

APRIL 2021

Postsecondary Programs and Services for Current and Former Foster Care Youth in Illinois

Chequita S. Brown, Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher,
Nidia Ruedas-Gracia, and Nathaniel Stewart



Introduction

The Postsecondary Pathways for Former Foster Care Youth (PP-FFCY) study is a research project that focuses on the transitions of foster care alumni to and through postsecondary institutions. Through the Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL), the PP-FFCY project team is conducting a comprehensive needs assessment report that 1) provides a descriptive profile of Illinois foster care alumni; 2) examines postsecondary access, opportunities, and supports for Illinois foster youth; and 3) addresses disparities in career and technical education (CTE) programs.

This research brief provides an overview of programs and services that helps strengthen postsecondary pathways for current and former foster youth in Illinois. Outlined below is a comprehensive review of the general and foster youth demographic profiles in Illinois, followed by an overview of various forms of student aid (e.g., national-, state-, and campus-level aid) available for foster care alumni, as well as a synopsis of the CTE program in Illinois.

The General Population of Illinois

Illinois, known as the Land of Lincoln, has roughly 12.6 million residents (United States Census Bureau, 2020b). Though currently the sixth largest state in the nation, the population of Illinois has experienced a significant decline during the last several years. Between 2013 and 2020, Illinois' total population decreased by approximately -2.4%, declining from 12.9 to 12.59 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2020a). Although Illinois' largest racial category is among White residents at 61% (n=7,690,980), the

Hispanic (or Latino) residents are the most populous ethnic group, comprising 18% (n=2,216,300) of Illinois' population. The remaining racial composition of individuals in Illinois consists of 14% (n=1,759,293) African American, 6% (n=710,119) Asian American, 2% (n=257,181) multiracial, and less than 1% (n=12,938) American Indian and (n=2,897) Native Hawaiian (United States Census Bureau, 2020c). Recent declines in the state's population suggest the state having negative population growth (Frey, 2020).

Foster Care Youth

Nationwide, there are roughly 424,000 children in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Of that number, more than 21,000 are children in foster care in Illinois (Illinois Department of Children & Family Services, 2021b). As of February of 2021, youth



from ages 0-5 represented 43% (n=9,152) of all children receiving service and support through the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services. Ages 6-12 (n=6,405 or 30%) make up the second-largest group, followed by ages 13-17, which makes up 18% (n=3,842) of the Illinois youth in foster care (Illinois Department of Children & Family Services, 2020b). Among the number of Illinois children in foster care, youth who are 18 and older are the lowest-populated group, representing 8% (n=1,754) of the total number of individuals in care (Illinois Department of Children & Family Services, 2020b). While youth usually “age out” of the foster care system at age 18, there are 26 states, including Illinois,

that provide extended foster care services to individuals until the age of 21 (United States Government Accountability Office [GOA], 2019). The 2008 Fostering Connections to Success and Increase Adoption Act, which amended the Title IV-E Social Security Act, allows states to receive federal reimbursement for costs to extend services for eligible foster youth from age 18 to 21 (P.L. 110-351, 2008). Foster youth can receive continued support while residing in a foster home, group care, or independent living such as an apartment, within a supervised setting (GOA, 2019).

As a condition for continued federal funding to support youth who are over the age of 18, these individuals are required to be completing high school (or an equivalent program); enrolled in a postsecondary or vocational school; participating in a program or activity purposed

to promote or remove barriers to employment; employed at least 80 hours per month; or incapable of meeting the noted requirements due to a documented medical condition (P.L. 110-351, 2008).

As of April of 2021, of the 21,395 youth in Illinois foster care, 51.3% (n=10,961) are male and 48.7% (n=10,434) are female. The Illinois counties with the largest population of youth in foster care are Cook (27% or n=5,729), Peoria (4% or n=939), and St. Clair (4% or n=865) (Illinois Department of Children & Family Services, 2020a, 2020b). The racial composition of Illinois reflects Whites comprise three-fourths of residents and have the majority of children in foster care (n=12,034) representing over half (56%) of the foster youth receiving services through the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS). IDCFS data indicate that children receiving services are more likely to come from racially marginalized backgrounds. However, Black children have a disproportionately higher rate of being in Illinois foster care representing 42.7% (n=9,136) of the number of youth in foster care statewide. Hispanic/Latinx children comprise 10% (n=2,141), Asian/Pacific Islander represent .3% (n=78), and Native American children make up .2% (n=41). A small population of children's identity could not be verified (.13% or n=30) or was unknown (.27% or n=55) due to missing information related to their race or ethnicity (Illinois Department of Children & Family Services, 2021).

