

Unified School District #2

Post-Secondary Education Financial Assistant Program Practice Guide

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Post-Secondary Financial Assistance Program Practice Guide

Introduction The Department of Children and Families is committed to supporting youth in care to pursue post-secondary education (PSE) programs upon completion of high school or Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED). Youth who remain in care will benefit from furthering their education in support of them becoming successful adults. While youth are enrolled in an education or vocational training program, youth will be provided housing and living supports to ensure their safety and security. This Practice Guide should be cross referenced with the Transitional Youth to Success Practice Guide to fully service youth in care pursuing post-secondary education.

The Pre-Post-Secondary Plan Begin the post-secondary education planning process during the youth’s 8th grade year (or immediately upon coming into care for youth who enter care after 8th grade). This will enable the youth to select his/her high school courses and engage in various activities throughout the high school years so that s/he will be well positioned to pursue post high school plans when the time comes.

| Timing | Task | Responsibility |
|--|--|----------------|
| September 1 st – December 15 th of 8 th grade | Solicit current educational records for 8 th grade students and meet with school personnel to draft the DCF Pre-PSE plan. The plan is to be inclusive of the youth’s Student Success Plan and the Individualized Education Plan (if the youth is special education). | Social Worker |
| December 15 th of 8 th grade | Submit Pre-PSE Plans to the Regional Education Consultants and Specialists by December 15 th using the forms in appendix. Submitted plans must be reviewed and approved by the Social Work Supervisor (SWS) before submission to Education Consultants and Specialists. | Social Worker |

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| Timing | Task | Responsibility |
|--|---|---|
| By February 15 th of 8 th grade | The Regional Education Consultant will review and respond by February 15 th and enter recommendations in LINK. | Education Consultants & Specialists |
| Continual (every 6 months) | <p>Incorporate the Pre-PSE Plan (including the Plan Assessment and Recommendations) in the youth’s Case Plan.</p> <p>Update the Case Plan to include evidence of progress toward PSE goals as well as any modifications to the PSE Plan. Confer with the Education Consultant or Education Specialist as needed to maintain the Case Plan up to date.</p> | Social Worker/ Social Work Supervisor/ Program Supervisor |
| Ongoing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor youth’s academic performance via progress reports/report cards • Update Education Icon • Discuss in supervision • Document in Link and Case Plan • Consult with Regional Education Consultant as needed if youth encounters academic difficulties | Social Worker/ Social Work Supervisor |
| 15 th Birthday for youth who are receiving Special Education only | Share the Pre PSE Plan with the Planning and Placement Team as part of the Transition Planning Process. | Surrogate Parent & Social Worker |

Submitting Final Post-Secondary Education Plans

For any youth interested in pursuing post-secondary education, the DCF Adolescent Specialist shall submit a PSE plan to a Post-Secondary Education Consultant. Plans shall contain the following materials and be submitted no later than July 15th prior to the youth’s senior year of high school:

- SAT and ACT scores;
- official high school transcript;

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Submitting Final Post-Secondary Education Plans, continued

- for approved GED youth, all relevant testing and available scores;
- most recent Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan, if applicable;
- most recent psychological or achievement evaluation conducted;
- a youth-prepared summary with a proposed education plan that identifies the following:
 - type of program;
 - field of study or major;
 - career goal; and
- list of schools or vocational/employment training programs to which the youth intends to apply or has applied; and
- an approved Preliminary PSE plan.

Note: PSE Plans submitted by the due date will be reviewed and Social Workers will receive a response by January 15th of the youth's senior year.

Approval of PSE Plans

PSE plans shall be approved by a DCF PSE Consultant. If a youth participates in Community Housing Employment Enrichment Resources (CHEER), a PSE plan shall still be submitted. Also approved forms must be submitted to the CHEER Coordinator by the Social Worker.

If there is a disagreement regarding the PSE determination a case consult shall be held between the PSE Consultant, and the Area Office staff (DCF Social Worker, Supervisor and Program Supervisor) and youth.

If an agreement is not met the Superintendent of USD #2 or designee, in consultation with the Assistant Chief of Child Welfare, will make the decision shall be final.

Eligibility for PSE Funding

To be eligible for assistance for post-secondary education funding, the youth shall:

- be adjudicated abused, neglected or uncared for and committed to DCF by the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters at the time the child turns 18 years of age;
-

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Eligibility for PSE Funding, continued

- earned a high school diploma or GED;
- demonstrate adequate social skills and appropriate behavior, as assessed by the Adolescent Specialist and the case history;
- have signed a DCF-779, "Notice at Age of Majority and Agreement for Services Post Majority (SPM),"
- maintain compliance with DCF through an annual Post-Secondary Education Contract to be sent to PSE Division;
- sign a FERPA Release; and
- complete annual 632 Budget and send to Child Welfare Accounting (CWA) and send to PSE Division.

