems or who have experienced homelessness.

 [Indiana Senate Enrolled Act 209](#) (2021): The 2021 Indiana General Assembly adopted SEA 209, which allows taxpayers (private companies and individual citizens) to apply for a **state tax credit for their contributions** to foster care support organizations approved through the Department of Child Services. Applicants are eligible for a 50 percent state tax credit on donations up to \$10,000. The policy makes \$2 million available per fiscal year and will renew annually through 2025.



BEST PRACTICES FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Even when an empowering environment is developed, well-intentioned policy agendas can have unintended consequences or fail to meet their intended goals when created or implemented with a narrow vision. Students with lived experience in foster care are tremendously resourceful but are still underserved by numerous systems (Font, & Gershoff, 2020). The above state policy examples demonstrate increased intentionality in creating broad levels of support that encourage students' postsecondary education achievement. Future policy efforts should continue to build on these positive initiatives by utilizing approaches that are asset-based, holistic and integrated.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Students who have spent time in foster care are incredibly resilient and resourceful. Despite the tremendous barriers they face, they do persist. With greater supports for postsecondary access and persistence, these students' assets can be fully realized. Broad, inclusive outreach will ensure that those leaving foster care see themselves as college students with all the promise and capabilities of their peers. Supports such as financial assistance, support services, housing and workforce development help ensure sustained success and security. With the influence and reach of state policy to develop responsive legislative agendas, these students' futures can look even brighter.



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JOHN BURTON
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for Youth

