



SCHOOL STABILITY AND SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS



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WHY IT MATTERS

Having positive and successful school experiences can counteract the negative effects of abuse, neglect, separation, and lack of permanency experienced by children and youth in foster care. Education provides opportunities for improved well-being in physical, intellectual, and social domains during critical developmental periods and supports economic success in adult life. Unfortunately, the research reveals that students in foster care face significant educational challenges.¹

An important foundation to educational success is school stability and, related to that, consistent and regular attendance. School changes are a significant problem for children and youth in foster care. Numerous studies have found that children in foster care frequently experience school changes: this includes when they are initially removed from home, and when

they move from one foster care living arrangement to another.² Children who change schools frequently make less academic progress than their peers, and each time they change schools they fall farther behind. School mobility has negative effects on academic achievement and is associated with dropping out. Research also shows that children

who are highly mobile perform significantly worse on standardized tests than stably housed children.³

Delays in school enrollment can occur when a child's initial entry into foster care, or a subsequent change in living arrangements while in foster care, involves changing schools. These delays are often caused by the failure to transfer records in a timely manner. Delays in school enrollment can negatively impact attendance and have a number of other adverse consequences, such as, students repeating classes, schools failing

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to address students' special education needs, and students enrolling in inappropriate classes.

The good news is that both the child welfare and education systems now recognize how detrimental school instability is for children and youths in foster care. Furthermore, federal policy has undergone a significant shift over the last decade – adding protections and supports for students in foster care related to their education. In December 2015, Congress passed the *Every Student Succeeds Act*

(ESSA), which reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA)⁴. For the first time, federal education law includes provisions that promote school stability and success for youth in care and collaboration between education and child welfare agencies to achieve these goals. These provisions, which mostly took effect on December 10, 2016, complement those in the *Fostering Connections Act* and require State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to work with child welfare agencies to ensure the stability of children in foster care.

ADVOCATES IN ACTION

School age children in foster care commonly experience a number of moves while in foster care. These changes can significantly impact their school experience.

ACTIONS

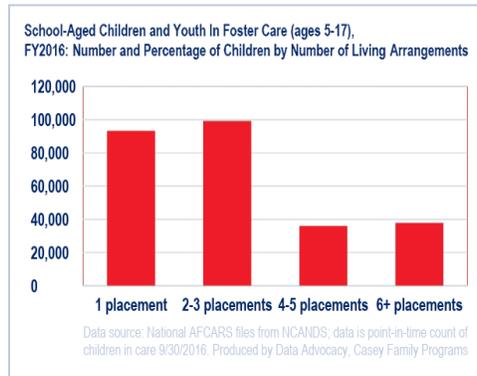
- **Work with schools and agencies to identify and track a child's data around school moves.** Volunteers can shine the light on the issue by showing that a child in foster care is far more likely to change school than their non-foster peers and how doing so impacts performance will get people's attention to act in the best interest of the child. Agencies who are intentional about finding a new placement for a student that is in close proximity to their current school location are ones that recognize how important school stability is.
- **Create solutions that address the transportation issues associated with school placement stability.** Creative solutions to the transportation issue are

often needed in order to make school stability happen for students. Being open and "flexible" with the rules is helpful. Engaging community groups, family members or neighbors who may not be providers but want to help, might be able to make transportation happen when other ideas or resources have failed.

- **Consider the child or youth's age and engage their opinion when appropriate.** The damage that school moves can do to not only the social-emotional development of an adolescent, but the academic damage, is too great of a risk. A student by 11 or 12 years of age should engage in conversations about where to attend school and may be helpful in identifying transportation solutions.

- **Use “best-interest determination” when making potential school changes for students with disabilities.** Like age, considerations around a student who is in special education are also really important and should give more “weight” to that best-interest determination.
- **Ensure that if a school move is warranted, the student is enrolled quickly and consistently.**

Many jurisdictions are using enrollment forms designed to facilitate communication between child welfare agencies and schools. With ESSA, federal law requires immediate enrollment even without records typically required and creates both state and local education agency points of contact to address enrollment barriers. Learn who these points of contact are. The volunteer can be the liaison between the agency, caregiver and school to ensure that this happens as quickly as possible and without barriers.



- **Share information about a child’s school placement history** (including whether the child was placed in a new school after initial removal into foster care) in court reports and during hearings along with other education information.
- **Think beyond academics.** A positive school experience is much more than just doing well academically. It is about establishing relationships with adults in the school building, creating friendships with peers, participating in non-academic or extracurricular activities that may be the only motivation for a child or youth to want to attend school and research shows that it enhances placement stability.

- **Get to know the adults in the school** who work with the child or youth. The obvious person is the student’s teacher(s) but other school personnel can play an important role in the child’s life. The best place to begin to find out who these potentially important people are is to ask the child!

BRIGHT SPOT

KIDS IN SCHOOL RULE! CINCINNATI, OHIO

Kids in School Rule! (KISR) is a collaborative program designed to promote improved education outcomes for students in Cincinnati Public Schools who are either in the custody of the Hamilton County, Ohio, Department of Job and Family Services (JFS) or under agency protective supervision, and attend Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS). The partnership between the school system, courts, legal aid, and child welfare provides a host of supports to students in foster care including

child welfare agency-based education specialists who liaison with caseworkers and schools. In addition to reducing the number of school placements for students in foster care, the education specialists use real-time data to alert them when a student in care is absent so they can intervene to ensure the child is attending school regularly.

To learn more: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/funding/funding-sources/federal-funding/cb-funding/cbreports/edcollaborations/kisr/#tab=summary>⁵

SELECTED RESOURCES

Below are tools and resources to support school placement stability and seamless transitions

Name	Description
<p><u>American Bar Association, Legal Center for Foster Care and Education</u>⁶</p>	<p>The <i>Legal Center for Foster Care and Education</i>, created in 2007, provides a national level perspective and voice for the education of children in foster care. They maintain a central clearinghouse of information on foster care and education and they provide training and technical assistance issues on foster care and education across the country. Additionally, they maintain a list serve that anyone who advocates educational needs and supports for youth in foster care can participate on. They have FAQs on different issues including <i>School Placement Stability</i>, <i>Every Student Succeeds Act</i>, <i>Fostering Connections Act of 2008</i>, and many others.</p>
<p><u>National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, <i>Fostering Success in Education: Educational Outcomes of Students in Foster Care</i></u>⁷</p>	<p>This 2018 education fact sheet provides a comprehensive review of data and research, laws and promising programs impacting the educational success of children in foster care and includes information on school stability and seamless transitions along with examples in the country where positive outcomes are occurring.</p>
<p><u>U.S. Department of Education, <i>Students in Foster Care</i></u>⁸</p>	<p>The U.S Department of Education released several non-regulatory guidance briefs to child welfare and education administrators related to school stability for children and youth in foster care. Additionally, they have released several joint letters on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education and HHS with guidance around school stability and supporting educational success for children in foster care. They also have a page on their website dedicated to students in foster care that includes many resources.</p>

ENDNOTES

- 1 Research Highlights on Education and Foster Care (2018). *National Working Group on Foster Care and Education*. <http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/>
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid
- 4 For more information about this act, see <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf>
- 5 <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/funding/funding-sources/federal-funding/cb-funding/cbreports/edcollaborations/kisr/#tab=summary>
- 6 See <http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/>
- 7 See <http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/>
- 8 See <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/index.html>