



# POST-SECONDARY EXPLORATION AND READINESS TOOLKIT





# I. PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL KIT

This tool kit is designed for youth who are or previously have been in foster care to explore their post-secondary options and support their transitions into independent adulthood so that they are successful. A youth who has been in foster care has many options available to them from higher education, employment and apprenticeship or a combination of all of these options. Deciding what options to pursue can be overwhelming and identifying support for success can be difficult. Within this toolkit are ideas to explore career interests while in high school and determine which post-secondary pathway is the best option. Maryland resources have been identified to increase access and better prepare youth in foster care within the community and at local colleges and universities. While this toolkit is for youth in foster care, it also includes information and tools for resource parents and caseworkers to begin the conversation on career vs. college readiness with youth, as well as college readiness assessments.

## Purpose

The Department of Human Services, Social Services Administration designed this toolkit to help assess the readiness for college, career, and other post-secondary options and increase the rate of youths' entry and completion of college programs and/or prepare them properly for employment or other vocational experience. By addressing barriers and support needs, youth and their teams can be better prepared for success and responsibly plan for their futures. This toolkit will help youth explore their post-secondary options with guidance and support from DSS and their family supports and responsibly plan personal and financial supports.



## Vision

The Department of Human Services, Social Services Administration (SSA) envisions a Maryland where people independently support themselves and their families and where individuals are safe from abuse and neglect. SSA is committed to increasing youth voice in their child welfare experiences to improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes, through collaborative assessments, quality data collection improvement and developing service plans to facilitate partnership with families, including consistently identifying & engaging the family/youth's chosen supports.

## II. TRANSITION PLANNING

Transition planning is required by federal law to support youth exiting foster care. The Maryland Youth Transition Plan (MDYTP) process begins at 14 and is reviewed every 6 months until you leave foster care or “age out” which in the state of Maryland is on a youth’s 21st birthday. A transition plan should reflect your wishes and be personalized to consider your strengths, preferences, and interests. Your transition plan can be as detailed as you want, but at a minimum must include specific information on the following:

- Education options
- Job supports and employment services
- Opportunities for mentoring and continuing support services
- Housing options
- Health insurance

All of these are important as you transition to independence. The [Maryland Youth Transition Plan](#) and guidance to get started can be found on the MyLife website.



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Maryland uses the [Ready by 21 Benchmarks](#) to guide the development and achievement of youth transition plans, so when you exit care at 21 you have the appropriate developmental skills to be independent.

Per the Ready by 21 Education & Employment Benchmarks there are fourteen criteria. All youth are assumed to be on a career readiness pathway; some youth may also be on a college readiness pathway, depending on the youth's individual goals.

1. Youth are assessed to be on grade level or making developmentally appropriate progress in reading, writing, and math.
2. Youth have an individualized, developmentally appropriate, and specific plan for obtaining their high school diploma or GED.
3. Youth earn their high school diploma or GED.
4. Youth have a plan for secondary education and/or training that is aligned with their employment goals.
5. Youth who have earned their high school diploma or GED, have implemented, or achieved their plan for secondary education and/or training.
6. Youth demonstrate employment readiness consistent with their developmental ability, including development and utilization of people skills, understanding their rights, responsibilities, and expectations as an employee and, how to complete job applications (online and paper), resume development, and interviewing skills.
7. Youth obtain and maintain an internship, apprenticeship, summer youth employment, year-round employment and/or volunteer experience that results in professional references.
8. Youth demonstrate use of networking techniques and the benefits of networking with professionals.
9. Youth know how to get an official replacement for their [birth certificate](#).
10. Youth know how to get an official replacement of their [Social Security Card](#).
11. Youth have a [State of Maryland-approved Identification](#) card if they have not yet obtained their driver's license.
12. Youth will be supported in getting their [driver's license](#) when they have identified it as one of their goals.
13. Youth know how to access consistent and reliable transportation to implement their employment, career, and educational plans, both while involved with the child welfare system and after they are no longer involved with the child welfare system.
14. Youth born in a country other than the United States have an official replacement of their citizenship papers and demonstrate understanding of their rights, responsibilities, and when/how to connect to immigration or citizenship resources and services.

Additional planning support can be found at FosterClub, a national network supporting young people in foster care, which has developed a transition toolkit to support youth. This [toolkit](#) assists with building a transition plan that helps define goals, build a support team, identify resources, refine skills, and map out a plan for life after foster care. The toolkit provides a step-by-step process for thinking about leaving care and includes transition-plan templates focused on ten critical areas:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  Community  |  Housing        |
|  Education  |  Identity       |
|  Employment |  Life Skills    |
|  Finances   |  Permanence     |
|  Health     |  Transportation |

Transition planning is an important process to identify your strengths, barriers and needed resources. Planning can help prevent unexpected issues and financial burdens.



## III. ASSESSING JOB READINESS

### Career Cluster Survey

Not sure what you want to do in the future or what career might best suit you? The [Career Clusters Interest Survey](#) is an assessment tool intended to help you identify careers that best match your interests. The tool rates activities you enjoy, including your personal qualities, and school subjects you favor to find your interests. The survey includes sixteen clusters of careers grouped based on their similarities (i.e., Education & Training, Government & Public Administration, including Health Science). Within each cluster, there is a variety of different jobs to be explored and potentially fit your interest. Remember, by choosing a career that matches your overall best interests, you are more likely to enjoy your job and will be successful in your role!

### Career Investigation

Once your top three career clusters have been identified, you have an opportunity to learn more about the specifics of these jobs, including employment requirements, wage data, education, and training requirements. Both the [Career Clusters Labor Statistics](#) and the [Career Exploration](#) are websites that can be used to predict job growth and needs. You may be able to compare the different jobs you are suited for by looking at the education and skill requirements, plus the potential salary to help you determine what you want to pursue and explore more about your options.

In preparation towards your career of interest, it would be best to gain experience working, volunteering, or participating in extracurricular activities in school. For example, if you are interested in becoming a teacher, find opportunities to help in afterschool programs working with children or become a tutor. By trying out a preferred career path, you are ensuring the likelihood of enjoying the job/career path, including expectations, before committing to a training program or a college degree. Starting early will give you the chance to change your mind as you continue to further explore your career options.





## Ready to apply for a job?

### *Prepare your resume.*

Your resume is the first impression a prospective employer has of you. Your resume should include the following:

- Why you are a qualified candidate for the position
- Your previous education
- Extracurriculars that highlight your strengths
- Your past work and volunteer experiences

By using this [resume workbook](#), you will have an opportunity to brainstorm your skills, talents and previous experience, as a start process towards developing a complete job resume. Some job applications can be completed online. It's a good idea to have a pre-written resume since most online applications will still ask you to upload your resume too. Also, for any portions of the online application you have to complete about your previous work experience, you can copy and paste from your resume.

### *Cover Letters*

In addition to resume preparations, employers may require cover letters. A great cover letter explains your interest in the specific organization and identifies your relevant skills or experiences for the job. Check out these cover letter [tips](#).

### *References*

While your job application requests both a resume and a cover letter, a reference is someone who can endorse your work ethic, qualifications, and suitability for a job. While a reference for your first job may be hard to identify, you can seek out a coach, teacher or mentor who can be personal references. You want to choose personal references who have known you for at least one year, think positively of you, and are available on short notice to respond to a reference check. For a mentor you may consider using your social worker or CASA advocate, but it's your personal choice to disclose if you have been in foster care. Again, make sure to inform your identified references in advance that they have been used as references and that you have up-to-date contact details for them (phone and email). More information on reference letters can be found [here](#).

