

2026

NEXT STEP

EMBARKGEORGIACENTER



STUDENT GUIDEBOOK

“next step” resource guide for high school aged youth who
have experienced homelessness or foster care



Embark Georgia Center

J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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INTRO

Whether you're a student embarking on your educational journey or an adult supporter guiding the way, we're thrilled to introduce you to this resource. Our team collaborates with statewide professionals, including college campus Designated Points of Contact (DPOCs), Independent Living Specialists, state administrative staff, and school liaisons across diverse campuses.

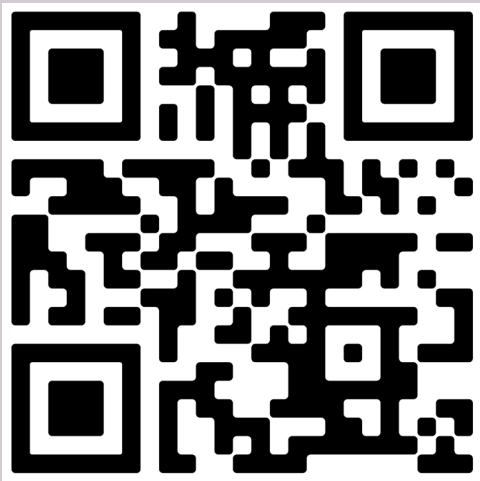
The Embark Georgia Center is dedicated to empowering students like you. We encourage you to ask questions, actively engage in the process, and share your feedback with us. Our team collaborates with professionals across our state, including Designated Points of Contacts (DPOCs) on college campuses, Independent Living Specialists, state administrative staff, and school liaisons and administrators across various college and technical school campuses.

Please know that we are here to support you every step of the way. Whether you have questions, suggestions, or simply need guidance— don't hesitate to reach out to us at etv@fanning.uga.edu or visit our website at <https://embarkgeorgia.org/>.

If we can't provide immediate answers, we'll gladly direct you to the appropriate person or office.

We are excited about the dreams and aspirations of our students, and we're committed to helping you turn those dreams into reality!

Here's to your future success,
The Embark Georgia Center Team



Acronyms, abbreviations and definitions to know:

DFCS-Department of Family and Children Services

DHS-Department of Human Services

DPOC-Designated Point of Contact

EPAC-Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation

ETV-Georgia Education and Training Voucher Program

ILP-Independent Living Program (DHS, GA-RYSE)

ILS-Independent Living Specialist

TCSG-Technical College System of Georgia

USG-University System of Georgia

Foster Care-24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes, but is not limited to, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, childcare institutions, and pre-adoptive homes.

Kinship Guardianship-temporary or permanent arrangement in which a relative or any non-relative adult who has a long-standing relationship or bond with the young person and/or family has taken over the full-time, substitute care of a child whose parents are unable or unwilling to do so.

Homelessness (According to McKinney Vento/U.S.)- individuals whose nighttime residence is NOT:

1) Fixed—stationary, permanent, and not subject to change, 2) Regular—used on a predictable, routine, or consistent basis, 3) Adequate—sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in the home, (42 U.S.C.§11434A(2)(B)(i)),

Last Dollar Funding A type of financial support that pays for remaining costs after all other financial aid (like grants and scholarships) has been applied.

Student Aid Index (SAI) A number calculated from your FAFSA that helps colleges determine how much financial aid you are eligible to receive. A lower number typically means you qualify for more financial aid.



MY STORY

MY IDENTITY

Before we dive deeper into Embark/ETV, take a moment to consider your identity and purpose. This part of our guidebook is focused on uncovering what those two words mean to YOU!



Take a moment to review the list of values below. Circle your top 5.

Achievement	Belonging	Diversity
Adventure	Career	Environment
Altruism (helping others)	Collaboration	Equality
Ambition	Compassion	Ethics
Authenticity	Confidence	Fun
Balance	Creativity	Relationships
	Curiosity	

Draw a picture that captures your top five values or draft a value statement

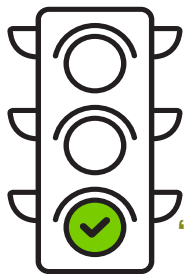
ex: I believe in honesty, kindness, empathy, striving to treat others, and understanding.

