

May 6, 2021

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-37-21

The purpose of this All County Information Notice (ACIN) is to provide guidance to county child welfare agency and juvenile probation department caseworkers regarding how they can support caregivers tasked with assisting children and youth in their care with distance learning and the return to in-person education during the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.



KIM JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
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GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

May 6, 2021

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-37-21

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS
ALL COUNTY CHILD WELFARE PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL TITLE IV-E AGREEMENT TRIBES
ALL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM COORDINATORS
ALL TRANSITIONAL HOUSING COORDINATORS
ALL FOSTER FAMILY AGENCIES
ALL ADOPTION AGENCIES
ALL ADOPTION REGIONAL OFFICES

SUBJECT: EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR CAREGIVERS AND FOSTER CHILDREN AND YOUTH DURING CONTINUED DISTANCE LEARNING AND THE RETURN TO IN-PERSON EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

REFERENCE: [SENATE BILL \(SB\) 98 \(CHAPTER 24, STATUTES OF 2020\);](#)
[EDUCATION CODE \(EC\) SECTION 43509;](#)

The purpose of this All County Information Notice (ACIN) is to provide information to caseworkers within California's Child Welfare and Probation departments about recent trends in education and how they can help caregivers navigate continued distance learning and/or school re-engagement during the return to in-person school attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, this letter will provide information for caseworkers to share with foster caregivers regarding resources in their communities to assist with the education of the children¹ in their care.

BACKGROUND

Public health requirements and guidelines during the pandemic have significantly reduced children's engagement with trusted adults outside of their homes. This is compounded by the shift to distance learning that allowed instruction to continue but

¹ For the purpose of this letter, children include minors and nonminor dependents, both child welfare and probation supervised, as applicable.

changed the day-to-day interactions students have with teachers and other school staff, which are especially critical for children at risk of abuse or neglect and children in foster care.

Foster children face some of the greatest obstacles to educational success. Even among subgroups of students who disproportionately struggle to succeed, foster children experience the lowest outcomes across almost all indicators of student success². The recent trends highlighted below demonstrate some of the primary concerns for this population. There are strategies and resources that can help educators recognize the signs of potential child abuse or neglect through virtual learning and ways that students at risk can be prioritized for the supports and services needed to provide greater success. This joint presentation, [Safeguarding Children Through Distance Learning](#), is in partnership with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), California State Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and California Teachers Association. The purpose of this webinar is to provide educators with innovative ways they can help to keep children safe by recognizing and reporting signs of suspected child abuse and neglect through distance learning. CDSS and the California Department of Education (CDE) also issued a letter, [Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect through Distance Learning Recommendations for California's Educators](#), that provides strategies for educators to assist students with buffering stress, sharing resources with families, and continuing to fulfill their role as mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect.

SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVERS AND YOUTH ENGAGED IN DISTANCE LEARNING

Caregiver involvement is always critical to children's educational success, and this is even more important during distance learning and/or a return to in-person education. In efforts to ensure caregivers feel comfortable and prepared to support children during distance learning or the return to in-person education, caseworkers should encourage caregivers to reach out to their foster child's teachers. If caregivers need additional support or resources after consultation with teachers, they should be urged to contact their school's administrators. It is essential that caregivers receive assistance from caseworkers if children are struggling or need additional educational support during this period of distance learning and the return to classrooms. Caseworkers should ensure caregivers know children's educational rights, available resources, and have regularly updated information about distance learning and plans to return to in person instruction.

Caregivers may also contact their local Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program and Foster Youth Liaison (see below for a description of what roles these individuals have at the CDE). This is the caregivers' opportunity to address the unique needs of

² Data regarding foster youth educational outcomes can be found at:
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sq/fosteryouth.asp>

the student and find solutions on how distance learning can be improved to better support the child(ren) under their care, including what educational supports the caregivers need as distance learning continues.