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## *Employment Documents*

Once you have both your resume created, your cover letter written, and reference identified, the next step is to make sure you have the following paperwork for employment (DSS will be able to provide copies or the originals). These documents will be needed to begin work and for tax purposes, they help your employer to recognize your identity, citizenship, ability to work and place of residence:

- An official or certified copy of your birth certificate.
- Your social security card.
- A driver's license or ID card

These documents will be necessary once you are hired to complete the hiring process, but it's better to know where to locate these documents ahead of time.

## *Successful Interview Tips*

In order to secure a job, you will have to interview for the position so that your employer can determine if you would be a good fit. While being interviewed can make anyone nervous, being prepared for an interview can be very helpful. If you are able to, ask a trusted adult to practice for the interview beforehand, that way you have answers prepared to personal questions and can develop your own questions to ask a future employer. Here are some additional [tips](#) for a successful interview. Also remember a first impression matters and it's important to dress for success during your interview. If you need help finding the right clothes or additional interview support, [Success in Style](#) has locations in Maryland to help individuals dress for success.



## IV. TRAINING AND JOB SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Job training programs provide instruction that enables people to acquire job readiness or vocational skills to help them become employable in their chosen profession. The following are a few job training programs that provide support through firsthand instructions and provision, including educational direction and learning:

### Job Corps

Job Corps is a free educational and training program that strives to help both youth and young adults to learn a career, earn a high school diploma or certificate of high school equivalency, and find and keep a respectable job. For eligible young people at least 16 years of age that qualify as low income, Job Corps provides the all-around skills needed to succeed in a career and in life. The work-based learning (WBL) program provides students with opportunities to link their career technical training with practical, on-the-job activities. Students who participate in WBL have a high rate of improvement in their work habits and attitudes, in their efforts of identifying their goals and aptitudes, and most importantly, increase their motivation to complete and further their education.

The following are Job Corps located within Maryland:

- [\*Woodland Job Corps Center\*](#)

Located in Laurel, Maryland, this site offers job training in the areas of construction and hospitality.

- [\*Woodstock Job Corps Center\*](#)

Located in Woodstock Maryland, this site offers job training in the fields of advanced manufacturing, automotive and machine repair, construction, finance and business, healthcare, homeland security, information technology and renewable resources and energy.

### Registered Apprenticeships

Registered Apprenticeships identified as a flexible training system that combines job related technical instructions with on-the-job learning experiences. Apprentices start working from day one with incremental wage increases as they become better at the job. Registered Apprenticeship is highly active in traditional industries such as construction and manufacturing, but it is also instrumental in the training and development of emerging industries such as healthcare, energy, and homeland security. Apprenticeships can be found through the Maryland Department of Labor, [Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program](#). You can call 410-767-2246 or e-mail [info@mdapprenticeship.com](mailto:info@mdapprenticeship.com) to connect with an apprenticeship navigator who will direct you to available apprenticeship opportunities in Maryland.

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## American Job Centers/ Maryland Workforce Exchange

The Maryland Workforce Exchange through the Department of Labor provides an online system with fast access to a complete set of employment tools in one [website](#). This website provides job search support, education and training, and labor market information for the state of Maryland. The [American Job Centers](#) are located regionally and services include career exploration assistance, referrals to training programs, placement services, résumé preparation assistance, and workshops to enhance job seeking skills and work readiness.

## YouthBuild

YouthBuild is a job readiness program designed to assist low-income youth and young adults, between the ages of 16-24, to receive supportive, individualized classroom instructions while working towards their high school diploma and preparing for registered apprenticeships in the construction trades. The [Civic Works YouthBuild](#), located in Baltimore, MD, allows youth and young adults a second chance who have dropped out of high school. Participating members are provided construction training and certifications, provision, and assistance for an opportunity to earn a high school diploma or GED, including job placement services. Each year, YouthBuild provides comprehensive services to a minimum of thirty participants per year between the ages of 16 and 24.

## AmeriCorps Vista

[AmeriCorps Vista](#) is a civil society program supported by the federal government, foundations, corporations, and other donors engaging adults in involved community service work with a goal of helping others and meeting critical needs in the community. Members commit to full-time or part-time positions offered by a network of nonprofit community organizations and public agencies, to fulfill assignments in the fields of education, public safety, health care, and environmental protection. Volunteers can serve at over two thousand separate locations and can receive a living allowance, education award for college and trade school, and professional skill building during contract term. The minimum age requirement for most AmeriCorps programs is eighteen. Most programs require a high school diploma but not all, and you do not need a college degree to participate.

## FEMA Corps

The [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\) Corps](#), alongside the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), is a unique, team-based service program that gives 18-24-year-old participants the opportunity to serve communities impacted by disaster while gaining professional development experience. FEMA Corps members live, work, and travel in designated teams and serve for 12 months with an option to extend for a second term. They gain training and experience while providing important support to disaster survivors and communities. They also earn a modest living stipend during their service and receive an education award upon completion of the program. FEMA Corps members focus on disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery activities, providing support in areas ranging from working directly with disaster survivors to supporting disaster recovering centers to sharing valuable disaster preparedness and mitigation information with the public.

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## YearUp

[YearUp](#) combines direct skill development, college credits, a stipend, and corporate internships to prepare students for success in professional careers and higher education. Youth earn up to twenty-four college credits and a stipend while gaining valuable work experience in the field of IT. To be eligible, youth must be between 18-24 years old, be a high school graduate or GED recipient, be of low to moderate income, be a U.S. Citizen, permanent resident, or have an employment authorization card, be available 5 days a week (Monday-Friday) for the full year of the program and be highly motivated to learn new technical and professional skills. The Baltimore location for Year Up is at the YMCA Druid Hill. It offers training specialties in consumer banking, data analytics, project management support, and helpdesk/desktop support.

## Knowledge Equals Youth Success

[Knowledge Equals Youth Success \(KEYS\)](#) Program - is a part of the Youth Services division of Employ Prince George's. The programs are designed to provide young adults 18-24 years old who are Prince George's County residents with the necessary tools to become competitive in the workforce. KEYS provides career pathways, credential attainment, and supportive services to those who may face barriers to employment.

## Youth Opportunity (YO) Baltimore

[Youth Opportunity \(YO\) Baltimore](#) serves youth between the ages of 18 and 24 who are not connected to school and/or the workforce and links them to community-based educational, workforce preparation, and personal development services.