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark blue border, intended for a drawing or a written value statement.

MY BOUNDARIES

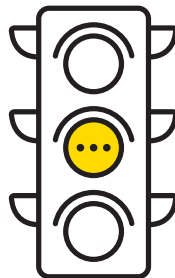
Who knows your story better than you? We want sharing to be a positive experience, especially since it can help you stand out when applying for colleges and scholarships.

The next time you share imagine a traffic light:



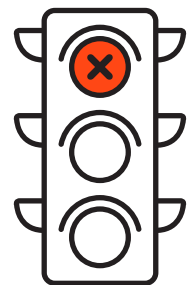
"I live in a home"

Green light: a statement you're comfortable making to anyone in any situation, GO ahead and say it!



"I live in a foster home"

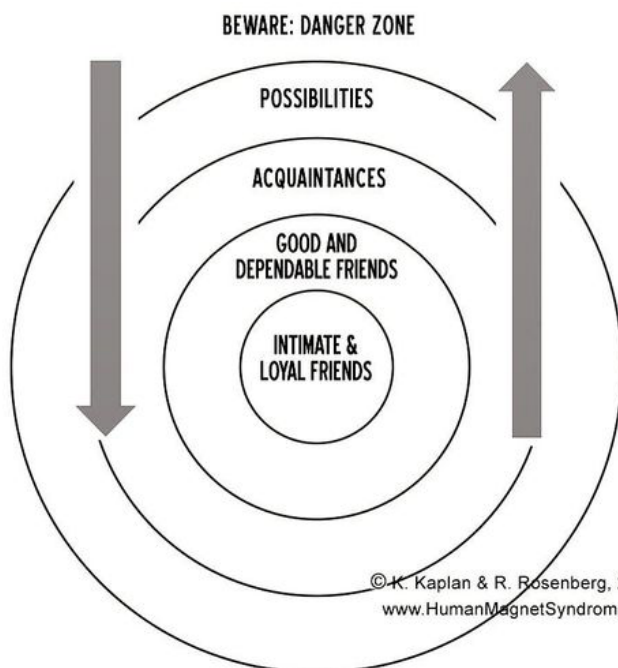
Yellow light: a statement that requires you to **SLOW DOWN** and consider how it will be received or if it will lead to someone asking more personal questions.



"I was taken from my parents and placed in foster care due to physical abuse"

Red light: a statement that includes private information, **STOP** and think twice about who you are talking to and if they can be trusted with this information.

RELATIONSHIP CIRCLES



This diagram shows that relationships can shift over time. It also shows that it's okay to want closeness and connection, and it's just as okay to create space to protect yourself. Both choices can be healthy, and your needs and boundaries matter.



RESOURCES

CAREER / SCHOOL ASSESSMENTS

There are multiple factors that go into selecting an after high school option that best suits you: campus life, cost, location, etc. As a high school student, it's important to begin considering what you want your path to be.

Let's take a look at some of our favorite programs, quizzes, and portals to help you decide **WHAT'S NEXT!**

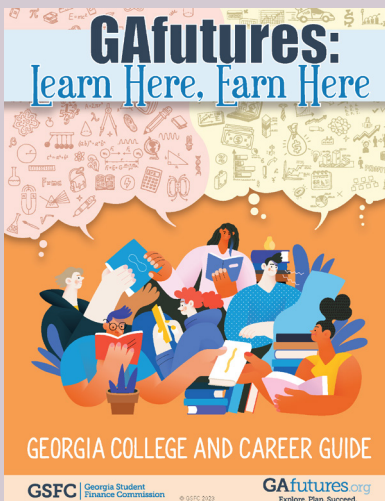


GAfutures is a platform for career exploration, college planning, and accessing financial resources, and is managed by the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC).

Career Exploration - discover various career paths and the education required

College Planning - find colleges that match your interests and needs

Financial Resources - learn about scholarships, grants, loans, and other financial aid options



The College and Career Guide provided by the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) is a comprehensive resource designed to help students navigate their post-secondary education and career planning. This guide offers valuable information and tools to support students in making informed decisions about their future.



