



PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2023

A FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES PROGRAM



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
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Statewide Government Study Sheds Light on Campus Foster Care and Homeless Liaisons

The State of Florida's consistent efforts to provide free tuition to students from foster care and homeless backgrounds, and the work of Positive Pathways Program (PPP) members, have resulted in impressive academic outcomes for students who can make it into a postsecondary educational program.

That is a major conclusion that can be drawn from a first of its kind report by the Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA). OPPAGA, the research arms of the Florida Legislature, released a report last December that focused on the work of school district McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons and post-secondary campus-based foster care liaisons, many of whom are part of the Positive Pathways Program.

The report included new information about the opinions and academic progress of thousands of postsecondary students using Florida's generous homeless and foster care tuition and fee exemptions. For instance, the report stated that the number of students using tuition waivers in the SUS increased from 940 in academic year 2016-17, when Positive Pathways began, to 1,458 in 2020-2021, a 55% increase, despite COVID-19. The percent of students using the DCF waiver at Florida College System (FCS) institutions increased from 3,701 in 2016-17 to 4,375 in 2020-19, an 18% increase, before dipping to 3,966, a 9% decrease. Furthermore, the number of students from foster care that attend an institution with a campus-based program increased from 905 in 2013-14 to 3,042 in 2021-22, a 236% increase.

The report also revealed that of the 10,681 foster youth who began using the post-secondary waiver from 2013-14 to 2020-21, the majority of students had at least a 2.0 GPA at the end of their first year of education, which demonstrates adequate academic progress as defined by the state.

Homeless and Foster Youth Services

Report 22-08
December 2022



"All of Florida's postsecondary institutions have at least one staff member designated as working specifically with foster care students."

Click [Here](#) for OPPAGA's Website.

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- OPPAGA, 2022

Expanded Keys to Independence Program Will Put More Students in the Driver's Seat



Embrace Families, a Community-based Care Agency headquartered in Orlando, has been awarded an expansion of their contract to administer the Florida Keys to Independence contract. During the January PPP monthly call, Elias Quintana, Marketing and Communications Coordinator, presented the K2I program, which helps young people navigate the process beginning with the 4-hour drug and alcohol course, learner's permit, driving lessons and education, obtaining a driver's license, and purchasing insurance. For more information, visit the K2I website [HERE](#).



Winter 2023 Student Spotlight: FAU Graduate Gets Straight to Business In Graduate Program

Each quarter, we feature a student spotlight story to highlight the accomplishments of our students who are using the Florida DCF tuition and fee exemption to pursue their dreams. We also plan to give credit to the organizations that supported their success, by showcasing their logos. Please consider supporting the organizations shown. They are focused on student success, just as you are.



This issue, we ask our members to join us in congratulating MaryAnn Chatziioannou-Singer. Maryann is a recent graduate of Florida Atlantic University, earning a Bachelor of Science in Psychology in December 2022. During her time at FAU, Maryann was involved in several programs including, Educate Tomorrow, AOK Scholars, and Champions Empowering Champions. Maryann currently serves as a staff member of the FAU Foundation Office. She is also excited to start her graduate program this January, as she was accepted into Master of Business Administration Program at Florida Atlantic University. "After graduating with my BA in Psychology, I feel that the knowledge I've gained will help me navigate my new MBA journey because in business, you are always communicating and negotiating with individuals for important decisions," who entered foster care as teenager. "Having a solid foundation in psychology will help me be successful in my future business career both now while completing my MBA and in future employment."



DCF Strengthens My Pathway to Success Plan Guide with Emphasis on Positive Pathways

The Florida DCF Office of Continuing Care (OCC) has updated the "My Pathways to Success Plan," the primary transition document that young people in foster care complete with their case workers. The plan, which has a variety of sections, such as budgeting, mentors, and employment, now has a revised education section. OCC also will now provide a facilitator guide with information about the Positive Pathways Program and links to campus based coaches, said Eric Wetzel, the Youth and Young Adult Transitions Specialist.

"These are really important documents and we are happy that the Positive Pathways Program is an official part of the brand new facilitator guide," Mr. Wetzel said. "We have made it our mission to make sure that these plans are getting done effectively with these young adults, and that includes making sure they inform them about Positive Pathways and what the Network can offer."

During the past few months, the number of completed transitions plans has increased 150%, meaning that many more students are aware not only about the educational benefits that await them if they age out of foster care, but that Positive Pathways exists as a network of educational professionals waiting to help them at educational institutions around the state.



My Pathway to Success Plan

EDUCATION

I am currently enrolled in and attending an educational, vocational, or technical program and **do not** need additional help.

Name & Address of the program I attend:

I am currently enrolled in and attending an educational, vocational, or technical program and **need** additional support (i.e., tutoring, transportation, scheduling, supplies, etc.)