UTILIZING FOSTER YOUTH SERVICES COORDINATORS AND FOSTER YOUTH LIAISONS

Foster Youth Services Coordinators

As outlined in [ACL 16-91](#), CDE administers a statewide grant program (previously the Foster Youth Services Program) called the Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP). The FYSCP provides categorical funding to County Offices of Education (COEs) to improve interagency support for students in foster care, consistent with EC section 42920.

The FYSCP is responsible for ensuring that LEAs within its jurisdiction are providing supportive educational services to foster children to improve positive educational outcomes. Foster children with the greatest need should be the first to receive services, particularly foster children residing in out-of-home placements. The FYSCPs increase placement stability for foster children by providing support including, but not limited to, assisting with the transfer of health and school records, emancipation training for independent living, and ensuring that all [Foster Youth Educational Rights](#) are being upheld. Each COE has a designated program coordinator whose contact information can be found on the CDE [Program Coordinator's website](#).

Foster Youth Liaisons

In addition to the FYSCP, school districts, county child welfare and probation agencies, and other professionals have additional responsibilities to facilitate educational equity for foster children. Every school district must appoint a designated staff person as the education liaison for wards and dependent children of the court.

The educational liaisons are placed at COEs and school districts to ensure and facilitate the proper educational placement, enrollment in school, and transfer between schools of foster children. A list of liaisons can be found on the CDE Educational Liaisons site: [Foster Youth LEA Program Contacts](#).

County caseworkers should ensure their foster caregivers have the local level contacts for the Foster Youth Liaison and FYSCP as well as an understanding of what services and support these contacts provide. Caseworkers should also be talking directly to foster children about their education and the supports and services that may be available.

If a caseworker or caregiver identifies an educational need that is not being met for a foster child, they can first reach out to the child's teacher, then a school administrator. Counties and caregivers can also work with their Foster Youth Liaison and FYSCP to ensure the child is receiving appropriate supports and services and that the LEA is upholding their educational rights.

Technical Assistance Hub

The FYSCP Technical Assistance Provider (TAP) provides support to each county offering services to foster children. The TAP demonstrates expertise with the FYSCP and continuous improvement, has the ability to foster collaboration among county agencies through interagency agreements that address school stability and information sharing, has the capacity and willingness to support data gathering and analysis processes, and has the ability to support online meetings and resource sharing among county FYSCP Coordinators.

The FYSCP maintains a TAP page. The goal of TAP is to support the collaboration and interagency coordination of services with local child welfare offices, school districts, and community partners, so that students in foster care in California will have thoughtful access to resources and supports, improved graduation rates, improved school attendance, and increased school stability. Publicly available updates from the FYSCP TAP team and CDE are posted on the [FYSCP Technical Assistance Hub](#).

Teaming Meetings

The various teaming approaches of agencies that serve the foster children, including child and family teams (CFTs), individualized education programs (IEPs), student study teams, and individualized program plans can be utilized to identify and support the needs of the individual child and family. Children in short-term residential therapeutic programs, juvenile halls, and other congregate care facilities should also be included in county strategies for ensuring that all foster children have an opportunity to meet to create individualized plans to address distance learning challenges and returning to school. Please see Attachment A for recommended questions that public agencies and/or caregivers and team members may want to consider.

Asking these types of questions can provide a focus to address the impacts of distance learning, social isolation, and the ability of the family to support their child. It is more critical than ever for the services and supports provided by child welfare, probation, education, county mental health plans, regional centers, and managed care plans be coordinated to support the holistic needs of children and families during this time.

This guide is intended to help child welfare workers, probation officers, county offices of education, LEAs, children, education rights holders and caregivers as they navigate school of origin decisions during these challenging times. See Attachment B for more resources.

Informing caregivers of the information described in this ACIN and having conversations about how they may provide additional support to foster children during distance learning and the return to in-person education will help foster children succeed academically. Physical school closures affect how programs and services are provided, and instruction may be adjusted to meet the needs of each student. Caregiver involvement is critical for maintaining the continuity of learning, regardless of how instruction occurs, e.g. in-person, distance learning, or a hybrid of the two.

