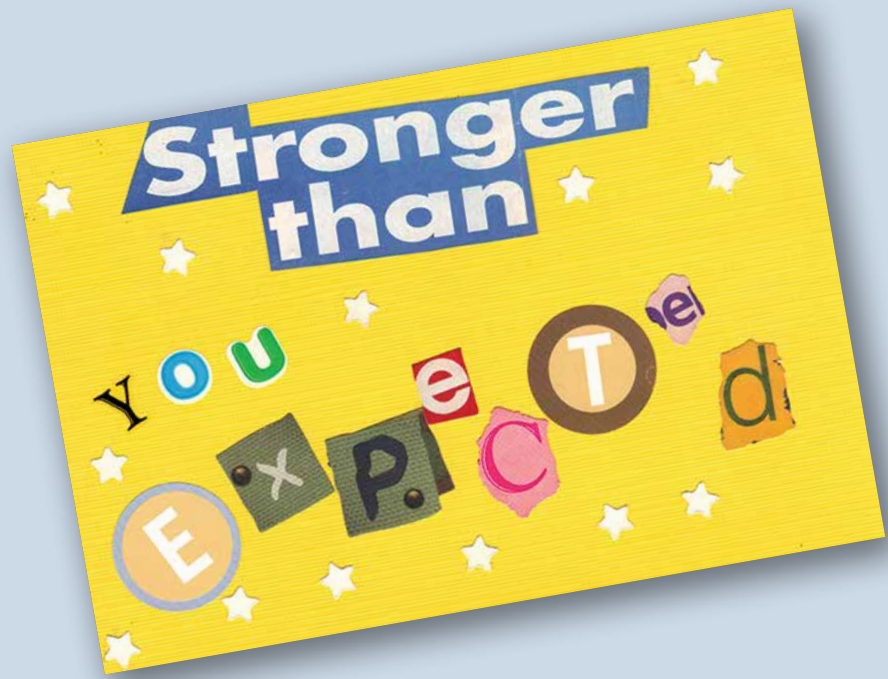


CHAPTER

2



INCREASING CROSS-SYSTEM AWARENESS

- TEXAS TAKES NEXT STEPS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS IN CARE
- TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY & PROTECTIVE SERVICES
- COURT SYSTEM
- EDUCATION SYSTEM

CHAPTER 2

Increasing Cross-System Awareness

TEXAS TAKES NEXT STEPS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS IN CARE:

In 2010, the Supreme Court of Texas issued an *Order Establishing the Education Committee of the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families* (the Children’s Commission). The Order charged the Education Committee to study the education challenges of students in foster care and develop recommendations to improve educational outcomes of children and youth in the Texas foster care system. The Order resulted in over 100 court, education, and child welfare stakeholders coming together over an 18-month period to listen and learn from each other, discuss and debate the issues, and ultimately develop their recommendations. The recommendations may be found in the Final Report of the Education Committee, “*The Texas Blueprint: Transforming Education Outcomes For Children & Youth in Foster Care*,” which was submitted to the Supreme Court of Texas on May 3, 2012. The core focus areas of the committee included:



- Judicial Practices
- Data and Information Sharing
- Multi-Disciplinary Training
- School Readiness
- School Stability and Transitions
- School Experience, Supports, and Advocacy
- Post-Secondary Education
- Future Collaboration

The Education Committee reached consensus on many recommendations, which included changes to daily practices, modifications to education and child welfare policy, and amendments to Texas’ legal framework. The recommendations, as implemented, will impact education, child welfare, and judicial practices. They will spur multi-disciplinary training, cross-agency data exchange, child-specific information sharing, and cross-system collaborations.²⁰

In December 2012, the Supreme Court of Texas created by court order the *Texas Blueprint* Implementation Task Force, which includes members from DFPS and TEA, to monitor the implementation of the *Texas Blueprint* recommendations. Please visit the Children’s Commission website for more information about the work of the Task Force at: education.texaschildrenscommission.gov/

In February 2013, the Children’s Commission, in partnership with the Texas Center for the Judiciary, TEA, DFPS, and other stakeholders, hosted Texas’ first Foster Care and Education Summit. Approximately 200 leaders from the child welfare, legal, and education fields from around Texas attended the two-day summit held in Austin, Texas, including:

- 29 judges;
- 42 representatives from 34 school districts;
- 14 representatives from state education organizations, including the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Association of School Boards, and the Texas Association of School Administrators;
- Representatives from all 20 Education Service Centers;
- 44 regional and state level DFPS staff;
- 13 representatives of Texas CASA and local CASA programs; and
- 34 advocates, including representatives from child placing agencies, statewide foster care associations, Casey Family Programs, Texas Appleseed, the Office of Court Administration, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department, Disability Rights Texas, the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project, TexProtects, and Texans Care for Children.

The conference provided a unique opportunity to build relationships across disciplines and develop a shared understanding of complex child welfare and education topics. All conference materials, including audio recordings and power points, will be beneficial to new district efforts addressing the education of students in foster care and are available at: www.yourhonor.com/single-conference/85#schedule

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES (DFPS)

In Texas, DFPS,²¹ through its Child Protective Service (CPS) and childcare licensing divisions, investigates allegations of child abuse and neglect, provides services to children and families, and monitors our state foster care system. CPS also manages community-based programs that prevent delinquency, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of Texas children.

CPS staff is responsible for:

- Providing services to children and families in their own homes;
- Placing children in foster care;
- Providing services to help youth in foster care make the transition to adulthood; and
- Placing children in adoptive homes.

Every day, about 10,000 DFPS employees in more than 300 offices in 11 DFPS regions across the state protect the physical safety and emotional well-being of the most vulnerable citizens of Texas. Within each DFPS region there are a number of services and opportunities to support students in foster care (*see Chapter 4 for more information on the CPS system*).

COURT SYSTEM

CPS cases are heard by district, county court-at-law, or associate judges in courts with jurisdiction to hear family law matters. Depending on the county, all or some of the judges with jurisdiction in that county may hear the cases or one judge may be designated as the CPS judge. Additionally, there are 17 specialty judges who solely hear CPS cases in approximately 120 Texas counties; these courts are referred to as Child Protection Specialty Courts. The Texas Family Code requires that courts hold periodic hearings during the time a child is in foster care. The following chart shows the timeline of these required hearings.

Day	Timeline of Required Hearings in DFPS Legal Cases
0	Ex parte or Emergency Hearing authorizing DFPS to take possession of child
14	Full Adversary/14-Day Hearing
60	Status Hearing
180	First Permanency Hearing
300	Second Permanency Hearing
300–365	Trial/Final Order, unless dismissal date extended
420	Third Permanency Hearing, if extended or monitored return to parent
365–545	If Extended, Trial/Final Order or Monitored Return to Parent
545+	Post-Final Order Efforts to Achieve Permanency — if the child is placed in the permanent managing conservatorship (PMC) of DFPS, periodic placement review hearings are held at least every 180 days until the child finds a permanent home.



TIP: Reach out to the local judiciary and lawyers who handle CPS cases to enhance collaboration. Introducing the foster care liaison is a good place to start, as well as informing the court stakeholders of other district efforts to help students in foster care.

EDUCATION SYSTEM

Texas has the nation's 2nd largest school system, comprised of more than 1,200 independent school districts and charter schools that educate nearly 5,000,000 students each year. Of those, 2,262,066 students were identified as at-risk for dropping out of school in the 2011–2012 school year, according to definitions adopted by the Texas Legislature.

State Education Agency (SEA):

TEA is the state education agency (SEA) responsible for administering federal and state education laws and policies under the leadership of the commissioner of education and is comprised of the commissioner and agency staff. TEA and the State Board of Education (SBOE) guide and monitor activities and programs related to public education in Texas. The SBOE consists of 15 elected members representing different regions of the state. One member is appointed chair by the governor. The mission of TEA is to provide leadership, guidance, and resources to help schools meet the educational needs of all students. TEA maintains a comprehensive website of resources and information for the public at www.tea.state.tx.us. Through its *Division of Federal and State Education Policy*, located in the Department of Standards and Programs, TEA works to implement statewide policy initiatives, including facilitating collaboration among education stakeholders on both the state and local level.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs):

Texas has more than 1,200 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) operating more than 8,000 public schools, including charter schools. Texas schools provide a free public education to students enrolled in grades Pre-K through 12.

