Research Brief

Using Research to Improve the Postsecondary Educational Outcomes of Community College Students in Foster Care

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INTRODUCTION

Community college is the most common pathway into postsecondary education among young people in foster care.[1] This pathway is a logical choice for both academic and financial reasons. Many young people in foster care with aspirations for postsecondary education need remediation before they are prepared for college-level coursework. At community college, students can take courses commensurate with their skill levels. They can also earn certificates, associate degrees, or credits to transfer to a 4-year school. Additionally, community colleges have lower tuition costs, and hence, are much more affordable than 4-year colleges or universities. Affordability is an important consideration for young people in foster care who can't rely on their parents or other family members to help them pay for tuition or the other costs of attendance, such as housing, transportation, and books.[2]

Community colleges could play a key role in reducing the disparity in postsecondary educational attainment between young people who are or were in foster care and their nonfoster care peers.[3]

> **Community college is the most common pathway into postsecondary education for young people in foster care.**

Regardless of whether they begin and end their postsecondary education at a community college or transfer to a 4-year school after earning their associate's degree, young people in foster care stand to benefit both academically and financially from starting at a community college. That said, few studies have examined the experiences of community college students who are or were in foster care.[4] Consequently, we know relatively little about why young people in foster care choose to enroll in community college, what happens to those young people once they enroll, or whether they are receiving the supports they need to achieve their educational goals.

We undertook this mixed-methods study with funding from the Spencer Foundation to learn more about the experiences of Illinois community college students who are or were in foster care. Although Illinois was one of the first states to allow young people to remain in foster care until their 21st birthday, it lags behind other states in using research to improve their postsecondary educational outcomes. The research included three main components:

Administrative Data Analysis. We used administrative data from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to identify all young people who turned 17 years old while in foster care between 2012 and 2018. This yielded a sample of 5,462 youth. We provided the names and birthdates of those young people to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), a nonprofit organization that receives college enrollment and graduation data from more than 36,000 participating colleges and universities across the U.S. The NSC matched the records we provided against its database and returned a file with college enrollment and graduation data through December 2020 for the young people in our sample for whom it found a match. We then linked the NSC data to DCFS data on the demographic characteristics and foster care placement histories of the young people in our sample.

Document Review. To better understand the landscape of policies and programs designed to promote postsecondary educational attainment among young people in foster care in Illinois, we reviewed online DCFS policy guides and other information.

Semi-Structured Interviews. We interviewed 24 students between the ages of 18 and 28 who had experienced foster care and completed at least one semester of community college. The students were recruited through email listservs used by the DCFS Postsecondary Education Specialists, a state foster care alumni group, and a nonprofit organization to share information with college students who are or were in foster care. The students are predominantly female (n = 20) and Black (n = 14). Sixteen were enrolled in a community college at the time of the interview, six were enrolled in a 4-year school to which they had transferred from a community college, and two had withdrawn from a community college after losing their financial aid. Nine of the students were still in foster care. We also interviewed five community college administrators on four college campuses. They were recruited through emails sent to community college financial aid offices and referrals made by financial aid offices. The interviews were conducted by phone and lasted between 75 and 90 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed.
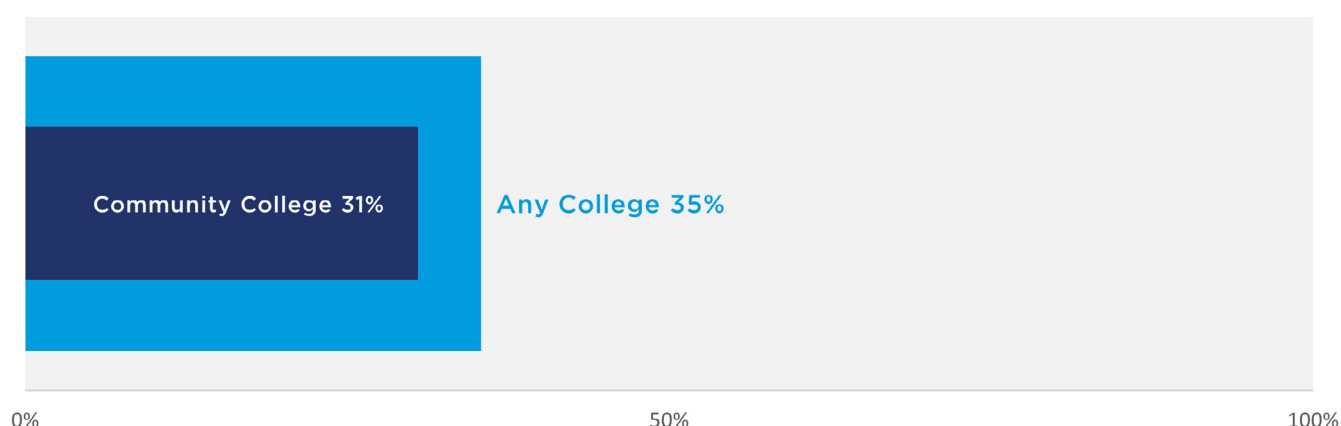
We begin with the findings from our analysis of the administrative data. These findings indicate that, at least in Illinois, most young people in foster care who pursue postsecondary education enroll in community college. However, few of those community college students earn a certificate or degree. We then turn to the results of our qualitative interviews, which shed light on why so few community college students who are or were in foster care succeed in school, and offer recommendations based on those results.