Federal and State-Level Financial Aid

Policymakers at the federal and state level established various financial support programs to increase postsecondary access and retention among

foster care alumni (Cochrane & Szabo-Kubitz, 2009; Dworsky, 2018; Geiger et al., 2016; Wolanin, 2005). Below is a summary of various financial aid resources available to Illinois foster care youth.

The Federal Pell Grant

As the largest federal need-based grant, Pell Grants are a valuable financial resource for foster care alumni striving to earn a college degree. To receive funds, current and former foster youth must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Pell Grant funds are awarded based on 1) students' expected family contribution (EFC), 2) cost of attendance at selected institutions, 3) students' enrollment status (full-time or part-time), and 4) the amount of time students enrolled during the semester. Individuals with foster care histories are considered independent students unlike their non-foster care peers who likely will identify as a dependent student. Thus, foster care alumni are likely to receive the full Pell Grant, which is currently up to \$6,495 a year for postsecondary education expenses (Federal Pell Grant, 2020).

The Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independent Program provides federal and state funds to current and former foster youth with financial needs and who are in state care between the ages 16 and 18. Through the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program, foster youth are eligible to receive up to \$5,000 per year for postsecondary education expenses such as tuition, room and board, books, and other related expenses. Chafee grants and programs are accessible to foster youth until the age of 23. However, foster youth must apply for the ETV Program and receive initial financial support by the age of 21. Additionally, foster youth must consistently make satisfactory progress toward completing their selected educational program (California Student Aid Commission, 2020; Davis, 2006; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019; Wolanin, 2005).

Illinois Monetary Award Program (MAP)

The Monetary Award Program, known as the MAP grant, is a state-level program that provides financial support to Illinois college students. Applicants must submit the Free Application for Federal Student

Nationwide, there are roughly 424,000 children in foster care.

Aid (FAFSA) to access MAP grant funds. These funds are applied toward tuition and mandatory fees for undergraduate students and should not exceed the maximum award amount for the academic year. MAP-grant eligibility requirements include but are not limited to the following:

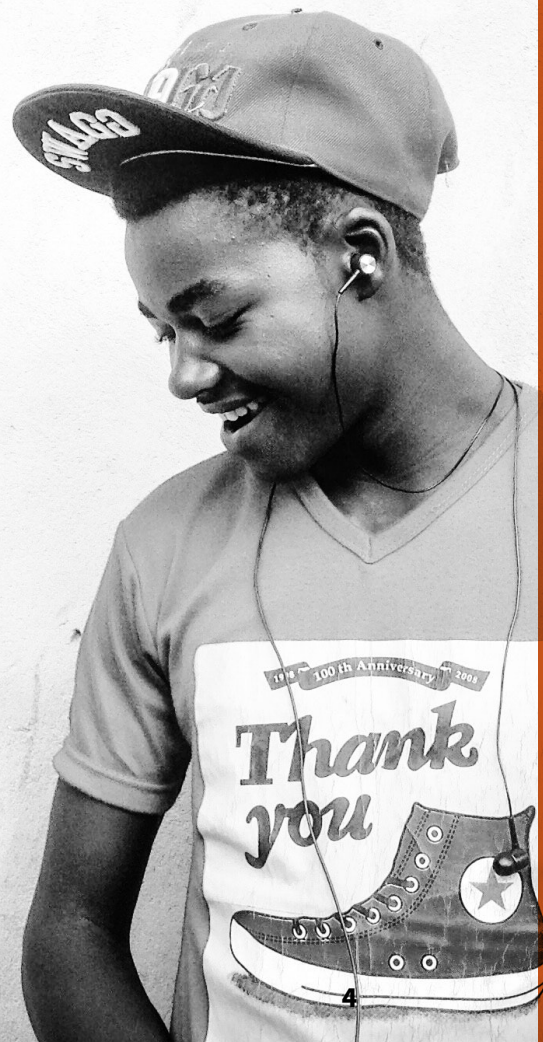
- Must have U.S. citizenship, eligible non-citizenship, or must meet the “undocumented student” criteria of the RISE Act
- Must be an undergraduate Illinois resident
- Must be enrolled in at least three credit hours per term at a MAP-approved college or university
- Cannot have received grant funds for 135 or more credit hours of enrollment
- Must not be in default on any student loan or state or federal grant refund

