

## Ensuring Educational Stability for Foster Care Youth

### Transportation Plan Guide

#### *Considerations for developing a local transportation plan*

Transportation is a central component of educational stability. Some children in foster care will need transportation to remain in their school of origin when such placement is in their best interest. The *Transportation Plan Guide* outlines strategies to fulfill transportation requirements that both local education agencies (LEAs) and county children and youth agencies (CCYAs) must provide to ensure educational stability for foster care youth. The guide may be used to assist LEAs and CCYAs in designing a formal, written local transportation plan as jointly required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and Pennsylvania Department of Human Services.

#### ***A. Every Student Succeeds Act's foster care provisions for ensuring educational stability***

LEAs must provide assurances that they will collaborate with state or local children and youth agencies to:

- 1) Develop and implement clear, written procedures governing how transportation to maintain children in foster care in their schools of origin, when in their best interest, will be provided, arranged, and funded for the duration of the time in foster care;
- 2) Develop and implement procedures to ensure that children in foster care needing transportation to their school of origin will promptly receive it in a cost-effective manner and in accordance with Section 475 (4)(A) of the Social Security Act; **and**
- 3) **If there are additional costs** incurred in providing transportation to the school of origin, the LEA will provide such transportation if:
  - The placing CCYA agrees to reimburse the LEA for the cost of such transportation;
  - The LEA agrees to pay the cost;
  - The LEA and local CCYA agree to share the cost. *ESEA 1112 (c)(5)(B)*; or
  - Other solutions, such as the sharing of costs between the school district of origin, the school district of residence, and the placing CCYA.

**Tip:** LEAs and CCYAs must find approaches that are flexible and that make clear which agency is responsible for arranging transportation and/or paying or sharing transportation costs and under what circumstances.

**Tip:** LEAs, including both the school district of origin and the school district of residence, as well as the placing CCYA, may also agree to paying for or sharing in the costs in providing transportation to the school of origin.

#### ***B. Funding transportation for foster care youth***

Some foster care youth will need transportation provided at additional costs. All appropriate federal funding sources should be maximized to ensure costs are not unduly burdensome on one agency.



Title IV-E, available to CCYAs, is an allowable funding source for children in foster care. Section 475 (4)(A) of the Social Security Act defines "foster care maintenance payments" which include the cost of reasonable travel for children in foster care to their school of origin, defined as the school in which the child was enrolled at the time of placement in foster care. As such, if a child is eligible/receiving a Title IV-E foster care maintenance payment, the Title IV-E agency is permitted to include the reasonable cost of transportation for that eligible child. However, please note:

- Not all children in foster care are eligible;
- Tribal foster children may be eligible; and
- State child welfare agencies are responsible for a portion of the remaining non-federal expense.

Title I funds, available to LEAs, may be used to pay additional costs needed to transport children in foster care to their schools of origin. Please note, however, that funds reserved for comparable services for homeless children and youth under Section 1113(c)(3)(A)(i) of ESEA may not be used to provide transportation for foster care youth.

Even if an LEA does not offer and/or provide transportation to children who are not in foster care, it must ensure that transportation is provided to children in foster care. *ESEA 1112 (c)(5)(B)*

**Tip:** "Additional costs" represent the difference between what an LEA would normally spend on transportation to the child's assigned school and the cost of transportation to the school of origin. Examples of "additional costs" could include special transportation aides, such as 1:1 support and transportation equipment not covered by other programs such as Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA).

### ***C. Considering low-cost or no-cost transportation options for foster care youth***

An LEA should consider whether transportation can be provided for minimal or no additional cost. Examples of no-cost or low-cost options for transportation that LEAs and CCYAs could explore include whether:

- The child may be dropped off at a school bus stop near the existing transportation system for the school of origin. Communication between the current and new school district is critical.
- Public transportation options exist, if the child is of an appropriate age and has, or is able to acquire, the skills to utilize such options.
- The foster parents or other family member(s) are willing and able to transport the child to school.
- The child is already eligible for transportation covered by other programs. For example, IDEA funds may be used to pay for transportation services if the child's IEP Team determines transportation is a related service that is required for a child with disabilities in foster care to receive FAPE.
- There are preexisting bus routes or stops close to the new foster care placement that cross district boundaries, such as bus routes for magnet schools and transportation for homeless students as required by the McKinney-Vento Act.

**Tip:** One way to solve the transportation puzzle is to identify all resources that can help transport the child. Engaging the youth and legal guardian can be critical in this search.

#### ***D. Foster care youth not requiring transportation***

Not every child in foster care requires transportation to remain in their current school. As examples, the following categories of foster care youth will not require transportation:

- **Children who are placed within the school boundaries.** CCYAs should make a documented effort to place children within or close to their current school communities.
- **Children whose “best interest” dictates that they should be immediately enrolled in new schools.** A Best Interest Determination must be made when deciding whether a child should remain in the current school or move to a new school. While the presumption is that children remain in their school, there are occasions when it will be in the child’s best interest to be immediately enrolled in a new school. In these situations, no special transportation will be needed. Please note: transportation costs must **NEVER** be a factor in determining the best interest of the child for school selection purposes.

