LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PAST YEAR: A PANEL ON SUPPORTING COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH EXPERIENCE IN FOSTER CARE & HOMELESSNESS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9, 12:00-1:15PM EASTERN
Housekeeping

HAVE A QUESTION?

This webinar is for you. Enter your questions in the questions pane and click ‘Send’.

RECORDING & HANDOUTS

An archive of this webinar and all materials will be posted here.

This PowerPoint is available in your “Handouts” panel.

If you’ve signed up for this webinar, you will receive a link to the recording in an email after the webinar is over.
HELLO! I’m Jillian Sitjar.
Senior Program Manager, Higher Education
jillian@schoolhouseconnection.org
About SchoolHouse Connection

SchoolHouse Connection works to overcome homelessness through education. We provide strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with schools, early childhood programs, institutions of higher education, service providers, families, and youth.

Website
Federal and state policy advocacy
Q&A from our inbox
Webinars and implementation tools
Youth leadership and scholarship
Unaccompanied Youth Homelessness During COVID-19

- K-12 liaisons and shelter providers are working remotely (K-12) and/or overwhelmed with need
- Difficulty with identification
- Youth lack devices, minutes, places to charge, and quiet, stable, safe places to learn
- Youth have either lost jobs, or are working in groceries, convenience stores
- Youth are being kicked out of “doubled up” situations, and cannot self-isolate
- Students aren’t considering postsecondary options and focusing on jobs/basic needs insecurity
New Report from the Hope Center

Taken from nearly 200K students from 202 colleges and universities

NEARLY 3 IN 5 experienced basic needs insecurity

FOOD INSECURITY AFFECTED
39% at two-year institutions
29% at four-year institutions

HOUSING INSECURITY AFFECTED
48%

HOMELESSNESS AFFECTED
14%

THE BLACK/WHITE GAP IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY WAS 16 percentage points

The Panel

Karie Ward - Executive Director, Fostering Success Michigan
Brett McNaught - Chief Executive Officer, Educate Tomorrow
Mark Delorey - Foundation Scholars Adviser, Western Michigan University
Peter Thompson - Senior Campus Coach, Seita Scholars Program, Western Michigan University
Wendy Jones - College Coach, Educate Tomorrow, Miami Dade College
Fostering Success Michigan

WHAT IS FSM?
A statewide collective impact initiative focused on increasing postsecondary access and success for youth with experience in foster care.

Focused on building a holistic network of support that insulates (strengthens protective factors and reduces risks) the education to career "pipeline" for students.

www.fosteringsuccessmichigan.com
COVID Has Created New Barriers.

- Postsecondary enrollment declined about 21% compared to last year.
- FAFSA numbers are down about 9% compared to last year; the decline is even steeper for lower-income students.
- We've seen more documentation and communication challenges during distance learning.

Source: https://formyourfuture.org/afsa-tracker/
Network Member Benefits

Purpose

To develop and support a statewide network of informed and empathetic education and child welfare professionals to support students from foster care and homeless settings through their journeys to post-secondary completion.

- Monthly network calls
- Targeted professional development
- Extensive and consistent networking opportunities
- Daily access to immediate technical support
- Alliance to Foster Transition x Education Research (AFTER)
- Small group support (College Connection)
- Updated resources and directory of campus-based and community-based liaisons
Western Michigan University Foundation Scholars Program

A merit-based program for students who are either:

• Homeless
• Undocumented
• A ward of the state
• Eligible for “free lunch”

Brief History

• Established in 2015
• Seventy students enrolled to date
• Retention – graduation rate 95%
• Most have graduated with honors
The Seita Scholars Program
Western Michigan University
Established 2008

- Provides support for youth who have experienced foster care through:
  - financial scholarship = 40% of the cost of attendance (supplemented by Pell, ETV, other scholarships)
  - Individual coaching focusing on skill development based on Casey Family Programs seven domains framework
  - a supportive community of peers
- 100 students currently; max of 160 students
- 195 students have graduated as of Spring 2021
- 46% graduation rate (approximately)
The 2020 Fall Cohort was the smallest in the history of the program (23 students: 14 first year; 9 transfers)
• First year student retention: 50% (lowest in program history)
• Overall 2020 Cohort student retention: 65% (lowest in program history)
• 2019 Fall Cohort second lowest in program history (68%)
• For comparison, 2018 cohort retention was 73%; 2019 cohort retention was 85%
• Proportionately, the number of students academically dismissed was consistent with past years; more students who were struggling (academic warning or probation) chose not to return
• Fall 2021 Cohort estimated at 15-20 students
Educate Tomorrow at Miami Dade College
A Student Services Program
Services Available to Students

- Individualized onboarding experience
- Academic support services
- Financial aid assistance
- Campus and community resource referrals
- Exclusive scholarships
- Career and academic coaching
- Workforce readiness and life skills development
- Leadership and internship opportunities
- Interactive campus activities
Program Successes

- Miami Dade College enrolls the highest number of foster care students in the state of Florida
- Over 450 students enrolled in AY 2019-20
- Over 400 graduates since 2013
- Educate Tomorrow Abroad awarded 2021 Senator Paul Simon Award for Campus Internationalization
- ET@MDC Changemaker Peer Mentor program funded by Aspen Institute and Service Year
- Executive Internship program helped to employ over 60 students
- Partnerships include local Community Based Care Lead Agency, school district, transitional housing/emergency shelters
- Over $200,000 awarded in scholarships
Panel Questions

Jillian Sitjar - SchoolHouse Connection
Karie Ward - Fostering Success Michigan
Brett McNaught - Educate Tomorrow
Mark Delorey & Peter Thompson - Western Michigan University
Wendy Jones - Miami Dade College
The FAFSA Simplification Act is Now Law!

