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**Introduction**

Students and their families come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences related to ethnicities, race, country of origin, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and other identities. This resource guide is designed to assist college access professionals to gain a better understanding of special or diverse populations, learn how to identify these students in your school, learn how to build support systems, explore the college application and financial aid processes, and learn ways to help students successfully transition into education after high school. This guide is not intended as legal advice and has been compiled from a variety of sources.

For the purposes of this primer, the diverse populations that will be covered include first-generation students, students experiencing homelessness, foster youth, LGBTQ youth, students with disabilities, and undocumented students.

GEAR UP provides services to diverse populations. Note: This population is sometimes referred to as special populations in reference to the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Perkins IV). These support services aim to increase academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education while increasing high school graduation and postsecondary participation rates, and increasing students' and families' knowledge of postsecondary options, preparation, and finances.

GEAR UP program service areas include:

- Tutoring & Homework Assistance.
- Comprehensive Mentoring.
- Financial Aid Counseling/Advising.
- Counseling/Advising/Academic Planning/Career Counseling.
- College Visit/College Student Shadowing.
- Educational Field Trips.
- Job Site Visit/Job Shadowing.
- Student Workshops.
- Tests/Test Preparation.
- Summer Programs.
- Student Orientation.
- Family Events.

**Special population students:** As defined by Perkins IV are individuals with disabilities, individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including foster children, individuals preparing for nontraditional training and employment, single parents, including single, pregnant women, and individuals with other barriers to educational achievement, including individuals with limited English proficiency.

**College:** Any type of education or training after high school. There are many options for students after high school including apprenticeships, military, on-the-job training programs, community college certificates, 2-year degrees, & 4-year degrees. The term college includes all of these things.
Understanding & Identification of Unique Needs

Identifying and understanding the unique needs of students from such diverse backgrounds can be challenging in a school environment. Their circumstances may have impeded, or could impact future, academic progress. Often, a student’s circumstances outside of school can result in behavioral challenges. These students may also be reluctant to share their personal story or circumstances with school personnel.

Sometimes it can be difficult to identify the students in your school or program who belong to special populations. If you do not have a system in place, you can build a network of colleagues within and outside of the school environment and educate them on what to look for to help ensure that students get the support that they need.

**Potential Indicators**
- Chronic tardiness/attendance problems.
- High mobility.
- Food insecurity.
- Hygiene issues.
- Signs of physical abuse.
- Chronic exhaustion.
- Signs of homelessness (moving from place to place, carrying all belongings).

**Recommended Practice: Identification**

Does your school have any formal or informal processes for identifying and referring special population students? If yes, is it inclusive of the populations that you serve? Could it be improved? Is it a safe, ethical, and confidential manner that helps you refer students to appropriate supports?

Are the school staff aware of this process? If not, can you provide training? If not, can you develop one that you can use to identify special population students? If so, consider the following: What information might be readily available to you that can help identify students, such as school records, information in student information system, IEPs, or registration forms? How might you gather information directly from students and their families/guardians, as well as how to let students and their families know that it is safe to communicate this type of information?

**Guiding Identification Questions**
- What brings you to our school (or organization)?
- Are there any special circumstances that we should be aware of? We have a number of supports that we want to make sure all our families know how to access.
- Are you currently in transition between living situations?
- Is there anything I can do to help you transition into our school (or community)?
- Are there any services that you received at your prior school that we should be aware of?
- Consider how you might develop a confidential record keeping system for your own personal use in assisting students.
- Consider appropriate school/district approval process for finalizing a referral process to ensure compliance with student privacy and other laws/regulations.
Build a Support System
Connect to community resources to better support the needs of your students. Discuss the identification and unique needs and support of your students and their families with your colleagues. Build awareness of the ways to create a safe and supportive environment for students from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Create a plan to inform the community of your services. Examples include family nights, fact sheets, bulletin boards, special events, banners, website, newsletters, brochures, and/or a community guide.

An accessible school or community a guide to community resources for students and their families is a great way to connect population students and families to the resources in your local community. If you have a guide, be sure to review to see if it needs to be updated or improved to better serve special population students. If you do not have a guide, you can get started by contacting your school social worker, the United Way, DSHS, faith-based organizations, community centers, or a local community foundation to determine if your community has a resource guide available.

Your school should strive to create a safe and supportive environment for students. You may review data from a school climate survey to assess how safe and supportive your school is for special population students. If you do not have access to school climate data, you may be able to glean information from your latest Healthy Youth Survey results at https://www.askhys.net.

Referral Network Questions
- What are the special populations of unique needs within my school?
- Where are my students?
- Who else serves similar populations? Common goals?
- How do we currently help these students develop self-advocacy skills and resilience? How can we improve?
- What strategies do we have in place to help students from diverse backgrounds overcome challenges that may impede their academic progress? Are they sufficient?
- Does everyone in the referral network have an awareness of state or local policies and procedures regarding credit recovery, alternative graduation options, and appeals processes for graduation?
- What are their challenges?
- How do we identify and refer students? To whom?
- How can we communicate with sensitivity?
- What resources available in my community to support populations of students with unique needs and circumstances? How do we advertise/attract students and families?

