

CHAPTER

11



THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: PROVIDING STUDENT SUPPORT, IMPLEMENTING ACADEMIC SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTIONS, & PROMOTING HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION

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CHAPTER 11

The School Experience: Providing Student Support, Implementing Academic Supports and Interventions, & Promoting High School Completion

CREATE A SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT THAT IS SENSITIVE TO THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE:

Students come into foster care through no fault of their own, but their status as “foster children” can be a source of deep shame and stigma. School personnel play an important role in being sensitive and creating a school environment that is emotionally safe and supportive of students who experience foster care.

Maintain confidentiality:

- It is important that a student is not publicly labeled as a foster child nor attention brought to the fact that the student is in the foster care system.
- Avoid discussing private student matters in public places, such as a break room, where confidential information may be overheard by school staff or students.
- Do not use the loud speaker, class announcements, or other public means to notify students of appointments and visitors related to their CPS cases.
- Refrain from asking students personal questions related to *why* they are in foster care. If a student shares this very personal information, it should be completely up to him or her and not because school personnel initiated the discussion.

Be mindful of the impact that family-based school assignments and activities have on students:

No matter the reasons for entering foster care, school assignments and activities that assume all children live with their birth family or know their family history may be difficult and present challenges for students in foster care. Assignments such as creating a family tree or a Mother’s Day card or giving a presentation about a memorable family vacation can be very difficult. Alternative activities for these types of school assignments should be explored.

Avoid negative stigmatization and assumptions:

- Students in foster care can be negatively labeled and stigmatized in school and in other community settings. Stigmatization can be detrimental to a student’s well-being and educational success.
- Stigmas in school create challenges such as:
 - Delays in enrollment because assumptions are made that students in care will only be enrolled in the new school for a short period of time.
 - Trauma and post-traumatic stress symptoms may be misdiagnosed. Misdiagnosis leads to students not receiving proper educational supports.
 - Placement in “minimum graduation programs.” Texas data reveals that students in foster care are disproportionately placed in the minimum graduation program.¹¹⁷
 - Assumptions are sometimes made that youth in care do not have post-secondary education goals. This myth negatively impacts students. On the contrary, research demonstrates that 70%



of teens in foster care desire to attend college.¹¹⁸ If students and education decision makers are not consulted about the student's graduation program, they may be unaware of the impact of the minimum program on future college access and entrance.



TIP: Promote pro-college messaging and use asset and strength-based approaches to encourage the academic aspirations of middle and high school students in foster care (see Chapter 13 for more information on post-secondary opportunities for students in foster care).

Confronting Stereotypes of Youth in Foster Care is a great video that can be shared to increase awareness about the stereotypes and stigmas students often face: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rheuqLV7ebs&feature=youtu.be

Be aware of the reasons why a student in foster care may miss school and how it might impact coursework:

Students in foster care may miss school due to parent and sibling visits, court dates, therapy, and other appointments. These absences are excused if the activity was ordered by the court.¹¹⁹ Work with the student to make sure he or she is able to make up coursework missed due to these activities.

Note: Caseworkers do their best to ensure school is not interrupted for visits or other appointments.



TIP: District liaisons may consider providing information regarding testing dates to the DFPS Regional Education Specialists and other child welfare stakeholders to make them aware of important testing dates. School attendance is especially important around state-mandated testing periods.

Take time to build relationships and establish trust and rapport with students in care:

- Students may have a difficult time trusting adults and developing relationships. Youth in care have had adults disappoint them and may be reluctant to interact.
- Take the opportunity to celebrate birthdays, personal accomplishments, and student successes! Encouragement and support is an essential element of building rapport and trust.
- Research demonstrates the importance of a trusted, caring, supportive adult as a critical factor for children and youth in foster care.¹²⁰
- Discuss a student's *positive attributes* with him or her and communicate these to caregivers, caseworkers, and other adults involved in the student's life.

Provide youth with choices and include them in decision making:

Children and youth in foster care may experience a sense of loss and powerlessness. Educators and supportive adults can use positive youth development practices that provide choices and include youth in decision making processes.



TIP: A great way to be a part of a high school student's success is by participating in a DFPS-sponsored meeting called a *Circle of Support*, if invited by the student (see page 102).

Promote information related to foster care and activities, supports, resources, and scholarships available in school counseling centers and public places:

Students may not be identified publicly as being in foster care. However, providing information about resources available for students in foster care at counseling centers or similar settings makes the resources available without invading the students' privacy. It also lets the students know they are supported and valued on their school's campus.

HOW DO TRAUMATIC CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES IMPACT EDUCATION?

According to the *National Child Traumatic Stress Network*, “child traumatic stress occurs when children and adolescents are exposed to traumatic events and traumatic situations, and when this exposure overwhelms their ability to cope with what they have experienced.”¹²¹ Although the experiences and responses to trauma and loss differ among students, it is important that educators and other advocates are sensitive and aware of the impact that trauma may have on learning, student behavior, student response to adults, and interaction with peers. Implementing trauma-informed practices in the classroom and raising the level of awareness about the impact of adverse life experiences on a student’s learning process, classroom behaviors, and cognitive development will help educators, school personnel, and other advocates respond in a way that is the most sensitive and adaptive to a student’s needs.



RESOURCES: Trauma-Informed Schools

Tools such as these are helpful for promoting sensitivity and increasing awareness about the impact of trauma on a student’s learning and school experience.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, “Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators” — *an excellent guide on trauma and learning, available in both English and Spanish; this is a must-read for educators and school personnel in supporting the academic success of students who’ve experienced trauma:*

nctsn.org/resources/audiences/school-personnel/trauma-toolkit

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Resources for School Personnel website — *provides a variety of excellent tools on trauma-informed practices, training tools, and information to help educators understand and respond to the specific needs of traumatized students:*

www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/school-personnel

Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Compassionate Schools Initiative*, “The Heart of Learning: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success” — *this book provides innovative approaches, practical tools, and applicable resources to equip educators in working with students whose learning has been adversely impacted by trauma. This valuable resource is free and available online:* www.k12.wa.us/CompassionateSchools/HeartofLearning.aspx

National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, Safe Schools Healthy Students — National Center Brief, “Childhood Trauma and its Effect on Healthy Development”: edn.ne.gov/pdf/social-emotional/Childhood%20Trauma%20&%20Its%20Effect%20on%20Healthy%20Development.pdf

WHAT STATE FUNDING SOURCES CAN SCHOOLS USE TO PROVIDE ACADEMIC SUPPORT?

Students in foster care are eligible for the regular instructional program through the Texas Foundation School Program. Students may be eligible for several other special programs and services through initiatives such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), special education, English as a Second Language (ESL), Career and Technical Education (CTE), or other state grant initiatives. Schools will find additional information on these specific programs and eligibility on the TEA website at: www.tea.state.tx.us

Foster students are also eligible for supplemental, compensatory instructional services with the state compensatory education program. Compensatory education is defined as programs and/or services designed to supplement the regular education program for students identified as at risk of dropping out of school.¹²² Students in foster care fall within the definition of “at risk” of dropping out of school,¹²³ therefore supportive services provided with state compensatory education funds must be supplemental to the regular educational program. The school district may use state compensatory education funds to provide supplemental instructional services to accelerate learning and academic performance for children in foster care; these services may help to eliminate any disparity in performance on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) or disparity in the rates of high school completion. While

districts have considerable flexibility with these funds for service provision, the funds may only be used to incorporate instructional strategies that have been shown by scientifically-based research to be effective with teaching low-achieving students. This may include interventions such as:

- tutoring;
- supplemental reading or math programs;
- school social work services (including home visitation) to engage parents or caregivers in improving academic achievement;
- consultation with instructional staff;
- coordinating community resources such as mentors and advocates; and
- providing direct individual, group, and crisis counseling.

Compensatory education services available for students must be described in the district or campus improvement plan. School staff may specifically connect foster youth with these supplemental programs.

If a district has Title I funding to support a school-wide program for low-achieving students under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, the district may coordinate its state compensatory education services with the federal Title I services.¹²⁴

Regardless of the funding source used for supportive services, all programs and supports should be based on evidence that the strategies used help improve student achievement and keep the student advancing toward high school completion. These strategies are discussed more fully in the following section.



RESOURCES: Additional Supports

The Texas State Compensatory Education program:

www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4082

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind:

www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4261&menu_id=2147483742

Bilingual Education:

www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=4098

TEA state grant opportunities:

www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147487920&menu_id=951

IMPLEMENTING ACADEMIC SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTION ACCORDING TO STATE LAW – POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDANCE FROM THE EDUCATION CODE:

This next section uses language from the Texas Education Code (TEC). Because the term “substitute care” is used in addition to the term “foster care” in the Texas Education Code, it is also used within this section when describing these provisions.

The Texas Legislature has found that students in foster care are faced with numerous transitions during their formative years. According to [Texas Education Code Section 25.007](#), students in foster care who move from one school to another are faced with special challenges in learning and future achievement. Given this recognition, the Texas Legislature has charged the Texas Education Agency to work with school districts in order to support learning and achievement for children in foster care, particularly when the students transition to new schools.

Reminder: The term “foster care” is being used throughout this guide to refer to all children and youth in CPS conservatorship/substitute care.

TEC § 25.007



Select policy and practice guidance based on the Texas Education Code – Transition Assistance for Students in Foster Care:

1. **Ensure that school records for a student in substitute care are transferred to the student’s new school not later than the 10th day¹²⁵ after the date the student begins enrollment at the school** (see Chapter 7 for more information on enrollment and Chapter 8 for more information on records transfers for students in foster care).
2. **Develop systems to ease transition of a student in substitute care during the first two weeks of enrollment at a new school.**

Transitioning to a new school is challenging for all students, especially students who have experienced numerous school transitions. Schools are encouraged to develop specific supports and systems to ease the transition. Schools are encouraged to create or adopt an “enrollment checklist” to help guide the activities of transferring a student into a new school.

Additional considerations to ease school transitions:

- Provide the student and caregiver with a welcome packet that includes information about enrolling in extracurricular activities, clubs, and tutoring opportunities.
- Facilitate introductions of the student to faculty, other students, and to the school environment.
- Convene an *enrollment conference* with the student in the first two weeks.

An *enrollment conference* is a school support strategy that was recommend in the “*Texas Blueprint: Transforming Educational Outcomes For Children & Youth in Foster Care*.” The enrollment conference would occur upon/after enrollment in a new school, to be attended by the youth, caregiver, and all relevant school personnel, and may also include the caseworker (in person or by conference call), the education decision maker, CASA, and the attorney and/or guardian ad litem.¹²⁶ This could be an opportunity to personally provide a welcome packet, check on how the student is adjusting, identify whether the student was receiving special education services at the previous school, and share important resources with the family. Districts may have similar processes, called something other than an “enrollment conference,” that can be adapted and implemented, so the same goals are achieved.

- During an *enrollment conference* the school could also:
 - Review credits;
 - Identify academic and extracurricular interests;
 - Identify career interests and goals;
 - Discuss students’ strengths;
 - Review assessment data;
 - Develop course and instructional strategies; or
 - Share information about the Online College Portfolio for secondary students or the Student Success Initiative supplemental home instructional reading and math resources for students in grades 3–8.

The *enrollment conference* also provides an opportunity to communicate in a confidential manner about court dates, behavior interventions, CPS supports, and other information that may impact a student’s academic success and progress.

Note: School staff should remember that decisions about a student’s special education eligibility or services may only be made by a properly constituted Admission, Renew, and Dismissal (ARD) committee.



TEC § 25.007

- Schools can also engage the caregiver and the student to develop the Personal Graduation Plan (PGP) required by the Texas Education Code.¹²⁷ A PGP is required for each student enrolled in a middle, junior, or high school who does not perform satisfactorily on the state assessment or is not likely to receive a high school diploma in four years.

To ease the transition into a new school, the PGP could be developed in the first two weeks in conjunction with an *enrollment conference*. This meeting could help build communication between the school, the caregiver, and student that will set the student up for success in the new school. For students with disabilities, the ARD committee would meet to develop the Individual Education Plan (IEP), which can meet the requirements for the PGP for students with disabilities.¹²⁸ Additionally, a student in substitute care who is not likely to receive a high school diploma before the fifth school year following the student's enrollment in grade nine as determined by the district must have the student's course credit accrual and PGP reviewed.¹²⁹

When developing the PGP, the school has the opportunity to communicate with the caregiver and student to:

- Identify educational goals for the student;
- Review diagnostic information, appropriate monitoring and intervention, and other evaluation strategies;
- Discuss and plan for the instructional program, including courses needed to meet graduation requirements under the distinguished, recommended, or minimum graduation plan;¹³⁰
- Address participation of the student's parent or guardian, including consideration of the parent's expectations of the student;
- Provide innovative methods to promote the student's advancement, including flexible scheduling, alternative learning environments, online instruction, and other strategies that have been scientifically validated to improve learning and cognitive ability. Contact the student's caregiver and DFPS caseworker for the student's approval process; and
- For high school students, promote college and workforce readiness and career placement and advancement. The plan should also facilitate the student's transition from secondary to post-secondary education. Additional foster care-specific supports and resources may also be discussed (*see Chapter 13*).

Texas Education Code PGP statute:

www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.28.htm#28.0212

See a PGP Resource Guide developed by ESC 13:

ritter.tea.state.tx.us/taa/stanprog102303a1.doc

Texas Success.org — The state has funded and developed *free* online resources to help students to improve their knowledge and skills in mathematics and reading. These mathematics and reading tutorial programs are aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). They are used as supplemental materials in many classrooms and can be accessed on any home computer. Browse these materials and provide this information for caregivers to help youth in foster care improve academic achievement: texassuccess.org/

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3. Develop procedures for awarding course credit — including partial credit, if appropriate, and electives — for work completed by a student in foster care while enrolled at another school.

DFPS staff considers educational needs when making any placement changes that will require a school disruption. Occasionally, students may be required to move to a new home and a new school during the middle of a grading period. The most likely time this could occur is when a student first comes into care of DFPS on an emergency basis. In that scenario, DFPS will work with caregivers and the school staff to the extent possible to keep the student in the home school, unless it is not in the student's best interest to remain there.

In the event that a school move is required, students may unfortunately lose credit for work completed in a prior school if the emergency happened mid-semester. This is when coordination between child welfare and education systems can be very powerful to facilitate student success. The loss of course work and credits earned may be mitigated through a local policy to transition the balance of the credit that was earned prior to a transfer to a new school for a core or an elective course.

TEC Section 25.007 requires the education system to consider special procedures for lessening the consequences of course disruption when awarding partial or full credit and the completion of coursework.¹³¹ Education and child welfare officials should work together to assist students when school moves are required. Each school district should examine local policies for awarding credit and course placement, such as how credit is awarded based on mastery of content and student performance in a course prior to a transfer to a new district or based on a course assessment when a student in foster care enrolls in a new district or school.

Districts also have flexibility with implementing credit recovery programs, designing optional flexible school days, and implementing other strategies for awarding credit for coursework completed and content mastered. Districts and schools may use online credit recovery programs, the Texas Virtual School Network (TxVSN), and other TEA-approved educational technology to assist in the transition process (*see Appendix H for more information on the TxVSN*). Alternative programs for course completion may need the approval of the DFPS Regional Director or DFPS Assistant Commissioner for CPS.



State resources may provide additional guidance on the local flexibility that is available to schools regarding course credits for students in foster care:

The TEA Curriculum Division:

www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147486096

Back on Track in Texas – Ready for Post-Secondary Success:

backontracktx.org/



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Additionally, the TEA website is dedicated to providing information on dropout prevention, best practices, and research-based interventions that also support credit recovery and course completion for struggling students.

Resources are available to schools to search for and to identify research-based strategies that can facilitate academic achievement for youth in foster care. The U.S. Department of Education has identified six key strategies for dropout prevention that apply to students in foster care:

- Use diagnostic data and data systems to identify student needs
- Assign adult advocates to at-risk students
- Provide academic supports and enrichment to improve academic performance
- Implement programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills
- Personalize the learning environment and instructional process
- Provide rigorous and relevant instruction that better engages students in learning, provides the skills needed to graduate, and serves students after they leave school.

RESOURCES: Dropout Prevention

Select Texas Dropout Prevention Policies:

www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=8327&menu_id=2147483659

TEA Dropout Information:

www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=3527&menu_id=2147483659

Response to Intervention (RTI) and Special Education FAQ: www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=2147500735&libID=2147500730

National Dropout Prevention Center Network and National Dropout Prevention Center — provides resources for researchers, practitioners, policymakers and families to increase opportunities for youth in at-risk situations to receive the quality education and services necessary to successfully graduate from high school: www.dropoutprevention.org/

The center also maintains a [database of programs](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/modelprograms) that have been found to be effective in improving academic achievement for youth in at-risk situations: www.dropoutprevention.org/modelprograms

Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Practice Guide - Dropout Prevention — provides specific recommendations for program design, development and implementation. A checklist is included that schools can use to design academic supports for students in foster care: ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=9

4. Promote practices that facilitate access by a student in substitute care to extracurricular programs, summer programs, credit transfer services, online courses, and after-school tutoring programs at nominal or no cost (a fee waiver may also be provided).