AND

- Begin in a full-time PSE program immediately after receiving a high school diploma or GED; and
- have an approved PSE plan;

OR

- Successfully complete CHEER; and
- have an approved PSE plan.

Youth who have an extended Individual Education Plan (IEP) or an English Language Learner graduate from high school after the age of 20 due to other extraordinary circumstances are still eligible for funding.

A youth and the youth's Adolescent Specialist shall work together to pursue an appropriate educational plan that meets the youth's educational needs and goals, including the youth's cultural and linguistic needs.

Youth shall be made aware of the funding limits for the post-secondary education program and encouraged to remember these funding limits when selecting a program.

Ineligibility for PSE Funding

DCF shall not pay PSE expenses for any youth who:

- was a Voluntary Services client placed in out-of-home care by DCF as of the youth's 18th birthday;
- is married;

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Ineligibility for PSE Funding,
continued

- is on active duty with any of the armed forces of the United States.

Note: For purposes of this policy, "active duty" is defined as a full-time occupation as part of a division of the armed forces of the United States.

Post-Secondary Educational Review and Annual Contract

The Adolescent Specialist shall monitor the youth's academic progress by:

- requesting a youth's transcript to determine the youth's passing of courses and credit attainment at the end of every semester/ trimester/quarterly; and
- discussing passing or failing grades.

The Adolescent Specialist shall document the following in the case record and Link:

- all discussions with the youth or others at the program the youth is attending;
- all educational consults;
- youth's major/minor;
- all course grades and GPA;
- earned credits and progress toward graduation;
- Free Application for Federal Youth Aid (FAFSA) completion and financial aid awards; and
- annual Post- Secondary Education contracts.

If concerns arise regarding the academic progress in a post-secondary education or employment training program based either on the periodic review or from other sources, the Adolescent Specialist shall request a PSE consultation immediately to determine if additional supports are necessary.

All relevant forms shall be filed in the Uniform Case Record.

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**Voluntary
Community
Service or
Military
Enlistment**

Only youth who have been accepted into and deferred their matriculation at an accredited college or university are eligible to participate in a formally recognized volunteer community service program (i.e., Habitat for Humanity, religious missionary, Americorps) for up to one year immediately following high school graduation.

Youth interested in participating in a volunteer program shall be included in the PSE Plan and approved by PSE staff.

Youth shall be eligible for subsidies available under the CHEER policy but shall be exempt from the reduction formula during the volunteer year as long as they are in compliance with the Voluntary Community Service Program. If the volunteer program provides any funding for living expenses, this funding shall be subtracted from allowable line items.

If a youth successfully completes a volunteer experience, the youth may continue with DCF and pursue the deferred PSE program as long as eligibility for PSE is maintained.

Youth who enlist in active-duty military service shall remain eligible for services until completion of "boot camp". Youth who enlist in military reserves or National Guard are eligible for continued services.

**Student
Disability
Resource
Services on
Campus**

The DCF Social Worker shall assist the youth in connecting with the Student Disability Center to provide any documentation such as the Summary of Performance, most recent psychological evaluations or new or pre-existing medical conditions that qualifies the youth for accommodations due to a medical, mental, or educational disability. The Social Worker shall maintain contact with the Student Disability Center to ensure youth is accessing the services, academic progress is being documented, and youth eligibility for services is discontinued for any reason.

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Youth Who Need Remedial Courses

Funding can be provided by DCF for youth who enroll in remedial courses, summer bridge programs, and other academic support programs through-out the year.

Youth who need additional academic supports after the first school year should be reviewed and discussed with PSE Consultant.

Transitioning to DMHAS

Youth who have been accepted into a Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) program shall be eligible for funding to pursue post-secondary education. However, these youth, like youth with physical diagnoses, shall factor their treatment needs into their PSE plans. DCF staff shall work with DMHAS to address and prioritize each youth's treatment needs while pursuing post-secondary education or employment programs.

Youth who are eligible for services through DMHAS may receive educational funding through DCF if they meet requirements set forth in this policy. Youth must be willing to comply and remain in compliance with treatment recommendations to receive post-secondary education funding from DCF.

PSE Part-Time Attendance Criteria

A youth who otherwise meets the PSE program eligibility requirements, and who demonstrates a need, may request permission each semester from the DCF SW and SWS in consultation with the PSE Consultant to attend courses on a part-time basis.

Factors that shall be considered when determining whether part-time attendance is appropriate include, but are not limited to, whether the youth:

- presents with or develops a medical or mental health condition supported by a doctor or clinician;
 - received accommodations and modifications through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) when identified as a student in need of specialized education instruction and related services prior to completing high school; or
 - is an English Language Arts (ELA) student who need additional time to acclimate to language and culture.
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PSE Part-Time Attendance Criteria, continued

Note: Part-time status is considered 6 – 11 credit hours and full-time credit is 12-18+ credit hours.

