



EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY PARTICIPANT GUIDE



Educational Advocacy Toolkit



Missouri Foster Care Education Bill of Rights

Senate Bill 291 (2009) created sections 167.018 and 167.019, RSMo, otherwise known as the “Foster Care Education Bill of Rights.” These laws require public school districts and child placing agencies to ensure foster children don’t fall through the cracks when it comes to receiving an education.

§ 168.018, RSMo

Section 168.018, RSMo, requires each school district to designate a staff member as “the educational liaison” for children in foster care. Acting in an advisory capacity, the educational liaison is required to:

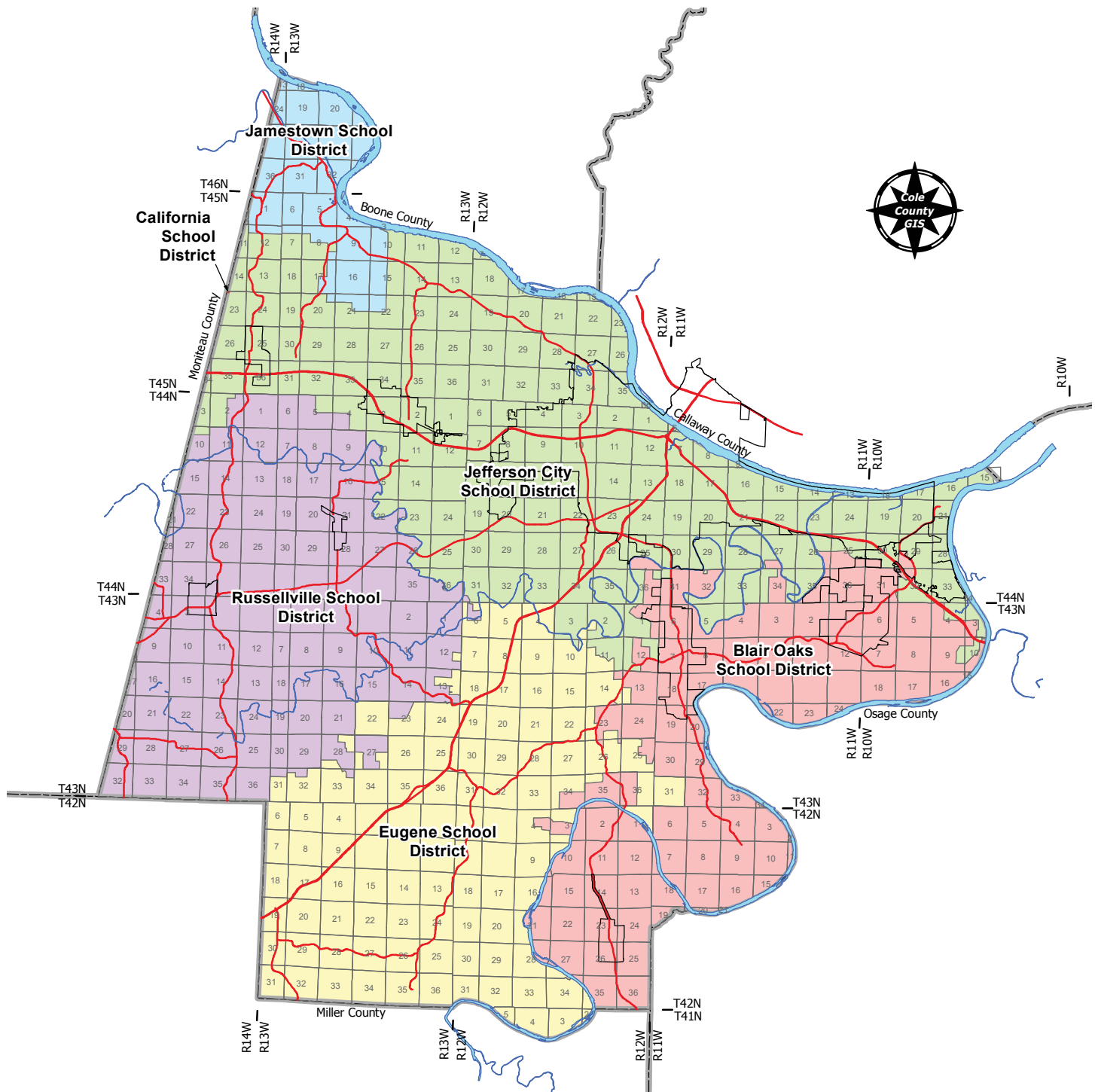
1. Ensure and facilitate the proper educational placement, enrollment in school and checkout from school of foster children;
2. Assist foster care students when transferring from one school or district to another, by ensuring proper transfer of credits, records and grades;
3. Request school records of a foster care student pursuant to section 167.022, within two (2) business days of a foster care student’s placement in a school, and
4. Submit school records of foster care students within three (3) business days of receiving a request for a foster care student’s records.

§ 167.019, RSMo

Section 167.019, RSMo, requires a child placing agency, as defined in section 210.481, RSMo, to promote the educational stability of foster children. The child placing agency must take into consideration the foster child’s school attendance area when placing the child. This section further defines the right of foster children in regard to their continuing education:

1. A foster child has the right to remain enrolled in and attend his or her school of origin or to return to a previously attended school in an adjacent district.
2. The school district shall accept for credit full or partial course work satisfactorily completed by a foster care student while attending a public school, non-public school, or non-sectarian school in accordance with district policy or procedure.
3. A foster care student’s school district of residence shall issue a diploma to a foster care student under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court providing the student completes the district’s graduation requirements.
4. A school district shall ensure that if a foster care student is absent from school because of a change in placement made by a court or child placing agency, or because of a verified court-appearance or court-ordered activity, the grades and credits of the foster care student shall be calculated as of the date the student left school, and the student’s grades shall not be lowered as a consequence of the absence.
5. Subject to federal law, school districts shall permit access of foster care student records to any child placing agency for the purpose of fulfilling educational case management responsibilities required by a juvenile officer or by law and to assist with the school transfer and placement of a student.

Cole County School Districts



Jefferson City Public Schools

Belair Elementary	(573) 659-3155
Cedar Hill Elementary	(573) 659-3160
East Elementary	(573) 659-3165
Lawson Elementary	(573) 659-3175
Moreau Heights Elementary	(573) 659-3180
Pioneer Trail Elementary	(573) 632-3400
South Elementary	(573) 659-3185
Thorpe Gordon Elementary	(573) 659-3170
West Elementary	(573) 659-3195
Lewis and Clark Middle School	(573) 659-3200
Thomas Jefferson Middle School	(573) 659-3250
Simonsen 9th Grade Center	(573) 659-3125
Jefferson City High School	(573) 659-3050

Cole R-I Russellville Public Schools

Russellville Elementary	(573) 782-4814
Russellville Middle School	(573) 782-4915
Russellville High School	(573) 782-3313

Cole R-II Blair Oaks Public Schools

Blair Oaks Elementary	(573) 636-2020
Blair Oaks Middle School	(573) 634-2053
Blair Oaks High School	(573) 635-8514

Cole R-V Eugene Public Schools

Eugene Elementary	(573) 498-4002
Eugene High School	(573) 498-4000

Private/Parochial Schools

Calvary Lutheran School	(573) 638-0228
Concord Christian School	(573) 634-3983
Helias High School	(573) 635-6139
Immaculate Conception School	(573) 636-7680
Immanuel Lutheran School	(573) 496-3766
Lighthouse Preparatory Academy	(573) 645-5253
St. Francis Xavier School	(573) 395-4612
St. Joseph School	(573) 635-5024
St. Martins School	(573) 893-3519
St. Peter School	(573) 636-8922
St. Stanislaus School	(573) 636-7802
St. Thomas School	(573) 477-3322
Trinity Lutheran School	(573) 636-7807

Welcome

Once you have equipped yourself with the tools you need to do the job of advocating for your CASA child, you can move forward and be the everyday hero that your child deserves. An advocate is someone who uses compassion, integrity, and justice to stand up for what is in the best interest of the child or children in each case. We call this **The CASA Way**.

The CASA Way!

We have an uncompromising belief that we can achieve what others think is impossible and that each of us is an essential part of the solution.



Icons Used In This Book



This icon alerts you to any **laws, regulations or codes** that apply to the subject of the toolkit.



The **tool** icon gives you just what it says, tools to make your advocacy a bit easier.



Don't forget these quick **tips** that make complicated issues more understandable.



WHAT WOULD AN ADVOCATE DO?

That pretty much says it all.

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EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY

TOOLKIT

This Educational Advocacy Toolkit was specifically developed to help CASA volunteers ensure that all of their CASA children receive an education that meets their individual needs, which may involve a wide range of services to meet each child's educational goals. This toolkit looks at how the education and child welfare systems intersect and provides you with the information and tools to help you make a difference in your CASA child's education.

The goal of this toolkit to provide you with the knowledge and tools you need to identify education-related challenges experienced by your CASA child and to advocate effectively to overcome them. The toolkit is organized in topic areas such as Things You Need to Know about Schools, School Placement, Day to Day Educational Advocacy, Special Education and Section 504. The toolkit is deliberately brief and simplified; wherever possible, resources are noted should you need or want to explore additional information.



This toolkit was adapted from the Texas CASA Fierce Advocate Series and the Iowa Educational Advocacy toolkit to offer Capital City CASA volunteers a set of tools that will help them be that everyday hero these children need.

CHAPTER 1

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Chapter at a Glance:

- The Role of Education in the Lives of Children
- Why is Educational Advocacy So Important?
- Challenges with Placement and Stability
- Defining Educational Neglect
- The Impact of Childhood Trauma
- The Loss of Familiarity
- The Need for Normality

Facts About Youth in Foster Or Out-of-Home Care

What We Know:

Poor educational outcomes often lead to poor employment outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care.

Nationally, each year 29,000 young people transition from foster care to self-sufficiency when they turn 18. Of those:

- *25% do not have a high school diploma or GED*
- *6% will finish a 2 or 4 year college but 70% have the desire to attend college*
- *Only 17% will be completely self-supporting*

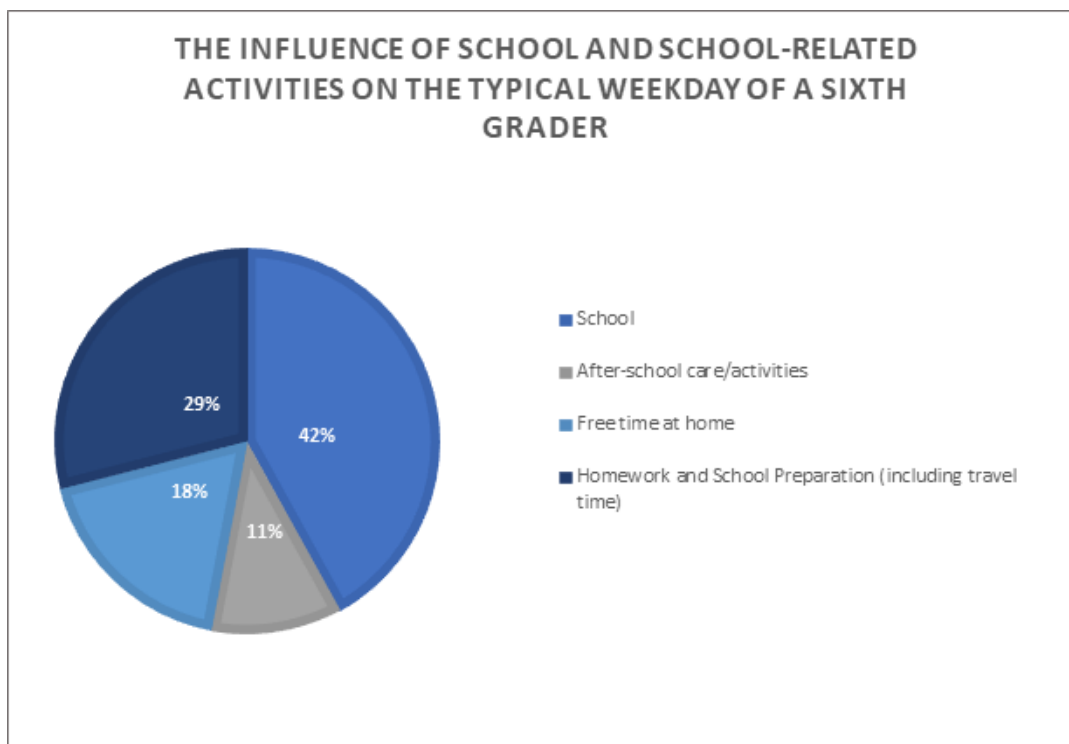
Source: Educators Making a Difference for Students - IFAPA

The Role of Education in the Lives of Children

School plays an enormous role in the lives of children; it's all-encompassing...

- ✓ *Morning routine—choosing an outfit, lunch money, permission slips, sports equipment, musical instruments...*
- ✓ *Socialization on the bus or walking to school...*
- ✓ *Spending the day with adults (teachers, counselors, administrators, coaches) who, hopefully, are nurturing their students and encouraging them to expand their minds and positively interact with their classmates. Students work in cooperative learning groups, deal with social problems in class, at breakfast and lunch, on the playground...*
- ✓ *After school depending on their age, children go to some kind of practice, club meeting, after-school care with kids from their and other schools. More adults have influence on their lives—coaches, tutors, mentors...*
- ✓ *At home, family wants to talk during dinnertime about everything that happened at school that day. Then there's homework to finish for the next day and/or talking or texting friends about what happened at school that day...*

School is a place where children learn what they're good at and what is challenging for them. They learn **how** they learn best. They develop the foundation for more complex analytical and communication skills. They learn how to relate to others, how to compromise, and how to get along with different personalities. The foundation is laid during a child's school years for how they conduct themselves as adults.



adapted from *Advocating for Educational Needs of Children in Out-of-Home Care*, CO Dept of Human Services

Why is Educational Advocacy So Important?

Children in foster or substitute care may have unique educational needs. As a CASA volunteer, you should be aware of how contact with the child welfare system could potentially affect a child's education.

Challenges with Placement and Stability

Children who grow up in the child welfare system face a number of obstacles and challenges related to their ability to access a high quality education and attain their educational goals. This situation is the result of a number of things:

- Frequent school changes as the children move from home to home and sometimes community to community
- Cross-system breakdowns that prevent smooth transitions between homes and schools
- Deficits in school readiness as a result of frequently traumatic and/or neglectful home experiences prior to entering foster care
- Higher rates of school dropout, truancy and disciplinary issues than their peers
- Lack of a consistent education advocate to ensure that the children receive all necessary services and supports



That's where you come in.

