



Fostering Independence Higher Education Grants Annual Report

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About the Minnesota Office of Higher Education

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to postsecondary education. The agency also serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis on postsecondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

The Minnesota State Grant Program is the largest financial aid program administered by the Office of Higher Education, awarding up to \$224 million in need-based grants to Minnesota residents attending eligible colleges, universities and career schools in Minnesota. The agency oversees other state scholarship programs, tuition reciprocity programs, a student loan program, Minnesota's 529 College Savings Plan, licensing and early college awareness programs for youth.

About This Report

This is a legislative-mandated report. As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197, this report cost approximately \$3,255.57 to prepare, including staff time.

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Introduction

The 2021 Minnesota Legislature passed the Fostering Independence Higher Education Grants in the higher education omnibus bill signed by the Governor on June 26, 2021. It required the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) to establish a postsecondary grant program for undergraduate students previously placed in Minnesota foster care. The program name was shortened to Fostering Independence Grants (FIG). The first awards were disbursed to student accounts in the Fall semester of the 2022-2023 academic year.

OHE is required to submit an annual report by January 15 to the chairperson and ranking minority chairperson of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over higher education finance and policy. The report must include (1) the number of students receiving foster grants and the institutions attended and (2) annual retention and graduation data on students receiving foster grants.

This report will provide summary data for the first year of the program, fiscal year 2023.

Challenges Faced by Former Foster Youth in Higher Education

The impact of financial assistance on former foster youths, can be best understood by looking at the general challenges this demographic faces. Resources referenced below are found in [Appendix B](#).

Limited Financial Resources: Over 400,000 children are in foster care across the United States (Walsh, 2021). These youth face significant barriers to higher education, partially due to insufficient financial resources and lack of mental, emotional, and intellectual support. Services at state and federal levels are available, but resources to make college affordable are often lacking for these students (Gross et al., 2023).

Low College Attendance and Graduation Rates: Foster youth apply for – and attend – college at lower rates than their non-foster peers; they often struggle with the total education costs. Less than three percent of foster youth receive a bachelor’s degree. That number contrasts with the 24 percent of young adults in the general population (Walsh, 2021). Although 80 percent of foster youth would like to earn a college degree, less than 55 percent enrolled in college three years later (Walsh, 2021).

High Financial Need and Basic Needs Insecurity: Most foster youth have an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of \$0 after completing the Free Application for Student Financial Aid (FAFSA), indicating significant financial need. These learners are more likely than not to be food insecure, with the Covid-19 pandemic significantly exacerbating these challenges. Many foster youth also lack standard familial support during crises (Skobba *et al.*, 2022).

Identification of Students

A data-sharing agreement between the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) and OHE makes it possible to identify FIG-eligible students by using responses from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or state financial aid application rather than requiring prospective students from completing a separate application specifically for the FIG program. Students indicate they were previously in foster care by answering affirmatively to questions about foster care on the applications.

For award year 2022-2023, 11,701 students completing a financial aid application indicated they had previously been in foster care. Of those, 4,820 of the students reviewed were under age 27, which is a requirement of FIG, and therefore were sent on to DHS for review. The data sharing agreement with DHS exists to verify foster care placement; DHS confirmed that of the 4,820 students, 1,253 had experienced foster care placement in Minnesota and met initial eligibility requirements for FIG. Students were notified of their initial eligibility by OHE.

Student eligibility for FIG is met through one of two ways:

1. An individual who is eligible for the Minnesota Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program is eligible for the Fostering Independence Grant.

Or

2. If the individual is not eligible for the ETV Program, in order to receive a foster grant, an individual must:
 - a. Meet the definition of a Minnesota resident student under [136A.101, subdivision 8](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/136A.101#stat.136A.101.8) (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/136A.101#stat.136A.101.8>)
 - b. After the individual's 13th birthday, be in or have been in foster care in Minnesota before, on, or after June 27, 2021, including any of the following:
 - i. Placement in foster care at any time while 13 years of age or older;
 - ii. Adoption from foster care at any time after reaching 13 years of age; or
 - iii. Placement from foster care with a permanent legal custodian at any time after reaching 13 years of age;

Additional eligibility requirements include the following:

- Under age 27 by September 1st of the award year
- Attending an eligible, participating Minnesota higher education institution
- Graduated from a high school or completed the equivalent as approved the Department of Education
- Meeting Satisfactory Academic Progress as defined by the higher education institution

Eligible Institutions

All Minnesota public institutions are required to participate in the FIG program; however, eligible private institutions can opt-out. In fiscal year 2023, 24 eligible private institutions and 38 public institutions participated in the FIG program for a total of 62 institutions.