## V. VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS

Vocational Training is instructional programs or courses that focus on the skills required for a particular job function or trade. Vocational training provides hands-on, job specific instruction that can lead to certification, a diploma or even associate degree. Some vocational training programs can be attended in high school, and may be called Technical Education. Some typical trades include:

- Automotive repair
- Carpentry
- Plumbing
- Welding
- Culinary Arts
- Cosmetology

### Vocational Technical (Vo-Tech) High schools

A vo-tech high school is a school for high school aged students to get both their high school diploma as well as training for a trade or occupation. Depending on how the school is set up, a student might graduate from a traditional high school as well as a vo-tech high school, or they might get all of their education at the vo-tech school. One of the great benefits of going to a vo-tech school is that students often graduate with certification and experience in a trade and are ready to enter the workforce. Most students will have the opportunity to visit the designated vo-tech high school in 8th or 9th grade, but to attend full time students will have to complete an application in 10th grade (and they'll attend the vo-tech high school in 11th and 12th grades). The application process may be competitive depending on the program and space within the program, and schools will consider your current high school grades. There are many vo-tech high schools in Maryland that offer a variety of training and certification programs.

|                     |  |                        |   |
|---------------------|--|------------------------|---|
| Allegany County     | <a href="#">Center for Career and Technical Education</a>  | Harford County         | <a href="#">Harford Technical High School</a>           |
| Anne Arundel County | <a href="#">Center of Applied Technology- North</a><br><a href="#">Center of Applied Technology- South</a>               | Howard County          | <a href="#">Applications and Research Laboratory</a>    |
| Baltimore City      | <a href="#">Carver Vocational-Technical High School</a><br><a href="#">Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School</a> | Kent County            | <a href="#">STEM Program within the High School</a>     |
| Baltimore County    | <a href="#">Eastern Technical High School</a><br><a href="#">Western School of Technology</a>                            | Montgomery County      | <a href="#">Thomas Edison High School of Technology</a> |
| Calvert County      | <a href="#">Career and Technology Academy</a>  | Prince George's County | <a href="#">Crossland High School S.T.A.T</a>           |
| Caroline County     | <a href="#">Caroline Career and Technology Center</a>  | Queen Anne's County    | <a href="#">Within both High Schools</a>                |
| Carroll County      | <a href="#">Carroll County Career and Technology Center</a>  | St. Mary's County      | <a href="#">Forrest Career and Technology Center</a>    |
| Cecil County        | <a href="#">Cecil County School of Technology</a>  | Somerset County        | <a href="#">Somerset County Technical High School</a>   |
| Charles County      | <a href="#">Within All High Schools</a>  | Talbot County          | CTE programs within both High Schools                   |
| Dorchester County   | <a href="#">Dorchester Career and Technology Center</a>  | Washington County      | <a href="#">Washington County Technical High School</a> |
| Frederick County    | <a href="#">FCPS Career and Technology Center</a>  | Wicomico County        | <a href="#">Parkside High School- CTE</a>               |
| Garrett County      | <a href="#">Within All High Schools</a>  | Worcester County       | <a href="#">Worcester Technical High School</a>         |

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## Private Career Schools or Trade Schools

There are over 100 private career schools that are approved in the state of Maryland. The Maryland Higher Education Commission provides additional information on choosing [the best career school](#) for you, questions that you should ask a potential school and has a [list](#) of accredited programs in Maryland. It is important to find out the cost of attendance and what financial aid is available to pay for the school, because private career schools are not eligible for the Tuition Waiver.



## VI. ASSESSING COLLEGE READINESS

A wide range of postsecondary options exist today, from types of schools (public, private, non-profit, and for-profit schools) to types of programs (targeted certificate programs, two-year Associate degree programs, four-year programs, and others). It can be challenging to decide if college is right for you. If you completed the career interest test from the previous section, have researched which career interests you the most and found that attending college to pursue a degree is necessary, then it is time to decide if you are ready.

### When should you begin preparing for college?

In your freshman year of high school, you should begin preparing for college. Colleges require your high school transcript as part of your application, so every class taken in high school and grade is taken into consideration. Achieving a high average GPA (grade point average) in high school tells admissions officers that you can manage the college workload. Both the difficulty of your classes and your grades are critical when preparing for college. Have you tried to challenge yourself by taking an Honors or AP class?



\*You should know that most schools have a GPA requirement which is a minimum GPA for college you must meet before you apply. Not all schools have a GPA minimum requirement but do have an average GPA standard for applicants. Research the school you are interested in and learn more about their admission and GPA requirements before applying!

For example, Towson University looks “at your cumulative weighted GPA, the rigor of your courses, trends in your grade performance, and your high school’s profile — all these factors go into a holistic academic review. Most admitted students have

a good mix of grades in a challenging college-prep curriculum, and for fall 2021 our average admitted student had a 3.7 cumulative weighted GPA.”

On the other hand, local community colleges do not have a GPA requirement for admissions, but you may be required to take placement tests to ensure you are enrolled in the appropriate level course or if you will need remedial (non-credit) courses.

At the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) you will need to take the placement tests if you have never attended college before and have any of the following scores:

- High School GPA (Unweighted): Under 2.5
- SAT- Scholastic Achievement Test- ( Reading and writing): Under 480
- SAT- Scholastic Achievement Test- (Math): Under 530
- ACT- American College Testing- (Reading, writing, and math): Under 21
- GED- General Education Development- (Language arts and math): Under 165
- Or you do not have any of the above documentation.

**Do not forget**, colleges also take sports, clubs, volunteer, and work experience seriously, because they demonstrate your ability to be responsible, diligent, and dedicated. Depending on the volunteer or work positions, you can also build skills that will help you in college, such as time management, customer service and communication skills. Whether a volunteer opportunity presents itself at school, church or in your community, take advantage of it and keep a record of all your extracurricular activities (for your college application).

Additionally, you may also need to consider your transportation, housing, childcare, and healthcare needs for when you attend school. If any of these apply to you or could impact your ability to attend school, they should be discussed, and your options reviewed to help you make the best choice in pursuing higher education.

## College Prep Checklist

College preparation should begin when you enter high school, but it can be difficult to know where to start. This college prep checklist, on the next pages, can be used to navigate the multiple considerations and requirements to applying for college, and can help keep you organized.

### 9th Grade

|            | Students   | Caseworkers/<br>Resource Parents   |
|------------|--|--|
| TO DO:     | Talk to your school counselor, caseworker, or mentors about education after high school. Your counselor can answer questions about what classes to take in high school, and how to sign up for standardized tests.                       | Continue to talk to your youth about college plans as if he or she will go to college. |
|            | Talk to your school counselor or teachers about Advanced Placement courses. Find out what courses are available, whether you are eligible, and how to enroll in them.  | Keep an eye on your youth's study habits and grades. Stay involved.                    |
|            | Use the career search at <a href="https://studentaid.gov/career-search">StudentAid.gov/career search</a> to research your career options.  | Encourage your youth to take Advanced Placement courses or other challenging classes.  |
|            | Make a list of your awards, honors, extracurricular activities, and paid and volunteer work. Consider participating in academic enrichment programs, summer workshops, and camps with specialty focuses such as music, arts, or science. |  |
| TO EXPLORE | Find ways to get help preparing for college at: <a href="https://studentaid.gov/prepare-for-college/help">StudentAid.gov/prepare-for-college/help</a> .  |  |

## 10th Grade

|            | Students   | Caseworkers/<br>Resource Parents   |
|------------|--|--|
| TO DO:     | Meet with your school counselor or mentor to discuss colleges and their admissions requirements.   | Find out whether your youth's school has college nights. Plan to attend those events with your foster child.   |
|            | Consider taking a practice Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®).  | Help your youth develop independence by encouraging him or her to take responsibility for balancing homework with other activities or a part-time job. |
|            | Plan to use your summer wisely: Work, volunteer, or take a summer course (away from home or at a local college).   |  |
|            | Attend career information workshops and/or fairs.  |  |
|            | Research majors that might be a good match with your interests and goals. Consider what fits well with your results from the career search at <a href="http://StudentAid.gov/careersearch">StudentAid.gov/careersearch</a> .               |  |
| TO EXPLORE | Think about starting to research different colleges. Play around with the College Scorecard tool at <a href="http://collegescorecard.ed.gov">collegescorecard.ed.gov</a> , to explore schools based on size, location, programs, and more. |  |