FINDINGS FROM ADMINISTRATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Finding 1: Most young people in foster care who enroll in college are community college students.[5]
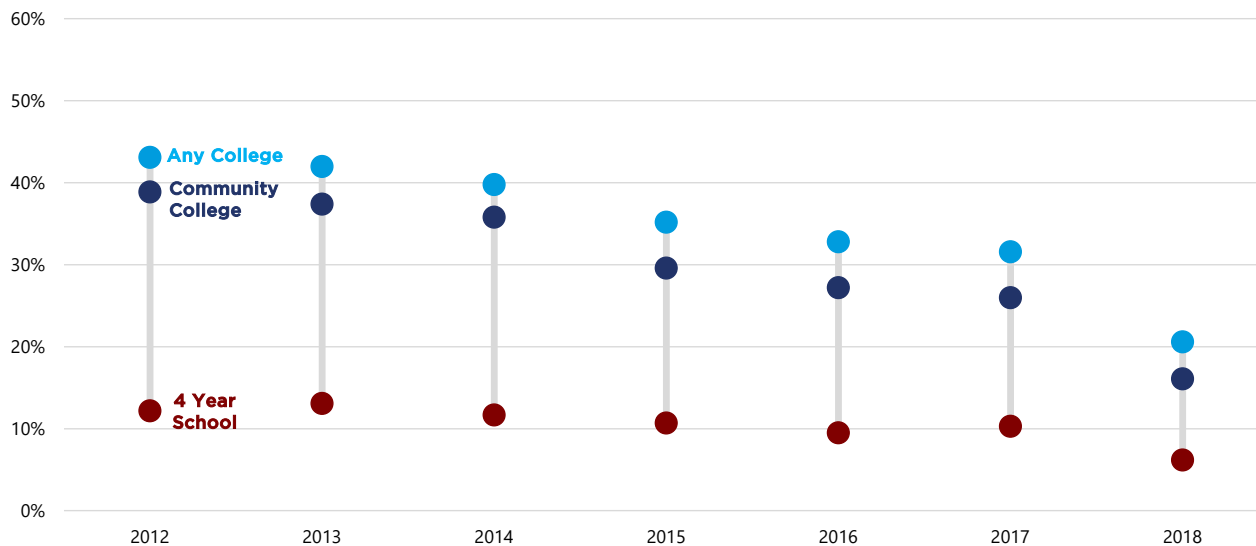
Thirty-five percent (n = 1,931) of the young people in our sample enrolled in college, including 31% (n = 1,664) who enrolled in a community college. In other words, the proportion of college students in our sample who enrolled in a community college was 86% (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. College Enrollment

Community College 31%   Any College 35%

0%   50%   100%

Both the overall college enrollment rate and the rate of enrollment in community college were higher for earlier cohorts as compared to later cohorts (Figure 2). Given this trend, we expect both rates to increase over time as more young people in the more recent cohorts pursue postsecondary education. By contrast, the 4-year college enrollment rate was relatively flat, except for the most recent cohort.
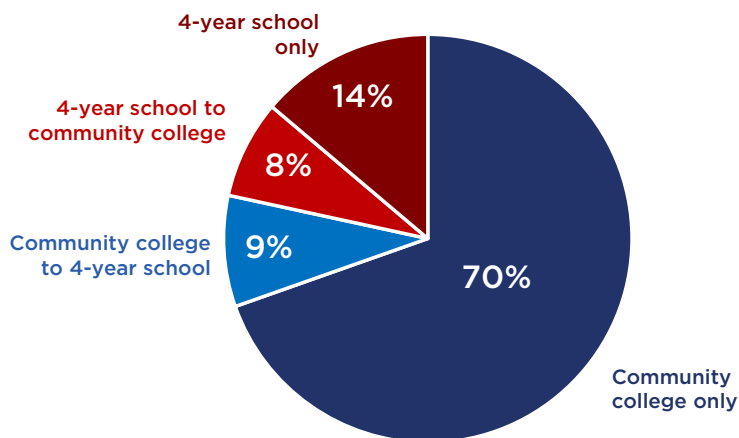
Figure 2. College Enrollment by Cohort

