



School District Perspectives on Issues Impacting the Education of Students in Foster Care

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Increasing numbers of students in foster care

- ▶ As you know, our population of foster children is increasing.
- ▶ At the July Child Welfare Oversight and Advisory Committee meeting, it was reported that over 9,900 children are currently in foster care, with 56-58% of those children placed with private foster care providers.
- ▶ Much of the attention has centered on the social service aspects of foster care, with education not always at the forefront. However, education is vital, and practically all foster children are being educated in our public schools.
- ▶ These children are not just being educated in our schools, they are being cared for, nurtured, fed, supported, and loved.

Special issues facing foster children, from the school perspective

- ▶ Information about a student that teachers and school leaders would typically receive from a parent is not received at all, or as quickly.
- ▶ This very often causes delays in providing appropriate educational and support services, and increases administrative work for teachers and school staff.
- ▶ Foster children often do not receive the same levels of support from home that other students receive. School staff often do not have the same levels of collaboration between the classroom and the home.

Most pressing concerns:

1. Lack of critical information, and the impacts this has on:
 - ▶ Making proper educational placements (classroom, programmatic, etc.);
 - ▶ Identifying and providing support services
2. Lack of stability in home placement that leads to lack of educational stability
3. Inadequate support for education in the foster home
4. Inadequate collaboration with the district, to allow schools to provide services children need.
5. Social worker, guardian ad litem, and other contacts with students that disrupt learning and could be made at other times.

Real experiences in schools

1. Lack of critical information

- ▶ Laws, policies, written procedures, and forms are in place to facilitate the sharing of educational information for students in foster care (*such as*: the Educational Passport and the DPP-330/Education Advocate form), however, a child too often arrives at school with no such information.
- ▶ It is often unclear to the school who the education decision-maker is, or even where the student was last enrolled.
- ▶ Sometimes, neither the foster parent nor the social worker has needed information.
- ▶ Any delay in a school or foster parent receiving complete information is to the detriment of the child.

2. Lack of stability in home placement

- ▶ Education stability is more than just enrollment within a given district, it means placement in a particular classroom and provision of specific, necessary support services.
- ▶ Uninterrupted Scholars Act of Kentucky, passed as 2018 RS HB 527.
- ▶ Lack of stability in home placements is common. This leads to unavoidable impacts on education stability notwithstanding the stated policies and priorities of HB 527. We see this notably near the end of a school year.
- ▶ Use of respite care for extended periods is also a factor in lack of educational stability.

3. Inadequate support of education in the foster home

- ▶ Some foster parents are uninvolved in their foster child's education and school work. Districts often see this with a given parent/foster home repeatedly, with many different children.
- ▶ Education has often been as neglected as other aspects of a child's life when they enter foster care, and it must be addressed as much as all vital needs. However, this is too often not what teachers and school leaders experience with students in foster care.
- ▶ We often see a lack of interest or support for extracurricular activities and student supports offered by schools, even though foster children may benefit from these activities.

4. Inadequate collaboration with the district in providing services to a child

- ▶ Kentucky public schools offer an unprecedented array of services to address needs of the whole child. Our schools have become vital modes of delivery for many supports beyond education, including food, clothing, and more and more even medical care.
- ▶ However, for students in foster care, schools too often face obstacles in providing ancillary supports, including mental health therapy and counseling, when it could be a vital benefit to these children.
- ▶ Better *coordination of care* across agencies and providers is essential, and could have an enormous positive impact.

5. Disruption of education by contacts from social workers

- ▶ Foster children are too often pulled out of the classroom for various meetings, appointments, and discussions linked to their status as a foster child, sometimes including visits from social workers or guardians ad litem (GALs).
- ▶ Again, educational stability is our stated priority, yet this is not recognized beyond the broad concept of mere enrollment in a district.
- ▶ Classroom learning time should be prioritized and protected as much as possible by foster parents, social workers, the courts, and all other parties in the child welfare system.

Policy considerations to improve the education of foster children

1. First, we must all prioritize education. Education should be a foremost consideration, not an afterthought of “the schools can take care of that.” We must all seriously consider the education of a child when considering the best interest of the child.
2. Require the child’s social worker to accompany the child and foster parent when enrolling at a new school.
3. Allow the new district to directly access student information in the Infinite Campus system, to ensure timely transfer of information.
4. Continue to implement performance-based contracting (PBC) between CHFS and private foster care providers, that prioritizes education and placement stability through incentives and disincentives, and allows school liaisons to share information with DCBS liaisons (including when the school and foster parents lack information).

5. Allow schools to provide necessary physical and mental health support services, such as counseling, therapy, etc., to a child in foster care in addition to any services they may be receiving by the CHFS, private foster care providers, MMCOs, etc.
 - ▶ At all policy levels, we must prioritize more support for these children, not less, and better coordination of care.
 - ▶ Providing services in school will also prevent disruption of classroom learning.
6. Invest in opening new foster homes in every community, and in high quality foster homes through training and support to foster parents that is focused on education and education stability.
7. Require private foster care providers to inform one another and the CHFS when they close one of their foster homes for any reason.

8. Strongly encourage biological parents to give secondary educational decision-making authority to the CHFS and foster parents when a child is removed from the home, to vastly improve timely sharing of information and provision of services via Educational Passport and DPP-330.
9. Encourage all parties in the child welfare system to collaborate with schools, not only to support students in foster care, but to build up families, build up foster families, and help prevent children from being removed from (any) home.
10. Provide additional funding to districts to support the whole foster child, and to other programs serving these children, and children at risk for neglect and abuse (such as the HANDS program).