## 11th Grade

|            | Students  | Caseworkers/<br>Resource Parents  |
|------------|---|---|
| TO DO:     | Explore careers and their earning potential with the Occupational Outlook Handbook search tool at <a href="http://www.bls.gov/oco">www.bls.gov/oco</a> .  | Talk to your youth about the schools he or she is considering. Ask why those schools appeal to your child and help him or her clarify goals and priorities. |
|            | Learn about choosing a college (and find a link to our free college search tool) at <a href="http://www.StudentAid.gov/prepare-for-college/choosing-schools">www.StudentAid.gov/prepare-for-college/choosing-schools</a> Or check out <a href="https://www.collegeboard.org/">https://www.collegeboard.org/</a> | Attend college fairs with your youth, but do not take over the conversation with the college representatives. Just listen; let your youth do the talking.   |
|            | Go to college fairs and college-preparation presentations hosted by college representatives.  | Take your youth to visit college campuses, preferably when classes are in session.  |
|            | Narrow down the list of colleges you are considering attending. If you can, visit the schools that interest you.  |   |
|            | Take the PSAT/NMSQT. * <b>You must take the test in 11th grade</b> to qualify for scholarships and programs associated with the National Merit Scholarship Program.   |   |
| TO EXPLORE | Register for and take exams for college admission. * The tests that most colleges require are the SAT, the SAT Subject Tests, and the ACT. <b>Check with the colleges you are interested in to see what tests they require.</b>   |   |

## 12th Grade

|        | Students  | Caseworkers/<br>Resource Parents  |
|--------|---|---|
| TO DO: | If you have not done so already, register for and take such exams as the SAT, SAT Subject Tests, or ACT for eighteen college admission.<br>* <b>Check with the colleges you are interested in to see what tests they require.</b>   | Make sure your youth's personal information is safe when he or she applies for financial aid, and they have access to all necessary personal documents. |
|        | Decide whether you are going to apply under a particular college's early decision or early action program. Be sure to learn about the program's deadlines and requirements.   | Work with your youth on filling out the FAFSA. See "FAFSA® Filing Time" on page 22 of this checklist for specific instructions.                         |
|        | Well before your college application deadlines, ask your counselor and teachers to submit the required documents (e.g., transcript, letters of recommendation) to the colleges to which you are applying.   |   |
|        | Apply to the colleges you have chosen. Prepare your applications carefully. Follow the instructions and <b>PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO DEADLINES!</b>  |   |
|        | Create a username and password called an FSA ID that you will use to confirm your identity when accessing your government financial aid information and electronically signing your federal student aid documents. Learn about the FSA ID, and create yours, at <a href="http://StudentAid.gov/fsaid">StudentAid.gov/fsaid</a> .  |   |
|        | As soon as possible after its Oct. 1 release, complete and submit your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) at <a href="http://fafsa.gov">fafsa.gov</a> , along with any other financial aid applications your chosen school(s) may require. You should submit your FAFSA by the earliest financial aid deadline of the schools to which you are applying, <b>usually by early February.</b> |   |

## 12th Grade (continued)

|        | Students  | Caseworkers/<br>Resource Parents |
|--------|---|----------------------------------|
| TO DO: | After you submit the FAFSA, you should receive your Student Aid Report (SAR) within three days to three weeks. This document lists your answers to the questions on your FAFSA and gives you basic information about your aid eligibility. Quickly make any necessary corrections and submit them to the FAFSA processor. |                                  |
|        | Confirm your eligibility for the Foster Care Tuition Waiver and apply for any additional scholarships that you may need to cover Cost of Attendance.  |                                  |
|        | Review your college acceptances and compare the colleges' financial aid offers. Use the "Compare Financial Aid Offers" tool at <a href="http://www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college">www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college</a> to analyze aid offers side by side.   |                                  |
|        | Contact a school's financial aid office if you have questions about the aid that school has offered you. In fact, getting to know your financial aid staff early is a good idea no matter what—they can tell you about deadlines, paperwork you might need to submit, and other aid for which you might wish to apply.    |                                  |
|        | Visit colleges that have accepted you if you are still considering the best options for you.  |                                  |
|        | When you decide which school you want to attend, notify that school of your commitment, and submit any required financial deposit. Most schools require this notification and deposit by May 1.   |                                  |

Consider the below questions before your senior year or before applying to college. If you do not feel confident in your ability to successfully complete tasks asked about, then consider college prep programs that can help improve these skills and prepare you for college. If you're already in your senior year and are still not confident in these academic tasks, then perhaps consider community college to begin with and transfer to a four-year college when you feel better prepared. Remember, the courses in freshman year of college will be required general education courses which can be completed at any local community college and the credits transferred. Community colleges can also provide support through disability services, student support services, and even writing centers to help improve writing skills. Learning how to access these resources in a local community college may also be easier and good practice before going to a larger college or university.

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | Do you have a 3.0 unweighted GPA at the end of Junior Year? <i>Most 4-year colleges accept youth with a GPA higher than 3.0</i> |
|  | Do you have a system for keeping track of your projects, books, and papers?   |
|  | Are you able to complete all the steps of a project in a timely manner?   |
|  | Can you read up to two hundred pages in a week?   |
|  | Do you have a system for taking notes?  |
|  | Can you draft a paper of ten or more organized pages that refers to two or more sources?  |
|  | Do you have a system for preparing for tests and exams?   |
|  | Do you know your academic strengths?  |
|  | Do you know which academic tasks give you the most difficulty?  |
|  | Can you identify the academic support you need to be successful?  |
|  | Do you schedule your own appointments with doctors, advisors, and counselors?   |

### *Post-secondary Education Preparation*

Extracurricular and college prep activities can help expose you to college life and make your application more attractive to colleges and universities, as well as future employers.

## **Talent Search**

*Talent Search* identifies and assists individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to succeed in higher education. The program provides academic, career, and financial counseling to its participants and encourages them to graduate from high school, continue to college, and complete their postsecondary education.

[UMBC Talent Search](#) serves Baltimore County primarily Dundalk High school and its feeder middle schools.

[University of Maryland-Main Campus Talent Search](#) primarily works with select Prince George's County High Schools and feeder middle schools.

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## Upward Bound

The *Upward Bound* program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their precollege performance and in their higher education pursuits. Upward Bound serves high school students from low-income families and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. The goal of Upward Bound is to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education.

Upward Bound programs can be found in selected colleges and universities throughout the state of Maryland; and typically serve local area high schools. For example, University of Maryland College Park's program serves local Prince George's County High School students. More information can be found on the Upward Bound [map](#).

## Next Generation Scholars (NGS)

*Next Generation Scholars* is a state grant program established by Maryland House Bill 1403 (2016) that provides funding for college access through nonprofit organizations to enhance college and career awareness and college completion for low-income Maryland high school students.

[Maryland Business Roundtable for Education](#)'s implementation is designed to offer essential college and career ready services to students who currently qualify for the Maryland Guaranteed Access Grant at the following schools: Fort Hill High in Allegany County; North Caroline High and Colonel Richardson High in Caroline County; Cambridge South-Dorchester High in Dorchester County; Kent County High in Kent County; and Wicomico Middle and Wicomico High in Wicomico County.

## CollegeBound

*CollegeBound* works exclusively in Baltimore City public schools, it operates on-site in 21 Baltimore City public high schools, providing full-time college advisors, delivering need-based funding through "Last Dollar Grants," and administering annual scholarships. More information can be found on their [website](#).

