



**House Committee on Human Services**  
**House Committee on Higher Education**  
Interim Charge: Tuition and Fee Waiver

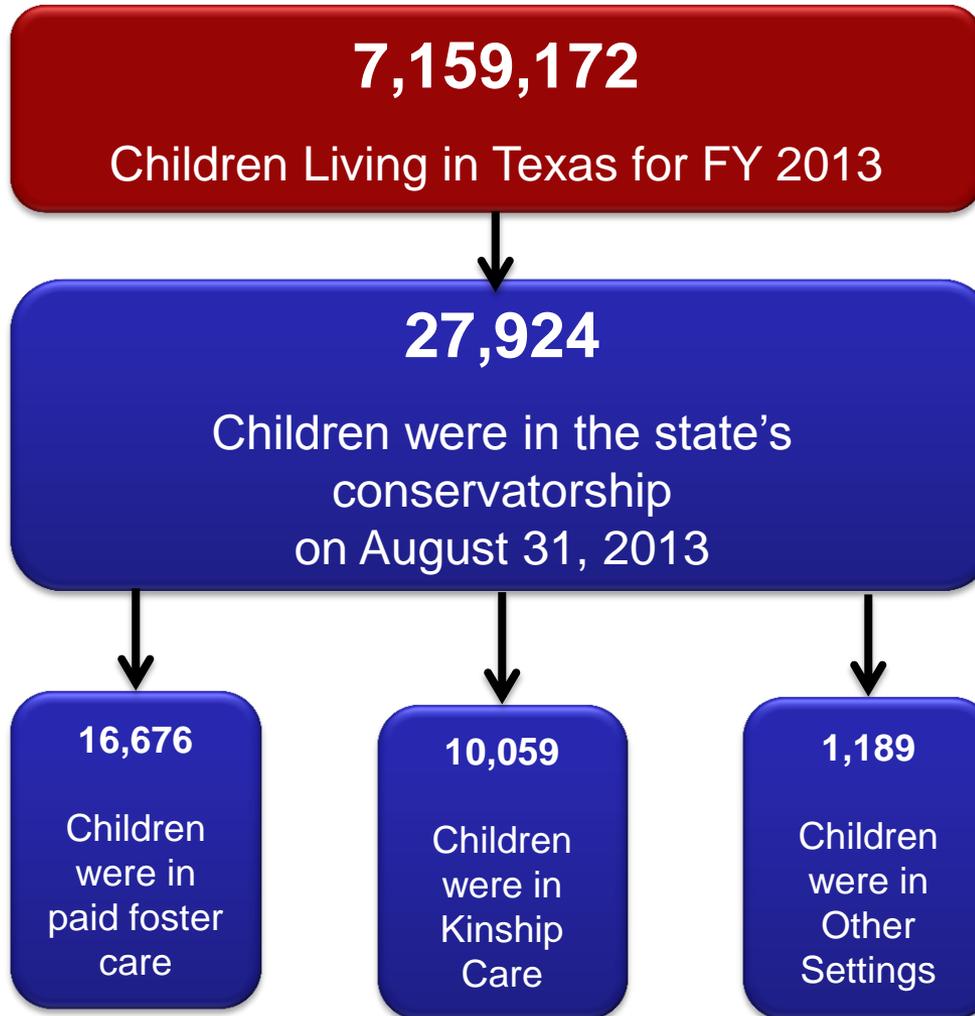
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Judge John Specia, DFPS Commissioner

*September 4, 2014*

*Former foster youth have the benefit of free tuition and fees if they enroll in higher education, yet very few take advantage of this opportunity.*

*Consider new strategies to support these youth and make recommendations to enroll and retain more foster youth in higher education.*



### In FY 2013:

- **1,328** youth exited care by aging out.
- **1,081** youth were identified as high school seniors.
- **667** youth age 18+ exited care with a high school diploma or GED.

