



WELL-BEING

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND POST-SECONDARY PREPARATION



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WHY IT MATTERS

Recent studies on the high school graduation rates of youth in foster care highlight a sad truth – students in foster care are far less likely to complete high school than their non-foster care peers including peers who are homeless.¹ Considering that high school graduates earn an average of \$8,500 more per year than their peers who do not complete high school is a troubling concern.²

There are many reasons why students in foster care are at risk of not graduating high school on time. Evidence suggests that young people in foster care are less likely to graduate if they experience repeated changes in their foster care living arrangements. They are also more likely to complete high school with a GED than with a high school diploma and for youth of color, they are less likely to have a high school diploma and more likely to have a GED than youth in foster care who are non-Hispanic white. While having a GED can improve

the life chances of individuals who do not graduate from high school, a GED is not equivalent to a regular high school diploma when it comes to labor market outcomes and post-secondary educational attainment. Compared to high school graduates, individuals who have GEDs earn less and are less likely to graduate from college.³

Not surprisingly, successfully achieving a post-secondary education is also challenging for youth in and from foster care. Numerous studies have found lower college enrollment rates and lower college completion rates, among young people who have been in foster care than among other young adults.⁴ Young people in and from foster care report that they don't receive the kind of supports and experiences they need to be motivated and knowledgeable of how to even prepare for a postsecondary education.

Students in foster care are far less likely to complete high school than their peers not in foster care.

ADVOCATES IN ACTION

“Something that’s missing is that the foster care system and the education system don’t really work in collaboration... They need to do something to keep us in our schools so that we can graduate.”

– Youth, aged 18

ACTIONS

- **Encourage youth to complete their high school education and prepare for post-secondary education opportunities.** Youth from care who were successful in completing high school and college often point to adults in their lives who believed in them, helped them overcome barriers and celebrated their successes.
- **Advocate for school stability** when in the best interest of the child. Children and youth in foster care do better educationally with greater chances for high school completion when they have school stability.
- **Assess current educational progress.** Due to inconsistent school histories and placements, many youth in foster care have gaps in their education. Review their transcripts regularly to see how they are progressing. If they are missing credits because of school moves or time out of school, see if there are policies that can help them get back those credits. If they are failing or struggling with content, help find a tutor or academic coach. If they have disabilities, ensure that their IEP is up to date and that appropriate services are being delivered.
- **Learn about opportunities for structured post-secondary education planning.** Many youth in foster care are eligible to participate in programs like Outward Bound or Gear-Up which support first generation or at-risk students in following their postsecondary education dreams. Visits to college campuses, hearing from alumni of care who completed college and helping them sign up for things like SAT preparation programs, college tours, etc. are all supports that have been proven to help.
- **Inquire if your state allows students to stay in foster care until age 21.** Some research shows that staying in foster care until age 21 leads to greater likelihood of attending and completing a post-secondary education as well as high school for those students who need more than four years to complete.⁵
- **Encourage experiences outside of school that support high school graduation and post-secondary preparation.** Youth are more likely to be successful educationally and in their future careers when they have access to extra-curricular activities and employment opportunities through volunteering, internships, entrepreneurships, summer employment and part-time regular employment during high school.

- **Become knowledgeable about the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).**⁶ In addition to a number of provisions that support students in foster care such as school stability and points of contact between education and child welfare agencies, there is a provision related to new data collection on student achievement and graduation rates. Check to see that schools are aware of these requirements.
- **Learn about different practices and programs** helping students in foster care graduate from high school. If there aren't any such programs in the schools your students attend, share information and encourage the consideration of these types of opportunities.
- **Remember that you may be their best educational advocate.** CASA volunteers are in a unique position to understand the individual needs of the child or youth as well as the bigger picture of what they need in order to be successful. Take any opportunity you can to bring others involved in the youths' case up to speed on their educational needs, gaps and successes.
- **Teach youth how to self-advocate.**⁷ Not only can you model how to advocate, but you can explicitly teach youth how to advocate through role play, practice and positive feedback. Learning to self-advocate will help youth the rest of their lives.

BRIGHT SPOT

GRADUATION SUCCESS WASHINGTON

The *Graduation Success* program at Treehouse in Washington state works with youth in care in middle and high school to create individualized plans helping them reach academic success. *Graduation Success* monitors students' academics, behavior, and attendance while connecting them with academic resources such as tutoring, college counseling, and career preparation. *Graduation Success* also works with students facing obstacles common amongst youth in care such as transitioning between schools, retrieving course credit, and addressing special education needs. Treehouse Education Specialists work one-on-one with *Graduation Success* students to:

- Create their own plan for high school graduation and beyond

- Build problem-solving and self-advocacy skills
- Connect to resources like tutoring, credit retrieval and college and career prep
- Recognize and develop available support systems around them, from caregivers, to social workers, to school teachers and counselors
- Resolve education barriers like school transitions, special education needs, disciplinary actions and credit retrieval

Statewide, youth in foster care graduated high school on time at 43%. For the past two years, students participating in *Graduation Success* have graduated on time at a rate of 64-68%.

To learn more, visit: <http://www.treehouseforkids.org/our-services/academic-support/>⁸

SELECTED RESOURCES

Name	Description
<p><u>American Bar Association’s (ABA), Legal Center for Foster Care and Education’s Fostering Success in Education Blueprint for Change: Education Success for Children in Foster Care</u>⁹</p>	<p><i>The Blueprint for Change: Education Success for Children in Foster Care</i> is a tool for change. The <u>8 goals and 56 corresponding benchmarks</u> are a framework or checklist for direct case advocacy and system reform. Leaders should use the <i>Blueprint for Change</i> framework to identify a jurisdiction’s strengths and areas for improvement.</p>
<p><u>ABA’s Legal Center for Foster Care and Education’s Questions and Answers: Credit Transfer and School Completion</u>¹⁰</p>	<p>This Q and A offers examples of state policies to address the issue of credit transfer for youth in foster care who change schools often. It also provides strategies for child welfare agencies to address the issues impacting credit retrieval and on-time graduation</p>
<p><u>Developmental Summer Bridge Programs – College prep and support program.</u>¹¹</p>	<p>Developmental summer bridge programs are designed to help new college students prepare for the rigor of the college experience, both academically and socially. By providing a supported, intensive environment, developmental summer bridge programs allow students to work through their developmental coursework with built-in academic assistance, thus giving them the opportunity to start at a higher level in the targeted course sequence in their first semester.</p>
<p><u>National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), Foster Care Bill of Rights</u>¹²</p>	<p>NCSL’s <u>“Foster Care Bill of Rights”</u> webpage provides access to the 14 States’ Bill of Rights for Children in Foster Care. These bills are designed to inform foster children and foster parents of their rights within the child welfare system, including why they are in foster care and how the process works, some of them specifically call out credit transfer as an educational right for children in foster care.</p>

Name	Description
<p><u>Talent Development High Schools</u>¹³</p>	<p>Talent Development works to give students the knowledge and skills they need to be successful at high-quality, demanding academic courses. Known as transition or acceleration classes, these courses concentrate on mathematics and English Language Arts, with a first-semester ninth-grade course, Freshman Seminar, for all students.</p>
<p><u>Texas Education Agency, Foster Care and Student Success</u>¹⁴</p>	<p>The resources and materials in this guide provide guidance related to the unique circumstances surrounding students who are in the foster care system and attend Texas public schools. In Texas, nearly 16,000 school-age students are in foster care at any given time.</p>
<p><u>Upward Bound – College readiness program for students from low income families</u>¹⁵</p>	<p>Upward Bound provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their precollege performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits. Upward Bound serves high school students from low-income families and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor’s degree. The goal of Upward Bound is to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from college.</p>

ENDNOTES

- 1 Clemens, E.V (2014). *Graduation and Dropout Rates for Colorado Students in Foster Care: 5-Year Trend Analysis (2007–08 to 2011–12)*, University of Colorado. The Colorado Department of Education began reporting on graduation, completion and mobility rates for students in foster care. The graduation rate for students in foster care included in the Class of 2013 was 27.5%. This is compared to the state graduation rate of 76.9% and the rate of students who are homeless who had a 42% graduation rate. https://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention/5-year_foster_care_trend_study
- 2 Okpych, N.J. & Courtney, M.E. (2014). Does education pay for youth formerly in foster care? Comparison of employment outcomes with a national sample. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 43, 18–28.
- 3 *Why Education Matters to Children in Foster Care: Education Fact Sheet* (January, 2014). National Working Group on Foster Care and Education.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 See Issue Brief on the “Every Student Succeeds Act”
- 7 See Issue Brief on “Youth Engagement”
- 8 <http://www.treehouseforkids.org/our-services/academic-support/>
- 9 See http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?EntryId=1624&Command=Core_download&method=inline&PortalId=0&TabId=124
- 10 See https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/migrated/child/education/QA_2_Credits_FINAL_authcheckdam.pdf
- 11 See <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/college-completion/mdrc-1.pdf>
- 12 See <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/foster-care-bill-of-rights.aspx>
- 13 See <http://www.tdschools.org/>
- 14 See <https://tea.texas.gov/FosterCareStudentSuccess/>
- 15 See <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html>