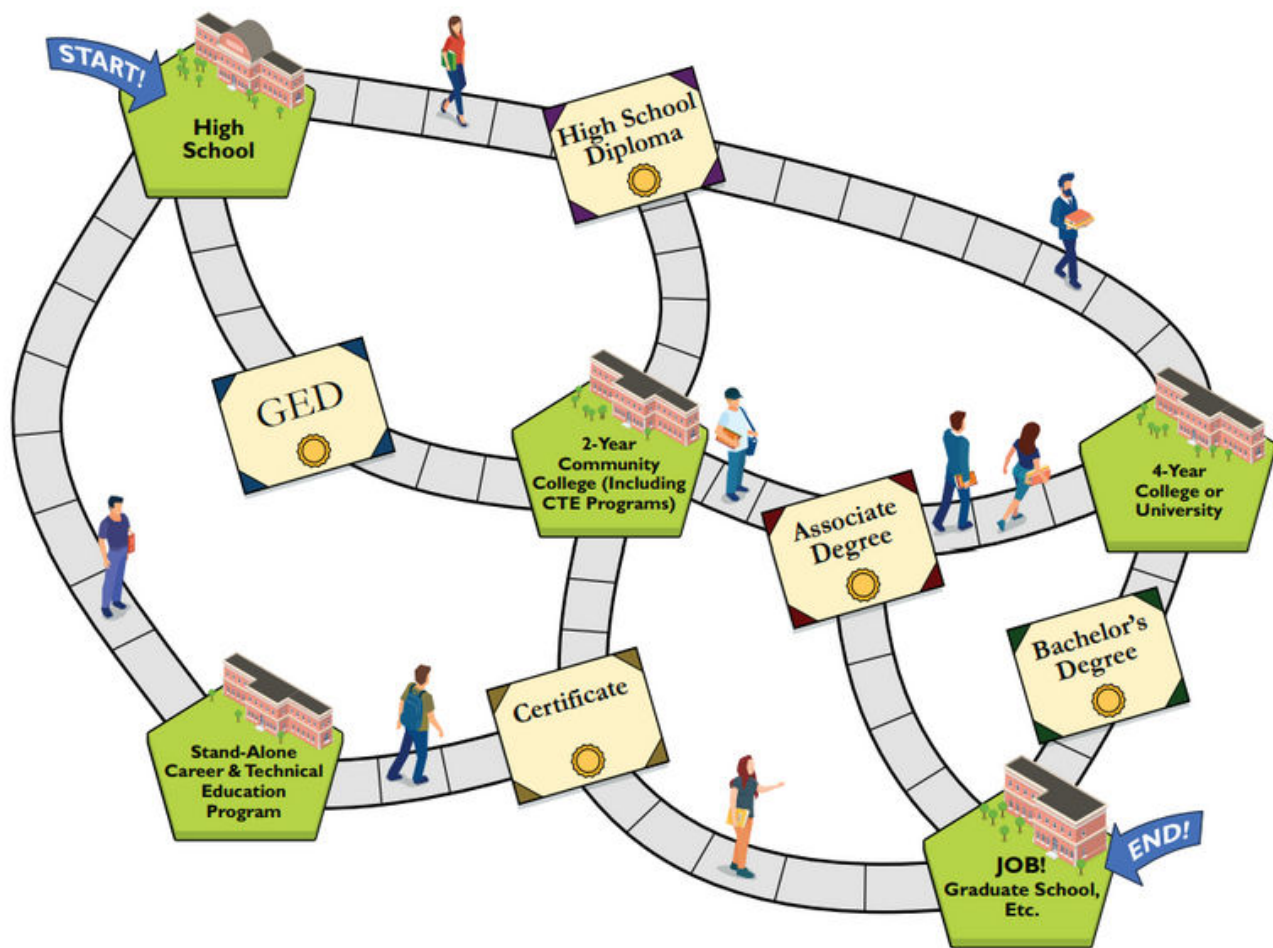


EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS

Once youth leave high school, they have numerous pathways available to reach the education and learning experience that best fits their needs and career goals. Educational pathways may be a mix of the options below. Students who qualify may choose to go directly to a 4-year university, or a student may choose to attend a community college. At community colleges, students can obtain a certificate in a skill that will allow them to quickly enter the workforce in their chosen field. Community colleges also offer AA degrees and the ability to transfer to a 4-year college to complete a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in the field of the student's choice.



PUBLIC 2-YEAR, COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Definition: Community colleges are quality educational institutions that can lead to an associate degree or a certificate in a specific career field. These colleges can also serve as a stepping-stone to a bachelor's degree from a 4-year college or university.

