

Ready to Succeed in the Classroom

Teachers' Ideas About How School **Districts** Can Help Improve Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth in the Foster Care System



The issue of improving educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care is receiving some long-overdue attention, but the voices of classroom teachers have not been prominent in the discussions so far. To help fill this gap, a team from the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning and funded by the Stuart Foundation convened six discussion groups in late 2009 to explore how teachers and foster children and youth interact in the classroom. The discussion group sessions were held in three California counties (Fresno, Orange, and Sacramento).

This document is one of three highlighting “wish lists” from teachers who participated in these discussions. The wish lists capture teachers’ ideas about what would help them serve children and youth in foster care better, at three different levels: within their schools, at the district or administrative level, and outside the school system (within the broader community). Their ideas for **school districts** are summarized below, followed by discussion questions for district administrators and staff that are based on the teachers’ wish lists. We encourage you to use these questions as a starting point for discussions within your school district, and to add to the list.

Teachers wished their districts and administrative staff would find ways to share information that would enable them to work more successfully and efficiently with these students. Another specific concern was the problem of students not being able to receive partial credit for their work when they transferred from one school to the next. As students approach the end of their high school years with a deficit in the credits needed to graduate and no realistic hope of making them up, many give up and lose whatever motivation they had to persevere in their classes, according to secondary school teachers.

High school teachers were painfully aware of the “cliff” that awaits youth when they emancipate from the system at the age of 18 and their foster families no longer receive financial support. As one teacher said, she had difficulty envisioning her own 18-year-old son — a product of a loving, supportive, and happy family — living independently at that age, much less someone lacking the education and life skills to do so. Teachers wished their districts and communities could find more ways to help youth aging out of the foster care system with credits towards graduation, variations on adult education, transitions to community colleges,

and other support for older students. They noted that both schools and districts could do more to help foster youth (and other students) explore careers earlier in their academic progression by considering alternative pathways through high school, including Career Technical Education (CTE).

Many teachers expressed grief about losing track of foster students to whom they had become attached, but whose progress they could not follow once the children left their schools. They wished for help from the district in finding ways to stay in touch with these students, while preserving their privacy and confidentiality.

Teachers thought districts could do more to ensure that children stayed within the same school or feeder system, even when their placements changed. Similar to the wish list for their individual schools, teachers wished districts could provide more professional development, including guest speakers on topics relevant to helping teachers become more effective with youth from the foster care system who were in their classrooms (i.e., dealing with typical behaviors, creating structure and consistency in the classroom, accessing community resources).

Ready to Succeed: Discussion Card for Districts

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Discussion Questions for School Districts: What Can *Districts* Do to Help Teachers Help Students in Foster Care?

- What is already being done to address the issue of partial credits not being awarded, creating a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to graduation; what more could we be doing?
- How can our district offer more support for older students (i.e., over 18) — e.g., offering more adult education or helping students transition to college and careers?
- What can our district do to promote earlier career exploration and provide multiple pathways through high school (Career Technical Education)?
- Can we find ways to allow district teachers to contact and stay in touch with a student removed from their classroom due to a placement change?
- What are we doing (and what more can we do) to keep children in the same school or feeder system, even when placements change?
- What types of professional development, including guest speakers, could be provided district-wide to support teachers with students in foster care in their classrooms?

The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning

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