

# OPERATION: EDUCATION

AN ACTION KIT TO ACHIEVE POSITIVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN THE CHILD WELFARE AND JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEMS



Juveniles  
for Justice  
a project of Juvenile Law Center



Youth  
Fostering  
Change  
a project of Juvenile Law Center



# OPERATION: EDUCATION

---

## **An Action Kit to Achieve Positive Educational Outcomes for Youth in the child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems**

A publication of Juveniles for Justice, Youth Fostering Change, and Juvenile Law Center. Youth advocates in Juveniles for Justice and Youth Fostering Change created this publication during the 2018-2019 program year, in collaboration with Juvenile Law Center staff.

**Juvenile Law Center advocates for rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the foster care and justice systems.**

Founded in 1975, Juvenile Law Center is the first non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the country. We fight for youth through litigation, appellate advocacy and submission of *amicus* (friend-of-the-court) briefs, policy reform, public education, training, consulting, and strategic communications. Widely published and internationally recognized as leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center has substantially shaped the development of law and policy on behalf of youth. We strive to ensure that laws, policies, and practices affecting youth advance racial and economic equity and are rooted in research, consistent with children's unique developmental characteristics, and reflective of international human rights values. For more information about Juvenile Law Center's work, visit [www.JLC.org](http://www.JLC.org).

© 2019 All rights reserved. Part or all of this publication may be reproduced if credited to Juvenile Law Center, Juveniles for Justice, and Youth Fostering Change.

Images:

Cover, page 1-2: photo by [Honey Yanibel Minaya Cruz](#)

Cover, pages 8, 18: photo by [Matese Fields](#)

Page 19: photo by [Darlene Cerna](#)

Page 23: photo by [Michelle Maria](#)

# WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK

<b>SPECIAL THANKS</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>YOUTH ADVOCACY PROGRAM</b>	<b>2</b>
Juveniles for Justice	3
Youth Fostering Change	5
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>EDUCATION DISRUPTED</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>YOUTH FOSTERING CHANGE: EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>19</b>
1. Create a Point of Contact	20
2. Involve Youth in Extracurriculars	21
3. Expedite Records Transfer, Re-Enrollment	21
4. Standardize Graduation Requirements	22
5. Invest in the Community	22
<b>JUVENILES FOR JUSTICE: EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>23</b>
1. Create a Point of Contact	24
2. Expedite Re-Enrollment	24
3. Standardize Graduation Requirements	25
4. Invest in Communities	25
5. Implement Accountability Procedures	26
<b>BENCH CARD: YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>BENCH CARD: YOUTH IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM</b>	<b>31</b>

# SPECIAL THANKS

We would like to offer thanks to Education Law Center, Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Philadelphia Task Force on Youth Residential Placements.

Thanks to Juvenile Law Center staff and the education team for working alongside us to uplift our stories and help better the system for ALL youth.



# YOUTH ADVOCACY PROGRAM

**We believe in the power of youth voice.** Young people are experts on their own lives, and their lived experiences should inform policies that affect them.

Since 2008, Juvenile Law Center's Youth Advocacy Program has prepared young people to lead advocacy and policy reform efforts in their local communities and beyond. The Program has three components: Youth Fostering Change, a program for youth with experience in foster care; Juveniles for Justice, a program for youth involved in the juvenile justice system; and the Youth Speakers Bureau, which engages current youth advocates and alumni in speaking engagements and media appearances. Our Youth Advocacy Program offers youth advocates the opportunity to assess the system's strengths and weaknesses, and then develop and implement advocacy projects to improve the system.

Our youth advocates have led many critical policy changes, from improving access to record expungement to empowering youth in foster care in dependency court. They speak directly to lawmakers and make national media appearances; their resources and tool kits have been used across the country. They have testified at Congressional briefings and met with White House staff.

Each year, youth advocates select an area of focus, identify a strategy to address it, and implement their project. Past projects have covered issues such as: juvenile records expungement, college preparedness, understanding your rights and the juvenile court process, foster care placements for older youth, preventing homelessness, and more.

Juvenile Law Center provides essential support, ensuring that the participants develop the skills they need to succeed. We're making sure our youth advocates have the strongest possible foundation for their future work. Learn how you can help them grow on our website: [www.jlc.org](http://www.jlc.org).

**Juveniles for Justice, Class of 2018-2019:** Alex, Bree, Jihid, Don, Ange, Lilly, Qilah, I-Sha-le, Jaheem

**Youth Fostering Change, Class of 2018-2019:** Anthony, Daishalynn, Keema, Alexis, Steven, Mark, Aiyana, Johnathan, Brit, Amber

**Youth Advocacy Program Team:** Cathy Moffa, MSS, MLSP; Marcía Hopkins, MSW; Shy Hill

# CLASS OF 2018-2019



## BRIT

I joined YFC because I wanted to be a part of something that doesn't just talk about making a difference, but that actually works to make a difference. A goal I have for this education project this year is to raise awareness about the education issues youth in foster care face. A fun fact about me: I am lefthanded.



## QILAH

I am 21 years old and have been a part of J4J for two years. I currently work at Wawa and just graduated from a program for Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). I entered the system at 15 years old and have supported myself for the majority of my life. I want to be successful, and Juvenile Law Center has given me a lot of support and guidance. My goal for my project is to advocate to pass the credit transfer bill in Pennsylvania.



## MARK

I am 18 years old and currently work fulltime at a deli. I am also trying to get my education back on track. This is my first year in YFC, and I joined because YFC aims to help better the lives of youth in care. I want to use my voice to push for change in the foster care system.



## ANGE

I am 20 years old and have been a part of J4J for three years. I just graduated with my GED! I entered the system at age 15 and joined J4J because of a friend's reference. I want people to know I am a good person and a great mom. My goal for this project is to help other young people.



## AMBER

I am 17 years old and will graduate from high school this year and start college in the fall. I am also an intern at the Achieving Independence Center. I joined YFC because I have many ideas for changing the system. My goal for our project is to give a voice to unheard youth who are going through similar experiences.



## **LILLY**

I have many plans for the future, including attending college for criminal justice, joining the S.W.A.T. team, and becoming a lawyer and an advocate for foster youth. This is my second year in J4J.



## **DAISHALYNN**

I am 17 years old and a first year member of YFC. I am attending an accelerated school. I entered care at the age of 15 and joined YFC to make change. A fun fact about me is I love food. My goal for our project is to help pass an education bill in Pennsylvania.



## **JIHID**

I am 20 years old and have been a part of J4J for three years. I entered the system in 2017 and joined J4J to have a job. I want people to know that I am intelligent and want to work for the CIA doing Cyber Security. My goal is to make change.