Of the 1,931 young people in our sample who enrolled in college, 70% only enrolled in community college, 9% started at a community college and transferred to a 4-year school, 8% started at a 4-year school and transferred to a community college, and 14% only enrolled in a 4-year school (see Figure 3). Of the young people who started at a community college and then transferred to a 4-year school, only 18% had graduated from community college with a degree or certificate before they transferred. Fifteen percent of the community college students in our sample enrolled in two or more community colleges.

Eighty-three percent of the young people who ever enrolled in community college were still in foster care when they first enrolled and 95% first enrolled in college before their 21st birthday. One-quarter of the young people who enrolled in a community college were only 16 or 17 years old when they first enrolled. Some of these young people may have been taking college classes as high school students. Others may have enrolled in a community college to obtain a GED.

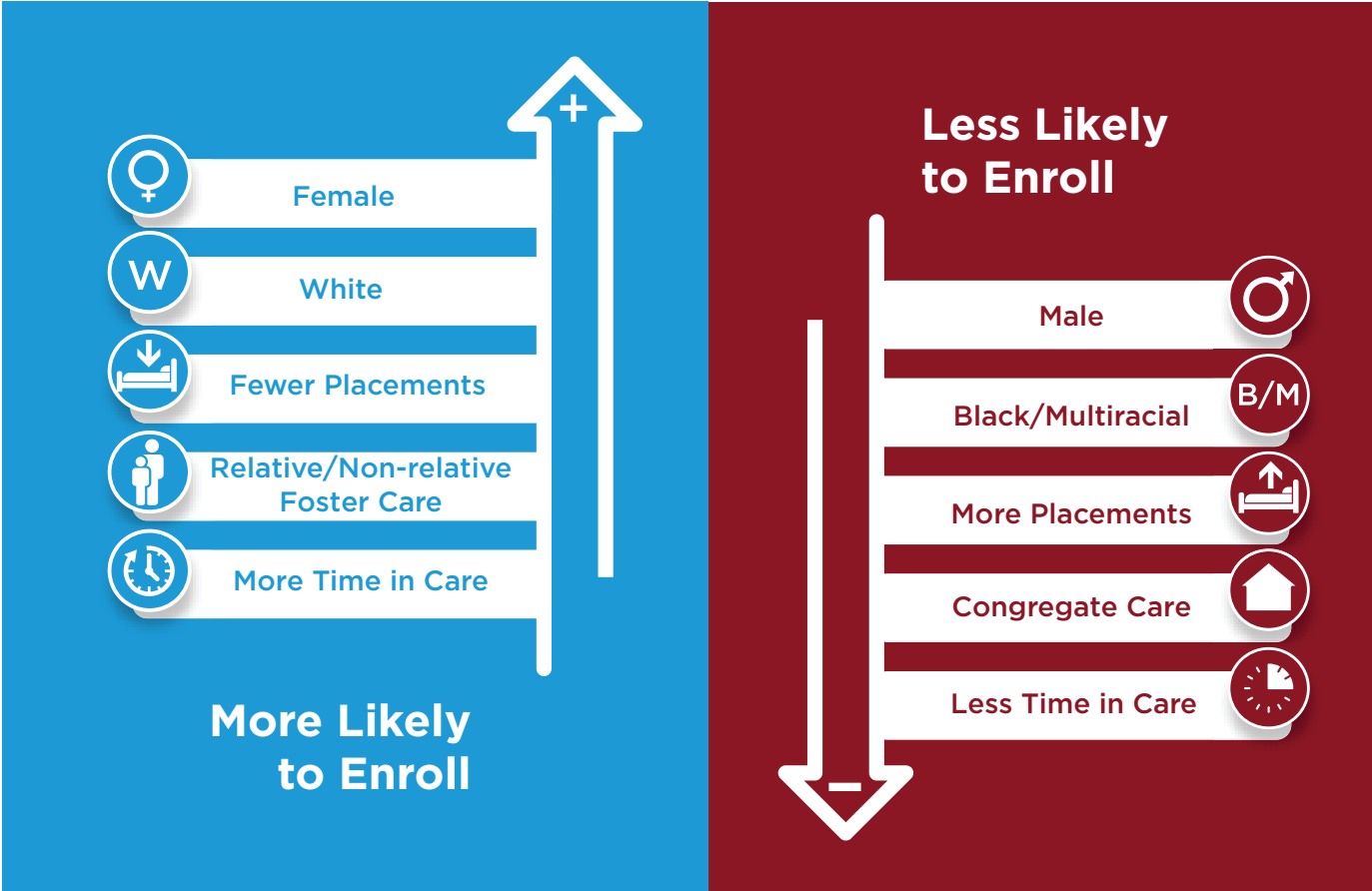## Figure 3. Enrollment by College Type

Finding 2: Not all young people in foster care are equally likely to enroll in community college.

The community college enrollment rate was higher for some groups than others.[6] Consistent with a growing gender gap in college enrollment nationwide, young women were 1.5 times more likely to have enrolled in community college than young men.[7] Also consistent with national trends, young people who are Black or multiracial were less likely to have enrolled in community college than young people who are White, although the differences were small (i.e., 4 to 6 percentage points).[8] These gender and racial differences persisted even after we took other factors, including their foster care placement histories, into account.

Additionally, all other things being equal, the likelihood of enrolling in community college was lower for young people who had experienced more rather than fewer placement changes, young people who had spent less rather than more time in foster care, and young people who were placed in congregate care rather than in a relative or nonrelative foster home at age 17.
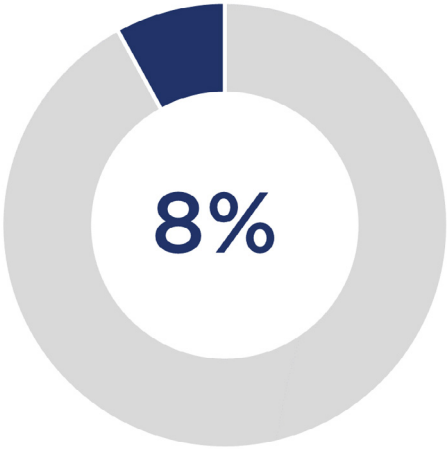
Figure 4. Characteristics Associated with Community College Enrollment[9]

Less Likely to Enroll

Male

Black/Multiracial

More Placements

Congregate Care

Less Time in Care

Female

White

Fewer Placements