#### ***E. Additional local transportation plan considerations***

- Collaboration with Intermediate Units

School districts should notify Intermediate Units (IUs) of foster care youth attending programs at their facilities and must make the same accommodations for their foster care youth who attend IU-based programs. If an IU provides the transportation for attending students in foster care, the IU must be a part of the discussion with the student’s school district of origin to ensure that the IU is included in the school district’s local transportation plan with their corresponding CCYA.

- Inter-district and inter-state procedures

Transportation procedures can be complex and may span multiple LEAs and CCYAs, as well as multiple state education agencies (SEAs) and state child welfare agencies. Thus, in developing the transportation procedures, LEAs and CCYAs should work to establish **inter-district and inter-state procedures** that address potential coordination among multiple LEAs and CCYAs.

*For example, LEAs should consider developing transportation plans with other LEAs or CCYAs, both in-state and out-of-state, with which they frequently interact regarding foster care youth; specific relationships should be defined in the local transportation plan.*

- In the event of a transportation dispute

Local transportation plans/procedures should include a dispute resolution process to address how the transportation requirement will be met if parties cannot come to an agreement. LEAs must ensure that a child in foster care remains in their school of origin while any disputes regarding transportation costs are being resolved. *ESEA 1111(g)(1)(E)(i) and 1112(c)(5)(B)(i)*





Best Interest Determination  
for Children in Foster Care

School Placement Form



This document serves as a guidance and a tool related to **school placement**. Children in foster care remain in their school of origin unless there is a determination that it is not in his or her best interest to attend the school of origin. The Best Interest Determination School Placement Form serves as a mechanism through which relevant parties can meaningfully participate in the Best Interest Determination (BID).

All children in foster care (with the exception of voluntary placements) are placed under order of the court. As such, court determinations, findings and orders are critical to best interest discussions. Teams should be aware of and must follow existing court orders. If a court order specifies an educational placement for the child, the CCYA must request and obtain a modified court order prior to the child changing schools if a best interest educational determination is different from the court order.

*This document shall be kept in both the child's school (LEA) and county children and youth agency's (CCYA) case file.*

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's PA Secure ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's CCYA Case Number: \_\_\_\_\_

School and District of Current Attendance: \_\_\_\_\_

School District of Current Residence: \_\_\_\_\_

Previous School District(s) Attended (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Current Grade of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Has the child's current school placement been determined by the court? Yes  No

If yes, has the court order been shared with the LEA? Yes  No

Does the child have an educational decision maker appointed? Yes  No

*In addition to the required LEA and CCYA representatives, every effort should be made to gather meaningful input from additional relevant parties. This might include the child (depending on age), foster parents, biological parents when appropriate, education decision makers, teachers, counselors, coaches, other relatives, child attorney, guardian ad litem, or other meaningful persons in the child's life. **Note:** If a child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Section 504 plan, or is an English Learner (EL), then these relevant LEA staff members must also participate in the best interest determination (BID).*



Best Interest Determination for Children in Foster Care

School Placement Form



Please complete the following chart, including all individuals involved in this Best Interest Determination (BID):

Name	Relation to Student	Organization
	LEA POC	LEA:
	CCYA Representative	CCYA:

Date of Best Interest Determination Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

**Factors considered in making a Best Interest Determination (BID):**

The student shall remain in the current school *unless* consideration of the following factors indicates that a change of school placement is in the child's best interest. (Check all that apply and provide explanation)

- Transferring schools will positively impact the child emotionally, socially, or academically (e.g. the child's siblings attend the new school).

[Empty box for explanation]

- The student is best served at a different school due to his or her academic history/ future (report cards, GPA, Teachers' progress reports, etc.). Please explain if a change in school placement would benefit the child academically.

[Empty box for explanation]



- The parents/prior custodians or child believe that changing schools is in the child's best interest. If so, state why?

- The preferences of the child (depending on age) have been taken into consideration. Please describe why the child believes that changing schools is in their best interest.

- The distance/length of commute to return to the current school (school of origin) would negatively impact the student's education and/or special needs. Has the child's age been considered when determining appropriate/feasible proximity? Please describe.

- The child's permanency goal, plan, and expected date for achieving the permanency supports a change in school placement. Please describe.

- The child has only attended the current school for a short time or is not attached to the school, does not mind transferring to another school, or is not involved in school related or extra-curricular activities. Please describe.

- Safety considerations favor a change in school placement. If so, state why?

- The student's need for special instruction or special education and related services can be met better at the new school. (Consider: Is the child receiving any special education services? Does the child participate in other specialized instruction? e.g. gifted program, English language learner, career and technical program). Please describe how the student's need for special instruction or special education can be met at the new school.

- The new school is able to meet the child's academic needs. (Consider: Would the child's new school have programs and activities that address the unique needs or interests of the student that the current school does not have? Please describe.



- Changing schools will NOT undermine the child's ability to stay on track to graduate. (Consider: How would changing schools affect the student's ability to earn full academic credit, proceed to the next grade, or graduate on time?) Please describe.

- The timing of the school transfer will not undermine school success. (Consider: Would the timing of the school transfer coincide with a logical juncture in the child's academic or personal progress? (e.g., after an event that is significant to the child or end of the school year) Please describe.

Please note, if applicable, any additional considerations or factors that indicate a change of school placement is in the child's best interest.

**Supporting Documentation:**

(Please attach any supporting documentation used in making this determination of best interest. The following is a checklist of sample documents; the list is not exhaustive.)

