

Policy recommendations for school boards and state policymakers

CSBA's Students in Focus: Foster Youth policy briefs provide up-to-date information and guidance for governance teams. The first brief, **Foster Youth in TK-12 Education**, is designed to help governance teams have data-informed discussions to ensure all students have the resources they need to succeed. **The second brief** draws on promising practice from local educational agencies (LEAs) and community-based partners across the state, outlines relevant legal and policy frameworks, and provides guiding questions for board members. By integrating research-based strategies with on-the-ground examples, these briefs equip governance teams with practical tools to improve educational stability and academic outcomes for foster youth. Based on data shared within these briefs and to achieve meaningful progress, it is essential that educators, social workers, health professionals, and community leaders work in concert to not only respond to immediate barriers but also lay the groundwork for long-term educational attainment and well-being for foster youth.



The following policy recommendations prioritize integrating academic, health, and social supports as well as continuous professional development and robust data sharing to build an educational landscape where foster youth are not only supported in their challenges but empowered to realize their full potential.

Strengthen school stability protections

- ▶ Guarantee immediate and seamless enrollment for foster youth, regardless of the completeness of their educational records, to minimize disruptions in learning and ensure their uninterrupted academic progression.
- ▶ Designate and allocate targeted transportation funding to ensure foster youth can remain at their school of origin. This practice promotes educational stability and continuity of supportive peer and adult relationships during placement changes.
- ▶ Become familiar with state and federal laws and requirements, as child welfare policies transcend the TK-12 environment and involve multiple state and local agencies including the California Department of Social Services, the state dependency and juvenile delinquency courts, county child welfare agencies, and local law enforcement.
- ▶ Explore how your LEA can support a student who chooses to remain in the child welfare system beyond the age of 18 through Assembly Bill 12 – the extended foster care law allowing students to continue receiving important services through the age of 21, as needed.

Invest in trauma-informed and healing-centered practices

- ▶ Implement robust, LEA-wide training programs on trauma-informed practices for all educators, administrators, and support staff. Such training should include recognizing signs of trauma, understanding its impact on learning and behavior, and developing classroom strategies that respond sensitively to the needs of trauma-affected students.

- ▶ Systematically embed healing-centered, restorative practices and comprehensive mental health support into the daily fabric of school life. The systematic incorporation of these practices ensures that all foster youth have ready access to services that address both academic and emotional well-being. This should include ongoing professional development and collaboration with mental health professionals.
- ▶ Encourage the development of inclusive and collaborative interdisciplinary teams to help improve communication between local agencies and enhance and expand services for students.

Help close the achievement gap through rigorous academic access

- ▶ Broaden and facilitate access for foster youth to college preparatory courses, Advanced Placement (AP) classes, and career technical education (CTE) pathways, removing bureaucratic barriers and providing targeted academic advising to help these students pursue challenging coursework that prepares them for postsecondary success.
- ▶ Increase the use of local data dashboards to rigorously monitor the academic progress of foster youth, enabling timely identification of students who require additional academic interventions or supports and ensuring accountability for educational outcomes at both the school and LEA levels.
- ▶ Utilize existing state requirements and permissions enabling students to meet local graduation requirements and to improve their opportunities for pursuing admission to college and universities.

Address attendance and engagement

- ▶ Develop and implement early warning attendance and engagement systems that are specifically tailored to the unique circumstances of foster youth, using predictive indicators to identify at-risk students and intervene before chronic absenteeism undermines educational attainment.
- ▶ Expand the availability of wraparound supports such as high-quality mentorship programs, individualized tutoring, and dedicated family engagement liaisons or attendance coordinators. These supports should be designed to provide ongoing encouragement and guidance, foster a sense of belonging, and address both academic and social-emotional needs.



Integrate health and wellness supports

- ▶ Establish comprehensive, school-based mental health services coordinated in partnership with child welfare agencies, ensuring that foster youth have timely access to counseling, behavioral health interventions, and crisis support within the school environment.
- ▶ Facilitate continuity of medical care for foster youth during placement transitions by promoting effective, secure cross-agency data sharing and collaboration between schools, healthcare providers, and child welfare organizations. This coordination guarantees that critical health information follows the student, reducing service gaps and supporting overall well-being.