Based on an Illinois Student Assistance Commission survey of the 2017-2018 academic year, 43% of eligible

applicants received MAP funding (Illinois Student Assistance Commission, 2019). Of the students surveyed, approximately 86% believed MAP funding positively impacted their college enrollment by minimizing the amount of student loans they needed for educational cost (Illinois Student Assistance Commission, 2019).

Illinois Tuition Waiver and Assistance

Currently, Illinois is one of 24 states that offers statewide tuition waivers to foster care alumni enrolled at a postsecondary institution (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2019; Parker & Sarubbi, 2017; University of Washington, 2021). Individuals with foster care experience are eligible for tuition and fee-waiver assistance when enrolled in an Illinois postsecondary institution. During the first five years of college, students can receive waiver assistance if they make satisfactory progress toward degree completion. The tuition and fee-waiver assistance work in tandem with other existing federal- and state-level (i.e., MAP



grant, Department of Children and Family Services programs) financial support programs. Thus, foster youth are required to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services' Tuition and Fee Waiver form (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2019).

Youth in Scholarship — Illinois Department of Children & Family Services

The Youth in Scholarship program is a full-tuition waiver for Illinois public colleges with additional benefits such as a monthly stipend and medical insurance until the age of 26. Individuals with foster care experience, including those who have been adopted or raised in Illinois guardianship, are eligible for this scholarship. Current and former foster youth may apply for the Youth in Scholarship beginning January 1. The application is due by March 31.

Youth in College/Vocational Training Program — Illinois Department of Children & Family Services

The Youth in College program provides eligible students with a monthly grant in the amount of \$511, along with a reimbursement on book expenses (when books are not covered by financial aid). Additionally, students may receive a one-time \$200 payment toward initial living expenses. Foster youth may receive Youth in College resources until age 25. Youth in College program eligibility includes but is not limited to:

- Full-time enrollment at an accredited college, university, or vocational training program
- Must be at least 16 years old and not yet 21 at the time of application
- Must maintain at least a “C” grade average every semester
- Class schedule must be submitted to Youth in College coordinator at the start of every semester; final grades must be submitted at the end of every semester

In addition to the FAFSA application, foster youth must complete the Youth in College/Vocational Training Program application.

Illinois College Preparatory and Support Programs for Foster Youth

In Illinois there are education programs designed to improve educational and career outcomes for high school students with foster care experience. Below are



several college and career preparatory programs that support postsecondary access and achievement among Illinois foster care youth.

First Star Academy

First Star Academy, a nationwide four-year college and career preparatory program, creates postsecondary pathways for foster care youth. Housed on various university campuses—12 academies nationwide and one international academy in London—First Star partners with local child welfare agencies, school districts, and universities to provide foster youth with holistic, long-term academic and personal support to generate self-sufficiency through college and career achievement.

Currently, there are two First Star Academies located in Illinois at Illinois State University and Loyola University Chicago. Throughout the academic school year, First Star participants attend monthly activities that focus on academics, life skills, and caregiver engagement. Additionally, foster youth participate in a residential summer immersion program where youth have the opportunity to live on a university campus for two to four weeks, depending on the academy (Casey Family Programs, 2018; First Star, 2019). Across the 13 academies, more than 400 foster youth have received services through First Star Academy, of which 98%

graduated from high school and 88% enrolled in either a two-year or four-year postsecondary institution (First Star, 2019).

Foster Progress

Based in the Chicagoland area, Foster Progress aims to increase educational attainment among high school foster care youth while assisting in their successful transition to adulthood. Through mentorship, advocacy, and educational access, Foster Progress provides supportive programs and activities to help foster youth earn a college degree. As of 2019, the number of students served through the Foster Progress Mentoring and Scholarship Program increased from four to 22 between 2016 to 2019. Equally important, program outcomes consisted of a 100% high school graduation rate among Foster Progress youth and an 82% college enrollment rate (Foster Progress, 2019).