Referral Networks
Who are your referral partners? Networks could include personnel at your school or within your community or organization who have knowledge of (and are trusted by) students with unique needs and circumstances.
Network could include:
- Parent/guardian.
- Teachers, administrators.
- School counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, school nurses.
- Community mental health counselors and social workers.
- McKinney-Vento liaison.
- Foster care liaison.
- Attendance/enrollment staff.
- Coaches.
- Bus drivers.
- Administrative assistants.
- Cafeteria staff.
- Custodial staff.
- School safety officers.
- Extracurricular/after school activity staff.
- Volunteers (family or community).
- Special education case managers.
- Vocational rehabilitation counselors.
- Local immigration support counselors.
- Community agencies.
- Community cultural organizations.
- Youth serving shelters.
FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

About
First-generation (or “first-gen”) students face substantial challenges around college access, success, and completion. Their parents/families may not know how to prepare the student for college or for what to expect once enrolled. This lack of college knowledge and navigation can negatively affect even well academically prepared students.

First-gen students often experience additional challenges, which puts them at a greater risk for not persisting. For example, students may lack support and or understanding from family and friends, be low-income, and be struggling to balance work, classes, and personal obligations. Many first-gen students lack resources in a variety of areas.

First-generation: A first-generation college student is defined as someone whose parent(s) or guardian(s) did not attend college or graduate without a degree.

Strategies for Working with First-Gen Students

College access professionals and school counselors can help support and guide these students. They can educate students about college and financial aid options, procedures, and timelines, as well as, self-advocacy skills, growth mindset, and available resources. Examples of tasks include:

- **Identify students and provide information about GEAR UP services** to teachers, counselors, and other school staff.
- Provide information about GEAR UP opportunities to special population students and their families.
- **Coordinate with teachers to promote recruitment of students** in GEAR UP activities.
- Encourage first-gen students to apply to more than one school.
- Help students determine what school is a good fit.
- Arrange for fee waivers.
- Assist with financial aid and scholarship applications.
- Demystify college and its lingo.
- Talk about imposter syndrome.
- Encourage students to identify, to take advantage of resources, and to ask questions.
- **Facilitate in-service training for school personnel working with students** within special populations to improve their abilities and techniques in meeting the special needs of these students.

College access professionals can inform students of the TRiO program and educate students on how to find and apply to the program. TRiO Student Support Services is a college program targets first-gen, low-income students, and or those with disabilities. TRiO offers mentoring, career counseling, and can help students at two-year colleges then transfer to four-year schools.
STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

About
Homelessness is found in every community and is increasing. More than 40,000 students in Washington are classified as homeless. This amount has doubled in past ten years.

Homeless: According to the McKinney-Vento Act, a child or youth who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence is considered homeless. In addition to the fixed, regular, and adequate wording, which is the definition’s guiding phrase, the definition includes examples of living arrangements that would not be considered fixed, regular, and adequate and, therefore, would meet the definition of homeless.

Unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) are youth whose living arrangement meets the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless and who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

Single Point of Contact (SPOC): The SPOC is designed to be an ally- a safe and supportive college administrator who is committed to helping unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) successfully navigate the college-going process. They are ideally knowledgeable of federal guidance, and state laws impacting higher education access and success for unaccompanied homeless youth. Having an ally allows UHY to have support finding campus and community resources and reduces the number of times student have to repeat, or relive, situations that led to them becoming homeless.

Youth become homeless, whether with their family or on their own, for a variety of reasons. Students who are experiencing homelessness face barriers such as meeting enrollment requirements (school records, immunizations, proof of residence and guardianship) and may lack of transportation, school supplies, and clothing. They may experience poor health, fatigue, hunger, prejudice and misunderstanding. They tend to have a higher rate of absenteeism and school mobility, which can have a negative impact on academic achievement and increase their odds of dropping out.

Strategies for Working with Youth Experiencing Homelessness

College access professionals can provide help in the college search and application process. Examples of tasks include:

- **Find out who your school’s homeless liaison is.**
- **Learn how homeless students are identified** and what educational barriers they are facing.
- **Determine if the student has ever been in foster care after age 13.** If yes, their college classes will likely be paid for at most Washington colleges.
- **Support study skills.** Connect student with tutoring and mentoring programs.
- **Assist with obtaining fee waivers** for such things as Advanced Placement (AP) exams, college entrance exams such as the ACT and SAT, and college applications.
- **Assist with college and career exploration.** Discuss additional considerations that students may need to take into account when exploring college options such as housing options, including during school breaks; employment options, if needed; transportation options, if needed; and availability of no-cost tutoring, and academic and other student supports.
• **Encourage them to participate in campus visits** hosted by their school.

• **Assist students in completing the FAFSA or WASFA** and finding scholarships for school. They may have difficulty completing financial aid without assistance; this is particularly true for UHY, who may be unable to access information on their parents’ income and assets or get a parent signature.

• **Provide information on specific opportunities** for homeless students. If the student has been in foster care, there are additional scholarships that they may qualify for.

• **Assist them in securing sufficient financial resources** to cover college expenses. Ensuring that a student has sufficient aid, including through federal and state sources, private scholarships, and the prudent use of loans, will reduce their work burden.

• **Help students learn how to navigate challenges and self-advocate.** For example, if a student gets a bill for a housing deposit before their aid is dispersed, encourage them to ask if fees can be waived, deferred, or included in their financial aid application.