- Report Cards
- Progress Reports
- Achievement Data
- Attendance Records
- Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- Section 504 Plan
- Family Service Plan
- Child Permanency Plan



- Individualized Service Plan
- Emails or correspondence from individuals consulted
- Documentation supporting child's participation in extracurricular activities such as athletics, clubs, or afterschool programs

**Determination:**

Date of Best Interest Determination: \_\_\_\_\_

- The student shall remain in the school in which the child was enrolled at the time of placement.

Name of School/District: \_\_\_\_\_

- Based on the best interest determination, a change in school placement is needed. The student will be enrolled in the school of current residence.

Name of School/District: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

County Children and Youth Agency Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Local Education Agency Point of Contact Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Signatures (if applicable):**

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Best Interest Determination  
for Children in Foster Care**

**School Placement Form**



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_





# Child Welfare Information Gateway

PROTECTING CHILDREN ■ STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

FACTSHEET

February 2013

Disponible en español

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/spcpswork.cfm>

## How the Child Welfare System Works



The child welfare system is a group of services designed to promote the well-being of children by ensuring safety, achieving permanency, and strengthening families to care for their children successfully. While the primary responsibility for child welfare services rests with the States, the Federal Government plays a major role in supporting States in the delivery of services through funding of programs and legislative initiatives.

### What's Inside:

- What happens when possible abuse or neglect is reported
- What happens after a report is "screened in"
- What happens in substantiated (founded) cases
- What happens to parents
- What happens to children
- Summary
- Additional Resources
- Appendix: The Child Welfare System



Use your smartphone to access this factsheet online.



Child Welfare Information Gateway  
Children's Bureau/ACYF  
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Eighth Floor  
Washington, DC 20024  
800.394.3366  
Email: [info@childwelfare.gov](mailto:info@childwelfare.gov)  
<https://www.childwelfare.gov>

The primary responsibility for implementing Federal child and family legislation rests with the Children's Bureau, within the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The Children's Bureau works with State and local agencies to develop programs that focus on preventing child abuse and neglect by strengthening families, protecting children from further maltreatment, reuniting children safely with their families, or finding permanent families for children who cannot safely return home. For more information, see *How Federal Legislation Impacts Child Welfare Service Delivery* on the Child Welfare Information Gateway website: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/impacts/index.cfm>

Most families first become involved with their local child welfare system because of a report of suspected child abuse or neglect (sometimes called "child maltreatment"). Child maltreatment is defined by CAPTA as serious harm (neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse or neglect) caused to children by parents or primary caregivers, such as extended family members or babysitters.<sup>1</sup> Child maltreatment also can include harm that a caregiver allows to happen or does not prevent from happening to a child. In general, child welfare agencies do not intervene in cases of harm to children caused by acquaintances or

<sup>1</sup> Each State has its own laws that define abuse and neglect for purposes of stating the reporting obligations of individuals and describing required State and local child protective services agency interventions. To find State-by-State information about civil laws related to child abuse and neglect, visit Information Gateway: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/state](https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state)

strangers. These cases are the responsibility of law enforcement.<sup>2</sup>

### THE CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT ACT

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), originally passed in 1974, brought national attention to the need to protect vulnerable children in the United States. CAPTA provides Federal funding to States in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities as well as grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for demonstration programs and projects. Additionally, CAPTA identifies the Federal role in supporting research, evaluation, technical assistance, and data collection activities. CAPTA also sets forth a minimum definition of child abuse and neglect. Since it was signed into law, CAPTA has been amended several times. It was most recently amended and reauthorized on December 20, 2010, by the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-320). Learn more about CAPTA from Child Welfare Information Gateway (2011): <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/about.cfm>

The child welfare system is not a single entity. Many organizations in each community work together to strengthen families and keep children safe. Public agencies, such as departments of social

<sup>2</sup> While some States authorize child protective services agencies to respond to all reports of alleged child maltreatment, other States authorize law enforcement to respond to certain types of maltreatment, such as sexual or physical abuse.

services or child and family services, often contract and collaborate with private child welfare agencies and community-based organizations to provide services to families, such as in-home family preservation services, foster care, residential treatment, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, parenting skills classes, domestic violence services, employment assistance, and financial or housing assistance.

Child welfare systems are complex, and their specific procedures vary widely by State. The purpose of this factsheet is to give a brief overview of the purposes and functions of child welfare from a national perspective. Child welfare systems typically:

- Receive and investigate reports of possible child abuse and neglect
- Provide services to families that need assistance in the protection and care of their children
- Arrange for children to live with kin or with foster families when they are not safe at home
- Arrange for reunification, adoption, or other permanent family connections for children leaving foster care

The Appendix provides a graphic overview of the process described in the following sections.

## What Happens When Possible Abuse or Neglect Is Reported

Any concerned person can report suspicions of child abuse or neglect. Most reports are made by “mandatory reporters”—people who are required by State law to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect.<sup>3</sup> As of August 2012, statutes in approximately 18 States and Puerto Rico require any person who suspects child abuse or neglect to report it.<sup>4</sup> These reports are generally received by child protective services (CPS) workers and are either “screened in” or “screened out.” A report is screened in when there is sufficient information to suggest an investigation is warranted. A report may be screened out if there is not enough information on which to follow up or if the situation reported does not meet the State’s legal definition of abuse or neglect.<sup>5</sup> In these instances, the worker may refer the person reporting the incident to other community services or law enforcement for additional help.