According to the TEC, students in foster care should be afforded opportunities to participate in summer programs, credit transfers, electronic courses provided through the Texas Virtual School Network, and after-school tutoring programs at nominal or no cost.¹³² Each school district is encouraged to examine what services are available and how it can meet this goal. For example, if the school has a 21st Century Community Learning Center before- or after-school program, a foster youth may participate at no charge. Many schools have other after-school tutoring programs in which students may be encouraged to participate. Schools may have a Communities In Schools (CIS) program that provides tutoring, mentoring, and summer programs.

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Extracurricular fee waivers for athletics or clubs could help youth engage in positive youth development opportunities. Whenever possible, schools should consider strategies to work with caregivers to link foster youth with these types of programs that support learning. Schools can reach out to invite students to participate and to obtain caregiver permission for student involvement in supportive services such as these.

Are there any special considerations for students in foster care related to participation in extracurricular activities?

School districts may not impose durational residency requirements for students in foster care for any activity sponsored by the school district.¹³³ Although the University Interscholastic League (UIL) imposes durational residence requirements on students generally, the Office of the Texas Attorney General has found that *NO* durational residential requirement in the UIL rules may be applied to a child placed by DFPS or a court into a foster home located in a receiving school district.¹³⁴ This is true regardless of whether it is the student's first time to be placed in a foster home or the child has been moved to a new foster home; if the placement is by DFPS or a court, no durational requirement can be imposed if the reason for the student's relocation is placement in care.¹³⁵

RESOURCES: Extracurricular Programs

National Center For Youth Law, "Beyond the Basics — How Extracurricular Activities Can Benefit Foster Youth," October–December 2010:

www.youthlaw.org/publications/yln/2010/oct_dec_2010/beyond_the_basics_how_extracurricular_activities_can_benefit_foster_youth/

21st Century Community Learning Centers:

www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=3546&menu_id=814

Communities In Schools:

www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=4639&menu_id=720

University Interscholastic League, Constitution & Contest Rules (2010–11):

www.uil-texas.org/policy/eligibility

National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections:

www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/education-and-child-welfare.html

5. Establish procedures to lessen the adverse impact of moving a student in “substitute care” to a new school:

School staff are encouraged to use the flexibility available to local school districts to establish supports for a student in foster care moving to a new school. Previous sections discussed local opportunities to examine and develop policies and procedures to ease the transition for youth in foster care. Another strategy suggested to reduce the negative and unintended consequences of student transitions is to implement the concept of a *Care Team*.

- A *Care Team* is a school support strategy that was recommended in the “*Texas Blueprint: Transforming Educational Outcomes For Children & Youth in Foster Care*” (see page 20). This team could be a group of professional staff members who provide and meet the educational needs and challenges of students who are not eligible for or receiving special education services.¹³⁶



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Specifically the *Care Team* could discuss information helpful for school success, including: credit completion, enrollment, transfers, withdrawals, college readiness, communication with caregivers, behavior, discipline, and previous student successes. The *Care Team* may also help facilitate the *enrollment conference*.

Care Team members may include people such as a school administrator, foster care liaison, social worker, teacher, counselor, or other adults such as the Communities In Schools (CIS) coordinator, caregiver, caseworker, group home staff, or other supportive people in a student's life. This team would be accessible to the students in foster care. The role of a *Care Team* might be addressed by an existing team such as a school Response to Intervention Team (RTI) or a Student Support Team. Or, a new team could be created to focus specifically on the needs and challenges of foster youth. The Team could convene on a regular schedule (e.g., every six weeks) to review the roster of students in care, or the team could be convened only when there is a crisis situation or a specific student need is identified.

Student Support Teams: txcc.sedl.org/resources/sst/sst_brochure.pdf

6. Become familiar with the Memorandums of Understandings (MOUs) between TEA and DFPS regarding the exchange of information as appropriate to facilitate the transition of students in substitute care from one school to another.

TEA and DFPS have an MOU for aggregate data sharing on the state level to examine educational outcomes of students in foster care. TEA and DFPS are using this state-level information to assist with policy development, planning training, and technical assistance for district liaisons and other stakeholders. It is not practical at this time for DFPS and each ISD to enter into local agreements. School districts may benefit from state-level information and also from case-level coordination as is allowable under FERPA, and, local school district, and CPS policies. Schools must follow the laws for sharing information that are required under FERPA (*see page 70–71*).

