Earlier this year, SchoolHouse Connection, Youth Villages, and Juvenile Law Center created an editable toolkit for colleges and universities to help inform decisions to support students with experience with homelessness and foster care during COVID-19. As the semester comes to a close and the holidays are quickly approaching, we offer six tips for institutions to support these students. If you have any other strategies or initiatives your college is undertaking to support students over the holidays, please contact Jillian Sitjar at jillian@schoolhouseconnection.org.

1. **Proactively communicate with students about their housing options and work with them to develop a holiday housing and support plan.**

   Students are often inundated with emails. Provide early, clear, concise messaging about all housing options for students over the holiday breaks. Utilize social media, texting, and other communication strategies to ensure students can make informed decisions about the break. Reach out to students who you are aware of that have experience with homelessness or foster care and work to develop a concrete housing and support plan. Offer multiple opportunities for students who have not yet been identified to reach out and get support in developing a housing and support plan.

   Check out how Kennesaw State actively uses Instagram to promote their materials and information. Prior to Thanksgiving Break, the CARES team will go to each residence hall on the Marietta campus to pass out chip clips with information about the CARES pantry and services. They are emailing all current pantry shoppers with holiday information and hours to make sure that students know they are still open.

2. **Keep residence halls open and allow students to remain on campus during the breaks at no additional cost.**

   Institutions that allowed students to remain on campus during the fall semester should continue to allow students to remain on campus over the holiday breaks at no additional cost. Students with experience with homelessness and foster care might not have anywhere to go or safe options for the holidays during the pandemic. If students need to be relocated to different residence halls or campus apartments, assist them with moving their items. As well, ensure regular sanitation of their lodging before and during their stay.

   Institutions like Georgetown University offer housing options for independent students, including homeless and foster students, over winter break.
3. **Conduct outreach to students who are on campus to make sure they have access to resources, food, laundry, medical, transportation, and social support.**

Ensure that students who remain on campus are connected to resources and have access to food, laundry, and support. Keep dining halls and food pantries open over the breaks or provide other safe food options for students. Keep wifi enabled throughout campus to ensure a stable internet connection. Review with students if there are any changes in transportation service during the holidays and develop a plan for alternatives if needed, including how to safely use services like Uber and Lyft using PPE. Help students develop a list of contact people that can provide social support during the holidays. If a student has behavioral health needs, make sure they have contact information for their treatment providers and know what to do in the event of a crisis. Any on-campus health clinics should have staff available to handle any medical concerns that arise, especially as flu season arrives. Make sure that students can contact Housing and Residential Living staff members who are on call if emergency support is needed.

4. **Provide virtual and safe in-person programming opportunities, including opportunities for celebration and self-care, to help students stay engaged and connected together over the holidays.**

Engage students who remain on campus with programming opportunities and activities. The holidays can be a stressful and lonely and traumatic time for students with experience with homelessness and foster care. Help students deal with this stress by offering opportunities for celebration and self-care. Consider planning events to promote skill building like sharing cooking tips, self-care practices, and coping skills. Provide virtual opportunities for community and connection such as organized games, holiday meals, book or movie watching sessions. Plan socially distanced activities on campus if possible, like movies and access to gym space. Arrange for treats and items that help youth experience some of the joys of the holidays such as organizing care packages, recruiting community members to send cards or holiday wishes to students, enlist community members to provide gifts and other items.

5. **Ensure multiple options for continuing the education of students who choose to leave campus during holiday breaks and are unable to return.**

COVID-19 continues to bring a lot of uncertainty. If a student leaves during the break and decides to not return to campus or is unable to, their education shouldn’t end if they are still enrolled. Colleges and universities should allow for schedule changes as late as possible and offer as many courses online as possible. Each student should be given an equal opportunity to advance their education from wherever they find themselves.
6. Provide reliable and accessible avenues for youth to get up-to-date information and to receive support.

Students should be given contact information for key campus staff and program coaches if applicable. It is recommended that campuses or programs develop a warmline for students that is available 24/7 for students to call should they need to talk to someone or have an issue they are facing. It is critical that students not feel cut off from their professional support system during this time. Regular text or DM check-ins are ideal.