## **ANTHONY**

I have been a youth advocate in YFC for 3 years, and I am graduating from the program this year. I joined because I wanted to advocate for policy reform for other youth who have had experience in the system. Fun Fact about me: I was the recipient of the Pennsylvania's Statewide Adoption Network's 2018 Youth Advocacy Award. I am also a poet and a father.



## **BREE**

I have been involved with Juveniles for Justice for three years. I like to write poems, dance, crochet, and play spades. I am an artist, and my art has been featured in several J4J projects. I am currently in school for cosmetology. I would also like to take up forensic science because I am interested in how crime scenes are solved.



## JOHNATHAN

I am 21 years old, a full-time college student, a student worker, a youth advocate at Juvenile Law Center, and a Judoka (I practice Judo). My goal for this year's project is to help reform the way placements are and the philosophy about the fighting force for youth instead of in opposition. My self-driven mission is to always better myself, to be aware and willing to help others when they are in need.



## ALEX

I am 19 years old and have been a member of J4J for three years. I entered the system at age 14 and joined J4J because of a friend who also is a part of the program. I have a twin and have a one year old daughter named Adrianna. My personal goal is to give Adrianna the world, become a therapist, get married by 30, have two more children, and become a foster mom.



## ALEXIS

I am 21 years old, and this is my second year in YFC. I also work with the Pride Task Force at Valley Youth House to help end homelessness in Philadelphia amongst LGBTQ youth. I am taking classes at Community College of Philadelphia. My goal for this project is to advocate to minimize education disruptions and maximize supports and resources for foster youth.



## DON

This is my second year in J4J, and I have enjoyed having an opportunity to make a change. I play basketball and draw very well. I also like video games, pizza, Sprite, and know how to do a back flip. I like spending time with my family, watching movies. In the future, I see myself owning a business, and my goal is to go back to school to get a master's degree.



## AIYANA

I am 18 years old and have been part of YFC for three years. I currently work at Community Council and am a student at Community College of Philadelphia. I joined YFC to give children a voice. My goal is to ensure that no child is left behind in life. I want all youth to have a meaningful educational experience because education is a major part of success.



## **I-SHA-LE**

I am 19 years old and a first-year member of J4J. I first entered the justice system in 2015 and then entered the foster care system in 2017. I joined J4J because I love to make change. I am graduating this year and looking forward to attending college for music production. My goal is to make a change in the juvenile justice system.



## **KEEMA**

I am 20 years old and have been part of YFC for two years. I have been in and out of care for many years and joined YFC to help teens who are aging out. I want people to know that I am a very good person. My goal for this project is to make our voices heard.



## **JAHEEM**

This is my third year in J4J. I wanted to be part of the program to improve how kids are treated in this system. I hope that in five years, I have a job as an EMT and have my own house and car. I like to cook, spend time with my family and my daughter, and go shopping with my friends. I also signed up for Job Corps and am excited to be starting on the path toward my career.



## **STEVEN**

I am 23 years old, a first-year member of YFC, and work at Drakes Tavern. I joined YFC to help others have a better and easier life. I want people to know that I am obsessed with Joker! In addition to my personal goal to go back to school, my goal for this project is to succeed.

# INTRODUCTION

We are [Youth Fostering Change](#) and [Juveniles for Justice](#), advocacy programs for youth at Juvenile Law Center. We work to affect change through policy advocacy, media outreach, and public education.

We have personal experience in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and have faced many challenges while completing our education. Being in one or both systems can greatly impact young people's ability to complete school and successfully graduate on time. We didn't get the support we needed to complete school. Some of us are 19 and 20 years old and are still working to re-engage in school.

Those of us in foster care have moved a lot or changed schools frequently, sometimes losing credits and repeating classes or entire grades. We had to juggle additional responsibilities that are typically managed by adults. We managed these obligations alone—without enough support from caseworkers, caregivers, attorneys, or our families—while trying to graduate from high school. Some of us also experienced homelessness which made it even harder to go to school and succeed.

Those of us with justice system experience were sent to facilities that provided sub-standard education—or sometimes no education at all. These facilities lacked the challenging and engaging classroom environments we would have had in our community schools.

Some of us did not receive appropriate coursework for our grade level, did not have our Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) transferred to facilities, and/or did not receive the services listed in our IEPs. Very few—and sometimes none—of our credits transferred to our community schools when we returned home. Some of us received support from our attorneys or families to re-enter school, while others had to advocate for ourselves to complete our education.

**We know we are not alone.** Many youth in foster care and the juvenile justice system face the same educational challenges. The foster care system should help us meet our education goals, not set us back. Being in the justice system shouldn't mean youth receive inadequate or no education.

All youth have a right to receive education, and we care about our education success and our peers' success. We want to help improve these outcomes for ourselves and youth like us.

**EDUCATION DISRUPTED:**

**HOW SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT  
IMPACTED OUR EDUCATION**





## BRIT

I went to a residential placement at age 13 and was put in middle school in a school at the on-ground school. I was in classes with kids ages 12-15. I went to this school for a

year. After that, I was discharged to a group home in North Wales and was put in 9<sup>th</sup> grade at my local public school. I stayed there for three months and then moved to a different group home in Ambler because the North Wales staff didn't want me there anymore.

It took two weeks for me to start school. I enrolled at a local public school for 9<sup>th</sup> grade and stayed almost the whole school year. My caseworker removed me from the school just two months before the year ended, and because of that, I did not complete 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

My case worker then moved me to a group home in Philadelphia.

After I was discharged from court, the judge ordered me to attend school in Bensalem. My mom was told that someone would visit our home with information, and I would be

**I DID NOT WANT TO BE 17 AND IN 9TH GRADE ALL BECAUSE THE SCHOOLS DIDN'T KEEP TRACK OF MY CREDITS.**

bussed to the new school. No one ever came, and we didn't hear from anyone for about a month.

After this, we were due back in court, and the same judge told me I would now attend a high school in Philly. I tried going to this school, but they said they would not

accept me in the middle of the school year. I had to go back to court again, and the judge sent me to a school for youth in the foster

care system. I stayed at this school until the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade; then I transferred to a different high school in Philadelphia.

During the enrollment process, I was told I had a half of credit for Spanish—a class I had never taken. I was also told I would need to start over from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

I was really upset and did not want to be 17 and in 9<sup>th</sup> grade all because the schools didn't keep track of my credits.

I dropped out of school for one year and then went to a FED program in Philadelphia. I got my GED within six months.

## QILAH

I was expelled in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, sent to an alternative school, and later forced to go to a juvenile placement because of a GPS violation.



The alternative school did not know I was in placement and marked me absent while I was in the juvenile facility.

After I left placement, I was put in foster care and placed in a group home. While there, I had to advocate for myself to go to the local public school and had to take a test to be accepted at the school.