At this time, Texas school districts can identify students who are in foster care when they are enrolled in school with a *DFPS Placement Authorization Form 2085* or a court order. They can facilitate the transition of students on a case-by-case basis as needed. Schools can use the *Placement Authorization Form 2085* to document that the student is in foster care and as supportive documentation for the at-risk checklist item #11.¹³⁷ These forms must be kept confidential, in a secured area such as a locked file cabinet. It is important that ANY records identifying a child as being involved in foster care or involved with CPS should be stored securely to protect confidentiality (*see page 52*).

The school or district can use data from this form to create a roster of students in foster care. Each school can flag and track students in foster care in the local data system in order to analyze student progress and outcomes. Districts are encouraged to use early warning data to facilitate a successful educational experience for all students, including students in foster care. Using a system that reports early warning data is a research-based strategy to identify student needs and to plan for student interventions. In order to help the school plan for interventions and supportive services, as well as to track outcomes, early warning data that schools should track and analyze for foster students includes attendance, grades, assessment, and behavior.

Where can I go for more information on student tracking and data sharing tools?

Many school districts have local databases that are capable of tracking academic progress, attendance, behavior, and achievement. Students needing additional support can be flagged, interventions can be provided, and progress can be tracked. For more information on a free early warning data system tool that schools can use, visit the Texas Comprehensive Center: txcc.sedl.org/resources/ewst/

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7. Encourage school districts and open-enrollment charter schools to provide services to support students in transition (from high school and foster care) when applying for admission to post-secondary study and when seeking sources of funding for post-secondary study.

School districts and charter schools are encouraged to provide information to students in substitute care about college programs and opportunities to pursue post-secondary studies, including junior and community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and vocational, technical, and certificate programs. Promoting college access by linking with local college programs is encouraged to support successful transitions into post-secondary education. Many specific financial resources and supports for students in substitute care exist. Districts should be informed of these resources, provide information, and connect students. For example: individuals formerly in Texas' foster care system are eligible for a lifetime tuition and fee waiver at any Texas state-supported institution of higher education, as long as the student enrolls in at least one college course before turning 25 years old.¹³⁸ School personnel can assist students in foster care by facilitating enrollment in at least one dual-credit or college course while in high school, automatically qualifying students for the lifetime tuition and fee waiver. Any college course, including developmental courses and many continuing education classes, will initiate the tuition and fee waiver. Connecting students to these opportunities is a positive strategy schools can implement to support successful transitions and college and career readiness (*see Chapter 13*).

8. Require districts, campuses, and open-enrollment charter schools to accept a referral for special education services made for a student in substitute care by a previously-attended school.

By law, a receiving school must accept a referral for special education from a previous district in order to speed the process for special education and ensure students receive proper academic supports and interventions once in their new school. The Texas Education Agency *Student Attendance Accounting Handbook* requires that records be transferred from one school to the next via TREx. Records that must be transferred include assessment instrument results, receipt of special education services, and individualized education plans, if applicable. Schools should review the list of required records to transfer in order to facilitate continuity and educational stability for students in foster care (*see Chapter 8 for more information on TREx and effective records transfer; see Chapter 12 for more information on special education*).

9. Provide other assistance as identified by TEA.

TEA looks forward to learning from each school district as they engage in this work. In addition to distributing knowledge, research, best practices, and statutory requirements, TEA plans to share results and feedback with school district officials who are working with students in foster care. TEA will continue coordinating with DFPS, the Children's Commission, and other stakeholders to provide resources to assist schools. The agency plans to disseminate additional foster care and education assistance to schools through the following avenues:

- The TEA *Foster Care & Student Success* website: www.tea.state.tx.us/FosterCareStudentSuccess/;
- The TEA *Foster Care Education* listserv;
- Webinar training;
- "To The Administrator Addressed" letters issued by TEA; and
- A Project Share group designed to support district foster care liaisons.



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To register one's district liaisons with TEA, please send an email with the name, position, and contact information of the designated *School District Foster Care Liaison(s)* to fostercareliaison@tea.state.tx.us. Also, please complete the *Foster Care Liaison Introductory Survey* at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Fostercareliaisons>.