Project STRIVE (Strategies to Rejuvenate Interest and Value in Education)

Targeting youth who have experienced trauma and neglect, STRIVE helps Illinois foster youth ages 14 to 21 transition into adulthood. In collaboration with Youth Guidance, the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (IDCFS), and Chicago Public Schools, STRIVE serves approximately 200 youth annually from more than 74 elementary and high schools in Chicago. STRIVE participants engage in a wealth of activities such as field trips and college tours for social and educational enrichment, and personalized counseling is provided (Youth Guidance, 2019).

Life Skills Program — Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

The Office of Education and Transition Services at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS) offers the Life Skills Program to help foster youth develop independent living skills while promoting economic and social self-sufficiency. In collaboration with IDCFS caseworkers, foster youth and caregivers create an individualized transition plan and establish time-sensitive goals for foster youth. Upon completion of the Life Skills Program, foster youth receive a \$150 stipend (Illinois Department of Children & Family Services, 2020C).

Career and Technical Education (CTE): Perkins V

The Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which is federal legislation that funds career and technical education, was reauthorized in 2018 as the



Strengthening Career and Technical Education Act for the 21st Century (Perkins V). This legislation provides states and local education agencies with a critical framework to center equity within CTE (NAPE Education Foundation, 2020).

Within the CTE database, students are categorized based on gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as by special populations such as “Individuals with



Disabilities” (ADA), “Single Parents,” “Limited English Proficient,” and “Economically Disadvantaged.” However, foster care youth were not identified as a student population among data collected during the academic year of the 2018-2019 CTE program. Indeed, students with a history in foster care may have been subcategorized within existing CTE program student populations (i.e., Economically Disadvantaged, Single Parents, Nontraditional Enrollees, etc.), as foster care alumni may possess intersecting identities and characteristics that aligned with the dominant categories used to identify diverse student populations.

The needs-assessment process is the primary lever within Perkins V for educators to highlight factors limiting the success of marginalized communities and underrepresented student groups in CTE. Its purpose is to develop more fully the academic knowledge and technical and employability skills of secondary and postsecondary students enrolled in CTE programs. Survey data collected by the Illinois State Board of Education revealed that in Illinois there was an average of approximately 34,222 students who were members of a state-recognized Career and Technical Education Student Organization (CTSO) in 2015-16 (Illinois State Board of Education, 2016).

More recent data indicate that 253,807 secondary and 128,042 postsecondary education students enrolled in Illinois CTE courses during the 2018-2019 academic schoolyear (U.S. Department of Education,

Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, 2020). While the health science concentration (n=9427) attracted the most interest among students enrolled in postsecondary institutions, the architecture and construction (n=4147) concentration had the highest enrollment among secondary education students. Of the Illinois postsecondary CTE students, 53% (n=68,154) were male and 47% (n=59,888) were female. The racial composition of enrollment in postsecondary CTE programs in Illinois indicated Whites (59% or n=75,613) as the largest student population, with 36% (n=46,706) being students of color and just over 4% (n=5,723) of students with unknown racial identities. Among students of color enrolled in postsecondary CTE programs in Illinois, Hispanics/Latinos (18% or n=23,083) were the largest student population, followed by Blacks or African Americans (12% or n=15,087). Asian students represented a little over 4% (n=5342), American Indian or Alaskan Native were .3% (n=332), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander were .1% (n=120). Individuals with two or more races (n=2,742) or unknown racial identities (n=5,723) made up 7% of the student population enrolled in CTE programs in Illinois. (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, 2020).

Overall, career and technical education has been shown to improve graduation rates. One CTE course taken by a student increases graduation expectancy by 15%; two CTE courses increases that percentage to 20%; and three CTE courses raises this to 28% (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009). Obtaining a CTE credential or license also improves the average median income of an individual: A high school graduate with career and technical education coursework will make \$42,000 compared to \$30,000 for someone without a CTE education (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009).

