

School Success for Students in Foster Care: Pennsylvania Youth Share their Stories

Ana

Since she was first placed in foster care as an 18-month-old, Ana has been in 27 different living placements. She cannot even remember how many schools she has attended. She has had to retake the same courses several times - sometimes simply as a result of her new school failing to obtain any records from her prior schools. For example, she had to take Spanish I four times and repeated a child development class where she had to take home a “fake baby” three times.

Andrea

Andrea entered foster care at age 6 and has since attended 11 schools, staying in only two of those schools for more than one year. Although she took Spanish I at her first high school, the record did not transfer when she changed living placements and schools in 10th grade. As a result, she was forced to retake Spanish I as a senior (despite having completed Spanish II as a junior) to meet her district’s language requirement. Although she moved again in the middle of high school, this time, with the help of her new foster mother, Andrea was able to remain in the same school and thrived.

Josh

When Josh transferred high schools, he had already completed Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry. His new high school required Algebra “1.5,” a 10th grade course that he was forced to take as a senior. Having already completed more advanced coursework in Algebra II, Josh was not challenged and disengaged from the class. His grades suffered and he got in trouble for his behavior.

Jarrett

During his time in foster care, Jarrett has changed schools six times. One of these moves occurred three weeks before the end of the semester, and when his school records did not arrive at his new school in time, he was not granted permission to take final exams or complete final projects for his courses. Jarrett’s GPA plummeted from 3.6 to 1.4 due to the missing coursework. Jarrett was also forced to retake courses that were called different names in different schools (e.g., “Health Education” and “Safety Education”).

For more information, contact Maura McInerney at mmcinerney@elc-pa.org or Kate Burdick at kburdick@jlc.org



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Rebecca

When Rebecca was living in a shelter, she earned four 0.75 credits in different subjects while attending a residential school. Yet, she was forced to repeat all four courses when she started in a new school. She is now a semester behind and will not be able to graduate with her class. When she changed schools, she had to start new subjects mid-year which she found confusing. She noted how hard it is to get good grades when you are constantly worried about moving.

Daniella

Daniella has been in care since she was 11. Since that time, she attended two neighborhood schools and five schools on-grounds at residential facilities. The schools in the residential facilities did not offer rigorous academic courses, and Daniella was behind academically when she returned to her home district. She was also told that she only had one credit in the system and had to repeat many courses – including Spanish I, English III, and Algebra – because she transferred schools in the middle of marking periods and did not earn credit for her work.

Maria

When Maria came into care at age 13, she moved to a new school district and left her friends behind. In 11th grade, she changed foster homes and started at a new school but her education records did not follow her. From September until April she was in the wrong classes because her new school did not have her IEP and did not know she needed learning support. Maria recently changed living placements again but is trying to stay in her current school.

Andrew

When Andrew was in middle school, he was enrolled in several on-grounds schools at residential treatment facilities. The coursework was very basic and he did not feel challenged because it was similar to work he had already completed. When Andrew transferred high schools in his junior year, he was forced to retake a history course he had previously completed because the courses had two different names, despite covering the same content.

Donna

Over the course of two years, Donna moved nine times and attended four or five different schools. Every time she started at a new school, she would have to wait a long time before she could enroll because her records were missing. Once, she was out of school for two months while she waited for her new school to enroll her. Her grades suffered, she had trouble making friends, and she even considered dropping out.

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Jessica

Jessica had to change schools several times due to changes in her foster care placement. She would have graduated a year ago if she had remained in the same school; instead, she was forced to change schools and could not earn the credits required by her current school to graduate. She hated changing schools because she had to work so hard to try to make friends and build close relationships with teachers.

Raquel

When Raquel's foster placement changed in high school, she talked to her principal and asked if she could continue attending the same school. While she was permitted to stay in the same school, she had to navigate transportation on her own and frequently arrived to school late due to travel complications. Fortunately, her principal worked with her to excuse her late arrivals because he understood the obstacles she faced in her home life. School stability and supports, such as peer mentoring, helped Raquel graduate on time.

Ciara

At age 16 when Ciara came into care, she transferred to an on-grounds school at a residential placement where she felt like she was given seventh grade work. When she later transferred to high school in the community, she struggled with the work at first because her previous school did not properly prepare her. However, thanks to the support of school staff, she eventually thrived. Ciara's guidance counselor also ensured all her credits transferred and that she was placed in the correct classes, and helped her apply to college.

Allison

Allison changed schools in the middle of the year and was enrolled in a math course that had the same name as a class she was taking in her previous school. However, she soon realized that the coursework was different between the two schools, and when she reached Algebra II her junior year, she felt she had missed out on important foundations. Thanks to a supportive adult who helped Allison complete the FAFSA and accompanied her to take college placement exams, Allison is now in college. Yet, she still feels like she is playing "catch-up" in math.

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