



# Tips & Best Practices for Act 1 Points of Contact: Lessons From Youth With Lived Experience

*School moves and placement changes often disrupt youth's education and create systemic barriers to being able to fully participate in school and graduate. These barriers must be addressed so that young people can equitably access their education and receive the benefits of supportive school spaces. Under Pennsylvania's Act 1 of 2022, school entities must assign a point of contact to help youth transition to school if they had to change schools at least once in a single school year due to involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems, or because of experiencing homelessness.*

**Act 1 Points of Contact (POCs) hold great power to influence a youth's school success and how welcome a youth feels at school.**

They are responsible for ensuring equal access to school, including access to school curriculars and ensuring that youth in grades 9-12 obtain full and partial academic credit they earned, answer the youth's questions, and ensure that youth receive needed services. POCs work directly with a young person to chart an individualized path to on-time graduation, which is called a Graduation Plan.

Under Act 1, all school entities should make sure that there is at least one building-level Point of Contact assigned in every school. This includes school districts, charter schools, regional charter schools, cyber charter schools, intermediate units, career and technical schools, and schools associated with residential placements. It is best practice that the Point of Contact have few

students on their caseload at any one time, and even fewer if the Point of Contact has other responsibilities. School entities should recruit and hire professionals with strong backgrounds in social work, case management, or school counseling and trauma training to serve as points of contact.

Young people who have directly experienced these barriers and now advocate for change with Juvenile Law Center's youth advocacy groups, **Advocates for Youth Justice**, and **Advocates Transforming Youth Systems**, recommend that Act 1 Points of Contact implement the following best practices to make this role meaningful and fully support students.

## TIPS FOR ACT 1 POINTS OF CONTACT

1. Whenever possible, **communicate with staff at a student's prior school(s)** to discuss and identify supports and services that worked well for the student before and assess their completed schoolwork. If possible, ensure that staff at the previous school or placement are supporting the student and planning for the transition to their new school.
2. Build a relationship based on trust to ensure there is **open communication between you and the young person**. Whenever possible, schedule in-person meetings with the youth before the youth transitions to a new school. Make an introduction with youth before determining their classes and needs. Get to know the young person more personally to make them feel comfortable. Taking these steps will also allow you to more effectively meet a youth's evolving needs and plan for any known future disruptions to a youth's education.
3. **Immediately request the youth's transcript and complete school records** from all prior schools the youth has attended. The previous school has 10 days to provide them. Talk with the youth about all schools they previously attended to ensure you have a complete file. Request records from any additional schools you might be missing.

4. Immediately work with the youth to ensure that:

- Youth are in the **right grade level and appropriate courses**
- All previously earned full and partial credits, grades, and records (including an IEP or other service agreement) are **immediately transferred** to the youth's new school
- A **youth-specific and individualized Graduation Plan** is developed and executed for students in grades 9-12. Youth must be told what classes and any credits they still need to graduate on time. Graduation Plans must be included in the student's education records
- A **youth should graduate from their current school**, if possible. If not, the option of graduation from a prior school must be explored. If neither of these paths is possible, the youth should be supported in applying for a state-wide Keystone diploma
- Youth are expeditiously connected to **educational supports**, including mental health services and/or tutoring
- **IEPs are followed and youth are included in IEP meetings**
- The school **does not assess any fines or fees** against the youth
- Youth have **appropriate transportation** set up immediately to consistently get to and from school
- Youth can be **involved in extracurricular activities** and school-sponsored activities, even if they transfer mid-year
- The youth is connected with **support for life skills** (e.g., scheduling, budgeting) and any other supports needed (e.g., mental health, food, violence prevention)

5. It is best practice to conduct **regular one-on-one check-ins** with the youth and provide ongoing support to ensure the youth is engaged, supported, and taking the right classes to graduate. After the initial meetings to meet the requirements of Act 1, it is best practice for check-ins to happen on at least a **monthly basis, at a minimum**, and can include:

- Updating a graduation timeline

- Matching youth to activities that better fit them and their identified goals
  - Connecting the youth with tutoring or any other ongoing supports needed to graduate on time
  - Facilitating communication with teachers
  - Continuing to review 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
  - Encouraging and supporting the student to graduate
  - Supporting the youth in **envisioning their future beyond high school** and supporting them with post-secondary planning, including particular needs they may have because of system involvement or housing instability (*e.g.*, looking for a college with support groups or housing provided over breaks)
  - Working with the youth to apply for scholarships, financial aid, post-secondary and other educational opportunities
6. Create a plan to **ensure youth can attend meetings with you**, including regularly reminding youth about upcoming meetings. It's important to speak directly with the youth to remind them about a meeting.
7. Make sure **youth with disabilities are able to participate fully in the meetings with you** and are getting the support they need through their IEP and 504 plans.
8. Make sure **youth who English Language Learners are able to participate fully in the meetings with you**, with interpretation provided as well as documents translated for them and their parent or other educational decisionmaker as needed, and ensure they are getting needed language support services.

9. Help the youth prepare for the meetings. Set a **youth-friendly agenda** that ensures youth understand the discussion and goals of the meeting (for example, talk slowly and avoid jargon). Ask if youth want help preparing for meetings and debrief with them after meetings. Give youth advance notice of who will attend and participate (including biological parents) and explain each person's role in the meeting.
10. During the meeting, **explain concepts in a youth-friendly way and use examples**. Ensure all meetings begin with **positive updates about the youth**. Talk to the youth about the importance of their participation in graduation planning. If youth have concerns or questions, take their question seriously and make time to answer their questions. Allow youth to bring any additional supportive adult to the meeting to make sure they feel comfortable. If specific action steps are brought up during the meeting, highlight them at the end of the meeting and then follow up.
11. Work with youth to make a **list of school staff and other adults who are important to them** and help them engage in and succeed in school. Revisit and add to this list frequently. Assist youth in forming strong connections with educators and other school personnel.
12. Always treat youth as individuals. **Always try to meet the youth where they are**. Make sure they have a thorough understanding of everything and explain things if needed. Ask what skills youth need to develop to maintain positive connections to school and support them in obtaining those.
13. Understand and **be attentive to youth who identify challenges in school** and work with them to resolve the challenges. Don't assume people have the same problems or are acting out for the same reasons. Understand that some of the things youth have gone through might be driving their behavior.

14. **Be patient with the youth.** Understand that not all system-involved youth or youth experiencing homelessness may want to talk about their personal situations. Build flexibility into scheduling so youth have time to open up and vent their concerns about their education.
15. Remember that Act 1 **Points of Contact must keep a student's eligibility private and cannot share out this information without consent.**
16. **Be genuine. Don't make promises you can't keep.** Practice active listening and understanding.
17. Keep in mind that many youth eligible for the protections of Act 1 may have experienced trauma. Make sure they feel **safe and comfortable.**
18. Communicate that youth deserve to **be treated fairly and with humanity.** Consistently tell youth that you want to know if they are being treated unfairly and then respond when they raise concerns.
19. **Be supportive of all aspects of youths' identities.**
20. **Help youth understand and manage their emotional and mental health.** Help them explore non-traditional ways of addressing emotions, like getting involved in activities and hobbies or learning meditation. Connect the youth with school counseling or other mental health professional, after obtaining their consent, to help and talk to students about their problems so that they can be helped instead of hurt. Provide or suggest trainings to co-workers on understanding trauma, foster care, juvenile justice, housing instability, and adolescent development.