My group home and the local public school had an arrangement with the guidance counselors to support graduation for foster youth, and I graduated high school while at the group home.

When I was discharged from foster care at age 18, I didn't have any vital documents and had to find them on my own. I was also homeless and unstable.

Neither the group home nor the local public school gave me a diploma, so I had no proof that I graduated from high school. I called

the group home myself to try to get my diploma.

Later, I got help getting my diploma from a program for youth in foster care.

The biggest challenge I had with my education started before I went to placement.

I felt a lot of pressure attending a predominantly white high school in Montgomery County before I was sent to the alternative high school. I also had to advocate for myself to attend an off-grounds school while in placement.

I wish I had more support to prepare for college or had someone who could guarantee my educational transition would be successful.

**NOW, I DO NOT KNOW WHEN I WILL GRADUATE.**

at home and school which caused me to lose interest and motivation.

The type of services that I need to be stable in school are tutoring, extracurricular activities, transportation, consistent and productive school, and updates about my grade level and progress.

### ANGE

I have been to four or five different schools since leaving placement. When I first left placement, I started back at my neighborhood school right away.



They didn't put me in the right grade level, so I stopped going to school and became truant.

I wanted to go back to school, so I looked up credit recovery programs on my own. I started attending one program but then stopped, tried another one and also stopped.

Later, I decided to go back to the first program but stopped attending again.

At age 20, I started attending a GED program in Philadelphia. I recently graduated from the program and got my GED.

My biggest challenge in trying to get my diploma or GED is being focused enough to go to school every day.

I have so many other things going on, and I have to be responsible for myself. I also didn't receive many credits for classes I had already taken.

### MARK

Since entering care, I have been in two schools. I started 9<sup>th</sup> grade at one school, but my grades were F's. I was also unnecessarily placed in a disciplinary school which set me back educationally.

Starting in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I attended a school specifically for youth in foster care. At the same time that I started that school, I needed to get a job, and I didn't go to school as often because I needed to work.

I was failing and not completing school assignments. Now, I do not know when I will graduate.

My biggest challenge with graduating on time is having constant responsibilities outside of school and the lack of flexibility and support that schools provide me.

There were many times that I had problems

**YOUTH FOSTERING CHANGE**



**AMBER**

I went to one school for half of my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year and went to an on-grounds school while I was in a residential facility. The work at the school was not appropriate for my grade level—I was doing 8<sup>th</sup> grade work.

After leaving this school, I went to a charter school for 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and then I went to a local public school for half of my 11<sup>th</sup> grade year.

I had a big problem with my credits not transferring during this time, and no one helped me track down my credits.

No one could locate my credits from my last school. The school placed me in 11<sup>th</sup> grade classes anyway, but I was considered a 10<sup>th</sup>-grader in the system because I had no credits.

I then transferred back to the previous charter school for my 12<sup>th</sup> grade year.

I could have used emotional support and mental health services to help stabilize my schooling.

school I went to before placement, but the principal said I was away too long and could not come back.

It took me two months to re-enroll in school, and I went to school online because no other school would accept me. I was having trouble doing my work at my current school because I didn't get an appropriate education in placement and fell behind.

I needed more help when I came out of placement and tried to go back to school.

The longer it took me to re-enroll, the longer I was out of class, and the harder it was for me to succeed when I finally started school.

The biggest challenge I have had trying to graduate

on time has been getting back into school because the instruction I had in placement was not advanced enough. I was not prepared for the work when I tried going back to school. I am still doing online school and trying my best.

**THE INSTRUCTION I HAD IN PLACEMENT WAS NOT ADVANCED ENOUGH.**

**DAISHALYNN**

I have been in five schools since entering care at age 15. I am 17 years old now, and I am in school.

I was placed into the system August 30, 2017. I went in with nothing except the clothes I had on my back, and in nine days I would have to be ready to start 10<sup>th</sup> grade at the school I'd been attending since 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

It was very frustrating having to buy everything I needed—school supplies, shoes, expensive uniforms—all over again. Not to

**YOUTH FOSTERING CHANGE**



**LILLY**

I didn't have any education while I was in juvenile placement. After placement, I went to a residential facility where I attended a community school for a month.

After I left this facility, I tried to go to the

mention getting settled into a new house full of strangers.

By September 18, I was being moved into a respite home somewhere far away from my school and in an area I never heard of. Getting to school took a long time and was hard, and I was always late.

On September 23, I was placed in a new foster home in West Philly. It took me a while to get used to a different route to school and back, but eventually I got the hang of it.

Things were good with me and at school. However, five months later I got suspended for five days. After my suspension ended, I expected to come back to school as usual. I thought I would be back in class and catching up on a lesson. I had it all wrong.

The dean pulled up my file and saw I was living in West Philly and going to school in North Philly. He thought it would be best for me if I went to a neighborhood school because it was closer, but that's not what I wanted.

A month later, I was attending a high school in Overbrook. I was repeating classes and re-doing the same lessons. I wasn't learning much, and it went on like that for the rest of the year.

At the end of June, I decided to check how many credits I had earned. For my 10<sup>th</sup> grade year I only gained three credits. I was so angry and went straight to a counselor who told me that my credits from my previous school were never transferred. All the hard work I put into both schools, and I only had three credits! I thought, "I'm going into the 11<sup>th</sup> grade with only 11 credits."

**I THOUGHT, "I'M GOING INTO THE 11TH GRADE WITH ONLY 11 CREDITS."**

I didn't want to be left behind or in high school forever, so I found an accelerated high school that would allow me to graduate with a diploma in May 2019. I took that opportunity and got into the school. I felt so good, like my life was back on track!

I started at the school in August 2018. Things were going great at school, but horribly in my foster home. Then at the end of October, I found out I was pregnant. I was already going through so much, and a few months later I got into a fight at school and

got kicked out. At that point, I was so ready to just give up.

I'm currently attending a different accelerated school, and I am on track to graduate by December 2019.

The biggest challenge I have had with school is getting my credits transferred. It was hard to find ways to graduate on time without enough credits. I am hopeful that new laws and policies are passed to ensure that no youth, especially people in the system, have to go through what I did.

## JIHID

It took me three weeks to go back to the school I attended before placement. However, I couldn't stay at the school because I was expelled from the whole school district and couldn't go to any Philadelphia public schools. I didn't find this out until I came home from placement.

I tried to go to a public school in another district, but the juvenile placement lost my transcripts so I couldn't go to a regular



**THE JUVENILE  
PLACEMENT  
LOST MY  
TRANSCRIPTS  
SO I COULDN'T  
GO TO A  
REGULAR  
SCHOOL.**

school. My mom and my aunt were trying to recover my lost transcripts.

I was forced to go to a cyber school in Exton and be re-evaluated for grade level, since I didn't have any credits. I ended up being placed in the

right grade level and graduated from cyber school.

