

Ready by 21 Benchmarks: Education & Employment

All youth have individualized, strengths-based transition plans that are based on trauma-responsive assessments that are developed and continually monitored and adapted in collaboration with the youth, LDSS foster care worker, and youth's team. The benchmarks are universal, minimum expectations for all youth ages 14 to their 21st birthday, who are involved with the foster care system. These benchmarks should be utilized to develop and monitor youth transition plans. Related indicators will be used to measure attainment at the individual and aggregate levels. Skills, knowledge, and plans will be assessed in accordance with the youth's developmental ability. Youth should have regular opportunities for age- and developmentally appropriate, normative experiences across all of the Ready by 21 domains.

All youth are assumed to be on a career readiness pathway; some youth may also be on a college readiness pathway, depending on the youth's individual goals.

1. Youth are assessed to be on grade level or making developmentally appropriate progress in reading, writing, and math.
2. Youth have an individualized, developmentally appropriate, and specific plan for obtaining their high school diploma or GED.
3. Youth earn their high school diploma or GED.
4. Youth have a plan for secondary education and/or training that is aligned with their employment goals.
5. Youth who have earned their high school diploma or GED, have implemented or achieved their plan for secondary education and/or training.
6. Youth demonstrate employment readiness consistent with their developmental ability, including development and utilization of interpersonal skills, understanding their rights, responsibilities, and expectations as an employee and, how to complete job applications (online and paper), resume development, and interviewing skills.
7. Youth obtain and maintain an internship, apprenticeship, summer youth employment, year round employment and/or volunteer experience that results in professional references.
8. Youth demonstrate use of networking techniques and the benefits of networking with professionals.
9. Youth know how to get an official replacement for their birth certificate.
10. Youth know how to get an official replacement of their Social Security Card.
11. Youth have a State of Maryland-approved Identification card if they have not yet obtained their driver's license.
12. Youth will be supported in getting their driver's license when they have identified it as one of their goals.
13. Youth know how to access consistent and reliable transportation in order to implement their employment, career and educational plans, both while involved with the child welfare system and after they are no longer involved with the child welfare system.
14. Youth born in a county other than the United States, have an official replacement of their citizenship papers and demonstrate understanding of their rights, responsibilities, and when/how to connect to immigration or citizenship resources and services.

Ready by 21 Benchmarks: Financial Empowerment

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1. Youth demonstrate financial empowerment skills related to income, saving, debt, credit, credit reporting, taxes, banking accounts, spending and budgeting, and demonstrate awareness of the benefits of proactively and routinely managing their finances as well as risks associated with inconsistent and/or inadequate management of their finances.
2. Youth will know how to apply for and maintain savings and checking accounts and will have the opportunity to learn how to use debit and credit cards and online banking.
3. Youth will have frequent experiential opportunities to use their personal budget to save for and purchase items that meet their needs and preferences that will include understanding cost, sales tax, rebates, coupons, and tips.
4. Youth will demonstrate the ability to get a copy of their credit report, understand what it says and how credit is established, and how to respond to incorrect information included in the report.
5. Youth know how to get documentation that states that they were in foster care in Maryland and are aware of using it to access special benefits or programs.
6. Youth demonstrate the skills needed to protect their credit and identity, including online and on social media, and know what to do if their identity is stolen, and demonstrate that they can safely secure and store personal information, medical documentation and their demographic information, including an original document of their birth certificate, social security card, etc.
7. Youth will demonstrate understanding of the need for and how to apply for financial aid to continue education after high school or obtaining GED. This includes completion and maintaining of the FASFA, Maryland Tuition Waiver, and/or Education and Training Voucher as well as other scholarships, grants, and financial aid.
8. Youth will demonstrate comprehension of the financial benefits of remaining in foster care until age 21 if they are unable to exit to a permanent living situation and how to access Maryland's Aftercare supportive services if they exit care after age 18.
9. Youth will have knowledge of government programs, including how to find eligibility and application requirements as well as how to utilize and maintain the assistance. Programs include but are not limited to Social Security Insurance (SSI), Medicaid/Medical Assistance (MA), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps), and Women, Infants and Children (WIC). As well as subsidized housing program like, Family Unification Program (FUP) and Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.
10. Youth demonstrate the understanding of how and the ability to pay their rent, utilities, renter's insurance, and other living expenses that come with managing their own household, including understanding how to access additional financial resources if needed.