The Georgia Match Program is a unique initiative to streamline the college admissions process for Georgia high school students.

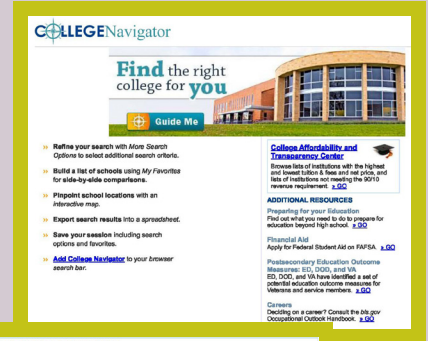
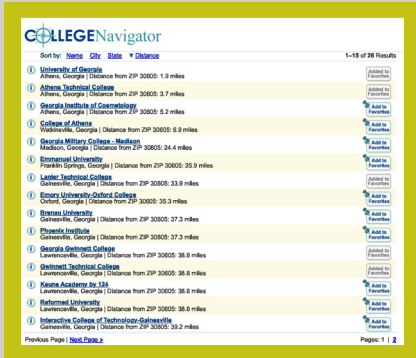
This Program is designed to: automatically match high school seniors with Georgia colleges and universities based on academic achievements and eligibility. It simplifies the application process by pre-qualifying students for admission to participating institutions.





College Navigator is for anyone looking into colleges. It's like having a personal college advisor available 24/7.

Finding Colleges - search for & compare colleges by name, location, or specific programs or majors
 Planning Financially - look at tuition, fees, and the average financial aid package
 Exploring Programs and Majors - see which colleges offer what programs



Niche offers a college quiz that helps students discover colleges and universities that may be a good fit for them.

What you need: high school GPA, ACT/SAT score(if taken), and smart phone or computer
 How long you need: 15-30 mins

Tell Niche what's important to you, and they will create a personalized list of schools to consider.

How it works

TAKE THE QUIZ
Tell us a bit about who you are and what you're looking for

GET MATCHED
We'll create a personalized list of

EXPLORE!
Use our suggestions to find

Your Best Fit in America

College Quiz

Direct Admissions

View on map

College Quiz

Georgia Gwinnett College
 Lawrenceville, GA • 4 Year • ★★★★★ 1,880 reviews
 Freshman: I wanted to apply to Georgia Gwinnett College because I wanted to take classes to prepare myself to go to bigger schools in the future. Once I started, my first reaction to the whole place was surprisingly good. I wasn't expecting the ... [Read 1,880 reviews](#)

Overall Niche Grade: Acceptance rate 93% • Net price \$10,339 • SAT range 940-1170

Will you get in? | Compare

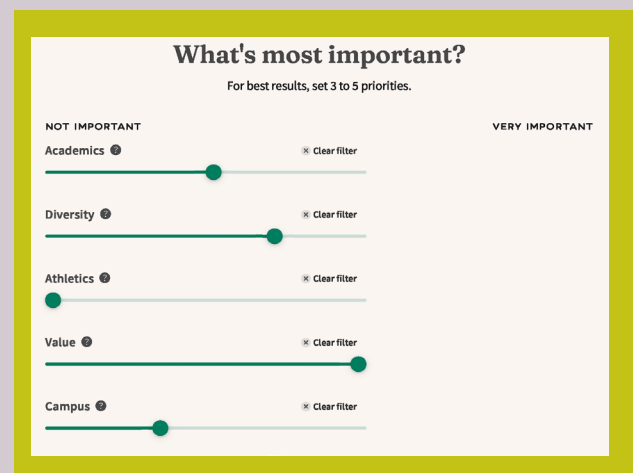
Add to List

Georgia Highlands College
 Rome, GA • 4 Year • ★★★★★ 656 reviews
 Sophomore: I have attended Georgia Highlands Community College for the past 2 years. I am currently in my sophomore year and preparing to graduate with an associate degree in elementary education this summer. The thing I enjoy most at: ... [Read 656 reviews](#)

