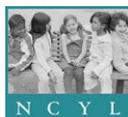




# ARIZONA FOSTER CARE EDUCATION TOOLKIT



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# A LETTER FROM THE FIELD

Dear Education Champions,

I am a teacher and an education advocate. I am also a person who experienced the foster care system. Although growing up in foster care brought many challenges of its own, it also helped shape my outlook and nurtured a determination and passion for ensuring that other young people experiencing adversity can succeed. Throughout my educational endeavors, there were many teachers, staff, and community providers who cared for and pushed me toward a path of success. As they say, it takes a village to raise a child. As a result of the caring adult allies in my life, combined with my own determination and resiliency, I successfully graduated from college and am now an educational professional teaching in Arizona.

For students experiencing foster care, one of the greatest educational gifts you can provide is being present and letting them know they have a safe space on your campus, at your school or within your organization. Simply knowing there was a place for me when I needed it was enough to get through a really rough day. As a teacher, I know first and

**IF A STUDENT IS WORRIED ABOUT WHERE THEY'LL SLEEP OR IF THEY'LL HAVE FOOD AFTER SCHOOL, THEY WILL STRUGGLE TO LEARN. SUPPORTING A STUDENT IN MEETING THEIR BASIC NEEDS IS A MUST IF YOU INTEND TO SUPPORT THEIR EDUCATION.**

foremost, my students need to feel safe well before they are ready to engage in learning. If a student is worried about where they'll sleep or if they'll have food after school, they will struggle to learn. Supporting a student in meeting their basic needs is a must if you intend to support their education. Secondly, having access to accurate information about the unique educational needs of students in foster care and the policies, resources and supports in place to help is critical. This toolkit was designed with all of this in mind. It provides practical information you can use to support your students and also provides first-hand tips about what works from alumni of foster care. Success is possible, if not



inevitable with your help. There will undoubtedly be times when more help is needed, when challenges will surface, and a clear path forward feels unclear. If that's the case, push ahead and reach out to the advocates, community-based organizations, and foster care agencies we've highlighted for more support and guidance. Let this toolkit serve as a guide to know what questions to ask, when to push back, and where to get more information.

While you may not have the answer for every challenge or roadblock a student will experience in the future, it doesn't mean you can't help in their success today. Every resource you find, every phone call you make, every meeting you attend, will help your student pursue a better future by supporting them today. I wish you and all of the students experiencing foster care in Arizona the best of luck!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'TJ Fowler'.

TJ Fowler

*Teacher & Board Member of Fostering Advocates Arizona*

# HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

For ease of use, each section of the toolkit follows the same format:



## INTRODUCTION

A brief overview of the topic and the important role it plays in the educational success of students in foster care.



## WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW

Quick concepts that highlight the key “takeaway” items of which every advocate should be aware.



## ACTION STEPS FOR ALLIES

A list of best practices and action steps that adult allies can use to sharpen their educational advocacy efforts.



## REAL LIFE REPORTS

Expert insight and advice from young people who have experienced foster care and the adult allies who worked alongside them.



## MORE TO KNOW

A deep dive into each topic with critical information pertaining to student rights, policy and procedure.

## COLLABORATORS

**FosterEd Arizona:** FosterEd Arizona’s vision is for young people in care to be positively engaged in school and learning, empowered to take charge of their educational futures, and supported by meaningful relationships with caring adults who will consistently and effectively support the young person’s educational trajectory once they have exited care. FosterEd Arizona works to create a future where every young person in foster care graduates from high school with a wide array of possibilities for their future. Since the launch of the Pima County demonstration project, FosterEd Arizona has supported the educational success of more than 1,100 students in Arizona foster care.

**Fostering Advocates Arizona:** Fostering Advocates Arizona (FAAZ), led by a Young Adult Leadership Board made of up a diverse group of young people who have experienced foster care, engages in policy advocacy to improve the transition from foster care to adulthood in Arizona.

**Additional Collaborators and Acknowledgments:** Thank you to all the dedicated community partners and allies working every day to ensure students in foster care achieve educational success! And a special thank you to our two Arizona state agencies, the [Arizona Department of Child Safety \(DCS\)](#) and the [Arizona Department of Education \(ADE\)](#), whose policies and procedures provided extensive information for this toolkit. We would also like to give a huge shout out and thank you to the [Alliance For Children’s Rights](#) in California whose [Foster Care Education Toolkit](#) inspired and guided the Arizona version, and also the [Legal Center For Foster Care & Education](#), for the deep knowledge and information they published on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that is used throughout this toolkit.

## PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

**FosterEd Arizona**, in partnership with **Fostering Advocates Arizona**, spent the past year gathering information on laws, policies, practices, and stories that lift up the distinct needs of and supports available to students in foster care. This toolkit is designed to assist adult allies who are working with children and youth in foster care with information, best practices, and tips and tools for engaging and supporting students in reaching in their educational goals. The content and design of this toolkit was informed by professionals in the field, working with children and youth in foster care and alumni of the Arizona foster care system, who have knowledge and life experience with what is needed for success.

# INTRODUCTION

You also will see resources available as links, downloadable forms and PDFs, and “call-out sections” with quick facts. While the toolkit does refer to laws and policies, it is not intended to be used as legal advice or guidance. The document should be used as a reference only and not as policy or as a substitute for advice from legal counsel.

## WHO ARE STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE?

As of March 2020 there were 13,319 Arizona children and youth, ages birth to 18, removed from their homes by the Department of Child Safety (DCS) due to the existence of neglect or abuse.<sup>1</sup> The intention of foster care is to provide temporary respite and safety for struggling families, with the goal of safely reunifying (after the family has met certain conditions). If that is not possible, alternative forms of permanency are sought, including searching for an adoptive family or a placement with a permanent legal guardian. For school-aged children and youth specifically, DCS assumes legal responsibility for their safety, health, and well-being, including ensuring that they thrive in school. “Unfortunately, for too many students in foster care, academic success remains elusive. A growing amount of research has begun to make the case that students in foster care are especially at risk for school failure, as evidenced by poor grades and high rates of absenteeism, grade retention, disciplinary referrals, and being withdrawn from school.”<sup>2</sup>

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE

All children and youth should receive a quality education. For most students, their parents are their primary champions, making sure their child’s needs are met at every step along their educational journey. For students who experience foster care, successfully navigating the path to educational success becomes more challenging. Their families have been disrupted; they have been removed from their homes and the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) has assumed responsibility for their safety, health and well-being, including their educations. The competing priorities of system-involvement, such as housing, medical and behavioral health services, visitations, parenting plans, long term permanency, can make it difficult for parents, caregivers and students to feel informed and empowered about their educational needs and rights. **Education is often the last thing to get addressed when a student is in foster care and their academic progress can fall out of focus.** For many students in foster care, too often the opportunity to learn has been interrupted by home and school moves. When students in foster care experience frequent school changes, they lose the critical connections and relational supports needed to thrive in adolescence and adulthood. They miss out on the normalcy of experiences like playing sports and joining clubs. They have gaps in their educational learning and rarely receive credit for coursework they have completed. The data substantiating these lived experiences is stark, revealing consistent enrollment in substandard learning environments, a staggering achievement gap, poor attendance, alarming school instability and low graduation rates.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this, hope lives! Leaders across the country and in Arizona and young people and their adult allies, have united to develop new laws, policies, practices and investments to support the educational success of students in foster care. **The data shows us, and the students tell us, when education is approached with an equity lens and students receive the tailored supports the law has carved out for them, success is not only possible, it is inevitable.**

# POLICY AND PRACTICE LANDSCAPE

Nationally, child advocates, elected officials and young people themselves have made headway in influencing and shaping federal policy to ensure access to education and to put in place concrete solutions to many of the educational challenges young people face in foster care.

## FEDERAL GUARANTEES



The [Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act](#) was enacted requiring child welfare agencies (the Department of Child Safety here in Arizona) to assure that children in foster care remain in the same school unless a change is in the student's best interest. When a school change is necessary, the student must be immediately enrolled in the new school, with or without school records and transcripts. The law also requires child welfare agencies to create a school stability plan for each student in care and coordinate with local school districts when a student enters foster care.<sup>4</sup>

The federal [Uninterrupted Scholars Act](#) was enacted to facilitate record and information sharing between schools and child welfare agencies. The Act amended [the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA) to permit educational agencies and institutions to disclose a student's education records, without parental consent, to a caseworker or other representative of a state or local child welfare agency or tribal organization "when such agency or organization is legally responsible, in accordance with state or tribal law, for the care and protection of the student."<sup>5</sup>



The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was enacted, placing new requirements on education agencies, including a responsibility to collaborate with their child welfare partners, to ensure school stability and success for students in foster care. More specifically, ESSA gives students in foster care the right to remain in their schools of origin unless it is not in their best interest to do so, the right to transportation to their schools of origin, and the right to immediate enrollment when a school transfer is necessary. The law also requires districts to have designated "points of contact" to facilitate communication and collaboration with the child welfare agency, and requires state education agencies to report the academic outcomes of students in foster care annually.



**IF TRANSITION-AGED YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE GRADUATED AT THE SAME RATE AS THE GENERAL POPULATION, 5,290 MORE YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD GRADUATE EACH YEAR, RESULTING IN \$2.17 BILLION IN ECONOMIC GAINS DURING THEIR WORKING LIFETIMES.**



ESSA and Fostering Connections lift up the critical importance of dual agency responsibility – a single agency alone cannot ensure school stability and prompt school enrollment. These laws also demonstrate an increasing understanding of child development and the impact of trauma on children. “Insights from neuroscience help us understand that healthy adolescent development is shaped by supportive relationships, opportunities to build skills and practice decision making and key resources that enable youth to participate in normal growing-up activities.”<sup>6</sup> School is one of the everyday spaces where children and young people have room to practice these critical skills. Thanks to the federal Fostering Connections Act and Every Student Succeeds Act, students in foster care have laws in place to help ensure their right to an education and collaboration between child welfare and educational agencies. Students in foster care have specific protections to ensure they remain in the same school when their living arrangements change, they are promptly enrolled if a school change is in their best interest, they have safe transportation secured and their records are transferred to their new school. These protections can be the difference between a student graduating on time or being retained.

## PROVISIONS OF THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

Federal educational protections under ESSA and Fostering Connections apply to students who are in “foster care.” “Foster care” means 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the child welfare agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes, but **is not** limited to, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, childcare institutions, and pre-adoptive homes.<sup>8</sup> An adapted summary of the key provisions of ESSA is below:<sup>9</sup>

### RIGHT TO REMAIN IN SCHOOL OF ORIGIN

Under ESSA, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) must take steps to coordinate with the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) to ensure school stability for children and youth in foster care. This includes making sure that students enroll or remain in their “schools of origin” unless it is not in their best interest to do so. (Note: Federal child welfare law (Fostering Connections Act) already required DCS to collaborate with ADE for school stability; ESSA made this mutual by requiring that ADE also collaborate with DCS.)

## INTRODUCTION



“School of origin” is the school in which a child is enrolled at the time of placement in foster care. If a child’s foster care placement changes, the school of origin would then be considered the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of the placement change.

### IMMEDIATE ENROLLMENT

When it’s in the best interest of a student to change schools, ADE must ensure immediate enrollment in a new school, even if the student or caregiver cannot produce normally required enrollment documents (such as transcripts and vaccination records). Additionally, the new school must immediately contact the former school to obtain any relevant academic or educational related documents.

### TRANSFER OF SCHOOL RECORDS, REGULAR ATTENDANCE, AND PARTICIPATION

Additionally, when a student in foster care does transfer schools, the new school must immediately contact the former school to obtain any relevant academic or educational related documents. Schools must also ensure students are regularly attending, fully participating, and their needs are met.

### SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION WHEN NECESSARY

Schools that receive Title I funds (most public schools, including charter schools) must collaborate with DCS to develop clear written policies and procedures governing how transportation to ensure school stability will be provided, arranged for and funded during the time the student is in foster care (in a cost effective manner and in accordance with child welfare law that permits the use of certain, federal Title IV-E funds for school stability).

### POINTS OF CONTACT

ADE must have a plan in place detailing the steps it will take to collaborate with DCS. It must also designate someone as the lead point of contact (POC) within the agency to oversee the foster care provisions within ESSA. The point of contact must be someone other than the state’s Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youth (often referred to as the “McKinney-Vento Coordinator”).

School districts must have a local plan in place detailing how they will collaborate with the child welfare agency (which may include tribal or local/state child welfare agencies). Once the child welfare agency notifies the school district or charter in writing of their agency POCs for students in foster care, **the school district or charter must designate a similar POC.**

## REQUIRED DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING

ADE is required by ESSA to report annually on student achievement and graduation rates for students in foster care.

## REMOVAL OF “AWAITING FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT” FROM MCKINNEY-VENTO

As a result of the protections ESSA provides, specific to the success of students in foster care, the law removes “awaiting foster care placement” from the definition of “homeless” for purposes of the McKinney-Vento Act. It’s important to note ESSA requires that ALL students who meet the definition of being in foster care are entitled to transportation, if necessary, to remain in their schools of origin. In this way, movement of this provision from McKinney-Vento to ESSA expands the pool of students entitled to remain in their school of origin with transportation as it is no longer limited to those “awaiting foster care placement.” McKinney-Vento previously provided directed funds for transportation to schools of origin; however, it is now rolled into general Title I funding (which covers a wide array of programs). Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and DCS must work collaboratively to share the responsibility for establishing a transportation solution.

## ADVANCEMENTS IN ARIZONA

In Arizona children and youth in foster care have struggled educationally.<sup>10</sup> Arizona’s Invisible Achievement Gap, a report from WestEd, found Arizona’s students in foster care were:

- Consistently among the academically lowest performing groups in Math and English;
- Had the highest dropout rates;
- More likely than the general population to be enrolled in the lowest performing schools; and,
- Much more likely to change schools during the school year.<sup>11</sup>

The report illuminated the fact that students in foster care in Arizona have a distinct set of educational needs and prompted state leaders to find new opportunities to support foster youth education success through partnership and collaboration.

One of those opportunities was the state’s investment in FosterEd Arizona. FosterEd works in partnership with a deeply invested team of state and local partners, students, and parents to create a reality in which foster youth graduate from high school with the widest array of possibilities for their future. The campaign began with the launch of a demonstration site in Pima County. The success of that effort, combined with the sense of urgency that followed the publication of [Arizona’s Invisible Achievement Gap](#), spurred the passage of legislation that would lead to statewide implementation of the FosterEd approach through a public-private partnership.



FosterEd works to ensure that students in foster care have (1) effective and committed education champions, (2) well-coordinated education teams, and (3) student-centered education engagement and plans. FosterEd works in close partnership with the Arizona Department of Child Safety and with schools, to support implementation of ESSA, Fostering Connections, and best practices to support foster youth educational success.

# GUARANTEEING AN EDUCATION



## EDUCATION AS A RIGHT

Under Arizona law, children and youth in foster care have the right to “go to school and receive an education that fits the child’s age and individual needs.”<sup>12</sup> School can provide students with critical connections to friends, caring adult allies and a sense of normalcy in an otherwise unpredictable time.

Despite this, Arizona has little statewide information about the education of school-age children who are in the foster care system and for whom the state is legally responsible. And yet, the data overwhelming shows that access to a quality education can have a positive, lifelong impact. According to Children’s Action Alliance 2019 Arizona Kids Count Datebook, “children who attend high-quality early learning programs, and more specifically preschool programs for 3- and 4- year-olds, are less likely to need special education services, or be retained, and are more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, and succeed in their careers than those who have not attended such programs.” Additionally, the report highlights, “students who graduate from high school on time are more likely to continue to post-secondary education and training; they are more employable and have higher incomes than students who fail to graduate. High school graduates also have better health outcomes, make healthier choices and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.”<sup>13</sup> The benefits for students in foster care and their communities, when they receive a continuous, high quality education are limitless.



## WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW:

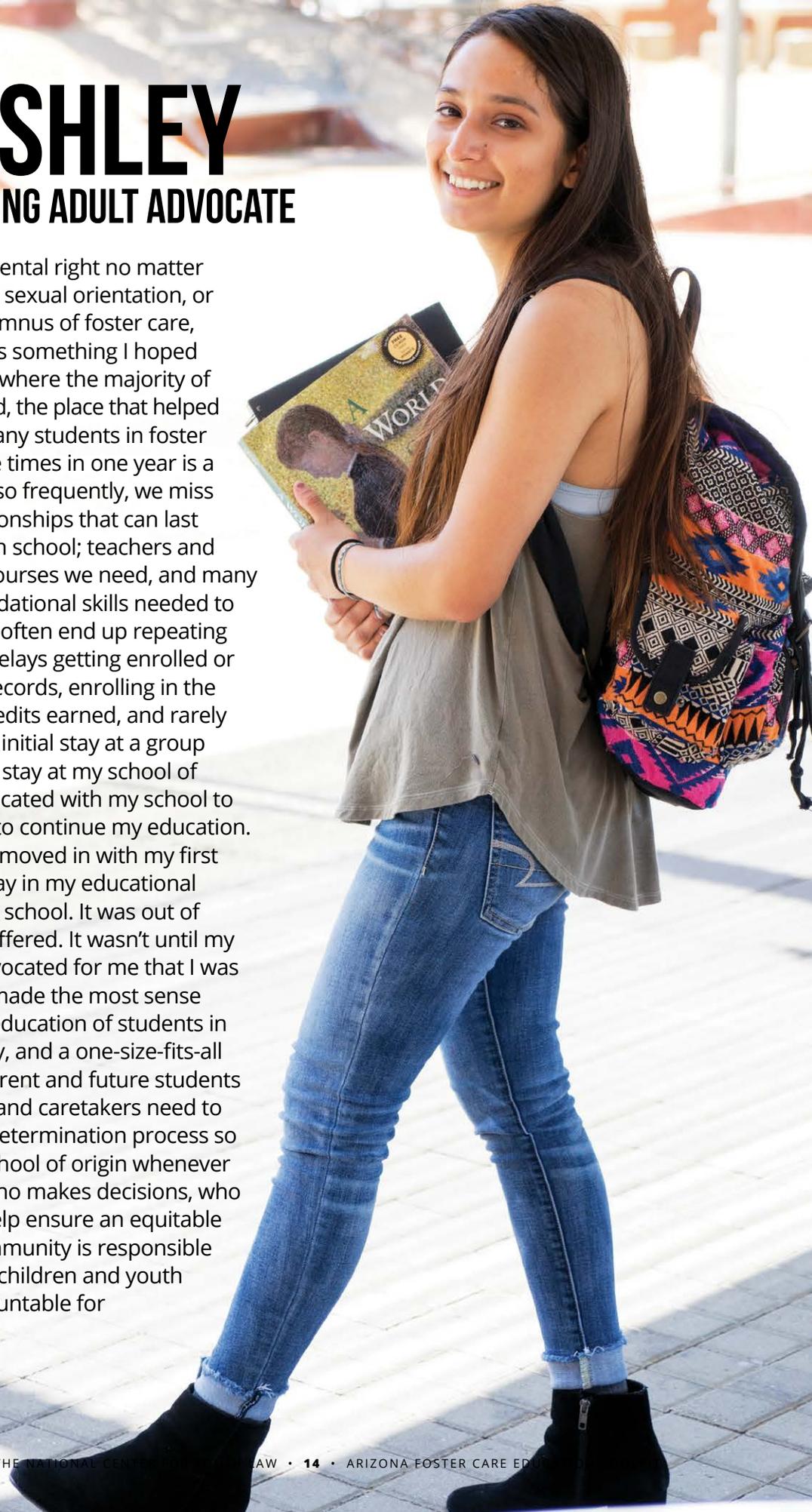
1. Together the Department of Child Safety (DCS) and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) share responsibility for the educational stability and success of students in foster care.
  - Federal child welfare law (Fostering Connections Act) already required DCS to collaborate with ADE for school stability
  - The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) now requires ADE to collaborate with DCS
2. ADE must designate someone as the **lead point of contact (POC)** within the agency to oversee the foster care provisions within ESSA.