<sup>3</sup> See Information Gateway’s *Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect* ([https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/manda.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.cfm)) and *Making and Screening Reports of Child Abuse and Neglect* ([https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/repproc.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/repproc.cfm)).

<sup>4</sup> The word approximately is used to stress the fact that States frequently amend their laws.

<sup>5</sup> See Information Gateway’s *Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect*: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/define.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/define.cfm)

The Children's Bureau publishes an annual report of national and State statistics on child abuse and neglect. To find the latest version of *Child Maltreatment*, visit the Children's Bureau website:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment>

## What Happens After a Report Is "Screened In"

CPS caseworkers, often called investigators or assessment workers, respond within a particular time period, which may be anywhere from a few hours to a few days, depending on the type of maltreatment alleged, the potential severity of the situation, and requirements under State law. They may speak with the parents and other people in contact with the child, such as doctors, teachers, or child care providers. They also may speak with the child, alone or in the presence of caregivers, depending on the child's age and level of risk. Children who are believed to be in immediate danger may be moved to a shelter, a foster home, or a relative's home during the investigation and while court proceedings are pending. An investigator also engages the family, assessing strengths and needs and initiating connections to community resources and services.

Some jurisdictions now employ an alternative, or differential, response system.

In these jurisdictions, when the risk to the children involved is considered low, the CPS caseworker focuses on assessing family strengths, resources, and difficulties and on identifying supports and services needed, rather than on gathering evidence to confirm the occurrence of abuse or neglect.

At the end of an investigation, CPS caseworkers typically make one of two findings—unsubstantiated (unfounded) or substantiated (founded). These terms vary from State to State. Typically, a finding of unsubstantiated means there is insufficient evidence for the worker to conclude that a child was abused or neglected, or what happened does not meet the legal definition of child abuse or neglect. A finding of substantiated typically means that an incident of child abuse or neglect, as defined by State law, is believed to have occurred. Some States have additional categories, such as "unable to determine," that suggest there was not enough evidence to either confirm or refute that abuse or neglect occurred.

The agency will initiate a court action if it determines that the authority of the juvenile court (through a child protection or dependency proceeding) is necessary to keep the child safe. To protect the child, the court can issue temporary orders placing the child in shelter care during the investigation, ordering services, or ordering certain individuals to have no contact with the child. At an adjudicatory hearing, the court hears evidence and decides whether maltreatment occurred and whether the child should be under the continuing jurisdiction of the court. The court then enters a disposition, either at that hearing or at a separate hearing, which may result in the court ordering a parent to comply with

services necessary to alleviate the abuse or neglect. Orders can also contain provisions regarding visitation between the parent and the child, agency obligations to provide the parent with services, and services needed by the child.

## What Happens in Substantiated (Founded) Cases

If a child has been abused or neglected, the course of action depends on State policy, the severity of the maltreatment, an assessment of the child's immediate safety, the risk of continued or future maltreatment, the services available to address the family's needs, and whether the child was removed from the home and a court action to protect the child was initiated. The following general options are available:

- **No or low risk**—The family's case may be closed with no services if the maltreatment was a one-time incident, the child is considered to be safe, there is no or low risk of future incidents, and any services the family needs will not be provided through the child welfare agency but through other community-based resources and service systems.
- **Low to moderate risk**—Referrals may be made to community-based or voluntary in-home child welfare services if the CPS worker believes the family would benefit from these services and the child's present and future safety would be enhanced. This may happen even when no abuse or neglect is found, if the family

needs and is willing to participate in services.

- **Moderate to high risk**—The family may again be offered voluntary in-home services to address safety concerns and help reduce the risks. If these are refused, the agency may seek intervention by the juvenile dependency court. Once there is a judicial determination that abuse or neglect occurred, juvenile dependency court may require the family to cooperate with in-home services if it is believed that the child can remain safely at home while the family addresses the issues contributing to the risk of future maltreatment. If the child has been seriously harmed, is considered to be at high risk of serious harm, or the child's safety is threatened, the court may order the child's removal from the home or affirm the agency's prior removal of the child. The child may be placed with a relative or in foster care.

## What Happens to Parents

Caregivers who are found to have abused or neglected a child are generally offered support and treatment services or are required by a juvenile dependency court to participate in services that will help keep their children safe. In cases of low risk, in-home services and supports may be provided, including parent education, child care, counseling, safety planning, and more.

In more severe cases or fatalities, police are called on to investigate and may file charges in criminal court against the perpetrators of

child maltreatment. In many States, certain types of abuse, such as sexual abuse and serious physical abuse, are routinely referred to law enforcement.

Whether or not criminal charges are filed, the name of the person committing the abuse or neglect may be placed on a State child maltreatment registry if abuse or neglect is confirmed. A registry is a central database that collects information about maltreated children and individuals who are found to have abused or neglected those children.<sup>6</sup> These registries are usually confidential and used for internal child protective purposes only. However, they may be used in background checks for certain professions that involve working with children to protect children from contact with individuals who may mistreat them.

## What Happens to Children

Depending on the severity of the case, children may remain at home or be removed into foster care.