Emergency Medical Leave of Absence

Youth requiring an emergency medical leave of absence from their post-secondary education program should provide medical documentation from their primary care physician or clinician to their DCF Social Worker to support the leave. The DCF Social Worker shall then request approval from the DCF Social Work Supervisor and Program Supervisor in collaboration with the PSE Consultant. The medical leave must be approved on a semester by semester/quarterly basis. A medical leave shall not exceed a full school year.

Pregnant and Parenting Youth While in PSE

Youth who become pregnant while in PSE are expected to stay enrolled on a full-time basis unless otherwise exempt from duty by a medical provider.

Youth can take a leave of absence during the semester in which the delivery occurs. The expectation will be for the youth to return immediately in the following semester.

PSE Funding Requirements

In order to qualify for Post-Secondary Education (PSE) funding from DCF, a youth shall:

- have a PSE plan (reviewed and filed in the Education section of the Uniform Case Record and Link) that has been reviewed and approved by a PSE Consultant;
 - demonstrate the ability and strong desire to pursue post-secondary education;
 - if age 18 or over, voluntarily agree to continue to receive services from DCF through signing the DCF 779;
 - complete the U.S. Department of FAFSA no later than 90 days prior to the expected award of a high school diploma or GED and annually thereafter;
 - complete, if required by the PSE program, the institution specific financial aid application;
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PSE Funding Requirements, continued

- apply, or compete, for appropriate grants and scholarships to offset costs; and
- complete DCF 632, have approved through chain of command, and send a copy to CWA via DCFCWAinvoices@ct.gov.

Note: PSE Consultants are available for assistance with developing DCF 632 budget.

Financial assistance shall be based on the annual DCF-632 budget. The DCF-632 budget shall be developed by the DCF SW based on the youth providing the following documentation:

- proof of enrollment or registration at an accredited institution;
- the FAFSA submission receipt;
- any institution-specific application(s) for financial aid;
- a copy of the financial aid award letter or Student Award Report (SAR);
- copies of all grant and scholarship applications and corresponding award determination letters; and
- itemized invoice/bill.

Note: The DCF Social Worker who has a youth attending a post-secondary education institution outside of the state, shall contact the DCF Health Advocate to coordinate medical coverage and identify providers in that state. If a medical provider or insurance cannot be secured in the state, then DCF shall pay for school's medical insurance as part of the annual DCF 632 budget.

Full-Time/ Part-Time

Youth are able to receive DCF support and services while enrolled on a full-time (12-18 credits) or part-time (6-11 credits) basis while maintaining a GPA of 2.0 per semester. It is recommended that youth earn 24-30 credits during the academic year to graduate in 4-6 years.

Note: The academic school year is from September to May (this includes trimester and quarter grading systems). Summer and winter sessions can be utilized to allow for youth to make up or get ahead in credits. DCF can make funding available for the tuition cost.

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Continuing Education Options

A youth who originally pursued a vocational education program after having completed high school or obtained a GED and successfully completes such a program, shall be eligible for continued PSE funding if he or she elects to enroll in a subsequent education program.

A youth who enrolls in a degree-awarding program which results in an associate degree may enroll in a bachelor's degree program. Any such program shall be determined to be a continuation of the program the youth has completed. Youth who complete a bachelor's degree may request financial assistance for additional education opportunities (i.e., Real estate certification or any other professional license/certification).

DCF shall not provide financial support for advanced degree programs and related expenses (e.g., master's degree).

Educational Compliance Meeting

If a youth does not maintain good academic standing or compliance with program expectations, an educational compliance meeting shall be held with the youth, the PSE Consultant and the Area Office staff (DCF Social Worker, Supervisor and/or Program Supervisor).

If appropriate, the youth may be given the opportunity to withdraw from the current program or track and select and enroll in a different educational program or CHEER.

A service agreement shall be developed with the youth with specific guidance for a youth to re-engage and comply with program expectations.

If the youth does not succeed in the second education program, the youth will need permission to attend a subsequent education program or CHEER from the DCF SW/SWS and Program Supervisors in consultation with the PSE Consultant.

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PSE Funding Limits

DCF shall not provide funding that exceeds the maximum cost of attendance (tuition, fees, books) of an undergraduate, in-state, full-time student at Central Connecticut State University for the fiscal year. Youth who choose to attend programs or colleges that exceed the DCF funding limit are solely responsible for all additional funding costs.

The annual DCF 632 budget shall reflect youth signatures for their understanding. Each year, the PSE Team will release the current year academic funding limits.

Education Costs of attendance shall include:

- tuition and fees; and
- books, equipment, supplies and materials required of all youth in the same course of study.