• **Assist students in understanding award letters and next steps.**

• **Provide information about various supports that may be available** to them, for example support service programs like TRiO.

• **Introduce them to the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) or an adult ally** on the campus.

• **Encourage them to explore other areas of assistance** that may be on or off campus such as food banks, food stamps, etc.

• **Help students make a plan** for transportation and housing.

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**College Exploration & Fit for Independent Youth**

The needs of students experiencing foster care and homelessness often overlap; moreover, students who identify as LGBTQ+ disproportionality experience both the foster care system and homelessness at higher rates than their peers do. Therefore, a number of overlapping strategies and resources will apply to students in these circumstances.

College access professionals can help students do research and determine what school is a good fit. For example, help students think through their needs and make a transition plan.

• Help students find out where on campus they can find a mentor or advocate.

• Find out if there any foster peer groups at preferred colleges.

• Do they provide year-round housing including during winter breaks? Or do they provide gap housing available during school breaks?

• Can a student have housing fees waived, deferred, or included in my financial aid package?

• Do they offer LGBTQ+-safe housing options (if applicable)?

• Does the preferred college offer an orientation? Is there anything that school can do to help with the cost of transportation?

• Does the campus offer a summer transition program? Is there help with transportation?

• Is there free or cheap transportation available in that town or on that campus?

• How does a student access tutoring and academic support services?

• Is there a Passport Navigator here?
• Where does a student go to register for disability services (if applicable)? What documentation is required?
• How can I apply to be a part of a TRiO SSS program, if available?
• Are their food or clothing banks on campus or nearby?

**Financial Aid for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth**

Students should file a financial aid application during their senior year and every year they attend college. All federal financial aid programs, most programs offered by the State of Washington, and many programs offered by colleges require that a student completes and submits the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). If they do not have a Social Security Number or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, you should complete the WASFA (Washington Application for State Financial Aid) instead of the FAFSA. Students should complete the FAFSA or WASFA as close to October 1st as possible because financial aid dollars are limited and often are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

A student who is unaccompanied, at risk of homelessness, and self-supporting also qualifies as an independent student on their financial aid application. If they answer “yes” to the general homelessness question on the FAFSA or WASFA, they will be asked whether they have received a homeless youth determination. If they indicate that they have, the financial aid administrator at the college they plan to attend may request the determination to prove that they are “unaccompanied” and homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Students should contact one of the following individuals to ask if they can provide you with a homeless youth determination:

• The high school or school district homeless liaison.
• The director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
• The director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program.

At risk of homelessness and self-supporting are defined as follows:

• **At risk of homelessness:** When a student’s housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate, for example, a student who is being evicted and has been unable to find fixed, regular, and adequate housing.

• **Self-supporting:** When a student pays for his own living expenses, including fixed, regular, and adequate housing.

If the student answers “yes” to the general homelessness question on the financial aid application but have not received a homeless youth determination, they can still submit their application. Once they submit the application, the student must request a homeless youth determination from the financial aid administrator at the college they plan to attend. While it is not required, to help the financial aid administrator make a homeless youth determination, the student may want to submit documentation from any of the following:

• Local school district personnel.
• State homeless education coordinators.
• The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE).
• Third parties such as private or publicly funded homeless shelters and service providers.
• Financial aid administrators from colleges other than the school to which you are presenting the documentation.
• Staff from college access programs such as TRiO (e.g., Talent Search or Upward Bound) or GEAR UP.
• College or high school counselors.
• Mental health professionals, social workers, mentors, doctors, or clergy.

If the student does not have any written documentation of their homelessness status, the financial aid office must still review the request for a homeless youth determination and make a determination as to whether the student qualifies as a homeless youth. The financial aid office’s determination may be based on other information available to them through resources like the state or local government, community organizations, or services provided by the college.

In Washington State, the FAFSA-Independent Student Verification form can be used for homeless youth determination. The school’s homeless liaison can complete this form, which is found on the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s website: www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/Resources.aspx.

Confirm that Financial Aid Office received the FAFSA and inquire if other paperwork or a subsequent determination by your financial aid administrator is needed.

Resources
• SchoolHouse Connections
  https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/
• National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)
  http://naehcy.org/higher-education/
YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

About
In Washington State, over 10,000 school age students live in foster care. Research shows that 70% of youth who are aging out of foster care plan to attend college — but more than half do not graduate high school and only between 3% and 11% complete a bachelor's degree.

Foster youth are also disproportionally Native American, African American, or multiracial and two and a half times more likely to participate in special education programs compared to their peers. Youth in care have a much higher rate of school mobility.

If a student has been in foster care at any time after age 13, money and resources are available to help them go to college - including vocational training, 2-, and 4-year options - for most Washington State schools. These students should complete the FAFSA as an independent student. They do not need to include parental information (even if adopted after age 13). They are also auto-enrolled in the College Bound Scholarship program.

Foster youth: A youth who has been removed from the custody of their parent(s) or guardian(s) by the juvenile court, and placed in a group home or foster home.

Strategies for Working with Foster Youth

College access professionals and school counselors can help support and guide these students. They can educate students about college and financial aid options, procedures, and timelines, as well as, self-advocacy skills, growth mindset, and available resources. Examples of tasks include:

- Encourage students to take advantage and participate in college prep programs, such as SETuP and GEAR UP.
- Explore support services.
- Ask if the student has considered Extended Foster Care, Independent Living, or Medicaid to 26.
- Review the state and federal financial aid programs available.
- Assist with financial aid application.
- Assist with scholarship searches and application.
- Help student enroll in TRiO or other support programs.

College Preparation Programs

Supplemental Education Transition Planning Program (SETuP): SETuP can provide information to students and their foster family about post-high school education and training opportunities. For more information, visit http://independence.wa.gov/programs/setup. Regional SETuP providers may be able to help prepare your students for college by offering:

- Financial aid application assistance.
- College application coaching and assistance.
- Pre-college testing guidance based on educational goals.
- Connecting you to other support services.
Support Services

**Extended Foster Care Program**: This program provides an opportunity for foster youth at age 18 to voluntarily agree to continue receiving foster care services, including placement services, while they complete a high school or post-high school academic or vocational program, or participate in a program or activity designed to promote employment. For more information, visit www.independence.wa.gov.

**First-Year Supportive Programming**: When helping students choose a college, investigate their Equal Opportunity Programs (EOPs), often labeled as First-Year Experience Programs, Summer Bridge Programs, Freshman Seminars, etc. These programs support youth in making a successful the transition to college.

**Foster Care Alumni Services**: Some schools offer services for foster care youth such as housing during holiday breaks. Help foster youth find out if the college they want to attend offers services for former foster youth.

**Housing**: Some colleges have priority housing and year round options. The Independent Youth Housing Program is available in certain parts of the state. It provides rental assistance and case management services to eligible youth who have aged out of the foster care system. This program may be able to help your students in foster care find a safe, affordable place to live and help them become independent. Learn more about eligibility and its services at http://independence.wa.gov/programs/independent-youth-housing-program/

**Independent Living Program (ILP)**: This program can provide foster youth with basic life skills and support. It is designed to enhance their ability to live independently by increasing their skills, knowledge and ability in the following areas:

- Educational stability, advocacy and achievement
- Post high school education preparation
- Income maintenance
- Employment/vocational readiness
- Housing
- Daily living skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Self-advocacy
- Bridging of healthy/supportive relationships

ILP is voluntary and is open to all youth that meet eligibility. Youth can be anywhere on the spectrum of transitioning to adulthood. Services are provided through local community based agencies and federally recognized Tribes throughout Washington. For more information, email ILSKIDS@dshs.wa.gov, contact your local DCFS office, or visit http://independence.wa.gov/programs/independent-living-program

**Medicaid to 26**: Youth may be eligible for continued foster care benefits even if there are no longer in foster care or other eligible out-of-home placement. To find out if they are eligible, have them call 1-800-562-3022 extension 15480.

**TRiO Student Support Services Program (TRiO SSS)**: This program is offered at many community colleges and four-year schools. If a student is low-income, first-generation, foster youth, and or have disabilities, this program can be a great support. In TRiO, youth can get tutoring and academic counseling and learn study skills. This program can help students navigate the college system. It also offers social and cultural events to help them build a supportive social network.
Financial Aid Programs for Foster Youth and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

**College Bound Scholarship:** The College Bound Scholarship is an early promise of state financial aid to help pay for education after high school. The scholarship combines with other state financial aid to cover college tuition at similar public college rates, some fees, and some money for books at over 60 colleges and universities in Washington. If a student has been in foster care any time from grade 7 to age 21, they are automatically enrolled in the College Bound Scholarship program. They will still need to apply for financial aid with a FAFSA or a WASFA beginning their senior year. More information is available at [www.collegebound.wa.gov](http://www.collegebound.wa.gov)

**Passport to Careers Program:** The Passport to Careers program helps foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth prepare for and succeed in college, apprenticeships, or pre-apprenticeship programs. Through the Passport to College program, students receive a scholarship that assists with the cost of attending college (tuition, fees, books, housing, transportation, and some personal expenses), support services from college staff, and priority consideration for the State Work Study program. The Passport to Apprenticeship Opportunities program will assist students participating in registered apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship programs with covering occupational-specific costs such as tuition for classes, fees, work clothes, rain gear, boots, and occupation-related tools. Students with questions about eligibility for the Passport to Careers program should contact 1-888-535-0747 (option 3), email passport@wsac.wa.gov, or visit: [https://wsac.wa.gov/passport/guide](https://wsac.wa.gov/passport/guide)

**Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program:** This national program offers financial assistance to eligible youth to attend an accredited* college, university, vocational or technical college. You may receive funding for qualified school related expenses, including Running Start. Funding is limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis to eligible students. ETV can help pay for expenses such as tuition, fees, books, housing, food, transportation, and other educational costs. For more information, visit [http://independence.wa.gov/programs/etv-program](http://independence.wa.gov/programs/etv-program), email ETVWASH@dshs.wa.gov, or call 1-877-433-8388.

