

# Guide for Schools:

## *Meeting the Needs of Students in Foster Care*

Students in foster care have unique educational needs that often go unnoticed. Frequent school changes cause serious confusion and sometimes lost instructional time. Students end up repeating or missing courses, at times failing to graduate as a result. Sometimes, students in foster care lack an active parent or other adult decision maker and advocate, which results in failing to receive an appropriate education (such as needed accommodations, remedial education, special education supports, or gifted and talented classes). Students in foster care are also more likely to experience school discipline, be truant, and ultimately drop out of school. The following best practices and tips can help improve the educational outcomes for students in foster care.

### Basic Practice Tips for Teachers & Administrators

- ❑ **Welcome the student to the school** as you would any other student. Give them a tour and ensure they have all necessary school supplies.
- ❑ **Respect the student's privacy.** Be discreet about their involvement in the child welfare system. Consult with the student before disclosing his or her status.
- ❑ **Understand the impact of trauma** and be aware that most students in foster care have experienced some form of trauma. Use trauma-informed strategies when engaging students in foster care.
- ❑ **Ensure the school has a complete academic record for the student,** including current IEP, 504, transcripts, and/or other support plans (if applicable). Help to track down missing records or documents to complete the student's record.
- ❑ **Identify and communicate with adult advocates and decision makers involved with the student.** Remember the decision maker may still be the child's parents (even if not living with them) or another person appointed in that role. Also, communicate with the student's caseworker, foster parent, attorney, GAL or CASA. These individuals will need regular academic and behavioral updates.
- ❑ **Engage the student in the school community.** Inform them of and help them join extracurricular activities, regardless of their enrollment date.
- ❑ **Advocate for the student.** Ensure the student has the support and guidance to progress academically and socially. This includes ensuring special education, behavioral, emotional, cultural, and linguistic needs are met.
- ❑ **Ensure the student is in the appropriate academic setting,** including universal screening processes and specialized school programs such as gifted & talented, honors, advanced placement, English as a second language, special education, etc.
- ❑ **Maintain up-to-date contact information** in the student's file and in your school database, including current caregiver and caseworker information.
- ❑ **Consider waiving fees for any child in foster care,** including books, lab and technology fees, in-school activities, athletic fees, and before/after school programs. All children in foster care are automatically eligible for free and reduced lunch.
- ❑ **Stay up-to-date and participate in professional learning opportunities** so you can be a champion for students in foster care.
- ❑ **Be aware of upcoming court hearings,** sharing relevant information about school with parties to the court case, and provide excused absences and make up opportunities for any school time missed for court attendance or other necessary child welfare appointments.

## New School: Student Checklist

When students in foster care must change schools, several vital objectives should be completed on the student's first day.

### Does the student...

- Have all necessary school supplies?
- Have the right placement in classes, including special education or 504 accommodations if needed?
- Need a tour of the school?
- Know how they are getting to/from school?
- Know how to find their school contact?
- Have all fees waived (sports, books, etc.)?
- Have online access to grades and homework?
- Know the attendance policy of the school?
- Have an adult to help with homework?
- Know about available extracurricular activities?

## School Stability Checklist

Students in foster care benefit from remaining in a stable school placement, even if their living placement is changing. Law and policy requires schools to ensure a child remains in their original school, unless it is the students best interest to change. Some key points to remember, when a current student enters care, or moves while in care:

- Connect with the child welfare agency to discuss what is in the student's best interest as it relates to remaining in the school.
- Gather information from teachers and staff who know the student so an informed best interest decision can be made.
- Once a best interest decision is made for a student to remain, contact transportation services to arrange prompt transportation when necessary.
- Consult with your school district point of contact (POC) about any issues or concerns.

## Collaboration Checklist

When students are in foster care, a team of individuals and professionals should support the youth. Teachers and administrators must ensure they are part of that team and communicating with the entire team so everyone is working in the best interest of the student.

When working with other professionals...

- Introduce yourself to the team members.
- Invite all team members to education meetings and conferences.
- Provide regular academic & behavior updates.
- Share education records, including IEPs, 504 plans, and disciplinary reports.
- Report any school difficulties, challenges, or changes.
- Involve team in planning any educational supports.
- Develop a professional relationship with the team.
- Relay the student's accomplishments and successes.
- Keep updated contact information of current caregiver and education decision maker (may be different people).
- Ensure appropriate releases of information, if needed.