The exact dollar amount a student receives will vary depending on the student's EFC, number of enrolled credits, Cost of Attendance (COA) at the college they attend, if they receive extended foster care benefits, and other funding sources. FIG is considered a last dollar program, meaning most other forms of aid must be finalized before the FIG award amount can be calculated. Due to the number of variables in the calculation, FIG awards are different from student to student. Students with special circumstances are able to appeal for an increase to their COA. All COA adjustments are eligible for FIG, except for adjustments related to study abroad.

As required by statutory language, the FIG award calculation is different for public institutions than it is for private institutions in two ways.

Recognized Cost of Attendance: The student's actual federal COA is the recognized COA for public institutions. The recognized cost of attendance for private institutions is the lesser of the student's actual federal COA or the annual highest public 2-year or 4-year COA. For fiscal year 2023, the highest 2-year public COA was \$24,942 at Minneapolis Community & Technical College. The highest 4-year public COA was \$34,016 at Metropolitan State University.

Treatment of Institutional Awards: To determine the FIG award, public institutions must subtract any institutional grants, scholarships, or waivers. Private institutions do not subtract these types of funding. For private institutions, if a student's actual federal COA is higher than the highest public COA, the private institution will provide institutional grants, scholarship, waivers, or tuition remission up to the student's actual federal COA. Part of a private school participating in the program is their agreement to comply with this component of the program.

Fiscal Year and Award Information

The initial appropriation for FIG in fiscal year 2023 was \$3.759M, which included \$238,000 for administration costs, leaving \$3,521,000 for grants to students. During the 2022-2023 academic year, given the demand for the program and successful launch to create awareness, it was determined the initial appropriation would not be enough to fund all eligible students for the aid year. Therefore, a transfer of \$750,000 was made from the Minnesota State Grant program to FIG in April, 2023.

For the first year of the program in 2022-2023, 492 students received FIG for a total of \$4,250,501. The average award was \$8,639. Eight students received FIG at one institution and then transferred to a different institution during the 2022-2023 academic year. The breakdown on number of recipients and the total award amounts at each participating institution can be found below in Table 1.

Table 1. Fostering Independence Grant Recipients and Total Awards by Institution

Institution Name	Sector Type	Number of Recipients	Total Award Amount
Minneapolis College	Public 2-year	35	\$380,480
St. Cloud Technical & Community College	Public 2-year	30	\$245,069
Minnesota State University, Mankato	Public 4-year	25	\$227,203
Ridgewater College	Public 2-year	24	\$169,608
Century College	Public 2-year	22	\$159,307
Minnesota North College	Public 2-year	21	\$126,307
Saint Paul College	Public 2-year	19	\$216,898
Anoka-Ramsey Community College	Public 2-year	17	\$165,973
Lake Superior College	Public 2-year	16	\$123,682
Normandale Community College	Public 2-year	14	\$125,146
Central Lakes College	Public 2-year	14	\$107,531
Bemidji State University	Public 4-year	13	\$83,671
St. Cloud State University	Public 4-year	12	\$72,828
Riverland Community College	Public 2-year	12	\$83,654
Minnesota State Community & Technical College	Public 2-year	12	\$99,500
Augsburg University	Private 4-year	12	\$151,912
University of Minnesota Twin Cities	Public 4-year	11	\$74,616
South Central College	Public 2-year	11	\$94,610
Hennepin Technical College	Public 2-year	11	\$87,956
Winona State University	Public 4-year	10	\$60,242
Metropolitan State University	Public 4-year	10	\$162,790
Alexandria Technical & Community College	Public 2-year	*	*
Anoka Technical College	Public 2-year	*	*
Bethany Lutheran College	Private 4-year	*	*

