

TIPS FOR PLANNING THE HIGH SCHOOL FALL SEMESTER FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE IN PENNSYLVANIA

Work to make sure a youth's health needs are met.

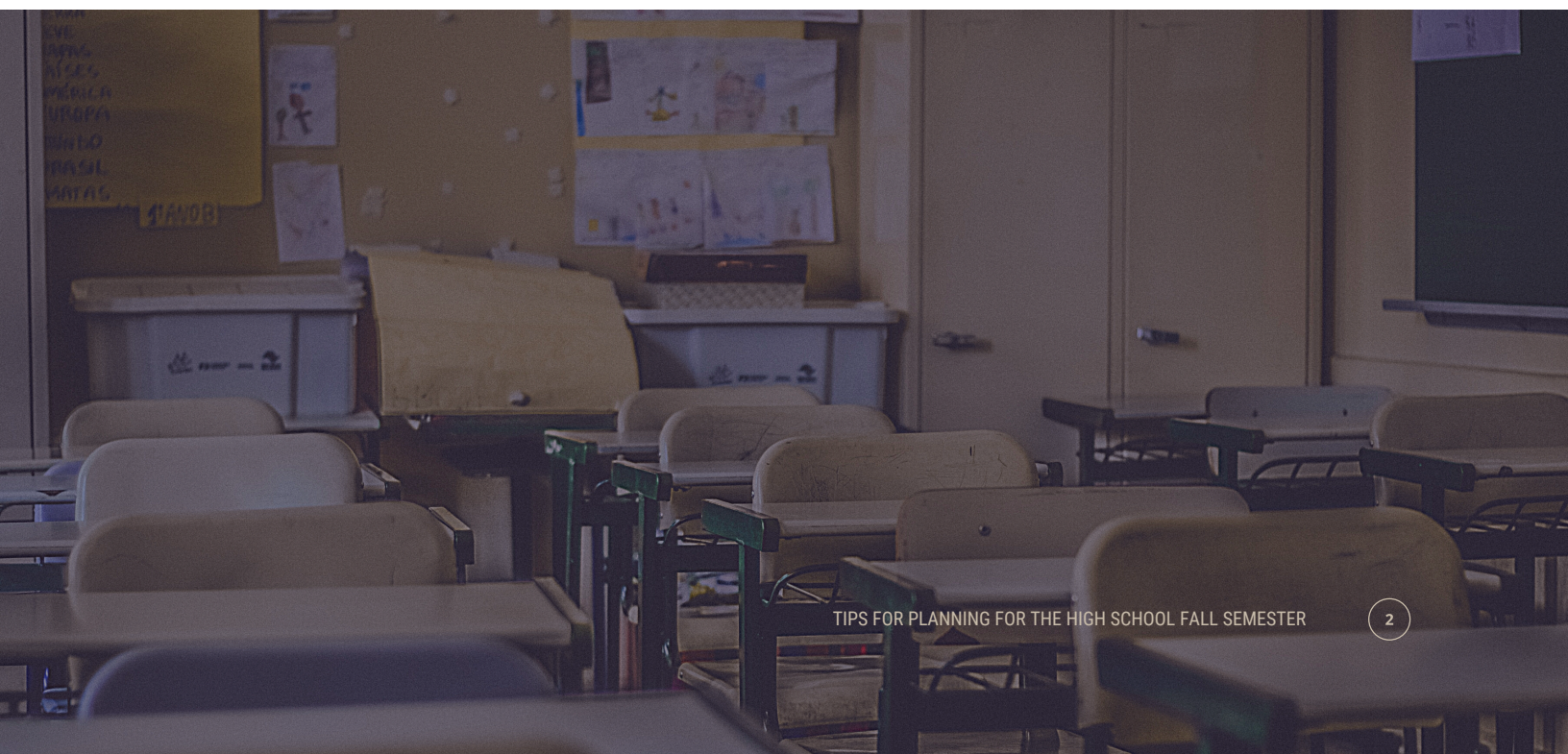
- 1 Ensure youth have current, accurate and youth-friendly information about how to stay safe (like proper hand washing, physical distancing, quarantine requirements and wearing a mask), where to go for physical and mental healthcare, and how to get support during the ongoing pandemic.
- 2 Ensure that students have access to physical and mental health care, including access to telemedicine.
- 3 Communicate with a youth's case worker if a youth has specialized needs or is at higher risk during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If there are options to learn in person or remotely, work with the youth and educational decision maker (EDM) to determine the best "learning option" for the youth.