Overall Niche Grade: Acceptance rate 100% • Net price \$6,823 • SAT range —

Will you get in? | Compare | Virtual tour

Add to List

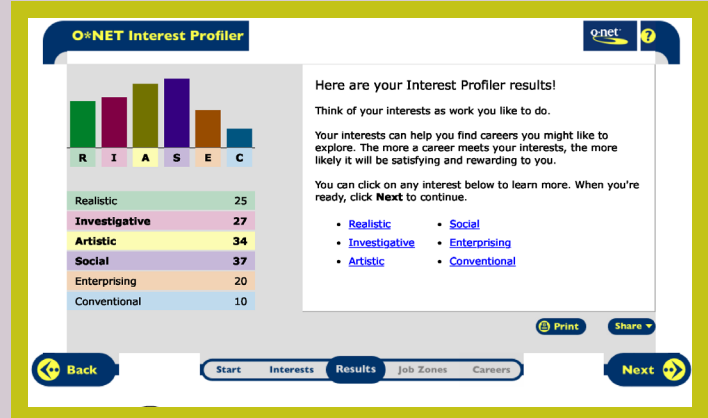
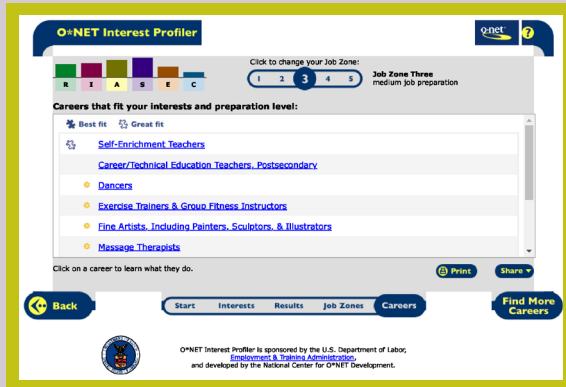




My Next Move O*NET helps individuals explore different career options based on their interests.

What you need: smart phone or computer
How long you need: 15-30 mins

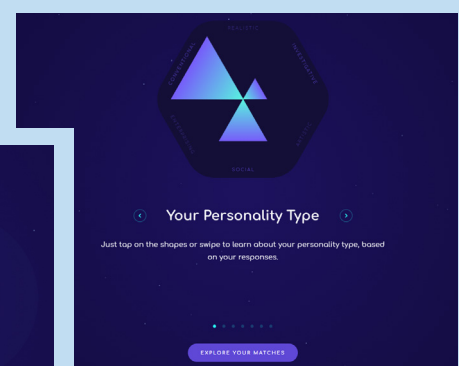
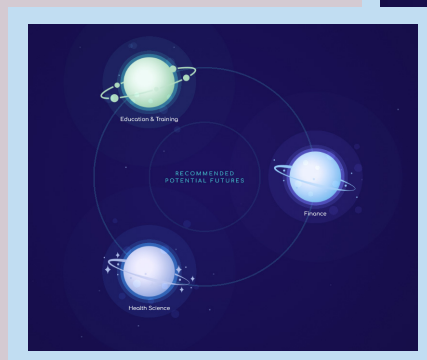
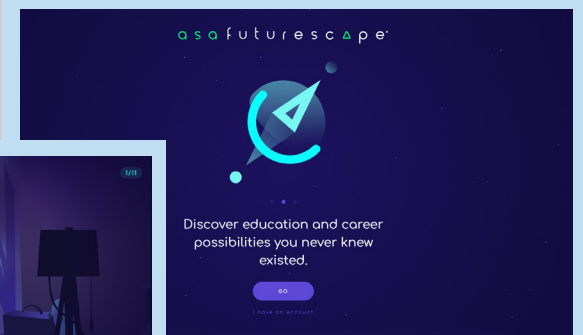
Answer questions about the type of work you might enjoy. O*NET will suggest careers that match your interests and training.



Futurescape shares info about career pathways/opportunities and educational requirements

What you need: smart phone or computer
How long you need: 11 mins

Futurescape gives examples of possible careers with job description, typical education route, necessary certifications, pay range, related jobs, and more.



NEXT STEP

CHOOSING YOUR NEXT STEP

As you prepare to take the next step after obtaining your high school diploma/GED, there are many options ahead of you to explore.

You might consider attending a **traditional four-year college or university**. This path may be more expensive, but it allows you to earn a bachelor's degree.

