

# 1-page summary: Community college outcomes for youth with CA foster care experience

**Article Title** Okpych, N. J., Gómez, A., & Agarwal, A. (2026). First-year and four-year community college outcomes for youth with experience in California foster care. *Child Welfare*, 103(6), 25-52.  
<https://community.cwla.org/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=27623766>

## Research Question

1. What percentage of youth with experience in foster care (YEFC) in California enroll in community colleges, persist through their first year, and complete a credential within four years?
2. How often are students with experience in foster care (SEFC) identified in California community college administrative data?
3. How do SEFC community college outcomes compare to those of the general student population?
4. What are SEFC financial aid patterns and rates of participation in campus support programs (CSPs)?

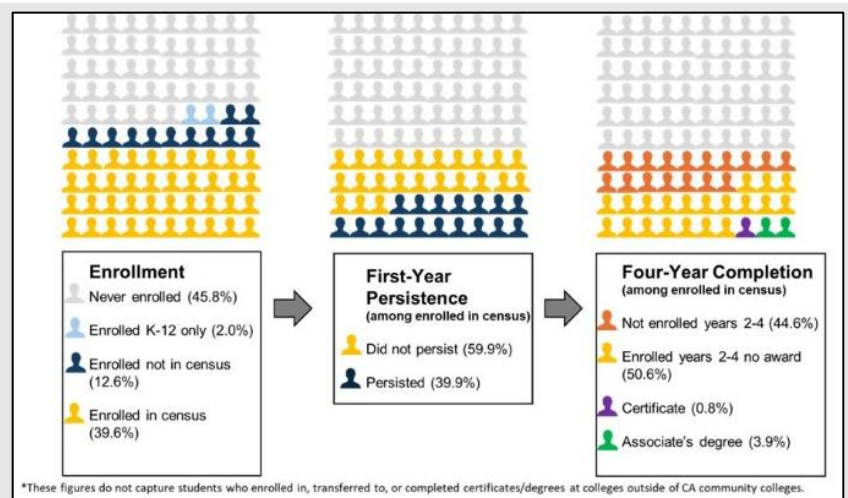
## Data & Methods

**Sample:** 137,717 young people who were in CA foster care on or after their 13th birthday between 2004 and 2016. Researchers linked statewide child welfare records with California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) administrative data.

**Analytic methods:** Descriptive analyses examined community college enrollment, persistence, GPA, course-taking, credential completion, financial aid receipt, and participation in CSPs (i.e., NextUp or EOPS). Outcomes were compared to statewide community college student outcomes using CCCCCO DataVista data.

## Main Findings

- Nearly 40% of YEFC enrolled in a CA community college. Of these ( $n=48,003$ ), 42% persisted through their 1st year and fewer than 5% completed a certificate or associate's degree within 4 years.
- SEFC completion rates were nearly 3x lower than those of the general CA community college population.
- Academic outcomes reflected significant challenges. The average first-year GPA was 1.43, most SEFC earned below a 2.0 GPA (67%), and nearly 60% withdrew from at least one course in their 1st year.
- Identification of SEFC in community college administrative data improved from 43% in 2012–2013 to nearly 60% in 2022–2023. Still, many SEFC are not identified.
- Most SEFC received financial aid in their 1st year (82%), particularly Pell Grants and California College Promise Grants, but relatively few received Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) (11%).
- Participation in NextUp increased substantially after the program was introduced in 2016 and expanded in later years. By 2022, 11% of SEFC participated in EOPS and 21% participated in NextUp.



## Implications

- The first year of community college appears to be a critical point of attrition for SEFC, highlighting the need for earlier and more intensive academic and social supports.
- Improving identification of SEFC in college data systems may increase students' access to financial aid and campus supports.
- Low GPAs and high withdrawal rates suggest many SEFC struggle to maintain financial aid eligibility, underscoring the importance of flexible policies and advising supports.
- Most eligible SEFC did not participate in a CSP, suggesting a need for stronger outreach and engagement efforts.
- Additional research is needed on the effectiveness of CSPs and on longer-term outcomes such as transfer and bachelor's degree completion.