Do not forget that colleges take sports, club, volunteer, and work experience seriously, because they demonstrate your ability to be responsible, diligent, and dedicated. Depending on the volunteer or work positions you can also build skills that will help you in college, such as time management, customer service and communication skills. Whether a volunteer opportunity presents itself at school, church or in your community, take advantage of it and keep a record of all your extracurricular activities (for your college application).

## Summer Bridge Programs

Most colleges and universities have a summer bridge program which is hosted for a couple weeks during the summer to provide orientation and support to help students make the transition from high school to college. Students take academic classes or begin a job training program, participate in enrichment activities, and have fun while building valuable on campus relationships. Summer bridge opportunities can be found on your college's or university's web page for first year students.



## VII. APPLYING TO COLLEGE

There are many post-secondary program options to choose from today, in person vs. online, certificate vs. associate vs. bachelor's degree programs. It is important to figure out what is important to you so you can choose the best program for you at this time. Now that you have decided that you are ready to attend college and have picked a program (and one or more colleges to apply to), you have to prepare your application.

- **College Scorecard:** One resource to find more information on specific colleges or specific programs is the Department of Education's [College Scorecard](#). The College Scorecard provides students and families with clear information through an interactive tool that lets you choose among any number of options based on your individual needs and interests including location, size, campus setting, and degree and major programs. The Scorecard also includes information about college costs, graduation rates, loan default rates, average amount borrowed, and employment.

### What to Consider When Choosing a college

As a prospective college student there are many factors to consider when choosing a college, from the majors and minors offered to the academic support and career services available. This [list of 10 factors](#) for choosing a college may be beneficial as you consider schools.

*Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU'S)* are colleges and universities that were established before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with the intention of primarily serving African Americans. Research has shown that HBCUs outperform non-HBCU institutions in retaining and graduating black students, after accounting for the socioeconomic status and academic preparation of enrolled students. Maryland has four HBCUs; Morgan State University, Coppin State University, Bowie State University and University of Maryland Eastern Shore. Also there may be additional scholarship opportunities available to attend a HBCU, find out additional information [here](#).



## Application Requirements

Each college has different college application requirements, the requirements for Maryland Colleges and Universities can be found on their websites. The [Common App](#) is an online college application platform that allows students to complete one application and can submit it to several colleges that accept the Common App. There are over 1000 colleges and universities that accept the Common App including: University of Maryland, Towson University, Morgan State University and Salisbury University.

On average, youth apply to 4-5 colleges, with two being your preferred choices, one reach school and one or two safety schools. If you are applying to a couple academically competitive schools then you may want to apply to more than 5 colleges.

Typical college applications include the following:

- Application form detailing personal demographic information, awards, achievements
- High School Transcript
- Letters of Recommendation
- Personal Essay
- Standardized Test Scores (SAT, ACT)- may not be required by most colleges
- College Application Fee (Waivers are available)

## Letters of Recommendation

Most colleges want 1-2 letters of recommendation from teachers who worked with you in an academic subject in 11th or 12th grade. It is best to ask teachers or guidance counselors for letters of recommendation at the end of 11th grade, since that allows them to compile their thoughts over the summer. You want to choose a teacher or guidance counselor that you know well, so they can give an accurate and supportive recommendation. If you have experienced school disruptions from placement changes and don't have a teacher that you know well, you can get recommendations from other adults you know well. For example, you might request a letter from a coach; a supervisor or manager at your job; a faith leader at your church; or another adult mentor from outside the school system.

## Personal Essay

The personal essay is a chance for the college to get to know you and they want to hear about your thoughts, interests, experiences, perspectives, challenges you've faced, and aspirations. Be sure to check if your college has a specific topic for the personal essay and follow their guidelines for the essay. This [website](#) can help with ideas and tips for your college essay. Don't forget to have an adult (guidance counselor, foster parent, etc.) help you edit and provide feedback before submitting your essay.

## Applying to College as a Returning Adult

If you have decided to wait to attend college for a few years as an adult then you might have difficulty with the application process for college. It is important to know the application deadlines for the college you want to attend and the FAFSA deadline. Connect early on with an admissions counselor at the school and the financial aid office, so any questions or concerns you have can be answered quickly. Also if you need recommendation letters for your college application, you can ask your employer, a mentor, or a coach. Remember that some financial assistance for youth in foster care also has deadlines, which can be found in the next section.

One resource is the [Maryland Educational Opportunity Center](#) which is a community based program that provides free counseling, information and technical assistance to adults and youths interested in going to college or other postsecondary schools. Maryland residents aged 19 years or older who are interested in continuing their education beyond high school are eligible for services. They can provide help with completing admissions and financial aid applications along with guidance for college and career programs.



## VIII. FINDING FINANCIAL AID

All students should complete the FAFSA or MSFAA (if a student is undocumented), in order to receive financial aid. You can combine several different sources of financial aid to receive the most aid possible. Remember loans require repayment once you leave college with additional interest, loans should be a last resort for students.

### FAFSA

The [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) Application must be completed to be considered for federal and state financial aid. Each year it opens on October 1st and should be completed by March 1st for priority consideration of financial aid. Students must have an SSN to complete the FAFSA. Check out this [website](#) for tips and tools to complete the FAFSA.



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*Important questions for youth in foster care on the FAFSA:*

- **Highest level of school completed by student’s parents (Questions 24 and 25):** Father and mother are defined here as the student’s birth or adoptive parents but not stepparents, guardians, or foster parents.
- **High school completion status by the beginning of next school year(Question 26):** The student indicates one of the following: high school diploma, General Educational Development (GED) certificate or state certificate, homeschooled, or none of the above (if they will still be in high school).
- **Foster Care (Question 52):** "At any time since you turned age 13, were both of your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?"
- **Emancipation and legal guardianship (Questions 53 and 54):** Students are independent if they are or were upon reaching the age of majority (18 years old), emancipated minors (released from control of their parent or guardian) or in legal guardianship, both as settled by a court of competent authority in their state of legal residence at the time of the adjudication. The emancipation must be determined by a court, not by an attorney, though the basis for it can vary by state.
- **Unaccompanied homeless youth (Questions 55 to 57):** A student is independent if at any time in the previous 2 years (irrespective of whether he or she is currently homeless or at risk thereof), the student is determined to be an unaccompanied youth who is homeless or is self-supporting and at risk of being homeless. This determination can be made by a school district homeless liaison, the director (or designee) of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or the director (or designee) of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program. Depending on the district, these authorities *may* choose to make this determination only if the student is receiving their programs’ services or if, in the case of a school district homeless liaison, the student is in high school. Students who are 22 or 23 years old, though not defined as youth in the McKinney-Vento Act, may also answer “Yes” to these questions.
- **Independent Students (Questions 93–one hundred):** These questions collect information about independent students. Only students who answered “Yes” to one or more questions in the previous section will complete this step.
- **Tax Information for Youth (Questions 32–44):** asks for the student’s and if applicable spouse’s income and assets. The FAFSA form asks for income and taxes paid according to lines on the IRS tax forms from 2 years prior. If you did not work or your income was less than the [federal income requirement](#) (in 2022 the federal income requirement was \$12,950) and you did not file taxes, that is ok. You can select that you are not going to file taxes, but you may need to submit an [IRS Verification of Non-filing](#) letter (FAFSA or your school may request this).

