

# FOSTERING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH A HISTORY OF FOSTER CARE: A BEXAR COUNTY PILOT PROJECT



*Texas has the opportunity to be **the national leader** in providing state funding to support improved college graduation rates for foster care alumni and to increase the number of children in foster care who are academically and emotionally ready to succeed in college.*

## FUNDING REQUEST

\$1,139,000 per year | \$2,278,000 over biennium

### OVERVIEW

The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), Texas A&M San Antonio (A&M-SA), and the Alamo Colleges District (ACD) have developed an innovative pilot program to create a pipeline of educational support for the more than 600 foster care alumni currently enrolled on our campuses, as well as youth in foster care who aspire to go to college. The pilot will enhance existing resources and practices, and develop targeted support to increase access, retention, and graduation rates for foster care alumni.

### THE CHALLENGE

Educational achievement can break the cycle of child abuse and neglect. A college degree has a significant impact on lifetime earnings and employment possibilities, better physical health, higher civic engagement, and less reliance on public assistance<sup>1</sup>—all of which impact resources essential to the prevention of future child abuse and neglect.

Although many youths in foster care aspire to go on to postsecondary education, **only 33% will enroll in a two- or four-year institution, and less than 4% will graduate with an associate's or bachelor's degree by age 25.**<sup>2</sup> Foster care alumni are a particularly vulnerable student population with unique educational challenges related to unresolved trauma, instability of placement and educational preparation, and fewer financial and emotional supports than their same age peers. The challenges are complex and require multi-faceted solutions.

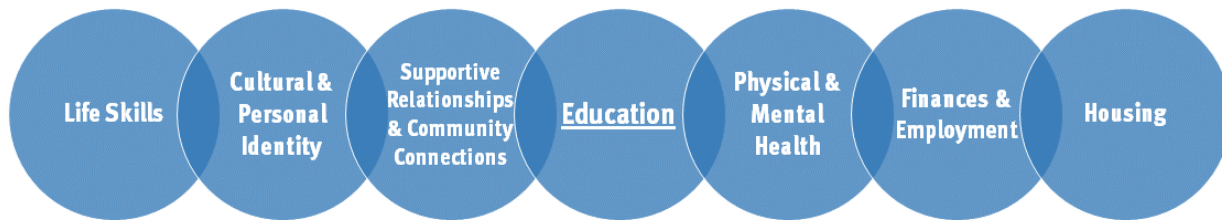
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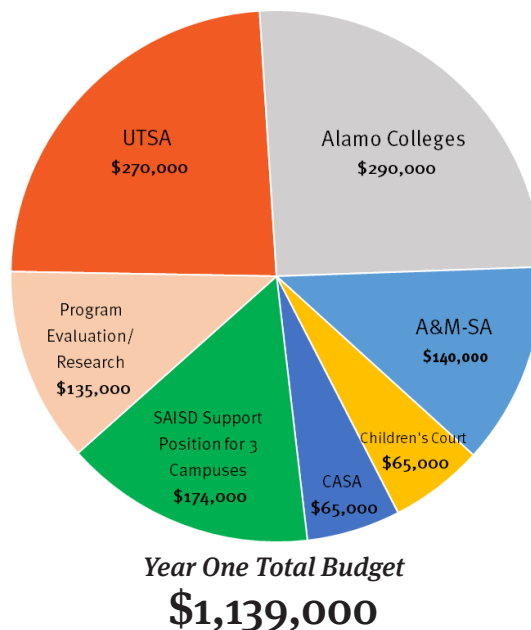
# LEGISLATIVE BRIEF



## AN INNOVATIVE PILOT PROGRAM

Informed by current students with a history of foster care, community partners, and evidence of best practices on our campuses and across the country<sup>3</sup>, this model of outreach and campus-based support will provide students on the UTSA, A&M-SA, and ACD campuses a comprehensive, strengths-based approach to educational success by addressing supportive relationships and community connections, physical and mental health, finances and employment, and housing. UTSA and A&M-SA will also serve as Supervised Independent Living (SIL) placements to provide housing, meals, and support services for currently enrolled students who elect to extend foster care to age 21.

The pilot program includes critical partnerships with the **Bexar County Children’s Court, Child Advocates San Antonio (CASA), the San Antonio Independent School District, and Child Protective Services (Region 8)** who will work together to create a pipeline of educational support for youth in foster care at the middle and early high school level. The pipeline will include a first of its kind Children’s Court “College-Bound Docket,” providing targeted mentoring, advocacy and academic support to improve college readiness. Increased funding will also allow the UTSA Institute for P-20 Initiatives to expand existing pre-college programming to meet the unique needs of youth in foster care.



## THE IMPACT

This pilot program is best suited to Bexar County because of the large number of foster care alumni currently enrolled in our institutions (600+), the large number of children in foster care in Bexar County (3,400), and the Children’s Court’s national reputation for innovative programming. As Hispanic-Serving Institutions with large populations of first-generation students to which we already offer supportive programming, we are especially well-suited to serve foster care alumni in Texas. We have published researchers in the area of supporting foster care alumni in postsecondary education and leadership roles on related local and statewide advocacy groups.



**This comprehensive, multi-tiered approach to improve outcomes for foster care alumni is novel in that it targets both current college students and youth currently in foster care, and creates opportunities for much-needed applied research and evaluation, lending itself to replication at other postsecondary education institutions in Texas and throughout the United States.**

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017). More education: Lower unemployment, higher earnings. Employment projections. Retrieved from: [https://www.bls.gov/emp/education\\_pays\\_handout.pdf](https://www.bls.gov/emp/education_pays_handout.pdf); Ma, J., Pender, M., & Welch, M. (2016). Education pays 2016: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society. Washington, DC: The College Board.

<sup>2</sup> Watt, T., Faulkner, M., Bustillos, S., & Madden, E. (2018). Foster care alumni and higher education: A descriptive study of postsecondary achievements of foster youth in Texas. *Child and Adolescent Social Work*, 1-10.

<sup>3</sup> Piel, M. H., Geiger, J. M., Schelbe, L., Day, A., & Kearney, K. (2019). Lessons learned from campus-based support programs for students with a history of foster care. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 55(3).