Relative/Non-relative Foster Care

More Time in Care

More Likely to Enroll

Finding 3: Few young people in foster care who enrolled in community college graduated.

Overall, only 8% of the young people who enrolled in a community college had graduated with a certificate or degree (see Figure 5).[10] Moreover, although the community college graduation rate was higher for earlier than for later cohorts, it never exceeded 11%. By comparison, the National Student Clearinghouse reported a 32% community college graduation rate for students who entered community college in 2014.[11]

Figure 5. Community College Graduation Rate

8%

FINDINGS FROM QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Finding 4: Students struggled in high school and were unprepared for college.

High school was very challenging—both academically and socially—for most of the students we interviewed. Students used phrases like "rollercoaster," "rock bottom," or "worst time of my life" to describe their high school experience. Several factors contributed to the challenges they faced. Some students struggled with emotional and behavioral dysregulation stemming from their history of trauma and loss. Twelve of the 24 students were in a residential care facility and six were placed in a psychiatric hospital. Although these placements were temporary, they often lasted longer than expected and this undermined students' academic progress.

Sam, age 21

"At one point in high school, I was placed in a psychiatric hospital. They didn't have a foster home to release me to. I was there for five months receiving no education, so I lost more credits."

Changing schools was common. Half of the participants had to change high schools when they entered foster care. The average number of high schools they attended was three. Instability and inconsistency undermined their academic progress, interfered with the development of relationships with teachers and peers, dampened their educational aspirations, and reinforced feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

Mariah, age 28

"I think my struggle from being in high school while being in foster care and those transitional periods is what affected me from being better and doing better. 'Cause in foster care, you don't really think about your future. You think about that now."

Many of these students struggled with a learning disability and had an Individualized Education Program (IEP). In some cases, that learning disability was not diagnosed until they were in high school.