Defining Educational Neglect

(The following is information from Chapter 32, MO Dept of Social Services Child Welfare Manual)



Educational neglect is the failure by the person responsible for the care, custody, and control of the child to provide an appropriate education and to promote school attendance as required by Missouri Law, Section 167.031 RSMo., requiring all children ages 7 up to 17 to attend school, except that any child who has successfully completed 16 credits toward high school graduation is not required to attend, therefore does not meet the criteria for educational neglect. Children ages 5 and 6 are required to attend school when they have been enrolled in a public school by their parent or guardian.

The Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline Unit may take reports of educational neglect for children up to the age of 17.

Educational neglect must be differentiated from truancy (a status offense):

- When a child is continuously absent from school through intent or neglect of the parent or caretaker, there is educational neglect.
- When a child is absent through his own intent, this is truancy and not reportable as child abuse/neglect.

Indicators/Characteristics of Educational Neglect

Indicators of educational neglect include the following:

- A child being held responsible for the care of other children during the school day while the parent works
- A parent who is unable to get the child fed and dressed in time to attend school
- Failure of parent to obtain and/or cooperate with special or remedial instruction for the child when recommended and provided by the school and the child is not succeeding in current class placement

Trauma's Impact on School Success

Trauma can wreak havoc on a child's ability to learn. Children who have been repeatedly subjected to trauma suffer from other social, psychological, cognitive and biological issues, including difficulty regulating their emotions, paying attention, and forming positive relationships--all which make it very difficult for a child to succeed in school.

Many of the children for whom we advocate suffer from complex trauma, which occurs through repeated and prolonged exposure to trauma-inducing situations, **most of which occur in a care-giving situation**. When a child can't rely on a close caregiver for comfort and safety--whether due to the caregiver's own emotional suffering or because the caregiver is the source of the trauma--that child's ability to metabolize and recover from toxic stress is seriously hampered. With trauma, symptoms can go largely unrecognized because they present like other problems: frustration, acting out, difficulty concentrating, following directions, or working in a group. Children can be misdiagnosed with anxiety, behavior disorders, or attention disorders rather than recognized as having trauma that's driving those symptoms and reactions.

Once trauma is identified as the root of the behavior, approaches can be adapted to help kids when they're at school. The following are some tips offered by Caelan Soma, Detroit-based regional director for the National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children, for understanding and supporting kids who have been through trauma:

- **Children who have been through trauma worry about what's going to happen next.** A daily routine can be calming, so teachers should try to provide structure and predictability whenever possible. Since words may not sink in for children who go through trauma, they may need other sensory cues as well (for example, a posted sign or a storyboard that shows which activity the class will do next and when).
- **Try not to judge the trauma.** Caring teachers may unintentionally project that a situation isn't really that bad, but how the child feels about the stress is what matters most. "We have to remember it's the perception of the child [...] The situation is something they have no control over, feeling that their life or safety is at risk," says Soma. It may not even be just one event but the culmination of chronic stress, which can cause trauma. "Anything that keeps our nervous system activated for longer than four to six weeks is defined as post-traumatic stress," says Soma.
- **You don't need to know exactly what caused the trauma to be able to help.** Instead of focusing on the specifics of the trauma, teachers and caring adults can concentrate on the support they can give children who are suffering. "Stick with what you are seeing now--the hurt, the anger, the worry," Soma says, rather than getting every detail of the child's story. Privacy is a big issue in working with students suffering from trauma, and schools usually have a confidentiality protocol that teachers must follow. You don't have to dig deep into the trauma to be able to effectively respond with empathy and flexibility.

- *Kids who experience trauma need to feel they're good at something and can influence the world.* Find opportunities that allow kids to set and achieve goals, and they'll feel a sense of mastery and control, says Soma. Assign them jobs in the classroom they can do well or let them be a peer helper to someone else. "It is very empowering," says Soma. "Set them up to succeed and keep that bar in the zone where you know they are able to accomplish it and move forward." Rather than saying a student is good at math, find experiences to let them *feel* it. Because trauma is such a sensory experience, kids need more than encouragement--they need to feel their worth through concrete tasks.
- *There's a direct connection between stress and learning.* When kids are stressed, it's tough for them to learn. Teachers can create a safe, accepting environment in their classrooms by letting children know they're understood and supported. "Kids who have experienced trauma have difficulty learning unless they feel safe and supported," says Soma. "The more the teacher can do to make the child less anxious and have the child focus on the task at hand, the better the performance you are going to see out of that child. There is a direct connection between lowering stress and academic outcomes."
- *Self-regulation can be a major challenge for students suffering from trauma.* Some kids with trauma are growing up with emotionally unavailable parents and haven't learned to self-soothe, so they may develop distracting behaviors and have trouble staying focused for long periods. To help them cope, schedule regular brain breaks. Tell the class at the beginning of the day when there will be breaks--for free time, to play a game, or to stretch. "If you build it in before the behavior gets out of whack, you set the child up for success," says Soma. A child may be able to make it through a 20-minute block of work if it's understood there will be a break to recharge before the next task.
- *It's OK to ask kids point-blank what you can do to help them make it through the day.* For all students with trauma, you can ask them directly what you can do to help. They may ask to listen to music with headphones or put their head on their desk for a few minutes. Soma says, "We have to step back and ask them, 'How can I help? Is there something I can do to help you feel even a little bit better?'"
- *Teachers can support kids with trauma even when they're outside the classroom.* Loop in the larger school. Share trauma-related strategies with all staff, from bus drivers to parent volunteers to crossing guards. Remind everyone: "The child is not his or her behavior," says Soma. "Typically there is something underneath that driving that to happen, so be sensitive. Ask yourself, 'I wonder what's going on with that kid?' rather than saying, 'What's wrong with the kid?' That's a huge shift in the way we view kids."

from the Childhood Trauma Blog Series, sponsored by TLC

20 Things Kids With Trauma Wish Their Teachers Knew

from Teachers' Guide to Trauma, by Dr. Melissa Sadin

- ❖ Do not yell at me--I fight, freeze or flee because the yelling triggers my amygdala.
- ❖ Avoid sarcasm--I have language processing issues and do not understand abstract words. I often assume you are making fun of me.
- ❖ Show me what I do well--I have a negative world view and am unable to see the good in myself.
- ❖ Learn about brain development then teach me about my brain--when I understand the way my brain has developed, then our conversations become about my brain and not about me.
- ❖ Help me out of my "Shame Cycle" -- I get trapped in a loop and cannot get out on my own.
- ❖ Do NOT engage in a power struggle with me--I am a survivalist. I will hold onto the struggle like a dog with a bone and never let go.
- ❖ Take care of yourself--if you have a weakness physically or emotionally, I will find it.
- ❖ Teach me to self-regulate--give me a place to self-regulate.
- ❖ Have an organized classroom--a disorganized classroom feeds my internal chaos.
- ❖ Establish a predictable and stable classroom community.
- ❖ Be consistent and fair with me.
- ❖ Teach me to dance--I do not hear the same relationship music. I am out of sync. Teach me give and take, the dance of attachment.
- ❖ Help me develop executive functions--I struggle to organize my approach to an assignment, and I lose everything that is not taped to my head.
- ❖ Be careful with homework--I may not have a safe place at home to work on school work. I may not remember what we did in school even if I seemed to understand it when we completed the sample problems.
- ❖ Lighten up--even when I am pushing your buttons. If you can stay light, it will relax my fear response.
- ❖ Be curious with me--ask me about what I like and what I am interested in.
- ❖ Less is more--speak less, mean more. If you use too many words, I will lose or confuse your meaning. Then I become afraid and I will freeze, flee, or fight.
- ❖ Do NOT use point systems--Class wide point systems make me feel defeated. Individual point systems are very threatening to me.
- ❖ I need help making choices regarding my behavior--if you teach me to self-regulate, I will build cognitive capacity and connections in my pre-frontal cortex. After time and when I am safe with you, I will be ready to learn how to make choices.
- ❖ DO NOT suspend me or give me detention--I already feel worthless. If you suspend me, you are throwing me away. If you give me detention you prove me right.

The Loss of Familiarity

Many youth experience grief and loss that is associated with not only the alleged abuse or neglect and traumatic experiences that brought them into the foster care system, but also the removal from all they care about, know and love. As a result of this trauma, students in foster care may show signs of depression or anxiety and may have trouble trusting adults and socializing with their peers. Children in foster care have experienced tremendous loss by being separated from parents, siblings, personal belongings and their friends and teachers at school, and this trauma may have a significant effect on their ability to do well in school.

The Need for Normality

For many children in foster care, school provides a safe environment and a chance to feel normal. Familiarity with teachers, coaches and friends as well as an opportunity to learn and excel creates a unique opportunity to support and encourage a child in crisis. In addition, every child learns differently, so it is important to continue to surround the student with people who are familiar with his or her unique needs. To maximize social and academic progress, the student should continue in the same school, whenever possible, despite disruptions in the child's home life.

The Fostering Connections

Act of 2008 is a federal law that emphasizes the importance of school stability and maintaining the child in the school in which the child was enrolled at the time of placement.



The act also requires child protective agencies to take into account the appropriateness of the current education setting and proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement in foster care.

In addition, if remaining in the same school is not in the child's best interest, the child welfare agency and school districts must work together to ensure immediate enrollment and transfer all of the child's education records to the new school. For these reasons, when making a recommendation regarding your CASA child's living arrangements – especially if those arrangements need to change – you should always take the child's school into account.

CHAPTER 2

WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

Chapter at a Glance:

- Important Education Information Advocates Should Know
- Confidentiality Concerns
- Confidentiality DOs and DON'Ts



The following information is designed to help you initiate positive relationships with school personnel and ensure that the educational needs of your CASA child are being addressed.

Important Education Information Advocates Should Know

Although there are legal requirements for all school districts, there is also a significant amount of local control, which creates a wide variety of policies and practices across Missouri schools. It is helpful to ask questions and clarify policies, practices and expectations and to not assume one school operates the same as another.

School personnel may be unfamiliar with Division of Social Services(DSS) or CASA. Take the opportunity to increase awareness and educate school personnel about CASA and CD. Part of your work as an Advocate is to educate people about the foster care system, your role, and the unique challenges children and youth in substitute care may face.

If your CASA child needs to move, planning for and scheduling a school change if necessary requires several important things be considered. Every district has its own calendar for holidays, testing dates and grading periods, as well as its own policies and requirements for things such as how credits are transferred and graduation. This makes it critical for the CASA volunteer to look into the impact and timing of a school move on the grading period/course credit, testing, or other important educational milestones that may affect the student. CASA has the opportunity to inform the school and court about the move and consult with others about the impact of the move on the student's education. Consulting with the school will also help to determine what is academically best for the student.

Many education laws exist to support students in foster care.

It is important that you are familiar with the various laws that exist to advance the education of students in foster care. Informed advocates can ensure that students are familiar with and take advantage of the numerous laws, policies and resources that are available to support students in Cole County schools.



Educators are advocates, too.

Teaming with schools is an important part of your work. School personnel are resources for your student. Work to build relationships with your partners in school to leverage these resources and opportunities for your CASA child.



Confidentiality Concerns

Federal confidentiality laws govern how information goes back and forth between DSS and schools.

Schools are required to safeguard the privacy of students' education records. The [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. Generally, schools must have parental consent to release personally identifiable student record information, although there are certain exceptions.



A court order is often the most applicable FERPA exception for a CASA volunteer to use to get school records for children in foster care since there is already an open court case. Your access to a student's educational records is typically established by the court order that names you as a CASA for the child and includes language about who can access the child's records. CASA volunteers should find the language they are looking for about school in the Order Appointing CASA.

Under the [Uninterrupted Scholars Act \(USA\)](#), which amended FERPA in 2013, the school district is permitted to share educational records directly with the caseworker when DSS has been named the child's conservator and the child is in foster care. The school

does not have to provide additional notice to the child's parent. The USA also allows DSS caseworkers to relay that school information to the court with a court order and without the need for parental consent. The USA did not change the fact that this information is highly sensitive and should be maintained in a responsible and confidential way. For more information, visit <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/uninterrupted-scholars-act-guidance.pdf>.

On the DSS side, the [Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act \(CAPTA\)](#) defines child abuse and neglect and prohibits the improper disclosure of child welfare records.

In light of the extreme stress and trauma children in foster care may endure, it is of the utmost importance that you also respect the confidentiality of information related to your CASA child. When talking to school staff, you need to consider the direct educational relevance of things you relay to the school. For example, it might be relevant to share that the child may exhibit behavioral issues on Tuesdays because the child visits his or her father on Mondays. However, it is probably inappropriate to share any details about the visit or why the child came into foster care in the first place. It may also be helpful to share potential triggers (for example, Mother's Day activities), sibling visits, medications or other factors that might impact a student's school day, behavior, focus or learning ability. Also, whenever possible, coordinate your information sharing with the caseworker and/or foster placement.



A child deserves to know adults at school respect their feelings and support their right to privacy

CONFIDENTIALITY DOS AND DON'TS

Please keep the following information in mind:

- When it comes to out-of-home children in the classroom, the family caring for the child is bound by confidentiality rules set by the MO Department of Social Services and pursuant to Section 210.150, RS Mo. Information obtained from DSS regarding children in care is confidential.
- Foster parents do not automatically have the authority to sign consent forms.
- Foster parents cannot identify the child as a child in care and are not allowed to release or share information regarding the child.
- DO encourage the school to contact DSS. For the school to receive specific information on the child they must contact the child's Department of Social Services caseworker or birth parent who have the authority and responsibility to disseminate information on the child.
- A foster parent may discuss information they have gained from their interactions with the child, including school performance, grades or discipline as well as homework or assignments. The staff at a school may assume a child is in foster care if they know the family the child is placed with. Teachers and other school personnel have a responsibility to keep this and any other information they know about the child private.
- Do bring your court order to the school and provide a copy to the school for their records.
- *Pursuant to Section 5 of the Capital City CASA Court Appointment Order, the CASA assigned to the child shall maintain any information received from any source as confidential and will not disclose such information except in oral or written reports to the Court and other parties to the case, or as required by Court Order.*



The first thing to do is get acclimated to the school and situation of the child or children from your case. The next chapter will provide a checklist of what you will need to do when going to the school for the first time.

Don't forget that the educators you will be interacting with likely entered the education arena because they care about children. They also are faced with the same type of challenge as a DSS caseworker: too many kids in their classes and not enough time. You have the advantage of being the CASA for one child or one or two cases.

CHAPTER 3

EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY 101

Chapter at a Glance:

- Who makes educational decisions for children in foster care?
- Education Roles and Responsibilities
- The Role of CASA as the Education Advocate
- Some Practices to Consider



There are many people involved in the education of a child in foster care. Read on to find out who is involved in your CASA child's education, learn about your role as the CASA volunteer and learn how to work collaboratively to help meet the child's educational needs.

Who Makes Education Decisions for Children in Foster Care?