Institution Name	Sector Type	Number of Recipients	Total Award Amount
Bethel University	Private 4-year	*	*
College of Saint Benedict	Private 4-year	*	*
College of St. Scholastica	Private 4-year	*	*
Dakota County Technical College	Public 2-year	*	*
Dunwoody College of Technology	Private 4-year	*	*
Fond Du Lac Tribal & Community College	Public 2-year	*	*
Gustavus Adolphus College	Private 4-year	*	*
Hamline University	Private 4-year	*	*
Herzing University	Private 4-year	*	*
Inver Hills Community College	Public 2-year	*	*
Leech Lake Tribal College	Private 2-year	*	*
Macalester College	Private 4-year	*	*
Minnesota State College Southeast	Public 2-year	*	*
Minnesota State University Moorhead	Public 4-year	*	*
Minnesota West Community & Technical College	Public 2-year	*	*
North Hennepin Community College	Public 2-year	*	*
Northland Community & Technical College	Public 2-year	*	*
Northwest Technical College	Public 2-year	*	*
Northwestern Health Sciences University	Private 4-year	*	*
Pine Technical & Community College	Public 2-year	*	*
Red Lake Nation College	Private 2-year	*	*
Rochester Community and Technical College	Public 2-year	*	*
Saint Catherine University	Private 4-year	*	*
Saint John's University	Private 4-year	*	*
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota	Private 4-year	*	*
Southwest Minnesota State University	Public 4-year	*	*
University of Minnesota Crookston	Public 4-year	*	*
University of Minnesota Duluth	Public 4-year	*	*
University of Minnesota Morris	Public 4-year	*	*
University of Saint Thomas	Private 4-year	*	*
White Earth Tribal & Community College	Private 2-year	*	*

*Data is not detailed due to the OHE Data Suppression Policy for Student Information ([Appendix C](#)) and the number of recipients is < 10.

Carleton College, Crown College, Martin Luther College, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Oak Hills Christian College, and Saint Olaf College were participants in the FIG program for the 2022-2023 award year, but did not have any recipients. Students attending the University of Minnesota Rochester are included with the University of Minnesota Twin Cities data.

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities had the highest percentage of FIG recipients with 82.8% of all recipients, as detailed below in Table 2. Due to program implementation delays, most students were notified of their FIG eligibility at the start of the Fall 2022 semester. Given this, students likely did not make college decisions based on their knowledge of the program. Notification of eligibility is now sent to students within two weeks of completing the FAFSA or state financial aid application. The percentage of students attending private institutions may change in future academic years as awareness of the program increases. Students who did not consider a private institution due to cost concerns may change their minds when learning about their FIG eligibility.

Table 2. Fostering Independence Grant Awards by Sector

	Recipients	Total Awards	Average Award
Public 2-year: Minnesota State Colleges	327	\$2,672,650	\$8,173
Public 4-year: Minnesota State Universities	87	\$741,604	\$8,524
Public 4-year: University of Minnesota	23	\$136,919	\$5,953
Private 2-year	14	\$57,005	\$4,072
Private 4-year	49	\$642,323	\$13,109