### In-Home

In low-risk cases, children may remain in their own homes with their families, and the families may receive in-home services and supports. These may include parent education, safety planning, counseling, and more. Families may also be connected with community services that provide concrete

<sup>6</sup> For more information about these databases, see Information Gateway's *Establishment and Maintenance of Central Registries for Child Abuse Reports*: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/centreg.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/centreg.cfm)

help (e.g., housing, food) as well as services such as therapy, parent training, and support groups.

### Out-of-Home

Most children in foster care are placed with relatives or foster families, but some may be placed in a group or residential setting. While a child is in foster care, he or she attends school and should receive medical care and other services as needed. The child's family also receives services to support their efforts to reduce the risk of future maltreatment and to help them, in most cases, be reunited with their child. Visits between parents and their children and between siblings are encouraged and supported, following a set plan.

Every child in foster care should have a permanency plan. Families typically participate in developing a permanency plan for the child and a service plan for the family, and these plans guide the agency's work. Family reunification, except in unusual and extreme circumstances, is the permanency plan for most children. In some cases, when prospects for reunification appear less likely, a concurrent permanency plan is developed. If the efforts toward reunification are not successful, the plan may be changed to another permanent arrangement, such as adoption or transfer of custody to a relative.<sup>7</sup> (For information on concurrent planning, see Information

<sup>7</sup> Under the Adoption and Safe Families Act, while reasonable efforts to preserve and reunify families are still required, State agencies are required to seek termination of the parent-child relationship when a child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. This requirement does not, at the State's option, apply if a child is cared for by a relative, if the termination is not in the best interests of the child, or if the State has not provided adequate services for the family.

Gateway's *Concurrent Planning: What the Evidence Shows* at [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue\\_briefs/concurrent\\_evidence/index.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue_briefs/concurrent_evidence/index.cfm).)

Federal law requires the court to hold a permanency hearing, which determines the permanent plan for the child, within 12 months after the child enters foster care and every 12 months thereafter. Many courts review each case more frequently to ensure that the agency is actively pursuing permanency for the child.

Whether or not they are adopted, older youth in foster care should receive support in developing some form of permanent family connection, in addition to transitional or Independent Living services, to assist them in being self-sufficient when they leave foster care between the ages of 18 and 21.

The Children's Bureau publishes annual statistics on the numbers and characteristics of children in foster care. To read the most recent Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) report, visit the Children's Bureau website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars>

## Summary

The goal of child welfare is to promote the well-being, permanency, and safety of children and families by helping families

care for their children successfully or, when that is not possible, helping children find permanency with kin or adoptive families. Among children who enter foster care, most will return safely to the care of their own families or go to live with relatives or an adoptive family.

For more detailed information about the child welfare system, please refer to the resources listed below. For more information about the child welfare system in your State or local jurisdiction, contact your local public child welfare agency.

## Additional Resources

Badeau, S., & Gesiriech, S. (2003). *A child's journey through the child welfare system*. Washington, DC: The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. Retrieved from [http://www.pewtrusts.org/our\\_work\\_report\\_detail.aspx?id=48990](http://www.pewtrusts.org/our_work_report_detail.aspx?id=48990)

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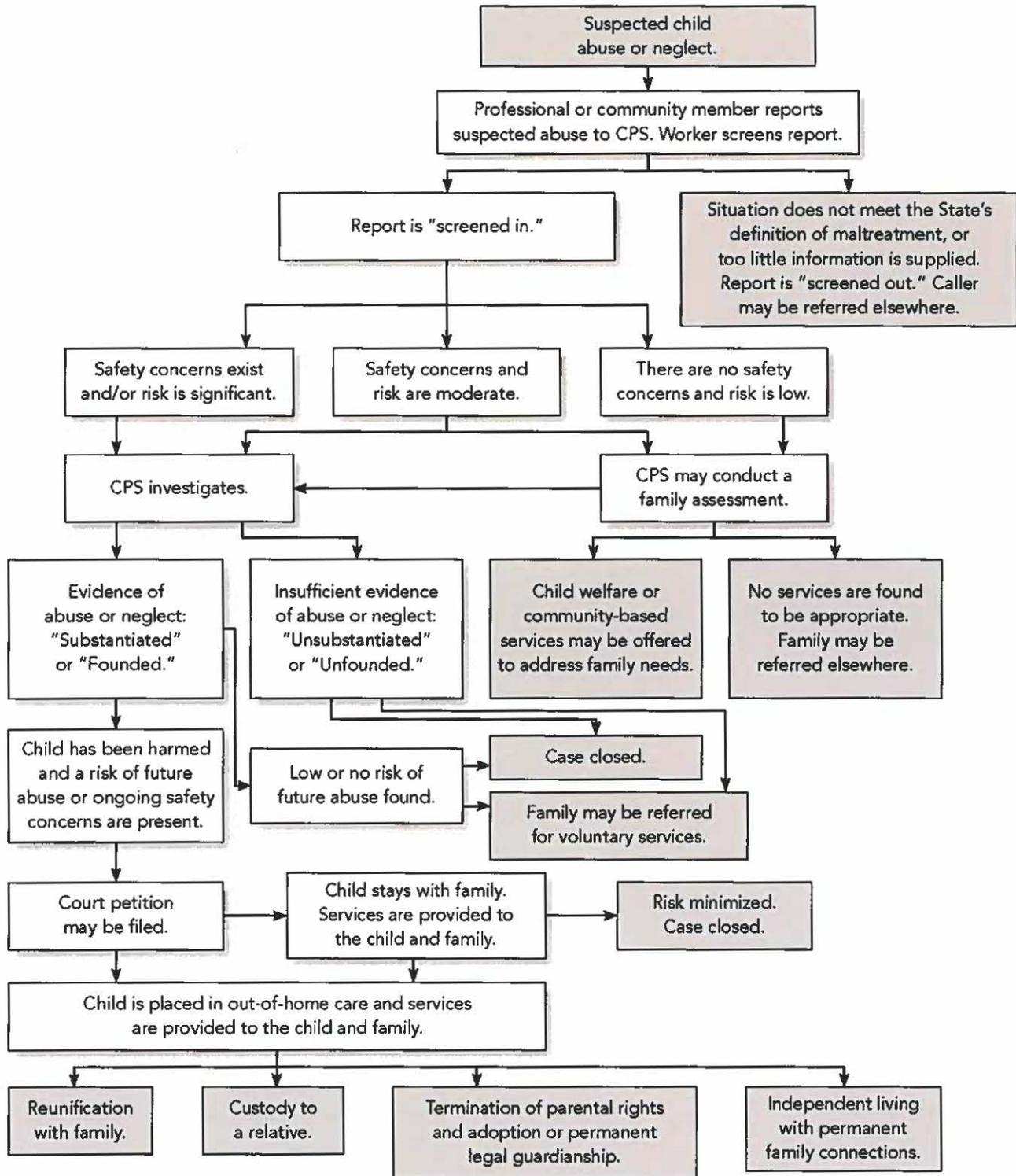
Goldman, J., & Salus, M. (2003). *A coordinated response to child abuse and neglect: The foundation for practice* (The User Manual Series). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/foundation/index.cfm>