Summary

There are more than 21,000 youth in care in Illinois ranging from ages 0 to 21 years. The state of Illinois provides a range of support and services to create postsecondary pathways for foster care youth. In Illinois, foster care youth are eligible for tuition waivers to attend college. Undergraduate students in Illinois are eligible for the Monetary Award Program (MAP) based on completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS) provides various programs and services to protect and support the

educational attainment of foster care youth. College preparatory programs like First Star Academy and Foster Progress help increase postsecondary access and retention among foster care youth in Illinois. Illinois postsecondary CTE students are approximately 53% male and 47% female. A concentration in the health sciences has the highest enrollment among CTE students in Illinois. Earning CTE credentials will increase students' employability and earnings after graduation.

Even in lieu of the updated Perkins V broadening the definition of special populations to include foster youth, there is little publicly available data that crosswalks what CTE programming and practices have been explicitly designed for foster youth and foster care alum

that have aged out of the system. Hence, additional initiatives that are tailored to increase CTE training and employment opportunities specifically for foster and former foster youth are needed. While national reports indicate higher attrition at the secondary and postsecondary level in addition to economic challenges of joblessness, underemployment, homelessness and/or food insecurity for foster and former foster youth, many of the disparities are exacerbated by race and ethnicity across the country; statewide Illinois foster youth data illustrate pronounced racialized inequities as well.



References

- California Student Aid Commission – CSAC (2020). [“California chafee grant for foster youth.”](#)
- Casey Family Programs. (2018). [Fostering college success mentorship programs: A public private partnership to build a better tomorrow for youth in foster care.](#)
- Cochrane, D. F., & Szabo-Kubitz, L. (2009). [Hopes & hurdles: California foster youth and college financial aid.](#) Institute for College Access & Success. Berkeley, CA: Institute for College Access & Success.
- Davis, R. J. (2006). [College access, financial aid, and college success for undergraduates from foster care.](#) Washington, DC: National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.
- Department of Children and Family Services. (2019, January 3). [Policy guide 2019.01: Tuition and fee waivers for youth served by the department.](#)
- Dworsky, A. (2018). Improving the postsecondary educational attainment of youth in foster care. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 181, 11-19. doi:10.1002/cc.20287.
- Fernandes-Alcantara, A. L. (2019). [Youth transitioning from foster care: Background and federal programs.](#) (RL34499, May 29, 2019). U.S. Congressional Research Service.
- First Star (2019). [2019 impact report.](#) Author.
- Foster-Progress. (2019). [Foster progress: 2018-2019 annual report.](#)
- Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 ([Public Law 110-351](#)), H.R. 6893, 110th Congress. (2008).
- Frey, W. H. (2020, January 2). [The 2010s may have seen the slowest population growth in U.S. history, census data show.](#) The Brookings Institution.
- Geiger, J. M., Hanrahan, J. E., Cheung, J. R., & Lietz, C. A. (2016). Developing an on-campus recruitment and retention program for foster care alumni. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 61, 271-280. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.01.005.
- Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (2021a, April 30). [Reports and statistics: Youth in care by county.](#)
- Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (2021b, April 30). Reports and statistics: Youth in care by demographics.
- Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (2020C). [Life Skills Program Tips Sheets.](#)
- Illinois State Board of Education. (2016). [Illinois CTE By the Numbers \[Fact Sheet\].](#)



Illinois State Board of Education. (2009). [Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) in Illinois 2009 \[Fact Sheet\]](#).

Illinois Student Assistance Commission – ISAC (2019). [Monetary award program \(MAP\) evaluation](#). Illinois Student Assistance Commission.

Parker, E., & Sarubbi, M. (2017). [50-State Review: Tuition Assistance Programs for Foster Youth Pursuing Postsecondary Education](#). Education Commission of the States.

[Perkins V: Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century](#). NAPE Educational Foundation.

United States Census Bureau (2019). [Quick facts-Illinois](#), population estimates. [Table]. United States Census Bureau. (December 23, 2019). [Resident population in Illinois from 1960 to 2019](#) (in millions) [Graph]. In Statista.

United States Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (2020). [2018-2019 Consolidated Annual Report CTE Participant Enrollment](#). Division of Academic and Technical Education.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau. (2020). [The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System \(AFCARS\) report FY 2019](#).

U.S. Department of Education. (2021). [Federal Student Aid: Federal Pell grants are usually awarded only to undergraduate students](#).

