



REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

Improving Educational Outcomes for Students in Foster Care

2017

Authorizing legislation: RCW 74.13.1051 and 2016 c 71 s 6
(<http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=74.13.1051>)

A Joint Report of:

- The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)
- Children's Administration (CA)
- The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC)

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Executive Summary

The Washington State Legislature has advanced educational outcomes for foster youth since 2007 with the creation of the Passport to College pilot program. The pilot status of the program was removed in 2012 with [House Bill 2254](#). In the 2016 legislative session, [House Bill 1999](#) established the goal of making Washington state the leader in the nation with respect to foster youth alumni graduating from high school, enrolling in postsecondary education, and completing postsecondary education.

Because of this groundbreaking legislation, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Children’s Administration (CA), and Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC)—in partnership with non-governmental agencies providing direct services to students in foster care—have worked collaboratively to achieve this vision.

Between July 2016 and October 2017, the three agencies have worked collaboratively to:

- Transfer the Graduation Demonstration Site and Education Advocacy programs from DSHS to OSPI, and develop new contracts with providers.
- Transfer the Supplemental Education Transition Planning Program (SETuP) from DSHS to WSAC, and develop new provider contracts and report templates.
- Improve collaboration with partners, including Treehouse, College Success Foundation, YMCA-Seattle, Volunteers of America, Community Youth Services, Pierce County Alliance, Youthnet, and Catholic Child and Family Services.
- Develop appropriate data-sharing agreements to ensure the safe exchange of personally identifiable information.
- Develop materials to share best practices and provide support to students from foster care.
- Provide training and guidance for contractors, volunteers, liaisons and staff.

OSPI, CA, and WSAC will work toward making improvements to foster youth education attainment and meeting the Legislature’s goals. In the upcoming year, the agencies will:

- Implement new data shares and strengthen current agreements to provide school districts, caseworkers, and education contractors with necessary information to support successful education outcomes.
- Continue outreach and distribution of K–12 and postsecondary support materials developed in the previous year.
- Gain agreement from school districts and CA field offices to commit to specific strategies for communication and collaboration, and identify points of contact.
- Ensure there is an intentional service continuum between Treehouse and SETuP contractors and the postsecondary institutions serving students from foster care.

Background

Legislation enacted in 2016 (HB 1999) mandated that administration of three education programs serving foster youth be transferred from Children’s Administration (CA) to other agencies. The Statewide Education Advocacy and Graduation Demonstration Site contracts moved to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and the Supplemental Education Transition Planning (SETuP) program moved to the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC). Another provision of the legislation provided for CA to share confidential child welfare information with other state agencies or a contracted provider for the purpose of assisting youth in out-of-home care to attain educational success. This report outlines progress made toward achieving the goals set forth in statute. These goals include making Washington number one in the nation for:

1. Foster care graduation rates
2. Foster care enrollment in postsecondary education
3. Foster care postsecondary completion

Update Status: 2016–2017

Establishing New Contracts and Data Sharing Agreements

CA, OSPI, WSAC, Treehouse, and the College Success Foundation worked together during the 2016–2017 school year to ensure the successful transfer of the Graduation Demonstration Site, Education Advocacy, and SETuP contracts by July 1, 2016. All parties developed the appropriate data-share agreements and processes for exchanging information to support improved education outcomes for children in out-of-home care.

During the transitional period, the partners met with SETuP providers, representatives from Treehouse, CA, and OSPI. These meetings provided new contract managers with an understanding of the work and the challenges needing to be addressed. New contract language was written in order to meet the legislative requirements of the programs being administered. The contracts incorporated provider feedback regarding best practices and strategies for implementation and service delivery.

Collaboration to Share Best Practices and Provide Supports

CA, OSPI, and WSAC met regularly during the 2016–17 school year to monitor progress, provide cross-agency training to leadership and staff, and discuss the successes and challenges of the contract transition. Contract managers and providers identified the following progress:

- Completed contracts to facilitate program administration and funding.
- Established data-share agreements to identify eligible youth for referral.
- Conducted cross-agency training.
- Established effective protocols for communication and support.