Ready by 21 Benchmarks: Permanent & Supportive Connections

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1. Youth demonstrate understanding of key characteristics of positive, healthy, and safe relationships, know how and where to access support when navigating difficult times in those relationships, and report having opportunities to develop these relationships.
2. Youth are able to identify important individuals in their lives on an ongoing basis—biological and fictive kin, friends, romantic partners, mentors, and others—and demonstrate understanding of how to have healthy relationships with them, including when there is conflict.
3. Youth practice strategies to invite biological family members and other individuals important in their lives to transition FIMs to participate in the transitional planning process as well as in other areas of planning, as appropriate.
4. Youth demonstrate the ability to seek advice and assistance from supportive adults and peers.
5. Youth identify supportive and committed adults and peers to help them meet their goals with success.
6. Youth have opportunities for normative relationship experiences similar to their peers who are not in care.
7. Youth demonstrate understanding of where to find and how to connect with others who have experienced involvement with the foster care system and/or other public systems.
8. Youth have opportunities to engage with their peers who are currently in or recently left the foster care system.

Ready by 21 Benchmarks: Safe & Stable Housing

All youth have individualized, strengths-based transition plans that are based on trauma-responsive assessments that are developed and continually monitored and adapted in collaboration with the youth, LDSS foster care worker, and youth's team. The benchmarks are universal, minimum expectations for all youth ages 14 to their 21st birthday, who are involved with the foster care system. These benchmarks should be utilized to develop and monitor youth transition plans. Related indicators will be used to measure attainment at the individual and aggregate levels. Skills, knowledge, and plans will be assessed in accordance with the youth's developmental ability. Youth should have regular opportunities for age- and developmentally appropriate, normative experiences across all of the Ready by 21 domains.

1. Youth have a plan for obtaining, maintaining, and sustaining safe and stable housing after they have transitioned from the foster care system, which includes both a primary and secondary plan (Plan B, which would include how to find and access shelters or other emergency housing if needed) for housing, and how the youth will pay for housing, utilities, and necessary living expenses as defined by the youth.
2. Youth know how to find safe, appropriate, and affordable housing that meet their personal needs and preferences. Including identifying properties, meeting with landlords, reviewing and negotiating leases, obtaining and maintaining renter's insurance and providing security deposits and first month's rent.
3. Youth know their rights and responsibilities as a tenant and how and when to contact their landlord or property management company, and/or emergency services.
4. Youth demonstrate skills necessary to keep themselves healthy and safe in their current and/or planned living environment, including getting furniture, how to cook, how to clean, do their laundry, basic home maintenance, and demonstrating an understanding of how to handle water, gas, electric, fire, and weather emergencies.
5. Youth demonstrate an understanding of the types of expenses, costs or fees not included in rent and know how to and who to contact about the costs when considering renting or moving.
6. Youth demonstrate an understanding of what it means to be a good roommate, tenant and neighbor and how to problem solve and access resources that are available in their community if conflicts between roommates, landlord or neighbors arise.

Ready by 21 Benchmarks: Well-Being & Civic Engagement

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1. Youth have a specific plan for the coordination of their physical, oral, vision, and behavioral health care needs (including locating, accessing, and meeting with providers). This will include vaccinations, prescription medications, routine health examinations and tests, and how to access crisis hotlines if needed.
2. Youth know how to obtain and maintain a copy of their Maryland Medical Assistance card and how to obtain and maintain Medicaid coverage through age 26 in Maryland or in their state of residence, if other affordable health insurance is not available to them.
3. Youth have reviewed and understand the implications of knowing their complete medical histories including obtaining and using prescription medications. Youth will know how to get a copy of their immunization record.
4. Youth demonstrate safe food preparation and storage practices and knowledge about basic nutrition and healthy diets.
5. Youth demonstrate an understanding of safe dating, healthy relationships, safe sex practices, sexually transmitted infections, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and other aspects of sexual health education and know how to obtain more information and access resources, including birth control.
6. Youth demonstrate an understanding of the risks associated with underage and lifelong binge drinking, drinking, and driving, tobacco and e-cigarette use, marijuana use, opioid use and abuse, and use of illegal substances, and have an understanding of the signs of addiction, consequences of substance use and where to go for help.
7. Youth demonstrate an understanding of the importance of sleep, exercise, and a healthy and balanced diet, as well as how to regulate their emotions and practice self-care individualized to their own needs and preferences as defined by the youth.
8. Eligible youth are supported in registering to vote, know how to obtain information on candidates and ballot initiatives, and how to vote in local, state, and federal elections.
9. Youth will understand what it means to be selected for Jury service and how they need to respond.
10. Youth have the skills to self-advocate in their own words when they are comfortable doing so.
11. Youth understand when legal representation might be necessary and how to find legal representation.
12. Youth are aware of the risks of human trafficking and how to protect themselves from being exploited or trafficked.
13. Youth know how to obtain help from law enforcement, medical personnel, and/or behavioral health experts if they are a victim of or witness to a crime or attempted crime.