The adult with whom the child lives is considered to be "acting as a parent" with implicit authority from the natural parent(s) to act as an educational decision-maker, unless the natural parent has informed the school that despite the fact that their child is living elsewhere, they intend to continue to be the educational decision-maker. It is advisable for a school to clarify the intent of the natural parent/s when a child is living outside the home by sending a letter to the parent and indicating that the school will look to the adult the child lives with to make educational decisions, unless the parent notifies the school otherwise. *MO Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education*

Depending on the child's needs and age, different people may participate in making education-related decisions including the DSS caseworker, school staff, the caregiver, the child and the CASA volunteer. It is very important for CASA volunteers to define their role and work with everyone involved to get the best educational outcome for the child.



Education Roles and Responsibilities

DSS	PARENT	FOSTER PARENT	CASA
Accesses school records	Accesses school records	Accesses school records	Accesses school records
Selects school	Should be involved in decisions regarding the child's education	May enroll child in school	Advocates for child's educational needs and goals to be met
Receives notice of disciplinary action and special education (IEP) meetings	Receives notice of disciplinary action and special education meetings	Receives notice of disciplinary action and special education meetings	Reports on educational issues at every court hearing
	Participates in conferences and school functions	Obtains report cards and approves field trips. Determines (with the child if appropriate) course selection, etc.	Receives notice of special education (SST, IEP, 504) meetings

The Role of CASA as the Education Advocate



Legal duties under Section 210.160(5) RSMo



The CASA shall be provided with all reports relevant to the case made to or by any agency or person and shall have access to all records of such agencies or persons relating to the child or such child's family members or placements of the child.



The CASA should determine before every hearing whether the child's educational needs and goals have been identified and addressed and should document their findings in the CASA report to the Court.

CASA VOLUNTEER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Share a copy of the initial court order appointing you as CASA on the case with the school. Many schools will not allow you access to the child's records without this documentation.
- Become an expert on your CASA child's educational needs. Inform yourself about your CASA child's education rights and entitlements. Monitor whether his or her educational needs are being met.
- Seek to build collaboration with **school personnel** * when advocating for the child.
- Communicate regularly with your CASA child. Be a consistent presence in his or her life, especially during a placement or school move.
- Write thorough court reports that make your CASA child's educational needs clear.
- If there is a possibility of a school change, talk to the DSS caseworker and the court about your thoughts or concerns. Relay all critical information that could affect a school move, such as upcoming test dates or key extracurricular events.
- There are many ways a CASA volunteer can advocate in the school setting regarding credit transfer, appropriate classes, special education evaluation, discipline, extracurricular involvement, endorsements and graduation plans. For more information about these issues, explore the following chapters of this toolkit.



***School Personnel include:**

- **Principal**
- **School Counselor**
- **School Social Workers**
- **School Behavior Interventionist**
- **Classroom teachers**
- **Art, Music, PE teachers**
- **Reading Specialists/Interventionists**
- **School Nurses**
- **Tutors**
- **Mentors**
- **Occupational/Physical Therapists**
- **Athletic Coaches**



SOME PRACTICES TO CONSIDER

- Attend IEP and other school meetings if possible.
- Support students in areas of interest – communicate with students about their goals and interests and help connect students to opportunities that support this whenever possible.
- Connect students with school staff mentors. CASA can't be at school every day, but caring educators are.
- Encourage positive behavior and work completion. This helps to reinforce teacher and foster parent rules.
- Help students with accepting responsibility and following through.
- Monitor behavior reinforcement systems. Make sure the child's school follows through on positive behavior systems and plans.



The school will expect to see a court order before giving personal information about the student. The school likely will also ask for identification such as a driver's license to run through its campus visitor security system. Have your CASA business cards handy to pass out any school staff that you want to stay in contact with.



- Do your homework and ask questions. Education law, policy and practice may be complicated if you aren't familiar with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and other laws and guidelines.
- Build relationships with your CASA child's teachers, DSS caseworkers, counselors, caregivers and school leaders.
- Keeping confidentiality in mind, make sure that teachers, principals, counselors, judges and any other key players have up-to-date information at all times.
- Be consistent in your involvement.
- Coordinate with the caseworker, school and guardian-ad-litem regarding visits to the school to minimize disruption.
- Remember that you play a significant role in gathering and providing information to the court and helping the child navigate through multiple systems.
- Ask the school counselor and teacher how you can help.

CHAPTER 4

HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENT

Chapter at a Glance:

- The Importance of Stability
- Enrollment
- Records and Credit Transfer
- Home Schooling

“ School changes may be inevitable for many children in foster care, but there are a number of steps you can take as a CASA volunteer to ensure a seamless transfer between schools and lessen the impact of the school move on the child.”



The Importance of Stability

In some cases, an appropriate foster home is not available to meet a child's needs in the child's school district, or the child is placed with a family member in another school district. In those cases, it may be necessary for the child to change placements and attend a different school.

Most placement moves require a change in schools, and **students average a four to six-month loss in emotional and academic growth for each school move.** Students in foster care not only suffer the loss of emotional and social connections but may also lose course credits, repeat courses they have already taken, and/or be placed in inappropriate classes or grade levels.

School changes may be inevitable for many children in foster care, but there are steps you can take as a CASA to ensure a seamless transfer between schools and lessen the impact of the school move on the child. As a CASA volunteer, you can provide additional help by making sure the child is quickly enrolled in the new school and his or her education records are transferred.



Find out if any placements are available that would allow the child to continue attending his or her current school. If no placements are available in the school's "zone of attendance," ask about transportation options to see if your CASA child may stay at the same school.

Child Welfare Information Gateway recently launched a new webpage, [Educational Stability in Foster Care](#). The new webpage contains resources that address common challenges, including immediate enrollment, transportation, and decision-making.



Pursuant to [Section 211.032\(7\)RSMo](#), upon request of the foster family, the guardian ad litem, **or the volunteer advocate**, and whenever possible, the child shall be permitted to continue to attend the same school that the child was enrolled in and attending at the time the child was taken into custody by the division. The division, in consultation with the department of elementary and secondary education, shall establish the necessary procedures to implement the provisions of this subsection.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (P.L. 114-95) was signed into law on December 10, 2015, as [Public Law 114-95 \(PDF - 895 KB\)](#). ESSA reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and includes new provisions that promote educational stability for children in foster care so they can continue their education without disruption, maintain important relationships, and have the opportunity to achieve college and career readiness. The law also emphasizes the importance of collaboration and joint decision-making between child welfare agencies and educational agencies.

The following are excerpts from a Missouri Department of Social Services policy memorandum (May 25, 2017) outlining the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)-mandated policy revisions which reflect key protections for students:

School Placement

Students in foster care who experience placement moves must be allowed to remain in their school of origin, unless it is determined not to be in their best interest. School of origin can be defined as the specific school within a district the child attended when he/she was placed in out-of-home care, or the child's school of enrollment at the time of any subsequent placement change.

In determining the child's school placement, ESSA requires the school of origin to complete a Best Interest Determination (BID) with the Children's Division. It is, therefore, important staff notify and engage the school of origin immediately when a child enters out-of-home care, when a child already in care has a planned or impending placement change, or when a child has experienced an emergency change of placement. Because a Family Support Team Meeting (FSTM) is required in each of these situations, staff should invite the school liaison or designee to the FSTM where school placement is discussed and a best interest determination is being made. Children's Division and Department of Secondary and Elementary Education have agreed that any dispute as to the best interest determination and school placement will be resolved by deferring to the child's Family Support Team.

School Transportation

ESSA prohibits schools from factoring transportation logistics and cost into the best interest determination process for a child's school placement. Children's Division and the local education agency (LEA) should discuss a transportation plan for each child remaining in their school of origin. Transportation plans may vary by district and by child and may be renegotiated when necessary. Transportation options to consider are outlined in the Child Welfare Manual, but staff and LEAs should explore all possible options. NOTE: If the student has an IEP that includes provisions for specialized transportation, transportation must be provided by the school district responsible for the student's Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

Education Enrollment Letter

An Educational Enrollment Letter is now required to be provided to the school upon a foster child's enrollment, or when a child already enrolled in school enters out-of-home care. **Immediately notifying the school of a child's foster care status is imperative to their educational stability and well-being, allowing for swift enrollment and timely transfer of records, as well as preparing school personnel to be cognizant of the child's need for a uniquely supportive and trauma-sensitive environment.** Additionally, new foster care provisions in the ESSA require schools to report annually on academic achievement and graduation rates for children in foster care as a separate sibling group. Prompt notification allows schools to begin tracking required data early, resulting in a more accurate illustration of how foster youth are performing compared to their peers not in foster care.



Although you will not be responsible for enrolling your CASA child in school, it is very important that you understand the process so that you can advocate when necessary. Ask these questions:

- Where does the child want to go to school?
- What does the child say about his or her school?
- What setting will best serve the child's educational needs and goals?
- Is the child progressing academically and on grade level?
- Does the child need additional school support?
- Is the new school aware of the previous services and supports received by the child?
- Can the new school continue to provide the same services and supports as the previous school?
- Is the current school setting a safe place for the child?
- Were the records transferred?
- Are the records complete?
- Did the child receive credit for previous coursework?
- What are the transportation options?
- Is everyone aware of the child's strengths and interests?

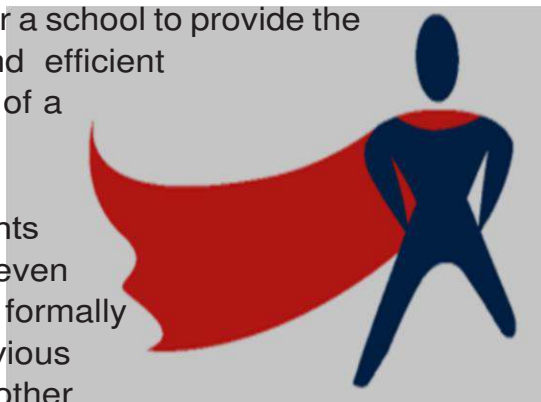
Different Placements May Require Different Educational Advocacy

How you get involved in educational advocacy for your CASA child will be different depending on the type of placement where the child lives. For example, if the child resides with a relative, the caregiver may need additional help to navigate enrollment and other school processes.

If your CASA child is in a residential facility, **it will be even more critical for you to be informed** about your child's educational needs. Missouri's residential facilities typically provide youth with on-site schooling or access to a public school (either online or within the residential facility's attendance area). If your CASA child is in a residential facility, talk with his/her case manager/therapist and remain informed about your child's educational progress and needs. Stay up to date with your CASA child's placement should he/she transition from on-site schooling to a public school within the residential's attendance area.

Records Transfer

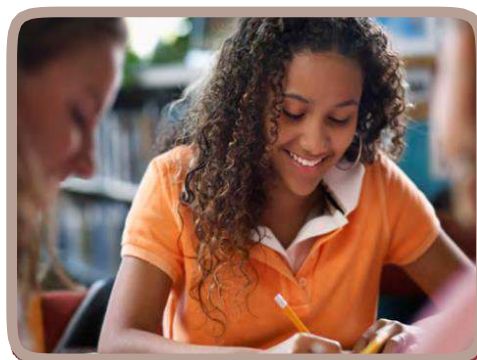
Without a student's records, it is difficult for a school to provide the right services and instruction. A fast and efficient transition will lessen the negative effects of a school move.



- Because of a Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) exception, even if a caregiver or foster parent did not formally withdraw the student from the previous school, enrollment by a student in another school district provides authority for the original school district to release the educational records of that student to the new school, regardless of whether parental or caregiver consent has been received.
- Ask the school if you might be able to assist with the transfer of records. Providing hard copies of a student's records may help expedite enrollment.
- Sharing education-related information with the new school will help to facilitate and streamline enrollment.

Credit Transfer

Principals, school committees and boards have a range of authority to develop local credit recovery and transfer policies. As a CASA volunteer, you should coordinate with school and district administration to ensure no credits have been lost and that the child is placed in the proper grade level. Communicate regularly with the school and follow up to make sure the child is properly withdrawn from the previous school to facilitate the credit transfer process. When possible, check the school calendar and advocate for required moves after the end of the semester or grading period. Be mindful of state-mandated examinations, college admission test schedules and Advanced Placement (AP) exam schedules.



Home Schooling

Home schooling is legal in Missouri, but the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) does NOT regulate or monitor home schooling. Any parent/guardian may educate a child at home. There is no teaching certificate or need to meet any education requirements in order to provide home instruction. A parent/guardian does not need to call DESE if they decide to home school, as no registration is required. DESE does NOT accredit home schooling. DESE only accredits public schools in Missouri.

If/when a parent/guardian decides to re-enroll their child in public school, the school district will determine the grade level at which the child will be placed at that time.

Neither the State Board of Education nor DESE has any authority to issue regulations or guidelines concerning homeschooling.

No curriculum or materials or financial support are provided to home schoolers from DESE or from the state, nor any advice about available online programs. If a parent/guardian is home schooling, they must decide on a curriculum/program to use on their own.

If a parent/guardian home schools through high school, they will issue the diploma and/or provide the transcripts necessary for the student to enroll in a post-secondary education program or gain employment. The post-secondary school and/or potential employer will decide if graduation from home school meets their eligibility requirements. The home schooled student can also get a high school equivalency certificate.

MO Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education

Missouri Statutes Related to Home Schooling

Sections 162.996, 167.031 through 167.071, and Section 210.167 of the Revised Statutes of Missouri provide the framework for home schooling in Missouri.



Home schooling is legal and can meet the state's compulsory attendance law, **provided the parent shows evidence (as required by Section 167.031.2, RSMo) of regular instruction by:**

(a) Maintaining the following records:

- a. A plan book, diary, or other written record indicating subjects taught and activities engaged in; and
- b. A portfolio of samples of the child's academic work; and
- c. A record of evaluations of the child's academic progress; or
- d. Other written, or credible evidence equivalent to subparagraphs a., b., and c.; and

(b) Offering at least one thousand hours of instruction, at least six hundred hours of which will be in reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies and science or academic courses that are related to the aforementioned subject areas and consonant with the pupil's age and ability. At least four hundred of the six hundred hours shall occur at the regular home school location.



If the parent/guardian of your CASA child claims the child has been home schooled, you should request copies of all records to ensure the parent has been providing adequate instruction and has been complying with Missouri's compulsory attendance laws.

CHAPTER 5

HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR DAY-TO-DAY EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Chapter at a Glance:

- Attendance
- Behavioral Problems and Discipline
- MO Safe Schools Act
- MO SW-PBS
- Functional Behavior Assessment
- Behavior Intervention Plan
- Grades and Academic Support
- Graduation Program
- Extracurricular Activities
- Nutrition

“There are many areas in which a parent is typically involved in their child’s life at school, including discipline, attendance, grades, assessments, extracurricular activities and tutoring. Foster children need even more diligent attention in these areas.”



In a perfect world no child would need an Advocate, but children in foster care often need a strong and reliable advocate when their parents are unable to fill that role. There are many areas in which a parent is typically involved in their child's life at school, including discipline, attendance, grades, assessments, extracurricular activities and tutoring. Foster children need even more diligent attention in these areas.