Alternatively, **community colleges and technical schools** offer excellent avenues for specialized training and certification programs. They're often more affordable and can be completed in a shorter timeframe.

Vocational training and apprenticeships are hands-on programs that allow you to learn valuable skills while gaining practical experience in the field.

For those who prefer flexibility and convenience, **online education** is another fantastic option. Many colleges and universities offer online courses and degree programs, allowing you to pursue higher education from the comfort of your own home.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

- funded by state/federal money
- usually cheaper
- larger class sizes

OR

PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

- not funded by state/federal money
- usually more expensive
- more selective admission

NOT FOR PROFIT:

- focus on educating student

OR

FOR PROFIT:

- focus on making money

IN-STATE:

- located in your state of residence
- usually cheaper
- Hope/Zell funding (in GA)

OR

OUT OF STATE:

- located outside of your state
- usually more expensive
- potential scholarships

MY GOALS

Setting goals can feel overwhelming, especially without a clear plan, making it easier to get discouraged or give up. SMART goals offer a solution by providing a structured approach. So, what exactly is a SMART goal?

SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

TAKE A LOOK AT THIS EXAMPLE:

Meet Alex, a 15-year-old who loves the guitar. Inspired by an upcoming talent show in three months, Alex sets a SMART goal: to flawlessly play a complex solo from a favorite song.

SPECIFIC

States exactly what you will accomplish

MEASURABLE

Progress is trackable

ACHIEVABLE

It is possible for you to achieve this goal

RELEVANT

Aligned with your values and interests

TIME-BOUND

Includes fair, but firm deadlines

SMART Goal Breakdown:

Specific: Learn and play the solo.

Measurable: Practice 30 mins daily, record progress weekly.

Achievable: Break down the solo, seek teacher guidance.

Relevant: Showcasing talent and connecting through music.

Time-bound: Master the solo in three months for the talent show.

READ THESE QUESTIONS

1. **Discover Your Passion** What excites you or what do you want to improve? Share it!
2. **Get Specific (S)** Instead of broad goals, be detailed. What's the specific skill or area to improve? Jot it down!
3. **Measure Your Progress (M)** Break it into smaller steps. How will you track progress? Share your plan!
4. **Make it Doable (A)** Can you realistically achieve it? Adjust if needed and make it doable.
5. **Connect to What Matters (R)** Why does it matter? Share with someone how it connects to your dreams.
6. **Set a Deadline (T)** Add a time-frame. When do you want to achieve it? Create a timeline!
7. **Create Your Game Plan** Break it into steps. What actions each day, week, or month? Make a plan!
8. **Seek Guidance** Who can help? Share your goal and seek guidance.
9. **Stay Flexible** Life happens. How can you adapt your plan?
10. **Celebrate Small Wins** What's your reward for each mini-win? Celebrate and stay motivated! Now, share your SMART goal with someone who can cheer you on!



Remember, the goal-setting process is a journey - it's okay if your plans evolve over time. The key is to stay curious, be proactive, and enjoy the process of discovering your WHY!

**NOW, IT'S YOUR
TURN!!**

SPECIFIC



What specific goal do you have?

MEASURABLE



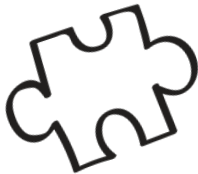
What and how will you track your progress?

ACHIEVABLE



What will you do to achieve your goal?

RELEVANT



How does this goal fit within my values and future?

TIME-BOUND



What kind of deadline are you setting for yourself?

FUNDING FAFSA



When it comes to paying for college, there isn't much you can do without the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA).

Federal Student Aid
A BETTER 2024-25 FAFSA Form
The FAFSA form is available for short periods of time while we monitor site performance and update the form to provide you with a better experience. Learn more about the 2024-25 FAFSA form.
2024-25 FAFSA® Form
Start New Form Access Existing Form
Need to access last year's form? Start or Edit a 2023-24 FAFSA Form

- What students need to apply:**
1. List of at least one and up to 20 colleges
 2. FSA ID log-in
 3. Info about current assets, such as cash, checking and savings accounts
 4. Depending on the situation- a copy of their tax return

To qualify as a ward of the court or in foster care, a student must have been in foster care or been a dependent or ward of the court at any point on or after their 13th birthday. Students should answer based on their own experience and can check either or both if both apply.

