

2018-2020 Policy Priorities

GOAL: Ensuring educational equity for foster youth through consistent application of specialized general education rights, decreasing the number of school changes for foster youth, and promoting placement stability.

Background: In California, since 2004, students have had the right to stay in their school of origin, defined as the school the child was attending when they entered foster care, or the school they last attended, or any school they attended within the last 15 months. In recent years, the federal government codified school of origin rights as part of Every Student Succeeds Act, and added the right to transportation to make continued attendance at a student's school of origin possible.

California identifies foster youth as one of three "at risk" sub-groups under the Local Control Funding Formula, recognizing their educational needs, and schools now are held accountable for the education outcomes and achievement gaps experienced by students in foster care. Nevertheless, students in foster care in California change schools an average of eight times while they are in care, losing four to six months of their educational progress with each move. This, along with inconsistent application of their other general education rights, means that students in foster care consistently demonstrate the poorest outcomes of any student group.

The Alliance for Children's Rights calls for these changes:

- Child welfare organizations should comply with the federal mandate to take school stability into account when making foster care placement decisions, and should embrace technology improvements that facilitate this.
- A default rule should be developed as to which entity must pay for transportation to school of origin for students in foster care.
- Efforts to recruit and retain stable foster family homes, including the homes of relatives, should be redoubled, in order to avoid the placement instability that results in school instability, and provide adequate financial, medical, and behavioral support for vulnerable children and their caregivers.
- We must raise awareness of the educational achievement gap for students in foster care and advance policies that improve school achievement.

Policy Statement: The Alliance for Children's Rights supports the development of laws and policies that promote the education of foster youth, ensure that foster youth maintain their right to remain at their school of origin and require state minimum graduation and partial credit laws to be applied equally to all foster, probation, and homeless youth attending any public school, including charter and juvenile court schools.

The Alliance State and Local Policy Action Plan Includes:

- Supporting AB 2121 (Caballero), which requires charter schools to comply with existing statutory requirements supporting educational outcomes for highly mobile student populations including foster youth;
- Supporting AB 2691 (Jones-Sawyer), which establishes the Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative within the California Department of Education (CDE) to address the impact of adverse childhood experiences on the educational outcomes of California pupils;
- Leading a California Collaborative for Educational Excellence professional learning network of six school districts in development and implementation of policies that are legally compliant, practical, and applied consistently at the local level;
- Partnering with key education, welfare, and dependency organizations throughout the state to train school districts on legal standards and best practices described in the ACR Foster Youth

Education Toolkit, and providing additional training with a Court Companion for those in the court system;

- Engaging with Los Angeles County and other key partners to develop a comprehensive school of origin transportation plan that suits the diverse needs of the largest county in the state, and
- Working at the local and state levels to determine key factors for tracking students in foster care in the education system; developing tools for making accurate tracking possible; encouraging statewide aggregation of the data; and sharing the data and its significance widely to develop a broad coalition of those committed to improving the achievement gap for students in foster care.