Make sure that the district has access to the most current information in Texas!
Join the Foster Care Education Listserv — visit: ritter.tea.state.tx.us/list/ and select *Foster Care Education*.

The 83rd Texas Legislature added new requirements to TEC § 25.007 that strengthen transition supports for students in substitute care.¹³⁹ Information to support districts in understanding and implementing these provisions will be made available in the future. See below for new provisions that have been added:

- ⇒ **Requiring school districts to provide notice to the child's educational decision maker and caseworker regarding events that may significantly impact the education of a child, including:**
 - (A) requests or referrals for an evaluation under Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. Section 794), or special education under Section 29.003;
 - (B) admission, review, and dismissal committee meetings;
 - (C) manifestation determination review required by Section 37.004 (b)
 - (D) any disciplinary actions under Chapter 37 for which parental notice is required;
 - (E) citations issued for Class C misdemeanor offenses on school property or at school-sponsored activities;
 - (F) reports of restraint and seclusion required by Section 37.0011.
 - (G) Use of corporal punishment as provided by Section 37.0011, is not permitted for students in foster care.
- ⇒ **Developing procedures for allowing a student in substitute care who was previously enrolled in a course required for graduation the opportunity, to the extent practicable, to complete the course at no cost to the student before the beginning of the next school year.**
- ⇒ **Ensuring that a student in substitute care who is not likely to receive a high school diploma before the fifth school year following the student's enrollment in grade nine as determined by the district has the student's course credit accrual and personal graduation plan reviewed.**
- ⇒ **Ensuring that a student in substitute care who is in grade 11 or 12 be provided information regarding tuition and fee exemptions under section 54.366 for dual-credit or other courses provided by a public institution of higher education for which a high school student may earn joint high school and college credit.**

PROMOTING HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION:



Promoting high school completion is important and necessary! Students in foster care are entitled to all education services generally available to other students. Additionally, students may benefit from additional attention in the school setting to make certain they remain on track for high school completion and graduation.¹⁴⁰ School staff can help by reviewing students' class schedules and coursework as an important element to properly advising students and ensuring progress towards timely high school completion and graduation. Communicating with the student and caregiver about academic progress, standardized testing, and future goals is also important.



TIP: School staff can support and encourage graduating seniors in many ways.

Helping to ensure students have their caps and gowns, senior pictures, and yearbooks and are able to participate in school-related graduation activities is important! Additionally, being present at a student's high school graduation and taking the time to celebrate and congratulate his or her success is a meaningful way to provide support to students. Students may not have other adults to celebrate with them.

Texas Law supports high school completion for students in foster care!

In some instances, students may not be on track for graduation. To this end, the TEC has some important provisions in place to encourage high school completion for students in foster care:



LAW: If an 11th or 12th grade student in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services transfers to a different school district and the student is ineligible to graduate from the district to which the student transfers, the district from which the student transferred shall award a diploma at the student's request, if the student meets the graduation requirements of the district from which the student transferred.¹⁴¹

LAW: A student in substitute care who was previously enrolled in a course required for graduation must be allowed the opportunity, to the extent practicable, to complete the course at no cost to the student before the beginning of the next school year.¹⁴²

It is important that school staff work with students to identify high school completion and credit recovery supports that help students in making progress towards high school completion. Alternative mechanisms to complete coursework and re-cover credits may be pursued. In some cases alternative high school programs and environments with fewer students and more individualized attention are also beneficial. Staff should work with students, caregivers, and the student's caseworker to determine a school setting that promotes a student's individual success and high school completion.