*For a list of accredited colleges, universities, technical or vocational institutes in Washington State and to view eligibility requirements visit: [http://wsac.wa.gov/colleges-and-institutions-washington](http://wsac.wa.gov/colleges-and-institutions-washington)

**Washington State Governors’ Scholarship for Foster Youth.** This scholarship helps youth in foster care continue their education and earn a college degree. Scholarship amounts vary depending on the college you attend and are available for up to five years. They must be enrolled full time and maintain satisfactory grades in order to renew the scholarship each year. Learn more: [www.collegesuccessfoundation.org/wagovernors](http://www.collegesuccessfoundation.org/wagovernors)

**Resources**

- Financial Aid for Foster Youth
  [https://gearup.wa.gov/students/pay-for-college](https://gearup.wa.gov/students/pay-for-college)
- Resources for Washington State Foster Youth
  [http://independence.wa.gov](http://independence.wa.gov)
- Foster Care Transition Toolkit
- Fostering College Knowledge: Planning & Paying for Higher Education for Youth in Care
LGBTQ STUDENTS

About
Students who identify as lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender or queer may be nervous about applying to/choosing a school. These students may have had some negative experiences in high school and may be looking for a school or programs where they will feel welcome, comfortable, and secure in their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

For LGBTQ+ students, however, their sexual orientation or gender can bring added challenges during the college admissions process. For transgender students who are early in their process of transitioning, there may be many different reasons for wanting to use (or not use) their legal name. Students should be aware that procedures and policies vary from institution to institution, so it is important to know the requirements. The college process also represents a good opportunity for students to find a campus that is friendly and welcoming of their LGBTQ+ identity.

Gender-fluid: A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender; of or relating to a person having or expressing a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

Gender Non-conforming: A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

Genderqueer: Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as “genderqueer” may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories. Also known as non-binary.

Gender Transition: The period of time in which a person begins to live in a gender role that is in accordance with his or her internal gender identity. Transition is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition may include some or all of the following cultural, legal and medical adjustments: informing one’s family, friends and/or co-workers; changing one’s name and/or sex on legal documents; undergoing hormone therapy; and/or seeking surgical alteration (see Sex Reassignment Surgery).

LGBT: An acronym, which stands for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender.” Other versions may add “Q” for Queer or Questioning, “I” for Intersex and “A” for Allied. Some may prefer to list the acronym as TBLG to place trans people in a position of importance and to rectify the way trans has historically been omitted, devalued or excluded.

Queer: Queer is a term that has been reclaimed by members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities to describe people who transgress culturally imposed norms of heterosexuality and gender traditionalism. Although still a derogatory term in many cases, many queer-identified people have taken back the word to use it as a symbol of pride and affirmation of difference and diversity.

Transgender: An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This group includes, but is not limited to, transsexuals, cross-dressers and other gender-variant people. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.
Strategies for Working with LGBTQ+ Youth

- **Help them assess the LGBTQ+ friendliness or climate of a campus** and its housing options.
- **Encourage students to visit campuses** (some schools offer travel scholarships), talk to students who don’t work for the admissions office about the campus climate, and reach out to students through the campus LGBTQ+ center or a dean of multicultural affairs.
- **Help students find LGBTQ+ resources on campus.** Does the school have an employee to provide resources and services (e.g., LGBTQ center, student groups, and organizations) to LGBTQ+ students? Does the school offer health and counseling services designed for LGBTQ+ students?
- **Learn about laws, what name and gender marker students should use** on their college application, and FASFA/WASFA.

College Application Process
There is no fixed rule concerning being out during the application process. Ultimately, the choice to disclose an LGBTQ+ identity to schools depends on the individual. Many schools appreciate having the fullest possible sense of all of their applicants — including the fact that they are LGBTQ+.

It is possible to be out to admissions staff members but not your family. Not everyone comes out before leaving high school for a variety of reasons. LGBTQ+ students not currently out to their family may want to consider whether they want to come out in their written application materials. If students chose not to disclose information to admissions through the written application, they may opt to call admissions officers at a school or come out during an interview with a staff member.

Completing the FAFSA or WASFA
The FAFSA and the WASFA are official government forms. According to Federal Student Aid, applicants must enter their information as it appears on official government documents (e.g., birth certificate and social security card). If the student has not changed their legal name and gender marker on Identity Documents (e.g., birth certificate, license, passport, Social Security Card), they must use the original information.

If students do not use their legal name and official gender designation, their application will not be processed successfully, and their financial aid may be in jeopardy. Unsure of what to do? Contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center by email, chat or phone. See: [https://studentaidhelp.ed.gov/app/home/site/studentaid](https://studentaidhelp.ed.gov/app/home/site/studentaid). Students can find out how to get a legal name change where they live and update their name/gender on state and federal IDs and records at the National Center for Transgender Equality ID Document Center for Washington State: [www.transequality.org/documents/state/washington](http://www.transequality.org/documents/state/washington).

Resources

- Supporting Transgender Students: College Admissions & Financial Aid [https://gearup.wa.gov/educators/washington-state-gear-resources/admissions](https://gearup.wa.gov/educators/washington-state-gear-resources/admissions)
- Campus Pride Index [http://www.campusprideindex.org](http://www.campusprideindex.org)
- Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse [https://www.campuspride.org/tpc/](https://www.campuspride.org/tpc/)
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities represented about 13.5% of the K-12 student population in Washington State. These students may face challenges transitioning through the educational system that other students do not. Despite efforts to improve graduation rates and post-school outcomes for all students, students with disabilities still graduate at lower rates than the average student population. Additionally, postsecondary enrollment and completion rates are substantially low.