# ASHLEY

## YOUNG ADULT ADVOCATE

I believe education is a fundamental right no matter the age, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability of a person. As an alumna of foster care, education, at the very least, was something I hoped would be normal in my life. It's where the majority of my social interactions happened, the place that helped me develop my identity. For many students in foster care, changing schools multiple times in one year is a stark reality. Many of us move so frequently, we miss out on developing critical relationships that can last a lifetime. We also get behind in school; teachers and counselors rarely know what courses we need, and many of us struggle to build the foundational skills needed to truly move on successfully. We often end up repeating courses unnecessarily, facing delays getting enrolled or getting access to educational records, enrolling in the wrong classes, losing out on credits earned, and rarely graduating on time. During my initial stay at a group home, I had the opportunity to stay at my school of origin. My placement communicated with my school to provide transportation for me to continue my education. However, that changed when I moved in with my first foster family. I did not have a say in my educational plan and I was moved to a new school. It was out of convenience and my grades suffered. It wasn't until my caseworker stepped in and advocated for me that I was able to attend the school that made the most sense for my educational goals. The education of students in foster care must be a priority, and a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. For current and future students in foster care, their adult allies and caretakers need to be aware of the Best Interest Determination process so students can remain in their school of origin whenever possible. It needs to be clear who makes decisions, who is a youth's ally and who can help ensure an equitable education path. The entire community is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of children and youth in foster care; everyone is accountable for our outcomes.



- The point of contact must be someone other than the state's McKinney-Vento Act Coordinator
  - ADE must outline in its state plan steps it will take to collaborate with DCS
3. DCS has also designated points of contacts for schools, which triggered a responsibility for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to also designate a POC.
- LEAs must include in their local plan that they will collaborate with the child welfare agency (DCS) point of contact. This can help streamline communication around the law, school changes, connecting students to communities, and other issues
4. The movement of provisions relating to students in foster care from the McKinney-Vento Act to the Every Student Succeeds Act, does NOT leave foster youth without protection.
- Previously, students in foster care were provided with protections such as the rights to remain in their schools of origins, to be provided with transportation, and to be immediately enrolled under the McKinney-Vento Act, which addresses the needs of students experiencing homelessness. The McKinney-Vento Act extended these protections to students in foster care who met the law's definition of "homeless" because they were "awaiting foster care placement"
  - When ESSA was passed, the "awaiting foster care placement" provision was removed from the definition of "homeless" under the McKinney-Vento Act because the Every Student Succeeds Act explicitly provided protections that apply to all in foster care, not only those awaiting placement
5. If school change is in the best interest of the student, youth in foster care have the right to immediate enrollment in school regardless of the lack of documentation.
- The new school must immediately contact the former school to obtain any relevant academic or educational related documents
  - Unpaid dues, school fees, and/or missing school property are not valid reasons to deny enrollment or transfer of school records
6. School transportation, when necessary, is the responsibility of both DCS and the Local Educational Agencies (LEAs).
- LEAs, typically school districts or charter schools that receive Title I funds, must collaborate with DCS to create clear written policies and procedures governing how transportation to ensure school stability will be provided, arranged for, and funded during the time the student is in foster care
  - Child welfare law permits the use of certain, federal Title IV-E funds for school stability. In Arizona, for students that are IV-E eligible, these funds are normally coupled with caregiver stipends
7. ADE is now required by ESSA to report annually on student achievement and graduation rates for students in foster care.



## QUICK FACTS

- ▶ ADE keeps an updated statewide list of foster care points of contact (**POCs**). Identified staff should be familiar with the foster care provisions in ESSA and available to assist adult allies working with students experiencing foster care in their school(s).
- ▶ Under ESSA, state education agencies, or SEAs (in Arizona, ADE) must include in their **state plan** the steps they will take to ensure coordination with the Child Welfare Agency or CWA (in Arizona, DCS) to ensure school stability for children and youth in foster care.



## ACTION STEPS FOR ALLIES

- 1. Identify Key Contacts and Understand Their Roles and Responsibilities.** It is important to know who the key contacts are for your student. This may include: DCS and LEA points of contact, the school principal, guidance counselor, teachers, the parent(s), foster caregiver, and the DCS Specialist. It is also important to understand each person's role. For example, DCS Specialists play a critical role in supporting the educational needs of students experiencing foster care. As a commitment to the success of all students, a "DCS Specialist shall:

  - Make every reasonable effort to ensure that appointments, visits and other non-school related activities are scheduled during non-school hours whenever possible. Attend meetings or conferences related to the child's education;
  - Maintain contact with the out-of-home care provider, school staff, and special education parent to obtain (and share) school information. Keep open and regular communication with team members;
  - At the end of each academic year, obtain the child's school records to ensure the education record remains current;
  - Recognize the child's educational achievements and efforts verbally, and document in the case file and court progress reports; and,
  - Ensure that parents whose rights have not been terminated (and where safety is not an issue and it is in the child's best interest) are informed of and involved in their child's educational services to the greatest extent possible."<sup>14</sup>
- 2. Communicate, communicate, communicate.** Communication between the student and members of the student's team is key to ensuring educational success. Teams should communicate on a monthly basis and include the student, parents, placement (kinship, community foster family, group home), DCS Specialist, teachers, mentors, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), etc.
- 3. Grow knowledge.** Students in foster care may not have consistent adults in their lives to rely on. With frequent changes in foster care placements, and accompanying school and district changes, students may not be able to depend on even the most dedicated and informed caregiver or school district staff members to protect their rights. Often youth in foster care will need to advocate for themselves. Knowing **their rights** can give students a sense of control and motivation to work hard in school. Knowledge can empower students to exercise vital self-advocacy skills.<sup>15</sup>
- 4. Build community.** Consider creating a "school-based foster club" in your organization or on your school campus. Clubs can be a great space for students to find support and meet other students experiencing foster care, while also providing insight on the unique needs of students in foster care. Be sure to keep the name of the club non-identifying, so as not to "out" students in foster care.
- 5. Identify students.** For educators, consider implementing a [Foster Care Screening Questionnaire](#) for incoming students and a [Foster Care Initial Education Intake Form](#) once the student has been identified. This will help schools identify which students on their campus are in foster care and how to best support their unique needs. After a student in foster care is identified, notify your ESSA POC and complete the Initial Education Intake Form to obtain as much school history information as possible from the student.



# NIKKI

## YOUNG ADULT ADVOCATE



When I graduated high school, I was 17 years old and living with a foster family. Because I was still a minor, I had to get a judge's permission to attend Arizona State University (ASU) and live in the dorms on campus. Although I was adamant about wanting to attend a four-year university, my DCS Specialist at the time expressed concern I was not ready, that it would not be safe for me at that age, and suggested I remain with my foster parents and take community college classes. While I didn't get to attend the court date when the decision was made, thankfully, my Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) and my Independent Living Specialist were there to represent my desires, and I was granted permission to attend ASU. For me, attending college and living in the dorms was part of the "normal experience" my friends, not in foster care, had and I wanted access to the same opportunities to build independence.

Unfortunately, too often, educational decisions that will impact youths in foster care for the rest of our lives are made without ever asking us what we want. At the time I was graduating high school, my biological parent was no longer my educational decision maker. Having a clear educational decision maker, who is connected to the needs of the student and their desires, as well as including them in the decision when age and developmentally appropriate, is both the law and best practice. I am a proud college graduate who had advocates on my side to help make that dream possible.



### MORE TO KNOW! GUARANTEEING AN EDUCATION MATTERS

#### Data is Key

"One of the most vexing problems for Arizona has been the inequities faced in education by students of color, English language learners, students raised in poverty, and students with disabilities."<sup>16</sup> While the state has historically tracked the progress of academically vulnerable student groups, Arizona (like many other states) does not have consistent statewide information about the education of students who are in foster care, or students who are represented in all other vulnerable populations. Critical data, such as what school a student attends, how they are doing academically, and whether they are receiving the educational supports and services they need to be successful, is consistently missing. At the school level, teachers and educators are generally unaware of a student's foster care status. Data sharing across child welfare and education institutions has been cumbersome, often lacks common identifiers, and has not had the investment in infrastructure to address comprehensive data sharing pathways. As a result, the education needs of students in foster care often go unrecognized and unmet, leaving students behind their classmates in academic achievement.

In 2015, in partnership with the Arizona Community Foundation and FosterEd, WestEd published the [Arizona Invisible Achievement Gap](#), shining light for the first time on data specific to students in foster care. The report revealed that during the 2012-2013 school year there were 10,770 children and youth in grades K-12 (i.e., ages 5-17) that spent a period of time in foster care. It also highlighted that “most of students in foster care were enrolled in a public school district (86%). About 1 in 10 (11%) were enrolled in a public charter school district and an additional 3% of students in foster care were enrolled in other types of districts, including juvenile justice schools, non-public schools, and other schools with exceptional status that were also classified as a school district. The majority of Arizona students in foster care were enrolled in a small number of districts. Specifically, 70% of students in foster care were enrolled in the 19% of the state’s public school districts that enrolled at least 50 students in foster care. Collectively, the 10 districts with the most students in foster care served over a third (36%) of this student population.”<sup>17</sup> Being able to consistently identify which students are in foster care is the first step toward ensuring they have the support and services needed for educational success.



### USEFUL TEMPLATES AND FORMS:

[Foster Care Student Screening Questions](#)  
[Foster Care Initial Education Intake Form](#)



## QUICK FACTS

- ▶ Foster Care is defined in ESSA as “24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians for whom the child welfare agency has placement and care responsibility.”<sup>18</sup>
- ▶ School of Origin is defined in ESSA as the school in which a child is enrolled at the time of placement in foster care. If a child’s foster care placement changes, the school of origin would then be considered the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of the placement change.<sup>19</sup>

# FOSTER CARE STUDENT SCREENING QUESTIONS

*Ask the youth and/or the person enrolling the youth in school to provide the following information. Note that disclosure is not required but may entitle the youth to additional rights and services at school. In order to capture all students in foster care, make sure to use these screening questions consistently across all district enrollment sites including public schools, public charter schools, vocational programs, alternative schools, and credit recovery programs.*

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person Completing Screening: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Screening: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 1. Youth in Foster Care

Is the youth in foster child?  YES  NO

Does the youth receive visits from a Department of Child Safety Case Specialist  YES  NO

Does the youth live in a group home?  YES  NO

Does the youth regularly attend court to discuss who they will live with?  YES  NO

Does the youth live with someone other than their parents?  YES  NO

Does the youth have an attorney or other court representative who helps determine who they will live with?  YES  NO

*Please note, living with a person other than a parent, may be an indicator that a child is in foster care. However, many children who live with relatives or non-related extended family members are not in foster care. Note too that parents are free to entrust their children into the care of others and that there is no requirement that the non-parent caregiver obtain legal custody of the child to enroll the child in school.*

## ASSESSING A COMPLETED FORM: DIRECTIONS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

### Section 1. Youth in Foster Care

If the answer to any of these questions is "YES," there is a high likelihood the youth is in foster care, in accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act, the child must be enrolled in school immediately, even if they don't have school records, a birth certificate, proof of immunization or any other documents that are typically required for school enrollment.

# FOSTER YOUTH INITIAL EDUCATION INTAKE FORM (1 OF 2)

*Schools should ask students (with caregiver assistance as needed) identified as being in foster care to complete this form. Caregivers, DCS Case Specialists, and professional allies supporting students in foster care should assist youth in completing this form and providing it to their new school to help ensure a smooth transition.*

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

## Caregiver:

Who does the youth live with? \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

## Other Contacts: Does the youth have a...

Social Worker?  YES  NO  NOT SURE Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Probation Officer?  YES  NO  NOT SURE Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Attorney?  YES  NO  NOT SURE Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Guardian Ad Litem?  YES  NO  NOT SURE Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Public Defender?  YES  NO  NOT SURE Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Court Appointed Special?  YES  NO  NOT SURE Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Advocate ("CASA")?  YES  NO  NOT SURE Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mental Health Provider?  YES  NO  NOT SURE Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Group home staff?  YES  NO  NOT SURE Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Anyone else important?  YES  NO  NOT SURE Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## School History

*Name of School(s) Attended and District or City*

Preschool: \_\_\_\_\_

Kindergarten: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 5: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 6: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 7: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 8: \_\_\_\_\_

# FOSTER YOUTH INITIAL EDUCATION INTAKE FORM (2 OF 2)

Grade 9: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 10: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 11: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 12: \_\_\_\_\_

Has the youth ever been tested for special education or received special education services?  YES  NO  NOT SURE

When did the student last attend school regularly (*i.e. in the last month, last two months, last six months, etc.*)? \_\_\_\_\_

Have there been in gaps in their educational attendance?  YES  NO  NOT SURE

**High School Youth ONLY:** *List courses the youth was enrolled in at their last school*

English: \_\_\_\_\_

Math: \_\_\_\_\_

Foreign Language: \_\_\_\_\_

History/Social Science: \_\_\_\_\_

Science: \_\_\_\_\_

PE: \_\_\_\_\_

Elective/Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Elective/Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Elective/Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Which, if any, extracurricular activities was the youth involved in at the youth's last school  
(*e.g., soccer, drama club, debate team, track and field, tutoring*)?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# IMPROVING AND SUPPORTING SCHOOL STABILITY



## SCHOOL STABILITY IS CRITICAL

Healthy relationships and connections are key protective factors for youth who have experienced foster care. Schools are important spaces where these relationships are formed and become part of a student’s healthy development. For children and youth in foster care who lack stability at home, the consistency of their school environment becomes even more critical. For many students, school represents a predictable space, a sense of normalcy, and a place they feel safe. They have friends, teachers, counselors, coaches, or other adult supporters they can count on. It’s the space where they spend the majority of their waking hours and one that is key to their health and well-being.

Additionally, studies consistently show that school stability is critical for academic success. One study found that the more changes in school placement a student experiences, the less likely the student is to graduate.<sup>20</sup> It is clear that promoting educational stability for students is a key factor in facilitating a student’s academic success. Therefore, it is critical that adult supporters and advocates promote school stability for students in foster care by minimizing changes in school placements. School changes should only happen when it’s essential and in the best interest of the student. Advocates also should help ensure that any necessary changes in school placement disrupt the student’s education as little as possible. ESSA is an important tool in promoting school stability for students in foster care. The law gives youth in foster care the right to remain in their “school of origin” (or “home school”) even if they move out of the district, if it’s in their best interest. For many students in foster care, this ensures school stability even when the student’s home placement changes, such as if the student moves in with an extended family member, community foster family, group home, or treatment facility. ESSA specifically addresses key components of school stability that are now embedded in both DCS and ADE policy.



## WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW

1. ESSA provides students in foster care with the right to remain in their school of origin, unless it is not in their best interests to do so.
2. School of origin is defined as “the school in which the student is enrolled at the time of placement in foster care or at the time of placement change.”<sup>21</sup>
  - If a student’s foster care placement changes, the school of origin would then be considered the school in which the student is enrolled at the time of the placement change.
3. A Best Interest Determination (**BID**) should be completed each time a student comes into placement or changes placement.
  - The BID is a process of collaboration that should include the child, out-of-home caregiver, the Local Education Agency (**LEA**), and the parent, guardian, and/or custodian, if appropriate.<sup>22</sup>
4. Under ESSA, if and when it is determined that it is in the student’s best interests to be enrolled in a new school, the student is to be immediately enrolled in the new school.
5. It is the responsibility of the new school to contact the school of origin immediately to obtain the student’s educational records and other relevant documents.<sup>23</sup>
6. When reviewing school records for transferring a student take notice of:
  - Special education services/plans
  - Previous grades and attendance
  - Extracurricular involvement and student strengths
  - Discipline issues
  - Student promotion and retention.
7. Per [DCS policy](#) and [Arizona state law](#), youth in foster care must be provided copies of their personal records.
  - These can include things like school transcripts, medical records, birth certificate, social security card, immigration documents, etc.
8. Arizona also has [specific rules about credit transfer](#) that apply to all students, regardless of their foster care status.<sup>24</sup>
9. Children are entitled to school stability transportation for the duration of their time in foster care.<sup>25</sup>
  - In Arizona, [DCS policy](#) and ADE policy have language to direct schools, staff, and out-of-home caregivers supporting the transportation needs of students in foster care.
10. Transportation may be already addressed through other laws/requirements (i.e., special education services that are part of student’s Individual Education Plan or IEP).
11. If the school district/school and DCS cannot resolve a dispute about transportation cost, a [Dispute Resolution](#) may be filed by the LEA or DCS with ADE. While a dispute is pending, the school/school district must ensure transportation is provided or arranged for the student.<sup>26</sup>
12. For students in foster care, normalcy is key to maintaining critical relationships that support and contribute to school stability.



## SANDRA EDUCATION LIAISON



For many students in foster care, school can be a stabilizing factor in otherwise uncertain times. I joined the team of an eighth grade student who had just moved in with her grandmother. Upon realizing her new home was just outside of the school district boundaries, the family was told by the school the student could no longer attend. The student was frustrated and sad that she was being forced to leave her peers and her school. She refused to go to a new school, which created problems at home with her grandmother. I worked with the student and her team to ensure they knew the student had the right to remain in her school of origin and that I would reach out to the district directly to ensure she was re-enrolled immediately. After a couple of discussions with the district's ESSA Point of Contact, the student was re-enrolled in her original school. Both the student and her grandmother were happy and grateful for the outcome.



### ACTION STEPS FOR ALLIES

- 1. Seek out Student Voice.** It is imperative that adult allies always center student voice in conversations about school stability. This means not only including them in conversations but also creating space for them to take the lead position when developmentally appropriate. When students take ownership of their education, they are empowered to collaborate with team members to find solutions and are more likely to succeed.
- 2. Start with student strengths and passions.** To support normalcy and self-motivation it is important to discuss a student's strengths before tackling questions of school changes and possible academic areas of growth. Discussing and actively supporting students' passions both in and outside of the classroom will lead to positive results all around.
- 3. Explore ALL options.** To find the right answer when it comes to transportation you have to look at all the options first. Bringing all potential stakeholders to the table can lead to an influx of resources unknown to all members of the team. Involving community and family supports can open the door to effective transportation plans that not only get the student where they need to be, but strengthen community and family relationships that are central to maintaining normalcy.

**4. Check back.** Once collaborative decisions are made regarding school placements, it is important to check back with students regularly. Discussing education at regularly scheduled meetings can be helpful to maintain school stability, motivate students to attend, and prevent small setbacks from becoming roadblocks to graduation or promotion. Some topics include:

- Setting and tracking educational goals
- Identifying any material needs for academic or extracurricular activities (e.g. technology, dues, school supplies, transportation, etc.)
- Celebrating of achievements, awards, goals met
- Notifying team members of any upcoming student functions where their presence is requested



### MORE TO KNOW! SUPPORTING SCHOOL STABILITY MATTERS

**School of origin:** ESSA includes provisions to ensure students remain in their school of origin when in their best interest. These same provisions appear in DCS policy. When a student is placed in out-of-home care or is moved to a new out-of-home living arrangement, “any such child shall remain in the school of origin, unless a determination is made that it is not in such child’s best interest to attend the school of origin, which decision shall be based on all factors relating to the child’s best interest, including consideration of the appropriateness of the current educational setting and the proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement.”<sup>27</sup> School of origin is defined as the school in which the student is enrolled at the time of placement in foster care. If a student’s foster care placement changes, the school of origin would then be considered the school in which the student is enrolled at the time of the placement change.<sup>28</sup>

**Best interest Determination (BID):** School and course placement decisions must always be based on the best interest of the student and ensure that the student is in the least restrictive educational program, with access to the same academic resources, services, and extracurricular activities that are available to all students.<sup>29</sup> To help ensure students have access to an educational environment they will thrive in, “the DCS Specialist will make reasonable efforts to maintain the child’s enrollment in the school of origin throughout the child’s time in out-of-home care, across all changes in a child’s living arrangement. School placement and transportation arrangements should be reviewed as often as needed; minimally at the time a change occurs in the child’s living arrangement, during regularly scheduled case plan staffings, and prior to the end of the current school year. The DCS Specialist will complete the **Best Interests Determination and Transportation Plan (BID)** with the child, out-of-home caregiver, the LEA, and the parent, guardian, and/or custodian, if appropriate, to determine if it is in the child’s best interest to change schools.”<sup>30</sup>

### Best Interest Determinations factors include the following:<sup>31</sup>

- Wishes of the parent and caregiver
- Student's preferences and feelings of connectivity in their existing school
- Safety of the child;
  - Distance and time for the child to travel to and from the school the child is attending at the time of placement;
  - Child's age, connections, social, and emotional state;
  - Academic, developmental, language, and socialization needs;
  - Anticipated length of stay in the current living arrangement;
  - Effect a school change will have on the child's learning, academic strength, and grade placement; and
  - Any potential for loss of credits that may occur due to changing schools in the middle of a term or semester.

### Immediate Enrollment

Historically, students in foster care have faced delays in enrolling in school when a placement change happens. They are often enrolled in the wrong classes or schools and their personal information, transcripts and records are delayed. Under ESSA, when a determination is made that it is not in such child's best interest to remain in the school of origin, the child is immediately enrolled in the new school, even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment. It is the responsibility of the new



## PATTI

### YOUNG ADULT ADVOCATE

Having reliable and consistent transportation setup for me in high school was critical to my educational success. After being removed from my family's home and spending six months living with a friend's family, I was finally placed in a kinship setting with a relative. This enabled me to have a stable living environment in addition to remaining close to my family, including my identical twin sister. The only con to the new placement was that my high school was now located on the opposite side of town from where I was living.

My guardian did not have the ability to drive me back and forth to school every day. Thankfully, my DCS Specialist and the staff at the school sprang into action and helped support me by working together to arrange transportation so I could stay in the same high school. Remaining in my school of origin was so important to me because it was one of the few things in my life that could stay consistent. Having a say in where I wanted to be, impacted the last two years of high school, and at age 16, it felt good to know one thing was in my control.



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school to contact the school of origin immediately to obtain the student's educational records and other relevant documents.<sup>32</sup> The new school then becomes the school of origin should a change in living arrangement occur in the future.

### **DCS Responsibilities and Immediate Enrollment**

The DCS Specialist “shall provide the out-of-home caregiver with the Notice to Provider, CSO-1035A and ensure that school aged children are maintained in the school of origin or immediately enrolled in a local school, if in their best interest, and within five days of the date of placement. School aged children placed in an emergency shelter should be maintained in the school of origin or enrolled in school as soon as possible, and within five days from the date of placement. The DCS Specialist should contact the LEA liaison when notified of problems with enrollment, and contact the Regional Education Liaison for assistance if the LEA liaison is unable to resolve enrollment or other education related issues.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Records and Transcripts**

In addition to ESSA requiring schools to enroll students immediately and obtain their educational records on their behalf, it's important for students also to have copies of their records and know how to read and understand them (when age and developmentally appropriate). Adults allies and supporters should help students in reviewing their records to understand the student's needs, progress, past school experiences and to spot any early areas where the student might need additional help. Using a [School History Chart](#) can be helpful in tracking school records. Information tracked and viewed could include:

- Schools attended;
- Grades;
- Courses taken and credits earned;
- Teacher comments/notes;
- Attendance records;
- School discipline information;
- Standardized test scores;
- Special education documents and service logs;
- Records from all educational programs the student has attended (including records from schools in juvenile detention or other alternative schools the student attended. If they do not appear, they can be requested directly from the prior schools).

Family members and adult caregivers and allies can also reach out to the LEA or school to request hard copies of the student's records using a [Records Request Letter](#).

### **DCS Responsibility Regarding Records and Transcripts**

The DCS Specialist “will also provide a copy of the signed [Request for Release of Education Records, CSO-1050A](#) and a letter requesting educational records to the school the student currently attends or will be attending.

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Upon receipt of the education records, the DCS Specialist will review the records to determine:

- If the student was evaluated for special education services;
- If special education services were recommended or rendered (look for documentation that would indicate Individual Education Program [IEP], Individualized Family Service Plan [IFSP], Adapted Physical Education [PE], Low Vision, Orientation and Mobility or Functional Behavioral Assessment);
- The student's previous grades, attendance, special interests/talents, involvement in extracurricular activities, and educational and discipline issues; and,
- Ensure that within five days of receipt, education records or relevant information are provided to the out-of-home caregiver and, upon request, copies of the records to the CASA, Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), Foster Care Review Board (FCRB), attorneys in the case and others specified in the Order relating to release of education records."<sup>34</sup>

Many of these items are also necessary for a student to continue their education, enroll in a post-secondary education program and/or seek employment. Additionally, DCS policy outlines when older students in foster care should receive their personal records and documents:

**At Age 14:** Provide all youth age 14 and older with a copy of their health records, including the Medical Summary Report in CHILDS, during each case plan staffing and within 30 days of their eighteenth birthday. The youth's health record may include, but is not limited to, notes and records of medical and dental professionals including:

- Name and address of the child's health and dental care providers;
- Immunization records;
- Hospitalization(s);
- Known medical problems including specific illness or diagnosis;
- Surgeries;
- Medications;
- Consultations with specialists; and,
- Any other relevant health information.

**At age 16:** Provide or make arrangements for youth age 16 to receive:

- A certified copy of their birth certificate;
- Social Security card
- State identification card (unless ineligible to receive) as outlined in Vital Records and Social Security Administration Records.

**At age 18:** Provide all youth, within 30 days of their eighteenth birthday, with a copy of their educational records. Youth's educational records may include, but are not limited to:

- Names and addresses of the child's educational providers;
- State and federal assessment score transcripts;
- Transcripts (report cards) including elementary, secondary or GED;
- Relevant discipline or health records;
- Referrals and program information for related purposes, i.e. Vocational Rehabilitation, and Youth Transition Program, etc.;
- Special education evaluations (including psycho-educational assessments and evaluations) and related Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Section 504 plans;
- Original diplomas, certificates or degrees earned; and
- Any other relevant education information.<sup>35</sup>



## TJ YOUNG ADULT ADVOCATE



I know how necessary it is for students to have their needs met in order to learn and succeed in school. I know this not only because I am a teacher, but also because I was a student in foster care myself. I remember getting ready to go back to school in August with my donated backpack. I was already dreading the school year, when I opened it to find markers, a ruler, pencils, erasers, folders, and paper. I appreciated everything I got, but I knew it wasn't going to get me through the entire year; not to mention I still needed a computer and books. Thankfully, throughout the year teachers gave me extra supplies without even having to ask. When I told my teacher I didn't have computer access at my group home she immediately responded she would figure something out for me. In time she did, and the group home picked up a laptop from the school for me to use! As for the books, she pulled out brand new copies and told me we would figure out what to do. I had my supplies and the endless support of my teachers to keep me going. I got the extra paper, pencils, binders, and support I needed. My teachers made it their personal mission to help me succeed. They believed I was capable of success even after entering foster care. It was because of them that I made it my job to do the same for my students.

### Credits and Coaching

Frequent changes in school placements for students in foster care can make tracking credits, grade completion, and advancement challenging. In addition to requesting records and utilizing the [School History Chart](#), discussing with the student (when age and developmentally appropriate) the student's report cards/progress reports on an ongoing basis can be very helpful. When reviewing the student's report card, progress report or transcript it's important to also understand what grading scale the school uses. For example:

- Are classes graded using an "A" through "F" scale? If not, what is the grading scale?
- How is the grade point average (or GPA) shown on the report card or transcripts collected?
- Do teachers also provide written comments about students' progress?

If there is discrepancy, help the student get clarity from teachers or school staff on interpreting the grades/GPA/teacher comments provided and how they can help advance the student's progress. If something in the records looks inaccurate, misleading or an invasion of privacy, the record can be challenged.<sup>36</sup> Advocate with, or on behalf of, the



## QUICK FACTS

- ▶ When other options have been fully explored and ruled out, the DCS Specialist may consider reimbursement of travel expenses for a Kinship Caregiver approved by the DCS Specialist, to support a child's continued enrollment in their school of origin, and to support participation in school related activities.

student to address the issue with the records to the attention of the school principal or challenge the record through a written request to the district superintendent. Many schools also now provide online portals that allow students and caregivers to access student information (e.g. attendance information, grades, etc.). Utilizing the [Accessing Grades and School Information Online Tip Sheet](#) can help students and their teams with general tips about using these online systems to track student progress and needs.

Arizona also has specific rules about credit transfer that apply to all students, regardless of their foster care status.

- If the student transfers from a charter school, other school district, or Arizona online course, the student's new school should give them a list that indicates which credits the school will accept as an elective credit and which credits it will accept as a core credit.<sup>37</sup>
- Within ten days of receiving the list, the student can request to take a test in each course for which the student did not receive core credit. If the student passes the test, the student can receive core credit for that topic.<sup>38</sup>

### Transportation

Reliable, timely, and safe transportation is key to school stability. However, transportation is frequently a point of contention for many students experiencing foster care. Disagreement over who is responsible for transportation, logistical and scheduling challenges, perceived lack of resources, transportation costs, and long commute times, are some of the challenges to ensuring transportation to a student's school of origin. However, Fostering Connections and ESSA are clear that school districts and child welfare agencies must collaborate to ensure students in foster care are provided transportation to school. In Arizona, this means both DCS and ADE have language in policy to direct schools, staff, and out-of-home caregivers in supporting the transportation needs of students in foster care.

Per ESSA, "**LEAs receiving Title I funds must collaborate with child welfare agencies to ensure transportation for children in foster care is provided, arranged, and funded.** LEAs must develop and implement clear written procedures—developed with the relevant child welfare agencies—that ensure prompt and cost-effective transportation to ensure school stability. LEAs must ensure that transportation is provided for children in foster care even if it does not transport other students. These procedures must include provisions for students in care who move from one district to another or across state lines. Children are entitled to school stability transportation for the duration of their time in foster care."<sup>39</sup> Additionally:

- Transportation will be provided for the duration of the child's time in foster care as long as it continues to be in the child's best interest.

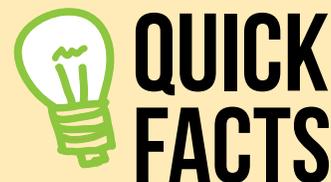
- The fact that a school district/school does not provide transportation for children who are not in foster care does not exempt the school from ensuring transportation for children in foster care when in their best interest.
- Interim transportation should be addressed to ensure no delays for the student in foster care while transportation is being worked out between the parties.
- Transportation may be already addressed through other laws/requirements (i.e., special education services that are part of child's Individual Education Plan or IEP). The school district/school will assess whether the child is entitled to transportation services under another entitlement, including related services under the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The school district/school will provide transportation funded by the school district/school if the student is eligible under IDEA.

### Paying for Transportation

- Paying for transportation to school of origin is a shared responsibility of the LEA and DCS. ESSA provides that schools that receive Title I funds (most public schools including charter schools) must collaborate with DCS to develop clear written policies and procedures governing how transportation to ensure school stability will be provided, arranged for and funded during the time the student is in foster care.
- What are some low cost/no cost options? The school district/school will examine existing transportation options available for the student, including incorporating the student into an existing bus route, modifying an existing bus route, or other no-or low-cost options. Transportation will be provided and funded by the school district/school if this type of solution is available.
- The DCS Specialist "shall facilitate a conversation with the out-of-home caregiver and other team members as needed to ensure transportation to school, including the school of origin, provides for normalcy and safety of the child. Additional transportation options include:
  - Caregiver or another responsible adult transports the child directly to school or a designated school bus stop;
  - Carpool approved by caregiver;
  - Public transportation, if appropriate to the child's age and safety needs;
  - DCS transportation vendor."<sup>40</sup>

### Additional Options for Transportation

- When other options are exhausted and the transportation will require "additional cost," written transportation procedures need to be developed, which can include the following steps to address and minimize cost:



- ▶ **Every Move, Every Time.**  
The Best Interest Interests Determination and Transportation Plan should be completed **EVERY** time a school change is being considered.<sup>41</sup>

## SECTION 2 • IMPROVING AND SUPPORTING SCHOOL STABILITY

- The school district/school will assess whether the child’s transportation expenses may be covered by other state or local funds.
- DCS may assess whether resources are available for kinship providers/foster parents to provide transportation with mileage reimbursement or other adult ride-share to the school or to a stop on a school existing route; provision of bus passes or public transportation vouchers; contract with private transportation service.
- If remaining costs cannot be addressed above or through other cost-effective solutions, one of the following options must be implemented:
  - DCS agrees to pay additional cost,
  - School district/school agrees to pay additional cost, or
  - DCS and school district/school share the additional cost (based on distance or time, splitting the costs evenly, or another cost-sharing agreement).

Additional information and Frequently Asked Questions related to school stability and transportation can be found in the [Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Education for Students in Foster Care](#).



### USEFUL TEMPLATES AND FORMS:

[School History Chart](#)

[Sample Records Request Letter](#)

[DCS Best Interests Determination and Transportation Plan](#)

[Accessing Grades and School Information Online Tip Sheet](#)

## QUICK FACTS

- ▶ Per DCS policy, “every child in out-of-home care shall have an individualized Out-of-Home Care Plan that specifies:
  - The child’s educational status including last school attended, last grade completed, current school attending, grade level performance, whether evaluated for or receiving special education services;
  - Services already provided and to be provided to the child or out-of-home caregiver to address the child’s educational needs; and,
  - Whether the child is attending his or her home school or district.”<sup>42</sup>

# SCHOOL HISTORY CHART

**STUDENT:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SCHOOL:** \_\_\_\_\_ **CREDITS:** \_\_\_\_\_ /22

**A = SEMESTER 1    B = SEMESTER 2**

ENGLISH 9-A	ALGEBRA II-A	SCIENCE 2-A	ELECTIVE 3-A
ENGLISH 9-B	ALGEBRA II-B	SCIENCE 2-B	ELECTIVE 3-B
ENGLISH 10-A	MATH 4-A	LAB SCIENCE-A	ELECTIVE 4-A
ENGLISH 10-B	MATH 4-B	LAB SCIENCE-B	ELECTIVE 4-B
ENGLISH 11-A	US + AZHISTORY-A	FINE ART/CTE-A	ELECTIVE 5-A
ENGLISH 11-B	US + AZHISTORY-B	FINE ART/CTE-B	ELECTIVE 5-B
ENGLISH 12-A	WORLD HISTORY-A	PHYSICAL ED-A	ELECTIVE 6-A
ENGLISH 12-B	WORLD HISTORY-B	PHYSICAL ED-B	ELECTIVE 6-B
ALGEBRA I-A	US GOVERNMENT-A	ELECTIVE 1-A	HEALTH
ALGEBRA I-B	ECONOMICS-B	ELECTIVE 1-B	ELECTIVE 7
GEOMETRY-A	SCIENCE 1-A	ELECTIVE 2-A	
GEOMETRY-B	SCIENCE 1-B	ELECTIVE 2-B	

## ATTEMPTED CLASSES:

*\*School districts can set their own, additional local graduation requirements, but cannot require less than what the state requires.*

# SAMPLE RECORDS REQUEST LETTER FROM PARENT/CAREGIVER/ADVOCATE



[Date]  
[Principal]  
[School]  
[Address]

*Use this sample to request copies of student's records, or to review records at the school*

Re: [Child's name], [Child's date of birth]  
Dear [Principal]:

I am the parent/guardian/caregiver/legal advocate for [child's name.]

(If you want to request copies of the child's records)  
To help me better understand [child's name]'s educational progress and to determine how I can support his/her education, I am writing to request a copy of all of his/her education records, including but not limited to the cumulative file and ALL:

- Individualized Education Plans (if applicable)
- Service logs (if applicable)
- Disciplinary records
- Attendance records
- Standardized test scores
- Grades/progress reports
- Assessments and protocols
- Notes by teachers or other staff members

Please send the records to me at [your fax, email, or mailing address].  
Please provide the records within five (5) business days. See 20 U.S.C. §1232(g) and 34 C.F.R. §99.10.

(If you want to request a time to review the child's records at the school)  
In order to help me better understand [child's name]'s educational progress and to determine how I can support his/her education, I would like to arrange a time to review all of [child's name]'s educational records at the child's school within five (5) business days. This includes but is not limited to his/her cumulative file and ALL:

- Individualized Education Plans (if applicable)
- Service logs (if applicable)
- Disciplinary records
- Attendance records
- Standardized test scores
- Grades/progress reports
- Assessments protocols
- Notes by teachers or other staff members, and memoranda.

See 20 U.S.C. §1232(g) and 34 C.F.R. §99.10.

I would like to make copies of some of his/her records at this time. I will call you soon to set up a time to review the records.

Thank you very much for your help with this request. I look forward to working with the district and supporting [child's name]'s education.

Sincerely,  
[Your name]  
[Your contact information]

# DCS BEST INTEREST DETERMINATION AND TRANSPORTATION PLAN (1 OF 2)

CSO-1348A  
(11/19)



## ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY BEST INTERESTS DETERMINATION & TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Provider ID \_\_\_\_\_

### Best Interests Determination: Foster Student School of Origin

Student Name (Last, First, M.I.) *PLEASE PRINT*	Current School	Grade
Parent(s)	Current Caregiver	
DCS Specialist	Local Education Agency (LEA) Point of Contact	

Remaining in the School of Origin Considerations	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Student:</b> desires to remain in school of origin
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Parent:</b> desires student to remain in school of origin
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Personal safety of the student</b> The school of origin has advantages for the safety of the student.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Student's need for special instruction</b> The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the school of origin.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>English Language Learners</b> Is the student an English Language Learner (ELL), and if so, is the school of origin equipped to meet the ELL needs or other language needs of the student.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Continuity of Instruction</b> Change in school may interrupt academic progress or result in loss of credits. The student has been in this environment for an extended period of time.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Age and connections of the student</b> Student is older, maintaining friends and contacts with peers and staff is critical to the student's school experience and participation. Student has siblings in the same school.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Academic Strength and Grade Placement</b> The student is struggling academically and is not at grade level, and is likely to fall further behind if transferred to another school.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Mobility, social and emotional state</b> The child has experienced numerous school changes, is suffering from the effects of mobility, has developed strong ties to the current school, or involved in school related or extra-curricular activities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education and/or special needs</b> The advantage of remaining in the school of origin outweighs any potential disadvantages presented by the length of the commute.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Length of anticipated stay in current placement</b> The student's current living situation continues to be uncertain. The student will benefit from the continuity offered by remaining in the school of origin.

Transferring to a New School Considerations	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Student:</b> desires to move to new school
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Parent:</b> desires student to move to new school
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Personal safety of the student</b> The new school has advantages for the safety of the student. The student has destructive or dangerous relationships at the school of origin.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Student's need for special instruction</b> The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the new school and can be implemented immediately upon entry to the new school.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>English Language Learners</b> Is the student an English Language Learner (ELL), and if so, is the new school equipped to meet the ELL needs or other language needs of the student
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Continuity of Instruction</b> Student has attended the school of origin for only a brief time. Change in school will not impact academic progress or credits earned.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Age and connections of the student</b> The student is younger or has no positive connection to a particular peer or social group, or to school staff. Student has siblings in same school and contact presents concerns.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Academic Strength and Grade Placement</b> The student's academic performance is strong and at grade level, and is likely to recover from a school transfer.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Mobility, social and emotional state</b> The child seems to be coping adequately with mobility, does not feel strong ties to the current school, or is not involved in school related or extra-curricular activities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education and/or special needs</b> The length of the commute will negatively impact the student's concentration, attitude, or readiness for school, or is inappropriate for the student's age or other reason.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Length of anticipated stay in current placement</b> The student's current living situation appears to be stable and unlikely to change. The student will benefit from developing relationships with school peers who live in his or her community school.