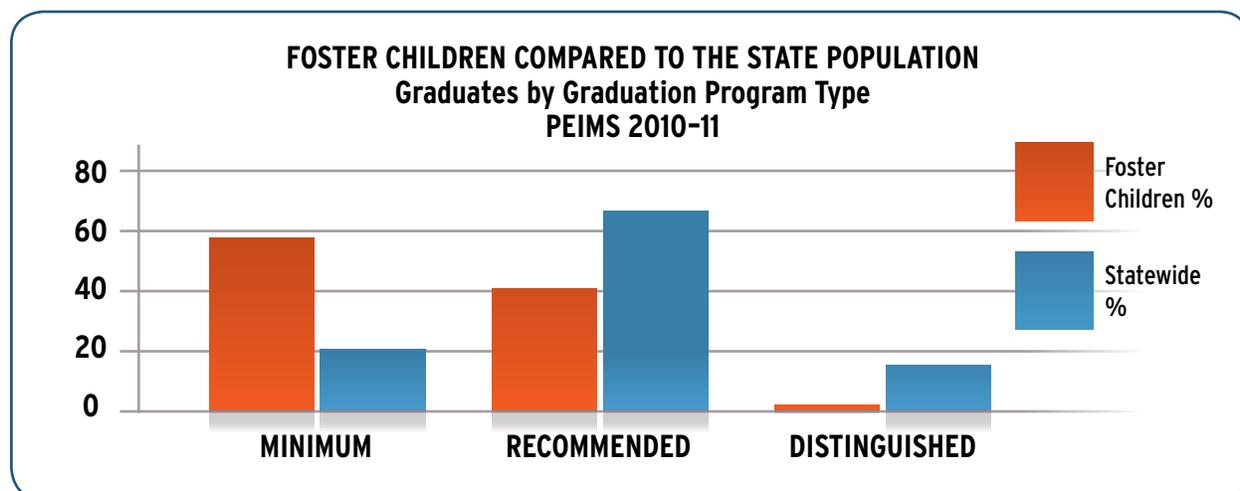
TIP: Remind students they can attend school and receive their high school diploma after turning 18.

Information about high school diplomas for older adults and other opportunities to earn a high school diploma should be considered and discussed with students when appropriate. Like all other Texas students, foster care alumni may enroll in and attend school to receive their high school diploma until age 21, and up to age 26 in some districts.¹⁴³ School advisors and counselors should connect older students and young adults in foster care with opportunities to complete their high school diploma.

For more information on TEA graduation requirements, visit:
www.tea.state.tx.us/graduation.aspx

WHAT GRADUATION PROGRAM IS RIGHT FOR A STUDENT?

Far too often, students in foster care are placed on the minimum high school graduation program.



According to TEA PEIMS data 2010–2011, significantly more students in foster care graduated with the minimum graduation program than students in the general population (57.1% compared to 19%). Conversely, substantially more students in the general population graduated with the recommended graduation program than students in foster care (67% compared to 41%). Only 1.3% of foster students graduated under the Distinguished Achievement Program, compared to 12.4% of students statewide. These outcomes highlight the achievement gap that exists between students in foster care and the general student population.¹⁴⁴ Click on this link to view *Data Use and Reporting of Texas Foster Students* in its entirety: www.yourhonor.com/myprofile/assets/WhatDoesTheDataTellUs.pdf

Pursuant to H.B. 5 passed by the 83rd FMS>MeSgdW. The minimum graduation program no longer exists; however, encouraging or settling for minimal requirements for high school graduation may have unintended consequences. It is important that school staff work with students and caregivers to determine the appropriate high school diploma plan and to ensure that students in foster care are provided with challenging, engaging coursework that will help them to become college ready. Please refer students and caregivers to the appropriate school guidance and counseling services for information on the impact of the different graduation programs on future goals and planning.



TIP: It is always important to involve youth in planning and discussion about their long-term goals and future aspirations when determining their high school graduation program.



RESOURCES: High School Graduation

More information on the *Recommended High School Graduation Program* requirements which are encouraged for all students may be found at: www.tea.state.tx.us/graduation.aspx

More information on the minimum high school graduation program may be found at: www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147484563

HOW DOES STATE STANDARDIZED TESTING IMPACT GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS?

Beginning in spring 2012, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) replaced the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Communication with students and their caregivers about STAAR, the five end-of-course assessments, and the relationship of the state assessment program to high school graduation is critical.¹⁴⁵ TEA maintains a website with current information and resources for STAAR that are helpful to school officials.

Access STAAR specific resources on the TEA website: www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/staar/



TIP: It is important to provide information to child welfare partners about standardized testing dates and work to ensure students participate in testing, even if a school move occurs near testing dates.

WHEN ARE STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE ELIGIBLE TO EARN A GED?

There may be special circumstances where a student younger than 18 may be working toward a GED; however, in most circumstances DFPS elects for students to complete a high school diploma. Contact the student's caregiver and caseworker for more information.

In situations where students and young adults are 18 and older and desire to earn a GED, schools should provide information and link students to GED resources and opportunities. Local colleges, Job Corps, and other programs may offer opportunities for students to earn a GED and/or additional skills training. Assisting students in transition by helping them link with GED and additional training opportunities can be another avenue to support students.