Students with disabilities face challenges that prevent them from entering and succeeding in postsecondary education programs. Because postsecondary institutions differ significantly from high school, it is imperative that students with disabilities know their rights and responsibilities and self-advocate in order to be successful. Responsibility shifts from the school system in K-12 to the student in postsecondary education. In K-12, the school is responsible for identifying students in need of specialized supports or services. However, in college, the student is responsible for seeking out the disability services office and self-identifying in order to request accommodations. Students may also have insufficient knowledge of available support systems and resources they may need to obtain services and/or accommodations.

In addition, students may lack the financial resources necessary for obtaining a professional evaluation. Professional evaluations provide documentation of a disability, which is usually required in order to receive accommodations in postsecondary education.

The demands at the college level are higher than in high school. For students to be successful at the college level, they need the ability to employ effective learning strategies and strong skills such as time management, communication, and self-advocacy.

After entering postsecondary environments, students with disabilities face additional challenges. Some struggle with the adjustment to independent living. To support improved postsecondary outcomes, transition planning must better prepare students for the rigor and much more independent nature of college life.

Strategies for Working with Youth with Disabilities

- Assist students in exploring the differences between K-12 & college.
- Explore common accommodations in college & how to request them at college.
- Identify and share issues related to students with disabilities preparing for and transitioning into college.
- Make sure that students with disabilities know their rights and responsibilities and self-advocate in order to be successful.

Accommodations for College Admissions Testing

If a student needs accommodations (extra-large test book, extra testing time), they can apply for them.

- Have students work with their school counselor to apply.
- Usually the paperwork needs to be submitted at least six months in advance.
- Remind students, some accommodations mean that they will be testing for a longer timeframe.
Documentation of a Disability

If a student would like the postsecondary school to provide an academic accommodation, then the student must identify his or herself as having a disability. Likewise, the student should let the school know about the disability to ensure that he or she is assigned to accessible facilities. In any event, the disclosure of a disability is always voluntary.

When Should a Student Request an Accommodation?

Students may request an academic accommodation at any time; however, it is preferable and highly recommended to request it as early as possible. Some academic accommodations may take more time to provide than others may take, e.g., transcribing a textbook into Braille. Students need to be aware of the postsecondary school’s procedures to ensure that the school has enough time to review any request and provide an appropriate academic accommodation. Additionally, most postsecondary institutions will require that a student show current documentation showing that he or she has a disability that requires an adjustment/accommodation.

What Documentation is Required?

Schools may establish documentation guidelines to determine eligibility for accommodations. Some schools require more thorough documentation than others do. An IEP or 504 plan may help identify services that have been effective for you; however, this is generally not sufficient documentation. Contact the school's DS office to find out their documentation guidelines.

Required Documentation Must:

- Be current (postsecondary testing is preferred).
- Make a clear connection between the disability and the requested accommodations.
- Be performed by a qualified evaluator- such as a medical doctor, psychologist, or other qualified diagnostician.
- Clearly state the diagnoses.
- Clearly state the functional limitations resulting from the diagnoses.

Who Has To Pay For A New Evaluation?

Neither the high school nor the postsecondary school is required to conduct or pay for a new evaluation to document a disability and need for an academic accommodation. Therefore, students may have to pay or find funding to pay an appropriate professional for an evaluation. If a student is eligible for services through the state vocational rehabilitation agency, he or she might qualify for an evaluation at no cost. See Division of Vocational Rehabilitation at DSHS. Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights

Resource

- Preparing Students with Disabilities for Postsecondary Education: A Resource Guide
  https://gearup.wa.gov/educators/washington-state-gear-resources/admissions
UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

About
Washington State has the ten largest population of undocumented individuals in U.S., which is approximately three percent of Washington’s population. The majority of these people have lived in this country for over a decade. In Washington, the top five countries of origin are Mexico, Guatemala, India, Vietnam, and Korea.

Washington is one of handful of states (including the District of Columbia) to offer in state tuition AND financial aid to undocumented students.

Undocumented: An umbrella term. This term is preferred by students and families based on their feedback to WSAC. Beyond people who knowingly came to US without documentation, undocumented individuals also include:

- **DREAMers**: Typically, people who entered US without immigration documentation as children (and still do not have legal status). The term DREAMer originated from several bills introduced in Congress since 2001 referred to as the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act).
- People with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).
- People who entered US with legal immigration documentation but are now “out of status”.

High school educators are often the first stop an undocumented student makes when trying to find out college information and especially how they are going to pay for it. Research shows 70% of families and students say their first resource for financial aid information is the school counselor.

Oftentimes, the student might have just learned about their status and their counselor might have been one of the first people they shared this with. They may be confused about their future and wondering if all their hard work in high school was wasted effort.

In Washington, students don’t have to be U.S. citizens to get state financial aid or resident tuition. There are different ways to qualify for immigrant students—including those who are undocumented.

Residency Standards: In-State Tuition and State Aid
The new student residency law went into effect on July 25, 2021. The new law, Senate Bill 5194, makes it easier for all Washingtonians, including and especially undocumented students, to meet residency requirements for in-state (resident) tuition and state financial aid.