Best Interest School Placement	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	Start Date	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
Student Signature	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	Parent(s) Signature	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
Caregiver Signature	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	Foster Parent Signature	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
DCS Specialist Signature		LEA Point of Contact Signature	

~ Please continue on Page 2 ~

# DCS BEST INTEREST DETERMINATION AND TRANSPORTATION PLAN (2 OF 2)

CSO-1348A  
(11/19)



## ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY BEST INTERESTS DETERMINATION & TRANSPORTATION PLAN

### Foster Student Transportation Plan

Student Name (Last, First, M.I.) *PLEASE PRINT*	School Name	Grade
Caregiver Name	School District	
Caregiver Relationship	School Address	
Home Address	City	State   ZIP
City	State	ZIP
LEA Point of Contact		
DCS Specialist	Email	Phone No.
DCS Specialist Supervisor	Email	Phone No.

### Transportation Method (Check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver directly to school	<input type="checkbox"/> Another responsible adult to bus stop
<input type="checkbox"/> Another responsible adult directly to school	<input type="checkbox"/> DCS provided (public or private transportation)
<input type="checkbox"/> School provided (designated bus or other service)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (explain below):
<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver to bus stop	

### Instructions

Identify the person(s) responsible for providing transportation, including name(s) and phone number(s). When transportation is provided by the school, include specific bus route information (locations, times, bus number(s)). For DCS contract transportation, include the mode (public bus pass/bus card, private cab/van, etc.) and specify the vendor name and contact information, as applicable. Include any other information necessary to ensure student safety.



Equal Opportunity Employer/Program. The Department of Child Safety (DCS) prohibits discrimination in admissions, programs, services, activities, or employment based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetics, or retaliation or any other status protected by federal law, state law, or regulation. Reasonable accommodations to allow a person with a disability to take part in a program, service, or activity are available upon request. To request this document in alternative format or for further information about this policy contact your local office. TTY/TDD Services: 7-1-1. Free language assistance for DCS services is available upon request. Ayuda gratuita con traducciones relacionadas con los servicios del DCS esta disponible a solicitud del cliente.

## ACCESSING GRADES AND SCHOOL INFORMATION ONLINE TIP SHEET

**Many schools now have online student information systems, including portals that parents and educational representatives can use to review the student's school information.**

**Here are some general tips on using online student information systems:**

- Use the online system as a tool to enhance communication with the student around school progress.
- Use the online system as a way to avoid surprises at the end of a semester or term by regularly monitoring how the student is doing (when age and developmentally appropriate).
- Use the online system as a way to talk to the student about attendance.
- Use the online system as a way to facilitate interest in academic progress.
- Try to make the interaction with the student around the online system a positive one, and a way you can show the student that you have an active interest their education.
- See the school's counselor for specific information on the school's on-line portal. You will be given instructions on how to set up an account (as the site is secure and only available to be seen by authorized users).

If you put the link to the portal in your "favorites," it is an easy way to check it frequently so you can stay on top of any issues and successes your student is having in school.



# IDENTIFYING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS



## HOW TO ENSURE STUDENTS ARE RECEIVING WHAT THEY NEED

Studies have shown that students experiencing foster care are 2.5 to 3.5 times more likely to receive special education services than students who are not in foster care.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it is crucial for adult allies to understand the law governing special education so that they can advocate throughout the special education process to ensure the student's needs are met. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the key federal law governing special education. Under IDEA, students with disabilities are entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education, also called "FAPE."

IDEA parents, caregivers, and other adult supports can play an important role in ensuring that students in foster care are identified and evaluated for special education and receive the services and supports they need.



## WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW

1. School districts have a responsibility to identify, locate, and evaluate children with disabilities.<sup>44</sup>
2. Once a school district receives a request for assessment for special education, it must either seek the IDEA parent's consent to begin the assessment or provide written notice that it refuses to do so within a reasonable amount of time, not to exceed 15 school days.<sup>45</sup>

## SECTION 3 • IDENTIFYING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

3. It is best to request assessment for special education in writing. An IDEA parent, guardian, caseworker or other adult advocate has a legal right to request that a public school evaluate their student for special education.<sup>46</sup>
4. Once the IDEA parent consents to the assessment, it must be conducted within 60 days.<sup>47</sup>
5. If the IDEA parent disagrees with an evaluation obtained by the school, they have the right to request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). The school must either ensure that the IEE is provided at public expense (at no cost to the IDEA parent) or file for a due process hearing to show their evaluation was appropriate.
6. An Individual Education Plan (**IEP**) is a written document that describes the special education services the child will receive.<sup>48</sup>
7. If a youth with an IEP transfers schools, the new school is required to provide the youth with an education that includes services comparable to those in the existing IEP.<sup>49</sup> The previous IEP will continue to be followed until the new school either adopts the existing IEP or develops and implements a new IEP. In short, a student does not lose IEP services with a change in school.
8. When the biological or adoptive parent(s) are known and able to participate, they are presumed to be the IDEA parent/special education decision-maker. If you are uncertain who is authorized to act as the IDEA parent, check with the student's DCS Specialist and the student's attorney.
9. A **504 Plan** is put in place to ensure that students with disabilities receive accommodations in cases of either physical or mental impairment or disorder. Students and their adult allies often need to advocate and share their 504s with their teachers. Walking through their accommodations with the teacher and talking about what that can look like in their classroom is key.
10. A special IEP meeting called a "manifestation determination" must be held within 10 school days of any decision to change the educational placement of a student with a disability due to an alleged violation of a code of student conduct. The student's placement should not be changed, if the behavior was a manifestation of the student's disability or was a direct result of the school's failure to implement the student's IEP.



### ACTION STEPS FOR ALLIES

1. **Know your student's rights.** Although there can be a lot to keep track of, knowing your student's rights is important to ensure they are receiving what they need to succeed. Having a basic understanding and knowledge about special education can assist you in communicating in shared terms with school and district team members.
2. **Ask questions.** No one should be expected to come into this process as an expert! Thanks to the support of other team members and outside resources, you do not need to be one. However, it is in everyone's best interest to ask questions to help

## SECTION 3 • IDENTIFYING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

fully understand the process. This also provides a great model for students to be self-advocates in their own meetings.

- 3. Environment matters.** Students who receive special education services can do so in a variety of settings. Educational environment is about how, where, and from whom a student is receiving services. Depending on the student's needs, this can be in an inclusion classroom, a resource room, a special support period in their schedule, self-contained classroom, etc. Knowing this information can help you support a student in advocating for the right learning environment.
- 4. Stay organized.** With deadlines specifically set by law, it is important to track when interactions happen, what information is shared, and any follow up that is expected. As an advocate it is a good idea to keep a folder specifically for special education information and meeting notes that includes a calendar.
- 5. Reach out.** At the end of this section there is a list of resources, both national and statewide, to support advocates of youth in need of special education evaluation and services. Seeking guidance is another way to model support-seeking behaviors and self-advocacy for foster youth.



### MORE TO KNOW! ENSURING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

#### Child Find and Assessment Process

The IDEA includes a “child find” mandate. This means that school districts have a responsibility to identify, locate, and evaluate children with disabilities.<sup>50</sup> This obligation applies to all children birth through age 21, including students in foster care. Many students in foster care, however, fail to be proactively identified by school districts and other providers for special education, and as a result do not receive the services they need and are entitled to under the law. Adults in the child's life, such as an IDEA parent, guardian, caseworker or advocate can help prevent this by referring a student in writing for a special education evaluation.<sup>51</sup>

Once a school district receives a request for assessment for special education, it must either seek the IDEA parent's consent to begin the assessment or provide written notice that it refuses to do so within a reasonable amount of time, not to exceed 15 days.<sup>52</sup> Once the parent consents to the assessment, it must be conducted within 60 days.<sup>53</sup>

**Special note on “screening”:** If a school offers or conducts a “screening” or “45-day screening” of a student by a teacher or specialist to assess for learning challenges or possible disabilities and “to determine appropriate instructional strategies for curriculum implementation,” this is not sufficient to be considered an evaluation for special education eligibility, and cannot be used as a way to delay the special education assessment timeline and process required by federal law.<sup>54</sup> If an IDEA parent requests a special education assessment and consents to the assessment, the school cannot respond by taking 45 days to “screen” the child and then an additional 60 days to do the initial evaluation; it has 60 days total to complete the screening and assessment.<sup>55</sup>

# JESSICA

## EDUCATION LIAISON



Having a well document IEP in place can be the difference between student success and adversity. As an Education Liaison, I worked with a student and their team to assist with obtaining their misplaced IEP assessments after a school move. Unfortunately, it's not uncommon for the educational records and assessments of students in foster care to be incomplete or missing. In this case, some new members of the student's team were not aware the student already had an IEP in place. Rather than having to request and wait for a new assessment, I helped create a list of the schools the student attended and then requested any IEP documentation from each school. By taking the time to contact each school directly, we were able to get a copy of the existing IEP and avoid an unnecessary evaluation. The school was able to update the IEP and provide needed services and modifications without delay.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess all areas related to the student's suspected disability, and to determine whether the student is eligible for special education and related services. Every student has a right to be evaluated in his/her native language, or other mode of communication, by a qualified professional in all areas of suspected disability, including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, adaptive behavior, communication, and motor abilities. Parents will receive an explanation and copy of the evaluation. A student may be eligible in one or more of the following disability categories:<sup>56</sup>

- Autism (A)
- Developmental Delay (DD)
- Emotional Disability (ED)
- Hearing Impairment (HI)
- Mild Intellectual Disability (MIID)
- Moderate Intellectual Disability (MIOD)
- Multiple Disabilities (MD)
- Multiple Disabilities with Severe Sensory Impairment (MDSSI)
- Orthopedic Impairment (OI)
- Other Health Impairments (OHI)
- Preschool Severe Delay (PSD)
- Severe Intellectual Disability (SID)
- Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
- Speech/Language Impairment (SLI)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Visual Impairment (VI)

## SECTION 3 • IDENTIFYING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

Note: No single individual determines eligibility for special education – not a medical doctor, a school psychologist, a teacher, a related service provider, a school administrator, or a parent. Rather, the student’s team, including the parents and other qualified professionals, reviews existing data on a child and identifies what additional data are necessary to determine whether the child is a child with a disability and the educational needs of the child.<sup>57</sup> Upon completion of the administration of assessments and other evaluation measures, a group of qualified professionals and the child’s IDEA parent (often referred to as the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team or MET) determine whether the child is a child with a disability and his or her educational needs.<sup>58</sup>

If a child is found eligible, an Individualized Education Program meeting (IEP meeting) must be held and an IEP plan must be developed within 30 calendar days.<sup>59</sup>

### **Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)**

If an IDEA parent disagrees with an evaluation obtained by the school, they have the right to request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). When the request is made, the school will provide information about where the evaluation can be obtained and the criteria that apply to an IEE. The school must either ensure that the IEE is provided at public expense (at no cost to parent) or file for a due process hearing to show their evaluation was appropriate. If the due process hearing decision is that the school’s evaluation is appropriate, the parent still has a right to an IEE at their own expense and have it considered at part of the MET process. Although the team is required to consider the information provided by an independent evaluator, the team is not required to include the findings or follow the recommendations.<sup>60</sup>

### **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

An “IEP” is a written document that describes the special education services the child will receive. It must include a number of specific components, including: a description of the student’s level of academic achievement and performance and how the student’s disability affects them; a statement of measurable annual goals; a description of progress; a description of the special education, related services, and supplemental aids, services and program modifications or supports that will be provided; information about whether there are ways in which the student will not participate in general education; and, information about any individual accommodations for assessments.<sup>61</sup>

Additionally, there may be general accommodations for students written out in their IEP, which can be critically important, especially for high school students. They are things they can advocate and ask for to help them in ALL of their classes. If students and adult allies only know one page of their IEP that can help them be successful across all lines, the general accommodations page is critical.

“Related services” and “transition planning” are two important parts of an IEP that may also apply to a student, based on age, experiences, and involvement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Adult allies can also speak with a student’s attorney if they have not been successful in obtaining services and assistance is required.”<sup>62</sup>

“Related Services are supportive services a student can receive in the student’s IEP. They may include:

- Transportation
- Speech/language

## SECTION 3 • IDENTIFYING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

- Audiology
- Interpreting services
- Psychological services
- Physical and occupational therapy
- Recreation (therapeutic or non-therapeutic)
- Social work services
- Rehabilitation counseling
- Medical services for diagnosis and devaluation only
- Mobility services
- School nurse services
- Services considered “developmental, supportive or corrective.”

“Transition Services” are services or activities designed to help a student with a disability transition from school to post-school activities (e.g. college, vocational training, a job, independent living, etc.).<sup>63</sup> The services should be individualized based on the student’s needs and interests. The plan for services should be put in place when the student turns 16, or earlier if appropriate. Services may include:<sup>64</sup>

- Instruction
- An employment and/or adult living plan
- Functional vocational evaluation
- Community experiences
- Daily living skills
- Related services (see above).

Supporting students in understanding what services and accommodations are included in their IEP is critical. If age and developmentally appropriate, sit down with your student and review the document [What’s in My IEP](#); answer any questions they may have or help them connect with a supportive adult who can. Additionally, the [Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy Resource for Students](#) and [Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy Resource for Adults](#) are tools to start thinking critically about what a student may need and how to advocate for it.

IEPs must be reviewed at least annually, and the student must be re-evaluated every three years.<sup>65</sup> You might hear this referred to as the “triennial re-evaluation” or “three-year review.”

### IEPs and School Transfers

If a student with an IEP transfers schools within Arizona, the new school (in consultation with the youth’s parents) is required to provide the youth with a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) (including services comparable to those in the existing IEP), until the new school either adopts the existing IEP or develops and implements a new IEP.<sup>66</sup> A student in foster care with an IEP is entitled to immediate enrollment in a new school, when a determination is made that it is not in the youth’s best interest to remain in their school of origin.<sup>67</sup> The new school must immediately contact the youth’s school of origin to obtain relevant records (including the youth’s IEP) and the school of origin must immediately transfer the youth’s educational records to the new school.<sup>68</sup> [IEP Sample Request Form](#)

### Educational Decision-Makers in Special Education

Parental participation is central to the IEP process and is one of the strongest “procedural safeguards” under the IDEA to ensure that children with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education. This remains true even when children are in foster care. Biological/adoptive parents continue to have the right

## HERE IS THE BASIC PROCESS TO GET AN IEP IN PLACE:

1

If a student needs an IEP, write to the school district special education director and school principal and request an IEP evaluation. The school must propose an assessment plan within 15 days.

2

Once the request is made and the IDEA parent/education decision-maker agrees in writing to the assessment plan, the school has 60 days to complete the evaluation and create a written IEP.

3

If a student is found eligible, an IEP Meeting must be held and an IEP plan must be developed within 30 days. IDEA Parents/education decision-maker will meet with the student's teachers and school staff to decide what the student's IEP should include.

to participate in the special education process and make decisions for their children in foster unless:

- A court has specifically limited their right to make educational decisions or all parental rights have been terminated by the court, or,
- The identity or whereabouts of the parent are unknown, or they have failed to participate in the special education process despite reasonable, documented attempts by the school to engage the parent in the special education of their child.<sup>69</sup>

If either of these circumstances occur, a “surrogate parent” may be appointed to make special education decisions for the child.<sup>70</sup> The surrogate parent must possess sufficient knowledge and skills to adequately represent the child, must not be an employee of a state agency that is involved in the education or care of the child, and may not have any interests that would conflict with the best interests of the child.<sup>71</sup>

### Special Education Disputes

- The special education “parent” can pursue dispute procedures if they disagree with the services provided or offered by the school, including:
  - Filing a [compliance complaint](#) (anyone can file a compliance complaint—not just the special education parent),<sup>72</sup>
  - Requesting mediation,<sup>73</sup> or
  - Requesting a due process hearing.<sup>74</sup>
- Because these procedures are complicated, the IDEA parent should talk to the child’s dependency attorney about the student’s options.
- While the disagreement is being resolved, the student must continue to receive the special education services the youth was already receiving.<sup>75</sup>

### Special Education and School Discipline

If the student is in special education, consider the following:

- Adult advocates should know that a “**manifestation determination**” IEP meeting must be held within 10 school days of any decision to change the educational placement of a student with a disability due to an alleged violation of a code of student conduct.<sup>76</sup> A disciplinary change in placement occurs when a student is removed from their placement for:
  - More than 10 consecutive days; or
  - More than 10 cumulative days that are part of a pattern of removal in response to similar student behavior.
- The purpose of the manifestation determination IEP meeting is to determine whether the student’s behavior is a “manifestation” of the student’s disability. Behavior is a “manifestation” of a student’s disability if:

## SECTION 3 • IDENTIFYING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

- The behavior was caused by, or had a direct and substantial relationship to, the student's disability; or
- The behavior was the direct result of the school's failure to implement the student's IEP.
- If the behavior is found to be a manifestation of the student's disability, the student may not be expelled for the conduct (or further disciplined); the student must receive a functional behavioral assessment (FBA); the school must implement a behavior intervention plan (BIP) (or review and revise an existing BIP); and return the student to the educational placement from which they were removed, unless the student meets specific criteria for an interim alternative educational setting (IAES).<sup>77</sup>
- If a student enrolled in or eligible for special education is expelled, the student must continue to receive FAPE (free appropriate public education) during an expulsion.<sup>78</sup>

### 504 Accommodations Plans

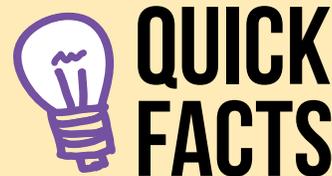
A "504 Plan" or "504 Accommodations Plan" refers to a student's written plan created under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination based on disability. Generally, a 504 Plan is put in place to ensure that students with disabilities receive accommodations they need and to ensure equal access to learning.<sup>79</sup> The disability can be either a physical or mental impairment or disorder. A school district must evaluate a student before a student can be determined eligible under Section 504.<sup>80</sup>

Examples of accommodations that may result from a 504 evaluation include, providing a student with a learning disability extended time for taking a test or, providing a student with a visual impairment with large-print books. For more detailed guidance on the 504 accommodations process and examples of other accommodations, please see the following resources:

- Parent and Educator Resource Guide to Section 504 in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/504-resource-guide-201612.pdf>

### Chronic Health Conditions

Sometimes students might have chronic health conditions that impact their ability to attend school consistently and create a need for accommodations. Chronic health certificates can also excuse excessive absences and create a supportive plan for students to make up missed learning. Many students with a 504 also have a Chronic Health Certificate related to their 504 plan disability.<sup>81</sup>



- ▶ Only the student's IDEA parent can sign and approve an assessment plan or sign and approve an IEP.<sup>82</sup> **In Arizona, "parent" is defined as:**
  - **A biological parent, adoptive parent, or a guardian** (but not DCS or other state agency, if the student is in state care)
  - **A guardian** (but not the Department of Child Safety or other state agency, if the student is in state care)
  - **Another caregiver** who is acting as the parent and is legally responsible for the student
  - **A surrogate parent** (as appointed by the court)
  - **A foster parent**, to the extent permitted by law.
  - If there are multiple people that might fit the "parent" definition, the natural or adoptive parent is considered the default parent unless they do not have legal authority to make educational decisions about the student."<sup>83</sup>



**PRACTICAL  
IEP  
TIPS**

  
**BEFORE  
THE IEP MEETING**

- Review progress reports and other documentation
- Review the previous and current IEP
- Think about your child's strengths and needs
- Ask for a copy of the draft IEP before the meeting
- Request a copy of the IEP (for IDEA parents) in your primary language or ask for a translator
- Review parental rights and responsibilities
- Take a list of the things you want to discuss to the meeting
- Familiarize yourself with grade level (general education) academic standards
- Consider inviting outside service providers and advocates for the child (where appropriate)<sup>84</sup>

  
**DURING  
THE IEP MEETING**

- Express your questions, concerns and ideas
- Ensure the student's strengths and needs are considered
- Ask questions to clarify anything you do not understand
- Be an active participant in talking about the student's goals
- Ensure the suggestions, which are proposed or refused, are documented
- If any issues are left unresolved, discuss/request another IEP meeting
- Request a copy of the IEP document before leaving the meeting
- Write down any questions you have that were not answered in the meeting

  
**AFTER  
THE IEP MEETING**

- Review the IEP on a regular basis and monitor the student's progress towards his or her goals
- If you do not understand how progress towards IEP goals is measured, request clarification from the educator or therapist who has written the progress report
- Discuss the option of an IEP review meeting if the student is not making progress toward IEP goals
- Discuss with the student their progress report(s), strengths, needs, barriers to learning, and IEP goals
- Communicate with the student's teacher or others from the IEP Team when you have questions or concerns

## SECTION 3 • IDENTIFYING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

### Additional Resources For Support and Information

For more detailed guidance on the special education process for students in foster care, please see these helpful resources:

- **Arizona Department of Education:**
  - The Special Education Handbook <https://cms.azed.gov/home/GetDocumentFile?id=582b4ee5aadebe0b4810853b>
  - Traveling the Special Education Highway <https://www.azed.gov/specialeducation/parents/>
  - IDEA Part B Procedural Safeguards Notice for the State of Arizona <https://cms.azed.gov/home/GetDocumentFile?id=54e3b6e7aadebe0f1845df44>
- **Arizona Center for Disability Law:**
  - Understanding Your Child’s Educational Rights: <https://www.azdisabilitylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/SE2-Guide-English-New-Logo.pdf>
  - Getting What Your Child Needs To Do Well in School: <https://www.azdisabilitylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/SE4PL-New-Logo.pdf>
- **Raising Special Kids (RSK):** RSK is a nonprofit parent organization that provides support and information for parents of children with a full range of disabilities and health care needs from birth to age 26. Programs are offered at no cost to families and are available in English and Spanish. RSK has a toll-free help line (1-888-877-5910) for parents, which is staffed by trained and knowledgeable specialists.
- **Advocacy 31Nine:** An Arizona nonprofit that works with caregivers of students in foster care who live in Maricopa County and receive special education services
- **The Student’s School Program Specialist:** Program Support and Monitoring program specialists are assigned by ADE to each Arizona district and charter school to provide program assistance. Program specialists offer technical assistance and monitor special education programs in school districts and charter schools throughout the state. To contact the person assigned to the student’s school, click on ESS [program specialist caseload list](#) to launch a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with the list of currently assigned specialists and how to contact them. If you are unable to reach them, the ESS front desk can direct you to the assistance needed:
  - Email: [ESSInbox](#)
  - Tel: (602) 542-4013
  - TDD: (602) 542-1410
- [American Bar Association Center on Foster Care and Education](#)
- [Special Education Decision Makers for Children in Foster Care: Everyone Has a Role](#)
- [Identifying Special Education Decision Makers for Children in Foster Care: State Law Questions](#)
- [Q&A: School Mobility and Special Education Services For Students in Foster Care](#)
- [Fact Sheet For Youth](#)
- [Fact Sheet For Case Workers](#)
- [Fact Sheet For Foster Parents](#)



### USEFUL TEMPLATES AND FORMS:

[Sample IEP Request Letter](#)

[What’s In My IEP? A Resource For Students](#)

[Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy: A Resource for Education Advocates](#)

[Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy: A Resource for Students](#)

# SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING RECORDS BEFORE IEP MEETING

[Parent Name/Mailing Address]

[Date]

\_\_\_\_\_, Director of Special Education

[School District or Charter School]

Re: [Your Child's Name and School]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

An IEP meeting regarding my child, [Name of Child], a student at [Name of School], is scheduled for [Date and Time of IEP Meeting].

As a parent, it is important for me to have a full understanding of my child's educational needs so that I can meaningfully contribute to the IEP team meeting. In order to prepare for the IEP meeting, I would appreciate it if you would send me copies of the following records:

*[Select which records you want and draft letter accordingly]*

- My child's current IEP.
- My child's prior IEPs for the last ( ) school years.
- All progress reports regarding my child for the \_\_\_ school year(s).
- Copies of the results of any standardized tests given to my child during the \_\_\_ school year(s), including state and district-wide assessments and any reading assessments. If accommodations were provided to my child during the tests, please provide records identifying the accommodations.
- Copies of the results of any evaluations conducted regarding my child, including all tests, procedures, and records regarding my child that will be provided to school personnel attending the IEP meeting.
- Policies and procedures for developing, reviewing and implementing IEPs of the [Name of School District or Charter School].

Please send these records to me at least one week before the IEP meeting so that I have enough time to review them beforehand. If you have any questions about this request, the best way to reach me is [by phone and/or e-mail, provide specific number and/or address]. Thank you.

Sincerely,

# WHAT'S IN MY IEP? A RESOURCE FOR STUDENTS (1 OF 2)

*(Adult allies working with students can use this document to support them in understanding their IEP and what supports and resources are available through it)*

**STUDENT:** \_\_\_\_\_ **ADULT ALLY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**An Individualized Education Plan, or IEP,** is a written document that describes the special education services that you need. Please review your IEP with an adult ally in your life. If you do not know what words or phrases mean, if have questions or problems with your IEP, you can ask your adult ally to take you to your next IEP meeting so you can bring your issues up to the team. You can attend the IEP meeting even if you do not have any questions.

SECTION	MEANING	PAGE #	QUESTIONS/CONCERNS
1. Present levels of academics, achievements and functional performance	Information about how you are doing in school, including results from test you took		
2. Strengths of the child	Things you do well		
3. Anticipated effects	The way your disability affects you in your general education classes		
4. Educational needs	Things that are harder for you at school or skills you need to work on		
5. Special Factors	Other things that may be important for your IEP		
6. Parent concerns	What your parents want you to learn and questions they have about your education		
7. Type of service	Special types of learning and situations that you may qualify for		
8. Related services	Support services to help you, like speech-language services, physical therapy, assistive technology services, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and transportation		
9. Amount of time in the general education setting	Amount of time you will go to general education classes		
10. Supplementary aids and services	Things to help you in the general education classes		

# WHAT'S IN MY IEP? A RESOURCE FOR STUDENTS (2 OF 2)

SECTION	MEANING	PAGE #	QUESTIONS/CONCERNS
11. Program modifications	Changes made in course standards and tests to help you do well in your classes		
12. Goals and objectives	Specific skills that you will be learning over the next year		
13. Postsecondary goals	Goals about what you want to do after high school		
14. Course of study	Specific classes you plan to take to reach your goals		
15. Projected date of graduation/program completion and type	Date you plan to graduate and the diploma or certificate you will receive		
16. Vocational education	Classes or program at school and at career teach, like work-study and job training		
17. Vocational education	Person who works for the Arizona Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and supports you in learning about job		
18. Transfer of Rights at Age of Majority	When a young adult with a disability reaches 18 years of age, the school district must provide any notice required by the law to both the young adult and the parents		
19. State-District wide Assessment Program	State and district tests you will take and any supports you will need when completing the test		
20. Least Restrictive Placement	Combination of special education services and general education and the best location or ways to support goals		
21. Team Participant Signatures	People who came to your IEP meeting and are members of IEP team		

# SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-ADVOCACY: A RESOURCE FOR EDUCATION ADVOCATES

*Self-awareness means knowing about yourself, including your strengths and needs.  
Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself, your ideas and your needs.*

**STUDENT:** \_\_\_\_\_ **ADULT ALLY:** \_\_\_\_\_

These tools are important for students in special education. Please complete the following “You! Scale” about the student you are working with. There are no right or wrong answers. The student will fill out the “Me! Scale”. Once you both complete the scale, compare your answers together; circle answers that are the same. Brainstorm how and when the student can use self-advocacy. If you do not know what some of the words below mean, consult the Special Education Acronyms & Terms resource in the appendix.

## YOU! SCALE

- |  |                              |                                     |                                   |                             |
|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. The student knows they are in special education                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 2. The student knows they have a disability  | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 3. The student knows they have an Individual Education Plan (IEP)                  | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 4. The student knows they have IEP goals   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 5. The student knows their IEP goals   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 6. The student has a copy of his/her IEP   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 7. The student knows what their accommodations are                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 8. The student can explain their accommodations to their teachers                  | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 9. The student can explain to others how their disability impacts their schoolwork | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 10. The student is comfortable telling others about their disability.              | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 11. Students with disabilities graduate high school.                               | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 12. The student talks about their post-school goals and dreams                     | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 13. Students with disabilities go to college                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 14. Students with disabilities get good jobs after high school                     | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |

## STUDENT'S STRENGTHS & NEEDS

1. List three things the student does well in school:

2. List three things the student needs support with in school:

3. List three things the student is good at outside of school:

4. List three things the student needs support with outside of school:

5. The most important thing in the student's life is:

# SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-ADVOCACY: A RESOURCE FOR STUDENTS

*Self-awareness means knowing about yourself, including your strengths and needs.*

*Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself, your ideas and your needs.*

**STUDENT:** \_\_\_\_\_ **ADULT ALLY:** \_\_\_\_\_

These tools are important for students in special education. Please complete the following “Me! Scale” about yourself.

There are no right or wrong answers. Your adult Ally (it can be anyone who supports your education) will complete the “You! Scale”. Once you both complete the scale, compare your answers together; circle answers that are the same.

Brainstorm how and when you can advocate for yourself.

---

## ME! SCALE

- |  |                              |                                     |                                   |                             |
|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. I know I am in special education                                | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 2. I have a disability   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 3. I have an Individual Education Plan (IEP)                       | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 4. I have IEP goals  | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 5. I know my IEP goals   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 6. I (or my parents/caretakers) have a copy of my IEP              | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 7. I know what my accommodations are                               | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 8. I can tell my teachers about accommodations I need in class     | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 9. I can explain to others how my disability impacts my schoolwork | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 10. I am comfortable telling others about my disability            | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 11. Students with disabilities graduate high school                | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 12. I can talk about my goals and dreams after high school         | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 13. Students with disabilities go to college                       | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 14. Students with disabilities get good jobs after high school     | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> I THINK SO | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |

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## YOUR STRENGTHS & NEEDS

1. List three things you do well in school:

2. List three things you need support with in school:

3. List three things that you are good at outside of school:

4. List three things you need support with outside of school:

5. The most important thing in your life is:



# CREATING THE RIGHT SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT



## CREATING A SPACE TO THRIVE

Advocates working with students in foster care can play a critical role in promoting school success and making sure that the school placement is an environment where the student can thrive. This includes ensuring that students are in a setting that can support all of their learning needs including their social and emotional needs. Adult allies should work with the student's team to ensure that the school and class placement decisions are always based in the best interests of the student and that the student is in the least restrictive educational program, with access to the same academic resources, services, and extracurricular activities that are available to all students.<sup>85</sup>

Creating the right school environment continues even after school placement is settled. **For youth in care, behavioral success can be just as important as academic success.** Finding community within a school can lead to connections that will foster motivation, self-advocacy, and academic success. Behavioral concerns may arise and it is important that school discipline is fair and offers opportunities for growth to students in foster care. Therefore, it is helpful for both the student and their advocate to know how to respond to disciplinary challenges.



### WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW

1. The Arizona Department of Education provides the [ADE Parent Gateway](#) for parents and caretakers. It includes access to information that may assist them in selecting the best learning experience for their student.
  - The [Arizona School Report Card](#) also has information on schools that can help inform students and caretakers on the quality of the school they are considering.
2. Behavioral concerns at school can often be tied to the stress and instability that many youth in foster care experience.
3. Most schools publish a student manual that includes the districts' disciplinary policies and what interventions and supports are available for students before and during formal disciplinary action.
  - The handbook is usually available on the district's website and in hard copy for students. It is often a good place to find guidelines on specific suspension and expulsion processes, detailed grounds for suspension and expulsion, and more.
4. Suspension is defined as a "short-term removal from a classroom or school, usually for a few days (over 10 days is commonly referred to as "long term suspension"). Expulsion is a long-term removal from an entire school district.
  - It is important to use the correct terminology to ensure that the student has clear options about educational institutions to attend.
5. When a school suspends a student for more than 10 days OR expels a student, the school must provide written notice and an opportunity for a hearing.<sup>86</sup>
6. Districts in Arizona must have an alternative to suspension program in place. If a student is suspended, expelled, or in the process of expulsion, another district can refuse to admit the student.<sup>87</sup>



### ACTION STEPS FOR ALLIES

1. **Engage with the student.** It is important to talk to the student about obligations they might have in addition to attending school (i.e., they are a parent, they have a job, etc.). This could mean looking for a school setting that offers an alternative schedule with a.m. and p.m. classes. If the school program is web-based learning (online), talk with the student about their comfort with online courses. Inquire about the student's desire to participate in extracurricular activities, clubs and any special education needs they have, as some alternative schools may not offer these services and activities. Inquire about the student's internal motivation and organizational skills necessary for success in an online setting. Does the student prefer to be in a classroom where a teacher is available to assist when needed?
2. **Don't wait for a problem to arise.** School choice is not only the choice of what school to attend but what is the best educational setting within that school. Discuss with the student if they find their classes challenging enough. If the student feels like the classes are too easy, support the student in talking with teachers/school counselors about enrollment in honors or advanced placement (AP) classes. If the classes are too

## SECTION 4 • CREATING THE RIGHT SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

challenging, the student might need extras assistance, tutoring, or a class modification. Adult advocates could also speak with the school to request a special education evaluation to assess the student's needs.

- 3. Empower the student.** As age and developmentally appropriate, encourage the student to reach out to teachers and school counselors about options and solutions. Support the student in figuring out who the appropriate contact person is at the schools, and how to initiate a conversation about the student's learning and needs.
- 4. Make a plan for behavior.** When it comes to behavioral issues it is important to be as proactive as possible. Look for and discuss the root causes whenever possible. Discuss with the team how discipline can be about growth and not just punishment. Whenever a disciplinary action occurs, have a plan to debrief with the student and work with the team to ensure there is a plan to welcome the student back to the classroom and school setting. Advocates can also make sure the school has up-to-date contact information on the student's placement, DCS worker, and education decision-maker to ensure any communication is directed to the correct person, especially regarding disciplinary hearings and suspensions.



### JARON EDUCATION LIAISON

Having choice in the type of school or program a student in foster care attends can help them get back on track for graduation. While some traditional school districts may limit the maximum number of credits a student earns per semester, there are credit recovery programs that are accelerated and allow students to work at their own pace. I was working with a student who had fallen behind in credits due to the interruptions foster care had caused her life. The credit recovery program we found allowed her to work hard and complete courses she was missing at a quicker pace. She worked through the program, recovered all of her missing credits and was able to graduate on time. It was just the confidence and encouragement she needed to enroll at Chandler Gilbert Community College, move into the dorms, and successfully complete her first year of college with passing grades.





# BOBBI

## YOUNG ADULT ADVOCATE

From my freshman year to my senior year, due to the instability I experienced as a student in foster care, I was homeschooled, attended two different public schools, a charter school, an online school, and a credit recovery program. In the middle of my junior year of high school, I was withdrawn from school completely. Fortunately, when I began school again, I worked with the adult allies in my life to design an education program that made sense for my needs; it included a combination of credit recovery, summer school and enrolling back in a public high school. I ended my senior year strong and was able to graduate. Despite changing schools so many times, I was able to see that I could be successful. I attribute some of this success to the stable K-8 experience I had at a private school. It gave me a strong educational foundation and ability to feel prepared for the challenges to come.

For many students who experience foster care, switching schools so many times impacts our academic pathways and long-term relationships. There is trauma around having to constantly leave friends and trying to find new friends. While some of my moves were related to my health and necessary, the long-term effects due to moving schools so frequently can be very intense. This combined with the lack of consistency already in a student's life while in foster care can feel insurmountable. Even in my third year of college, I'm constantly working on holding myself accountable for work and studying. In the past, the focus was on just getting enrolled somewhere and making sure I was passing.



Thankfully, the school stability I had prior to high school allowed me to achieve academic success and build confidence in my abilities. It also allowed me to form and maintain friendships that are still in place to this day. I realized that sometimes the easiest option is not always the best. That while it may take extra work, collaboration and determination to support a student in foster care, I'm proof that success is possible.



### MORE TO KNOW! CREATING THE RIGHT SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

#### School Setting Success

Most students will attend a comprehensive public-school environment unless:

- The student qualifies for special education and has an IEP requiring a different educational placement.
- The student has been transferred to an alternative school due to suspension/expulsion (see school discipline section)
- The parent or other caregiver making educational decisions about the student determines that it is in the student's best interests to attend an educational program that is not a comprehensive public-school setting.

In Arizona, students have a variety of educational settings available to them. [The ADE Parent Gateway](#) provides parents and caretakers with access to information that may assist them in selecting the best learning experience for their student. [The Arizona School Report Card](#) also has information on schools that can help inform students and caretakers on the quality of the school they are considering. School options may include:

- Traditional public school
- Public charter school
- Magnet school
- Private schools
- Credit recovery school
- Vocational school
- Federally supported education programs, such as Job Corps
- General Education Development (GED) program

#### Some Early Considerations On Distance Learning

The forced closure of schools and higher education institutions during a community crisis can result in a shift in how instruction occurs for Arizona students and the loss of valuable in-class instructional time.

It is in this context, considering distance/online learning, parents, caregivers and adult allies should consider how best to support students learning, growth and development. Although distance learning allows for flexibility that can assist in moving a student forward academically and personally, it can also become a pitfall if the plan does not include the proper support.

#### Tips for Supporting Youth In Distance Learning Contexts

If the student and their team make the decision that distance learning is the best school option, keep in mind the following:

##### 1. Building Perseverance

- Make sure the student has a list of resources to go to for help including both in person and online.
- Make sure you are communicating regularly about learning goals, assignments, and checking for understanding of the lesson(s).



### 2. Teaching Time Management

- Flexibility is one of the advantages to online/distance learning. However, if a student does not have time management skills it could result in falling behind and a loss of credits.
- Create and follow a calendar with the student that includes both personal and academic commitments. Follow up to ensure that they are following their calendar or making changes that reflect how time is being spent (e.g. I got tired, so one hour of reading became 30 minutes).
- Include time for required readings, not just assignment completion.
- Breaks are important and should be built into the student's calendar as long as work gets done.

### 3. Ensuring Basic Technical Skills

- Before the student starts their distance learning curriculum, make sure you are both comfortable with the technological side of things and familiarize yourself with the website(s) the student will be accessing.
- Make sure you have access to the technology required for distance learning classes.
- Leave time for tech glitches or internet connectivity problems.

### 4. Focusing on Motivation

- It is important to celebrate growth and milestones in all forms of learning and distance learning is no different. Keep track of the student's progress and celebrate milestones whenever possible.

### 5. Creating a Good Study Environment

- A noisy and cluttered classroom can be difficult to focus in. Distance learning and traditional classrooms have this in common. For best results, a student should have an assigned area away from distractions to complete work.

