

FOSTERING GRADUATION SUCCESS: S.B. 324

ABOUT THE BILL

The Fostering A Smooth Transition for Graduation Bill, introduced as S.B. 324, supports students experiencing educational instability by ensuring access to timely graduation and the full range of educational opportunities. The bill defines “education instability” as one or more school changes in a year due to homelessness, an adjudication of dependency or delinquency, or a court-ordered voluntary placement or custody agreement. Without targeted support, youth who are forced to change schools due to homelessness, or foster care or juvenile justice system involvement, are at high risk of not graduating high school. Senate Bill 324 helps youth experiencing education instability achieve school success through graduation planning, smoother transfer of academic credits, and targeted educational supports.

WHY DOES PA NEED THIS BILL?

Despite hard work, students experiencing education instability often cannot graduate because they change schools mid-year before earning full credit, their new school will not honor credits earned, or they didn't have the opportunity to take a course that is a graduation requirement for their final school. By supporting S.B. 324, we can eliminate barriers to success and make a difference in young people's lives.

KEY PROVISIONS OF S.B. 324

- 01 ASSIGNS A POINT OF CONTACT TO ASSIST THE YOUTH**

School must appoint a point of contact to assist the student's transition to the new school. The point of contact works with key players to determine appropriate classes and connect the student with needed educational and mental health services. The point of contact also immediately requests previous school records, including an IEP or 504 service agreement. For students in grades 9-12, the point of contact also works with the student to develop a graduation plan.
- 02 FACILITATES CREDIT TRANSFER**

Schools must develop policies and procedures to apply full or partial credit for schoolwork that is satisfactorily completed by the student, and which is documented in the student's record.
- 03 PROMOTES EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Schools must allow students experiencing education instability the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular programs for which they are otherwise eligible. Schools must waive each fee that would otherwise be assessed against the student and cannot penalize students for delays in obtaining school uniforms.
- 04 PROVIDES WAIVER AND MAKE-UP OPTIONS**

The school entity must ensure that a student experiencing education instability graduates on time. When youth are behind, the school may waive local requirements for graduation if the student has satisfactorily completed a similar course, the student has demonstrated competency in the content area, or where the student is able to produce any other evidence or method of satisfactory completion of the required credits. The school may also offer the student an alternative or modified course of study to assist the student with completing requirements by their reasonably expected graduation date.
- 05 PROVIDES DIPLOMA OPTIONS**

If the waivers and make up options are insufficient to allow a student to graduate on time, the previous school district may issue a diploma if the student meets all of its requirements. A student who meets state standards may also receive a state-issued diploma.

THIS BILL ADDRESSES KEY BARRIERS TO GRADUATION

01 ENROLLMENT PROBLEMS

Students frequently experience delays getting their educational records transferred to their new school, which delays their ability to re-enroll. As a result, youth may be placed into inappropriate classes, forced into an alternative school or GED program, or unable to re-enroll promptly or at all. Many students sit out of class, losing valuable learning time.

02 UNEQUAL EDUCATION

Unfortunately, many juvenile justice and residential facilities offer fewer essential courses required for graduation, which automatically creates a frustrating barrier for youth. Often, the curricula in facilities do not align with state standards.

03 DIFFICULTY TRANSFERRING CREDITS

Youth may be prevented from earning credits because of delays in school record transfers—or a failure of the school to send records at all. Youth and their families may not know how to request or obtain transcripts. Schools may refuse to accept credits from schools offering courses with different titles, content, or structure than their own. Some schools may refuse to provide any credits or partial credit even when courses appear on a youth's transcript.

04 BARRIERS TO SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

Each school district or charter controls how long a youth must be in attendance before they can attain credit. Some districts do not provide credit to any youth unless they are enrolled for a full semester. As students switch schools due to system involvement or homelessness, they often fall far behind.

"Since leaving placement I have been in three different schools. While in foster care, I have been in eight different homes including foster homes, and mother-baby homes (programs specific to helping moms). Right now, I am 19 and in 10th grade because two years of school is gone."

- ALEX

"I was told I only have half a credit for Spanish; a class I had never taken before. I was then told that I would need to start from the 9th grade. I was really upset and didn't want to be 17 years old and in the 9th grade again all because the schools didn't keep track of my credits. I dropped out of school for one year and then went to the E3 centers in Philadelphia to get help to get my GED. I got my GED within 6 months."

- BRIT

Roughly 60% of youth who have experienced homelessness do not graduate on time, and 66% of youth with juvenile justice involvement never graduate. Only 75% of youth with experience in foster care graduate from high school or get a GED by age 21, compared to 92% of Pennsylvania's general population.

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