McCarthy, J., Marshall, A., Collins, J., Arganza, G., Deserly, K., & Milon, J. (2003). *A family's guide to the child welfare system*. Washington, DC: National Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health at Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. Retrieved from <http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/72140.html>

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### Appendix: The Child Welfare System



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
 Administration for Children and Families  
 Administration on Children, Youth and Families  
 Children's Bureau





# What Is Child Welfare? A Guide for Educators

Educators make crucial contributions to the development and well-being of children and youth. Due to their close relationships with children and families, educators can play a key role in the prevention of child abuse and neglect and, when necessary, support children, youth, and families involved with child welfare. This guide for educators provides an overview of child welfare, describes how educators and child welfare workers can help each other, and lists resources for more information.

## What Is Child Welfare?

Child welfare is a continuum of services designed to ensure that children are safe and that families have the necessary support to care for their children successfully. Child welfare agencies typically:

- Support or coordinate services to prevent child abuse and neglect
- Provide services to families that need help protecting and caring for their children
- Receive and investigate reports of possible child abuse and neglect; assess child and family needs, strengths, and resources
- Arrange for children to live with kin (i.e., relatives) or with foster families when safety cannot be ensured at home
- Support the well-being of children living with relatives or foster families, including ensuring that their educational needs are addressed
- Work with the children, youth, and families to achieve family reunification, adoption, or other permanent family connections for children and youth leaving foster care

Each State or locality has a public child welfare agency responsible for receiving and investigating reports of child abuse and neglect and assessing child and family needs; however, the child welfare system is not a single entity. Public child welfare agencies often collaborate with private child welfare agencies, community-based organizations, and other public agencies to ensure that families receive the services they need, such as supportive child care, parenting classes, in-home family preservation services, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment.



Use your smartphone to  
access this factsheet online.



**Child Welfare Information Gateway**  
Children's Bureau/ACYF  
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Eighth Floor  
Washington, DC 20024  
800.394.3366  
Email: [info@childwelfare.gov](mailto:info@childwelfare.gov)  
<http://www.childwelfare.gov>

## How Can Educators Assist Child Welfare Agencies and Families?

Since educators—including teachers, administrators, counselors, and other school personnel—are regularly in close contact with children and families, they are in a unique position to support at-risk children and families, play a role in preventing child abuse and neglect, identify and report suspected abuse or neglect, and be an important resource for children in foster care.

- **Supporting families and preventing child abuse and neglect.** Educators can play a significant role in preventing child abuse and neglect and supporting children at risk for or already experiencing maltreatment. Merely being a supportive adult in a child's life can enhance the child's resiliency. Educators also can help guide parents in times of crisis, teach and model positive discipline practices, and refer children and families for additional services and supports, if needed, which may prevent referrals to out-of-home care.
- **Identifying possible abuse and neglect.** Educators also should be aware of the types of child maltreatment, including neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse; their possible physical, emotional, and behavioral signs; and State definitions about what constitutes child maltreatment.
- **Reporting suspected child abuse and neglect.** In 2010, 16.3 percent of all child abuse and neglect reports were made by educators, with only legal and law enforcement personnel (16.7 percent) reporting more.<sup>1</sup> Educators should be knowledgeable about the child maltreatment reporting protocols for their particular schools and localities. All States designate teachers as mandatory reporters, which means they are required by law to report suspected child abuse and neglect to the appropriate child welfare agency. Other school employees also may be mandatory reporters, but that designation varies by State.
- **Being a resource for child welfare agencies.** Child welfare workers frequently consult with school personnel when assessing a family, developing a case plan, and determining where the child should live. Educators may have information (either in records or through personal knowledge) about the child's or family's strengths and challenges. This information is invaluable to caseworkers as they assess and work with the family to formulate realistic goals. Additionally, when a child changes schools, educators can support a smooth transition by facilitating the timely transfer of records.
- **Being a resource for children involved with child welfare.** Children involved in a child protective services (CPS) investigation or living in out-of-home care (e.g., with relatives or a foster family) need the stability of normal experiences such as attending school and being involved in extracurricular activities. Children who have changed schools a number of times may need extra help in making up schoolwork, earning credits, or filling in gaps in their learning. They also may need support or encouragement to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports, music, drama, and clubs, which can have a

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. (2011). *Child Maltreatment 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm10/cm10.pdf>.

positive effect on their attendance, academic work, behavior, and ability to make friends. Additionally, educators can assist by learning more about policies and services applicable to children involved with child welfare, such as eligibility for services, scholarship and financial aid opportunities, and confidentiality issues. Furthermore, children involved with child welfare often have experienced various forms of trauma (e.g., abuse, neglect, removal from the home), and educators can support them by recognizing the effects of trauma and utilizing trauma-informed practices.

## How Can Child Welfare Workers Assist Educators?

Collaboration between the education and child welfare systems can assist educators by:

- **Ensuring that children are ready to learn.** Children who have experienced abuse or neglect may have cognitive difficulties or developmental delays, and they may perform below their peers in school. Child welfare workers can help ensure that children and families receive the services and supports they need, including access to early intervention, special education, mental and behavioral health, and prevention services. These services and supports can build resiliency to reduce the effects of previous maltreatment, thereby improving children's school readiness and overall well-being.
- **Keeping children in their home schools.** When students are able to remain in the same school, they remain connected to friends and adults in the school and avoid the academic and emotional challenges that can be caused by changing schools. This prevents disruption in their education, eases their transition to a new living arrangement, and ensures that previous community supports are still in place. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (the Fostering Connections Act) requires that child welfare workers try to place children with relatives or others in their community in order to minimize school moves. In certain cases, the Fostering Connections Act permits child welfare agencies to use funds to provide transportation to support school stability. If a child must move to a new school, Fostering Connections requires child welfare workers to coordinate with schools to ensure a smooth transition.
- **Inviting educators to participate in a multidisciplinary team.** Child welfare workers can assist educators and support school success by being active participants in individualized education program (IEP) team meetings, school discipline meetings, and transition meetings to discuss a child's postsecondary goals. Similarly, given their strong connection to the child and family, educators are in a unique position to provide their expertise at multidisciplinary team meetings arranged by child welfare workers. These meetings bring together family members and professionals to discuss the child's and family's needs and develop a case plan that supports both. Coordinating child welfare and education plans and ensuring the appropriate individuals are involved helps improve outcomes for children and families.

Working together, educators and child welfare workers can ensure that families have the supports and services they need to successfully care for their children, that children are safe and well, and that children and youth have the opportunity to achieve positive educational and social outcomes.

## Resources

*Child Welfare, Education and the Courts: A Collaboration to Strengthen Educational Successes of Children and Youth in Foster Care* (National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections) - [http://www.nrcpfc.org/education\\_summit/](http://www.nrcpfc.org/education_summit/)

*Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators* (National Child Traumatic Stress Network) - [http://www.nctsnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/Child Trauma Toolkit Final.pdf](http://www.nctsnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/Child_Trauma_Toolkit_Final.pdf)

*Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect* (Child Welfare Information Gateway) - [http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/define.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/define.cfm)

*Foster Care and Education* (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education) - <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/FosterCareEducationBrochure.pdf>

*Foster Care and Education Data Sheet* (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education) - <http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/EducationalOutcomes.htm>

*Fostering Connections Implementation Toolkit: Improving Education Outcomes for Children and Youth in Foster Care* (Legal Center for Foster Care & Education) - [http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/migrated/child/education/publications/toolkit\\_combined\\_with\\_cover.authcheckdam.pdf](http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/migrated/child/education/publications/toolkit_combined_with_cover.authcheckdam.pdf)

*A Look at Child Welfare From a Homeless Education Perspective* (National Center for Homeless Education) - [http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/ch\\_welfare.pdf](http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/ch_welfare.pdf)

*Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect: Summary of State Laws* (Child Welfare Information Gateway) - [http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/manda.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.cfm)

*Preventing Child Maltreatment and Promoting Well-Being: A Network for Action: 2012 Resource Guide* (Child Welfare Information Gateway) - <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/guide2012/guide.pdf>

*The Role of Educators in Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau) - <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/educator/index.cfm>

*State Child Abuse Reporting Numbers* (Child Welfare Information Gateway) - [http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl\\_dsp.cfm?rs\\_id=5&rate\\_chno=W-00082](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp.cfm?rs_id=5&rate_chno=W-00082)

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The Children's Bureau, within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the Federal agency with primary responsibility for administering Federal child welfare programs. The Children's Bureau was created by President Taft in 1912 to investigate and report on infant mortality, birth rates, orphanages, juvenile courts, and other social issues of that time. With an annual budget of over \$7 billion, the Children's Bureau works with State and local agencies to develop programs that focus on strengthening families, protecting children from abuse, and finding permanent families for those who cannot safely return to their homes. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/index.htm>

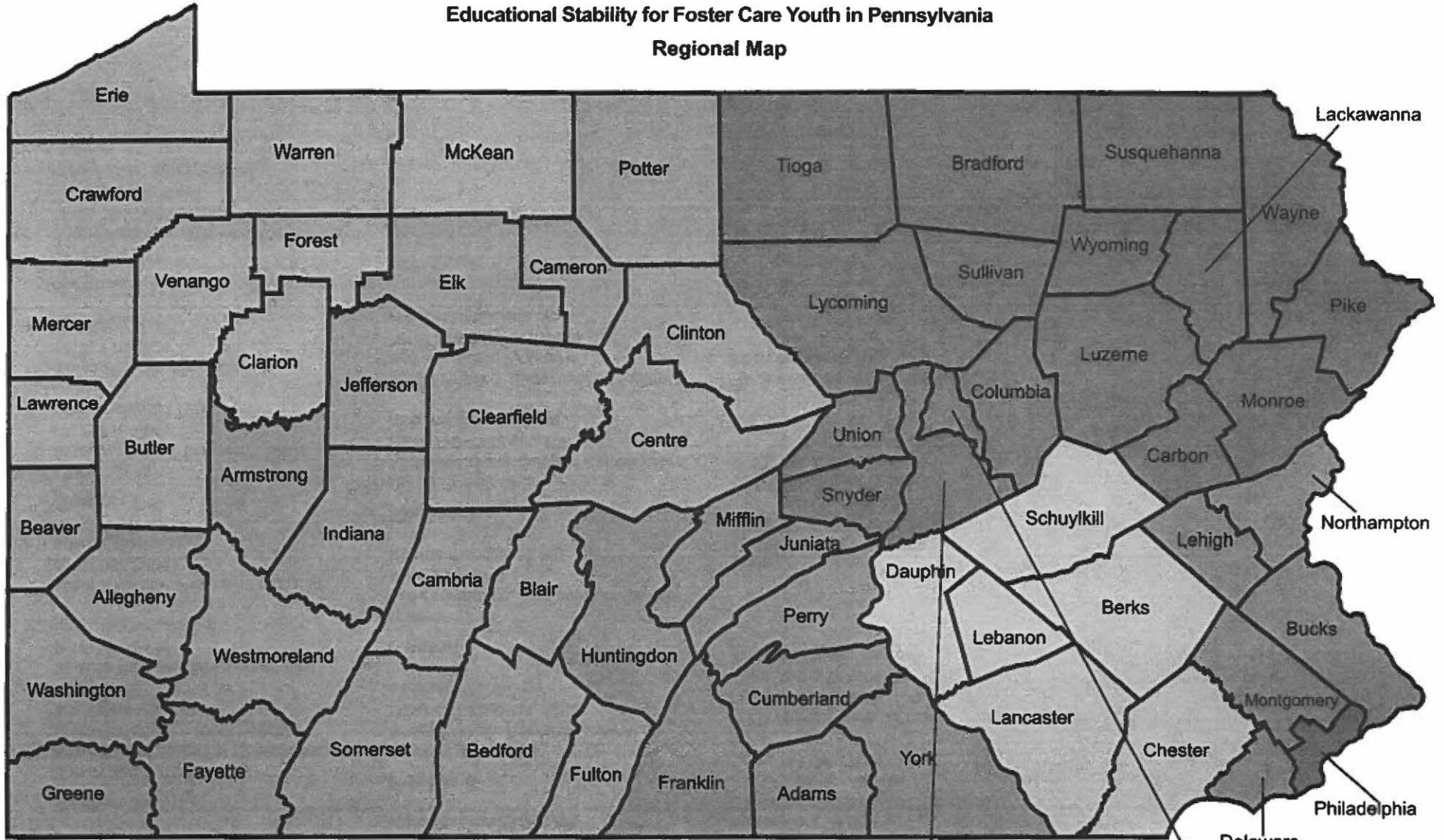
The Children's Bureau's information clearinghouse, Child Welfare Information Gateway, links child welfare and other professionals to thousands of resources: <http://www.childwelfare.gov>



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Administration on Children, Youth and Families  
Children's Bureau



## Educational Stability for Foster Care Youth in Pennsylvania Regional Map



**Region 1**

Philadelphia

**Region 2**

Berks, Chester, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Schuylkill

**Region 3**

Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, Huntingdon, Juniata, Mifflin, Perry, York

**Region 5**

Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, McKean, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, Warren

**Region 6**

Armstrong, Blair, Cambria, Cameron, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Indiana, Jefferson, Potter

**Region 7**

Bradford, Carbon, Columbia, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Lycoming, Monroe, Montour, Northumberland, Pike, Snyder, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Wayne, Wyoming

**Region 4**

Allegheny, Beaver, Bedford, Fayette, Fulton, Greene, Somerset, Washington, Westmoreland

**Region 8**

Bucks, Delaware, Lehigh, Montgomery, Northampton



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2016-17 Regional & Site Coordinators**

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Please visit [www.PAFosterCare.org](http://www.PAFosterCare.org)  
for more information.