### Supporting Normalcy In School

For children and youth in foster care, their lives are far from normal. The everyday challenges of being separated from their family (sometimes without even knowing why), moving from place to place, leaving friends behind, and more can make growing up and adolescence an even harder time than it already is. **As advocates, it is important to lift up the critical role normalcy plays in school stability and creating a**

## SECTION 4 • CREATING THE RIGHT SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

**familiar and safe environment that students want to come back to.** According to the Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative, “consistently, young people have emphasized that their foster care experiences were far from normal. **What they needed - but too often did not receive - was what their peers not in foster care typically have: parents to love and guide them; close relationships with their siblings, extended family members and other committed adults; a sense of identify and belonging; and daily experiences such as extracurricular activities, sleepovers, and time just hanging out with friends. These typical experiences are, collectively referred to as normalcy, what help define a normal childhood.”<sup>88</sup>**

To address this widespread concern, in 2014 Congress passed and President Obama signed into law the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (SFA). **The legislation shifts the focus from being solely on safety and entails several provisions that encourage a focus on permanence and well-being, including normalcy.** “This shift has been spurred by the growing information concerning the effects of trauma on child and adolescent development, and recognition that foster care can cause additional harm if services are not holistic, of high quality and developed in a timely manner. The law deepens the emphasis on well-being by making clear that the well-being of young people in foster care must be grounded in a normalcy standard - that is, young people preparing to transition from foster care deserve the same family support, opportunities, experiences and high expectation as all other young people in their communities.<sup>89</sup> A key component of creating space for normalcy takes place at school. When students are connected to their school community, including participating in clubs, sports, forming friendships and creating a sense of belonging, it can contribute to their sense of wellbeing and provide a stabilizing effect. For many students living in congregate care, going to school can be one of the most normalizing experiences of their day; a space where they can just be themselves without the constant reminder that they are separated from their families.

### **Normalcy For Students In Foster Care**

Depending on a student’s age and developmental abilities, normalcy at school can look like:

- Playing on a sport team or joining a club
- Joining student government
- Taking drivers training and getting a license
- Hanging out with friends after school
- Attending a sleep over at a school friend’s house
- Going to a movie or concert
- Going to summer camp
- Going to prom
- Attending a friend’s birthday party
- Having needed books and supplies for school
- Having access to technology, including the phone and internet to do school work and stay connected to friends and family
- Getting an after-school job
- Opening a bank account to save money
- Shopping for their own clothes

### **Work Supporting Normalcy in Arizona**

“In Arizona, lawmakers and DCS recognize the importance of normalcy and has taken steps to implement the SFA using already existing state law - [A.R.S. § 8-513](#). Also, DCS has embedded pieces of the SFA requirements into their [Foster Home Licensing Rules](#) (Article 3, R21-6-307) and created [a Reasonable And Prudent Parenting Standard](#) (Chapter 4, Section 12) in their [Policy and Procedure Manual](#).



## TIP 1

Discuss what “normal” experiences means to each youth. This could include activities many people take for granted including using the internet or having a cell phone, playing a sport, or going to a movie with friends.

## TIP 2

Be up-to-date on requirements and trainings to implement the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard for foster parents, caregivers and group care providers. For an overview of the Arizona Department of Child Safety Caregiver Procedures for Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard (RPPS), [click here](#).

## TIP 3

Check out the Fostering Advocates Arizona [video](#) and hear from the experts, young adults who have experienced foster care, on what normalcy means to them.

## TIP 4

Visit [Fostering Advocates Arizona](#) to learn more about the SFA, implementation in Arizona, tips for caregivers, and more.

According to the Department of Child Safety, “The Department supports out-of-home caregivers to use normalcy standards and, specifically, apply a Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS) to determine whether to allow a child to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities. The Department also provides an [“ADCS Caregiver Procedures for Reasonable and Prudent Parenting \(RPPS\)”](#) to assist caregivers in better understanding what decisions can be made without consulting the Department of Child Safety as well as when the Department must be notified for approval or consultation.”<sup>91</sup>

### Trauma Is Often Manifested In Behavior

Trauma is especially challenging for educators to address because students often don’t [express the distress they’re feeling](#) in a way that is easily recognizable. Their trauma behaviors are often labeled as “aggressive” or “off-putting” when misunderstood. Identifying the [symptoms of trauma](#) in the student can help educators understand these confusing behaviors. Behavioral problems in school can often be tied to the **stress and instability that many students in foster care experience**. Indicators of need may be:

- **“Poor Grades and/or Standardized Test Scores:** Changing placements regularly and lacking a consistent adult to help identify their education needs, including disabilities, can contribute to student struggles. Youth may act out in frustration to hide their academic struggles.”<sup>92</sup>
- **“Emotional Reactions:** Youth in foster care are twice as likely as war veterans to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental health conditions that cause anxiety, irrationality, irritability, and aggression.”<sup>93</sup>
- **Inappropriate Peer Interactions:** Youth in foster care often struggle to establish appropriate social boundaries and may be negatively influenced by peers due to abuse/neglect and a lack of long-term healthy relationships.<sup>94</sup>

Student discipline can take many forms, including loss of privileges, (for example, attending field trips or dances), detention, behavior contracts, in-school suspension, out of school suspension or expulsions. **Exclusionary practices like suspensions and expulsions deprive students of important classroom time that can negatively affect academic achievements and lead to outcomes such as truancy, decreased social development, dropping out, and delayed employment.** As adult advocates for students who have experienced foster care, it is critical to avoid blaming students and to be supportive and solution oriented.

Students need reliable adult supporters to help them assess and understand their rights and what actions and alternatives can be taken. “While schools often need to take formal disciplinary action to protect

## SECTION 4 • CREATING THE RIGHT SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

the safety of everyone on campus, foster youth are subject to disproportionate levels of school discipline due to unmet mental health needs caused by the trauma they experience. Law and best practices require schools to attempt to modify behavior through other interventions before more formal disciplinary actions or involuntary school transfers are made.”<sup>95</sup>

### **Knowing The Basics About Suspensions, Expulsions And Discipline-Related Rights**

“Suspensions” means the temporary withdrawal of the privilege of attending a school for a specified period of time and “expulsions” are the permanent withdrawal of the privilege of attending a school unless the governing board reinstates the privilege of attending the school.<sup>96</sup> In Arizona, school staffs have some discretion in deciding when to suspend or expel a student.<sup>97</sup> There are “zero tolerance” offenses that require mandatory expulsion. These offenses include:

- Bringing a firearm to school
- Threatening the educational institution (for example, threatening to cause physical injury to a school employee or student or threatening to cause damage to the educational institution, etc).<sup>98</sup>
- There are some alternatives to expulsion for zero tolerance offences:
  - Schools can make decisions on a case-by-case basis and use alternative strategies such as mediation, community service, or restitution.<sup>99</sup>

### **Notice And Hearing Processes:**

- When a school **suspends** a student for more than ten days (commonly referred to as long-term suspension), it must provide written notice and the possibility of a hearing to the student.<sup>100</sup> The notice must be sent no later than three school days following the imposition of a short-term suspension, pending long-term suspension.
- When a school **expels** a student, it must provide written notice and an opportunity for a hearing to the student and their parent or guardian. The written notice must be provided at least five working days before the hearing takes place.<sup>101</sup>
- School districts may provide more details on the notice and hearing process. Check the district website for more information about the student’s rights.

### **After The Suspension Or Expulsion:**

- Arizona districts must have an alternative to a suspension program in place. Ask about this program if the student is suspended or even expelled. It is likely an alternative education placement – so the student will attend a different learning environment either within the school or elsewhere in the school district.<sup>102</sup>
- If a student is expelled from one school district, or is in the process of being expelled, other districts can refuse to admit the student.<sup>103</sup> This means students may be unable to attend a district school for a long period of time, until their original school district decides to readmit them.
- Parents, caregivers and adult allies should support the student’s transition back to school after suspension is completed; make sure any missing work/assignments or absences during the suspension are not held against the student when they return to school.

### **Other Important School Discipline-Related Rights In Arizona:**

- A school **may not** suspend or expel a student for tardiness, truancy or other absence from school, unless the student is above the age of mandatory school attendance.<sup>104</sup> In Arizona, students must attend school until they are 16 years old.<sup>105</sup> The school must use other methods to address truant behavior.

## SECTION 4 • CREATING THE RIGHT SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

- For any disciplinary action to be taken, the act must have a connection to school – for example, this includes acts committed on school grounds, en route to or from school, during lunch, or during a school-sponsored activity.<sup>106</sup>
- Arizona has specific laws about when school staff can restrain or seclude a student as part of school discipline.<sup>107</sup> These include:
  - In order to restrain or seclude the student, the student must pose an imminent danger of bodily harm to the student or to others, AND
  - less restrictive means are insufficient to address the situation.
- Staff participating in restraint and seclusion techniques must be trained. Parents/caregivers should receive notice within 24 hours if restraint or seclusion techniques were used with the student. Same-day notice is preferable.
- Restraint or seclusion must end when the imminent danger of bodily harm has ended.
- If the student has been restrained or secluded consider the following options: (i) request all copies of the relevant incident reports;<sup>108</sup> (ii) request that such restraint and/or seclusion practices immediately stop; and (iii) if applicable, request an IEP/504 plan meeting for the student to implement appropriate behavioral interventions and additional services as needed.

### Addressing disciplinary challenges and steps for intervention

Address school disciplinary issues early, especially if the student is experiencing repeated school discipline issues. Adult allies and caretakers should request a meeting with the student's teacher(s), and or/other school officials to better understand the root causes of the student's behavior.

**Step 1: Gather information and identify needs.** "Disciplinary challenges may be obvious at enrollment or reveal themselves later. Early and consistent communication with the student and the adults in their life will help with a quick response when assistance is needed. Getting necessary education records will help identify the student's triggers and any successful or unsuccessful interventions used in the past."<sup>109</sup> See [Requesting Education Records Form](#). Also, remember to talk directly with the student to fully understand the cause of the behavior.

- Is the student's schoolwork too easy or too hard?
- Is the student getting along with their teacher and peers?
- Is there something else on the student's mind that is bothering the student?
- Keep in mind that school discipline issues might stem from bullying. Arizona law requires school districts to address school harassment, intimidation and bullying. Check the school district's policies on confidential reporting of bullying, required school investigation processes, and discipline of students, teachers and administrators who are found responsible for school harassment, intimidation and bullying.

**Step 2: Create a plan.** "When a student first begins to demonstrate disciplinary challenges, quickly bring together a team of key individuals (youth, parent(s), caregiver, DCS case specialist, teachers, relevant school personnel, attorney, CASA, behavioral health providers, etc.). Encourage the student to share their struggles and solutions or supports they feel would help."<sup>110</sup> Work with the student to create a plan that is both supportive and incentivizing. Focus with the student on what may have worked in the past; consider creative options such as changing the student's seating assignment or creating a self-monitoring system for the student so they can learn their triggers while also getting support in learning to regulate their own behaviors. See [Discipline Intervention Idea Bank](#).

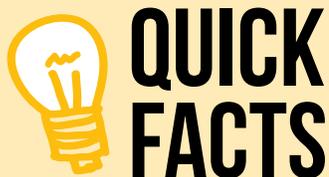
**Step 3: Track progress and check-in.** “Identify available school and outside resources and interventions and determine who will be responsible for implementing them. Use the [Discipline Intervention Plan](#) to track the provisions and success of interventions, updating as needed. Document ineffective interventions to demonstrate when more intensive services are needed.”<sup>111</sup>



### USEFUL TEMPLATES AND FORMS:

[Discipline Intervention Plan](#)

[Discipline Intervention Idea Bank](#)



- ▶ Open enrollment in the state of Arizona offers even more school choice options to students. “Arizona state law allows students to apply for admission to any public school, based on available classroom space. The law requires that school districts develop policies regarding open enrollment that may include transportation and that the policies shall be posted on the district’s website and available to the public upon request.”<sup>112</sup>
- ▶ Students who have been suspended are more likely to face retention issues and drop out. There is also a connection between suspension or expulsion and the juvenile justice system. “Students who have been suspended or expelled are three times more likely to come into contact with the juvenile probation system the following year than one who wasn’t.”<sup>113</sup>
- ▶ “According to the Arizona School Board Association, most suspensions are not for guns, drugs, or violence; only 5% of all out-of-school suspensions were considered serious or dangerous. Ninety-five percent of out-of-school suspensions were for nonviolent disruptions, with the majority being for subjective violations such as disrespect, or defiance.”<sup>114</sup>

# DISCIPLINE INTERVENTION PLAN

**STUDENT:** \_\_\_\_\_ **D.O.B.:** \_\_\_\_\_

**EXAMPLE**

Behavior to be Addressed, Including Frequency

Physical and verbal conflict with peers during passing periods 3-4 times per week including shoving, name calling, using profanity

Interventions

School counselor will meet with student to: (1) discuss appropriate behavior in the halls; (2) practice social scripts of appropriate peer interactions

Start Date/Frequency of Service

9/15/14, 2 times per week for 30 min. each session for 3 months

Name/Position of Responsible Person

Mrs. Sanchez, School Psychologist

Outcome

Counselor met with student 22 times over 12 weeks. Student was responsive to intervention. Student reduced number of peer conflicts during passing periods to 1 per week. It is recommended this service continue until youth has no conflicts with peers over a 1 month period.

**BEHAVIOR 1**

Behavior to be Addressed, Including Frequency

Interventions

Start Date/Frequency of Service

Name/Position of Responsible Person

Outcome

**BEHAVIOR 2**

Behavior to be Addressed, Including Frequency

Interventions

Start Date/Frequency of Service

Name/Position of Responsible Person

Outcome

**BEHAVIOR 3**

Behavior to be Addressed, Including Frequency

Interventions

Start Date/Frequency of Service

Name/Position of Responsible Person

Outcome

# DISCIPLINE INTERVENTION IDEA BANK

## IF A STUDENT EXHIBITS:

### Extreme Emotional Reactions

*Example:*  
Has angry outbursts.

## TRY THIS INTERVENTION:

- Behavior Support Plan.** Approach student in a calm manner, present options when possible.
- Allow for a “cooling off” period** when a student becomes upset. Allow them to do a lap around the building with a teacher.
- Teach specific coping methods** for dealing with anger (deep breathing, counting to 10, walking away).
- School-based counseling.** Give the youth a weekly, daily, or “as-needed” opportunity to speak with a trusted adult on campus.
- Develop a signal with the student** to alert teachers and administrators when they are having a bad day.

## IF A STUDENT EXHIBITS:

### Inappropriate Peer Interactions

*Example:*  
Regularly participates in off-task behaviors with group of peers.

## TRY THIS INTERVENTION:

- Group-based counseling.** Support youth to develop positive social relationships and social skills.
- Participation in group extracurricular activities.** This will give the youth an opportunity to interact with peers in the pursuit of a positive goal.
- Teach social scripts.** Have a counselor meet with the youth to role play different scenarios with peers and to plan pro-social ways to respond to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_

## IF A STUDENT EXHIBITS:

### Poor Grades and/or Standardized Test Scores

*Example:*  
Not passing a class, or scoring “below basic” on the state standardized test.

## TRY THIS INTERVENTION:

- School-based tutoring**
- Assistance with organization skills from a peer or counselor**
- Remedial classes**
- \_\_\_\_\_

## ADDITIONAL NOTES:

*Consider a special education assessment to determine if additional services and supports are appropriate. Consult a school psychologist or see Special Education and Foster Youth for more information.*



# GRADUATING AND SUCCESS



## GETTING TO THE FINISH LINE

For youth who experience foster care, due to frequent school changes, missed class time, variability in school district graduation requirements, and an overall lack of consistent adult support, many students find themselves unsure of the number of credits they have or what course they need to graduate. It's not uncommon for a student to have "junior status" while their credit accumulation is that of a freshman. According to Casey Family Programs, "it is estimated that 30-50 percent of youth exit the foster care system without a high school diploma or high school equivalent."<sup>115</sup> As a result, preparing to graduate from high school and/or obtaining a GED can be both an exciting time and also one full of questions and anxiety for many students in foster care. Students should be at the center of decision making early on and driving what they want their future to look like. This can start as early as middle school, then launch them into their high school years more prepared and informed about their options and rights. Partnership with young people requires broad support of the adult allies in their lives, communicating with them directly and the other adults on their team, assisting them in understanding what the graduation requirements are, the path(s) forward (there are often more than one), and the support and options available to get them there.



## WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW

1. There are three ways a student can complete their secondary education in Arizona:
  - A high school diploma
  - A High School Equivalency (HSE) in the form of General Education Development (GED)
  - An HSE in the form of College Credit Pathway
2. In addition to credit requirements, there are some mandatory testing requirements, such as a passing score on the AZ Civics Test. (See below under “Required Testing.”)
3. Arizona sets minimum requirements for high school graduations. Students need a minimum of 22 credits in order to graduate.
4. School districts can set their own graduation requirements- they cannot require less than what the state requires, but they can set additional requirements (“local requirements”).
  - Support the student(s) you are working with in finding and reading through the graduation requirements for the school they attend (or expect to attend). Often, this information is in the school district’s parent handbook.
  - This is a good opportunity to not only support the student in staying on track to graduate, but also to start a conversation about future hope and plans (like going to college or getting career training).
5. School districts must provide students the opportunity to take a test that demonstrates their competence in a required subject, rather than attending the class. Students have to request this opportunity.
6. There are minimum course requirements for admission to colleges and universities. Students interested in attending post-secondary education should check with the school admissions offices to make sure they are complying with those minimum requirements.
7. If the student encounters a problem with the transfer of their school records or is concerned their credits or grades have not been accurately accounted for, contact:
  - The registrar at the student’s new school district
  - If necessary, the student’s dependency attorney should be notified so that the attorney can help resolve the issue



## ACTION STEPS FOR ALLIES

1. **It is never too early or too late.** The earlier discussions about a student’s future start the more likely they are to take active steps towards the future. Even students as young as middle school can and should be discussing future goals regarding school and career. Tracking credits and Grade Point Average (**GPA**) is a great place to start with high school freshmen. When it comes to being behind on credits it is important to be honest with students but allow them to continue to set their own goals. A student with sophomore credits in their fourth year of high school can choose to continue working on their high school diploma with the right support, knowledge, and motivation.
2. **Don’t wait for grades to come to you.** It is important to track grades throughout the semester, not only when grades come in at the end. Check in with teachers about make up assignments and extra credit when there is still time in the course to make a difference and set a student up for success rather than failure.
3. **Keep the goal in mind.** When discussing goals with high school students it is helpful to be as specific as possible for the purposes of planning. If a student knows the college

# NIKKI

## YOUNG ADULT ADVOCATE



When I entered care, attention was focused on my immediate needs; things like finding a place to live and scheduling doctors' appointments. No one mentioned or seemed to be concerned about what would happen to my education. I found out weeks after it happened, that my group home had disenrolled me from my school of origin, a school I was excelling in. It was only after a staff member at the group home happened to inquire about the classes I was taking, several advanced placement courses for college credit, that they made an effort to ensure I got re-enrolled. The principal at my school made an exception for me to return given the circumstances, and a taxicab was set up for the lengthy commute. Getting re-enrolled quickly and having transportation set up was key to my school success. It was also critical that I was able to stay in the school that was going to, to help me be most successful in my future. Because the level of education you achieve is so interconnected to the outcomes you will have later in life, like finding employment and avoiding homelessness – it is important that it remains a priority for all youth who experience foster care.

they hope to attend they can track class requirements and possible scholarships to support their plan. A lot of hard work goes into high school graduation and our students should reap the benefits of what they have put in.

4. **Seek support.** Most high schools and colleges have staff in place specifically to support college applications and admission. Knowing the team and reaching out to support whenever possible will prepare students for the college experience of having to seek out and request support in a larger student population.
5. **The student is in the driver's seat.** In the semesters leading up to graduation it is important to practice a gradual release of responsibility to students when it comes to planning, organizing, and following up on their goals. In preparation for college and career ahead of them they will have to use the skills they gain in this process to become successful in reaching their goals.