Marissa, age 19

"In high school. . . it wasn't the best experience for me just because I did struggle a lot. Up until my junior year, I didn't have any accommodations or anything like that. It was hard for me to focus. Then I got my accommodations, and I was finally able to get through high school."

Some students dropped out before turning 18. Others who finished high school were surprised that they graduated. Many of these students knew that high school had not prepared them for college and that they needed time to get back on track with their education.

Leyla, age 22

"I guess in high school I just didn't really know what I was gonna do. I didn't—I just didn't believe in myself. I was going down a really bad path— bad friend group. Once I got out of high school, the first thing I did was I got a job. . . I just needed time, because I felt like being in foster care you have to grow up so fast. Mentally, I wasn't there.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Minimize school changes and other disruptions to education.** The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) includes provisions that guide educational stability for young people in foster care.[12] Consistent with ESSA, child welfare systems should place more emphasis on educational stability when young people enter foster care or experience a placement change if continuing in the same school is in their best interests.

- **Assess the existing array of policies and programs.** Illinois has multiple policies and programs designed to promote the academic achievement of high school students in foster care. Research is needed to determine the consistency with which these policies and programs are being implemented across the state and the extent to which students are benefiting from their implementation. (See Table 1)

- **Increase collaboration between education and child welfare systems.** Effective collaboration between the two systems is essential to ensure that students in foster care graduate from high school and are prepared for college-level work.

Finding 5: Students navigated the transition to college with little professional guidance.

The students we interviewed had to navigate the transition to college largely on their own. They had limited knowledge about college and few had toured a college campus. Many were the first in their families to go to college. Students noted that the instability in their lives made planning for college hard. Most could not recall talking with an educator or child welfare professional about their college plans. Some attributed this to low expectations of young people in foster care.

Sam, age 21

"I feel like there's this stereotype of foster kids. You're not going to go to college. You're not going to have a good career. . . . No one discussed college with me. No one went, "Hey, you're at this point in your life. Maybe we should figure out what you want to do with your life. It was never a conversation about what I would do after high school."

Some students reported seeking guidance elsewhere, such as from a friend, a relative, or a court-appointed special advocate (CASA).[13] However, the people they turned to were often unable to answer their questions. Hence, many entered college without a clear sense of how it worked or what it cost.

Mariah, age 28

"I didn't have an understanding that this is what I'm going to owe. Understanding the process of college, like what the money was for, what the books was for. Just having an understanding of it all would have helped. I had the push, the drive, and the motivation, but not the support."

All but one of the students we interviewed described their caseworkers as being "hands-off" once they entered college. Many wished that their caseworker had checked in on them more often and asked more questions about their transition. Some students felt that their caseworkers expected them to be more independent than they were.

Autumn, age 23

"I think they were looking at me as an adult. Which at 18, I am a young adult, but I don't think they were keeping in mind that there's a lot of things that I didn't know, considering the way that I grew up. I just felt like they expected me to do or know certain things. . . . Then I just felt like I was on my own to do a lot of the things that I would've liked more assistance with doing. They told me like, "Well, you're an adult. You're going to have to do these things on your own.""

RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop the capacity of caseworkers to help young people in foster care plan for and succeed in college. In California, the John Burton Foundation has developed a variety of tools, including a webinar, designed to help caseworkers (and foster parents) prepare young people in foster care for the transition to college.[14] Illinois and other states should consider developing a similar set of tools. Additionally, some jurisdictions are moving towards a specialized case management model for transition-age young people in foster care.[15] Caseworkers who specialize in working with this population may be better equipped to offer support as they plan for and adjust to college.

Finding 6: Most students were required to take remedial courses

Only two of the students we interviewed scored high enough on their placement tests to qualify for college-level math and English courses, and both of those students transferred to a community college from a 4-year university. Most students were required to take remedial courses, which do not count towards degree completion. However, no one explained how to interpret their scores. Many of these students had to repeat the same remedial class multiple times and did not understand how this would affect the amount of time it would take to graduate or their eligibility for financial aid. [16,17]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide academic support to students who are required to take remedial classes. Community colleges should connect students with campus-based resources that can help them catch up on core subjects and monitor their progress.

Finding 7: Students have a limited understanding of financial aid, including aid available through the child welfare system.

The students we interviewed had a limited understanding of their financial aid package or the way financial aid works more generally.[18] Most, but not all, could tell us what DCFS college resources they received, but they were unfamiliar with the specific eligibility requirements of those programs. For example, many of the students who were participating in the DCFS Youth in College program thought they would remain eligible for financial support from DCFS as long as they were enrolled in college. In reality, young people are eligible for up to 5 consecutive years or through age 25, whichever comes first.