# Educational Challenges for Foster Youth

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- Fail to graduate from high school or receive a GED
- Lack of stability
- Absenteeism and enrollment interruptions
- Lack of college preparation courses through schools
- Lack of educational or career advocacy
- Housing costs
- Difficulty navigating the higher education system

- Focused DFPS Policies and Residential Contracts to emphasize school stability and success:
    - Enroll young children in DFPS care in early childhood programs.
    - Require youth stay in the same school, even if they are removed from their home or change placement, unless it is not in their best interest.
    - Maintain an education portfolio for every school-age child.
    - Require that youth are enrolled immediately in a new school when then child moves, and that records are transferred promptly.
    - Require that youth regularly attend school.
    - Promote the graduation track for youth.
  - Support and provide training for schools to understand and respond to the unique needs of youth in the foster care system.
  - Information and data sharing with the Texas Education Agency (TEA).
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In 2012, the “Texas Blueprint” was issued by the Education Committee of the Texas Supreme Court Children’s Commission.

Some of the key recommendations from the report include:

- Identifying an Education Decision Maker for youth,
- Identifying foster youth in the TEA Database (PEIMS),
- Allowing Youth to remain in their school of origin when removed,
- Granting partial credit when youth transfer schools,
- Providing youth information on dual credit courses, and
- Expanding the role of Foster Care Liaisons.

- CPS, TEA, and the Children’s Commission collaborated to develop a Resource Guide for schools to better meet the needs of children in care.
  - CPS, CASA, TEA and the Children’s Commission collaborated to develop a toolkit for CASA staff and volunteers for education advocacy.
  - CPS Regional Education Specialists provide training and work with schools to ensure the needs of students in CPS care are addressed.
  - CPS promotes and targets post-secondary educational opportunities through the development of the student’s Personal Graduation Plan.
  - CPS Regional Education Specialist work with school counselors on fee waivers for the SAT, ACT, PSAT, and post-secondary applications for foster youth.
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## What is the Tuition and Fee Waiver?

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*The college tuition and fee waiver provides exemptions from payment of tuition and fees at Texas institutions of higher education to individuals formerly in Texas state foster care and to adopted youth.*

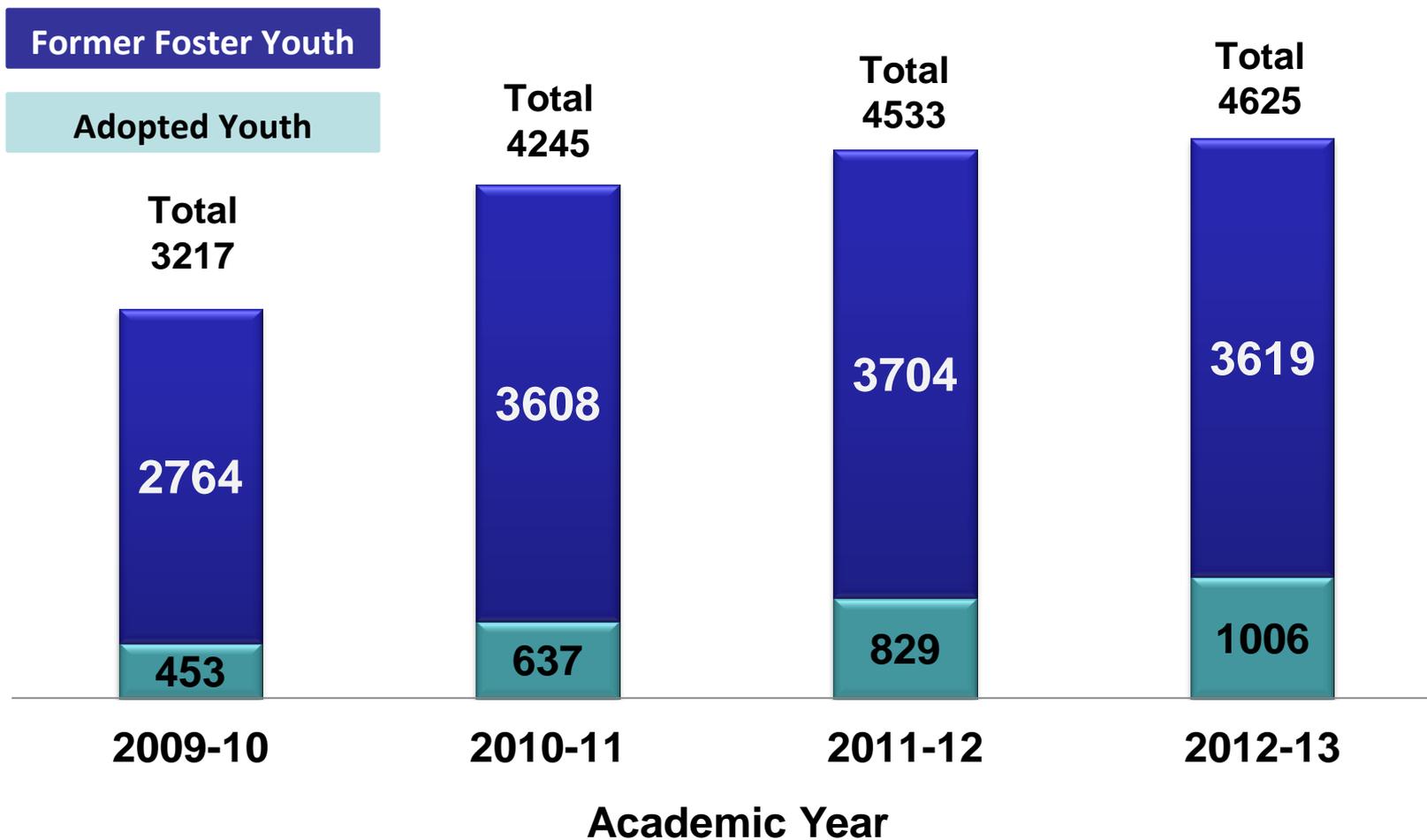
Foster youth and former foster youth are eligible to receive the Tuition and Fee Waiver when **at least one of the following apply:**

- In foster care the day before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday;
- In foster care the day of their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, and parental rights to that youth have been terminated;
- In foster care the day they graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma;
- Adopted on or after September 1, 2009; or
- A non-parent was granted Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) of them, as long as PMC was granted on or after September 1, 2009.

*Note: Youth or young adults must activate the waiver by their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

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# Use of the Tuition & Fee Waiver



The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) is \$5,000 per year in **federal funding** and is available to young adults who:

- were in foster care but have not turned 21; or
- were adopted after age 16; or
- exited foster care to the Permanency Care Assistance program after turning age 16.

The ETV may be used toward the cost of certain items, such as:

- Room and board costs
- Tuition/fees (where the tuition and fee waiver is not accepted)
- Books/supplies
- Transportation
- Computer/Software
- Medical insurance through the school
- Child care
- Tutoring

Youth learn about the Tuition and Fee Waiver and Education and Training Voucher in a number of ways, including:

- Transition Plan meetings beginning at age 16
  - Youth-driven Circles of Support
  - Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program
  - Seminars for youth that are aging out of foster care
  - Transition Centers in Texas that host PAL classes and college recruiting events
  - DFPS website, including Youth Connections
  - Presentations or individual outreach by Regional Youth Specialists
  - Experiential life skills training conducted by foster care providers
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- Encourage CPS residential providers to encourage all youth in their care to explore college options and visit college campuses and events.
- Educate high school counselors regarding the tuition and fee waiver for students in foster care and to promote their use.
- Work with TEA to inform administrators about the tuition waiver.
- Promote the benefits of the Extended Foster Care program.
- Utilize the Youth Leadership Council meetings to discuss the tuition and fee waiver and other transitional living services benefits.

# College Outreach Programs

## Colleges and Universities with **specific support programs:**

Austin Community College	Texas Tech University	University of Texas-San Antonio
Dallas Community Colleges	Texas Women's University	University of Texas-El Paso
Sam Houston State	University of Houston	University of Texas-Austin
Texas State University	University of North Texas	Lone Star Colleges

## Colleges that have **dedicated staff** who are available to assist foster youth enrolled at their schools:

Alamo Community College	Texas State Technical Colleges	University of Texas-Pan American
Amarillo College	Texas A&M-San Antonio	UT-Permian Basin
Houston	Prairie View A&M	West Texas A&M
Midland College		

## What more can be done?

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- Report specific data to CPS about former foster youth that use the tuition and fee waiver, including:
    - Graduation rates,
    - Grade point averages,
    - Classifications (freshman, sophomore, etc.),
    - Average credit hours, and
    - Degree Programs.
  - Identify a point of contact who will serve as the foster care liaison and direct these students to appropriate student support services.
  - Offer free or low cost room and board for students formerly in foster care during the school term.
  - CPS staff are reviewing a recommendation for colleges and universities that have campus dormitories to consider becoming a Supervised Independent Living program.
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