

# Supporting Foster Care Involved Youth

## Secondary Super Strategies | INTRODUCTION

### Who are Foster Care Involved Youth?

**F**oster care is a temporary service provided by a state agency for children who cannot live with their families. Children in foster care may live with relatives or with unrelated foster parents. Foster care can also refer to placement settings such as group homes, residential care facilities, emergency shelters, and supervised independent living.

Foster care involved youth face a multitude of barriers stemming from their family structure and their involvement within the system. These barriers can include school transiency, difficulty forming relationships, behavioral and emotional challenges, academic setbacks, and attachment issues.

Schools have the potential to be a safe space for these students and the ability to provide them with the skills needed to be successful, self-advocating adults. Doing so takes school leadership, intentionality, and awareness of the challenges foster care involved youth face and of the relevant resources and regulations.<sup>2</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

In fiscal year 2018, the national number of youth living in foster care totaled 437,283 with approximately 36% between the ages of 10 and 18. The average amount of time in care was approximately nineteen months.<sup>5</sup>



## Foster Care Involved Youth Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop positive working relationships with senior supervisory child welfare agency staff.
- Develop clear, consistent guidelines to facilitate information-sharing across all systems involved. These systems may include:
  - √ child welfare services
  - √ mental health
  - √ juvenile justice
  - √ law enforcement
- Clearly define each agency's role.
- Meet regularly with staff from each system to ensure students are receiving appropriate wrap-around services and to decrease duplication.
- Provide and participate in cross-training with involved systems. Cross-training provides a platform for organizations to share policies and procedures, skills, perspectives, build relationships, and improve service delivery to foster care involved students and families.
- Maintain confidentiality. It can be important to inform specific school personnel of a student's foster care status to ensure the student's health, welfare, safety, and academic needs are being met. However, it is equally important for staff to be aware of students' rights to privacy and to understand the potential negative impact of revealing personal information.
- Provide training to teachers and counselors on trauma-informed care to better equip staff with support strategies for students in foster care.



## Foster Care Involved Youth Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a structured and supportive classroom.
- Have a plan in place to accommodate students who enter school midyear. Keep a file of all school notices and newsletters that were sent home throughout the year and make copies for families who move into the district.
- Encourage foster parents' involvement.
- Identify a school staff member as a single point of contact for both the student and foster parent(s). This could include a:
  - √ teacher
  - √ counselor
  - √ school social worker
- Arrange periodic progress report meetings with the foster parent(s), caseworker, and student to discuss the student's accomplishments and needs.
  - √ Including the student in these meetings allows them to feel a sense of control over their lives and helps in developing self-advocacy skills.
- Provide training to administrators, teachers, and counselors on current laws pertaining to educational attainment of students involved in the foster care system.
- Teachers and staff should be aware of reasons for absences and the impact on course work.



### DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Illinois Report Card for 2018-2019, the graduation rate for youth in care was 54% compared to 86% of their peers.<sup>1</sup>

## Foster Care Involved Youth Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should be mindful of the impact of family-based assignments and activities.
  - √ Alternative assignments for creating a family tree, a Mother's Day card, presentation about a memorable family vacation and the like should be offered to all students.
- Students in foster care may miss school due to parent and sibling visits, court dates, therapy, and other appointments. Work with these students to ensure they are able to make-up missed coursework due to such activities.
- Partner with your local community college for CTE career exploration days. Inform students on the different career options within CTE and how they can get started during high school.
- Encourage foster care involved youth to take career aptitude tests to assist them in determining their skills and interests for future occupations.
- Teach students to advocate for themselves.
  - √ Allow them to participate in school meetings, special education placement discussions, and transition planning.
- Encourage the student to become involved at school.
  - √ Develop procedures for permitting students who enroll after the beginning of the school year to participate in ongoing school programs and activities.



### SOURCES:

<sup>1</sup> Illinois Report Card: Academic Progress. (2019). Retrieved April 7, 2020, from <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/State.aspx?source=trends>.

<sup>2</sup> McKellar, N., & Cowan, K. C. (2011, September). Supporting Students in Foster Care. Principal Leadership, 12-16. Retrieved from [https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Handouts/Families%20and%20Educators/Foster\\_Children\\_Sept%202011.pdf](https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Handouts/Families%20and%20Educators/Foster_Children_Sept%202011.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention. (2010, March). The Role of Schools in Supporting Children in Foster Care. Retrieved from <http://www.promoteprevent.org/sites/www.promoteprevent.org/files/resources/The%20Role%20of%20Schools.docx.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act H.R.2353, 115th Cong., (2018) (enacted). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2353/text?r=2>.

<sup>5</sup> United States. (2018). The AFCARS report. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau.