

To ensure that foster youth scholars graduate from high school and have a successful transition to college we have created a list of best practice strategies. These recommendations are designed for teachers, counselors, SpEd teams, Foster Youth Liaisons, administrators, and any individuals or groups within the K-12 education system that work with foster youth. These strategies are essential for supporting foster youth through the final stretch of their high school experience.

When working with a student that is part of the child welfare system, our actions should support stability, engagement, and advocacy. For some students, you are an extension of their family support system, so it is critical in this unprecedented and unpredictable time to be someone they can trust and rely on.

We thank you for your continued commitment and support of foster youth and their families.



STABILITY

A student that is in foster care is more vulnerable to experience a deficiency in these areas, and they will often look to school and their teachers to provide structure while holding them accountable to expectations.

Trauma-Informed and Resiliency-Focused

- Most people are experiencing a trauma right now due to COVID-19, but it may be especially traumatic for youth in foster care. Responses to this event may produce a variety of feelings and emotions that could include irritability, avoidance, shutting down, or other behaviors.
- Focus on relationships before content. Since students learn better in an environment where they feel safe, heard, and cared for.
- Consider starting classes with a mindfulness activity or stress relieving activity for students.
- Students that are having difficulty coping may benefit from being connected to mental health support services.
- Seniors may be experiencing an extra sense of loss due to missing high school milestones such as prom or an in person high school graduation. Consider providing alternative options to cultivate joy and honor their achievements.

Consistency and Clarity

- Structured schedule - predictable and unwavering
- Activities with clear expectations and guidelines to complete
- Routine check-ins - knowing they will be missed when they are not present.
- Assess evolving needs and refer them to enhanced supports
- Assess current school-from-home set up and remove barriers to their ability to successfully complete their course requirements.
- Consider asking students to do less as they navigate this crisis.
- Connect with caregivers of students with poor attendance to assess barriers and challenges the home faces, as well as provide guidance on how to support scholars in completing their online coursework.

Grades / Credit Recovery

- Verbally communicate with all foster youth about the COVID19 grading policies, explain pass/fail, credit/no credit, and GPA impact of not receiving letter grades.
- Provide opportunities for students to improve their grade.
- Ensure all seniors graduating with AB167 are on track and local requirements have been met, identify recovery options if necessary.
- Assess if independent study/credit recovery options would allow students to complete more A-G requirements during this time.

Transition and Housing Plan

- Encourage students to connect with their ILP coordinator regarding their transition plan.
- Ensure Cal Grant and Chafee applications are completed and verified for all graduating seniors.
- Coach students through the college choice decision making process and remind students to notify their school of choice by the deadline and request a deposit fee waiver.
- Support students in evaluating their financial aid award letters and encourage them to meet with their ILP coordinator to establish a clear plan and identify financial resources available to them.
- Identify campus-based foster youth-specific personnel and make a warm connection.

ENGAGEMENT

We want to ensure that familiar structures are carried over into the online classroom by having regularly scheduled check-ins and meeting times where a trusted adult is available. During one-on-one check-ins, this is an opportunity to show students you really care and understand their unique situation through an empathetic trauma focused lens. It is also critical to provide social spaces for students to engage with peers as they typically would during a normal school day on campus.

- One-on-ones - for those who are in the foster care system, absent, low academically, have mental health concerns, or low socioeconomic status.
- Weekly small group flex space - office hours - (1) social engagement (2) academic support (3) needs outside of school
- Send key webinars to students and families; Alternatively, synthesize key updates for graduating seniors in a weekly email.

ADVOCACY

Lastly, we must continue to advocate for students whether it is following through with connecting them to additional resources and reminding them that they are valued and should continue to participate with their class in the new virtual space.

- Champion efforts to make sure students' needs are met by connecting the student to school-based resources and external stakeholders.
- Ensure school stability rights are protected. If foster youth move during this time, they have the right to remain enrolled at their school of origin and access any distance learning opportunities.
- Check in with caregivers to ensure/advocate for stable placement until college transition.
- Support the Every Student Counts Campaign - Identify all foster youth and ensure verbal connection to all students in jurisdiction (by either counselor, liaison, advocate or ILP) and confirm student is engaged in distance learning, has a transition plan, and will successfully graduate.