

***New Jersey's 2020-2024  
Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program***

**Methods to Operate the ETV Program Effectively**

Through the New Jersey Foster Care (NJFC) Scholars program, DCF continues to provide ETVs to eligible youth who have aged out of foster care or left care for kinship legal guardianship or adoption. The NJFC Program is the umbrella program for ETV, Statewide Tuition Waiver and “State Option” funding. The NJFC Scholars program is overseen by the Office of Educational Support and Programs (OESP) within the Office of Adolescent Services (OAS), and administered via contract by the non-profit provider, Embrella (formerly Foster and Adoptive Family Services).

**I. Identification of Prospective Students**

Eligibility for ETV funding under the NJFC Scholars Program is based on age and length of time in foster care placement. In New Jersey, students who are 16-21 years of age and were: 1) 14 years of age or older with at least 18 months of foster care placement, 2) 16 years or older with 9 or more months of foster care placement or 3) who exited care for adoption or Kinship Legal Guardianship (KLG) after the age of 16 qualify for the program. Students who exited care for adoption between the ages of 12 and 15 are also eligible for NJ Foster Care Scholars under “State Option” which offers the same financial support as ETV (using State dollars).

DCF’s Office of Research, Evaluation and Reporting provides a monthly data file using an algorithm that captures all youth age 14-21 years of age with the requisite foster care placement histories as well as the youth ages 12-15 who exited care for adoption and those who exited care after age 16 for adoption or KLG. This monthly data report is used to qualify students for the NJFC Scholars Program and determine if the student is eligible for ETV or State funding (for the Tuition Waiver or State Option). This report is also used for targeted recruitment strategies (see below).

**Outreach/Recruitment**

Embralla convenes year-round workshops throughout the state for youth currently and formerly in foster care, their caregivers and caring adults to assist them in applying for ETV and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as well applications for New Jersey specific state aid.

Embralla also convenes the Passport to Education conference, held annually, for youth in foster care, their child welfare caseworkers and youth-serving providers. Information and resources are shared with both youth pursuing post-secondary education and training and the agency staff or resource caregivers that are assisting them. The conference includes workshops on navigating the financial

aid process, college application process, budgeting and options for post-secondary education etc.

NJFC Scholars sessions, including information about ETV, are also held across the state to inform secondary and post-secondary school staff and youth about eligibility and to enhance a collaborative service partnership for a youth's success in post-secondary education. Sessions are also held with youth service providers and advocates such as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Law Guardians, life skills and housing providers, high school guidance counselors, Equal Opportunity Fund (EOF) programs, and college support programs.

### **Application Process**

The NJFC Scholars application is web-based allowing convenient access and to expedite the application process. Students must apply each semester and there is an abridged version of the application for reapplicants. Students must provide a copy of their high school diploma or High School Equivalency as well as:

- For Citizens: Proof of completed and submitted FAFSA for the academic year (confirmation email from FAFSA, Student Aid Report, award letter, etc.)
- For Dreamers eligible for New Jersey State Aid and the New Jersey Statewide Tuition Waiver: Proof of completed and submitted New Jersey Alternative Financial Aid Application
- Proof of acceptance or enrollment from the Post-Secondary Institution they are attending or are planning to attend (acceptance letter, registration or class schedule)
- If transferring to a new school, proof of the number of credits transferred must be provided, or a letter explaining why credits did not transfer
- Returning students only must provide:
  - Most recent college/technical school transcript

## **II. Review and Acceptance**

Upon acceptance, students receive a welcome letter confirming their acceptance into the NJFC Scholars Program. The welcome letter outlines the academic policy and requirements of the student's funding as specified by either ETV or the Statewide New Jersey Tuition Waiver legislation. The letter specifically notes that the ETV funding must not exceed the cost of attendance, is limited to up to \$5000 per academic year and must be dispersed in two \$2,500 installments. Students are also informed that they must be registered at least half time and must be continuously enrolled on their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday to continue to receive funding until they reach the age of 23. Lastly, the letter advises the student that funding ends at age 23 regardless of the student's completion of post-secondary education.

Each NJ Foster Scholar is assigned a Scholarship Coordinator at Embrella who assists the student in understanding their funding, communicates with the financial aid offices to resolve any financial aid issues and supports the student in navigating any financial aid requirements.