To qualify under the legal guardianship criteria, you must have a guardianship in place currently or when you turned 18. Both kinship guardianships and non-related legal guardianships qualify.

To qualify as homeless for FAFSA purposes students must be “unaccompanied,” which means that they are not living with or in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

☐ At any time since the student turned 13, they were an orphan (no living biological or adoptive parent).

☐ At any time since the student turned 13, they were a ward of the court.

☐ At any time since the student turned 13, they were in foster care.

☐ The student is or was a legally emancipated minor, as determined by a court in their state of residence.

☐ The student is or was in a legal guardianship with someone other than their parent or stepparent, as determined by a court in their state of residence.

☐ None of these apply.

Student Other Circumstances

At any time on or after July 1, 2023, was the student unaccompanied and either (1) homeless or (2) self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

☒ Yes ☐ No

If a student has “unusual circumstances”, they will be “Provisionally Independent.” The student can sign and submit their FAFSA without providing parental income information but will need to contact their school to see what supporting documentation they need to submit.

Students can also qualify if they are “self-supporting and at risk of being homeless.” This means that they pay for living expenses, and their housing may cease to be “fixed, regular, and adequate,” such as if they are being evicted and have nowhere else to go.

BETTER FAFSA
BETTER FUTURE

Provisionally Independent Student*

You will be able to complete your FAFSA® form without parent information, consent and approval, and a signature.

You will need to provide documentation of your circumstances to your school.

* A new term being introduced on the 2024-25 FAFSA form.

SCHOLARSHIPS & GRANTS

Money given to students for education that doesn't have to be repaid. Scholarships are given to students based on various criteria like academic merit, talent, or community involvement. Grants are usually awarded based on financial need or academic achievement.

Hope/Zell: Merit-based scholarship for Georgia Residents attending school in-state. Covers a significant portion of tuition.

Pell Grant: Federal aid helping make college more affordable for students with financial needs.

FSEOG: Federal aid providing additional support for students with financial need, managed by colleges and universities, availability and eligibility may vary.

LOANS

Borrowed money that students need to **payback** with interest. Unlike grants and scholarships, loans must be repaid after school. It's important to understand the terms of the loan, including interest rates and repayment plans, before borrowing.



Federal Direct Subsidized: Federal loan that doesn't accumulate interest until 6 months after leaving school

Federal Direct Unsubsidized: Federal that accumulates interest once it's disbursed(given out)

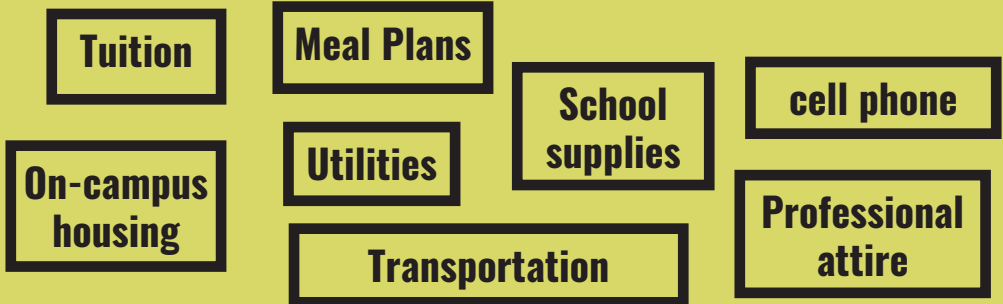
Private Student Loans: Private loan offered by a lender (bank, credit union, online lender) & often come with higher interest rates than federal loans

Parent PLUS: Federal loan available to parents/guardians to help students pay for school