Attendance



Missouri has a **compulsory attendance law**. This means the "custodian" of a child between the age of 7 and 16 is responsible for making sure the child attends school. A custodian may be a parent, guardian, or other caretaker such as a foster parent. Students with excessive absences may restore credit if district policies allow them to do so.

The Missouri compulsory attendance law states that "the term 'attend...on a regular basis' shall mean that the student has not been absent from school without satisfactory excuse or truant from school more than **eight (8)** school days or partial school days during the school year."

A violation of the compulsory attendance law is a class C misdemeanor.

Behavioral Problems and School Discipline

School suspensions and expulsions contribute to education gaps and learning delays and also put students at serious risk of dropping out of school. Police involvement in unlawful conduct at school can lead to financial problems and involvement in the juvenile or criminal justice systems.

In order to keep youth engaged in school and on track for graduation, schools are encouraged to use trauma-informed approaches with Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavior Support (PBS) strategies to prevent behavioral issues whenever possible. Collaborate with your child's school behavior interventionist for additional support.

CASA volunteers may work with school personnel to help them better understand and make connections between a student's learning needs and behaviors in the school setting and circumstances out of the school setting. Sensitivity to and awareness of the challenges students may be facing can help school personnel respond in a way that is sensitive and adaptive to student's needs.



TIP

Coordinate with the child's caregiver about transportation and communicate with the school about appointments.

Missouri's Safe Schools Act

The Missouri Safe Schools Act was originally passed in 1996. The Safe Schools Act as it pertains to discipline can be broken down into four main sections:

- 1) Establishing a written discipline policy;
- 2) Discipline policy requiring administrators to report acts of school violence to employees on a 'need to know' basis;
- 3) Discipline policy requiring administrators to report acts that would constitute a felony to law enforcement officers;
- 4) Discipline policy that allows for a one-year suspension or expulsion of a student who brings a weapon to school.

Establishing a Written Policy

The local board of education must clearly establish a written policy of discipline which includes the district's determination on the use of corporal punishment as well as procedures in which punishment will be applied. A copy of the district's discipline policy shall be provided to the pupil and parent/legal guardian at the beginning of each school year. All employees shall annually receive instruction related to the specific contents of the discipline policy and any interpretations necessary to implement the provisions of the policy.

Reporting Acts of School Violence on a Need to Know Basis

Administrators are required to report acts of school violence to district employees on a need to know basis. This is defined as school personnel who are directly responsible for the student's education or who otherwise interact with the student on a professional basis.

'Act of School Violence' or 'Violent Behavior' means the exertion of physical force by a student with the intent to do serious physical injury to another person while on school property, including the school bus, or while involved with school activities.

Reporting to Appropriate Law Enforcement Officials

At a minimum the policy shall require school administrators to report, as soon as reasonably practical, to the appropriate law enforcement agency any felony or act that if committed by an adult would be a felony. These include: *First Degree Murder, Second Degree Murder, Kidnapping, First Degree Assault, Second Degree Assault, Forcible Rape, First Degree Burglary, Second Degree Burglary, First Degree Robbery, Distribution of Drugs, First Degree Arson, Voluntary Manslaughter, Involuntary Manslaughter, Sexual Assault, First Degree Property Damage, Possession of a Weapon, First Degree Child Molestation, Deviate Sexual Assault, Sexual Misconduct Involving a Child, Sexual Abuse*, when committed on school property, including the school bus, or while involved in school activities. The policy must also require that any portion of a student's IEP that is related to demonstrated or potentially violent behavior shall be provided to any teacher or other school district employee who are directly responsible for the student's education or who otherwise interact with the student. The policy

shall also contain the consequences of failure to obey standards of conduct set by the board of education.

Likewise a juvenile officer, sheriff, chief of police, or other appropriate law enforcement authority shall, as soon as reasonably practical, notify the superintendent or their designee, when a petition has been filed alleging a student has committed one of the above acts.

Suspension/Expulsion

The discipline policy must provide for a suspension for not less than one year, or expulsion for a student who brings a weapon to school. The term 'school' includes, but is not limited to '*a school playground, parking lot, school bus, school activity on or off school property*'.

However, the Superintendent, or in a school district with no high school, the principal of the school which the student attends may modify the suspension on a case-by-case basis; and the suspension/expulsion does not prevent the school district from providing educational services in an alternative setting to a student who has been suspended.

Definition of a Weapon

The term 'weapon' shall mean a 'firearm' as well as the following items: *a blackjack, a concealable firearm, an explosive weapon, a firearm, firearm silencer, a gas gun, a knife, knuckles, a machine gun, a projectile weapon, a rifle, shotgun, a spring gun or a switchblade knife.*

A 'firearm' is defined as '*any weapon (including a starter gun), which will or is designed to or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive; the frame or receiver of any such weapon; any firearm muffler or firearm silencer; or any destructive device. This term does not include an antique firearm.*'

A 'destructive device' is defined as: '*any explosive, incendiary, or poison gas; bomb; grenade; rocket having a propellant charge of more than one-quarter ounce; mine.*'

Missouri Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (MO SW-PBS)

Many Missouri school districts (including Jefferson City Public Schools) are implementing the Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SW-PBS) in their schools. SW-PBS is a framework for creating safe and orderly learning environments in schools, while improving the social-emotional outcomes for students. It is a proactive approach that relies on research based practices, including developing clear behavioral expectations, teaching these expectations, acknowledging appropriate behavior, consistently correcting inappropriate behavior, and using behavioral data to systematically solve problems.

SW-PBS is built on a **multi-tiered system** of support model that provides additional behavior supports to students who are not responding to universal interventions:

- **Tier 1** includes universal management strategies designed to meet the needs of all students and develop a common language and focus for all school staff, families, and community members. Universal or Tier 1 strategies are designed to be implemented consistently and efficiently across all school settings, classroom and non-classroom (e.g. cafeteria, hallways). This includes teaching specific behaviors or social skills that will lead to success in school, providing frequent positive reinforcement for expected behavior, consistently addressing social errors, and arranging teaching and learning environments to ensure success for all. This level should meet the needs of approximately 80 percent of a school's student body.
- **Tier 2** includes the use of data to identify students who are at risk for difficulties. Interventions should prevent the development of problems and also decrease the frequency or intensity of problem behaviors, thereby minimizing their impact. Standardized interventions that support student needs are continuously available, and data is used to monitor progress and make decisions.
- **Tier 3** includes the approximately 1-5% of students who continue to experience difficulty after participation in ongoing Tier 1 support and inclusion in a Tier 2 intervention. In many cases these students have school histories of significant academic and behavioral difficulties over an extended period of time. Because their needs may be more intense and chronic, **Tier 3 support systems are individualized**. Just as with the Tier 2 level, schools must build on the established schoolwide system to accurately identify these students, and data-based decision making is essential.

Students with chronic and/or intense problem behaviors require specially designed and individualized interventions that match the function of the problem behavior. A simple **functional behavioral assessment (FBA)** is conducted to create a summary statement that forms the basis for a student's **behavior intervention plan (BIP)**. Expertise in the science of behavioral assessment is necessary for the development and implementation of individualized support plans.

Teams are formed to design and implement individual student plans should include those adults who are typically involved with the student on a daily basis along with other staff who have more specialized skills (i.e. school counselors, social workers, special education staff, school psychologists, administrators, and school nurses). The team also includes the family members and, if appropriate, the students.

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)

The team begins the FBA process by working with the teacher(s) to identify the interactions between the student's behavior and the environment(s) where it is most likely to occur. The team then defines the behavior in operational terms and determines the settings where the behavior is most likely and least likely to occur. Other information will also be gathered (i.e. interviewing others who have and/or currently work with the student, review school records, interview family members and student) in order to develop a summary statement. After the summary statement has been confirmed through observation, the FBA information will then be used by the team to design a BIP.

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)

The BIP is designed to change contributing variables associated with the student's behavior, the teacher's behavior and the environment. The BIP is based on an instructional approach, similar to that used by teachers for academic instruction. Follow-up observations by team members, ongoing monitoring of specified data and other means may be employed to revise, refine, end or continue the plan. The BIP is reviewed by the team on a regular basis until such time as the team and the teacher(s) make a decision to do otherwise.

Because many of the difficulties exhibited by students in need of a FBA and BIP are long-standing and significant, school personnel should understand that it is likely to take extended periods of time and intensive intervention before the problems begin to improve. Any plan may be influenced by unforeseen changes in the student's or school's situation. For these reasons it is important for all involved to continue to dedicate the time, resource and personnel necessary to increase the likelihood of the plan's success.



If your CASA child is struggling with behaviors at school, talk with his/her teacher, counselor and the school's Behavior Interventionist to determine if your child is receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions and has a Behavior Intervention Plan in place. If a Behavior Intervention team has been formed, inquire about the possibility of participating in team meetings.

Grades and Academic Support

It is also important to ensure that students are placed in the correct class level at the time of enrollment and throughout the school year. Students will confer with school counselors to identify and plan the appropriate courses for high school graduation. Make sure that your CASA child is in a class that is academically challenging but presented at a level that allows them to succeed.

Pursuing tutors and special supports to ensure that your CASA child successfully manages their academic course load is essential. Every district is unique, so get to know the available services in your area. A great resource is your local school district website. You may be able to contact student support specialists, counselors and others who work with at-risk students.

Depending on the school district, an individual with access to a child's school records can also access the online portal for parents and guardians to monitor grades, absences and disciplinary actions on a daily basis. This may be a very valuable tool for monitoring student performance and typically also allows you to communicate directly via email with teachers.



TIP

Monitor report cards closely to ensure that your CASA child is making satisfactory grades. If your CASA child is struggling in a particular class, you can always advocate to set up a meeting with the student and teacher to discuss the issues and ways you and others can provide support.

STEPS TO TAKE TO SUPPORT A STUDENT'S TESTING

- If they have an IEP or 504 plan, make sure the appropriate accommodations will be given.
- Encourage the student's presence during mandated testing periods.
- Remind the student and caretaker about the importance of proper nutrition and rest in preparation for exam days.
- Monitor the student's assessment results and learning needs.
- Advocate for students to participate in make-up exams if appropriate.
- Communicate with both the sending and receiving school when a child must move before or during an assessment. Make sure a plan and opportunity for the student to take the assessment is in place.





Many foster youth will need support in areas in addition to academic tutoring. For example, some students have poor time management and study skills, and may need help preparing for college entrance exams such as the ACT and SAT, writing college essays and completing applications for colleges, universities or trade schools. There are numerous sources of support for these activities, both online and through schools and nonprofit organizations. The following list offers a couple examples of online support services:

- **How-to-Study.com:** offers many suggestions and techniques for taking notes, developing good listening skills, test taking strategies and more. This is an excellent source for volunteers to get ideas for activities to explore with youth. URL: www.how-to-study.com
- **Online Tutorial Resources:** free online tutorials in a huge variety of academic subjects, including vocational and technology skills, high school and college courses and financial literacy. URL: <http://www.khake.com/page67.html>

Graduation Program

If your CASA child is in or entering high school, you will also want to monitor your child's progress toward graduation. Be sure that the child is enrolled in courses that will lead to graduation under an appropriate graduation program.

Students hoping to attend higher education need to be enrolled in courses that will allow for admission to community college, four year institutions or other programs. Follow up with your child's school counselor to determine if their courses are appropriate for their future plans.



MO Graduation Requirements

In 2006, the Missouri State Board of Education approved 24 units of credit as the minimum graduation requirements beginning with the class of 2010. This includes four units of English language arts and three units of mathematics, science, and social studies, along with one unit of credit for fine arts, practical arts, and physical education. In addition, students must earn a half-unit of credit in health education and a half-unit of credit in personal finance. The remaining seven units are electives.

Individual Career Academic Plan (ICAP)

Students, with the assistance of educational staff are expected to develop an Individual Career and Academic plan which creates a road map for high school and beyond. Most jobs in Missouri will require additional training or education beyond high school. Students who graduate and work in Missouri will need skills that meet business, industry, and higher education standards.

The development and implementation of a student's ICAP is critical in maximizing a student's high school experience and making sure he/she is on target to complete high school ready for success. Developing a rigorous and relevant ICAP based on career aspirations can open doors of opportunity that can lead to a lifetime of economic and social productivity.

An ICAP is a student's roadmap to their future via anticipated coursework, assessments, organizations, and experiences. The foundation for the creation of an ICAP starts at the elementary level, when students start to become aware of the concept of work and begin to learn about the world of work through broad career paths. In the middle grades students should be provided with career and educational exploration activities that focus on career paths and clusters through coursework and various career activities, culminating with the development of an initial ICAP which should be based on a rigorous pathway. This initial ICAP should be developed no later than the end of 8th grade.

An ICAP should not only reflect graduation requirements, but also the relevant movement towards career aspirations. Information in addition to the state and local graduation requirements that must be utilized to successfully develop a plan include a knowledge of a student's academic strengths and weaknesses, knowledge of their interest, abilities and values, knowledge and understanding of various postsecondary opportunities such as technical training, college, stackable credentials, etc. and the requirements for pursuing a certain path, such as a college entrance exam score and/or licensure certificate. Students also need an understanding of current high school courses, programs, and extracurricular activities and their connections to future career aspirations. High school students might choose options such as participation in an internship or apprenticeship, earning credentials that count toward an associate's degree or taking college credit bearing classes like dual credit, AP and/or IB.

Federal and state regulations pertaining to the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) require that transition be addressed for all students with an Individual Education Program (IEP) beginning at age sixteen, or younger if appropriate. Requirements for these transition services are located in the Special Education State Plan. It is essential that school personnel, students, and their parents/guardians continuously review and modify ICAPs as appropriate to make sure students are on-target for graduation and their specific post-secondary plans. The goal of this planning and monitoring process is that all students graduate ready for success.

MO Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education, May 2018

Extracurricular Activities

Children who participate in sports, clubs, student government, the arts and other extracurricular activities have better grades and higher attendance, and are more likely to complete requirements for high school graduation. However, children in foster care are less likely to participate in these activities due to a number of factors such as transportation needs, fees for the activities and not being aware of the activity.

This is an excellent area in which to advocate for your CASA child. Learn what interests them, what is available in the school district, and make the necessary connections to ensure that he or she is actively engaged in one or more meaningful activities. Advocate for participation in extracurricular activities outside school hours to maximize the student's engagement in school.

Nutrition

Children and youth in foster care are categorically eligible for free meals under the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs. These programs also include summer feeding programs in the local communities. Caregivers for children and youth in foster care do not have to complete a separate application for these programs.



CHAPTER 6

HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SECTION 504 SERVICES

Chapter at a Glance:

- Who Makes Special Education-Related Decisions?
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Things a CASA Should Know
- Referrals and Consent
- Evaluations and Eligibility
- IEP Review and Reevaluation
- School Transfers for Special Education Students
- Special Disciplinary Considerations
- Graduation

“

It is important for you to know your CASA child's strengths and needs so you can advocate for an appropriate special education program, including academic rigor and effective behavior intervention strategies.”



