

Everyone Can Make a Difference

Small Ideas Creating Big Change for Students in Foster Care

For students in foster care, education is the door out of instability into a more promising life. But with many of the 400,000 youth in foster care nationwide struggling in school, the challenge we face can seem insurmountable.

The good news is that many students in foster care are succeeding because of the creativity and determination of the people in their lives. Broader, system-wide changes are

needed to help all youth succeed, but the big impact of these small ideas are a reminder that each of us has a role in helping students in foster care succeed in school.

Teachers matter. Caregivers matter. Social workers matter. Elected officials matter. And each of us can make a difference.

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Education Tips for Vermont Social Workers

When Vermont began updating its policies on the education of children in foster care following the passage of Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Resource Coordinator Joan Rock came up with a creative idea. She develops and shares “an education tip” with social workers at each weekly staff meeting. Each “tip” responds to social workers’ questions about the real-life educational needs of the children they serve.

Education Tip: “There are forms to help guide you through the decision making process regarding what is in the best interest of the child educationally. These forms are called ‘Questions to Consider’. Supervisors and Resource Coordinators have these forms.”

Key Education Testing Dates Sent to Florida Judges

Florida’s Department of Children and Families Services partnered with the state’s Department of Education which developed a list of key educational dates for the 2011-2012 school year -- for comprehensive tests, end-of-course assessments, and other statewide assessments. The State’s Court Improvement Project sent this list to all juvenile court judges. Judges now have ready access to these key dates so that they do not schedule hearings for school-aged children and youth in foster care during school hours on those days.

“It is so important that children in foster care attend their court hearings and attend school. Sharing critical testing dates with judges helps make sure that being in court doesn’t interfere with the child’s educational progress. We are partnering to make the best decisions possible for our kids.”

—Mary Cagle, Director of Children’s Legal Services, Department of Children and Families

School-based Foster Family Recruitment in Arizona

To help find foster families for children in foster care within a particular school community, a former Foster Home Recruiter from Arizona’s Department of Economic Security developed a flyer for junior high and high schoolers to take home to their parents in “high needs” areas for foster families. The flyer, sample text to the right, spoke directly to school kids and asked, “Would you help a kid get back home?” It provided information that students can share with their families about becoming foster parents and helping a child in foster care. Follow up flyers provided additional information on how “your family can become a foster family.”

Would you help a kid get back home?

Your area has been identified as a “high need area” for foster homes for junior high school and high school students.

What does that mean? Children who need a home are forced to leave this community because there aren’t enough foster homes. This means that they leave their friends, their schools and their families.

What can you do? Talk to your family and decide if you can help.

Know of other small ideas creating big change for students in foster care? Email cleducation@americanbar.org so we can spread the word.



**National Working Group on
Foster Care and Education**