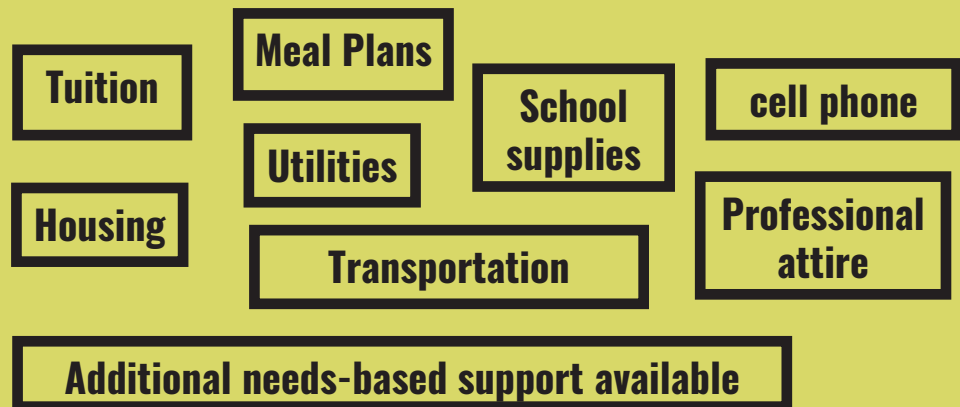
FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

Navigating college costs looks different for every student. The trusted financial aid partners listed below offer funding opportunities with varying eligibility requirements, award amounts, usage guidelines and application processes.

ETV & Chafee Stipends (more info on next page)



Fostering Success Act / Scholarship Program & Wrap-around Support



Georgia Foster Care Scholarship



Covers cost of attendance, minus any other scholarships or grants received, or \$30,000, whichever is less.

Scholarships are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the availability of appropriated funds

nsoroWORKS & nsoro Educational Foundation



Tuition

Meal Plans

**School
supplies**

cell phone

Utilities

Housing

Transportation

**Professional
attire**

Additional needs-based support available



TCSG (Technical College System of Ga) Tuition Waiver



Tuition

Meal Plans

**On-campus
housing**

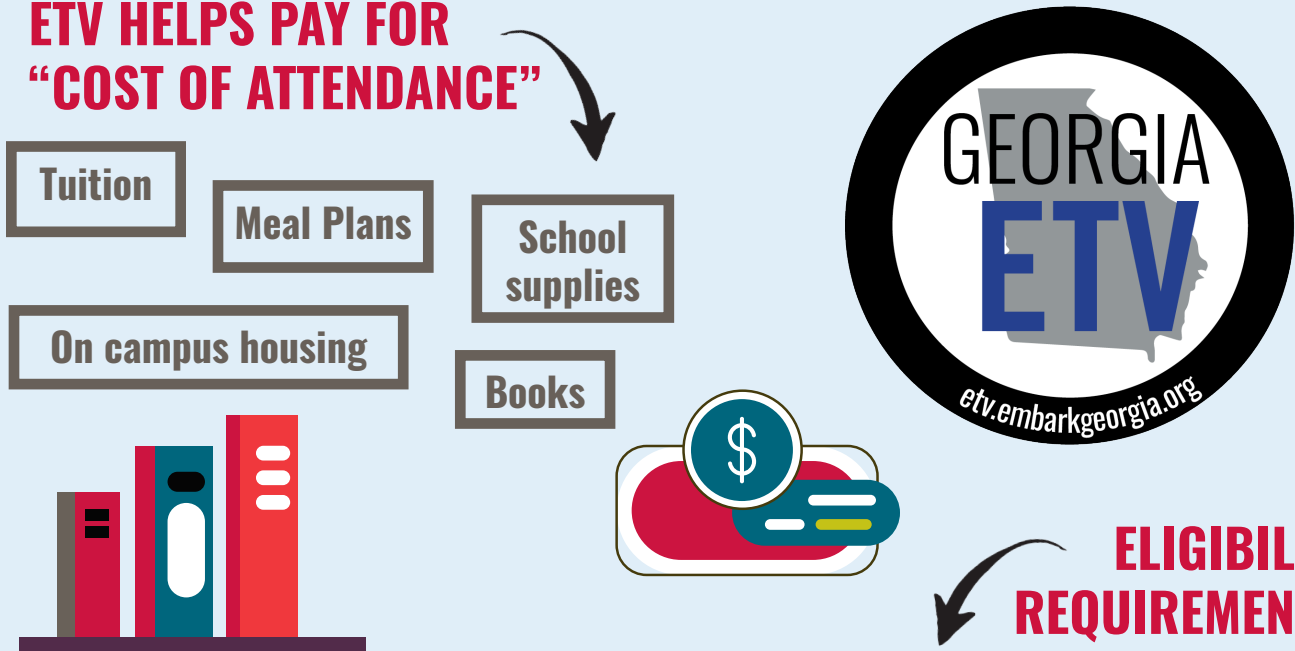
Fees

GEORGIA ETV

EDUCATION & TRAINING VOUCHER

The ETV Program is designed to assist students who have experienced foster care with financial supports for educational and living expenses while attending a post-secondary educational institution.