- 1 If the youth changed living placements since attending school in person last year, request a "Best Interest Determination" to help decide which school is best. Consider factors such as the educational program and related services offered, the youth's connections and supports in the prior school, and the youth's preference.
[Learn more here](#)
- 2 If the student has options for in person or remote learning, work with the EDM to:
 - Determine if the youth feels safe attending in person and any supplies needed to do so.
 - Determine what arrangements or supports are needed to maximize learning remotely (e.g. supervision, tutoring, privacy, a quiet space to work, needed school supplies, technology as discussed below).
 - Ensure the student understands the new schedule and requirements.

Make sure youth have the technology and supports in the home or placement for remote learning.

- 1 Make sure youth have the following equipment, technology, and supplies:
 - a computer
 - a web camera
 - a microphone
 - access to a printer
 - a quiet place to work, a desk, and chair and any other supplies needed (note books, pens, etc), and
 - reliable and adequate internet access, including
 - sufficient bandwidth for the number of people learning and working remotely from the home or facility, and access to needed websites.
- 2 Ensure that youth have instruction in how to use their equipment and have access to people who can help them with their work or equipment issues in their home or placement.
- 3 Make sure youth have the supervision and support they need to learn and get their work done.



Connect with a Foster Care Point of Contact in the youth's school or district to ensure they get the supports they need and to help address any concerns.

- 1 Every school district and charter school has a Foster Care Point of Contact ("POC") to support students who are in foster care. You can locate that person by using [this directory](#). Every county children and youth office also has an Education Liaison to help you with school issues.
- 2 The POC and [Education Liaison](#) can help if the youth has any concerns or needs, including technology and access to support services.

Help youth get access to free food provided by their school.

- 1 All children in foster care can receive free meals, no matter where they attend school. If students are not receiving instruction in person, schools will distribute school meals to students.
- 2 Ensure that the youth and EDM knows how meals will be distributed and have a plan to ensure a youth can safely access the meals.

Consider whether youth with disabilities are eligible for make-up services, including COVID Compensatory Services ("CCS") or Remaining in School.

- 1 CCS are services youth are eligible for if the youth was unable to access a free appropriate public education at school during school closures due to COVID-19. CCS should be provided when:
 - a youth did not receive services in their IEP due to COVID, and/or
 - a youth did not make progress during school closures last year.
- 2 The IEP team should meet at the beginning of the school year (and later in the school year) to determine how much CCS is owed to the youth. Advocates should work with the EDM to ensure that the IEP team is addressing what is included in the CCS before the school year begins.
- 3 A youth who turned 21 last year may be eligible to remain in school to receive make up services this school year.

Help students stay engaged in school and on track to graduate.

- 1 Verify students' credits and that they know what credits and classes they need to graduate at the beginning of the school year.
- 2 Work with students to identify any courses they are struggling with due to disruptions in the 2019-20 school year and work to identify supports that could help.
- 3 Help students to engage with any sports, extra-curricular activities, career/technical education, or other school programs and events of interest that will take place remotely or in person.
- 4 Ensure the transition services students are receiving to support them in preparing for adulthood are coordinated with transition services they receive through their IEP.
- 5 Students should get help from guidance counselors to apply for college and training programs, but advocates should be proactive to make sure youth get the help they need.
- 6 Ask case workers, Independent Living workers, and school guidance counselors to help youth apply for college and financial aid for college, including tuition waivers for youth who have been in foster care. IL workers and caseworkers should provide assistance as well as part of the youth's transition plan.
For more information, [check out this guide.](#)





Help youth in residential placements to receive an appropriate and quality education.

- 1** Youth in residential placements have the right to attend the local public school where the placement is located, unless a court order says otherwise. This remains the case during the pandemic.
- 2** If a youth does have a court order specifying an “on-grounds school” the school must provide an appropriate education to ensure youth continue learning as school resumes next this year, no matter how that looks.
- 3** If the youth is attending school remotely while placed in a residential setting, make sure that the youth has all the supports, equipment, and supplies needed that are detailed in Tips 3 and 4 above.
- 4** If the residential placement cannot provide the youth an opportunity to receive an education (cannot support remote learning, for example), advocate for a change in placement or access to the local public school.
- 5** If the youth has an IEP, they must continue to receive all services in the IEP. Review the IEP before the school year starts to ensure that the youth is getting needed services and that changes are made to address any new needs.

Make sure youth understand how attendance is tracked and counted.

- 1 Make sure the youth and their caregivers understand that attendance will be taken and how it will be taken.
- 2 Check in with youth and caregivers to ensure that the youth's attendance is properly being counted and address any concerns to avoid truancy issues. For more information regarding attendance during COVID-19 see state [guidance on attendance](#).
- 3 Identify the person in charge of attendance at the youth's school (attendance designee) and make sure the youth and caregiver know how to provide documentation to get absences excused.

If you have questions or concerns about the issues covered in this fact sheet, please call Education Law Center's Helpline:

215-238-6970 (Eastern and Central PA)
412-258-2120 (Western PA).

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