The placement I left should have tried harder to find my transcripts. They said they sent them, but I did not receive them and, therefore, had no proof of my grade level.

Another major challenge I had graduating on time was catching up on school after starting late.

told I had to transfer schools due to behavior issues in school. This time I was sent to an accelerated school an hour away from my new foster home, and I had problems commuting to the school.

Four to six months after I started at the accelerated school, I was reunified with my parent. I did not continue attending the accelerated school after I was reunified, and I spent a few months out of school before starting a GED program. I got my GED from a program in Philadelphia.

The biggest challenge I faced through this entire process of being in care and obtaining my high school diploma was that I needed more social and emotional support, transportation, and tutoring to stay focused in school and graduate on time. I care a lot about education for foster youth and furthering my own education. I want to attend college; specifically, I want to go into a paralegal program.



**ANTHONY**

I started high school at my neighborhood school when I entered foster care. The credits I earned there didn't transfer when I moved schools because my foster care placement changed.

Unfortunately, I started failing classes due to problems going on in my new foster home, so I had to move homes again. This time my grades started improving because I was put into a foster home with my two brothers.

Things continued to improve until I was told I would not be reunified with my biological family. Finding this out made me angry and disappointed. I felt betrayed by workers and the system. I started failing my classes because of the grief and pain I felt knowing I was unable to return home.

As my progress in school declined, I was

**BREE**

I only missed a few weeks of school after going to a detention center and a juvenile placement. However, when I went back to my group home and the on-grounds school, the school counselor said I would not graduate on time because I missed work while at the juvenile placement.

The same counselor advocated for me to graduate because she knew I was a good student. I did extra work to catch up and was placed in the right grade. I graduated on time and got my diploma at age 17. The school I was in was supportive because they knew I worked hard, even if I got into fights at school.

The biggest challenge I had was getting caught up on all the work I missed so that



I could graduate on time. What I really needed was more support dealing with non-school related issues and support to help me learn how to remain calm and stay out of trouble.



## JOHNATHAN

I was going to my neighborhood school in West Philadelphia, then I entered care and was placed in a shelter. The shelter tried to switch me to a different school,

but before they could, I was placed in a residential facility. I went to a public community school while at the residential facility. The school was an alternative school, and I had a delayed entry.

The residential facility forced me to get an IEP. I was taught below grade-level at the alternative school. I eventually got kicked out of the community school and had to transfer to an on-campus school located at the residential facility.

I left the facility and moved to a group home in the Poconos. I enrolled in their local school where the staff would talk down to me. Staff assumed I had learning disabilities aside from emotional concerns. They made me take special education classes until I told them I wouldn't attend school unless they put me in proper classes.

I graduated and tried to go to a community college. My experience was okay, but being in a group home was still causing disruptions. I relied on my group home to get me to classes, but they neglected me. It was also hard to study due to all the drama at the group home.

I moved to Philadelphia and tried to go to another community college. Getting there was easier, but the supports were hard to find or, once I found them, the quality of

what they offered made the support seem nonexistent.

I am now attending Cabrini University and getting support from Juvenile Law Center, JEVS Human Services, and other supports to continue to do well and graduate.

**I WAS TAUGHT BELOW GRADE-LEVEL AT THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL.**

## ALEX

Before I left the juvenile placement, my judge said I was not ready for a regular high school. Instead, I was put in an alternative school. Since leaving placement, I have been in three different schools.

I am also in foster care and have been in eight different homes including foster homes, group placements, and mother-baby homes (programs to help moms). I am 19 and still in 10<sup>th</sup> grade because two years of my schoolwork is gone. Now, I am slowly enrolling myself in a charter program.

The biggest challenge I have had trying to graduate on time is being moved from home to home and school to school. The work was not consistent from school to school.

## ALEXIS

I've attended 15-20 schools since entering care. I got my diploma when I was 19 years old. I moved placements too often, and therefore went to too many schools. I struggled with



lateness and absences a lot because when I moved, I often had to rely on my social worker to come pick me up and take me to school. I was sometimes late for school depending on when she could pick me up and the distance to the school.

I was also removed from classes too often—sometimes weekly—because of my DHS involvement. I often had visitations, meetings, and even my scheduled therapy session at 1:00 pm—during school hours. I ended up missing so many hours of school each month that I often ended up in detention or after school to make up work.

When I entered high school, I faced

**I'VE ATTENDED  
15 TO 20  
SCHOOLS  
SINCE  
ENTERING  
CARE.**

additional challenges with my education and credit transfers. At one point, I dropped out of high school and was homeless. This happened because I ran away from a group home where I no longer felt safe. I tried to report the things that made me feel

unsafe, like having all my belongings stolen constantly, but nothing ever happened.

During this time, I attended two more schools in other counties, and when I was transferred back to the Philadelphia School District, many of my credits did not transfer with me.

For example, I repeated my senior project twice because the name of the senior project was different, and I was told it could not count towards my graduation. I was upset that I had to complete another project to graduate on time. I was also feeling unsafe where I was living, so I ran away. I eventually re-entered foster care.

I ended up graduating through a high school program in Philadelphia that also allows you to take college courses at the Community College of Philadelphia, but my diploma has a Philadelphia high school name.

The biggest challenge I had with graduating on time was experiencing homelessness due to issues with my placements, credit transfer problems, and having to redo subjects in school. I am now going to Community College of Philadelphia and doing well in my classes.

## **DON**

It took me three to four weeks to get re-enrolled in my public school after I came home from placement. I had trouble with my credits because the placement wouldn't give them to my new school. I was a grade behind because my credits never got transferred.

My high school tried to get my credits from the placement, but the placement never provided them. School was hard because I had to start my grade over. I could have finished school in 2018.

I would like to go to Community College of Philadelphia, but I am still working to get my diploma.

I am 18 years old and just recently started back at my local public school and am working with Education Law Center to get into a different school.

I needed someone to be supportive and help me when I asked. I wish someone would have helped me with the credits as soon as I came home from placement—that's been my biggest challenge to graduating on time.





**YOUTH FOSTERING CHANGE**

## **AIYANA**

I entered care at the age of 15. During that time, I went to three schools before I graduated.

I was attending a public school when I first entered care, and then I transferred to a charter school when I changed foster homes.

Next, I went to a juvenile placement. I received no credits during that time, and my only “school” work was coloring sheets. I was discharged from the juvenile placement to a foster home and started going to an accelerated alternative school.

Since I didn’t earn any credits at the juvenile placement facilities and the charter school didn’t have any of my credits, I had to complete 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade at the accelerated school. I graduated from this school, but the diploma says that I graduated from a local public school.

The biggest barrier to graduating on time was not having any real schooling at the juvenile placement. I currently attend a community college.