**To qualify, students must meet all of the following requirements:**

- Earn a high school diploma, GED, or diploma equivalent before their first term at the college determining residency.
- Maintain a primary residence in Washington for at least 12 consecutive months immediately before their first term at the college determining residency.
- Sign an affidavit saying they meet the above requirements and that one of the following is true:
  - They will file an application to become a permanent resident of the United States as soon as they are eligible to apply. And, that they are willing to engage in activities designed to prepare them for citizenship, including citizenship or civics review courses or
They are a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or U.S. permanent resident.

How to submit the affidavit:

- **Individuals who applied/will apply for state financial aid using the Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA)**
  WASFA-filers submitted/will submit the affidavit as part of the WASFA. The WASFA is for undocumented students, students who are not eligible for federal aid, and students who do not want to apply for federal aid.

- **Individuals who applied/will apply for federal and state financial aid using the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or who are not applying for aid**
  FAFSA-filers or people not applying for aid will submit a PDF form to their school.

**Student Residency**

In Washington, the state uses residency requirements for tuition at public colleges and state financial aid programs. There are several ways to meet residency requirements. Students’ residency options depend on their citizenship or immigration status. To be considered for resident tuition and state aid, students must be U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals, or non-citizens with a qualifying immigration status. Undocumented students who meet certain requirements can also qualify. Each financial aid program also has program requirements, and students have to apply for aid.

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC):

- Adopts residency rules for tuition and fee purposes.
- Sets guidelines for all public colleges and universities to follow.
- Advises residency officers and financial aid officers on residency decisions.

Each public college has a residency officer who uses state laws, rules, and guidelines to determine student residency. At private colleges that offer state financial aid, the financial aid office determines student residency. To apply for residency, students should contact the schools they want to attend.

View the complete residency guide.

**Financial Aid**

The first, best step for all students is to apply for financial aid. In Washington, there are two ways to apply and both of them are free. Students need to pick one:

1. WASFA (Washington Application for State Financial Aid)
2. FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

The WASFA is for students who aren’t eligible for federal aid because of their immigration status, including students who have DACA or are undocumented. The FAFSA is for U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, and eligible non-citizens.

Unsure about whether to apply for financial aid with the FAFSA or the WASFA? Take the WASFA Questionnaire.
Students must be Washington residents to get state financial aid. In most cases, a Washington resident is someone who lives in the state for one year immediately prior to starting their college or program, regardless of immigration status or citizenship. But there are other ways to be a resident. Learn more on WSAC’s Student Residency page.

Strategies for Working with Youth Who Are Undocumented

- When planning Financial Aid Nights - avoid using the term FAFSA nights.
- Share with students and families that in-state tuition and state aid are not the only funding available to undocumented students. Some schools even give full rides to undocumented students.
- Share with students and families how they can save money through dual credit if they are academically ready.
- Remind students and families that in Washington State, live in a state where the governor and attorney general have made it clear that we stand by undocumented students. Schools are prohibited from releasing student information without a subpoena/warrant, including to ICE.
- Show that you are an ally and your office is a safe space, where students can access resources.
- Provide translated materials.
- When hosting a campus visit, visit the undocumented student center or multicultural center on campus.
- Normalize and be inclusive when talking about resources. Do not make assumptions about who is in the audience.
- Update all pages on your websites and print materials that reference financial aid to include FAFSA and WASFA. WASFA often is left out of financial aid information that schools and departments provide; mentioning it any time FAFSA is mentioned can be a helpful to ensure students have all the information they need. Don’t forget to include information for foster youth and unaccompanied youth.
- Create—and regularly update—an undocumented student resource page on your website, with links to the latest information and the resources available on your campus such as mental health services, healthcare, emergency funding, and legal assistance. Remember, the issues that affect special populations students go beyond just financial aid and college admissions.

Resources

- Washington Student Achievement Council
  https://wsac.wa.gov/immigrants
- United We Dream
  unitedwedream.org
- Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
  nwirp.org/DACA
Fee Waivers
If paying for the postsecondary entrance exams is difficult, students have options. Fee waivers are available via school counselor and are typically based on free and reduced price lunch qualification. There may also be GEAR UP fee waivers available.

Make sure students take advantage of these opportunities well before the registration deadlines. Share information about the various college entrance exams and the availability of fee waivers and testing accommodations. Consider sharing this information via student presentations, advisory lessons, family workshops, and mailings (electronic and hard copy).

Advanced Placement (AP) Exams: AP test fee waivers are available for eligible students with no limit on the number of waivers per student. To qualify for an AP exam fee waiver, the student receives or is eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch or meets other criteria. Waivers are administered at the school; speak with your school’s AP test coordinator. Eligible students qualify for the Test Fee Program through one of the following five methods: Free Lunch Program, Reduced Lunch Program, Social Security Program, Medicaid Program, or Declaration of Income. Learn more: https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/dual-credit-programs/exam-based-dual-credit

ACT: To qualify for an ACT fee waiver, the student must be enrolled in high school in the 11th or 12th grade and be a United States citizen or testing in the United States, US territories, or Puerto Rico. The student must also meet one or more of the following indicators of economic need:

- Student is receiving free/reduced lunch.
• Family income is below the USDA reduced-price lunch level.
• Student is enrolled in TRIO or a similar program.
• Family lives in subsidized housing or receives public assistance.
• Student is experiencing homelessness.
• Student is living in a foster home.
• Student is a ward of the state or is an orphan.