Youth who have exceeded the funding amount may, within available appropriations, be eligible for the following with the Program Supervisor approval in collaboration with the PSE Consultant:

- a computer;
- accommodations and special equipment related to a youth's disability that are not funded by another source;
- tutoring; and/or
- two round-trip transportation expenses to be used to visit caregivers during educational breaks if attending an out-of-state institution.

A youth who is residing in a congregate care setting, SWEPT or a Therapeutic Foster Care setting/home are only eligible for the tuition, fees and books and supplies portion of the costs of attendance. The housing costs are paid to the housing provider above and beyond the allotment.

Youth who have not exceeded the tuition funding limit for that academic year and wish to take additional courses during the winter or summer sessions may do so.

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**PSE
Funding
Limits,
continued**

Youth who are participating in a summer internship or bridge program where housing, stipends or living expenses are provided are only eligible for expenses not otherwise covered. These expenses should not exceed the Community Housing Assistance Program (CHAP) rent or stipend line-item amounts.

Youth in dorms, off campus apartments, and CHAP Boarding arrangements are also eligible for case management services.

Note: To avoid youth taking out unnecessary loans, the DCF Social Worker shall confirm the full cost of attendance, books and fees and determine if the Federal Financial Award will cover the full amount. If there is an unmet need the youth will be encouraged to seek scholarships and grants and write a letter to the Financial Aid Office. The DCF Social Worker can also request for ETV funds.

**PSE
Subsidies
During
Academic
Breaks**

The periods of the annual youth budget are September-December and February-May (8 months). A youth is eligible for an additional subsidy (based on CHAP funding amounts) for housing and other living expenses from DCF during academic breaks such as Thanksgiving, Spring and Winter breaks and the summer months (June, July, August).

This subsidy is an additional stipend which shall be prorated based upon the number of days the youth is on an academic break and requires housing and living expenses. The daily prorated amount is 1/30th of the total monthly funding limit.

(See "Adolescent Services Practice Guide" for subsidy amounts.)

**Education
Training
Vouchers**

Education Training Vouchers (ETV) are federal funds provided to the Department specifically to serve youth who are post majority and in an accredited Post-Secondary Education program. Eligible youth are able to access funds per federal guidance. The Department makes these funds available via an application process sent directly to the Transitional Supports and Success (TSS) Division.

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Funding for Extraordinary Learning Opportunities

Youth can participate in school sponsored enrichment and study abroad programs where housing, stipends or living expenses are provided, but are only eligible for expenses not otherwise covered. These expenses should not exceed the CHAP rent or stipend line-item amounts.

Funding can be made available via their annual budget or other funding resources through the Department.

Navigating PSE Payments

Making payments on behalf of youth to a PSE institution is due prior to the start of every semester/quarter/trimester. Funding payments for books and supplies should be predetermined by the DCF 632 and should be provided to youth or PSE institution prior to the start of the semester/trimester/quarter. Payment request made in Link shall include the academic term date.

In order to maximize the State's IV-E reimbursement, the following must be completed:

- Youth must sign the DCF - 779 by their 18th birthday. If youth re-enters DCF care after 18 years, a new 779 must be signed.
- Social Worker must file a motion for Determination and a Permanency Plan. This must be filed in court within 120 days of signing the 779. Ongoing Permanency Plans must be filed in court until the youth reaches age 21. A brief discharge summary must be submitted to court when youth discharges from care.
- Social Worker must update the youth's placement in LINK. Placement information must be kept updated while youth is in care.
- Social Worker must update the youth's education information in LINK. The "Education Sites" tab must be kept up to date. If youth has completed secondary-education then the "last grade completed" must always be "12th grade". If youth is participating in CHEER and is involved with an employment training, this information must also be included.

Lastly, the youth's transition plan must be kept updated.

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Transition After PSE Program

For youth who have completed a college degree or vocational training program, a one- time transitional period may be provided to youth launching from the Department for up to six months and shall begin immediately following graduation.

Applications for an extension should be submitted using form DCF-781. Applications should be submitted to the DCF Commissioner's Office two months prior to anticipated launch date. The decision of the Commissioner will be communicated to the region and area office from which the application originated.

Note: Please refer to the Transition Planning and Launching from DCF Care in Adolescent and Transitional Age Supports policy and Practice Guide.

Discontinuation of Services and Transitioning from Care

Youth who have not been successful and/or compliant with post-secondary education programs and CHEER and are at risk of losing DCF benefits shall be given written notice through the DCF-800, "Notice of Proposed Denial, Suspension, Reduction, or Discontinuation of DCF Benefits."

The DCF-800 shall be issued to the youth as soon as the youth is deemed to be out of compliance by the Adolescent Specialist in collaboration with the PSE Consultant. The youth may request a Fair Hearing. If requested within ten days, DCF shall continue to provide services until a Final Decision is made by the Fair Hearing Officer.

Information on the hearings process can be found in the DCF Fair Hearings Policy, Chapter 6-5.