School districts are required to offer services to qualifying students with disabilities in accordance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or with Section (§) 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. As a CASA volunteer, you may be asked to participate in making decisions about your CASA child's need for special education instruction under IDEA or for accommodations through §504.

KEY TERMS REGARDING SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SECTION 504

If you are an advocate of a special education student, the following terms and definitions may be helpful in assisting you to understand the special education process.

- Special Education under IDEA: Specifically designed instruction at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. There must be a continuum of supports and services, including accommodations and modifications, to ensure the student with a disability has access to the general curriculum. To qualify for special education services, a student must be evaluated and determined to have a disability and an educational need.
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): Requirement that a student who has a disability be educated in the least restrictive environment and, to the maximum extent appropriate, with their peers who do not have disabilities.
- Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): All special education students are afforded the right to a FAPE – a federal right for students with disabilities to receive special education services at no cost.
- Student Support Team (SST): A team dedicated to identifying and supporting students who exhibit academic or behavioral problems by providing early systematic assistance to students and connecting them to appropriate interventions and supports.
- Individualized Education Program (IEP): A plan that is developed by a team that details special education and related services provided to the student through IDEA funding. The team must consist of school personnel AND the child's parent.
- Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA): A **problem-solving process** for identifying the events that reliably **predict** and **maintain** problem behavior. In general, antecedent events or conditions trigger a specific behavior, while consequence events affect the likelihood the student will repeat the behavior in similar future situations. The primary objective of the FBA is to gather **evidence** to **develop** and **support a Summary Statement** of the **function of behavior** and to use this information to design the positive Behavior Intervention Plan.
- Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP): The BIP is developed from an FBA and defines how an educational setting will be changed to improve the behavioral success of the student. The BIP describes 1) how the environment will be changed to prevent occurrences of problem behavior to make the behavior irrelevant, 2) the teaching that will occur to give the student alternative ways of behaving to make the problem behavior inefficient and 3) the consequences that will be provided to reinforce appropriate behavior to make the problem behavior ineffective.
- 504 Plan: A written plan of accommodations that a child will receive, such as extra time on tests or preferred seating. Students who do not qualify for special education services often receive 504 plans.



IEP vs. 504 Comparison Chart

	IEP	504 PLAN
WHAT IS IT?	An Individualized Education Plan is a blueprint detailing how a student's special education plan will be carried out. For children with unique needs due to mental or physical disabilities, IEPs outline how specific accommodations and services will provide that student with an appropriate education.	Like an IEP, a 504 plan details the academic, organizational, and social accommodations that will be used to help a child access learning at school. But 504 plans are less formal, apply to more situations, and can be used by children with a wider range of disabilities than can IEPs.
QUICK TIP! To receive an IEP, a student must require special-education services because of his or her disability. If a student with a disability does not require special-education services, he or she will generally get a 504 plan.		
THE LAW	IEPs are governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA. IDEA is the federal law that covers special education for students with disabilities, and ensures free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to all students, regardless of ability.	504 is really shorthand for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. It also requires FAPE for school-age students.
WHO IS ELIGIBLE?	<p>To qualify for IDEA services, students must be classified as having at least one of the following diagnoses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Autism 2. Blindness 3. Deafness 4. Emotional Disturbance 5. Hearing Impairment 6. Intellectual Disability 7. Multiple Disabilities 8. Orthopedic Impairment 9. Other Health Impaired —Other Health Impaired (ADHD is covered here) 10. Specific Learning Disability 11. Speech or Language Impairment 12. Traumatic Brain Injury 13. Visual Impairment 	A 504 plan is available to any public-school student with a documented disability that "substantially limits" his or her ability to learn and function in school.

	IEP	504 PLAN
HOW DOES IT APPLY TO STUDENTS WITH ADHD?	<p>Students diagnosed with ADHD may qualify for IDEA services as Other Health Impaired (OHI). However, many children with only ADHD are denied services under IDEA; the exceptions are kids with especially severe ADHD that “results in limited alertness” that “adversely affects a child’s educational performance.”</p> <p>If your child has ADHD <i>and</i> another disability, such as a speech impairment or dyslexia, it’s more likely he’ll be covered under IDEA.</p>	<p>If your child has been denied an IEP, but his ADHD still limits his ability to learn in an educational setting, he may qualify for accommodations or services under Section 504.</p>
HOW DOES IT APPLY TO LD STUDENTS?	<p>Learning disabilities (including dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia) fall under IDEA. In order to qualify, your child must require special-education and related services.</p>	<p>A 504 plan can be created to help a child with learning disabilities, if the school determines an IEP is unnecessary.</p>
<p>QUICK TIP! Neither ADHD nor LD <i>guarantees</i> a child an IEP or a 504 plan. An evaluation of the student must demonstrate that a disability substantially affects the child’s ability to function in school, — academically, behaviorally, and/or socially.</p>		
GETTING AN EVALUATION	<p>If you request an evaluation, the school must provide one, unless it can demonstrate that other interventions (like extra assistance from the teacher or other informal accommodations) can solve the problems you have identified. If it can’t, the school is required to evaluate your child for eligibility for services, free of charge.</p>	
	<p>You may request that the school pay for an independent educational evaluation (IEE), which is conducted by an outside professional. If the school does not pay for an IEE, you may pay for one yourself. The school is required to consider, but need not follow, the recommendations of the IEE.</p>	<p>Under 504 plans, parents have no right to a publicly funded IEE. Parents are allowed, however, to pay for one themselves. The school is not required to take the results into consideration.</p>

	IEP	504 PLAN
WHO DESIGNS IT?	<p>The IEP team MUST include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child's parent or legal guardian • The child's general-education teacher • The school's special-education teacher 	<p>The 504 plan team members can vary, but often include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A parent or guardian • The child's general-education teacher • The principal • A special-education teacher <p>With 504 plans, it's most important to include the people who know your child best.</p>
WHAT DOES IT INCLUDE?	<p>The IEP is a written document, usually several pages long. In most cases, it includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student's classification • Current academic and behavioral status • Specific academic and behavioral goals • Specific strategies for achieving these goals, and who will implement each one • Accommodations, services, and curriculum changes • The timing of each service • Plan for standardized tests • Transition plan for high school and beyond 	<p>A 504 does not have to be a written document, but it usually is. It's generally much shorter than an IEP — about 1–2 pages long. It contains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The specific accommodations or services the school will provide • Who will provide the services • Who is responsible for making sure the plan is implemented
GOALS	<p>IEPs must include goals. The best goals are SMART — Specific, Measurable, Achievable Results, Time-limited.</p>	<p>504 plans do not have to include a list of enforceable goals.</p>

	IEP	504 PLAN
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	<p>The school is required to involve parents in the design of the plan.</p> <p>Parents must be given prior <i>written</i> notice before any service is changed, and may invoke “stay put” rights to keep services in place while disputes are being resolved. Parents must also consent in writing to the initial evaluation for an IEP. Parents must sign the IEP before it goes into effect.</p>	<p>Schools are not required to involve parents in the writing of a 504 plan. However, many schools choose to do so.</p> <p>On the other hand, parents <i>must</i> consent to any evaluation of their child for services, and parents <i>must</i> be notified of any changes to the 504 plan. This notice does not need to be written.</p>
<p>QUICK TIP! No matter what plan the school proposes for your child, you MUST consent before any evaluation is carried out or any accommodations are implemented.</p>		
MAKING REVISIONS	<p>Your child’s IEP must be reviewed every year, and she must be re-evaluated at least every three years to see if the IEP is still necessary or requires changes.</p> <p>You can call additional meetings to review the IEP whenever you’d like.</p>	<p>Rules vary by state, but are generally similar to IEP rules: The plan should be reviewed each year, and the child should be reassessed every three years.</p>
RESOLVING DISPUTES	<p>If you believe the school is not properly implementing your child’s IEP, follow these steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal negotiation • Mediation • Due process hearing • Appeals and civil lawsuits • Formal state or federal complaints 	<p>If you believe the school is not living up to its responsibilities regarding your child’s 504 plan, you have a few options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal negotiation • Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) • Impartial hearing • Office of Civil Rights complaint • Lawsuit
COST TO PARENTS	Students receive accommodations and services free of charge.	
FUNDING	Schools receive funding from the federal government for each additional student who has an IEP.	<p>Schools do not receive additional funding for eligible students using a 504 plan. They can, however, have funding taken away if they fail to meet the requirements of Section 504.</p> <p>Funds designated for students with IEPs may not be used on 504 plans.</p>

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. It ensures that the student with a disability has equal access to an education. Unlike special education services under IDEA, §504 plans provide education accommodations that “level the playing field” without changing what the student is expected to master. Some students with disabilities may not qualify for special education. In those cases accommodations may be provided under §504. To qualify for a 504 plan, a student (1) has a mental or physical impairment (such as low IQ, food allergy, physical or orthopedic impairment, ADD or ADHD) that substantially limits one or more major life activities, (2) has a record of such an impairment or (3) is regarded as having such impairment. For additional information about §504, visit <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>.



If your CASA child has a disability and you need more information, ask school personnel about how the child will be evaluated and which programs and services he or she might be eligible for.



Who Makes Special Education-Related Decisions?

For a child to be provided with special education services, a parent must first sign consent for the initial evaluation. This requirement is intended to assure that the unique and extensive knowledge about a child that parents possess enhances the planning and delivery of educational services and that the authority held by parents as their child’s guardian is recognized and upheld.

For children in Missouri who have been removed from their biological parents' custody, the adult with whom the student lives is considered to be "acting as a parent" with implicit authority from the natural parent(s) to act as an educational decision-maker, unless the natural parent has informed the school district that despite the fact their child is living elsewhere, they intend to continue to be the educational decision-maker. It is advisable for a school district to clarify the intent of the natural parent(s) when a child is living outside the home by sending a letter to the parent and indicating that the school will look to the adult the child lives with to make educational decisions unless the parent notifies the school otherwise.

If a child is living in a foster home, the foster parent is the educational decision-maker, as the foster parent is considered to be "acting as a parent."

If a child is living in a group home or staffed private residential setting, the parent continues to be the educational decision maker as long as he/she has retained parental rights and provided evidence of this. If no evidence is provided, an educational surrogate needs to be appointed.

A Division of Children's Services caseworker can temporarily serve as an educational decision maker until an educational surrogate has been assigned by the Department of Education or by the judge overseeing the child's case. The responsible public agency, however, must pursue that assignment without delay.



TIP

If an educational surrogate has been appointed for a child, it is important for CASA volunteers to work closely with the educational surrogate because this person is responsible for special education- related decisions.

Rights and Responsibilities

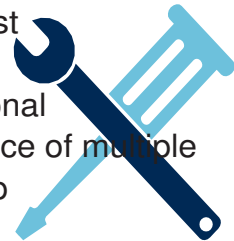
If your CASA child has a disability and is receiving special education services under IDEA, he or she will have an IEP that indicates the child's placement, including the instructional settings (general education classroom or special education classroom), who will provide the specially designed instruction or related services, annual goals and objectives of the child's IEP, and for students who are over 14 years of age, a transition plan. The IEP team may also develop a BIP if it is determined that the student requires one. As a CASA, you have the right to attend your child's IEP meetings and to speak up about his or her needs.

When a CASA has concerns about a child's special education services, he/she should discuss them with the school. The CASA should contact the Family Support team if he/she believes the school has violated a child's special education rights or disagrees with the school about a child's placement, services, evaluations, or eligibility for special education.



THINGS A CASA SHOULD KNOW

- Make every effort to be included as a member of your CASA child's Student Support Team (SST).
- Make every effort to attend every IEP meeting for your CASA child.
- Make sure you can describe the child's disability and its impact on school performance.
- Discuss what programs or services you believe the child needs and be prepared to explain why those services are the right fit.
- Check that any service providers, teachers or anyone else who knows the child and has relevant information are participating in the IEP meeting.
- Review all of your CASA child's evaluations, observations and progress reports. If you do not have an evaluation, request a copy in advance of the IEP meeting.
- If the child has received special education services in the past, try to determine how much progress the child has made since the last IEP meeting or the last evaluation. Has he or she met the goals on the previous year's IEP? If not, the student may need additional supports, services or possibly a different setting. Or, in the instance of multiple moves since the last IEP or evaluation, suggest strategies to help the child make progress.



The Special Education Process – Referral and Consent

It is important for you to know your CASA child's strengths and needs so you can advocate for an appropriate special education program, including academic rigor and effective behavior intervention strategies. Collaboration with school staff is key to solving problems and making sure your CASA child receives services that are necessary for him or her to be successful.

- A parent or school district personnel (i.e. teacher, counselor, principal) can refer a child for special education evaluation. Requests may be verbal or written.
- School psychologists/examiners are responsible for leading the special education referral process and assisting Student Support Teams.

- The school has thirty days to consider this request and determine if a disability is suspected. If no disability is suspected, the school district will provide the parent with a Notice of Action explaining the rationale for refusing to conduct an evaluation. If a disability is suspected, the school district will review information about the child in a form called a Review of Existing Data (RED). The RED team (a team of people that meets the requirements of an IEP team) looks at all of the information and decides if other data is needed to make a decision about special education eligibility. Written consent from the parent must be signed before testing can be started.



Under MO special education law, a child is eligible for special education and related services if the child meets **both** of the following criteria: **(1)** meets the requirements of at least one of the following disability categories: autism, deaf/blind, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment and deafness, intellectual disabilities, multiple disability, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, language impairment, sound system disorder, speech-fluency, speech-voice, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment/blindness, young child with a developmental delay, **AND (2)** is in need of special education and related services as a result of the identified disability.

Evaluations

A Notice of Action (NOA) is given to the parent(s) of the child proposing to test all areas related to the possible disability to help in deciding whether the child is eligible to receive special education services. The testing must include enough information to identify all of the child's education needs, and the results must describe the child's abilities.

Written permission is needed from a parent before testing can be started. Testing must be completed and an IEP team meeting held within 60 calendar days (not counting school vacations for longer than 5 days) of the signing of the assessment plan to determine if the child meets the eligibility requirements for special education.

The results of testing, including information from the parent and child's teacher(s), are used to decide on the child's eligibility for special education and related services and to make decisions about an educational program that meets the needs of the child. (If the parent disagrees with the results/conclusions of any part of the testing, he/she can request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE).

Special Education Eligibility

The IEP team meets (within 60 days of the date the parent gave written permission) to review the results of the child's testing. Members of the IEP team include:

- Parent(s) of the child
- Not less than one general education teacher of the child
- Not less than one special education teacher
- A representative of the school district
- Not less than one individual who can explain the results of the testing
- Other people who have knowledge or expertise about the child, invited by either the parent or the agency.
- The child, whenever appropriate.



If the team cannot agree on the child's eligibility, the district must make the final decision about the child's eligibility. If the parent does not agree with the district's decision he/she may challenge the decision through a due process hearing.

If the child is eligible for special education under one of the categories as defined by IDEA and the Missouri State Plan, the IEP team must meet within 30 calendar days to develop an IEP. The IEP generally includes the following components:

- Present levels of academic and functional performance (PLAAFP)
- Special considerations: Federal and State Requirements
- Measurable annual goals
- Accommodations and/or Assistive Technology
- The extent to which the student will participate in regular education classes
- Graduation or transition plan information for students 16 years and older
- Placement Considerations and Decision

The Annual IEP Review

The IEP team must review and revise the child's IEP at least once a year to decide whether the yearly goals are being met. The IEP can be reviewed and changed more often if the parent or school staff asks for a review.

The IEP review looks at any lack of progress toward the child's yearly goals or in general education courses; the results of any reevaluation; information about the child; the child's expected needs; or other matters.

IEP Reevaluation

At least once every three years the child will be reevaluated to decide whether they continue to be eligible to receive specialized education. This reevaluation may or may not include testing of the child. The IEP team may agree that the child still qualifies as a child with a disability following a review of existing data. If a parent believes more testing is needed in order to help decide whether his/her child's educational needs are being met, they can make a request in writing to the child's IEP team.

School Transfers for Special Education Students

The Missouri Safe Schools Act requires receiving school districts to request records within two business days of enrollment. Sending Missouri districts are required to send records within five business days of receiving a request for records.

If a student in special education who attends a Missouri school district moves after an IEP has been established, the receiving district must provide appropriate special education services, including services comparable to those described in the previous IEP, until the new district can call an IEP meeting to review the IEP. The receiving district may choose to perform a new evaluation (the school district must go through the standard IEP process before establishing an IEP), but the district must provide comparable services during the interim.

Special Disciplinary Considerations



Under IDEA, students with disabilities are entitled to a free Appropriate Public Education. Students thus have a legal right to make progress toward their IEP goals despite any change in school placement as a result of any disciplinary action.



Please see Appendix B for more information about what MO DESE special education procedures say about behavior and discipline.

Graduation

Each Missouri public school district/charter must provide a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities until they are graduated with a regular diploma or attain the age of 21 years. According to the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) local school boards must establish policies and guidelines that ensure that students with disabilities have the opportunity to earn credits toward graduation in a nondiscriminatory manner within the spirit and intent of that requirement. Provisions include:

- Any specific graduation requirement may be waived for a student with disabilities if recommended by the student's IEP Committee.
- Students with disabilities will receive grades and have credit transcribed in the same manner as all other students when they complete the same courses as other students.
- Students with disabilities who meet the goals and objectives of their IEPs, as measured by the evaluation procedures and criteria specified in the IEPs, will have credit transcribed in accordance with the state definition of units of credit.
- Students with disabilities who meet state and local graduation credit requirements by taking and passing regular courses, taking and passing regular courses with modification, taking and passing modified classes, or successfully achieving IEP goals and objectives shall be graduated and receive regular high school diplomas.
- Students with disabilities who reach age 21 or otherwise terminate their education, and who have met the requirements for graduation, receive a certificate of attendance.

Public school districts/charters must comply with [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) and ensure that graduation policies do not discriminate against students with disabilities protected under that act.

To ensure success for the student and smooth interactions throughout the special education process, be sure to:

- Interact with the school staff when things are going well as often as you do when as when things are going poorly.
- Be persistent if there is no action taken when issues arise. If someone says nothing can be done, seek a second opinion. Remind school personnel that the child is entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education and that there needs to be a strategy to address the child's needs even when resources are limited.
- Approach school personnel assuming that they are also interested in what is best for the child. Collaboration and working closely with team members is often the best way to get a good outcome for your CASA child.

CHAPTER 7

HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR SCHOOL READINESS

Chapter at a Glance:

- Why Early Learning Matters
- Early Head Start/ Head Start
- First Steps/ First Steps Transition
- Early Childhood Special Education
- Other Pre-Kindergarten Programs
- Parents as Teachers

“Children are school ready when they possess the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for success in school and later learning and life. Children in foster care have experienced neglect or abuse and may not have had the opportunities or advantages of other children.”



Why Early Learning Matters

From birth to age five, a child learns faster than at any other time in his or her life. Those early learning experiences influence success in school and beyond.

Kindergarten readiness isn't based on age; it's a set of skills. Children who start kindergarten with grade-level skills (the skills of a typical five-year-old) or higher are ready for a successful and satisfying education. They start ahead and they stay ahead.

A child's learning from birth to age 5 determines his or her kindergarten starting point. When students score low on entering kindergarten assessments, it rarely reflects their intelligence but rather missed opportunities during their earliest learning years.

Children need to enter school with basic reading, math, social and emotional skills. From birth to age five, when a child's brain develops rapidly, is the time to build the foundation of cognitive abilities and character. These early skills are necessary for success in school, health, career and life.

What's the Impact?

Lack of proficient literacy and early learning skills has far-reaching consequences for students and society. Students who start kindergarten behind form the largest group of dropouts, and they have less than a 12 percent chance of attending a four-year university. Most parents believe children who start behind will catch up within a year or two - but that is not the reality. Students who are one-to-three years behind typically make a year's worth of growth each year, just like all students. The bad news is, they are still one-to-three behind their grade level.

Closing a learning gap once a child begins school is costly and difficult because the child needs to achieve their typical year of academic growth plus another year of growth to catch up by even a single level. The data is clear. All children can and will improve, but most will never catch up to their classmates. And this has a lifelong impact.

It's All About the Brain

A child's experiences from birth to age five create the necessary brain connections essential for all future learning. Parents and caregivers are children's first and most influential teachers. Reading, talking, and purposeful play with children beginning at birth provides the necessary experiences which wire the young brain and help their minds grow strong and bright, shaping language, literacy, math, and social and emotional skills.

The science is clear. From the time a child is born, he or she is learning every waking moment. In fact, babies and toddlers are either learning or sleeping. And between birth to age 5, a child learns at a speed unmatched the rest of his or her life. It is during these years - when more than 85 percent of a child's brain is formed - that crucial brain connections are created. These connections help develop indispensable academic, social and cognitive skills, which are the basis for learning.

Babies, toddlers and preschoolers learn best by imitation and gentle repetition. Hundreds of repetitions in a safe, supportive environment involving reading, talking and playing with a purpose with children beginning at birth help shape their networks of neurons.

Brain research shows developing a network of neurons enables children to:

- Detect the different sounds in words (phonemic awareness).
- Recognize letters and develop strategies to figure out new words (decoding).
- Develop real-world understanding of what the words refer to (create contexts for understanding meaning).
- Build an oral and listening vocabulary (approximately 5,000 words by kindergarten).

A rewarding school career starts long before a child enters the classroom. From infancy until the first day of school, parents and caregivers provide the essential early developmental experiences and nurturing relationships which wire the young brain and build the necessary skill for lasting success.

from The Children's Reading Foundation



The following interventions and supports can help children in foster care with any developmental delays and allow them to participate in school at the same level as other students.

Early Head Start

Early Head Start is a federally funded program that provides early, continuous, intensive, and comprehensive child development and family support services to low-income infants and toddlers (ages 0-3) and their families, and pregnant women and their families.



The goals of Early Head Start are:

- To provide safe and developmentally enriching caregiving which promotes the physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of infants and toddlers, and prepares them for future growth and development;
- To support parents, both mothers and fathers, in their role as primary caregivers and teachers of their children;
- To support families in meeting personal goals and achieving self-sufficiency across a wide variety of domains;
- To mobilize communities, to provide the resources and environment necessary to ensure a comprehensive, integrated array of services and support for families;
- To ensure the provision of high-quality responsive services to families through the development of trained and caring staff.

Head Start

Head Start is a federally funded program for preschool children (ages 3-5) from low-income families.



Children who attend Head Start participate in a variety of educational activities. Staff assist parents with medical and dental care, provide healthy meals and snacks and supervise children playing indoors and outdoors in a safe setting.

Benefits of Head Start include:

Education - Children are exposed to a variety of developmentally age-appropriate activities through participation in a research-based curriculum. Children participate in a variety of activities that include: language, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, self-help and problem-solving.

Health - Each child receives comprehensive health screening and physical and dental examinations. Appropriate follow-up is monitored as needed. Training for staff and families is also provided.

Nutrition - Children participate in nutrition experiences and are encouraged to try new foods that are balanced and served in a family-style setting. Nutrition training, counseling and referrals are available for parents.

Social Services - Families are recruited by staff for the program and assist in identifying their strengths and goals. This component also promotes community support through agency collaboration to meet the needs of children.

Cole County Children's Division caseworkers are encouraged to refer children in foster care who may be eligible for Early Head Start/Head Start programs. Children in foster care are considered first-priority for services if a waiting list exists.

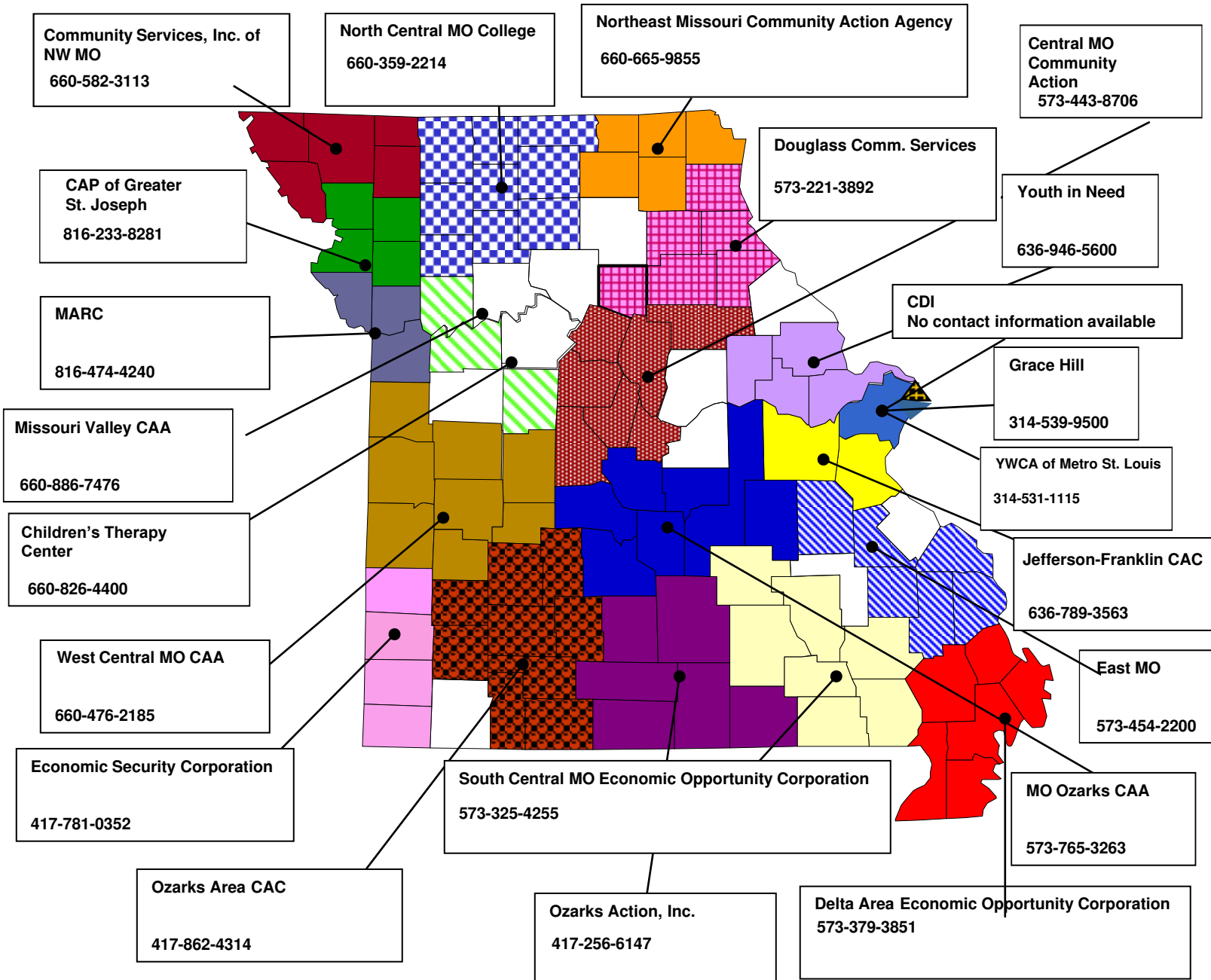
Central Missouri Community Action is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit-agency operating the Early Head Start and Head Start programs in mid-Missouri. The program is funded by the federal government and in part by local community support to provide services to low income families in the counties of Audrain, Boone, Callaway, Cole, Cooper, Howard, Moniteau and Osage.

For additional information visit [Head Start-An Office of the Administration for Children and Families Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc): <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>.



Missouri Head Start

Statewide Head Start Provider service areas:



Missouri First Steps/First Steps Transition

First Steps is Missouri's early intervention system for infants and toddlers.

The goal of First Steps is to make sure a family has the necessary support, services and resources needed to raise a healthy, happy and successful child. Family members know their needs best and have the greatest influence on the child's development. The First Steps system helps the family:



- Understand the child's needs.
- Increase the child's participation in family and community life.
- Obtain the assistance needed to deal with situations related to the child's development
- Provide the best conditions for the child to learn.

First Steps serves children between the ages of birth and 36 months who either:

- have a diagnosed physical or mental condition associated with developmental disabilities (such as Down syndrome, spina bifida, or cerebral palsy), or
- have a condition with a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay or disability (such as a very low birth weight child who has experienced intracranial bleeding or ventilator dependency), or
- are functioning at half the developmental level expected for a child of equal age in one or more of the following areas: communication, adaptive, physical (including vision and hearing), cognitive or social/emotional.

Eligibility is determined through an initial evaluation and assessment. This includes an assigned service coordinator collecting information about the child's birth, medical and developmental history and/or an evaluator administering a test to determine the child's current abilities. The evaluation is typically conducted in the family's home or another natural environment.

Once a child is determined eligible for First Steps, the service coordinator will schedule an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team meeting to determine the family's priorities,

develop outcomes and identify needed services. Each eligible child is also assigned to a group of professionals called an Early Intervention Team (EIT) that will provide the services and supports outlined in the IFSP.

Children may be referred to First Steps by their doctors, hospital staff, social-service agency caseworkers, the Parents as Teachers program or other public health entities. Parents may also contact First Steps directly if they are concerned about their child's development. It is a family-focused program designed not only to serve the needs of the child but also the family as a whole. Caregiver participation is essential for effective service and is the primary focus of those who serve the family. First Step professionals meet the child and the family in their natural environment where the child typically lives, learns and plays. The number and types of professionals involved with each family depend on the needs and outcomes identified in the IFSP. Some examples of professionals include occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, special instructors and audiologists.