I am requesting financial assistance in attending an educational, vocational, or technical program

I need help enrolling in school

N/A, I do not want to attend school

What is my educational plan (Check all that apply)

I want to get a:

High School Diploma GED College Degree Technical Certificate

Additional information I would like to add to my education plan (i.e., Supports and resources, Do I have an IEP/504 plan, any barriers, goals, etc.?)

[Click HERE to see the full document success plan.](#)

OPPAGA Report Shows Success of Students Using the DCF Tuition Waiver in Florida Colleges and Universities

(Continued from Page 1)

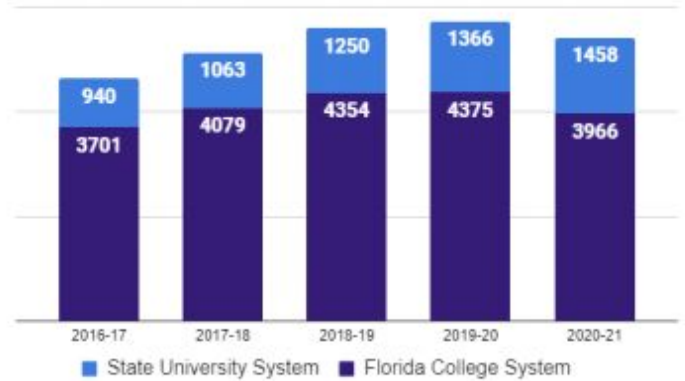
The percentage was 61% for students attending Florida College System (FCS) schools and 89% for students attending State University System (SUS) institutions.

OPPAGA analyzed FCS data of 4,065 students and found that 732 (18%) of the students completed a degree during the review period, with 11% completing a degree within three years. Another 243 (6%) completed a certificate program. Throughout the nation, first-time in-college students at public two-year colleges graduate at a rate of 29%, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Completion rates were much better among SUS students. OPPAGA found that 244 (50%) of the 489 waiver population students that enrolled in either 2013-14 or 2014-15 finished a bachelor's degree at some point during the review period. Among students that started as first-time-in-college students in the fall, the most competitive time to begin a four-year degree, 25% completed the degree in four years and 40% completed the degree in six years. Transfer students were even more successful. Of the 210 students studied who transferred to an SUS institution, 57% completed a bachelor's degree during the study period. Those statistics compare favorably to a six-year graduation rate of 63% among all students at public institutions nationwide, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. The statistics are far better than the six-year graduation rate of 27% for US first-generation students in general, according to the Center for First Generation Student Success.

"These numbers and percentages are much higher than the statistics of between 3% and 11% that are consistently relayed over and over again in documents around the country," said Steve J. Rios, senior director of Positive Pathways for Educate Tomorrow. "In general, it seems that if we can just get these students into a postsecondary educational institution and support them there, they can definitely succeed."

Students Using the Florida DCF Tuition Exemption



OPPAGA's report also showed that Florida's state colleges and universities waived \$17.8 million during the academic year 2021-22, which demonstrates the state's strong commitment to academic success of students from foster care and those experiencing housing insecurity.

A major reason why OPPAGA conducted this study was to determine how colleges and universities were implementing expected changes related to services for students experiencing housing insecurity. These changes included requiring a homeless liaison to be appointed, publishing liaison's contact information and providing the information to DCF, and establishing processes to maintain original documents certifying students' homelessness. Regarding the majority of these and related items, the OPPAGA team concluded that "At the time of OPPAGA's survey of liaisons, nearly all respondents reported having implemented changes needed to comply with the 2022 legislation.

To read the full report, which includes specific recommendations, click [HERE](#).

OPAGGA Recommendations About Students Using DCF Foster Care Exemption

- Regularly generate a list of foster youth who are newly eligible for the tuition waivers.
- Create a system Florida postsecondary institutions can use to verify students' tuition waiver eligibility.
- Increase the age at which students lose eligibility for the foster care-related tuition waivers.
- Modify statute to specify the training requirements for liaisons at postsecondary institutions.
- Prioritize housing for foster youth students on their campuses.

Quote From OPPAGA Report: Benefits of Campus Based Programs

“Campus support programs provide an array of services to help foster youth acclimate to and succeed in postsecondary institutions. Campus support programs for foster youth students were first founded in the late 1990s to provide advising, skill-building, advocacy, and referral services to help foster youth navigate and succeed in college. These programs vary in the types of support that are offered but often aim to improve college retention by offering financial, academic, logistical, and/or psychosocial support.

Studies examining the needs of participants in campus support programs have found that the most common needs are access to financial aid, housing, and concrete resources (e.g., staff to assist students in securing these services); assistance with academic challenges; access to mentoring and social and emotional supports; navigating campus life and developing campus awareness; and managing connections to relatives and relationships outside campus.^{50,51} The largest unmet needs identified in two studies were difficulty paying for living expenses and navigating the transition from foster care to postsecondary education.” (OPPAGA, 2022, p. 22)



Call for PPP 2023 Monthly Call Speakers

We are looking for members who are interested in presenting their programs and resources during our monthly calls. To present your program, please email us at pathways@educatetomorrow.org. We can't wait to hear from you!

Graduate Spotlight Segment To Launch During February PPP Monthly Conference Call



During the February PPP Monthly Call, we would like to highlight stories of recent graduates across the state. As Jasmine Moore reaches out to get to know Pathways members throughout Florida, she will ask for contact information about your recent graduates. The graduates will be asked to speak during the new “Graduation Spotlight” segment of the call, the next one of which is scheduled for Wednesday, February 1, from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m..

Please email jasmine@educatetomorrow.org with any recent graduates who would like to share their success stories at an upcoming PPP call.

Florida Institute of Child Welfare Issues Report on Independent Living Skills

The Florida Institute of Child Welfare released an extensive report recently about independent living skills. Using a mixed-methods approach, the evaluation team analyzed state statutes and policy documents, and collected information about CBC approaches to life skills development.

Lisa Schelbe, PhD., a Positive Pathways member, was a co-investigator on the report, which can be found on the Institute’s website, [The Florida Institute for Child Welfare - FICW \(fsu.edu\)](https://www.ficw.fsu.edu)



FLORIDA
INSTITUTE
FOR CHILD
WELFARE
AT FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Assisting Youth in Foster Care
in Developing Life Skills to
Become Self Sufficient Adults:
Evaluating Florida’s Efforts

November 2022

2023

The YEAR Ahead

During the January PPP monthly call, the following network members shared about their exciting plans for 2023. We have provided their contact details in case you want to be involved in their work.



Calvin Martin

Chief Innovation Officer
Florida Guardian ad Litem
calvin.martin@gal.fl.gov

Calvin Martin shared that he was looking forward to implementing different strategies for increasing mentors for the Guardian ad Litem program. He is excited to have mentors and student advocates from JAL Champions join a future Positive Pathways meeting to share their work and impact they have had across the state.



Karie Ward
Executive Director

Fostering Success Michigan
Educate Tomorrow
Karie@educatetomorrow.org

Karie Ward was excited to announce a nationwide data collection project, which will involve connecting with states to learn how they collect data for their high school completion rates and discuss their funding models for statewide work. Karie Ward, Dr. Steve Rios, and Jasmine Moore will reach out to states connected to Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN).



Varzi Jean-Baptiste
Director and Care Coordinator

Educate Tomorrow
varzi@educatetomorrow.org

Varzi Jean-Baptiste announced that the 2023 Educate Tomorrow College Tour will officially return in person this year from March 20-March 24. High school students will have the opportunity to connect with college liaisons at different colleges and universities across the state. Please contact Varzi if you have any questions about this tour. She can be reached at varzi@educatetomorrow.org.



Dr. Jamie Bennett
Cofounder and Executive Director

Cetera
jamie@ceterafl.org

The Fostering Success Coaching Institute (FSCI) is hosting a Virtual Coaching Summit on February 15 and 16, from 1 - 4 p.m., daily. The FSCI Summit is appropriate for anyone interested in learning how to build their skills in working with students who have experience in foster care. For more information visit www.fosteringSUCCESSCOACHING.COM. Registration is now open.



Jasmine Moore
College Coach

Educate Tomorrow
jasmine@educatetomorrow.org

Jasmine shared that she was excited to join the Positive Pathways team. One of her first initiatives will be a graduation spotlight to feature success stories of our students across the state. If you have any students that you would like to be featured, please contact Jasmine at jasmine@educatetomorrow.org



Yvette Robinson
Founder

Xavier House
Yvette.robinson@xavierhouse.org

Yvette shared information about the Xavier House, which seeks to be the first foster group home to screen youth in care in need of placement that have behaviors consistent with high intelligence. For more information about the Xavier House, please visit: <https://xavierhouse.org/> or contact Yvette at yvette.robinson@xavierhouse.org.

2023

The YEAR Ahead

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Caitlyn Cates
Program Manager
Unconquered Scholars
Florida State University
cmcates@fsu.edu

Caitlyn highlighted new Unconquered Scholars, which includes financial literacy and helping students prepare for life after graduation. Caitlyn also shared that students in the Unconquered Scholars program have an 84% 6 year graduation rate and their current retention rate for first year students is 95%. As a program, the students have just under a 3.0 GPA.



Paras Traganos
Guardian ad Litem
Brevard County
paras@erols.com

Paras shared that he is excited to partner with Yvette Robinson and support the goals of Xavier House. Paras is also co-founder of Castillo Professional Development, which focuses on identifying the trades and attributes of highly intelligent and gifted foster youth. This training program is the first of its kind, which will provide information for any person who is involved with supporting youth from care, including foster parents, case workers, and community based care organizations.