ETV HELPS PAY FOR “COST OF ATTENDANCE”



Student must have been in foster care for at least 6 months (**does NOT have to be consecutive**) with at least one day of those **6 months coming on or after the student's 14th birthday**.

If a student was reunified with one or more of their biological parents, entered guardianship or was adopted, they must have been in foster care for at least 6 months (**does NOT have to be consecutive**) with at least one day of that **6 months coming on or after the student's 16th birthday**.

- **Must attend or be accepted into an accredited college or tech school**
(in Georgia or out-of-state)
- **Have GED or high school diploma**
- **Student must be under the age of 26**
- **Must meet GPA requirements**

LEARN MORE



GEORGIA ETV

ETV PAYMENTS ARE PAID TO...



Institutions (schools)

Tuition, housing and meal plans on campus, books, supplies, tools, and equipment related to current coursework, (after aid is applied, e.g., Pell and HOPE Scholarships).

Student is responsible for requesting funding through the ETV website.

Students

Payments that cannot be paid directly to the school but are considered cost of attendance can potentially be paid by the student and then reimbursed.

The student will be responsible for providing applicable receipts, proof of payment, and purchase details.

Once students begin receiving ETV support, they must...

Complete annual application These allow students to share their goals and plans.

Submit class schedules
Schedules help confirm enrollment, grades and plan for ETV spending **each semester**.

Submit grades Students must maintain at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA and must provide a grade report **each semester**.

You do not have to use your ETV right after high school or completing your GED. It's completely okay to take a break from school, explore the workforce, or use the tuition waiver program to attend a technical school.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Student is limited to a maximum of 5 years of ETV support

Students can use ETV for multiple degrees, if you have remaining eligibility and funding, you may continue to use it toward another program. One "Year" is utilized when a student spends ETV dollars between July 1st and June 30th of the following year

Additional financial support can be given through monthly stipends (additional criteria required to be eligible); must be enrolled full-time in an accredited school or educational institution & **must be under 23 years old**

Students must connect with their ILS (Independent Living Specialist)

As a part of DFCS, the Independent Living Program serves to support eligible students in their transition from students into adulthood. To find your ILS, scan this QR code:

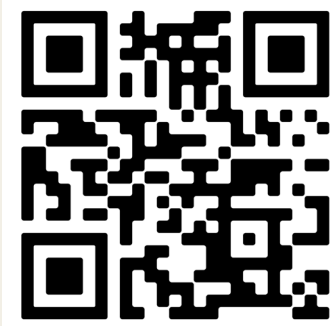


EMBARK STUDENT SUPPORT



UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA

J.W. Fanning Institute
for Leadership Development
Embark Georgia Center



Embark Georgia is a statewide leadership initiative increasing college access for young people who have experienced foster care or homelessness. These students face challenges, like not having enough money, dealing with instability in high school, and not having as many connections. Embark supports students through a network of support on a student's campus and across the state.

Embark Georgia partners with the University System of Georgia, the Technical College System of Georgia, and the Division of Family and Children Services. They work together to make sure students get the support they need to thrive in college.

All public 2-4 year campuses in Georgia have has someone called a Designated Point of Contact (DPOC) who helps connect students with services and support. The list of DPOCs can be found here:



University System of Georgia Summer Precollegiate Program Series

High school youth from across the state apply and are selected to participate in this college campus experience program. Participants spend time on a USG campus where they receive important information on college preparation, learn about the college application process, develop leadership skills, and discover new opportunities.

The program is open to rising high school sophomores and juniors who are in foster care, wards of the state, or emancipated.