First Steps Transition

Transition from First Steps means going from early intervention to another program such as the following:

- The local Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) program
- A local preschool program
- Other options

With help from the service coordinator and providers, a transition plan will be created to ensure a smooth and successful transition from First Steps. This meeting occurs before the child's third birthday. The following steps outline the transition process for the family:

Step 1 - Beginning with the first IFSP meeting, transition from First Steps is discussed at every meeting.

Step 2 - When the child is around 2 years old, the service coordinator will discuss options the family may consider for transition at age 3. Notification to the local school district along with the opt out policy will be discussed.

Step 3 - When the child is between 2 years 3 months and 2 years 9 months, the service coordinator will arrange and hold a transition plan meeting. This meeting is held to discuss the program options available in the community and develop a plan for child and family after the child turns 3. The family can do the following things to prepare for the transition plan meeting:

- Review the child's most recent IFSP.
- Talk with the First Steps providers about the child's progress.
- Talk about plans for the child after age 3.
- Decide if you want to share additional information such as medical reports or information from services the child received outside of First Steps.
- Write down questions and bring them to the meeting.
- Decide if you want to invite an ECSE representative to the meeting (if you are interested in pursuing ECSE, a meeting with the local school district must also occur before the child's third birthday; if the ECSE is present at this meeting you will have one combined meeting: the transition plan and conference with ECSE).

Step 4 - Your child will transition out of First Steps at age 3.

Going to preschool or another early childhood program is a new experience for a young child. Here are some strategies to prepare the child for a new program:

- Meet the child's teacher. Ask the teacher if the child can bring a favorite item to preschool for the first month to help transition to the program.
- Visit the child's classroom.
- Make sure the child's immunizations are updated.
- Read books to the child about going to preschool and riding a school bus.
- Talk about what children do in preschool. Make a picture book with the child.
- Talk about what teachers do in preschool. Make a box of items the child may see in the classroom.

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Services

Special Education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parent, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate, the content, methodology or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of a child with a disability to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the education standards of the public agency that apply to all children.



Early Childhood Special Education (ESCE) Services are provided in all areas of the state of Missouri. It is the responsibility of the local school district to ensure that any 3-5 year old child with a disability receives appropriate special education and related services. If a district's size or resources do not make it feasible to provide the services needed to meet the unique needs of all preschool children with disabilities in their district, they may choose to contract with private agencies, private individual contractors or other school districts to make available appropriate services.

Services for preschool children with disabilities can be provided in a variety of settings. Where possible and appropriate, services are provided in the environment where the child typically spends his or her day (community childcare facility, Head Start, Title 1 school district preschool programs, etc.); however, some children may require services provided in a group setting primarily designed for children with disabilities or individual or small group services in a setting such as a public school building. Services may be provided to children on a one-to-one basis, in small groups, or in a classroom setting. At least annually, the IEP team must determine if the child will participate 100% of the time in an integrated setting with non-disabled peers because the IEP requires it.

The following are examples of Special Education programs which meet the needs of children in Cole and surrounding counties.

Special Learning Center

The Special Learning Center provides comprehensive, early intervention services for children from birth to age 7 with developmental delays and disabilities. Children served in the Special Learning Center program have delays ranging from mild to severe. Children without delays also attend the Special Learning Center and serve as friends and role models to their peers.

Many Central Missouri public school districts contract with the Special Learning Center for early childhood special education services including:

- Physical, occupational and/or speech therapy services provided at the public school during school hours;
- Classroom instruction provided at Special Learning Center through the preschool/pre-Kindergarten program;
- Consultative services

Southwest Early Childhood Special Education Program

The Southwest Early Childhood Special Education Program is offered by the Jefferson City Public School District. This program serves children ages 3-5 in Cole and Callaway counties who meet the state and federal guidelines for developmental delay or disability.



Eligible students are determined through an evaluation process and must have an active individual education plan (IEP). In order to be determined eligible for special services, children must show significant delay in one or more developmental areas: physical development, communication, cognitive, adaptive skills, social/emotional functioning.

Services available include:

- Itinerant Services: Provided to students either in the Southwest school setting on a limited time basis or in a child's natural environment
- Center-based Services: Provided in the early childhood special education classrooms for students requiring specialized instruction in addition to therapies
- Services: Occupational, Physical, Speech, Language Therapy, Specialized Instruction - (in a variety of developmental areas), and more

First Steps and ECSE Comparison Chart

Components	First Steps	Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)
Ages Served	Birth to age 3	3 to 5 years olds
Program Goals	Support the family to meet the developmental needs of their child with a delay or disability as identified in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).	Support the child with a disability to meet his/her educational goals as identified in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
Eligibility	Infants and toddlers who have a newborn condition, diagnosed medical condition or a developmental delay.	Preschool-age children who have a disability that meets one of 13 categorical disabilities (see Missouri State Plan for Special Education).
Services	Services are provided to support the family's ability to meet their child's developmental needs.	Services are specially designed instruction to support the child's educational needs.
Location	Services are provided in natural environments, such as a child's home or other places in the community.	Services are provided in the "least restrictive environment" or alongside children who are not disabled. Removal of the child from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.
Plans	An IFSP is developed by the team, including the parents, and includes outcomes based on the family's concerns and priorities. The plan is reviewed every six months.	An IEP is developed by the team, including the parents, and includes the child's educational goals, services and placement, including how progress will be measured. The plan is reviewed at least once per school year.
Cost	Parents may pay a monthly family cost participation fee.	Services listed in the IEP are the responsibility of the school district and are provided at no cost to the parent.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, or disability in its programs and activities. Inquiries related to Department programs and to the location of services, activities, and facilities that are accessible by persons with disabilities may be directed to the Jefferson State Office Building, Office of the General Counsel, Coordinator – Civil Rights Compliance (Title VI/Title IX/504/ADA/Age Act), 6th Floor, 205 Jefferson Street, P.O. Box 480, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480; telephone number 573-526-4757 or TTY 800-735-2966; email civilrights@dese.mo.gov.

Other Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) Programs

Other pre-kindergarten programs for children in Cole County include community preschools, faith-based preschools, and early childhood programs through local school districts.

One notable pre-school program offered through the Jefferson City Public Schools is the Southwest Early Childhood Title One Preschool.

Eligibility requirements are as follows:

- Child must be 4 years of age before Aug. 1 of the current school year.
- Child must reside within the Jefferson City Public Schools attendance area. (Callaway County residents may request consideration for placement in the classroom located at Callaway Hills Elementary School).
- Child must meet eligibility for free/reduced lunch benefits.
- Family must sign up for and actively participate in Parents as Teachers.
- Child must be screened through Jefferson City Public Schools.

Full and half-day attendance options are available.



Parents as Teachers

Cole County public school districts offer the Parents as Teachers program as a valuable opportunity for families. Parents as Teachers is an early childhood home visiting and parent education program for families with children from birth to 5 years of age as well as expectant parents.



Free services offered through Parents as Teachers include:

- Annual child health/hearing/vision and developmental screenings for children ages 3 months to 5 years (not yet in kindergarten).
- Group connection events where parents and children participate in activities together or parents come to receive information from speakers on a variety of topics.
- Connection to other local resources.
- Access to a Drop In and Play Center for enrolled children and their parents.
- Personalized home visits with a certified parent educator for families who qualify (includes partnering to set and reach child/family goals, discussing a variety of child development and parenting topics, and sharing a book and specially chosen parent-child activity).



As a CASA volunteer, if any of the children on your case are too young for school, understanding the opportunities listed in this chapter are critical. **Making sure that the youngest of the kids we serve have these early advantages can make a **profound** difference in their further education.**



CONCLUSION

As a CASA volunteer, you're already familiar with the many challenges children in foster care face, including when it comes to reaching their full academic potential. Issues like frequent school changes, lack of cross-system communication, the effects of traumatic experiences and more can often hold these children back from attaining a quality education and meeting their goals.

*But now, armed with the tools and knowledge in this guidebook, you are also aware of the instrumental **opportunity** you have to make a real difference for your CASA child's education. Equipped with a better understanding of how the school and child welfare systems interact, you can stand up for your student and ensure they get the individualized attention they deserve – setting them up to succeed and overcome their circumstances.*

Capital City CASA's vision is a safe, positive future for all Cole County children, and this work is an essential part of achieving that vision. Volunteers like you have the potential to make a lasting difference in a child's life. You have the power to help a child reach their educational goals by making sure they have the resources and support they need. Thank you for all that you do to create brighter futures for the children who need us most.



RESOURCES & APPENDICES

- Resources: Helpful Websites
- Appendix A: Glossary of Acronyms
- Appendix B: Students with Disabilities and Discipline: Frequently Asked Questions
- Appendix C: Educational Advocacy Checklist
- Appendix D: Educational Advocacy: Questions to Ask Your Youth
- Appendix E: Capital City CASA Library Educational Resources
- Appendix F: Infinite Campus

RESOURCES

Helpful Websites

- MO Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education: <https://dese.mo.gov/>
- MO Child Welfare Manual: <https://dss.mo.gov/cd/info/cwmanual/>
(see Chapter 31: Educational Stability and Support)
- The IEP Center: <http://www.specialeducationrights.com/>
- Missouri Parents Act (MPACT): www.missouriparentsact.org/
- Wrightslaw: <https://www.wrightslaw.com/>
- Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University:
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>
- Child Welfare Information Gateway: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/service-array/education-services/meeting-needs/educational-stability/>

Appendix A: Glossary of Acronyms

ABA	Applied Behavior Analysis
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AP	Advanced Placement
BD	Behavior Disorder
BIP	Behavior Intervention Plan
CAPTA	Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act
DESE	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
DSS	Division of Social Services
ELL	English Language Learner
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
FAPE	Free Appropriate Education Act
FBA	Functional Behavior Assessment
FERPA	Family Education Rights and Privacy Act
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEE	Independent Educational Evaluation
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IFSP	Individualized Family Service Plan
ISS	In-School Suspension
LD	Learning Disabled/Disabilities
LEA	Local Education Agency
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MAP	Missouri Assessment Program
MSIP	Missouri School Improvement Plan
OHI	Other Health Impaired
OI	Orthopedic Impairment
OT	Occupational Therapy
PAT	Parents as Teachers
PBS	Positive Behavior Supports
PT	Physical Therapy
RTI	Response to Intervention
RSMo	Revised Statutes of Missouri
SEA	State Education Agency
SP	Speech or Language Impairment
SST	Student Support Team
SW-PBS	Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support

Appendix B: Students with Disabilities and Discipline: Frequently Asked Questions

MO Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education

Does the Missouri Safe Schools Act apply to students with disabilities?

Yes. However, this state law specifies that its provisions are subject to the state and federal regulations on disciplining students with disabilities. Those provisions come into play primarily where the disciplinary action involves a long-term suspension (defined in question #7) or expulsion, and where a student has been expelled from a prior district and is seeking to enroll in a new one.

Can students with disabilities be removed from school for possession of a dangerous weapon, possession or use of illegal drugs, or sale or solicitation of a controlled substance?

Yes. Such students may be removed from school in several ways: (1) a 45-calendar-day interim alternative educational placement; (2) a court injunction; (3) a long-term suspension or expulsion if the student's conduct is determined to be unrelated to the student's disability; or (4) a 45-calendar-day interim alternative educational placement following a decision by a formal due process hearing that the student is dangerous. (The 45-day interim placement also can be renewed through additional due process hearings if the student is deemed to be dangerous.)

Can a school district "stack" suspensions when drugs and weapons are involved?

Yes. When a student is involved with a dangerous weapon or drug situation, there is nothing to prohibit the school district from imposing an initial short-term suspension, followed by a 45-calendar-day alternative interim educational placement, and followed by a long-term suspension or expulsion (if the student's conduct is then determined unrelated to the disability).

Are school districts required to use 45-calendar-day placement for drugs or weapons, or can they go right to a long-term suspension/expulsion if conduct is unrelated to the student's disability?

No, a school district is not required to use the 45-calendar-day interim alternative educational placement when a student is involved with a dangerous weapon or drugs. A school district may proceed immediately to a long-term suspension or expulsion if the IEP team determines the conduct is unrelated to the disability. As stated above, the school district may also "stack" suspensions. This means a school district could short-term suspend a student to allow time to convene the IEP team to determine if the child's disability is related to the behavior that is subject to the disciplinary action (manifestation determination). If the conduct is determined to be unrelated to the student's disability, a long-term suspension or expulsion may then be imposed.

How does the school district remove students with disabilities from school if they are dangerous or violent?

There are four options: (1) A court injunction; (2) a due process hearing order for a 45-calendar-day alternative interim educational setting; (3) a long-term suspension or expulsion if the conduct is unrelated to the disability; or, (4) a change of placement through the IEP process to a more restrictive environment based on needs of the

student. This last method cannot be used as a long-term suspension/disciplinary option.

When a student with a disability is suspended for more than 10 days in a school year, does the student still receive services?

When a student with a disability is suspended for more than 10 days in a school year, but is not long-term suspended, the school district administration, in consultation with the child's teacher, will determine which services are needed to enable the child to appropriately progress in general curriculum and appropriately advance towards achieving goals set out in the IEP.

What is considered a "long-term" suspension?

A long-term suspension is a suspension in excess of 10 consecutive days or in excess of 10 days cumulatively where a pattern of suspension is created. To determine whether a pattern is created, school districts must consider:

- 1) if the series of removals total more than ten(10) days cumulatively in a school year;
- 2) if the child's behavior is substantially similar to the child's behavior in previous incidents that resulted in the series of removals; and,
- 3) such additional factors as length of each removal, the total amount of time the child has been removed, and the proximity of the removals to one another.

When can students with disabilities be long-term suspended or expelled?

Students with disabilities may be long-term suspended or expelled if the conduct leading to the discipline is unrelated to the student's disability. However, even where the conduct is unrelated, the student must continue to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and services which allow for continued progress in general education curriculum pursuant to an Individualized Education Program (IEP) during the period of long-term suspension or expulsion.

Do students have a right to services when short-term suspended?

No. Students who receive short-term, out-of-school suspensions do not have a right to continued services. Students with disabilities who are short-termed suspended must be provided any services provided to nondisabled students. An example is providing homework to students who are short term suspended must be provided any services provided to nondisabled students. An example is providing homework to students who are short term suspended. However, if such students have been suspended in excess of 10 days cumulatively, the school administrator, in consultation with the student's teacher, will determine if a pattern of suspensions exists. If no such pattern is determined, school personnel, in consultation with at least one of the child's teachers, determine the extent to which services are required on the 11th day and thereafter.

What are some discipline options that can be used with a student with a disability?

Short-term suspension; community service; detentions; paying for damage to school property; Saturday school; counseling or social skills training; long-term suspensions or expulsions (if the conduct is determined unrelated to the disability); 45-calendar-day interim alternative educational placements if the student possessed a dangerous weapon, or possess/used illegal drugs, or solicited/sold controlled substances.

