

The School Counselor and Supporting Students in Foster Care

(Adopted 2018)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors implement comprehensive school counseling programs to meet the academic, career and social/emotional needs of all students. School counselors recognize that some students cope with situations that place them at higher risk. Youth in foster care represent an underserved and often-overlooked student population.

The Rationale

Children and youth in foster care represent one of the most vulnerable student subgroups in this country. Of the approximately 437,465 children in foster care in 2016, nearly 275,407 were in elementary and secondary schools (Children's Bureau, n.d.). Children in foster care experience much higher-levels of residential and school instability than their peers. Children experiencing this type of instability, including many students in foster care, are more likely to face a variety of academic difficulties (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

Research suggests that strong collaborative relationships between public schools and child welfare agencies improve the educational outcomes of students in the foster care system (Weinberg, Zetlin, & Shea, 2009; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2005; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006). It is imperative that professionals work together, along with the students' families when possible, to support each individual student and their unique needs.

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors should inform themselves of the proper policies that apply to their states and local school districts regarding foster youth students' rights to school placements. School counselors should be knowledgeable about special circumstances and rights students may have in qualifying states and districts in which youth in foster care are able to receive their high school diploma with fewer credits or may qualify for a fifth year of high school if they changed school after their sophomore year. School counselors serve as the liaison between their school and child welfare agencies to promote communication and collaboration to address students' educational needs in their specific communities and improve students' educational outcomes.

In addition, school counselors:

- Help foster students with a stable school environment
- Bridge the communication between schools during times of transitions
- Promote resilience and identify protective factors
- Collaborate with foster/biological family and community stakeholders (e.g., social workers, therapists, attorneys and case managers)
- Display awareness of the challenges students face
- Inform themselves of resources available to help students access postsecondary training opportunities (e.g., current scholarships, grants and application fee waiver programs available to foster youth in their states)

Summary

School counselors recognize students in the foster care system are resilient, have many strengths and may require additional support in obtaining resources, social/emotional care, academic planning and college/career guidance. School counselors recognize it is their duty to be knowledgeable about legislation, resources and needs for students in foster care.

References

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Resources

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