Education Service Centers (ESCs):

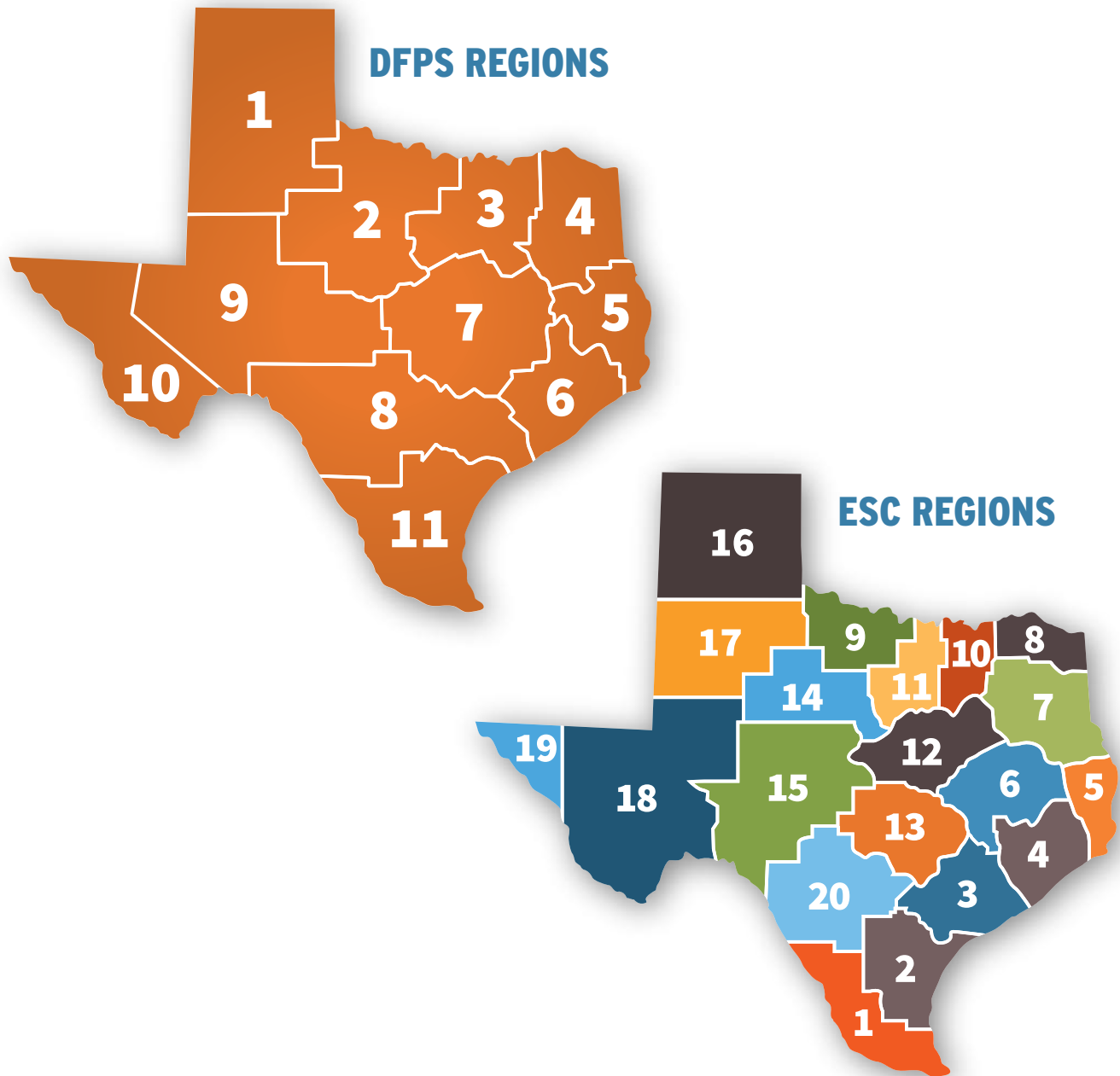
Texas has a regional education support system for schools called Regional Education Service Centers. There are 20 independent Education Service Centers (ESCs) that receive funding from TEA and local school districts to provide support services and technical assistance to school districts.



Education system’s role in helping improve education outcomes:

The Texas Legislature recognized that students in foster care are faced with numerous transitions during their formative years,²² and thus directed TEA to work with schools to assist in the transition of students from one school to another. The Texas Education Code has numerous provisions that relate to students in foster care that will be discussed throughout this Resource Guide.

Some ESCs have designated staff to address the education of students in foster care within their ESC region. ESCs offer professional development courses and some may host collaborative forums and joint trainings with child welfare partners. One should contact the local ESC to learn of opportunities, training, and supports that may be available or are currently being developed to address the education of students in foster care.



TIP: DFPS and ESC service regions differ. It is important to clarify which type of region is being referred to when working with partners from the child welfare system.