Appendix C: Educational Advocacy Checklist

Enrollment

- Is the child or youth enrolled in school?
 - ✓ At which school is the child or youth enrolled?
 - ✓ In what type of school setting is the child or youth enrolled (e.g., specialized school)?
- How long has the child or youth been attending his/her current school?
 - ✓ Where is this school located in relation to the child's or youth's foster care placement?
 - ✓ Were efforts made to continue school placement where feasible?
- If currently not in a school setting, what educational services is the child or youth receiving and from whom?
 - ✓ Is the child or youth receiving homebound or home-schooled educational services?
 - ✓ If YES: How frequently are educational sessions taking place? What is the duration of each session? (e.g. how many hours?)

Provision of Supplies

- Does the child or youth have appropriate clothing to attend school?
- Does the child or youth have the necessary supplies and equipment (e.g. pens, notebooks, musical instruments) to be successful in school?

Transportation

- How is the child or youth getting to or from school?
- What entity (e.g. school, foster parent) is responsible for providing transportation?

Attendance

- Is the child or youth regularly attending school?
- Has the child or youth been expelled, suspended or excluded from school this year/ever?
 - ✓ If YES: How many times?
 - ✓ Have proper due process procedures been followed for the expulsions, suspensions or exclusions from school?
 - ✓ What was the nature/reason for the child's or youth's most recent expulsion, suspension or exclusion from school?
 - ✓ How many days of school will the child or youth miss as a result of being expelled, suspended or excluded from school?
 - ✓ If not currently attending school, what educational services is the child or youth receiving and from whom?
- How many days of school has the child or youth missed this year?
 - ✓ What is the reason for these absences?
 - ✓ What steps have been taken to address these absences?
 - ✓ Has the child or youth received any trancies and, if so, how many times?

Performance Level

- When did the child or youth last receive an educational evaluation or assessment? How comprehensive was this assessment?
- At which grade level is the child or youth currently performing?
 - ✓ Is this the appropriate grade level for this child or youth?
 - ✓ Is there a specific plan in place to help this child or youth reach the appropriate grade level?
- What is the child's or youth's current grade point average? If below average, what efforts are being made to address this issue?
- Is the child or youth receiving any tutoring or other academic supportive services? If YES: In which subjects?

Tracking Education Information

- Who is making sure the child or youth is attending school?
- Who gathers and communicates information about the child's or youth's educational history and needs?
- Who is responsible for educational decision-making for the child or youth?
- Who monitors the child's or youth's educational progress on an ongoing basis?
- Who is notified by the school if the child or youth is absent (e.g. foster parent, caseworker?)

Change in Placement/Change in School

- Has the child or youth experienced a change in schools as a result of a change in his/her foster care placement? If YES: How many times has this occurred?
 - ✓ What information, if any has been provided to the child's or youth's new school about his/her academic records and needs?
 - ✓ Did this change in foster care placement result in the child or youth missing any school? If YES: How many days of school did the child or youth miss?
 - ✓ What efforts were made to maintain the child or youth in his/her original school despite foster care placement change?

Health Factors

- Does the child have any physical issues that impair his/her ability to learn, interact appropriately, or attend school regularly (e.g. hearing impairment, visual impairment)?
 - ✓ If YES: What is the physical issue?
 - ✓ How is this physical issue impacting the child's or youth's education?
 - ✓ How is this need being addressed?
- Does the child or youth have any mental health issues that impair his/her ability to learn, interact appropriately, or attend school regularly?
 - ✓ If YES: What is this mental health issue?

- ✓ How is this mental health issue impacting the child's or youth's education?
- ✓ How is this need being addressed?
- Is the child or youth currently being prescribed any psychotropic medications?
 - ✓ If YES: Which medications have been prescribed?
 - ✓ Has the child's or youth's need for the medication been clearly explained to him/her?
 - ✓ How will the medication affect the child's or youth's educational experience?

Emotional Issues

- Does the child or youth have any emotional issues that impair his/her ability to learn, interact appropriately, or attend school regularly?
 - ✓ If YES: What is the emotional issue?
 - ✓ How is this emotional issue impacting the child or youth's education?
 - ✓ How is this need being addressed?
- Is the child or youth experiencing any difficulty interacting with other children or youth at school (e.g. does s/he have a network of friends? Has s/he experienced difficulty with bullying?
 - ✓ If YES: What is being done to address this issue?

Special Education and Services Under 504 and IDEA

- If the child or youth has a physical, mental or emotional disability that impacts learning, has the child or youth been evaluated for Special Education/Section 504 eligibility and services?
 - ✓ If NO: who will make referral for evaluation and assessment?
 - ✓ If YES: What are the results of the assessment?
 - ✓ Have assessment results been shared with the appropriate individuals at the child's or youth's school?
- Does the child or youth have an appointed educational surrogate pursuant to IDEA (e.g. the child's or youth's birth parent, someone else meeting the IDEA definition of parent, or an appointed surrogate parent)?

- ✓ If NO: Who can best speak on behalf of the educational needs of the child or youth?
- ✓ Has the court used its authority to appoint a surrogate for the child or youth?
- ✓ Has the child or youth's educational decision-maker been informed of all information in the assessment and does that person understand the results?
- Does the child or youth have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?
 - ✓ If YES: Is the child's or youth's parent or caretaker cooperating in giving IEP information to the appropriate stakeholders or signing releases?
 - ✓ Is the plan meeting the child's or youth's needs?
 - ✓ Does the child's or youth's educational decision-maker agree with the IEP and is that person participating in developing the IEP?
- Does the child or youth have a Section 504 Plan?
 - ✓ If YES: Is the plan meeting his/her needs?
 - ✓ Is there an advocate for the child or youth participating in meetings and development of this plan?

Extracurricular Activities and Talents

- What are some identifiable areas in which the child or youth is excelling at school?
 - ✓ If YES: Which activities is the child involved in?
 - ✓ Are efforts being made to allow the child or youth to continue in his/her extracurricular activities (e.g. provision of transportation, additional equipment, etc.)?
- Have the child's or youth's talents been identified?
 - ✓ If YES: What are these talents?
 - ✓ What efforts are being made to encourage the child or youth to pursue these talents?

This checklist has been adapted from one originally developed by TeamChild: Advocacy for Youth. Its expansion to a national judicial checklist was made possible through the support of Casey Family Programs. The checklist is published by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges in *Asking the Right Questions: A Judicial Checklist to Ensure That the Educational Needs of Children and Youth in Foster Care Are Being Addressed* (2005).

Appendix D: Questions to Ask Your Youth

What's the best way to make sure you're prepared to advocate for your foster youth's academic needs? It may seem obvious, but you've got to get to know them!

Your first goal as a CASA is to spend time learning about your youth; what are their hopes, their dreams, their fears, their aspirations? The same questions easily apply to their educational experience. Give your youth lots of opportunities to discuss all aspects of their educational experience. You should have some basic information before meeting your foster youth (e.g. grade, academic performance, whether they have transferred to a new school), but don't be afraid to ask those same questions of your youth. They may give you a different perspective. Feel free to ask about extracurricular activities, friends, teachers, classes, homework, and more.

The lists below should serve as an overview of the kinds of questions you may want to ask. Try to keep your questions open-ended; give your youth the opportunity to be thoughtful with their answers instead of asking simple yes or no questions. Many youth won't quickly volunteer information; they may not even realize that there is a concern or matter that needs to be addressed. Often they may assume that you, no matter what your role, can't or won't do anything about concerns. By asking these questions, you can begin to gain more insight about what is going on at school and with their education. Check back on the different areas periodically, even if your youth seems to be on track.

If you do find out about problems - do your best to try to address them quickly. While weeks pass with phone tag between teachers, caseworkers, CASAs, administrators and guardians at which the youth continues to suffer a negative school experience. Insist on quick resolution when possible.

**The following lists of questions are all-inclusive: some are more appropriate for elementary school-aged youth, while others are more appropriate for middle school or high school-aged youth.*

General

These open-ended questions allow your foster youth to bring up anything they want to talk about in particular.

- Can you tell me about your school?
- How many schools have you attended so far?
- How do you get to school? (if by bus, tell me about riding on the bus; if walking, how long is the walk and who walks with you?) What about for after-school activities?
- What's breakfast/lunchtime like at your school? Do you bring your lunch or eat school lunches?
- Can you tell me about your friends at school? What do you like to do during recesses?
- What's your favorite part about your school?
- What is hardest for you about school?
- If you could change something about school, what would it be?
- How important is school for you right now?
- Are you doing as well in school as you would like to?
- Do you ever have a problem or concern at school that you feel like nobody is listening to or doing anything about?
- If you get in trouble at school, is someone from your home coming to school to meet with the principals/teachers?
- Are you taken out of school a lot for appointments? What is being scheduled during school hours that takes you out of school? Is it something that can be rescheduled?
- Do you miss a lot of classes voluntarily (skipping)? What causes you to want to skip school?
- When there is a performance or activity where family and friends come watch the students, does anybody come watch you?
- Do you feel like you fit in at school? Are you able to be "current" with haircuts, clothes, shoes, etc.? Why or why not? How do you feel about it?
- Do you feel you are treated differently or unfairly sometimes because you are in foster care?

Classes

Asking about classes can help you develop a sense of what kind of learner your foster youth may be. It can also provide you with insight into whether they may need special education or other extra support.

- How do you feel you are doing in school?
- How do others view you are doing in school? Have you received comments from teachers or adults about how you are doing in school?
- If doing well - what do you think is helping you do well? If not doing well - what are some of the things causing you to not do as well as you want?
- How do you like your teacher(s)? Do you have a favorite teacher?
- Do you have a favorite subject? Why is it your favorite?
- Do you have a least favorite subject? What don't you like about it?
- Are you able to take the classes you want to take?
- Do you feel like you are in the right class (are you taking classes you've already taken or classes for which you have not had adequate preparation)?
- Are there subjects you have where you feel you need some extra help with that you are not getting?
- Do you know what grade level you are considered? Is that where you should be/think you should be?
- If you are behind in credits/classes, have you been offered credit recovery? Have you talked to your counselor about what you can do to catch up? If so, what is the plan and how is it going?
- Who is your teacher? What is he/she like? Do you like him/her? What about other teachers you have?
- Is there a teacher or someone at school who's especially nice or helpful to you?
- Is there anything you think that might be making it harder for you to learn? (can you see the board/hear the teacher, are you sleepy, do you feel like there are too many distractions, do you have trouble writing down your thoughts, do your feelings interfere with what is going on in class?)
- Is it easy or tough to sit in class for a full period? For a full day?
- How do you like working on projects with your classmates?
- Are you able to go on field trips?

Home Support

It is important for a foster youth to also have support outside of school, particularly as their workload increases with age and grade level.

- Do you have a good place to do your homework? Are there any issues or distractions that cause you to have problems doing your homework at home?
- Do you have problems doing work at home because you don't have computer/internet access?
- When you have questions about what you're learning, do you feel like you have someone to ask?
- Do you have someone who can tutor you if you need help with your homework and studies?
- Can you stay after school if you need to for help with homework and studies?
- Do you feel supported in school by your [caregiver]*?
- Do you feel like you have enough supplies and tools to get your work done?

**could be a parent, foster parent, caregiver, relative, or foster home staff member*

Extracurricular

You can also be an advocate and resource for new opportunities that might inspire your youth beyond the classroom. Find out what your youth enjoys so you can help them find healthy outlets for those interests.

- What do you like to do outside of school?
- Are you able to talk to or visit with your friends from school outside of school? If not, why not?
- Do you get to attend events the school has after school, in the evenings and on weekends? If not, why not?
- Can you tell me about clubs, sports and other activities you participate in during or after school?
- Are there any activities that you've done in the past that you would like to be doing now?
- Are there any activities that you haven't done that you'd like to be doing now? Maybe that you've seen friends do?

- Are you being told you can't participate in activities/sports because you are new to the school?
- Are there things you can't participate in or do because of money?

Future

Some foster youth may not have been asked about what their goals are. Even if they do not have answers, encourage them to think about their plans for the future. This is a great exercise for students of any age.

- Do you know what you want to do when you grow up/graduate?
- What are your goals/hopes/dreams/ideas for what you'll do after school?
- Do you know what it takes to get there? (e.g. good grades, vocational program, college degree, etc.)
- What else do you need *now* to be able to get there?
- Is there someone who encourages and supports you in what you want to do when you grow up? Who?
- Do you know who to talk to when you when you have questions about what you want to be?
- Has someone talked to you about what options you have after high school? Who are those people?
- Are you being encouraged and supported in your educational goals? Do you know who to talk to when you have career/educational questions?
- Are you getting guidance about planning for your education after high school?
- For juniors and seniors - is someone helping you pick out and apply for college, fill out financial aid forms, register for ACT/SAT, look into housing at colleges, etc.?
- For seniors - are you getting to do the things other seniors do - class pictures, graduation gown, prom, graduation party? If not - who have you talked to about it and what have they said?

Other Questions

- Do you know who to talk to when you need help with emotions you are having?
- Do you know who to talk to when you are having miscellaneous questions, just things you want to know?
- Do you know who to talk to when the person who is supposed to be helping you isn't?
- Has someone talked to you about the benefits you receive when you transition out of foster care or about the option of staying in extended care?

Getting to know your foster youth is an ongoing process. The longer you work closely with a youth, the better sense you'll get of their wants, needs, and goals for school and beyond. Encourage them to follow those dreams!

Additional Resources

Judicial Council Checklist/s (Judicial-Education-Checklist.pdf): Use this checklist as a guide in addition to the questions above to develop an understanding of your youth's educational aspirations and goals.

CAPITAL CITY CASA LIBRARY EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY RESOURCES

Brain Whys: A Brain Book for Parents and Educators

by Dr. Cheryl Moretz

Building Resilience in Students Impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences

by Victoria Romero , et al.

Disrupting Poverty: Five Powerful Classroom Practices

by Kathleen M. Budge & William H. Parrett

Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind

by Eric Jensen

Fostering Resilient Learners--Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom

by Kristin Souers

Helping Traumatized Children Learn: A Report and Policy Agenda

by Harvard Law School and The Task Force on Children Affected by Domestic Violence

Helping Traumatized Children Learn: Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools

by Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School

Lost at School

by Ross W. Greene, Ph D

PBIS Tier Three Handbook

by Jessica Djabrayan Hannigan

Teachers' Guide to Trauma

by Dr. Melissa Sadin

Teaching with Poverty in Mind

by Eric Jensen

What Should Danny Do? School Day

by Adir Levey, et al.

Appendix F: Infinite Campus



Infinite Campus is a web-based student information system. Some of the information available to parents/legal guardians via the Parent Portal include: demographic information, a calendar, individual student schedule, grades, attendance and immunization records.