Part of the problem seems to be that information about college resources for youth in care, or about college financial aid more generally, is difficult to find. There are online links to "tip sheets" about these resources on the DCFS website, but one needs to know where to look.[19] Additionally, the information as described in the "tip sheets" can be confusing. For example, the Youth in College fact sheet states that one of the benefits is "a monthly board payment in the amount of $1,235." However, it also states that the scholarship does not cover "room/board costs."[20] The students we interviewed expressed a desire for information about these resources to be more accessible and presented in a more user-friendly format.

Many of the students we interviewed didn't know enough about how financial aid works to make informed decisions about when to enroll in college, the number or type of courses to take, or the impact of employment on their eligibility. They knew that they were required to submit a new FAFSA each year to remain eligible for their financial aid, including the aid provided by DCFS.[21] However, several noted that they submitted their FAFSA at the last minute, not realizing that this reduced their chances of receiving aid or reduced the amount of aid they would receive since priority is given to students who submit their FAFSA early. Additionally, some students were unaware that their financial aid could be adversely affected if they failed to make "satisfactory academic progress" as defined by their community college.

Indeed, eight of the 24 students we interviewed lost their financial aid and consequently owed a significant sum of money to their colleges. Four other students took out student loans, which they later learned were unnecessary, to cover the cost of college tuition. All but one of these students accumulated student debt while still in foster care. They did not receive assistance repaying this debt before aging out.

Laticia, age 20

"It would have been helpful to know everything about applying to college. . . like the FAFSA. . . because that was so confusing. I had to learn about that myself. . . I didn't know those Federal grants existed. . . . I was thinking about doing student loans because all I hear about is student loans everywhere. That would've been a bad idea. . I really, really research things before I start doing anything. . . and that's how I found about the grants myself. . . . It just seemed like this is so independent for me."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase access to information about and remove barriers to financial aid.** Child welfare systems should design youth-friendly materials that clearly describe all of the postsecondary educational supports available to young people in foster care, including their eligibility requirements. The materials should be easily accessible to young people, caregivers, and caseworkers. Child welfare systems should also streamline the process of applying and re-applying for these postsecondary educational supports. (See Table 2)

- **Provide opportunities for students to repay debts owed to community colleges before they age out of foster care.** Child welfare systems should educate young people planning for college about the importance of avoiding college debt and about alternatives to student loans. They should also ensure that students who have incurred debt are provided with financial counseling to explore options, such as loan forgiveness, deferment, or forbearance; refinancing; or income-driven repayment plans. Every effort should be made to remove barriers and ensure that students are eligible to re-enroll in college after they exit from foster care.

Finding 8: Student engagement with Postsecondary Education Specialists varies widely.

Two full-time Postsecondary Education (PSE) Specialists are responsible for administrative tasks, such as processing applications for funding, completing paperwork related to financial aid awards, and monitoring compliance with eligibility requirements. PSE Specialists also facilitate access to postsecondary educational supports. Our interviews suggest that the amount and type of engagement students have with PSE Specialists varies widely. Of the 18 students who had some level of engagement with a PSE Specialist, five connected with a PSE Specialist to learn about the supports available to college students through DCFS and review their requirements *before applying*. This proactive engagement with a PSE Specialist was generally prompted by a caseworker, a foster parent, or a relative caregiver. Nine students only engaged with a PSE Specialist to fill out an application or to submit documentation for maintaining eligibility. Four students did not engage with a PSE Specialist until *after* they had lost their financial aid or had accumulated student loan debt. Six students had no engagement with the PSE Specialists. This includes two students who were unaware of their existence. Most students could not describe their engagement with a PSE Specialist until after we used the actual names of the people in these positions.

For a majority of the students we interviewed, support from the PSE Specialists was limited to group emails about deadlines or scholarships. Several students received personalized emails from or had check-ins with a PSE Specialist. Students appreciated both the group emails and the more individualized support. It was less common for students to receive more substantive assistance, such as help filling out an application, solving a financial aid problem, or addressing basic needs, but those who did benefited immensely from the help they received.

Vanessa, age 25

"I was paying for all my college by myself. . . I was checking my email one day, and an email said something about a $1,000 grant. . . . I didn't think it was real. . . .[The PSE Specialist] is like, "Yeah, this is, but how come you're not getting help from us? You qualify. . . . To somebody that is financially safe, it's not a lot. To somebody that's trying to rebuild and recover and redo more, that's a lotta money."