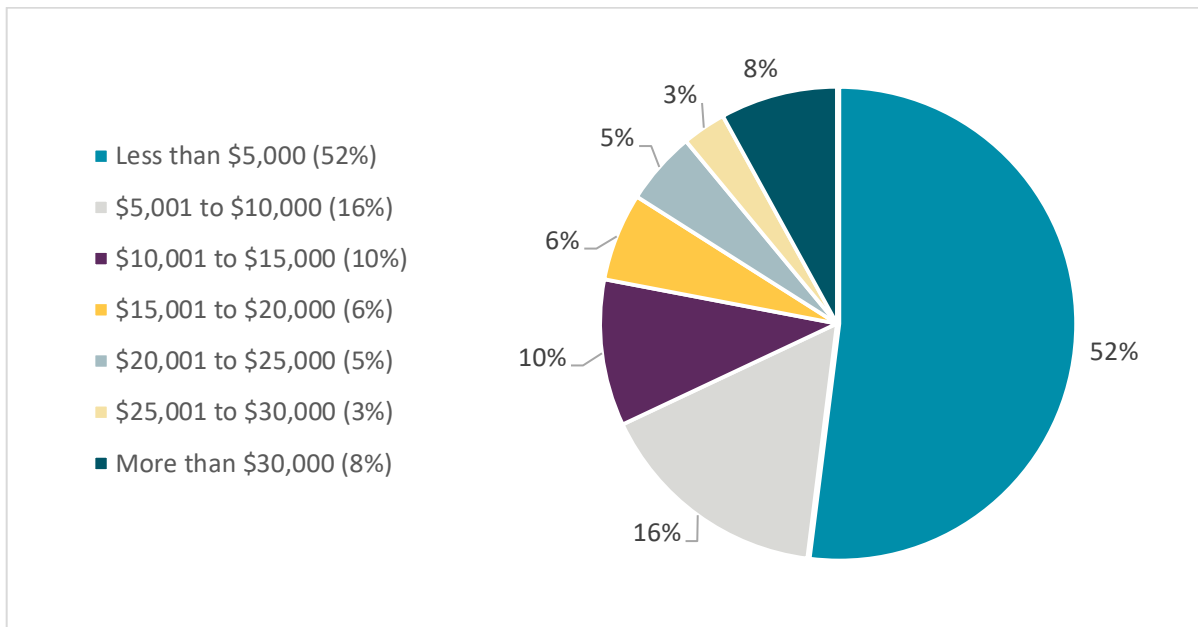
Student Demographics

The student demographics below are for recipients of the Fostering Independence Grant for the 2022-2023 award year.

Income Groups

Figure 1 below represents the income groupings for FIG recipients. Income group data was based on parent Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) for dependent students and student Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) for independent students from financial information reported on the 2022-2023 FAFSA or state financial aid application. Fifty-two percent of students receiving FIG reported having an AGI of \$5,000 or less.