In January 2017, leaders from CA and OSPI met to reaffirm each agency's goal for collaboration. CA and Casey Family Programs facilitated a full-day technical assistance meeting with the American Bar Association and United States Department of Education to discuss the potential barriers to OSPI and CA bi-directional data-share agreements and interface. Challenges included differing interpretations of the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), and Washington state information-sharing laws, and the differing needs and uses of education information. Community stakeholders had an opportunity to review current information-sharing agreements and request feedback regarding more efficient pathways for sharing information.

The data-share agreements between CA and OSPI will assist OSPI with the identification of children and youth in foster care for provision of state and federal services, and will provide CA with individual student education information, integrated into CA's electronic case management system to improve individual case management and education planning.

In addition to the data-share agreements, CA and OSPI have updated the interagency agreement in October 2017 that reflects the state requirements for collaboration and coordination between the two systems, as well as the federal requirements that created additional collaboration requirements as part of the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. The agreement addresses enrollment, record transfers, transportation, and joint education planning. The agreement will be available to all 295 school districts and 45 CA offices. OSPI chose to integrate this agreement into the Consolidated Program Review Process as a compliance item for this upcoming school year.

OSPI and CA staff also delivered five separate trainings at the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth conference in Orlando, Florida in October 2016. This was an opportunity for Washington state to be recognized as a leader in interagency collaboration. In addition to providing collaborative professional development, OSPI and CA created statewide guidance documents vetted by both organizations. These documents include:

- [Frequently Asked Questions for ESSA Implementation](#)
- [Best Practices: Foster Care and School Selection](#)
- [Best Practices: Foster Care and Immediate Enrollment](#)
- [Best Practices: Foster Care and Higher Education](#)
- [Foster Care Dispute Resolution Process](#)

Training and Guidance for Volunteers, Liaisons, and Staff

Throughout the year, CA, OSPI, and WSAC worked in collaboration to provide training to groups working with students from foster care, including Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteers, Foster Care Liaisons at the Student Support Conference, and college financial aid administrators at the Washington Financial Aid Association conference. In October 2016, foster care training sessions were included in the program at

WSAC's *Pave the Way* conference for educators, policy makers, and community partners from across the education pipeline, from preschool through college.

Washington Student Achievement Council

In the past year, one of the challenges WSAC identified in the SETuP program was accurate reporting of student-level data. Although SETuP providers produced annual reports, information provided was in an aggregate form, and data definitions were not consistent across all of the providers.

In addition to developing contract language, WSAC created a new reporting tool for SETuP providers to address the challenges that had been identified previously. This new tool collects student-level data, allowing WSAC to track, evaluate, and analyze the postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion of SETuP participants.

WSAC will be able to better gauge high school completion, postsecondary enrollment, and postsecondary completion for SETuP participants after November 2018, when student-level data from the 2017 reporting tool can be analyzed through the National Student Clearinghouse.

In the past year, WSAC has provided SETuP contractors with additional educational resources and training, including access to the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) curriculum and regional conference, Passport to College training, financial aid information and training, and referrals to GED support for students. Further, the new federal GEAR UP grant request included a special call-out for support to foster youth, which has not happened before.

In the fall of 2017, WSAC and CA finalized a data-sharing agreement increasing the frequency of information exchanges, which allows WSAC to provide SETuP contractors with more accurate and timely information for outreach to foster youth.

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

In 2016 and 2017, OSPI developed comprehensive guidance on state and federal foster care provisions. This guidance was developed in collaboration with CA and community partners in an effort to ensure consistent practice across the state.

The OSPI Foster Care Education Program Supervisor participated in several workgroups to improve collaboration and communication across systems, and to foster intentional efforts to improve educational outcomes. These included CA Children, Youth, and Family Advisory Committee; Reinventing Foster Care; Commission on Children in Foster Care; the Passport Leadership Team; and the collaboration workgroup hosted by WSAC.

To further support the work of WSAC and the Passport Leadership Team, OSPI updated the Foster Care Education Program Website to mirror language used by higher education professionals.

To reinforce OSPI's renewed commitment to the successful implementation of foster care statutes, the Foster Care Education Program Supervisor conducted 75 professional development opportunities over the course of a year. These trainings included school districts, the Office of the Education Ombuds, Civil Legal Aid, Charter School Directors, Treehouse staff, school counselors, shelter providers, Federal Foster Care providers, Homeless Liaisons, Foster Care Liaisons, CA caseworkers and Area Administrators, the Commission on Children in Foster Care, the Foster Parents Association of Washington, and others.