10<sup>th</sup> grade over again.

At this point, I started at a charter school because no other school would accept me due to a past juvenile offense. I attended this school for almost a year and didn’t earn any credits. They said I still only had seven credits. Then, my group home forced me to attend a school specifically for youth in foster care. The school called every school I had attended to retrieve my credits. I am still working on getting my diploma through a different program.

The biggest challenge I have had graduating is going to alternative schools and having that mess up my credits. I was told I earned a certain amount of credits in those schools, but public schools said I earned much less. I needed consistency throughout my education.

## **KEEMA**



**YOUTH FOSTERING CHANGE**

I have been in and out of foster care since birth. I started high school at my neighborhood school but then transferred to a school specifically for youth in foster care. I then went to a group home and attended their on-grounds school. I didn’t feel like the on-grounds school was a real school.

When I left that school, I tried getting my GED from a program in Philadelphia. While I was there, I was told by the school district that I had earned only two credits from my neighborhood school. They didn’t even look at my time at the group home or the high school for youth in care.

I still do not have my diploma or GED.

The biggest barrier I have had trying to graduate is having credits that I earned lost and having a child while trying to go to school.



**JUVENILES FOR JUSTICE**

## **I-SHA-LE**

While living in Tennessee, I left a juvenile placement and was forced to attend an alternative school for a year since I was expelled from the only local public school.

After that, I moved to Ridgley, Tennessee and attended an alternative school there for a few months. I earned 11 credits at that school, but when I left the school said I only earned seven credits for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I then moved again, went to a public school in Philadelphia for a month, and had to start



## JAHEEM

I was put on house arrest for three months after I came home from placement. It was summer, so there was no school in session.

I decided I wanted to get my GED because my judge told me I would never get off probation if I didn't finish school, and I knew getting my GED would be the fastest way to finish school.

I was on probation for about a year and was taking classes to get my GED at the same time. I graduated about a year after being on probation, and it took me about a year and a half total to get my GED.

specific advanced placement classes. They also didn't have proof of me taking those advanced classes.

I was able to go back to Montgomery County for school because of my own advocacy, and I took the PSATs there. I got a perfect score.

Because of my score, the school thought I was ready for the actual SATs, but my foster parents wouldn't sign the consent form.

I ran away again so that I could sign the papers myself. During this time, I was homeless for a year. I was able to pass the test, and I got my diploma.

I started working immediately after I graduated. I went to Temple University and got my associates in Art and Psychology. After I graduated, I was homeless. I am still working.



## STEVEN

I entered care at age five. I went to a public school in Montgomery County for a month of high school.

I ran away from my foster home because of an altercation in the foster home. I was placed in another foster home and transferred to a public school in Philadelphia.

I was there for about three months, and I didn't like the education at this school. The work wasn't challenging, and the environment was hostile.

I was in advanced placement classes in Montgomery County, but the Philadelphia school tried to place me in lower level classes because they didn't have those

The biggest barrier to graduating high school was being homeless. I want to be able to financially support myself. I want to be able to live, not just survive.

**I WANT TO BE ABLE TO FINANCIALLY SUPPORT MYSELF.  
I WANT TO BE ABLE TO LIVE, NOT JUST SURVIVE.**

# WE KNOW WE ARE NOT ALONE

Many youth in foster care and the juvenile justice system face the same educational challenges.

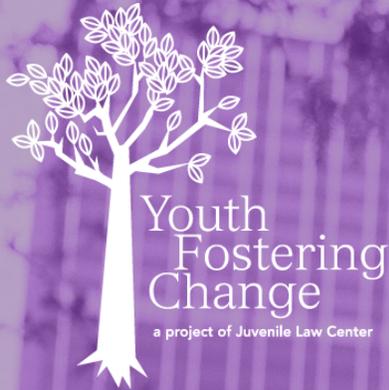
**These challenges lead to poor educational outcomes. National data shows:**

- As many as two thirds of youth who leave the juvenile justice system drop out of school.<sup>1</sup>
- An estimated 3-10.8% of foster care alumni attain a bachelor's degree by age 21, compared to the national rate of 32.5%.<sup>2</sup>
- Youth of color in foster care are less likely to have a high school diploma and more likely to have a GED than non-Hispanic white youth in foster care.<sup>3</sup>
- Available research shows that only 2% of youth held at juvenile facilities for 90+ days were accepted to college.<sup>4</sup>
- Only 65% of foster youth complete high school by age 21.<sup>5</sup>

**These outcomes are unacceptable.** The foster care system should help youth meet education goals, not set them back. Being in the justice system shouldn't mean youth receive inadequate or no education.

All youth have a right to receive education, and we care about our educational success and our peers' success. We want to help improve these outcomes for ourselves and youth like us.

# EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS



These recommendations were created by Youth Fostering Change with the goal of reducing educational barriers for youth with experience in the foster care system and ensure they earn their high school diploma without delays.

## YOUTH FOSTERING CHANGE RECOMMENDS:

- 1. Create A Point of Contact for Students in Foster Care:** School moves and placement changes often disrupt youth's education. A point of contact would help youth in care reintegrate to a new school after a move or some other educational disruption.
- 2. Involve Youth in Extracurricular Activities:** Youth in foster care often do not have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities at school. Involvement in these activities gives youth in care the opportunity to have a normal high school experience.
- 3. Expedite Records Transfer and Course Re-enrollment:** Youth sometimes struggle to get re-enrolled after they have moved schools or placements. Some youth are re-enrolled in the wrong classes or the wrong grade. Course re-enrollment should be a quick process for youth.
- 4. Standardize Graduation Requirements:** Youth in care often find the classes they take in one school are not recognized by another school. Conflicting or different graduation requirements at different schools disrupt a young person's path to graduation. This often forces youth in care to re-do work they already completed in a comparable class at a different school.
- 5. Invest in the Community:** Investing in communities is necessary to address the racial inequities in the child welfare system. These kinds of investments encourage the growth of community-based supports and reduce the number of African American and Latinx youth being funneled into the child welfare system.

# 1. Create A Point of Contact for Students in Foster Care

School moves and placement changes often disrupt youth’s education. Although youth in foster care have case workers, they do not have someone at school who is specifically assigned to help them transition from one school to the next. A point of contact would help youth in care reintegrate to a new school after a move or some other educational disruption.

## HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS RECOMMENDATION:

1. Identify a point of contact in every school. Each point of contact should have a maximum caseload of 30 students.
2. Recruit and hire professionals with strong backgrounds in social work, case management, or school counseling and trauma training.
3. Schedule in-person meetings with the youth and their point of contact before the youth transitions to a new school. It is the point of contact’s responsibility to ensure that:
  - Youth are in the right grade level;
  - All previously earned credits and partial credits are accepted by the new school and are counted towards graduation;
  - Youth know how many credits they still need to graduate on time;
  - Youth are connected to educational supports, including therapy and/or tutoring;
  - IEPs are followed and youth are included in IEP meetings;
  - Youth have appropriate transportation to get to school; and
  - Youth are involved in extracurricular activities
4. Require the point of contact to communicate with the sending placement school and/or on-grounds school to discuss supports for the student and their completed schoolwork, and to obtain the student’s transcripts and other documentation. Ensure staff at the previous school or placement are supporting the student and planning for the transition to a new school.
5. Require the point of contact to conduct regular check-ins with the youth and provide on-going support to ensure the youth is taking the right classes to graduate. These check-ins should happen on a monthly basis, at a minimum, and can include:
  - Creating a graduation timeline;
  - Working with the student to apply for scholarships, financial aid, post-secondary and other educational opportunities;
  - Facilitating communication with teachers;
  - Reviewing all graduation requirements with the youth well before graduation;
  - Communicating with case workers, parents (or foster parents or other educational decision makers), and attorneys to make sure everyone is on the same page;

**Information about the youth’s involvement in care should be shared responsibly and in accordance with existing laws to protect the youth’s privacy.**

- Encouraging and supporting the student to graduate; and
  - Providing access to educational supports (e.g. tutoring)
6. Allow youth to bring a supportive adult to meetings with the point of contact.

## 2. Involve Youth in Extracurricular Activities

Youth in foster care often do not have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities at school, or their participation is disrupted when a young person changes schools. Involvement in these activities gives youth in care the opportunity to have a normal high school experience.

### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Make sure youth know about their new school's extracurricular activities when they transition to a new school, including how they can participate.
2. Ensure that obtaining funds for supplies, equipment, and travel associated with the activities do not prevent a youth in care from participating.
3. Make sure youth who have mental and behavioral health diagnoses know that appropriate accommodations can be put in place for them to participate in extracurricular activities at school.

## 3. Expedite Records Transfer and Course Re-enrollment

Youth sometimes struggle to get re-enrolled in school or in classes after they have moved schools or placements. Some youth are re-enrolled in the wrong classes or even the wrong grade, delaying and disrupting their education. Course re-enrollment should be a quick process for youth.

### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Grant youth in care or their guardians hard copies of school records including transcripts, credits, medical records, disciplinary records, and IEPs, especially for school transfers.
2. Don't make youth wait to start classes just because of a delayed credit or transcript transfer. Require schools to expedite transferring academic records and credits so youth have a seamless transition when they start school.
3. If class credits are not easily transferred, credits are lost, youth are returning from unaccredited schools, or youth have earned partial credits, provide youth the chance to take placement tests in order to determine grade level and earned credits.
4. Youth who have passed a higher-level class (like Spanish II) should be given credit for lower level classes (like Spanish I) even if it does not show up on their transcript.

5. Reasonable means must be taken for youth to take classes comparable to their previous ones or continue projects they started at their previous school.

## 4. Standardize Graduation Requirements

Youth in care often find the classes they take in one school are not recognized by another school. Conflicting or different graduation requirements at different schools disrupt a young person's path to graduation. This often forces youth in care to re-do work they already completed in a comparable class at a different school.

### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Require all credits earned in placement to be accepted or transferrable to returning schools. If graduation requirements are different, the credits should be converted to be equivalent replacement credits.
2. Require schools to accept credit from any other school that is licensed or otherwise authorized by the State.
3. Allow schools to waive class requirements for graduation in certain circumstances.
4. Require all placement schools to offer courses that align with state standards and count toward graduation anywhere in the state.

## 5. Invest in the Community:

Investing in communities is necessary to address the racial inequities in the child welfare system. These kinds of investments encourage the growth of community-based supports and reduce the number of African American and Latinx youth being funneled into the child welfare system.

### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Require trainings for school professionals working with youth in care, such as trauma-informed approaches, cultural competency training, and de-escalation training.
2. Ensure LGBTQ+ youth in care and/or youth who have mental health needs get specific supports to help them remain safely in their community.
3. Invest in schools specifically to fund counseling and guidance to support student health and safety, instead of spending on security measures (police, metal detectors, etc.).
4. Provide services and education supports for youth to remain in their communities and in a family-like setting (i.e. kinship, foster home, etc.).
5. Provide students with educational resources that relate to their culture, ethnicity, and religion.

# EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS



**Juveniles  
for Justice**  
a project of Juvenile Law Center

These recommendations were created by Juveniles for Justices with the goals of reducing educational barriers for youth with justice system involvement and ensuring they seamlessly return to school and graduate on time.

## JUVENILES FOR JUSTICE RECOMMENDS:

- 1. Create A Point of Contact for Youth with Justice System Involvement:** Youth leaving juvenile placements face the process of re-entry and going back to school with little support. Every school should have a point of contact to support youth transitioning from juvenile placements and ensure young people have seamless transitions back to their home schools.
- 2. Expedite Re-enrollment:** Youth sometimes struggle to get re-enrolled after they have moved schools or placements. Some youth are re-enrolled in the wrong classes or the wrong grade. Course re-enrollment should be a quick process for youth.
- 3. Standardize Graduation Requirements:** Youth leaving placement often find that work they completed in the facility does not count towards graduation in their new school. This means they must re-do work, setting them back and delaying graduation.
- 4. Invest in Communities:** These investments address the racial inequities in the juvenile justice system. They offer strategies to reduce the number of African American and Latinx youth being funneled into the juvenile justice system by encouraging the growth of community-based supports.
- 5. Implement Accountability and Enforcement Procedures:** Facilities often don't give youth safe, secure opportunities to report the sub-standard education youth receive while in placement. When visits or inspections do occur, they do not always capture the whole picture of young people's educational experiences or the issues youth face at the facility schools.

## 1. Create a Point of Contact for Youth with Justice System Involvement

Youth leaving juvenile placements face the process of re-entry and going back to school with little support. Every school should have a point of contact to support youth transitioning from juvenile placements and ensure young people have seamless transitions back to their home schools.

### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Hire a school official whose job it is to be in partnership with the juvenile facility where the youth was placed.
2. Hire a professional who has experience with behavioral health, experience with de-escalation, and who is invested in and cares about working with youth.
3. Require the point of contact to be responsible for the educational support of the child.
4. Require the point of contact to collaborate with youth on an education transition plan.

## 2. Expedite Re-enrollment

Youth sometimes struggle to get re-enrolled in school or classes after leaving juvenile placements. Some youth are re-enrolled in the wrong classes or even the wrong grade, delaying and disrupting their education. Course re-enrollment should be a quick process.

### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Assign a person to each school to assist with transferring credits and records. This person should strive to keep youth academically on track. This position is separate from the point of contact described above.
2. Require that records must travel with youth as they leave placement.
3. Allow youth to remain in extracurricular activities when transferring to a new school.
4. If credits are missing from a previous school or facility, youth should take a test to identify their grade level.

### 3. Standardize Graduation Requirements

Youth leaving placement often find that work they completed in the facility does not count towards graduation in their new school. This means they must re-do work, setting them back and delaying graduation.

#### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Require all credits earned in placement be accepted or transferrable to returning schools. If graduation requirements are different, the credits should be converted to be equivalent replacement credits.
2. Give youth leaving placement or their guardians a physical copy of transcripts.
3. Require everyone who is behind in graduating to have a personalized educational plan.
4. If the youth is not currently in school and/or not working with a school's point of contact, their judge should appoint someone to create a personalized education plan with the young person. This is especially important for youth over 18 who have not graduated.
5. Require all credits earned in Pennsylvania, or earned outside Pennsylvania due to involvement in the juvenile justice or child welfare system, be accepted at schools throughout the state.
6. Require all placement schools to offer courses that align with state standards and count toward graduation anywhere in the state.

### 4. Invest in Communities

These investments address racial inequities in the juvenile justice system. They offer strategies to reduce the number of African American and Latinx youth being funneled into the juvenile justice system by encouraging the growth of community-based supports.

#### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Counties must invest in prevention services to keep kids out of juvenile facilities and in their community. These services should be for families and youth to address family needs that could be impacting a youth's ability to do well in school. These services should also help youth find ways to reconnect within their communities like jobs, internships, sports, arts, etc.
2. Ensure the curriculum reflects diversity and culture in placement and in local schools.
3. Require all facility staff, teachers, judges, attorneys, social workers to receive cultural competency trainings and trauma-informed practice trainings.
4. Ensure youth know they can attend their community schools when placed in a facility, unless a court has explicitly ordered otherwise.

## 5. Implement Accountability and Enforcement Procedures

Facilities often don't give youth safe, secure opportunities to report the sub-standard education youth receive while in placement. When visits or inspections do occur, they do not always capture the whole picture of young people's educational experiences or the issues youth face at the facility schools.

### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Conduct quarterly, randomized inspections of schools (by state or county) to ensure schools are compliant with the state rules.
2. If the schools aren't meeting the requirements, an improvement plan must be developed before the next quarterly inspection.
3. Give youth opportunities to talk about their education while in placement—state and county inspectors, attorneys, CASAs, social workers, and other professionals visiting youth in facilities should confidentially ask youth questions about their educational experience. Ideally an independent third party would be checking on facilities regularly, including asking youth questions about their education.

# BENCH CARD: YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

## Recommended Practices

1. **Let youth speak first in court so they can actively participate in their court process.** Regularly invite youth to speak privately in chambers to address issues youth may not feel comfortable raising in the court room.
2. **Use a trauma-informed approach when meeting with youth.** Think about what the person goes through daily as a youth in care. For example: Try to understand why youth may use substances to cope. Is there something going on in school or at home?
3. **Ask youth what school they want to attend.** If they have not been going to school, find out why.
4. **Don't place youth because of truancy.** Provide support for youth to stay with their families, and identify the best school environment for them.
5. **Know about the education and conditions inside facilities.** Often, youth are coming out worse than when they went in.
6. **Do not send youth to facilities that aren't accredited, provide poor or limited education, or do not offer credits.** Some facilities do not offer the courses youth need to graduate on time. They may offer different classes than what is needed for graduation from the youth's home district, enroll the youth in too many elective courses, or not offer credit-bearing courses at all. Youth will not reach their potential or thrive in these facilities.

## I am capable of success and so is my team! I want you to know:

- What is going on in my life. Ask me!
- I'm telling you the truth when I talk in court. I sometimes feel that you believe my caseworker, even when I am telling the truth.
- I want to talk in court and need you and my team to pay attention to my concerns.
- When I am informed, I know what I want for my education.
- I have been in DHS for a while and know the system very well. I want to tell you what my experience has been.
- When I don't do well in school, it is because I need support and tutoring—not punishment, such as being removed from school or sent to placement.
- I became less interested in school because I kept changing schools, repeating work, and not getting support through this process.
- I sometimes have to miss school to go to court or meetings with caseworkers, which I want to attend. Scheduling these activities during school hours makes it harder for me to complete my schoolwork.
- I fall behind if I have to go to a new school when I change homes.
- Going to school is sometimes unsafe for me because of bullying or the community.

Ask youth and their legal teams the following questions to ensure youth are in the best educational setting and are thriving in school and at home.

## Questions to Ask Youth in Court

These questions should be asked to both youth and adults in the court room. Youth should always have the opportunity to speak first.

### **School Goals:**

- What subject are you most interested in?
- What are you thinking about doing after high school?
- Have you thought about college?

### **School Climate:**

- What's your favorite thing about school?
- Do you have any concerns about school that you would like to share?
- Do you feel safe in school?

### **School Support:**

- Is there an adult involved in making education decisions with you? Who?
- What are your workers doing to help you succeed in school?
- Are the staff and teachers at your school helping you to fully engage in school?
- Has anyone talked to you about preparing for education or training after high school?
- What kind of support do you need from your school? Tutoring? Counseling? If you have an IEP, are you getting additional support?

### **Classwork & Course Information:**

- What type of work are you doing in your classes? Is it challenging enough? Is it too challenging?
- How are your grades?
- If you are having challenges with grades, would tutoring help bring them up? Do you know how to access tutoring?
- Do you have copies of your transcript?
- If you are getting your GED or on a GED track, do you know the progress of your work? Are your GED classes credit bearing?

### **School Attendance & School Engagement:**

- Do you feel there are other priorities/challenges that prevent you from attending school and completing work? How can we help?
- Are you working while you are going to school? If so, how are you balancing that? What support do you feel would be helpful while you're doing both?
- What are your family obligations that might make it difficult for you to fully participate in school?
- If you have a child or children, do you have child care? If not, do you feel this is preventing you from going to school?
- Have you considered participating in extracurricular activities?
- Do you have support from your guardian, worker, or school to participate fully in extracurricular activities if you wish to participate in them?

### **Transportation & Logistics:**

- How do you get to school? How long does it take?
- Do you receive transportation help? If not, do you need it?

