

Foster Care Education

A guide to meeting the educational needs of youth in the child welfare system

School personnel know how important an education and high school diploma are for all children. The majority of Colorado's youth in foster care are not graduating from high school on time and school personnel are in a distinct position to make this a greater possibility. The following best practices and helpful tips are a resource to help guide the important work of improving the educational outcomes for youth in care.

Best Practices for Teachers & Administrators

1. **Welcome** the student to the school- give them a tour and ensure they have all necessary school supplies.
2. **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.
3. Ensure the school has **complete** academic records- including current IEP, 504, transcripts, and/or other support plans (if applicable).
4. **Identify and communicate** with the student's educational decision maker & caseworker- provide regular academic and behavioral updates. The point of contact could be a parent, foster parent, caseworker, or Guardian *ad Litem* (GAL).
5. **Engage** the student in the school community- inform them of and help them join extracurricular activities, regardless of their enrollment date.
6. **Advocate** for the student- ensure the student has the support and guidance needed to progress academically and socially.
7. Ensure special education, behavioral, emotional, cultural, and linguistic **needs are met**.
8. Ensure the student is in the **appropriate academic setting**- including Gifted & Talented, Honors, Advanced Placement, ESL, Special Education, etc.
9. Maintain up-to-date **contact information** in Infinite Campus- including current caregiver and caseworker information.
10. **Waive all fees** for any child in out-of-home care- including lunch, books, lab week, in-school activities, and before/after school programs (Colorado Statute 22-32-138).
11. For students in 7th grade or higher, consider the student's Individual Career and Academic Plan (**ICAP**).
12. Stay up-to-date on and participate in **local, state and national legislation** efforts and professional learning opportunities to stay informed of how you can be a champion for all students in out-of-home care.
13. Support the student through the Court process by being aware of upcoming court hearings, encouraging the student to attend, and acknowledging the stress these hearings may cause.

Tips to Help Youth Succeed in School

- Greet the student everyday
- Develop a positive relationship
- Find out what they like
- Help them feel connected to school
- Ask them about themselves
- Celebrate any advances
- Check in with student regularly
- Be a listening ear
- Be aware of necessary accommodations
- Help them develop social skills
- Be consistent
- Encourage school involvement
- Identify support programs
- Be an advocate
- Ensure the most appropriate learning environment
- Be non-judgmental
- Be a positive role model
- Help them set realistic goals & aim high
- Talk about high school graduation & postsecondary education

Educational Support Checklist

To ensure a smooth transition to a new school for the youth, there are several vital objectives that should be completed on the student's first day. Below is a checklist for teachers and administrators to complete with the student to make certain they have everything they need to be successful.

Does the student...

- Have all necessary school supplies?
- 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 (lunch, 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 the extracurricular activities available?

The following is a checklist of ongoing objectives for teachers and administrators to refer to when working with a youth in out-of-home care. There is likely a team of professionals who also work with the youth which typically includes the student's caseworker, Guardian *ad Litem* (GAL), foster parents, biological parents, and often times, a mental health professional. It is important for teachers and administrators to ensure they are communicating with the entire team so everyone is working in the best interest of the student.

Working with other professionals...

- Introduce yourself to the team
- Invite to all education meetings and conferences
- Provide regular academic & behavior updates
- Report any difficulties, challenges, or changes
- Involve team in planning any educational supports
- Develop a professional relationship with the team
- Relay the good news
- Identify the educational decision maker
- Keep updated contact information of current caregiver
- Ensure appropriate releases of information

Colorado Facts

From the Colorado Department of Education for the 2012-2013 school year

- Only 27.5% of youth in foster care are graduating high school in 4 years.
- Approximately 1 in 11 students in foster care dropped out one or more times.
- Children and youth in foster care have higher rates of suicide, homelessness, unemployment, and teen pregnancy compared to the general population.