

The School Counselor and Students in Foster Care

(Adopted 2018; revised 2024)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors advocate for and implement school counseling programs that meet all students' academic, career and social/emotional needs. School counselors recognize that students who experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as being in the foster care system, are at a much higher risk (CDC, 2023). Students 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. Approximately 391,098 children were in foster care in 2022 (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). Children in foster care experience much higher levels of residential and school instability than their peers and are more likely to face a variety of academic difficulties (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). School counselors are aware of the cultural factors that may be in play as students transition into cultures that may not be the same as their family of origin. Additionally, school counselors consistently support students in culturally affirming ways.

Strong, collaborative relationships between public schools and child welfare agencies improve the educational outcomes of students in the foster care system (Huscroft-D'Angelo et al., 2022; Stapleton & Chen, 2020). It is imperative that school counselors collaborate across specialties and professions, as well as with students' families of origin and foster families, to support individual students and their unique needs.

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors and stakeholders work together to learn federal and state laws and school district policies regarding students in foster care. 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 transportation to their school of origin, earn their high school diploma with fewer credits, be eligible for partial credits and/or may qualify for a fifth year of high school if they changed schools 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

43 specific communities and improve students' educational outcomes. School
44 counselors advocate for policies and procedures addressing the unique needs of
45 students in foster care.

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47 In addition, school counselors:

- 48 • Promote an inclusive school climate that includes connectedness and a sense of
49 belonging for students in foster care
- 50 • Recognize that a stable environment is helpful for students in foster care and
51 encourage stability, safety and community in all areas
- 52 • Assist in bridging the communication gaps among schools, families, child
53 welfare agencies and communities during times of transitions
- 54 • Identify and promote protective factors and strengths to support development
- 55 • Collaborate with foster/biological family and community stakeholders (e.g.,
56 social workers, therapists, attorneys and case managers)
- 57 • Display an awareness of the challenges students face, including promoting
58 representation in materials (e.g., families/ guardians instead of parents)
- 59 • Address personal and systemic biases and deficit-based approaches to eliminate
60 systemic barriers impeding the success of students in foster care (ASCA, 2021)
- 61 • Support school and district teams in the decision-making process regarding
62 educational equity and planning
- 63 • Use data-informed approaches to identify needs and support remediation efforts
64 for students in foster care experiencing educational gaps due to transitions
- 65 • Engage in and promote professional development opportunities for students in
66 foster care and advocate for their diverse, distinct needs in school.
- 67 • Support the college and career readiness needs of students in foster care
68 through postsecondary-focused resources and activities (e.g., current
69 scholarships, grants and application-fee waiver programs available to students
70 in foster care in their states)
- 71 • Understand the intersections of students' cultural identities and the need for
72 culturally responsive practices

73 74 **Summary**

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

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