### **III. Measuring Satisfactory Progress**

As per the academic policy, students must maintain a 2.0 GPA each semester and make Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) as determined by their Post-Secondary Institution (PSI). Scholarship Coordinators are responsible for verifying GPA and SAP each semester by using the “NJ Foster Scholars Program Student Account Inquiry Form” (refer to the section below on “Methods to Ensure ETV Funding Doesn’t Exceed Total Cost of Attendance”). Students who don’t meet the above-stated academic requirements will be placed on probation with the objective of raising their grades to meet the 2.0 requirement for the next semester. If a student falls below a 2.0 GPA for two consecutive semesters they are removed from the program. The student may appeal their removal due to extenuating circumstances and can be reinstated. The majority of students whose appeals are granted successfully continue in school.

#### **Methods to Ensure ETV Funding Doesn’t Exceed Total Cost of Attendance (COA)**

Embrella uses an “NJ Foster Scholars Program Student Account Inquiry Form” to ensure that ETV funding does not exceed the cost of attendance. Upon a student’s acceptance into the NJFC Program, Embrella staff email the Inquiry form (every semester) to the Post-secondary institution’s (PSI) Financial Aid, Bursar or Student Accounting office for completion of cost of attendance expenses, actual costs for tuition and fees, room, and board. The inquiry form also asks the PSI to list the financial aid awarded to the student for the semester by category- federal (Pell, SEOG), state, and institutional grants, scholarships, loans (subsidized, unsubsidized, private) and personal payments.

Once Embrella receives the completed inquiry form from the PSI and confirms that the student’s financial aid package doesn’t exceed the COA, the ETV funds (up \$2,500 per semester and no more than \$5,000 per academic year) are available to be released to either the PSI, the student, or a third-party vendor depending on the category of student’s unmet need. Funds will be released to the PSI if the unmet need is for tuition and fees, room and board (if the student is living on campus). Funds are released to the student (via check, debit card or direct deposit) for educational supports such as transportation, child care expenses, laundry, food, incidentals or rental payments (with

a copy of a lease). Funds are released to a third-party vendor for the purchase of computers or laptops, books and supplies.

It should be noted that students who remain under the supervision of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) do not receive ETV funds for food, rent or incidentals support because CP&P provides those students with Independent Living stipends to cover those expenses. NJ Foster Care Scholars have access to their web-based student portal to allow them to make educational support requests.

All financial records are maintained in a secured Microsoft Access database. Fields in the database include all the COA, payments, amount of payments, payee information, what the payment or purchase was for, date of payment or purchase and the type of funding used (ETV or State). The database also captures the student's demographic data, grade point average by semester, and ETV timeframes. This includes the date school began, date the student disengaged from school (if relevant) and date resumed school (if relevant) and date of student's 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Students are notified in writing 6 months prior to their 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday to remind them that ETV funding will terminate.

### **Coordination with Other Education and Training Programs**

DCF and Embrella make every effort to assist youth in maximizing all available financial aid. Embrella also administers New Jersey's Statewide Tuition Waiver Program (TW) on behalf of DCF. ETV students whose ETV funding is discontinued because they reach the age of 23 and who meet the TW eligibility (9 months of foster care placement after the age of 16) may then access TW funding to complete their education. The TW funding is available to students for 5 years from the date TW is accepted allowing the student to continue their education up to age 28 (if they begin using TW at age 23).

DCF will work with the administration of the New Jersey's Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) to ensure current and former foster youth apply and utilize available State aid. HESAA has oversight of the Education Opportunity Fund Program as well as State aid, including the Tuition Aid Grant, Community College Opportunity Grant, NJ STARS, the Governor's Urban Scholarship Program and the Governor's Industry Vocations Scholarship (NJ-GIVS).

Embrilla also has coordinated (and will continue to coordinate) with HESAA to ensure NJFCS' independent status is verified expeditiously. This streamlining allows students to obtain applicable State aid without the necessity for additional paperwork.

DCF has relationships with several of New Jersey's State Universities: Rutgers University, Stockton, Montclair State University – each having their unique college support programs which many of our NJ Foster Scholars are participants.

DCF's PACES program (which began in September 2017), in partnership with four non-profit agencies (see Chafee plan for additional information on PACES) is tasked with ensuring that high school students in foster care are college-ready. This includes referring them to college bridge and student support and TRIO programs, such as

Upward Bound and the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) Programs.

#### **4. Method for Determining Unduplicated Youth**

Using the database, Embrella and OESP staff can run a variety of reports using the “query” function. A query is also done to check for duplicates. Frequently run reports include:

1. All students with identifying information, name and location of PSI, enrollment status, GPA
2. ETV-funded students
3. State-funded students
4. Amount of ETV spending and by spending category
5. New students per semester
6. Returning students
7. Students who fell below 2.0 GPA