*Necessary Information/ Documents:*

When completing your FAFSA, have your social security number, tax information for the previous two years (if applicable), your email address (one that is frequently used, preferably not a school one that could expire) and list of schools to which you are applying.

Remember to keep your FSA ID username, password, and challenge questions somewhere safe so you can recall them to check on your application status and so you can use them for next year's application too. If you feel comfortable, you can share your FSA ID with your DSS worker so they can help keep the information and help with the following year's application.

## Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC)

MHEC is the State of Maryland's higher education coordinating board responsible for establishing state-wide policies for Maryland public and private colleges and universities and for-profit career schools. MHEC is responsible for the Maryland College Aid Processing system and state financial aid. You can find out about all state financial aid opportunities and requirements [here](#).

## MSFAA

The [Maryland State Financial Aid Application \(MSFAA\)](#) is available to applicants who are ineligible to receive federal aid through the FAFSA, either undocumented youth or qualified children of undocumented immigrants. These students can then be considered for in-state tuition and state financial aid. The MSFAA is available for completion on the Maryland College Aid Processing System ([MDCAPS](#)). To be considered for specific state scholarships and grants the application deadline is **March 1st** but the application can be completed up until June 1st for financial aid for the upcoming school year. If you need guidance with completing the MSFAA, ask an adult for help and use this [MSFAA FAQ](#) or the [User Guide](#). If you continue to have difficulty submitting the MSFAA, it would be helpful to contact the Financial Aid Officer at your school who can provide additional support.



## Financial Aid for Youth in Foster Care

### Maryland Tuition Waiver

The Tuition Waiver provides a waiver for tuition and mandatory fees (lab/ technology fees, diploma fees) for foster care students at a Maryland Public College/University. The waiver applies to credit & non-credit bearing courses in fall, winter, spring and/or summer. But the waiver does not cover “room & board” or other cost of attendance fees (books, school supplies, transportation, meal plans or food). Students must be enrolled in an associate degree, a bachelor’s degree and/ vocational certificate program. The waiver is available to foster care students for up to 10 years or at the completion of a bachelor’s degree (whichever occurs first), as long as the waiver was initially used by students on or before their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### Eligibility Requirements:

- A youth must be placed in foster care by the Maryland Department of Human Services; and
- In foster care at age 18, or at the time of graduation from high school or successful completion of a GED examination; OR
- In foster care for at least one year on or after their 13th birthday, and entered guardianship, was adopted, or reunited with at least one of the individual’s parents.
- The younger sibling of an individual who met the qualifications outlined in section (a) and (b) above AND was concurrently entered into the same guardianship by the same parent or was adopted by the same adoptive family with the older sibling.
- To access and renew the waiver, students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

### Eligible Schools:

|   |  |   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| <a href="#"><u>Allegany College of Maryland</u></a>     | <a href="#"><u>Cecil College</u></a>                         | <a href="#"><u>Frederick Community College</u></a>  | <a href="#"><u>Howard Community College</u></a>          | <a href="#"><u>St. Mary's College of Maryland</u></a>       | <a href="#"><u>University of Maryland, Baltimore County</u></a> |
| <a href="#"><u>Anne Arundel Community College</u></a>   | <a href="#"><u>Chesapeake College</u></a>                    | <a href="#"><u>Frostburg State University</u></a>   | <a href="#"><u>Montgomery College</u></a>                | <a href="#"><u>Towson University</u></a>                    | <a href="#"><u>University of Maryland, College Park</u></a>     |
| <a href="#"><u>Baltimore City Community College</u></a> | <a href="#"><u>College of Southern Maryland</u></a>          | <a href="#"><u>Garrett College</u></a>              | <a href="#"><u>Morgan State University</u></a>           | <a href="#"><u>University of Maryland Eastern Shore</u></a> | <a href="#"><u>Wor-Wic Community College</u></a>                |
| <a href="#"><u>Bowie State University</u></a>           | <a href="#"><u>Community College of Baltimore County</u></a> | <a href="#"><u>Hagerstown Community College</u></a> | <a href="#"><u>Prince George's Community College</u></a> | <a href="#"><u>University of Maryland Global Campus</u></a> |   |
| <a href="#"><u>Carroll Community College</u></a>        | <a href="#"><u>Coppin State University</u></a>               | <a href="#"><u>Harford Community College</u></a>    | <a href="#"><u>Salisbury University</u></a>              | <a href="#"><u>University of Maryland, Baltimore</u></a>    |   |

\*Students can take classes virtually at these schools, and do not have to live in Maryland to still qualify for the Tuition Waiver.

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## [Education and Training Voucher \(ETV\)](#)

The Education and Training Voucher Program is a federal program out of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act. It provides additional federal funds up to \$5000 per academic year to eligible foster care recipients for qualified education and training programs. Funds are based on need, and a first come first serve basis. The Maryland ETV is administered by a non-profit organization. Applications for each school year are available starting July 1st and students must apply for each semester. The online application is available at the above link on the Maryland ETV webpage.

### Eligibility Requirements:

Were in foster care beyond age 18; or were in foster care and entered guardianship or were adopted on or after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday; have graduated High School or have successfully completed a GED.

- A youth must be a US citizen or eligible non-citizen.
- Youth are eligible up to age 26 if they initially applied for funds before their 21st birthday.
- Funding can be renewed for up to 5 years (consecutive or nonconsecutive).
- Students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and this has to be completed before the ETV application.
- Students must make satisfactory academic progress towards their degree/certificate to continue to be eligible for funding. See Satisfactory Academic Progress information below.

## Other Scholarship and Grant Opportunities

*This is not a complete list of all the scholarship and grant opportunities that are available, work with a trusted adult to explore additional private scholarships that may be available to apply to.*

**Pell Grants:** unlike a loan, does not have to be repaid. The maximum Federal Pell Grant award is \$6,895 for the 2022–23 award year (July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023). The amount depends on your financial need, costs to attend school, status as a full-time or part-time student, and plans to attend school for a full academic year or less.

**Guaranteed Access Grant:** need-based grant that provides financial assistance to eligible applicants enrolled at postsecondary institutions. The amount of the GA Grant equals 100 percent of the student's financial need.

**Educational Assistance Grant:** The Educational Assistance (EA) Grant is a need-based grant that provides financial assistance to eligible applicants enrolled at postsecondary institutions.

**Delegate Scholarship:** The Delegate Scholarship is offered to Maryland residents who plan to pursue a postsecondary credential full-time or part-time at a two-year or a four-year Maryland college, university, or private career school.



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**The Senatorial Scholarship** is offered to current high school seniors and full-time and part-time, degree-seeking undergraduate and graduate students, as well as students attending a private career school.

**CASA Academic Excellence Scholarships:** Scholarship Application typically opens in the spring. Contact the Maryland CASA Association for the application and requirements in March. The scholarship, which awards \$2,500 a year for up to four years of higher education, is funded by the Akerman law firm through an endowment established in 2015 as part of the firm's historic \$1 million pledge to the National CASA/GAL Association. The endowment supports young adults who have spent part of their childhood in the foster care system, by helping minimize the financial burden of higher education. The recipients of the scholarship go through an intense application process, including written and video interviews. Each student demonstrates outstanding academic commitment and readiness for success.

**The Blue-Ribbon Project College Fund:** The Blue-Ribbon Project's College Support Fund provides grants and financial assistance to youth in foster care attending trade schools, community colleges, and four-year universities.

## Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)

SAP measures academic performance based on three standards: cumulative grade point average (GPA), pace, and maximum timeframe. To continue to be eligible for any of the above financial aid, students must comply with all three requirements. Each school may have different standards, so make sure you know your school's Financial Aid Policies. For example, for the maximum time frame standard a school may require students to complete required coursework within 150% of the published program length, which means a student must complete a 120-credit hour program within 180 attempted hours. Also some schools may require a minimum GPA or a maximum number of classes you can withdraw from. **If you don't meet these standards, you will lose financial aid.** In order to regain financial aid a student may take classes and pay for tuition and other charges as applicable without the help of financial aid and do well enough in the coursework to satisfy SAP at the end of the subsequent semester(s). Or a student submits a successful appeal - see procedures below. It is also important to remember that if you drop out of enough courses or from the school altogether in the middle of an academic period, you could be required to return or pay back the scholarship money. Speak with your institution's financial services office to understand this process.

Students who are beyond the maximum time frame to completion may regain financial aid eligibility on a semester-by-semester basis through the appeal process. Each college has a different appeal process which can be found on the Financial Aid Policies webpage. But it typically includes a written statement of written letter or email describing extenuating circumstances that prevented the student from meeting the SAP requirements AND the course of action or change that will allow them to make satisfactory academic progress at the next evaluation. Typical circumstances that are considered include: student becomes seriously ill, student is severely injured, student's relative dies, or other circumstances may be considered if they are determined to have caused physical or psychological stress on a student. An appeal may not be based upon the need for funds nor the lack of knowledge that eligibility for aid was in jeopardy. The course of action or academic plan should reflect realistic and attainable goals and may include necessary courses to achieve satisfactory academic progress standards, change in habits, new resources that will be utilized, etc. If the appeal is approved, the student will be placed on academic probation and will be eligible to receive financial aid for one semester. A student may re-establish eligibility by meeting the SAP standards which will remove the student from probation and reinstate their financial

aid. If after the probationary semester, the student is not meeting minimum SAP requirements, but they are meeting the terms of their academic plan, their academic plan is rolled over to the next semester and the student will continue to be eligible for financial aid but remain on academic probation. If after the probationary semester the student is not meeting the minimum SAP requirements or the terms of their academic plan, they will be ineligible from receiving financial aid in subsequent semesters or until they re-establish SAP without financial aid.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS TO ATTENDING COLLEGE

### Securing Housing

Housing instability encompasses challenges, such as having trouble paying rent, overcrowding, moving frequently, or spending the bulk of household income on housing. Housing costs often make up a major part of a student's living expenses and students, including youth in foster care, struggle to find affordable housing options.

The choice between living on-campus (e.g., in a residence hall or dorm), or off-campus (e.g., with family or in your own apartment), can be as difficult as choosing which college to attend or career to pursue. It is important to know that most community colleges do not have on-campus housing options, and some colleges may only have on-campus housing options for the first two years. Also during winter and spring college students may not be allowed to stay on campus and campuses close, so you may have to make a plan for breaks. Discuss your options with your DSS worker to see if you are eligible for the Semi-Independent Living Arrangement (SILA) program and if the SILA stipend can help offset costs of housing.

#### On-Campus Considerations

- **Resident Advisor (RA)**- someone is always available on site to navigate emergencies and offer guidance. RA's play a crucial role in developing a sense of community among campus residents.
- **Student Engagement**- Research from the National Survey of Student Engagement (2020) suggests that students who live on campus are more likely to graduate because they are more likely to be engaged in school. Also, most college dorms have planned social activities, some of which are free, that help students get acquainted with campus and other students.
- **Free Amenities**- Utilities are typically free in a dorm. Colleges that do charge for cable or internet typically do not charge the same amount you might pay for in an apartment or home. Also, some dorms come equipped with TV's, an on-site gym, and games. Living on campus can also help you save money and time since you can walk to class
- **Decreased daily duties**- Living on campus may provide the opportunity to purchase a meal plan which means you will not have to worry about cooking. If you live off campus, expect to make your own food.
- **School breaks**- Some colleges require students to leave the campus during summer and holiday breaks. Unless your college allows you to stay on campus, you will need to find a place to stay.
- **Food**- Schools may or may not require you to purchase a meal plan if you choose to live on campus. Campus meal plans can sometimes be covered by scholarships, grants, or as part of compensation as an RA to help student's budget food costs.

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## Off-Campus Considerations

- **Privacy and Space-** You will have greater privacy if you live on your own. Even if you opt to have a roommate, you will typically have more space available to you off campus.
- **More Independence-** Living in a dorm may come with a code of conduct and even a curfew. Living off campus would allow you to come and go as you please with few restrictions.
- **Food-** If you are considering living off campus, consider whether you will have time to shop for groceries, prepare your own meals, and clean up. Will food be more affordable for you on or off campus?

## Federal Housing Programs

**Youth Housing Voucher Program** – The [Family Unification Program](#) (FUP) is a specific housing choice voucher program for youth between 18 and 21 years old who left the foster care system at age 16 or older and who lack adequate housing. The local department of social services and the local housing authority can determine eligibility for this program, as there is a limited number of vouchers available.



## Securing Housing During School Breaks

More schools are now offering housing options to students during school and holiday breaks. In some states, public colleges and universities must remain open during breaks to accommodate former youth in foster care in need of a place to stay. Make sure to visit the student services center on your campus to learn more about what options are available. If on-campus housing is unavailable during your school during breaks, below are alternate plans to consider.

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- **Stay with Someone You Know** – You can opt to stay with family, current or former foster parents, or friends during school breaks. If staying the whole break is not feasible, consider arranging a plan to stay with multiple people and rotate visits. But make sure to make the arrangements ahead of time and plan your stay in advance.
  - **Ask the Office of Student Services** – Ask your student affairs office to provide you with information on how to secure temporary housing in the area.
  - **Check with the Office of International Student Affairs** – Visit your campus Office of International Student Affairs to inquire about housing supports for international students during school breaks. Some campuses allow for a select number of dorms to remain open to accommodate these students and you may be able to make similar arrangements.
  - **Sign up for School-Sponsored Community Service Trips and Study Abroad** – Throughout the school year, schools offer development opportunities for students, including service trips and study abroad grants. Study abroad trips typically take place during school breaks and include housing. Some trips may be free, and others may require a fee. Aside from housing, these opportunities can provide you with an opportunity to give back and gain valuable skills through community work. Contact the Student Life and Study Abroad offices at your school to learn more.
  - **Apply for a Resident Assistant (RA) Position** – Many schools employ current students as RAs to serve as a resource to students. Consider training to become an RA yourself. In addition to lending a helping hand and building your resume, RAs are provided housing and sometimes a meal plan as part of their employment package.
  - **Consider Greek Housing** – Many colleges allow Greek housing to remain open to students during summer break. If you are part of a fraternity or sorority, find out if your house will be open during school breaks, if there are any restrictions, and if there is a fee to stay. Even if you are not part of a Greek organization, talk to your university to see if you may be able to find temporary housing through a Greek organization.

## Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is defined as being without reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food. Food insecurity has become a growing problem across the nation. Here are some suggestions if you are experiencing food insecurity on campus:

- Contact your campus dining services about free and low-cost meals at school. Campus dining services may maintain a list of local food programs that offer daily meals. Dining services on campus can also inform you about on-campus food assistance programs such as Campus Kitchens, student food banks, and meal plan voucher programs.
- College campuses across the nation have begun offering free [food pantries](#) to serve students in need and ensure access to food does not become an obstacle to a student pursuing his or her education.
- The [Campus Kitchen Project](#) provides access to meals from surplus on-campus and community food sources, in exchange for volunteering.