Figure 1. Fostering Independence Grant Recipients by Adjusted Gross Income



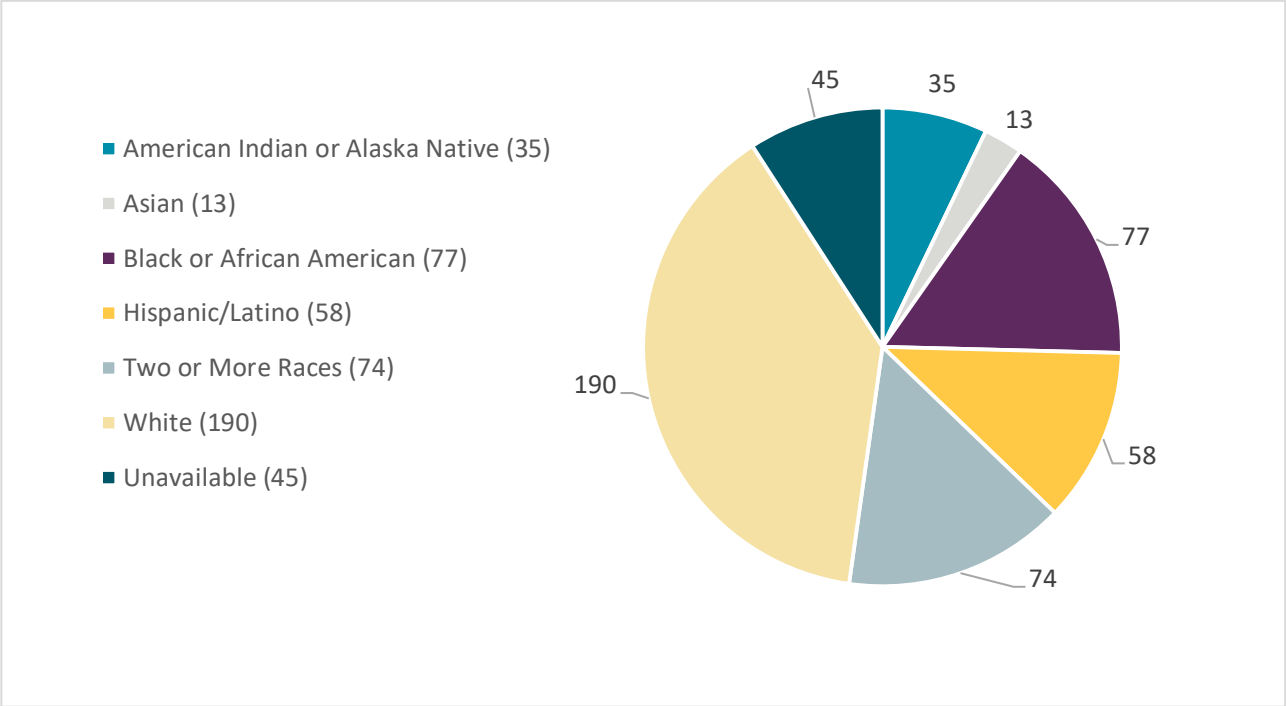
Gender

A majority, 65%, of FIG recipients identified as female. Whereas, 25% of the recipients identified as male. The gender identity for the remaining 10% of the FIG recipients was either unavailable or missing. The percentage of students identified as female receiving FIG is significantly higher when compared to all undergraduate students attending Minnesota institutions. In the 2020-2021 academic year, 56.7% of all students identified as female, 42.5% identified as male, and .7% were unavailable or missing (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2023).

Racial/Ethnic Origin

Figure 2 below illustrates the racial/ethnic origin of the FIG recipients in 2022-2023. Students from racial/ethnic groups historically underrepresented in postsecondary education were 52% of FIG recipients.

Figure 2. Race/Ethnicity of Fostering Independent Grant Recipients



Graduation and Retention Data

Since the 2022-2023 award year was the first year of the program's existence, graduation data is not available for this report. Graduation data may be available in the 2024 fiscal report. However, OHE has verified that as of December, 2023, 72% of the 492 students who received FIG awards in 2022-2023 have completed financial aid applications for the 2023-2024 award cycle.

Appendix A: Minnesota State Statute

136A.1241 FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE HIGHER EDUCATION GRANTS

Subdivision 1. Establishment. The office must establish a grant program for individuals who satisfy the eligibility requirements under subdivision 3. Using available FAFSA or other state aid data, the office shall identify and inform eligible individuals, and the institutions for which the individuals have been accepted or are attending, of their eligibility for the foster grant. This program is established to provide an individual who is currently or was formerly in foster care with foster grants for up to five years for higher education costs.

Subd. 2. Definitions.

- (a) For purposes of this section, the terms in this subdivision have the meanings given.
- (b) "Adoption" means adoption of an individual who has been in the care and custody of a responsible social services agency or Tribal social services agency and in foster care.
- (c) "Eligible institution" means an eligible public institution or an eligible private institution.
- (d) "Eligible private institution" or "private institution" means an institution eligible for state student aid under section [136A.103](#), paragraph (a), clause (2).
- (e) "Eligible public institution" or "public institution" means an institution operated by the Board of Trustees of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities or the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota.
- (f) "Foster care" has the meaning given in section [260C.007, subdivision 18](#).
- (g) "Foster grant" means a grant under this section.
- (h) "Office" means the Office of Higher Education.
- (i) "Recognized cost of attendance" means the amount calculated under subdivision 4.
- (j) "Responsible social services agency" has the meaning given in section [260C.007, subdivision 27a](#).
- (k) "Tribal social services agency" has the meaning given in section [260.755, subdivision 21](#).

Subd. 3. Eligibility.

- (a) An individual who is eligible for the Education and Training Voucher Program is eligible for a foster grant.
- (b) If the individual is not eligible for the Education and Training Voucher Program, in order to receive a foster grant, an individual must:
 - (1) meet the definition of a resident student under section [136A.101, subdivision 8](#);
 - (2) be at least 13 years of age but fewer than 27 years of age;
 - (3) after the individual's 13th birthday, be in or have been in foster care in Minnesota before, on, or after June 27, 2021, including any of the following:
 - (i) placement in foster care at any time while 13 years of age or older;
 - (ii) adoption from foster care at any time after reaching 13 years of age; or

- (iii) placement from foster care with a permanent legal custodian at any time after reaching 13 years of age;
- (4) have graduated from high school or completed the equivalent as approved by the Department of Education;
- (5) have been accepted for admission to, or be currently attending, an eligible institution;
- (6) have submitted a FAFSA; and
- (7) be meeting satisfactory academic progress as defined under section [136A.101](#), subdivision 10.

Subd. 4. Cost of attendance.

- (a) The recognized cost of attendance for a public institution has the meaning given in Code of Federal Regulations, title 20, chapter 28, subchapter IV, part F, section 1087II.
- (b) The recognized cost of attendance for a private institution equals the lesser of:
 - (1) the cost of attendance for the institution as calculated under Code of Federal Regulations, title 20, chapter 28, subchapter IV, part F, section 1087II; or
 - (2) for two-year programs, an amount equal to the highest recognized cost of attendance charged at a public two-year institution, or for four-year programs, an amount equal to the highest recognized cost of attendance at a public university.

Subd. 5. Foster grant amount; payment; opt-out.

- (a) Each student shall be awarded a foster grant based on the federal need analysis. Applicants are encouraged to apply for all other sources of financial aid. The amount of the foster grant must be equal to the applicant's recognized cost of attendance after deducting:
 - (1) the student aid index as calculated by the federal need analysis;
 - (2) the amount of a federal Pell Grant award for which the applicant is eligible;
 - (3) the amount of the state grant;
 - (4) the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant;
 - (5) the sum of all Tribal scholarships;
 - (6) the amount of any other state and federal gift aid;
 - (7) the Education and Training Voucher Program;
 - (8) extended foster care benefits under section [260C.451](#);
 - (9) the amount of any private grants or scholarships, excluding grants and scholarships provided by the private institution of higher education in which the eligible student is enrolled; and
 - (10) for public institutions, the sum of all institutional grants, scholarships, tuition waivers, and tuition remission amounts.
- (b) The foster grant shall be paid directly to the eligible institution where the student is enrolled.
- (c) An eligible private institution may opt out of participating in the foster grant program established under this section. To opt out, the institution shall provide notice to the office by September 1 for the next academic year.

(d) An eligible private institution that does not opt out under paragraph (c) and accepts the student's application to attend the institution must provide institutional grants, scholarships, tuition waivers, or tuition remission in an amount equal to the difference between:

- (1) the institution's cost of attendance as calculated under subdivision 4, paragraph (b), clause (1); and
- (2) the sum of the foster grant under this subdivision and the sum of the amounts in paragraph (a), clauses (1) to (9).

(e) An undergraduate student who is eligible may apply for and receive a foster grant in any year of undergraduate study unless the student has obtained a baccalaureate degree or previously has been enrolled full time as defined in section 136A.101, subdivision 7a, or the equivalent for eight semesters or the equivalent, or received a foster grant for five years, whichever occurs first. A foster grant must not be awarded to a student for more than three years for a two-year degree, certificate, or diploma, or five years for a four-year undergraduate degree.

(f) Foster grants may be awarded to an eligible student for four quarters, three semesters, or the equivalent during the course of a single fiscal year. In calculating the award amount, the office must use the same calculation it would for any other term.

Subd. 6. Dissemination of information.

(a) The office shall, by September 1, 2022, and September 1 each year thereafter, prepare and provide the information to be disseminated by responsible social services agencies, Tribal social services agencies, the office, the Department of Human Services, and eligible state and private institutions that:

- (1) describes the availability of the program established under this section;
- (2) explains how to participate in the program; and
- (3) includes information on all available federal and state grants identified under subdivision 5.

(b) The office shall maintain and annually update the list of eligible private institutions that opt out under subdivision 5, paragraph (c), and post the list of the institutions on the office's website.

Subd. 7. Assistance from the Office of Higher Education.

The office shall assist foster grant applicants eligible under subdivision 3 by providing assistance in:

- (1) completing the foster grant application; and
- (2) accessing and applying for available federal and state financial aid resources under subdivision 5.

Subd. 8. Report.

(a) The office shall prepare an anonymized report to be submitted annually to the chairperson and minority chairperson of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over higher education that contains:

- (1) the number of students receiving foster grants and the institutions attended; and
- (2) annual retention and graduation data on students receiving foster grants.

(b) The report required under this subdivision may be combined with other legislatively required reporting. If submitted as a separate report, the report must be submitted by January 15.

Appendix B: Resources

- Gross, J., Geirger, J., Uhls, E., & King, G. (2022). The relationship between financial aid and postsecondary completion among youth formerly in foster care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 40 (1), 207-219. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-022-00884-y>.
- Minnesota Office of Higher Education (2023). https://www.ohe.state.mn.us/sPages/student_enroll_data.cfm
- Walsh, A. (2021, February 24). *College affordability challenges facing youth with experience in foster care*. The Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/report/college-affordability-challenges-facing-youth-experience-foster-care/>.
- Skobba, K., Moorman, D., & Meyers, D. (2022). The cost of early independence: Unmet material needs among college students with homelessness or foster care histories. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 37(5): 691-713.

Appendix C: OHE Data Suppression Policy for Student Information

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the protection of private data on students when releasing summary data about our institutions and students.

Increased attention to education has led to an expansion in the amount of information on students and institutions reported by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE). Such reports offer a challenge of meeting reporting requirements while also meeting legal requirements to protect each student's personally identifiable information (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [FERPA]) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99). Recognizing this, subgroup disaggregation of the data may not be published if the results would yield personally identifiable information about an individual student (or if the number of students in a category is insufficient to yield statistically reliable information). States are required to define a minimum number of students in a reporting group or subgroup required to publish results consistent with the protection of personally identifiable information (34 CFR § 200.7).

Scope

This policy applies to all public reports generated by employees, agents, or contractors of OHE.

Policy

OHE may release summary data, including aggregate student counts for all groups including those of less than 10. However, OHE may not release any other information regarding the group depending on the sensitive nature of the data.

Other information is defined as information that, alone or in combination, is linked or linkable to a specific student that would allow a reasonable person in the school (institution) community, who does not have personal knowledge of the relevant circumstances, to identify the student with reasonable certainty. Other information may include, but is not limited to: gender or sex, gender identity, race/ethnicity, Tribal affiliation, disability, citizenship, income and wages, expected contributions, cumulative debt, and birth date or birthplace information. Other information also includes aid awarded for the following programs, including but not limited to: Postsecondary Child Care Grants, Minnesota Indian Scholarship Program, MN Reconnect, Public Safety Officer Survivor Grant, Teacher Candidate Grants, Grants for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and State Grant.

OHE may suppress other information for aggregate student counts of less than 10 for the following reasons:

- the information could identify an individual, or
- the report will be released to an audience that includes recipients other than individuals to whom OHE may disclose personally identifiable information pursuant to federal or state law.

In addition to suppressing small cells, OHE may:

- Recode categories with values of 95 to 100 percent to greater than or equal to 95 percent (≥ 95 percent), and
- Recode categories with values of 0 to 5 percent to less than or equal to 5 percent (≤ 5 percent).

Unforeseen circumstances, such as a pandemic or natural disaster, may affect the integrity of annually collected data. OHE will consider and decide upon potentially adjusted reporting and suppression strategies in such extraordinary times.

Individuals and organizations to which OHE discloses information will be directed that its re-disclosure to anyone who is not authorized to receive that information under state and/or federal law is prohibited. Disclosure of data by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education is subject to Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA, Minnesota Statutes Chapter 13) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (34 CFR Part 99.31).

Additionally, any use of education records by another state agency, its employees, agents, or contractors is subject to and shall be consistent with applicable provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA) including, but not limited to, FERPA regulations at 34 C.F.R. § 99.32 through 99.35, regarding recordkeeping, redisclosure, and destruction of education records.

Definitions

- Personally identifiable information (PII): Data that identifies the individual. For the purposes of education records, PII is defined by federal law as information that includes, but is not limited to a student's name; the name of the student's parent or other family members; the address of the student or student's family; a personal identifier, such as the student's social security number, student number, or biometric record; other indirect identifiers, such as the student's date of birth, place of birth, and mother's maiden name; other information that, alone or in combination, is linked or linkable to a specific student that would allow a reasonable person in the school (institution) community, who does not have personal knowledge of the relevant circumstances, to identify the student with reasonable certainty; and information requested by a person who the educational agency or institution reasonably believes knows the identity of the student to whom the education record relates.
- Summary Data: Statistical records and reports aggregated from data on individuals in a way that individuals are not identified and from which neither their identities nor any other characteristic that could uniquely identify an individual is ascertainable.

Classification of Information

Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes 2020, section 13.02, subdivision 12 and Minnesota Statutes 2020, section 136A.162, data on students collected and used by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education are private data on individuals, including data on applicants for financial assistance collected and used by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education for student financial aid programs administered by that office.



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2024