



INFORMATION PACKET

# SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

## How do jurisdictions ensure that **youth in care receive the academic credits** they have earned when they move?

One major challenge for youth in foster care is the high rate of school mobility, both when they are initially removed from home and when they change living placements while in care. When youth in care change schools, they often experience difficulties in transferring course credits. Even within the same state, schools in different districts can offer different classes, employ different methods of calculating full and partial course credits, and require students to take different types of core classes to graduate. Thus, when youth in care switch schools, they often cannot obtain full or partial credit for the coursework they completed at previous schools. Even when youth in care obtain credit for courses they took at previous schools, these credits may not count toward core graduation requirements, instead counting only as electives.

Addressing the educational needs of youth in care and ensuring prompt and full credit for previous coursework is important for a number of reasons. Achieving success in school is necessary for children's lifelong employment and economic trajectories. All children in foster care deserve positive educational opportunities and experiences to achieve their full potential.<sup>1,2</sup>



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Enacted in October 2008, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (Fostering Connections) requires that, among other important school stability provisions, “the State agency and local educational agencies . . . provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school, with all of the educational records of the child provided to the school.”<sup>3</sup> Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, school districts are also responsible for ensuring the educational stability of all students in foster care, including the immediate enrollment in school and transfer of school records when a child changes schools.

Taken together, these two pieces of federal legislation emphasize the shared responsibility of educational and child welfare agencies in ensuring that the educational needs of children in foster care are being met promptly. A number of states have gone further than the federal legislation, passing laws pertaining to school stability and completion, such as requiring credit transfer policies at the local level.

## Jurisdictional examples

The following jurisdictions have enacted statewide policies to ensure that youth in foster care are awarded credit for all work completed, so they can stay on track for high school graduation:

### California

**California Assembly Bill 490 (AB 490)** requires public school districts to accept “full or partial coursework” completed by a student while attending a public school, juvenile court school, or nonpublic, nonsectarian school or agency. AB 490 does not specify a specific method for calculating partial credits, but some school districts in California have developed their own. For example, Fresno Unified School District calculates credits based on “seat time,” which is defined as the number of hours a student successfully completes in a particular course.

Recognizing the need for a statewide, uniform partial credit calculation tool, the California Child Welfare

Council adopted a partial credit model policy in September 2013. This policy was developed by the California Department of Education, California Department of Social Services, California School Boards Association, California County Welfare Directors Association, several members of the California Legislature, school districts, child welfare agencies, and youth advocates who have had experience in foster care. This group developed a **Partial Credit Policy Manual** that provides comprehensive guidance to ensure youth in foster care are awarded credit for all work completed so they can stay on track for high school graduation. It provides a partial credit calculation formula, explanations of the policy’s provisions, and implementation tools for use by school personnel and social workers.

### CALIFORNIA ASSEMBLY BILL 490

Youth in foster care have a right to receive full or partial credits, including determination of seat time, for all work satisfactorily completed before transferring schools.

Grades cannot be lowered due to absences or gaps in enrollment caused by changes in school or home placements, attendance at court hearings, or participation in any court related activity.

Upon receiving notification of a transfer, the sending school must issue check out grades, calculate credits earned, and send the information on an official transcript to the receiving school within two business days.

The receiving school must accept all credits, apply them to the same courses, and enroll youth in foster care in the same or equivalent classes as those they were enrolled in at the sending school.



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## Selected Resources

The following table provides additional manuals, tools, and other resources to support credit retrieval for youth in foster care:

### SELECTED RESOURCES

AUTHOR/TITLE/DATE	RESOURCE LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
American Bar Association (ABA) Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, <i>Blueprint for Change: Education Success for Children in Foster Care</i> (2014)	<a href="http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?EntryId=1624&amp;Command=Core_Download&amp;method=inline&amp;PortalId=0&amp;TabId=124">http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?EntryId=1624&amp;Command=Core_Download&amp;method=inline&amp;PortalId=0&amp;TabId=124</a>	This Blueprint offers eight goals and 56 corresponding benchmarks to serve as a framework or checklist for direct case advocacy and system reform. Leaders should use the Blueprint for Change framework to identify a jurisdiction's strengths and areas for improvement.
ABA Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, <i>National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care</i> (2018)	<a href="https://fosteringchamps.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/NationalEducationDatasheet2018-2.pdf">https://fosteringchamps.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/NationalEducationDatasheet2018-2.pdf</a>	This 34-page fact sheet summarizes research and data related to the education of children in foster care, and provides national examples of promising practices and policies to address a wide range of factors influencing disparities in education outcomes.
California Health and Human Services, <i>Partial Credit Model Policy for Improving the Educational Outcomes for Foster Youth</i> (2014)	<a href="https://foster-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Californias-Partial-Credit-Model-Policy-2013.pdf">https://foster-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Californias-Partial-Credit-Model-Policy-2013.pdf</a>	This policy manual provides comprehensive information to ensure youth in foster care are awarded credit for all work completed, so they can stay on track for high school graduation. It provides a partial credit calculation formula, explanations of the policy's provisions, and implementation tools for use by school personnel and social workers.
National Conference of State Legislatures, <i>Foster Care Bill of Rights</i> (2019)	<a href="https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/foster-care-bill-of-rights.aspx">https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/foster-care-bill-of-rights.aspx</a>	This webpage provides access to the 14 states' Bill of Rights for Children in Foster Care. These bills are designed to inform foster children and foster caregivers of their rights within the child welfare system, including why they are in foster care and how the process works. Some of them specifically name credit transfer as an educational right for children in foster care.

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U.S. Department of Education, <i>Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care</i> (2016)	<a href="https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/ed_hhs_foster_care_guidance.pdf">https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/ed_hhs_foster_care_guidance.pdf</a>	This guidance sends a strong message to schools and districts that the needs of children in foster care must be addressed, and that schools and districts must immediately begin conversations about their shared responsibility to support the school stability and success of students in foster care.

- 1 Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2014). *Sustaining momentum: Improving educational stability for youth in foster care*. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/resources/sustaining-momentum>
- 2 Kelly, K. (2015). Courtroom educational advocacy for children in foster care. *American Bar Association, Children's Rights Litigation, January 15, 2015*. Retrieved from <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/childrens-rights/articles/2015/courtroom-educational-advocacy-children-foster-care/>
- 3 H.R. 6893 (110th): *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*.
- 4 American Bar Association and Casey Family Programs, Legal Center for Foster Care and Education [Issue brief]. (2008). *Questions and answers: Credit transfer and school completion*. Retrieved from American Bar Association website: [http://fosteringuccessmichigan.com/uploads/misc/QA\\_2\\_Credits\\_FINAL.authcheckdam.pdf](http://fosteringuccessmichigan.com/uploads/misc/QA_2_Credits_FINAL.authcheckdam.pdf)

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