Examples: East Los Angeles College, San Diego Mesa Community College

Admission Requirements: Open to everyone! No GPA minimum, admissions tests or essays.

What to Know:

- Offer 2-year degree (associate degree), certificate, or CTE (Career and Technical Education).
- Affordable, lower-cost option. In some cases, students can attend for free or at a low cost.
- Small class sizes.
- All California community colleges have resources and supports for foster youth, such as priority registration and campus support programs and advising. Learn more [here](#).
- Many campuses are “commuter campuses,” where students live at home and commute to campus. On-campus housing is uncommon.
- Students can transfer to a 4-year college or university. In some states, community college graduates have priority transfer admission to 4-year universities. For example, California community college graduates have priority transfer admission to the Cal State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) system, as well as Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s). Learn more [here](#).
- Instructors are often more available to meet with students than professors at 4-year colleges and universities.
- The timeline to obtain a degree can vary, ranging from 2 years for full-time students to several years, if students balance part-time study with work or family obligations.

IN-STATE, PUBLIC 4-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Definition: In-state, public 4-year colleges and universities receive government funding to operate and generally offer bachelor’s degree programs in a variety of fields (like math, science, or humanities), along with graduate degrees like master’s and doctoral degrees.

Examples: UCLA, Texas Tech, SUNY, Arizona State University

Admission Requirements: Generally, a selective admissions process that requires essays, letters of recommendation, and a minimum GPA. (Note: UCs and CSUs no longer require the SAT or ACT, but some out-of-state colleges and universities will still require testing.)

What to Know:

- Offer 4-year degree (bachelor’s degree) and higher (for example, master’s degree).
- Tuition is generally higher than at community colleges, but financial aid and scholarships are available. In some states, such as California, low-income students often qualify for state financial aid that pays the full tuition costs.

- Tuition rates are typically significantly lower for students residing in the state than for those coming from a different state. However, some states have interstate regional agreements like the Western Undergraduate Exchange Program (WUE). Learn more [here](#).
- Typically, larger class sizes than in community colleges.
- May provide resources and supports for foster youth. In California, all CSU's and UC's have specific support programs just for foster youth. Learn more [here](#).
- Generally, offer on-campus housing (for example: dorms, apartments). In California, the CSU and UC systems offer priority housing for foster youth.

PRIVATE 4-YEAR NON-PROFIT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Definition: Institutions that do not receive government funding to operate.

Examples: University of Southern California (USC), Harvard, Spelman College

Admission Requirements: Vary by school. Some can have a more selective admissions process that requires testing, essays, letters of recommendation, and a minimum GPA.

What to Know:

- Offer 4-year degrees (bachelor's degree) and higher (for example, master's degrees).
- Typically, more expensive than public 4-year colleges and universities. However, partial or full scholarships may be available.
- Campus and class sizes can vary greatly, from small liberal arts colleges with under a thousand students to larger universities with thousands of students.
- Resources specifically for foster youth vary by school but are less likely to be available than at public institutions.
- Generally, offer on-campus housing (for example: dorms, apartments).

PRIVATE FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Definition: For-profit colleges and universities are institutions of higher education owned and operated by private, profit-seeking businesses. A major difference between for-profit and non-profit colleges/universities is ownership. For-profit colleges and universities have a profit motive and are owned by an individual or group of shareholders. In contrast, any profits made by a non-profit school or organization must be reinvested back into or held by the organization itself.

Examples: West Coast University, Alliant International University, The Los Angeles Film School

Admission Requirements: Vary by school. Some can have a more selective admissions process that requires testing, essays, letters of recommendation, and a minimum GPA.

What to Know:

- Can be significantly more expensive.
- Offer a variety of certifications and degrees.
- Generally, have higher acceptance rates and lower admissions requirements.
- Mostly online, offering flexibility.
- Some are accredited and others are not, requiring youth to do a high degree of research before applying, as discussed below.

A WORD OF CAUTION ON FOR-PROFIT INSTITUTIONS:

There are some very questionable privately owned institutions, both online and with physical campuses. Some of these institutions have come under government scrutiny for various reasons, including that graduates have a hard time finding employment and are often burdened with large and unnecessary student loans.

While looking for the educational pathway that best suits the student and their needs, caregivers should help youth find a school that has been accredited. Caregivers can consult the US Department of Education's [College Navigator tool](#) to see which schools are accredited and by whom. Accredited schools undergo a certification process, and students will be able to take out federal student loans to attend, if appropriate. Caregivers and youth will also want to look for solid proof that the school offers support for job placement, with a good success rate, and that graduates receive certification in their trade. Caregivers and youth should also exercise extreme caution when considering taking out loans and should ensure that they fully understand the terms of any loans and whether a similar credential can be obtained elsewhere with less loan burden.