Most students did not reach out to the PSE Specialists because they did not know what the PSE Specialists might be able to help them with. A few students who did reach out to a PSE Specialist did not receive the assistance or understanding they needed.

Autumn, age 23

"I honestly felt a little disappointed because I had explained a little bit of my situation and why I was doing poorly in school and what was going on in my personal life, and they just didn't really even acknowledge it. They just were telling me like, "Oh, well, you need to get a 2.0 GPA. You need to be enrolled full-time in order to still keep receiving the monthly stipends." That just seemed to be all they were concerned about."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Realign supports provided by PSE Specialists with student needs. PSE Specialists could leverage the compliance monitoring interactions they have with students to check in and offer guidance or support. Establishing these relationships may encourage students to seek help from PSE Specialists if and when they need it.

Finding 9: Students want community colleges to understand their unique needs and tailor supports to address them.

The students we interviewed wanted their community colleges to know that they have needs that are distinct from those of other students. Some suggested that community colleges should identify and check in more often with students who are or were in foster care to review their academic progress and connect them with campus-based resources about which they might not be aware. Others suggested that community colleges could offer those students special workshops or student-facilitated support groups.

These suggestions reflect a desire to feel like they matter to and are valued by their community colleges. They stressed the need for community colleges not to make assumptions about their knowledge or needs, but rather, to talk with them about how they can be supported. Mostly, they want to be aware of resources and make decisions for themselves.

Autumn, age 22

"Just to have the extra support if I need it. Yeah, my school has support, but to actually know that there is a group of people who understand my background, the situation that I'm going through, or that I have been through and how that affects my personal life, as well as my academics and things like that, that would it be great to have a safe haven."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Develop campus-based supports specifically for students who are or were in foster care.** Programs specifically designed for students who are or were in foster care can be found on campuses across the country, including the campuses of community colleges. These programs typically provide an array of wraparound services and supports that address financial, academic, housing, and social-emotional needs to help students succeed in and graduate from college.[22] Existing programs in other states could serve as a model.

- **Establish Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) at community colleges throughout the state.** SPOCs are college administrators who help youth who are or were in foster care address barriers by providing support, guidance, and referrals to admissions, financial aid, and academic advising staff. Every community college campus in California has a Foster Youth Success Initiative liaison designated to provide support to students who are or were in foster care.[23] Lists of the SPOC should be available to students, caregivers, and caseworkers.

Finding 10: Community college administrators want to support students who are or were in foster care but face barriers to providing that support.

The community college administrators we interviewed expressed a genuine interest in students who are or were in foster care. Supporting those students is difficult for at least two reasons. First, community college administrators don't know which students are or were in foster care unless students self-identify.[24]

Student Accounting Specialist

"Generally speaking, we don't have too many that come to us and say, "Hey, I've been in foster care. What can I do?" It's more, we get notification from DCFS themselves that hey, we've got this student that'll be attending at your college, and they're eligible for this waiver because of a scholarship or their whatever aid."

Second, community college administrators are not necessarily familiar with the supports that are available to community college students through DCFS. However, at least some are familiar with the PSE Specialists.

Student Accounting Specialist

"I had not realized at first the different programs. . . . Luckily I was able to work with one of the post-secondary specialists, and she sent me information on the four different programs that our students tend to use—the waiver, the scholarship, the ETV, and the book reimbursement. Now, I have it all laid out, and so I have all of the nuances and the rules right there at my fingertips so when I get that paperwork, when it comes into my office."

Some of the community college administrators we interviewed had limited experience working with students whom they knew were in foster care.

College Professor and Administrator

Well, I'm only aware of one. I'm sure that there were others, but there's only one that I know well who disclosed it. . . foster care was a central part of her identity. . . . Really, she's the only experience I can speak about."

Only one of the administrators we spoke with was aware of the unique challenges faced by students who are or were in foster care and the importance to those students of building trusting relationships.

Financial Aid Director

"They tend to need a lot of one-on-one because of the comfort level that they—they have to build a relationship. . . . They're very challenged when they have to. . . go [to] one office to another, and they have to interact with multiple people. The trust level is not there. They have to really establish a relationship with somebody, and somebody that understands kind of what they've gone through and the challenges they've had because they're similar. "

This sentiment was echoed by some of the students we interviewed who wished that personnel at the community college had a better understanding of their situation so they weren't made to feel different from other students.