February PPP Monthly Call to Feature Guardian Ad Litem Champions Program

During the February PPP Monthly Call, scheduled for 1:30 to 2:30, on Wednesday, February 1, Statewide Chief Innovation Officer Calvin Martin, one of PPP's strongest advocates, will introduce the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) CHAMPIONS, a youth advisory council composed of a group of former foster youth who provide a voice for all foster care youth appointed to the program.

CHAMPIONS serve as ambassadors and credible messengers for best-interest child advocacy as well as being instrumental in helping shape the statewide Guardian ad Litem Office priorities, practices, training opportunities and effectiveness.



**STATEWIDE
GUARDIAN
AD LITEM
OFFICE**

Join Positive Pathways, YOUR Network for Success!

The Florida Department of Children and Families Positive Pathways, part of the DCF Office of Continuing Care (OCC), is funded by DCF and Educate Tomorrow, which has administered the program since 2016. The Program is comprised of more than 300 members located at Florida's public colleges, universities, technical colleges and community-based care agencies. These individuals are knowledgeable, accessible and compassionate professionals who provide consistent support to young adults from foster care and homeless backgrounds as they pursue their postsecondary educational goals.

The Positive Pathways team, which includes Brett McNaught, CEO of Educate Tomorrow, Jasmine Moore, and Dr. Steve J. Rios, all of whom are nationally recognized professionals at the intersection of higher education and child welfare. Positive Pathways is a part of the DCF Office of Continuing Care, which is directed by Taylor Peck. Assisted Director Cal Walton, III, and Eric Wetzel, the Youth and Young Adult Transitions Specialist, serve as subject matter experts for the Program, the only program of its kind in the nation. For more information, contact us at Pathways@EducateTomorrow.org, or visit our website, www.PositivePathways.org.

Newsletter Supplement: Overview of Educate Tomorrow and the Positive Pathways Program

Educate Tomorrow, a non-profit organization, was founded in Miami in 2003 to meet the urgent need in Miami Dade County to help students from foster care take advantage of Florida's innovative and generous tuition exemption program. At the time, few former foster youth in Miami or throughout the entire state were enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions using the waiver. During its 20 years in existence, Educate Tomorrow has become an award-winning, nationally-recognized leader at the intersection of child welfare and higher education.

In 2013, Educate Tomorrow began to shift its operational focus away from recruiting and training volunteer mentors and began to connect directly with colleges and universities to establish dedicated college coaching programs for students who qualified for tuition exemptions. In 2016 the Florida Department of Children and Families created Positive Pathways, a statewide program to promote best practices for postsecondary success for former foster youth in Florida. Educate Tomorrow was awarded the contract to run Positive Pathways in 2017 and has worked to grow the number of college coaching programs statewide.

The Positive Pathways Program now oversees a network of more than 300 students, child welfare and education professionals and has become a model program in the United States. Positive Pathways provides technical assistance, professional development, networking opportunities, webinars and an annual conference that has attracted as many as 150 professionals in the quickly growing field supporting students from foster care and homeless backgrounds as they pursue postsecondary education.

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Dr. Steve J. Rios, the Senior Director of Positive Pathways, is a nationally-recognized leader in this field and has led a number of statewide and national initiatives funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Helios Education Foundation, and most recently the Walter S. Johnson Foundation. He co-founded Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN), a forum for statewide leaders of postsecondary educational institutions serving students from foster care.

Steve holds a master's degree in Public Administration from Florida Atlantic University and a doctorate from Florida International University in Adult Education and Human Resource Development.

Brett McNaught became the CEO of Educate Tomorrow in 2012. Brett is an alumni of the National Urban Fellows Executive Leadership Program and the Miami Foundation Miami Leaders Program. Before Educate Tomorrow, he was an officer of buildOn where he led their International programs, overseeing the construction of over 1,000 classrooms for more than 40,000 children a day in eight countries.

Brett has a M.S.Ed in Community and Social Change from the University of Miami. He is currently a board member of Hope for Haiti. He is co-chair of the Education and Employment committee for Helping Our Miami Youth (HOMY). In 2018 McNaught was named Florida Department of Child and Families' Child Welfare Champion Award and in 2020, McNaught was named Miami Today Best of Miami "Educator in Crisis Time."

Educate Tomorrow has received awards for partnership, leadership and innovation from the Florida Department of Children and Families, Miami Today Best of Miami Educators in Crisis Time, Florida International University, Miami Dade College, Voices for Children, Switchboard Miami, The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, American Red Cross Women's Spectrum awards and College Board.

To learn more, visit www.EducateTomorrow.org or www.PositivePathwaysFlorida.org