## **Questions to Ask Prior to a School Transition**

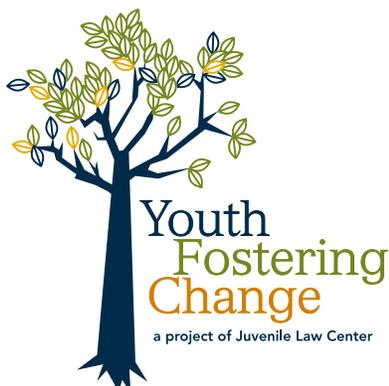
- Do you know where you are going to school next? Who is assisting you with this process?
- Do you know if you are starting school on the right grade level?
- Do you know how many credits you have earned? Do you know what else you need to graduate?
- If on GED track, do you know what you need to get your GED?
- Has a Best Interest Determination (BID) meeting been held to determine what is the best school for you? Were you involved in that meeting?
- Do you have everything you need to go to school? Supplies? Clothes, shoes, etc.?
- Do you have any concerns about the transition?

## **Questions to Ask After a School Transition**

- How was the transition when you changed schools?
- Are you missing any credits that you thought you earned in your previous school(s)?
- If you are missing credits, do you have the opportunity to test into the right grade-level?
- Have you had to repeat any work, classes, or projects?
- What kind of support do you need from your school? Tutoring? Counseling? If you have an IEP are you getting additional support?
- What do you think of your new school?

## Questions to Ask Youth in Residential Placements & On-Grounds Schools

- What type of work are you doing in your classes? Is it on grade level? Is it challenging?
- Have you been talked to about attending the local public school off-campus or your previous public school?
- How many other kids are in your classes?
- Are you getting additional support if you have an IEP?
- Are you earning credits, getting your GED, or taking CTE courses?
- Have you ever had school taken away from you as a form of discipline?
- Do you feel prepared to go back to that grade level or the next grade level in your home school?
- Has anyone been working with you to plan what will happen after you leave the facility? Who? What preparation has occurred?
- What are some of your major concerns when you get out? For example: housing, re-enrollment in school, making sure you have the right academic credits, feeling behind, others?
- Do you know what school you will be going to next? What kind of school environment will you be most successful in? Do you feel like you are ready to go back to your home school?



For more information visit [www.jlc.org/yfc](http://www.jlc.org/yfc).

# BENCH CARD: YOUTH IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

## Recommended Practices: Older Youth in Court Hearings

1. **Use a trauma-informed approach in your court room.** Think about what the young person goes through daily as a youth. For example: Try to understand why youth may be behaving a certain way—are they doing this to cope with something? Is there something else going on in school or at home? Consider what community-based alternatives and resources could address the issue other than supervision and placement.
2. **Ask youth what school they want to attend.** If they have not been going to school, find out why. For example, could it be because they're being bullied?
3. **Know about the education and conditions of facilities.** Often, youth are coming out worse than when they went in. Do not send youth to facilities that aren't accredited, provide poor education or limited options, or do not offer credits. Youth should not be sent away to facilities where they will fall behind in school. There are facilities that do not offer the courses youth need to graduate on time. They may offer different classes than what is needed for graduation from the youth's home district, enroll the youth in too many elective courses, or not offer credit-bearing courses at all. They may not have the special education services a youth needs to learn.

## I am capable of success and so is my team! I want you to know:

- Youth deal with a lot besides going to school every day, especially when we have a lot going on at home. Ask us!
- Many of us had negative education experiences in juvenile facilities. We need you to check on us and follow up with the facility about our overall education and educational needs.
- Youth take classes and earn credits that they can't use when they come home.
- It can take a long time for us to transition back into school after placement when we don't receive help or the process to transfer our records is delayed.
- We often advocated for ourselves to obtain our transcripts and school records from schools or placement facilities.
- We are often put in the wrong grade level when we leave placement and have to do extra work to catch up.
- We need additional in-school supports when we return from placement— more than before we went to placement. Resources like counseling and on-site tutoring makes the transition easier.
- Having to go to an alternative school or being prohibited from going to our community school creates more barriers to going back to school. Sometimes we don't know we aren't allowed back at our school. This disrupts our education and delays our graduation.

Ask youth and their legal teams the following questions to ensure youth are in the best educational setting and are thriving in school and at home.

## Questions to Ask Youth in Court

These questions should be asked to both youth and adults in the court room.

### School Goals:

- What are your goals? Do you feel like you're on track to meet them?
- Has anyone talked to you about preparing for education and training after high school?

### School Support:

- Are you learning? What's easy for you and what's hard?
- What kind of support do you need in school to do what you need to do/want to do?
- How are your grades?
- If you are having challenges with grades, would tutoring help bring them up? Do you know how to access tutoring?
- If you have an IEP, do you know where you can get help with school? Is the school offering these supports for you?

### School Climate:

- Do you feel like you're safe in your current school?
- Do you feel like you are being treated as an equal to your peers in school?

## Questions to Ask Youth Before Deciding to Place Youth in a Juvenile Facility

- What do you think caused this behavior?
- [If applicable] Why haven't you been going to school? Do you feel there are things preventing you from attending/going on time?
- What supports for you or your family would help you stay at home and out of trouble?
- What changes would make school a better place for you to learn?
- Do you have an IEP? What kind of services do you get through the IEP? Have you had any meetings with the school about it? Were you involved and able to bring supportive adults with you?

## Questions to Ask Youth in Residential Placements & On-Grounds Schools

- Do you feel you are receiving the right grade level work while in placement? Do you feel prepared to go back to that grade level or go to the next grade level in your home school?
- Do you feel like you can pick up where you left off in school? Do you feel like you can continue with the supportive relationships and services that you had before going to placement?
- Who has been working with you to plan what will happen after you leave the facility?
- What are some of your major concerns when you get out? For example: housing, re-enrollment in school, making sure you have the right academic credits, feeling behind, others?
- Do you know how many credits you earned in placement and do you know if all of them will count toward graduation?
- Do you know what school you will be going to next? What kind of school environment will you be most successful in? Do you feel like you are ready to go back to your home school?

# ENDNOTES

1 Southern Education Foundation, Just Learning: The Imperative to Transform Juvenile Justice Systems Into Effective Educational System (2009), at 18. <https://www.southerneducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Just-Learning-Final.pdf>.

2 National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care, (2018) at 1. [http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?EntryId=1279&Command=Core\\_Download&method=inline&PortalId=0&TabId=124](http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?EntryId=1279&Command=Core_Download&method=inline&PortalId=0&TabId=124)

3 *Id.* at 7

4 Southern Education Foundation, Just Learning: The Imperative to Transform Juvenile Justice Systems Into Effective Educational System (2009), at 15-16. <https://www.southerneducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Just-Learning-Final.pdf>.

5 Fostering Success in Education, National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care (2018), at 2. <https://foster-ed.org/fostering-success-in-education-national-factsheet-on-the-educational-outcomes-of-children-in-foster-care/>

# Juvenile Law Center

The Philadelphia Building

1315 Walnut Street, Suite 400

Philadelphia, PA 19107

215-625-0551 / 800-875-8887

215-625-2808 fax

**WWW.JLC.ORG**

 Juvenile Law Center

 /  @JuvLaw1975