Jessica, age 19

I feel some people I've—when I've emailed financial aid at my college, they've been helpful. Then other times I feel they don't really know a ton about certain things when you're in foster care. I feel they were very like, "I don't know what you're talking about," or I don't know. I don't know how to explain it, but I feel they could also be a little more helpful."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Offer training to community college administrators and interested faculty and staff on how they can serve as allies to students who are or were in foster care. This training should cover both the challenges these students face and the supports available to them through child welfare systems. It should also include information about how trauma affects learning and development and provide practical guidance for working effectively with students who have experienced trauma.[25]

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from this study is that the rate at which young people in foster care in Illinois enroll in and graduate from college has changed little over the past decade. This is despite significant state and federal investments in programs designed to remove financial barriers to postsecondary education. Our analysis of the linked administrative data indicates that about 35% of the young people who were in foster care on their 17th birthday enrolled in college, and 86% of those who enrolled in college, were community college students. However, only 8% of those community college students graduated with a certificate or a degree. These findings are remarkably similar to the results reported by Courtney and colleagues (2011).[26] Of the 26-year-olds who had aged out of foster care in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois, 40% had completed at least 1 year of college, but only 8% had a degree from a 2- or 4-year school.

The results of our qualitative interviews shed some light on why so many young people in foster care enroll in community college and why so few of those who enroll manage to graduate. In particular, we find that young people in foster care face multiple challenges along their postsecondary educational pathway. These challenges began in high school and continue after they enroll in community college. Additionally, few of the students we interviewed seemed to benefit from the supports available to young people in foster care to help them succeed in high school or pursue postsecondary education.

We also find that community college administrators want to support students who are or were in foster care, but more collaboration between the child welfare system and community colleges is needed for those administrators to be able to provide that support.

Although our study was limited to a single state, what we learned about the experiences of community college students from Illinois who are or were in foster care may be useful to other jurisdictions that are committed to improving postsecondary educational attainment among young people in foster care.

Table 1: State of Illinois Policies and Programs to Promote the Education of High School Students in Foster Care	
Our document review uncovered several policies and programs designed to help young people in foster care succeed in school. Some of the policies and programs are intended to promote collaboration between the child welfare and education systems; it is not clear how consistently these policies are followed or these programs are being used.	
Foster Care Liaisons[27]	• Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires local school districts to designate a foster care liaison to facilitate compliance with state and federal laws related to students in foster care and to collaborate with the public child welfare agencies to address barriers that prevent students in foster care from enrolling in, attending, and succeeding in school • DCFS is required to share information with the district-designated foster care liaison
Surrogate Parent Program[28]	• Individuals with Disabilities Act requires schools to assign an Education Surrogate Parent to students in foster care who are eligible for special education services. • ESPs participate in special education processes such as consent for evaluations and services, placement changes, and the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
Education Assistance Project[29]	• Partnership between Northern Illinois University and DCFS designed to improve the education of students in foster care • 8 education advisors throughout the state provide training, technical assistance, and support to promote access to services and programs that address students' educational needs
Annual High School Academic Plan Meeting[30]	• Caseworkers are required to convene a meeting at the start of each school year for caseworkers, students, caregivers, school counselors, other relevant school staff to review each high school student's academic progress, begin postsecondary education planning, and complete the Annual High School Academic Plan • NIU education advisor may be invited to address any problems

Table 2: Educational Supports for Young People in Foster Care

Young people who are or were in foster care may be eligible for a variety of supports through the Illinois Department of Children and Families Services to help them pay for college.

DCFS Youth in Scholarship[31]	• Provides scholarships to 53 young people each year, four of which are children of veterans • Recipients receive a waiver of tuition and mandatory fees at an in-district community college or one of nine eligible 4-year colleges • Participation is restricted to 5 years
DCFS Youth in College[32]	• Covers some or all of the room and board costs at college or off-campus rent and utilities • Students must be enrolled full-time and maintain a GPA of 2.0 or higher GPA • To transfer to YIC at age 21 or after their case has closed, students must have completed at least one semester full-time with a GPA of 2.0 or higher • Participation is restricted to five consecutive years or through age 25, whichever comes first
DCFS Tuition & Fee Waiver[33]	• Requires public universities and in-district community colleges to waive the cost of tuition and fees after any Illinois MAP grants or federal Pell grants awarded to the student are applied
Education and Training Vouchers[34]	• Federally funded, state-administered vouchers for education-related expenses for a maximum of 5 years • Students are eligible up to age 26

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