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## California Foster Youth Missing Out on Financial Aid

Berkeley, CA – In California and nationally, very few former foster youth make it to or through college, and cost is a major obstacle. A new report shows that despite federal and state programs and policies intended to help them afford college, surprisingly few California foster youth who apply for student aid receive all the grants they should.

Together, federal Pell Grants, state Cal Grants, and jointly funded Chafee Grants can add up to almost \$12,000 for a foster youth at a California community college, \$16,000 at a California State University, and more than \$20,000 at a University of California campus. Of identifiable California foster youth who filled out a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) in 2008-09, 84 percent were eligible for a Pell Grant, 17 percent were offered a Cal Grant, and just nine percent received a Chafee Grant, which is specifically for foster youth. Only four percent of these very low-income students received all three grants.

The report, [\*Hopes & Hurdles: California Foster Youth and College Financial Aid\*](#), examines the reasons behind this trend, from a lack of awareness about financial aid options to barriers within the aid programs themselves that pose particular challenges for foster youth. “The financial aid system isn’t working for foster youth,” said Debbie Cochrane, the report’s lead author and program director at the Institute for College Access & Success. “These students have beaten the odds to go to college, but not being able to get the grants they need puts their future in jeopardy.”

Early deadlines and GPA requirements make it harder for foster youth to get Cal Grants. Due to instability in their home and academic lives, these students are less likely to make college plans and apply for financial aid by the program’s March 2 deadline. In addition, many have attended multiple high schools, which must quickly cooperate to calculate a student’s GPA. Funding for Chafee Grants is so limited that fewer than half of the eligible applicants receive one. Also, Chafee Grants often arrive so late in the semester that students may have already fallen behind in classes or dropped out because they could not afford to buy books or pay their rent.

“Life in the child welfare system creates serious hurdles for foster youth who want to go to college, and problems with the way essential programs like Cal Grants and Chafee Grants operate can put higher education even farther out of reach,” said Cochrane.

The report recommends guaranteeing Cal Grants for foster youth; increasing cooperation between counties, the California Department of Social Services, and the California Student Aid Commission; extending foster care supports to age 21; and improving the funding and administration of Chafee Grants.

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*An independent, nonprofit organization, the Institute for College Access & Success works to make higher education more available and affordable for people of all backgrounds. For more about our programs and initiatives, including the Project on Student Debt, see <http://ticas.org>*