A student can use the waiver to take the ACT up to two times. Students must access the waiver from the school counselor, not from ACT. The waiver must be signed by the student and school counselor. This waiver covers the basic test fees, including sending the test score(s) to up to 4 colleges. It does not cover late registration fees or change fees. See: www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/FeeWaiver.pdf

SAT: To qualify for an SAT fee waiver, the student must be enrolled in high school in the 11th or 12th grade (SAT) or in grades 9-12 (SAT Subject Tests). They must be a U.S. citizen or be testing in the U.S., Puerto Rico, or a U.S. territory. Students must also meet one or more of the following indicators of economic need (same as for the ACT)

• Student is receiving free/reduced lunch.
• Family income is below the USDA reduced-price lunch level.
• Student is enrolled in TRIO or a similar program.
• Family lives in subsidized housing or receives public assistance.
• Student is experiencing homelessness.
• Student is living in a foster home.
• Student is a ward of the state or is an orphan.

A valid waiver must be obtained from the student’s high school counselor or an authorized agency, not from the College Board. The student can receive up to four waiver cards: Up to two waivers for the SAT and two waivers for SAT Subject Tests. It covers the basic test fees, including sending the test score(s) to up to four colleges; up to four Request for Waiver of College Application Fee forms, and a $40 discount for the Official SAT Online Course; does not cover late registration fees or change fees. College application fee waivers should be included with the students’ college applications and sent to colleges included in the Directory of Colleges Cooperating with the SAT Program Fee-Waiver Service. Additional information is available at http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-fee-waivers
Post-Admissions Strategies

Between Senior Signing Day and the fall, a number of tasks still must be completed before students attend. For first-gen students, these tasks can be challenging because students no longer have access to school counselors and do not know how to navigate this new system.

Nationally about **20-40%** of students melt. These rates are higher among special populations and among students: from low- and moderate-income families; those with lower academic achievement; and/or who intend to enroll at community colleges compared to their peers intending to enroll at four-year colleges and universities.

After students receive acceptance letters and make their springtime decisions to attend a particular college, a number of tasks still must be completed for students to successfully matriculate. Many of these tasks may be challenging for students who no longer have access to high school counselors, who may not be familiar with support resources available at their intended college, and whose families may lack experience with the college-going process. Several of these tasks relate to financing higher education, such as making sense of and paying deposits and identifying and budgeting for expenses like health insurance and course textbooks.

Colleges also expect students to access, digest, and respond to considerable correspondence over the summer. Students are often required—but do not always properly anticipate the need—to register for and attend orientation, take placement tests, and complete housing forms.

Many of these tasks may be challenging for students who no longer have access to their high school counselor and whose families may lack experience with the college-going process. These tasks may include:

- Determining cost of attendance.
- Making sense of financial aid award letters.
- Understanding tuition bills and required deposits.
- Identifying and budgeting for expenses (i.e. health insurance, textbooks, meals).
- Registering for and attending orientation.
- Receiving required immunizations.
- Taking placement tests.
- Completing housing forms.
- Registering for classes.
- Arranging transportation.

Accessing and navigating online portals--More recently, access to this information is often provided through institution-specific online portals. These online portals sometimes can be difficult to navigate. In addition, they create an extra barrier for students who have limited internet access, causing some to miss timely access to essential information.
Transition Support Strategies

- Use student alumni panels so that seniors hear from near peers.
- Set realistic expectations.
- Identify which students are attending the same institutions and form a cohort or support system for next year.
- Share accurate and timely information with students and families about expected knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that are needed to be successful in college.
- Explaining common challenges. Demystifying these issues.
- Review the differences between K-12 and higher education.
- Share how students can find support on campus can help them be successful. Help students identify resources and support services on campus.
- Address challenges of commuters and those not living on campus.
- Help students make a plan for the summer and next steps before enrollment.
- Use a text messaging campaign to assist students after graduation. Focus on important dates, actions, and problem solving.

On-Campus Supports

Postsecondary campuses have multiple supports available to support special population students. There are also free tutoring and writing centers, as well as, career counseling and academic advising for students at all schools. Most schools have a mental health counselor and health facility on campus. Common support services include:

- **Summer Bridge Programs** are designed to ease the transition to college and support postsecondary success. They provide students with academic skills and social resources needed to succeed and occur in the summer between high school and college.
- **TRiO Student Support Services Program (TRiO SSS)** is offered at many community colleges and four-year schools. This program is for students who are low-income, first-generation, or have disabilities. TRiO provides tutoring, teaches study skills, and offers academic counseling. This program helps students navigate the college system and offer social and cultural events to help students build a supportive social network.
- **College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)** helps students who are children of seasonal workers. CAMP offers counseling, tutoring, skills workshops, financial aid stipends, health services, and housing assistance.
- **Campus Disability Service Offices** help provide assistance (placement testing, classroom, assistive technology, and more) for students with disabilities.
- **First Year Experience** is a program offered by many schools. This program can help students transition to college throughout their first year. It is free and open to all.

Remind students that successful college students use a variety of available resources such as tutoring, informal student study groups, meeting with professors during office hours, meeting with an academic advisor, and asking for help when they need it.

Resources

- Washington State GEAR UP Transition Resources
  https://gearup.wa.gov/educators/washington-state-gear-resources/transitions