- The “FAFSA Simplification Act” was included in Section 701 of Title VII, of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, H.R. 133.
- Signed into law on December 27, 2020.
- The changes are effective as of July 1, 2023. They apply to the 2023-2024 award year and subsequent years.
- The 2023-24 FAFSA will be available for completion on October 1, 2022. Until then, the current law/guidance are in place.
- It seems far off, but not too early to plan for implementation and determine what kind of guidance is needed.
- Many requirements come from current guidance, and should be implemented now.
The FAFSA Simplification Act

- Homeless and foster care status do not need to be redetermined every year.
- Determinations must be made as quickly as practicable.
- More officials and programs are authorized to determine unaccompanied homeless youth status.
- FAAs must accept homeless youth determinations from authorized parties.
- (Similar to existing guidance)
- FAAs must make determinations for homeless youth who cannot get determinations from other authorities.
- (Similar to existing guidance.)

https://schoolhouseconnection.org/new-fafsa-policies-for-homeless-and-foster-youth/
The Fostering Postsecondary Success for Foster and Homeless Youth Act

Hannah Jenuwine
Legislative Aide
Congressman Dan Kildee (MI-05)
Fostering Postsecondary Success for Foster and Homeless Youth Act

- A recognition program through the U.S. Department of Education (ED), to identify and highlight colleges and universities with tailored campus-based supports for foster and homeless youth, helping these students navigate the college-going process.

- A national Center for Fostering Postsecondary Success for Foster and Homeless Youth, to provide technical assistance to postsecondary institutions as they create and maintain campus-based supports and disseminate best practices across the country.
‘Foster and Homeless Youth Friendly’

- Mentorship programs
- Academic support services
- Housing assistance programs
- Life and workforce skills development programs
- Financial aid or scholarships
- Counseling or mental health services
- Case management services
- Other services the Secretary of Education determines appropriate
Selection Process and Information Sharing

- Annual, merit-based selection
- Criteria and procedures shall be issued by ED
  - In consultation with relevant organizations
  - With a comment period
- Institutional profiles on ED’s website
Center for Fostering Post-secondary Success for Foster and Homeless Youth

- **Duties**
  - Providing technical assistance
  - Collect, evaluate, and deliver information on best practices
  - Maintain resources to help foster and homeless youth navigate higher education

- **Cooperative Agreement**

- **Funding Authorization**
  - $2 million in first two years
  - $1 million each year after
Resources

SchoolHouse Connection Higher Education Page
- Gearing up for Summer and Fall - Tips for Homeless and Foster Youth
- Tip Sheets for Helping Homeless Youth Succeed
- Do’s and Don’ts in COVID

SchoolHouse Connection Financial Aid Page

SchoolHouse Connection Archived Webinars

Hope Center Report

---

DO's

- Prioritize students experiencing homelessness for housing and conduct strategic outreach for students to share their extenuating circumstances.
- Create contingency plans if campuses switch to remote learning and work with students to identify housing options. Consider sharing these plans with students to help curb their nerves regarding what could happen if the campus were to close.
- Offer housing refunds if campuses switch to remote learning.
- Provide COVID-19 testing/health kits for students free of charge.
- Individualized outreach to students experiencing homelessness.
- Create a survey asking students what they need to be successful.
- Offer flexible class attendance policies, include a basic needs paragraph and resources in all syllabi, and record/transcribe classes.
- Train faculty and academic advisors on the distinct need of students experiencing homelessness.

DON'Ts

- Pressure students to make a decision about housing options weeks prior to school.
- Wait until the last minute to notify students if they receive on-campus housing.
- Require students to quarantine without providing a room for students to do so.
- Require students to purchase and submit a negative COVID-19 test prior to arrival.
- Create FAFSA barriers like requiring additional documentation or notarized statements.
- Bombard students with lengthy and confusing emails.
- Enforce strict attendance policies that require students to have their webcam on.

---

Why It Matters

Students experiencing homelessness face many barriers in their pursuit of higher education. The pandemic has created even more barriers to their education, health, and safety. Institutions should review their policies and practices to ensure that they support students experiencing homelessness, and help rather than hinder their enrollment, retention, and success.
Contact Information

- Jillian Sitjar, Senior Higher Education Program Manager, SchoolHouse Connection, jillian@schoolhouseconnection.org
- Karie Ward – Executive Director, Fostering Success Michigan, karie@educatetomorrow.org
- Brett McNaught – Chief Executive Officer, Educate Tomorrow, mcnaught@educatetomorrow.org
- Mark Delorey – Foundation Scholars Adviser, Western Michigan University, mark.delorey@wmich.edu
- Peter Thompson – Western Michigan University, Senior Campus Coach, Seita Scholars Program, peter.h.thompson@wmich.edu
- Wendy Joseph, College Coach, Educate Tomorrow at Miami Dade College, wjoseph@mdc.edu