United States Census Bureau. (2020a). [Resident population in Illinois from 1960 to 2020 \(in millions\) \[Graph\]](#). In Statista.

United States Census Bureau. (2020b). [Resident population of the U.S. in 2020, by state \(including the District of Columbia\) \(in millions\) \[Graph\]](#). In Statista.

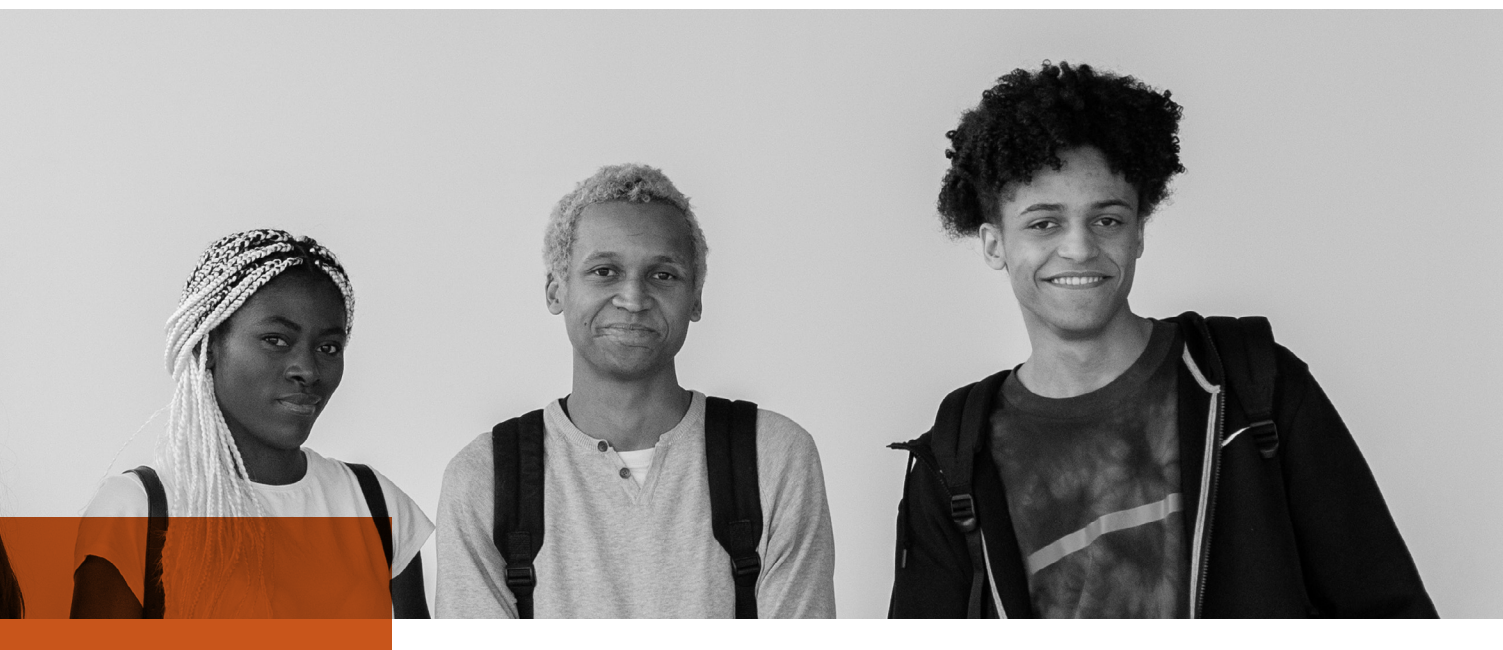
United States Census Bureau. (2020c). [Resident population of Illinois in 2019, by race and ethnicity \[Graph\]](#). In Statista.

United States Government Accountability Office [GOA] (2019, May). [Foster care: States with approval to extend care provide independent living options up to Age 21](#). GOA-19-411.

University of Washington. (2021). [Foster care and higher education: Tuition waivers by state](#).

Wolanin, T. R. (2005). *Higher education opportunities for foster youth: A primer for policymakers*. Washington, DC: The Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Youth Guidance. (2019). [Youth guidance: Guiding kids to bright futures annual report 2019](#).





This publication was prepared pursuant to a grant from the Illinois Community College Board (Grant Number: D5355).
 Copyright © 2021 - The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois