

BOARD OF REGENTS BRIEFING PAPER

Handbook Revision, Fee Waiver for Nevada Foster Youth

BACKGROUND & POLICY CONTEXT OF ISSUE:

At its September 6-7, 2018, meeting the Board of Regents approved a [fee waiver for Nevada Foster Youth](#) (*Title 4, Chapter 17, Section 13*). The policy provides for eligible students who were in the custody of a Nevada child welfare agency after age 14 a waiver of certain registration fees and laboratory fees. Subsequently, at its June 6, 2019, meeting, the Board approved [a revision to the fee waiver policy](#) that made the waiver available to students placed out of state by a Nevada child welfare agency for treatment purposes or through an Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) and who may have graduated from a high school outside Nevada, provided they meet the other program eligibility requirements.

While the policy revision adopted at the June 6, 2019, meeting broadened the fee waiver to include students placed out of state by a Nevada child welfare agency and removed the provision that the required high school diploma be earned from a Nevada high school, limiting language was also added stating that this exception applied only to students who “did not achieve permanency with a family prior to the age of 18.” As such, the policy inadvertently created a different eligibility standard for youth in the custody of a Nevada child welfare agency who were placed out of state and graduated high school outside of Nevada versus those who were placed in state and graduated from a Nevada high school. For Nevada foster youth graduating from a Nevada high school, there is no limitation related to the achievement of permanency and therefore there is an inconsistency within the policy. The proposed revision to *Title 4, Chapter 17, Section 13* treats all students in the custody of a Nevada child welfare agency in the same manner. This is appropriate given the decisions made by Nevada child welfare agencies are based on the needs of the child and whether or not these needs can be best addressed in state or out of state and should not impact fee waiver eligibility.

When the original fee waiver policy proposal was brought to the Board in 2018, it included a provision that eligible students must have been in the custody of a child welfare agency after the student reached the age of 16. At that meeting, the Board approved the waiver and changed the age to 14, thereby expanding eligibility. The second part of this proposed revision to *Title 4, Chapter 17, Section 13* extends the beginning age a student must be in the custody of a Nevada child welfare agency to qualify for a fee waiver from age 14 to age 13. This proposal is being brought forward based on feedback from faculty and staff on the campuses who work directly with students who have experienced foster care. Specifically, the change to age 13 would align with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and create for consistency in messaging to students around qualifying for the NSHE fee waiver as well as federal student aid provisions. FAFSA filers who indicate they were in foster care or a dependent or ward of the court any time after age 13 are not required to provide parent/guardian income information on the FAFSA, thereby simplifying FAFSA completion while maximizing the amount of need-based financial aid for which they qualify. In addition, this revision would expand fee waiver eligibility to students who may have left the custody of a Nevada child welfare agency at a slightly younger age, but still have substantially similar needs to their peers who stayed in custody a year longer.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS BEING RECOMMENDED OR REQUESTED:

- Revise Board policy (*Title 4, Chapter 17, Section 13*) to standardize the eligibility requirements for Nevada’s foster youth regardless of which state they graduated high school from as long as they were under the care of a Nevada child welfare agency.
- Revise Board policy (*Title 4, Chapter 17, Section 13*) to revise the age at which a student must have been in the custody of a Nevada child welfare agency to qualify for the waiver from 14 to 13.

IMPETUS (WHY NOW?):

The current policy creates an inequity in which students qualify for the waiver, based on their placement by a Nevada child welfare agency, and this should be resolved. In addition, now that the fee waiver has been in place for over three years, it is time to consider ways to improve support for this population of students.

CHECK THE NSHE STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL THAT IS SUPPORTED BY THIS REQUEST:

- Access (Increase participation in post-secondary education)
- Success (Increase student success)
- Close the Achievement Gap (Close the achievement gap among underserved student populations)
- Workforce (Collaboratively address the challenges of the workforce and industry education needs of Nevada)
- Research (Co-develop solutions to the critical issues facing 21st century Nevada and raise the overall research profile)
- Not Applicable to NSHE Strategic Plan Goals

INDICATE HOW THE PROPOSAL SUPPORTS THE SPECIFIC STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL

- Standardizing the language of the NSHE Foster Youth Fee Waiver policy helps both staff and students understand and communicate the requirements of obtaining a waiver and thereby supports student access, success and closing the achievement gap.
- Given the current low numbers of foster youth eligible for the waiver, lowering the age by one year may allow increased access to a population not currently being served.

BULLET POINTS TO SUPPORT REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:

- By standardizing eligibility requirements institutional staff and community partners can assist students with clear direction.
- Given the current low numbers of foster youth eligible for the waiver and the practical alignment with the FAFSA age requirement for independent status, it allows for the consistent messaging for students.

POTENTIAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:

None have been presented.

ALTERNATIVE(S) TO WHAT IS BEING REQUESTED/RECOMMENDED:

The Board may maintain the current policy.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHANCELLOR’S OFFICE:

The Chancellor’s Office supports this recommendation.

COMPLIANCE WITH BOARD POLICY:

- Consistent With Current Board Policy: Title # _____ Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- Amends Current Board Policy: Title 4, Chapter 17, Section 13
- Amends Current Procedures & Guidelines Manual: Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- Other: _____
- Fiscal Impact: Yes No _____

Explain: *Based on the fee waiver utilization seen in the first three years of the program, as well as the average annual number of students who have exited care at age 13 over the last five years, it is estimated the initial annual increase would be under \$50,000.*

POLICY PROPOSAL
TITLE 4, CHAPTER 17, SECTION 13
Fee Waiver for Nevada Foster Youth

Additions appear in *boldface italics*; deletions are [~~stricken~~ and bracketed]

Section 13. Fee Waiver for Nevada Foster Youth

1. A student who was in the custody of an agency which provides child welfare services in Nevada after the student reached the age of ***13*** [~~14~~] years may be permitted to register for credit without a registration fee or, except as otherwise provided, laboratory fee(s) if the student:
 - a. Has graduated from high school or obtained a general equivalency diploma or equivalent document;
 - b. Completes the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); and
 - c. Is under the age of 26 years.

A student placed out of state by a Nevada child welfare agency for the purpose of treatment or who was placed out of state through an Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) [~~and did not achieve permanency with a family prior to the attainment of age 18~~] is eligible for the waiver.

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