

December 2007

## **DRAFT: Passport to College Promise Scholarship Program Status Report (RCW 28B.117)**

### **Overview**

The 2007 Legislature created the Passport to College Promise Scholarship program to help former foster youth attend and succeed in college (House Bill 1131). The program provides youth with college preparation and important academic and financial support services, and also establishes a student scholarship and incentive grants for institutions that agree to provide these targeted services.

During the first year of the program, implementation efforts are focused on working with a planning committee to develop program policy and delivery systems. The planning committee includes representatives of The Department of Social and Health Services, the colleges and universities, and non-profit private agencies supporting foster youth. Funds will be disbursed for the first time in 2008-09. The six-year pilot program directs the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) to report to the Legislature on several occasions, the first being this status report due on January 15, 2008. This status report addresses four areas:

- Proposed scholarship and student support approaches;
- Estimates of the number of students who will receive services;
- Baseline information about typical enrollment and persistence patterns; and
- Recommendations for statutory changes needed to promote achievement of program objectives.

### **Program Background**

The Passport program's intent recognizes the many social and educational barriers that may deter foster youth from enrolling in and completing college. In response, the law establishes two purposes:

1. Encourage current and former foster care youth to prepare for, attend, and successfully complete higher education; and
2. Provide current and former foster care youth with the educational planning, information, institutional support and direct financial resources necessary for them to succeed in higher education.

In carrying out these purposes, the law puts in place a partnership of efforts among the HECB, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), all sectors of higher education, foster youth, caregivers, and private agencies supporting foster youth – such as Treehouse, Casey Family Programs, and the College Success Foundation (CSF). Each of these groups has been integral to developing the Passport initiatives which, by program design, begin with providing information about college to youth as young as 14 years of age.

## **1. Approaches to Student Support and Student Scholarship**

### **Pre-College Education Transition Planning, Program Promotion and Student Identification**

Student support begins while youth are in the foster care system. In order to reach them, several efforts are being launched.

Education Transition Planning. As directed by statute, DSHS has completed a solicitation process and selected two non-governmental entities with expertise in helping foster youth plan for college. The contractors will work with youth beginning at age 14, and at least every six months after, to provide information ranging from:

- taking the right high school courses and college tests;
- knowing how to apply for college admission and financial aid; and
- completing a sound transition plan before the youth leaves foster care.

Funding constraints limited DSHS to awarding only two contracts. Contracts were awarded to Treehouse, serving the King County area and to Youthnet, serving Snohomish through Whatcom counties. Working in these two areas may provide information about differences in serving youth in rural versus urban areas. But it is important to note that youth living in Eastern Washington and other parts of Western Washington will receive no services.

Improving Services to Youth through Better Information Exchanges. Information sharing is crucial for colleges to proactively construct and offer adequate financial aid packages and student support services. In a major step forward, DSHS and HECB attorneys have agreed in principle about how information can be shared about potentially eligible Passport youth, and what will constitute student consent. An agreement is being developed.

Program Promotion. Passport to College Promise Scholarship information is posted on the HECB and Foster Care to College (DSHS) Web sites, and is mentioned on several other sites. Passport funding will also support phase two development of the DSHS Web site ([independence.wa.gov](http://independence.wa.gov)).

A program brochure has been developed and is being distributed to potentially eligible youth, their caregivers, independent living providers, and college staff. The Passport to College Promise Scholarship is now part of a common application that consolidates applications for several forms of college financial aid for foster youth.

Youth who have emancipated, or are close to emancipation, and their caregivers are mailed quarterly information and consent forms. These forms permit DSHS to share eligibility information with the HECB.

Training. HECB staff has already conducted several Passport training sessions for the higher education and social services communities. The SBCTC convened a foster care resources panel including Passport information at its statewide fall Student Services Commission meeting. Efforts such as this will continue to take place throughout the coming year, making connections with, for example, the association of school counselors, caregiver groups and others.

### **College Student Support Services and Institutional Incentive Grants**

The statute creates a voluntary option for an institution to receive a performance-based payment linked to a Passport student's satisfactory progress, in exchange for an agreement to do two things:

1. Add a student self-disclosure question to their admissions applications or registration materials; and
2. Have a "viable plan" for addressing the unique needs of former foster youth.

Viable Plan. Development of a "viable plan" is the first step in encouraging institutions to provide targeted services known to be critical to youths' college success. Work by Casey Family Programs provided a framework for the planning committee's discussions about viable plans. This Seattle-based national foundation, established in 1966, is a leader in child welfare issues. The planning committee selected four elements to form the foundation of an institution's "viable plan":

- ***Designated campus support staff.*** Designate a staff person at the college who can knowledgeably guide youth toward resources for financial aid, academic guidance, personal issues and career counseling/advising.
- ***Full financial aid package.*** Agree to review student budgets on a case-by-case basis to recognize actual living expenses for current and former foster youth. And, tailor financial aid packages that, to the extent of student eligibility and available funds, utilize all resources. These include resources such as Foster Care to 21, Medicaid to 21, and the federal Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV), to meet the student's full need and to minimize reliance on loans.
- ***Assurance of support.*** Strive to create a lasting institutional commitment to serve current and former foster youth by designating a president, chancellor, vice-president or other position of leadership in the institution to advocate for the Passport program population.

- ***Work with social services educational providers.*** Connect and communicate with DSHS social services staff and its contracted education and transitional service providers to ensure that current and former foster youth receive a full-range of support services. And, to promote mutual education and training to improve college preparation messages to current foster youth and their caregivers.