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- [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) helps low-income households buy the food they need for good health. You must apply, be interviewed, and meet all the financial and technical [eligibility requirements](#) before being granted SNAP benefits. You should file an application with your local department of social services or [online](#). If you are currently in foster care, discuss completing the application with your DSS Worker first.

## Childcare

If you are interested in enrolling in school as a pregnant or parenting young adult but finding childcare is a challenge, look into whether your school provides grants to help you pay for childcare. Some colleges and universities may also offer on-site childcare, or an employer may offer on-site childcare services. Also, a relative or friend that you trust may be able to care for a child while you are at school.

- *Maryland's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)*- TANF provides cash assistance to families with dependent children when available resources do not fully address the family's needs and while preparing program participants for independence through work. Families may apply for assistance for childcare costs [online](#). If you are currently in foster care contact your DSS worker before applying.
- *Women, Infants, Children (WIC)*- WIC provides healthy supplemental foods and breastfeeding support for pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children under 5. To apply you must contact your local county WIC office, more information can be found [here](#).
- Additional Maryland resources from child care to pre-k can be found at the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood [website](#) and information about the child care scholarship eligibility requirements can be found [here](#).

## Health Insurance

All colleges in the United States require you to have health insurance. Before you enroll, this is typically a cost that is outlined in your tuition. It should be made clear by the college or university you are attending if this is something you will be responsible for once you are a student. Mandating health insurance helps colleges protect their students from facing medical debt further down the road. To get out of paying for your school's offered plan, you will have to get a waiver and submit proof of your current insurance. A waiver is necessary if you are a new or returning undergraduate student and enrolled in 6 or more credits. Information on the insurance waiver can be found on your colleges or universities health and wellness center page. If you are not in contact with your parents and need health insurance before heading to college, you may qualify for [Medicaid](#). In addition, if you were in foster care at the age of eighteen or older and are enrolled in Medicaid, you will be eligible to receive coverage until you are twenty-six. Additional information on enrollment is available at [Maryland Health Connection](#).

## Working while in College

There are [federal work study](#) opportunities, which provide part-time jobs for undergraduate and graduate students with financial need, allowing them to earn money to help pay education expenses. As a college student you will also have more flexibility and options when deciding your class schedule. If you are currently employed and decide to take classes, talk with your employer as soon as possible and see if your schedule can be arranged around your class time. Perhaps you can work during the day and take classes at night or take classes in the morning and work in the evening.

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## On Campus Programs

Colleges have a lot of programs that can provide both academic and social support, here are a few to consider connecting with:

### TRIO Programs

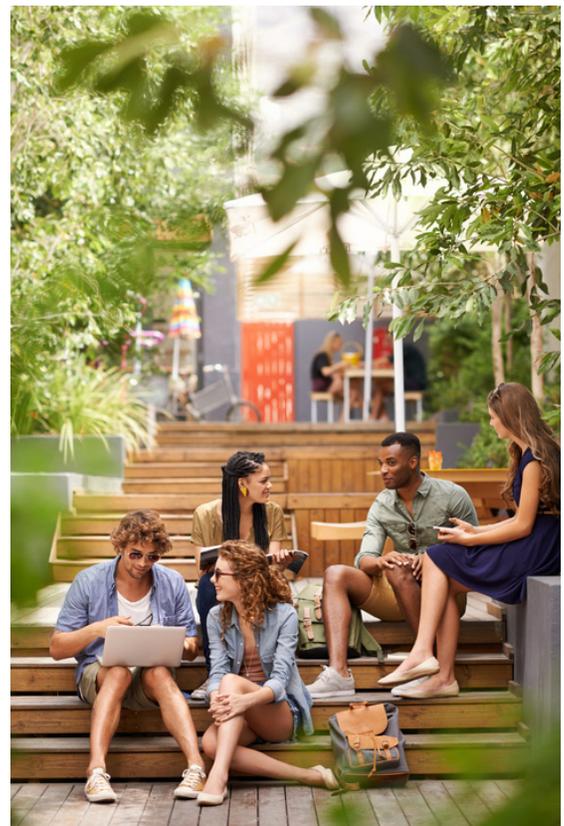
Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) are outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs. There are several TRIO programs at different schools in Maryland, you can find them [here](#).

### Honors Societies

Honor societies recognize students with exceptional academic records and typically there are two types of honor societies: general societies open to all students and societies for certain academic disciplines. Typically honor societies set admission criteria, for example, students may need to rank in the top 20% of their class or have a minimum GPA. There are several benefits to joining an honors society, including members-only scholarships, chances to gain leadership and academic experience, and mentorship and networking opportunities. Although make sure you understand the requirements to join an honors society as there may be a membership fee. To find out more about the honors societies active on your college campus check out the student life page, like this [page](#) at Towson University.

### Greek Life

Greek life refers to fraternities and sororities on college campuses (not every college and university has Greek life). If you are considering joining a fraternity or sorority, do your research and make sure it would benefit your college life. Joining a fraternity or sorority may be a great way to meet new people and build lasting relationships. Many fraternities and sororities are national organizations, with chapters on campuses across the country, while others are campus-specific. Members of a fraternity or sorority often share common interests and support one another's journey through college with academic support and leadership skills development. But joining a fraternity or sorority also has requirements such as membership dues and a significant time commitment in terms of social and volunteer events that are mandatory. Before committing to a fraternity or sorority be sure to understand the requirements and expectations, so you don't overwhelm your schedule. To learn about the fraternities and sororities active on your campus and how to join, look on the student life page for your school.



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## IX. APPENDIX

### MyLife

Website provides links to all local colleges and universities, you can find more information about programs and application deadlines on these websites.

### College Application Checklist

This checklist can be used to track your application deadlines, financial aid deadlines and other necessary information for the colleges you have applied to.

## Supportive Resources Definitions

The following resources can be found on campus at your chosen school, they may have slightly different names but provide the same service.

**Academic Advising** - Advisors will help you find the right courses for your major, explore career options and untangle the sometimes complicated process of transferring credits.

**Tutoring** - Faculty, adjuncts, peer tutors, study groups, computer labs and online support are available for general academic skill building or for specific course study to improve grades.

**Writing Center** - Provides writing consultation for papers and offers a rotating series of live, online group workshops on composition, grammar, source use and documentation to improve writing

**Career and Community Service**- To help you explore careers, get work experience, prepare for the workforce and become civically engaged.

**Disability Support Services**- Provides reasonable and ethical accommodations consistent with ADA guidelines using an individualized, student-centered approach and modeling best practices through training, collaboration and engagement. Accommodations and services may include: notetakers/scribes, testing accommodations, sign language interpreters, and more. Documentation of your disability from a doctor, psychiatrist or psychologist is necessary to receive accommodations. Previous documentation of disability support in high school (IEP or 504 Plan) would be helpful.

**Counseling Services**- Provides free personal counseling to registered students.

**Health & Wellness Services**- On campus center to provide health care services to students, including routine physicals, sick visits, and more.

**Student Achievement & Success**- Provides support and retention programs to increase the academic success, graduation and transfer of students who may have more barriers and challenges to overcome in order to realize their goals, typically these programs are for first-generation or low-income students.

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