## MORE TO KNOW! GETTING TO GRADUATION MATTERS

### High School Graduation

For many students, being empowered around their education starts with understanding the basic Arizona high school graduation requirements. The Arizona State Board of Education establishes the requirements for graduation from high school. The table below summarizes the **minimum** credit requirements for high school graduation in Arizona. It's very important to note, school districts and charter schools may, at their discretion, **establish additional graduation credit requirements for their students.** <sup>116</sup>

## Additional Notes to Consider:

### Mathematics

- Three credits containing course content in preparation for proficiency at the high school level on the statewide assessment and aligned to the Arizona Mathematics Standards for Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II. These three credits shall be taken beginning with the ninth grade unless a student meets these requirements prior to the ninth grade.
- The requirement for the third credit covering Algebra II, may be met by, but is not limited to the following: a math course comparable to Algebra II course content; computer science, career and technical education and vocational education, economics, science and arts courses as determined by the local school district governing board or charter school.
- The mathematics requirements may be modified for students using a [Personal Curriculum](#).

### Science

- Three credits of science in preparation for proficiency at the high school level on the statewide assessment.

### History and Social Science

- History and Social Science will minimally consist of one credit of American history; one credit world history/geography; and one-half credit of government and one-half credit of economics."<sup>117</sup>

### GED™- The General Education Development (GED)

GED™- The General Education Development (GED) is the most common way to obtain your HSE. Criteria includes:

- Students must be 18 years of age and not have received their high school diploma in order to qualify for the GED.
- Students 16 and 17 years of age may qualify, however additional requirements must be completed before being allowed to schedule the high school equivalency required test:
  - Official withdrawal from last school attended
  - Notarized and dated permission letter from parent or guardian
- In order to take the test, ALL students must provide a state ID card or government issued ID.
- There are four subject areas required to pass the GED™ test:
  - 1). Mathematical reasoning
  - 2). Reasoning Through Language Arts
  - 3). Social Studies
  - 4). Science
- A score of 145 is required for each subject in order to pass the test.

GED™ Testing Accommodations: If a student has a documented disability and requires accommodations (i.e. extra time, a quiet testing space, a reader, etc.) during the testing session, visit the frequently

## MINIMUM CREDIT REQUIREMENTS



**English or English as a Second Language** **4 CREDITS**

**Mathematics** **4 CREDITS**

**Science** **3 CREDITS**

**History & Social Science** **3 CREDITS**

**Fine Arts or Career & Technical Education** **1 CREDIT**

**Locally Prescribed Courses** **7 CREDITS**

*Summary of High School Graduation Credit Requirements - Graduating Class of 2017 Forward*



# JARON

## EDUCATION LIAISON



Helping a student in foster care keep track of their educational records and credits obtained is critical to graduating on time. I was working with a student who was a senior but deficient six credits. Within our first few meetings, we discovered she had credits from a previous school she attended that were unaccounted and not showing up on her transcript. With the help of the school transcripts specialist, we were able to find the missing transcripts from her previous school and ensure they were counted toward her graduation goal.

asked questions at the [GED Testing Services Accommodations](#) website. To request testing accommodations, follow the steps outline in the [Accommodations Guide](#).

GED™ Preparation: There are several recommended study techniques to help young people prepare for the high school equivalency test:

1. In-Person/Online Classes: State-funded Adult Education programs offer classes to help prepare for the GED test. Visit the [State-Funded Adult Education Programs](#) page to find information on accessing one of these programs throughout Arizona.
2. Studying Independently: Students can find study materials at the [GED Marketplace](#).
3. GED Ready™ Official Practice Test: Students can create a MyGED account to take a [practice test to assess](#) how likely they are to pass and receive recommendations for improving their score.

### College Credit Pathway

The College Credit Pathway is another options for adults (18 and older) looking to obtain their HSE in Arizona. Adults can earn their HSE diploma by demonstrating they have completed 25 specific college credits (along with passing the AZ Civics Test). Applicants must complete the following:

- Twenty-five specific college credits as follows:
  - English Arts- 6
  - Mathematics- 6
  - Social Studies- 3
  - Science- 4 o Computer (CIS)- 3
  - College/Career Planning-3
- All college credits must be at least 100-college level
- All college credits must have a passing letter grade of C or above
- All college credits must be earned at, accepted at, and/or validated by an Arizona accredited public community college and/or state university. A list of eligible post-secondary institutions can be found [here](#).
- Applicants must pass the Arizona Civics Test prior to submitting any documentation to ADE to qualify for the College Credit Pathway program.

Adult students interested in obtaining their HSE diploma through the College Credit Pathway program can learn more in the [Frequently Ask Questions](#) or download a [copy of the application](#).

### Required Testing

Arizona High School Diploma/High School Equivalency Testing Requirements: In addition to credit requirements, there are some mandatory testing requirements, as well as some optional requirements school districts can require. Tests include:

**Civics Test**

**Arizona Law** requires “high school graduates to pass a (60/100) civics test identical to the civics portion of the naturalization test used by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services:

- School district boards and charter school governing bodies may decide how the test is administered
- Students must correctly answer at least 60 of the 100 questions on the civics test
- Students may retake the test as many times as necessary to pass
- Schools must document a student’s passing grade on their transcript
- Students receiving special education services are exempt from obtaining a passing score unless required by an IEP

“The Civics Test provided by ADE includes the 100 civics questions from the naturalization test with most questions rewritten as multiple-choice questions. The multiple-choice questions are ordered by the grade based on test content alignment, beginning with kindergarten and ending with high school, as the statute requiring the civics test does not provide guidance regarding the grade(s) when students should be permitted to take the test. Students should have the opportunity to learn the content on the civics test before being asked to take the test. Based on the alignment of the test questions, students should have been exposed to virtually all of the test content by the end of Grade 8. It may be appropriate to offer the civics test to students as early as Grade 8. Once a student passes the civics test by answering at least 60 questions correctly, the student should not be required to take the civics test again regardless of the student’s grade level at the time the test was passed.”<sup>118</sup>



# ASHELY

## EDUCATION LIAISON

As an education liaison co-located on a high school campus, I often work closely with high school seniors. I joined the team of one student who had started and finished each year of her high school experience at a different high school. In our initial meeting, she expressed with excitement her desire to pass all of her classes, apply to college and finally stay at one high school long enough to graduate on time. With the student leading the way, we gathered all of her transcripts and reviewed each semester one by one. She quickly realized that she was missing records from an online class she took over the summer. When I compared the missing credit to her class schedule, we realized she was currently enrolled in the class for which she had already received credit. We quickly set up a meeting with her guidance counselor to rectify the scheduling and transcripts discrepancies. Her guidance counselor was incredibly appreciative that we found this error early on so that Monique could be placed in the appropriate classes needed to graduate on time. With much perseverance, drive and dedication, the student was able to graduate on time!





# QUICK FACTS

- ▶ “High school graduates earn a national average of \$8,000 more annually compared to those that do not complete high school.”<sup>121</sup>
- ▶ “Freshmen who are “on track” to graduate-earning no more than one F in a core course per semester and accumulating sufficient credits to advance to sophomore year- are four times more likely to graduate than students who are off-track.”<sup>122</sup>
- ▶ Strong relationships with adult allies can impact student achievement. Students with mentor relationships have been found to have a decrease in negative behavior such as truancy and an increase in positive outcomes such as improved grades and self-esteem.<sup>123</sup>

To help prepare for the test, view the [Civics Test and Administration Manual](#) and the list of [100 US Civics Questions](#) provided by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

AzM2 Test Passing AzM2 is not a state requirement for graduation; however, local schools may choose to develop their own academic requirements related to the AzM2 assessment. See the [AzM2](#) webpage for more information about this state level summative assessment.<sup>119</sup>

### AIMS Test

As of February 20, 2015, passing AIMS Reading, Writing and Mathematics is no longer required for graduation from high school. AIMS Science is required for students in grades 4, 8, and high school for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.<sup>120</sup>

More information and up-to-date announcements and changes in state law regarding high school graduation, HSE and testing requirements can be found on the [ADE website](#).

For more detailed guidance on post-secondary education options, financial aid, and the support students in foster care can receive to attend college and vocational programs, please see these helpful resources:

- **Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation:**
  - A Education Guide for Youth Currently and Formerly in Foster Care [https://www.affcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AFFCF\\_psguide19-20.pdf](https://www.affcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AFFCF_psguide19-20.pdf)
- **Arizona Department of Child Safety:**
  - Foster Youth Education Guide
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# APPENDIX: DCS REQUEST FOR RELEASE OF EDUCATION RECORDS



## ARIZONA DEPARTMENT of CHILD SAFETY

Mike Faust, Director  
Douglas A. Ducey, Governor

### REQUEST FOR RELEASE OF EDUCATION RECORDS

*(Child/Youth is a ward of the Court in the legal care, custody and control of the Department of Child Safety)*

To: \_\_\_\_\_  
*School or the Arizona Early Intervention Program Provider (DES/AZEIP, DES/DDD, or ASDB, and their contractors)*

Fax Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
*No., Street, City, State, ZIP*

RE: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Child(ren)'s Names and DOB*

I am a representative of the Department of Child Safety (DCS) for the above named child(ren) whom DCS is legally responsible to care for and protect under Title 8 of A.R.S., including § 8-806 and § 8-825.

Pursuant to amendments made to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in 2013 (20 U.S.C. § 1232g (b)(1)(L)), I am entitled to receive copies of education records in your possession or control for the above named child(ren). Records sought include: special education (includes early intervention evaluations, IFSPs, service logs, and comparable IDEA Part B records), discipline, attendance, assessments, medical, speech-language, academic, state or district mandated testing, immunization, birth certificate, Section 504 plans, social, psychological, and achievement records. Records you provide will not be disclosed by DCS except to an authorized individual or entity engaged in addressing the child(ren)'s educational needs, or as directed by a court.

Under state and federal law, any information you have or may obtain from DCS, including the fact that the above-named child(ren) may have been contacted or that this Request for Education Records is being made is CONFIDENTIAL. DO NOT inform anyone without a need to know of this request or otherwise disseminate confidential information regarding this matter to any person, including the parent, guardian or custodian, unless specifically authorized by applicable law or court order.

Please provide the records to me as soon as possible by:

- Mailing them to me at: \_\_\_\_\_
- Calling me at: \_\_\_\_\_  
to pick them up when they are ready. Please specify the hours you are open when you leave a message.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your cooperation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
DCS Representative's Name (*print or type*)      DCS Representative's Signature      Date

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program. The Department of Child Safety (DCS) prohibits discrimination in admissions, programs, services, activities, or employment based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetics, or retaliation or any other status protected by federal law, state law, or regulation. Reasonable accommodations to allow a person with a disability to take part in a program, service, or activity are available upon request. To request this document in alternative format or for further information about this policy contact your local office. TTY/TDD Services: 7-1-1. Free language assistance for DCS services is available upon request. Ayuda gratuita con traducciones relacionadas con los servicios del DCS esta disponible a solicitud del cliente.

CSO-1050A (08/19)

CSO-1348A  
(11/19)



## ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY BEST INTERESTS DETERMINATION & TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Provider ID \_\_\_\_\_

### Best Interests Determination: Foster Student School of Origin

Student Name (Last, First, M.I.) *PLEASE PRINT*	Current School	Grade
Parent(s)	Current Caregiver	
DCS Specialist	Local Education Agency (LEA) Point of Contact	

Remaining in the School of Origin Considerations	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Student:</b> desires to remain in school of origin
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Parent:</b> desires student to remain in school of origin
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Personal safety of the student</b> The school of origin has advantages for the safety of the student.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Student's need for special instruction</b> The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the school of origin.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>English Language Learners</b> Is the student an English Language Learner (ELL), and if so, is the school of origin equipped to meet the ELL needs or other language needs of the student.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Continuity of Instruction</b> Change in school may interrupt academic progress or result in loss of credits. The student has been in this environment for an extended period of time.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Age and connections of the student</b> Student is older, maintaining friends and contacts with peers and staff is critical to the student's school experience and participation. Student has siblings in the same school.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Academic Strength and Grade Placement</b> The student is struggling academically and is not at grade level, and is likely to fall further behind if transferred to another school.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Mobility, social and emotional state</b> The child has experienced numerous school changes, is suffering from the effects of mobility, has developed strong ties to the current school, or involved in school related or extra-curricular activities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education and/or special needs</b> The advantage of remaining in the school of origin outweighs any potential disadvantages presented by the length of the commute.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Length of anticipated stay in current placement</b> The student's current living situation continues to be uncertain. The student will benefit from the continuity offered by remaining in the school of origin.

Transferring to a New School Considerations	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Student:</b> desires to move to new school
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Parent:</b> desires student to move to new school
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Personal safety of the student</b> The new school has advantages for the safety of the student. The student has destructive or dangerous relationships at the school of origin.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Student's need for special instruction</b> The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the new school and can be implemented immediately upon entry to the new school.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>English Language Learners</b> Is the student an English Language Learner (ELL), and if so, is the new school equipped to meet the ELL needs or other language needs of the student
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Continuity of Instruction</b> Student has attended the school of origin for only a brief time. Change in school will not impact academic progress or credits earned.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Age and connections of the student</b> The student is younger or has no positive connection to a particular peer or social group, or to school staff. Student has siblings in same school and contact presents concerns.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Academic Strength and Grade Placement</b> The student's academic performance is strong and at grade level, and is likely to recover from a school transfer.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Mobility, social and emotional state</b> The child seems to be coping adequately with mobility, does not feel strong ties to the current school, or is not involved in school related or extra-curricular activities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education and/or special needs</b> The length of the commute will negatively impact the student's concentration, attitude, or readiness for school, or is inappropriate for the student's age or other reason.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Length of anticipated stay in current placement</b> The student's current living situation appears to be stable and unlikely to change. The student will benefit from developing relationships with school peers who live in his or her community school.

Best Interest School Placement  Agree  Disagree

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_  Agree  Disagree

Caregiver Signature \_\_\_\_\_  Agree  Disagree

DCS Specialist Signature \_\_\_\_\_  Agree  Disagree

Start Date \_\_\_\_\_  Agree  Disagree

Parent(s) Signature \_\_\_\_\_  Agree  Disagree

Foster Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_  Agree  Disagree

LEA Point of Contact Signature \_\_\_\_\_

~ Please continue on Page 2 ~

CSO-1348A  
(11/19)



## ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY BEST INTERESTS DETERMINATION & TRANSPORTATION PLAN

### Foster Student Transportation Plan

Student Name (Last, First, M.I.) *PLEASE PRINT*	School Name	Grade
Caregiver Name	School District	
Caregiver Relationship	School Address	
Home Address	City	State   ZIP
City	State	ZIP
LEA Point of Contact		
DCS Specialist	Email	Phone No.
DCS Specialist Supervisor	Email	Phone No.

### Transportation Method (Check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver directly to school	<input type="checkbox"/> Another responsible adult to bus stop
<input type="checkbox"/> Another responsible adult directly to school	<input type="checkbox"/> DCS provided (public or private transportation)
<input type="checkbox"/> School provided (designated bus or other service)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (explain below):
<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver to bus stop	

### Instructions

Identify the person(s) responsible for providing transportation, including name(s) and phone number(s). When transportation is provided by the school, include specific bus route information (locations, times, bus number(s)). For DCS contract transportation, include the mode (public bus pass/bus card, private cab/van, etc.) and specify the vendor name and contact information, as applicable. Include any other information necessary to ensure student safety.



Equal Opportunity Employer/Program. The Department of Child Safety (DCS) prohibits discrimination in admissions, programs, services, activities, or employment based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetics, or retaliation or any other status protected by federal law, state law, or regulation. Reasonable accommodations to allow a person with a disability to take part in a program, service, or activity are available upon request. To request this document in alternative format or for further information about this policy contact your local office. TTY/TDD Services: 7-1-1. Free language assistance for DCS services is available upon request. Ayuda gratuita con traducciones relacionadas con los servicios del DCS esta disponible a solicitud del cliente.



*Arizona Department of Child Safety*

TITLE	POLICY NUMBER	
Foster Parent Travel Reimbursement	DCS 03-16	
RESPONSIBLE AREA	EFFECTIVE DATE	REVISION
Budget and Finance/Office of Accounting	May 24, 2019	

**I. POLICY STATEMENT**

The Department of Child Safety (DCS) shall permit foster parents to apply for reimbursement of preapproved travel expenses to transport a foster child to medical treatments, visitations or another approved expense. Travel shall serve a valid public purpose, i.e. consistent with relevant statutes, rules, and policies and shall not promote the purely private or personal interests of any individual.

**II. APPLICABILITY**

This policy applies to foster parents, and licensed and unlicensed kinship caregivers who incur expenses for non-routine travel on behalf of children in DCS care. Other Department policies and procedures that are consistent with this policy and other laws, rules, technical bulletins, policies, and procedures dealing with procurement, budgeting, or accounting may also apply.

**III. AUTHORITY**

[State of Arizona Accounting Manual \(SAAM\)](#)

Topic 50, Section 95 – Reimbursement Rates

[State of Arizona Accounting Manual \(SAAM\)](#)

Topic 50, Section 25 – Meals and Incidentals

**IV. DEFINITIONS**

Arizona Financial Information System or AFIS: Business management software used by the State of Arizona to manage its business functions.

Client: Any person who receives services from the Department.

Department or DCS: The Arizona Department of Child Safety.

Foster Parent: A person who acts as parent and guardian for a child in place of the child's natural parents but without legally adopting the child. Includes licensed foster parents, and licensed and unlicensed Kinship Caregivers. Does not include licensed congregate caregivers.

Kinship Caregiver: A person who is a relative or a person who has a significant relationship with a child and acts as parent and guardian for a child in place of the child's natural parents.

Incidentals: Minor expenses associated with business travel such as tips and parking fees, and child specific items (i.e. diapers, emergency/necessary clothing, etc.).

Non-Routine Travel: Travel to non-local in-state, out-of-state or out-of-country visits, placements, or services, which typically involves additional travel expenses such as airfare and lodging.

Office of Accounting: The unit within DCS Financial Operations responsible for establishing accounting codes, allocating costs to appropriate funding sources, meeting financial reporting requirements, managing payroll, and ensuring timely payments to providers and vendors.

SAAM: State of Arizona Accounting Manual. The SAAM governs all travel costs. Available at: <https://gao.az.gov/publications/saam>.

Valid Public Purpose: The use of public monies in a manner consistent with relevant statutes, rules, and policies and in a way that does not promote the purely private or personal interests of any individual.

## V. POLICY

The Department may reimburse Foster Parents who incur out-of-pocket travel expenses including mileage, lodging, meals, and other incidentals while traveling on behalf of children in their care.

### A. Limitations to Reimbursements

1. The Department shall not reimburse expenses in excess of the actual cost incurred for lodging, meals and incidentals.
2. Allowable reimbursements are not to exceed the rates published in the [State of Arizona Accounting Manual, Topic 50, and Section 95](#).
3. Reimbursements are limited to foster parents and the foster child receiving medical treatment, attending visitation or another approved expense in excess of 50 miles from their place of residence (unless otherwise noted). If there is not a confirmed need for both foster parents to travel, only the costs for one parent will be reimbursed. Reimbursements for other family members are not permitted.
4. All requests for reimbursement must include original itemized receipts to reflect the actual amount spent, regardless of the state approved rate.

### B. Timeliness of Reimbursement Claims

1. Reimbursement forms must be filed with DCS Finance/Accounting at [CentralizedInvoicing@AZDCS.GOV](mailto:CentralizedInvoicing@AZDCS.GOV) within 90 days after the incurrence of the expense.
2. Any claim not received within 90 days after the month of travel will be considered delinquent. Delinquently filed claims must be approved by additional Department staff, require reasons for delinquent filing and may preclude future untimely claims.

### C. DCS Arranged Travel

1. Prearranged Travel for airfare, car rental and lodging is to be arranged by the DCS Travel Desk with the DCS Specialist.
2. In the case of cancellation, the traveler must notify the Department at least 48 hours beforehand.
3. The Department will not reimburse travel costs incurred by a traveler due to the traveler not complying with a cancellation policy.