Children's Administration

The CA statewide Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) team identified several areas where CA could focus improvement efforts in 2016 and 2017. The statewide education program manager, regional education leads and regional leadership collaborated throughout the year with the CA CQI team on a well-being campaign to improve outcomes in three well-being areas. Each month a different outcome was identified for emphasis. Addressing education needs was one of the identified areas of focus. Targeted information on steps to better address education needs was provided to caseworkers in their September 2016, March and June 2017 monthly health and safety visits. Currently the statewide education program manager is working with the CQI team to update education information on the CA intranet so caseworkers may readily access policy, practice tips, and resources in one place.

The CA statewide education program manager, CA Education Training Voucher (ETV) program specialists and regional education leads participated in and provided several cross-training events with OSPI, school districts, community providers and CA staff. CA presented at the following conferences this past year: Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), Children's Justice Conference, Washington Financial Aid (WAFA), and the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAHCY).

The CA statewide education program manager and CA regional education leads regularly communicate to field staff about early learning, K-12 and post-secondary resources and referral processes available to children in out-of-home care. Regional education leads regularly attend staff meetings, email useful information to caseworkers, and are available as consultants. ETV Program Specialists participated in staff meetings in 32 CA field offices, attended numerous colleges, and met with all six Independent Living provider agencies.

Throughout the year, the CA statewide education program manager coordinated with the Foster Care Recruitment and Retention and Kinship Caregiver Program Managers to post articles in the Caregiver Connection Newsletter and various caregiver listservs to communicate with a variety of caregivers.

The month of September is National School Attendance Month. OSPI and DSHS collaborated this past summer to create a campaign to share the importance of regular school

attendance. Both agencies created campaign materials to include posters, fliers, public service announcements with the Governor, and robo-call messages for parents and students recorded by Seahawk's Jermaine Kearse. OSPI and DSHS have invited individual administrations within DSHS to participate. CA participated by providing information about the importance of school attendance to children and youth, caseworkers, caregivers and the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC).

This year CA revised and trained all staff on CA's Educational Services and Planning policy. The policy was revised to match current practice and to strengthen guidance to caseworkers. Revisions included requiring all children in foster care to attend public school unless they receive approval from CA and the court. Caseworkers must also use the School Notification Form (DSHS 27-093) to inform schools when children enter out-of-home care, change placements, or return home.

When children enter out-of-home care or their placement changes, changing schools can affect education outcomes. ESSA requires child welfare and the school districts to collaborate on transportation to keep children in their same school when it is in the child's best interest. There is not always an additional cost incurred, but when one occurs, ESSA requires the school district and child welfare to collaborate and cost sharing may result. CA and OSPI collaborated to develop a process to facilitate payment for shared transportation cost to school districts.

Conclusion and Next Steps

CA, OSPI, and WSAC are committed to ensuring staff who work directly with children have the information needed to proactively support successful education outcomes. All three agencies' staff work together to improve education for school-aged children in foster care. While progress has been made, there are opportunities to further improve the processes for establishing contracts and sharing information between agencies.

During the 2017–18 school year, we are committed to:

- Implementing new data-shares and strengthening current agreements to provide school districts, caseworkers, and education contractors with information necessary to proactively support successful education outcomes.
- Continuing outreach and distribution of K–12 and postsecondary support materials developed in the previous year.
- Collaborating with Washington's 295 school districts and 45 CA field offices to get the revised interagency agreement signed. The agreement commits agencies to follow best practices and identify contact points for the districts and CA offices.
- Ensuring there is an intentional service continuum between Treehouse and SETuP contractors and the postsecondary institutions serving students from foster care.

SETuP providers and Treehouse Grad Success Coordinators are taking a collective impact approach toward serving students in foster care. WSAC and OSPI are facilitating meetings

with both parties to provide guidance on educational services and service areas, as well as how to fill gaps in service, create bridges for referrals, and ensure student educational needs are being met. These conversations have also confirmed that the appropriate releases of information are in place, allowing contractors to communicate and ensure there is no duplication of services for students.

WSAC, CA, and OSPI are working with an advisory group made up of representatives from postsecondary institutions, non-governmental agencies, and the College Success Foundation to identify best practices and reporting benchmarks to develop a postsecondary support plan for students through the Passport program. The plan will be rolled out to colleges at the annual Passport to College conference in May 2018.

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