Incentive Grants. Each participating institution that chooses to create a viable plan will enter into an agreement with the HECB. The institution determines how each support service will be implemented. Payment of the incentive grant, about \$500 per quarter, is made based on student performance measures such as enrollment and satisfactory progress.

## **Student Scholarships**

The purpose of the scholarship, when combined with other resources, is to fund the actual cost of education and limit the need for student borrowing. The annual scholarship can be as much as the cost of tuition and fees at the most expensive Washington public university, currently about \$6,900.

Institutions will:

- Identify youth that fit the Passport definition
- Review the student's budget on a case-by-case basis
- Package all available aid, including a Passport scholarship
- Pay the student and receive reimbursement from the HECB

Students entering an academic program with a high school diploma, GED, or passing an "ability to benefit" test will be routinely eligible. Recognizing that some youth may not meet these typical minimum standards, HECB staff and the planning committee is developing an exception process for schools that can document an educational pathway for students who are either taking prerequisites before they can enter programs, needing remedial coursework, or enrolling in a short program.

## **2. Estimates of the Number of Students Who Will Receive Services**

There is no easy way to estimate the number of students who will receive services. In estimating college enrollment, programs serving former foster youth have varying eligibility definitions, so estimates also vary. However, it is well known that these youth, facing the immediate need to transition to adulthood, are less likely than other youth to enter college directly from high school. Here are estimates based on three sources:

HECB. Using applicant information from need-based aid recipients, the HECB can derive an estimate of about 300 students aged 22 and younger that look similar to first-year Passport eligible students. Estimating the eventual full population of Passport eligible students using the same measure (but for all class levels), the HECB identified about 1,250 potentially eligible students. Of these, about 80 percent attended a community or technical college.

DSHS. In its most recent annual count of 600 emancipating youth, DSHS found that about 200 completed a high school diploma or GED. This represents the minimum number of fully eligible alumni of the foster care system that could immediately take advantage of these services. However, a finding from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study released by Casey Family Programs in 2005 predicted that about 43 percent of alumni, or approximately 260 students, would complete some education beyond high school.

College Success Foundation. Another indicator of “first year, first time” applicants comes from the College Success Foundation’s (CSF) privately funded Washington Governor’s Scholarship. This year, 53 student applications were received and 31 students were awarded scholarships. Based on its eligibility criteria of high school graduation and a minimum grade point average of 2.0, this scholarship may serve a slightly more prepared segment of the foster youth population.

### **3. Information on Enrollment and Persistence**

There is little information available on the college persistence rates of foster youth. And few of these patterns would include the influence of a Passport-like program.

HECB. Based on previous financial aid data about students who seem to mirror the Passport population, the HECB identified 238 students enrolled in the 2002-03 academic year. Looking at these students over a five-year period, their enrollment pattern (defined as enrollment in at least any one term per year) was:

- 238 students enrolled in the first year
- 117 students (49 percent) enrolled in the second year
- 63 students (26 percent) enrolled in the third year
- 44 students (18 percent) enrolled in the fourth year
- 28 students (12 percent) enrolled in the fifth year

College Success Foundation. The Washington Governor’s Scholarship has been in place for six years. Using the foundation’s definition of persistence, CSF staff found that almost 53 percent of the first (2002) cohort had either graduated or are still actively attending college. It is of note that this design is a resource-enriched program, including college mentors and other support activities.

Casey Family Programs. The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study found that of those enrolling in community colleges, about 25 percent received a credential within six years. It also found that just over 20 percent of youth completed a degree/certificate beyond high school.

### **4. Recommendations for Statutory Changes**

No statutory changes are needed at this time. However, some future areas for consideration may be:

- A. Including other youth in the Passport program, such as tribal foster youth who are not in the state's care.
- B. The federal government has plans to broaden its definition of foster youth for the purposes of federal student aid eligibility. This may require further study to determine any potential impact on Passport eligibility criteria.
- C. College mentors have been mentioned as a possible enhancement.

### **Next Steps**

- **January 2008.** The HECB will begin building the information systems for Passport.
- **March 2008.** The HECB has filed its notice of intent to file rules and will continue to work with the planning committee in upcoming months to establish this guidance.
- **July 2008.** Begin making payments to students and institutions.
- **September 2008.** The HECB and SBCTC will develop a method to perform an annual analysis to verify that institutions of higher education have awarded eligible Passport students all available aid for which they qualify.
- **December 2009 and December 2011.** The HECB and SBCTC will jointly submit reports on rates of student participation, persistence and progress.
- **December 2012.** The Washington State Institute for Public Policy will complete an evaluation of the program and submit its report to the Legislature.

**RESOLUTION NO. 07-25**

WHEREAS, The Legislature through ESB1131 authorized the Board to develop, with the assistance of an advisory committee, the Passport to College Promise program to help encourage former foster care youth to prepare for, attend, and successfully complete higher education; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature requested a status report on program decisions and implementation; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature requires a report on the program by January 15, 2008; and

WHEREAS, Board staff have developed a report that includes:

- Discussion of the proposed scholarship and student support service approaches;
- Estimates of the number of students who will receive such services;
- Baseline information on the extent to which former foster care youth who meet the eligibility criteria have enrolled and persisted in postsecondary education, and
- Concludes statutory changes will not be needed in order to implement the program in the 2008-2009 academic year;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Higher Education Coordinating Board adopts the staff report on the Passport to College Promise Scholarship program and authorizes staff to convey the report to the Legislature.

Adopted:

December 13, 2007

Attest:

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Bill Grinstein, Chair

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Betti Sheldon, Secretary