### D. Education Related Travel Reimbursement

1. When a child's foster home is outside of the child's school of origin district boundary, the DCS Specialist shall work with the school, caregiver

and other members of the service team to explore transportation options to maintain the child in their school of origin.

2. When other options have been fully explored and ruled out, the DCS may consider reimbursement of travel expenses to support the child's continued enrollment in their school of origin, and to support participation in school related activities.
3. Reimbursement is only available to an unlicensed Kinship Caregiver, or a designated adult approved to provide travel for education related purposes.
4. A licensed Foster Parent providing transportation to maintain a child in their school of origin may not receive reimbursement under this policy but may be considered for assessment of a special foster care rate. See DCS Program Policy, [Chapter 4 Section 9 Foster Care Rates, Allowances and Payments](#).

### PROCEDURES

#### A. Reimbursement of Expenses

To record travel expenses incurred by foster parents on behalf of the State, and to ensure proper reimbursement of those expenses, foster parents must complete the *DCS Foster Parent Travel Reimbursement Claim* form.

#### B. Roles and Responsibilities

1. It is the responsibility of the individual seeking reimbursement to:
  - a. Obtain approval prior to travel.
  - b. Seek reimbursement only for items eligible for reimbursement.
  - c. Submit a complete and accurate *Foster Parent Travel Reimbursement Claim* form in a timely manner (forms should be filed within thirty (30) calendar days of incurrence of the expense qualifying for reimbursement, but not later than ninety (90) calendar days of incurrence of the expense qualifying for reimbursement).
2. It is the responsibility of the DCS Specialist and DCS Supervisor to:
  - a. Pre-approve travel and complete the travel preapproval form.
  - b. Ensure the claim is complete, accurate and consistent with submitted original itemized receipts and all state reimbursements

- c. Submit the completed reimbursement claim and completed pre-approval form to a Regional Resource Liaison.
    - d. Communicate any information about claims from the Office of Accounting to persons requesting reimbursements.
  3. It is the responsibility of the Regional Resource Liaison to:
    - a. Receive the completed reimbursement documentation from the DCS Specialist and verify all necessary documentation is complete.
    - b. Process documentation according to standard work practices, and enter units for reimbursement.
    - c. Notify Centralized Invoicing of the reimbursement and provide all necessary documentation.
    - d. For designated adults approved to provide transportation for educational purposes, receive and process information provided on the W9 Form to build the designated adult into the CHILDS Provider Registry to receive payment.
  4. It is the responsibility of the Office of Accounting to:
    - a. Confirm eligibility of claimed reimbursements.
      - i. Verify the rates do not exceed the state approved maximum.
      - ii. For educational transportation, also verify the foster parent is unlicensed.
    - a. Pay eligible claims.
    - b. Reject claims that are not complete, accurate, or in compliance with Statewide policies and communicate this information to the Regional Liaison.

### C. Documentation

1. Preapproval via the *Foster Parent Pre-Authorization for Travel* form is required prior to travel.
  - a. If prearranged travel accommodations are necessary, approval should be obtained through the Travel Desk by following the directions on this form.
  - b. This form should be retained in the case file until all travel has been completed and submitted to the Regional Resource Liaison as part of the reimbursement documentation.
2. The Regional Resource Liaison shall submit the approved *Foster Parent Travel Reimbursement Claim* form with original itemized receipts to DCS Finance/Accounting at [CentralizedInvoicing@AZDCS.GOV](mailto:CentralizedInvoicing@AZDCS.GOV).
3. The DCS Specialist retains copies of pre-authorization form, claim form and original itemized receipts until reimbursement is received.

### D. Review of Filed Claims

The DCS Specialist reviews the submitted claim for accuracy, non-duplication and the appropriate approvals and:

1. Returns claims that are incomplete, duplicative, or lacking the appropriate approvals.
2. Routes the claim to the Program Administrator if over 90 days old from the time of expense.
3. Notifies the claimant if the claim is not approved.

### E. Travel Reimbursement for Education Related Activities

When an unlicensed kinship caregiver is approved to provide assistance transporting the child to and/or from their school of origin, the DCS Specialist will complete the following:

1. Verify the number of roundtrip miles anticipated.
2. Explain that reimbursement is limited to the miles accrued to transport the child to and from school and school related activities (including return mileage when the child is not in the vehicle), and is limited to the current per mile state rate.
3. Provide and review the DCS *Foster Parent Pre-Authorization for Travel-DCS-1861A* form and *DCS Foster Parent Reimbursement Claim* form, instructions and process for submittal.

- a. Unlicensed kinship caregivers providing transportation must provide verification of a valid driver's license, current vehicle registration and insurance to the DCS Specialist or designee prior to providing transportation, and every six months thereafter as long as the person is providing transportation. Separate forms and verifications are required for each adult, if more than one adult is approved to provide transportation.
- b. Education related reimbursement will occur within 30 days of receipt of a complete and accurate claim with all necessary approvals. Reimbursement Claims must be submitted for full months and may not include trips for multiple months.
- c. Every 6 months, a new DCS Foster Parent Pre-Authorization for Travel form must be submitted, reviewed, and approved.

### VII. FORMS INDEX

*DCS Foster Parent Pre-Authorization for Travel DCS-1861A*

*DCS Foster Parent Reimbursement Claim DCS-1862A*

## Glossary of Acronyms and Terms

### **A Autism**

A developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction and that adversely affects educational performance. Characteristics include irregularities and impairments in communication, engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines and unusual responses to sensory experiences. [A.R.S. § 15-761(1)]

### **ADC Annual Data Collection**

One of two major data collections overseen by ESS Data Management annually; this includes several agency and school-level reports: Preschool Transition, Parentally Placed Private School Students, Discipline, and Exit.

### **ADE Arizona Department of Education**

Supervised by a publicly elected state Superintendent of Public Instruction, the ADE oversees the K–12 public education system in Arizona, providing for the students of Arizona a uniform public school system including kindergarten schools, common schools, high schools, and normal schools.

### **AELAS Arizona Education Learning & Accountability System**

A comprehensive statewide data system to collect, compile, maintain, and report student-level data for students attending public education institutions.

### **APR Annual Performance Report**

Report on the performance of local education agencies (LEAs) based on established targets defined in the State Performance Plan (SPP).

### **A.R.S. Arizona Revised Statutes**

State laws and regulations governed by the executive departments and agencies of the state government.

### **AzEDS Arizona Educational Data Standards**

The data standard for the AELAS; a common language and process to streamline communication using CEDS being adopted by education systems across the nation to simplify the exchange of data between LEAs and their state agencies.

### **AzEIP Arizona Early Intervention Program**

Statewide interagency system of early intervention services for families of children birth to three with disabilities or developmental delays and governed by Part C of IDEA.

### **AzM2 (Formerly AzMERIT) Arizona Measurement of Education Readiness to Inform Teaching**

AzM2 is Arizona's statewide achievement test for English Language Arts and Mathematics.

### **CEDS Common Education Data Standards**

Key set of education data elements to streamline the exchange, comparison, and understanding of data within and across educational institutions and sectors.

**C.F.R. Code of Federal Regulations**

The codification of the general and permanent rules and regulations published in the *Federal Register* by the executive departments and agencies of the federal government.

**CTDS County – Type – District – School/Site**

A 9-digit identifier assigned to entities, including PEAs/LEAs, that do business with ADE.

**DB Deaf-Blindness**

A condition of little or no useful sight and little or no useful hearing.

**DD Developmental Delay**

Performance by a child who is at least three years of age but under ten years of age on a norm-referenced test that measures at least one and one-half, but not more than three, standard deviations below the mean for children of the same chronological age in two or more of the following areas:

- Cognitive development
- Physical development
- Communication development
- Social or emotional development
- Adaptive development

The results of the norm-referenced measure must be corroborated by the information from a comprehensive development assessment and from parental input, if available, as measured by a judgment-based assessment or survey. If there is a discrepancy between the measures, the evaluation team shall determine eligibility based on a preponderance of the information presented. [A.R.S. § 15-761(3)]

**DDC Discipline Data Collection**

The data system used by ESS to collect, track, and report disciplinary incident data for students with disabilities. Data collected is used to satisfy federal reporting requirements within the Annual Special Education Discipline Report.

**DOA District of Attendance**

The PEA/LEA where the student attends to receive educational and/or special education services and is identified with a DOR outside of the PEA/LEA. These students are commonly referred to as tuitioned-in students.

**DOR District of Residence**

The PEA/LEA where a student resides, regardless of where he/she attends to receive educational and/or special education services. This includes students attending sites within PEA/LEA, tuitioned-out students, and students attending sites outside of PEA/LEA.

**ED Emotional Disability**

- a) A condition whereby a child exhibits one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects the child’s performance in the educational environment:
  - i. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors.

- ii. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
  - iii. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
  - iv. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
  - v. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.
- b) Includes children who are schizophrenic but does not include children who are socially maladjusted unless they are also determined to have to have an emotional disability as determined by evaluation as provided in section 15-766. [A.R.S. § 15-761(7)]

**EID Entity ID**

A unique numeric identifier assigned in conjunction with the CTDS to all entities that do business with ADE.

**EL English Learners**

Formerly referred to as limited English proficient (LEP), this term refers to students receiving services of language assistance with English as a second language.

**EOD Educational Organization Directory**

A directory that stores organizational, operational, and legislative details for all entities that do business with ADE.

**ESS Exceptional Student Services**

The unit within the ADE that provides a system of supports that wraps around educators to improve student outcomes—academically, behaviorally, functionally.

**FAQ Frequently Asked Questions**

Listed questions and answers, commonly asked in some context, and pertaining to a particular topic.

**FERPA Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act**

A federal law that gives parents access to their child’s educational records, an opportunity to seek to have records amended, and some control over the disclosure of information from the records.

**FFY Federal Fiscal Year**

The accounting period for the federal government that begins on July 1 and ends on July 1. The fiscal year is designated by the calendar year in which it ends; for example, fiscal year 2019 begins on July 1, 2018 and ends on June 30, 2019. Congress passes appropriations legislation to fund the government for every fiscal year.

**FPNI Federal Primary Need Indicator**

Identifies the disability category that has the greatest adverse impact on a special education student’s ability to access and progress through the general curriculum.

**FTE Full-Time Equivalency**

A unit of measurement that indicates the workload of an employed person in a way that makes workloads comparable across various contexts.

**FY Fiscal Year**

A period used for calculating annual financial statements in businesses and other organizations, including government. The fiscal year for the Arizona Department of Education begins on July 1 and ends on June 30.

**HI Hearing Impairment**

A loss of hearing acuity, as determined by evaluation pursuant to section 15-766, that interferes with a child's performance in the educational environment and requires the provision of special education and related services. [A.R.S. § 15-761(8)]

**ID Intellectual Disability**

A significant impairment of the general intellectual functioning that exists concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and that adversely affects the child's performance in the educational environment. [A.R.S. § 15-761(13)]

**IAES Interim Alternative Educational Setting**

An appropriate setting determined by the child's IEP team or a hearing officer in which the child is placed for no more than 45 school days. This setting enables the child to receive educational services and participate in the general curriculum (although in another setting) and to progress towards meeting the goals set out in the IEP. As appropriate, the setting includes a functional behavioral assessment and behavioral intervention services and modifications to address the behavior violation so that it does not recur.

**IDEA Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

The federal law that governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to students with disabilities.

**IEP Individualized Education Program**

Legal document mandated by IDEA that defines the individualized goals of a child who has been found to have a disability, as defined by federal regulations. [20 U.S.C. 1401 and 1412; A.R.S. § 15-761(11)]

**ISP Individualized Service Plan**

A plan for parentally-placed children that attend private/parochial schools or home schools located within the resident district boundaries who are eligible to receive special services from the resident district.

**ISS In-School Suspension**

Instances in which a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular classroom(s) for disciplinary reasons but remains under the direct supervision of school personnel. Direct supervision means school personnel are physically in the same location as the students under their supervision.

**IT Information Technology**

Application of computers and telecommunications to store, retrieve, transmit, and manipulate data, often in the context of business or other enterprise.

**LEA Local Education Agency**

A commonly used synonym for a school district or charter school, an entity which operates local public primary and secondary schools.

**LEP Limited English Proficiency**

See EL.

**LRE Least Restrictive Environment**

The opportunity for students with disabilities to be educated with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate that provides access to the general curriculum or any other program that nondisabled peers would be able to access.

**MD Multiple Disabilities**

Learning and developmental problems resulting from multiple disabilities as determined by evaluation pursuant to section 15-766 that cannot be provided for adequately in a program designed to meet the needs of children with less complex disabilities. Multiple disabilities include any of the following conditions that require the provision of special education and related services:

- a) Two or more of the following conditions:
  - i. Hearing impairment
  - ii. Orthopedic impairment
  - iii. Moderate intellectual disability
  - iv. Visual impairment
- b) A child with a disability listed in subdivision (a) of this paragraph existing concurrently with a condition of mild intellectual disability, emotional disability or specific learning disability. [A.R.S. § 15-761(17)]

**MDSSI Multiple Disabilities with Severe Sensory Impairment**

Multiple disabilities that include at least one of the following:

- a) Severe visual impairment or severe hearing impairment in combination with another severe disability
- b) Severe visual and severe hearing impairment [A.R.S. § 15-761(18)]

**MIID Mild Intellectual Disability**

Performance on standard measures of intellectual and adaptive behavior between two and three standard deviations below the mean for children of the same age. [A.R.S. § 15-761(14)]

**MOID Moderate Intellectual Disability**

Performance on standard measures of intellectual and adaptive behavior between three and four standard deviations below the mean for children of the same age. [A.R.S. § 15-761(15)]

**MSAA Multi-State Alternate Assessment**

A comprehensive assessment system designed to promote increasing higher academic outcomes for students with significant cognitive disabilities in preparation for a broader array of post-secondary outcomes.

**NPO Non-Public Organization**

Organizations that can do business with educational entities in their day-to-day operation. These entities are not considered as bearing a primary responsibility to the public and operate in a variety of capacities such as private businesses, private schools, educational support programs, and miscellaneous entities.

**OHI Other Health Impairment**

Limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, due to chronic or acute health problems that adversely affect a pupil's educational performance. [A.R.S. § 15-761(20)]

**OI Orthopedic Impairment**

One or more severe orthopedic impairments and includes those that are caused by congenital anomaly, disease and other causes, such as amputation or cerebral palsy, and that adversely affects a child's performance in the educational environment. [A.R.S. § 15-761(19)]

**OSEP Office of Special Education Programs**

The federal agency responsible for ensuring states' compliance with the IDEA.

**OSS Out-of-School Suspension**

Instances in which a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular school for disciplinary purposes to another setting (i.e., home, behavior center). This includes both removals in which no IEP services are provided because this removal is 10 days or less, as well as removals in which the child continues to receive services according to his/her IEP.

**OT Occupational Therapist**

Provides the following services to students with disabilities:

- improving, developing, or restoring functions impaired or lost through illness, injury, or deprivation;
- improving ability to perform tasks for independent functioning, if functions are impaired or lost; and
- preventing, through early intervention, initial or further impairment or loss of function.

**PEA Public Education Agency**

Defined the same as LEA except this term also includes secure care facilities and state institutions. [A.R.S. § 15-761(26)]

**PL Public Law**

The part of law that governs relationships between individuals and government, and those relationships between individuals which are of direct concern to society.

**PSD Preschool Severe Delay**

Performance by a preschool child on a norm-referenced test that measures more than three standard deviations below the mean for children of the same chronological age in one or more of the following areas:

- a) Cognitive development
- b) Physical development
- c) Communication development

- d) Social or emotional development
- e) Adaptive development

The results of the norm-referenced measure must be corroborated by information from a comprehensive developmental assessment or survey. If there is a discrepancy between the measures, the evaluation team shall determine eligibility based on a preponderance of the information presented. [A.R.S. § 15-761(24)]

### **PT Physical Therapist**

Provides the following services to students with disabilities:

- screening, evaluation, and assessment of children to identify movement dysfunction;
- obtaining, interpreting, and integrating information appropriate to program planning to prevent, alleviate, or compensate for movement dysfunction and related functional problems; and
- providing individual and group services or treatment to prevent, alleviate, or compensate for movement dysfunction and related functional problems.

### **RTC Residential Treatment Center**

A live-in health care facility providing therapy for substance abuse, mental illness, or other behavioral problems.

### **SBI Serious Bodily Injury**

A bodily injury that involves substantial risk of death; extreme physical pain; protracted and obvious disfigurement; or protracted loss or impairment of the function of a bodily member, organ, or faculty.

### **SEA State Education Agency**

A formal governmental label for the state-level government agencies within each U.S. state responsible for providing information, resources, and technical assistance on educational matters to schools and residents.

### **SID Severe Intellectual Disability**

Performance on standard measures of intellectual and adaptive behavior measures at least four standard deviations below the mean for children of the same age. [A.R.S. § 15-761(29)]

### **SIS Student Information System**

A data management system obtainable through several vendors to assist districts and charter schools in managing and reporting their data to ADE. (Interchangeable with SMS)

### **SLD Specific Learning Disability**

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. Disorders include such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Disorders do not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disabilities, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. [20 United States Code § 1401]

**SLDS Statewide Longitudinal Data System**

A state-level data system capable of tracking student data over multiple years and multiple schools.

**SLI Speech/Language Impairment**

- a) For a preschool child: performance on a norm-referenced language test that measures at least one and one-half standard deviations below the mean for children of the same chronological age or whose speech, out of context, is unintelligible to a listener who is unfamiliar with the child. Eligibility for a preschool child is appropriate only when a comprehensive developmental assessment and parental input indicate that the preschool child is not eligible for services under another preschool category or under the developmental delay category. If there is a discrepancy between the measures, the evaluation team shall determine eligibility based on a preponderance of the information presented.
- b) For a child who has reached the required age for kindergarten: a speech or language impairment as defined in 34 C.F.R. § 300.8. [A.R.S. § 15-761(34)]

A communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8 (c)(11)]

**SLP Speech Language Pathologist**

Provides the following services to children with disabilities:

- identification of children with speech or language impairments;
- diagnosis and appraisal of specific speech or language impairments;
- referral for medical or other professional attention necessary for the habilitation of speech or language impairments;
- provision of speech and language services for the habilitation or prevention of communicative impairments; and
- counseling and guidance of parents, children, and teachers regarding speech and language impairments.

**SLPA Speech Language Pathology Assistant**

Performs tasks as prescribed, directed, and supervised by an SLP; these tasks include following documented treatment plans, documenting patient/client performance, assistance with clerical duties, scheduling and record keeping, and collecting data. In Arizona, SLPAs have a license from the Department of Health Services, but do not hold a certificate from the ADE.

**SMS Student Management System**

A data management system obtainable through a number of vendors to assist districts and charter schools in managing and reporting their data to ADE. (Interchangeable with SIS)

**SPED Special Education**

Education programs for students with disabilities.

**SPP State Performance Plan**

Evaluation of the state's implementation of IDEA Part B and improvement of implementation.

**SWD Students with Disabilities**

A student with a consequence of an impairment that may be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, developmental, or some combination of these.

**TBI Traumatic Brain Injury**

An acquired injury to the brain that is caused by an external physical force and that results in total or partial functional disability or impairment, or both, that adversely affects educational performance. Applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in mild, moderate or severe impairments in one or many areas, including cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem solving, sensory, perceptual and motor abilities, psychosocial behavior, physical functions, information processing and speech. Does not include brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative or brain injuries induced by birth trauma. [A.R.S. § 15-761(38)]

**UE Ungraded Elementary**

Students with disabilities receiving group B services must be at least 5 years old but less than 6 by September 1 and have an IEP that supports the necessity for a full-time instructional program of 712 hours per year.

**U.S.C. United States Code**

Official compilation and codification of the general and permanent federal statutes of the United States.

**VI Visual Impairment**

An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance; includes both partial sight and blindness. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8]

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