



INFORMATION PACKET

SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

What is the **Every Student Succeeds Act** and how does school stability affect children in foster care?

Students in foster care often face educational barriers. Although there are many gaps in data collection, studies estimate between 42-63% of youth in foster care complete high school by the age of 18, which is generally fewer than their peers who are not in foster care.¹ Of those who graduate, only a small percentage attend and graduate from college.¹ These troubling outcomes are due in part to the multiple school placements many experience while in foster care.² It is estimated that up to 75 percent of youth change schools when they enter care and over one-third of high-school-age youth in foster care have changed schools five or more times.¹

School continuity should be prioritized by child welfare agencies because it affects more than just academics. For many children in foster care, school is the one predictable and safe place in their lives, and feeling connected to caring adults and peers at school can serve as a counterweight to the negative effects of being separated from family and the trauma and chaos caused by a new home placement. Child welfare leaders should take steps to address school stability because all children in foster care have a right to a quality education and the resources they need to reach their full potential in life.



EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA) REQUIREMENTS

- Children remaining in schools of origin when it is in their best interests
- Immediate enrollment in school and transfer of school records
- Coordinated transportation plans and clear procedures on how transportation will be provided, arranged, and funded
- Establishment of a designated point of contact within the state educational agency
- “Awaiting foster care placement” language removal in McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act
- New data collection and reporting requirements on student achievement and graduation rates

For more about ESSA, please visit <https://www.ed.gov/ESSA>

What is ESSA and why is it important?

For the past decade, child welfare agencies have been the sole entities required to ensure that children in foster care remain in their schools when their placements change. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), school districts are now also responsible for ensuring the educational stability of all students in foster care. The requirements offer an opportunity for child welfare agencies to partner with school districts to provide stable educational experiences for youth in foster care.

ESSA shines a spotlight on the unique educational needs of children in foster care. For the first time, there are federal education protections for children in foster care, and many of the ESSA foster care protections reinforce and complement

those in [other federal laws](#) such as the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act. Both laws emphasize the shared responsibility of educational and child welfare agencies to promote the well-being of children in foster care. These educational stability protections were required to be in place by December 16, 2016.

The educational disparities that children in foster care experience will continue unless the educational and child welfare systems work more effectively together. The key to begin building a successful collaboration is to start a meaningful conversation, and this law provides the opportunity to do so. The ultimate success of this law, however, depends on implementation at the local level. Child welfare and educational agencies must work together to make informed, joint decisions about children and remove barriers that may hinder educational progress and stability.

ESSA and effective collaboration

Partnerships are well underway between child welfare and education agencies in many states, and progress has been made across the country to better support the education of children in foster care through increased collaboration. The following core components have resulted in effective collaborations between state education agencies and child welfare agencies:

- Establish a structure for collaboration and collectively prioritize goals. There should be a high-level commitment for all the partners who are part of the collaborative structure.
- Keep leadership engaged and informed of ongoing work and use their authority to keep the momentum going. Ensure that staff within all agencies support the ongoing work. Leaders must understand the value of the collaboration and that real change takes time. It is critical to engage new leaders quickly and demonstrate the success the collaboration has achieved to date.

What is the Every Student Succeeds Act and how does school stability affect children in foster care?

- Data drives change and supports progress. Initially, data can help engage new partners and start the conversation about the educational needs of children in care. But data can also be a tool to maintain the collaboration's momentum over time by providing ongoing information on the strengths and weaknesses of the system and the progress of the collaboration.

EXAMPLE FROM THE FIELD

In Philadelphia, the child welfare and education agencies developed a detailed joint protocol to promote educational stability for all children in out-of-home placement. The protocol addresses how school stability decisions are made and reviewed and tackles the difficult issue of transportation to the current school. To eliminate any confusion or conflict, the agreed-upon protocol provides transportation guidelines for short-term placements, identifies who will initiate transportation requests, and explains the types of transportation that are provided in specific situations.³

- 1 American Bar association, Legal Center for Foster Care and Education. (2018). Fostering success in education: National factsheet on the educational outcomes of children in foster care. Retrieved from <https://fosteringchamps.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/NationalEducationDatasheet2018-2.pdf>
- 2 Clemens, E. V., Lalonde, T. L., & Sheesley, A. P. (2016). The relationship between school mobility and students in foster care earning a High School credential. Children and Youth Services Review, 68, 193–201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2016.07.016>
- 3 Educational Stability for Foster Care Youth in Pennsylvania [Website]. Retrieved from <http://www.pafostercare.org/>

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