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this information notice, contact the Child and Youth Permanency Branch at (916) 657-1858 or FosterCareEducation@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By

VALERIE EARLEY, Chief
Child and Youth Permanency Branch
Children and Family Services Division

Attachment A

Recommended teaming questions that public agencies, caregivers, and team members may want to consider:

- What is the child's perspective on how distance learning is different from in-person learning? Are there things that the child likes better about distance learning? Specific things that they miss from in-person learning? Does the child feel like they are learning?
- What is the caregiver's perspective on how distance learning is different from in-person learning? Does the caregiver feel that they have enough information about the child's in-person learning to be able to make an accurate comparison? Does the caregiver feel like the child is learning? What are the challenges of distance learning outside of concerns related to academic achievement?
- Is the child's teacher or school counselor aware of any educational and social/emotional needs? Is there information that would be helpful for them to know from the caregiver, and vice-versa?
- In what ways is the child demonstrating learning? Are there some ways of demonstrating learning that are working better or in which the child needs more support?
- Is the child regularly and actively engaging during distance learning or in person instruction? How is the teacher or counselor defining engagement? Are there ways that the child can be supported in engagement, or alternative ways the child can show engagement?
- What have the child, teacher, and caregiver learned from the distance learning experience that can inform the plan for return to school?
- What supports can the school administrator provide to the child, family, and teacher to facilitate communication and address any identified needs related to distance learning or the in-person return to school?
- How can the district foster youth liaison be involved to support the child and family?
- Should the foster youth IEP coordinator or the 504 coordinator be involved? Has the child been referred for a special education assessment, if appropriate?
- Has the child been referred for assessment by the county behavioral health agency, if appropriate?
- If the child may have the option of changing school placements as a result of return to in-person learning, what are the child and caregivers' concerns about transportation, health, school of origin, and educational stability? Who is the point person for them to talk to about these concerns? How can the team work together to create a transition plan for children who may change schools?
- For youth who will be graduating, what is the plan for postsecondary education or job training? Who can the youth be connected to in order to transition smoothly to the new environment?

Asking these types of questions can provide a focus to address the impacts of distance learning, social isolation, and the ability of the family to support their child. It is more critical than ever for the services and supports provided by child welfare, probation, education, county mental health plans, regional centers, and managed care plans be coordinated to support the holistic needs of children and families during this time.

Attachment B

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected school closures with many schools continuing to utilize a distance learning education. We want to provide caregivers and foster youth with resources to help engage in distance learning.

- [The California Department of Education](#) is the primary source for educational needs. They serve our state by innovating and collaborating with educators, schools, parents, and community partners. Together, as a team, they prepare students to live, work, and thrive in a multicultural, multilingual, and highly connected world. They have a dedicated page to COVID-19 foster youth distance learning resources.

Technology Assistance

- [John Burton Advocates for Youth](#) improves the quality of life for youth in California who have been in foster care or homeless by advocating for better laws, training communities to strengthen local practices and conducting research to inform policy solutions. **They have resources for education equipment including laptops.**
- [iFoster](#) is currently offering technology access to foster youth ages 13-24, which include: free, unlimited high-speed data hotspots, headsets, and laptops to assist in taking online classes. For additional information on the resources that they have, call or email iFoster at: **1-855-936-7837** or phone@ifoster.org.
- [One Simple Wish](#) is an innovative wish-granting platform, you can send some love to a child who needs it. **They are providing laptops to aged out foster youth in school.**
- [FosterMore](#) is an unparalleled coalition of media and entertainment companies, foundations, non-profits, businesses and philanthropic organizations working to create greater understanding, empathy, and action to improve the future of youth in foster care. **There are links to Comcast & Spectrum free wi-fi resources.**
- [EveryoneOn](#) has several internet service providers that offer **low-cost, affordable home internet** for qualifying low-income households.

Training Resources

- [Alliance for Children's Rights](#)
The Alliance for Children's Rights advocates for thousands of clients each year—including abused, neglected, and vulnerable children and teens in the foster care system, runaway and emancipating youth, children who need guardians, and the families who step up to care for them. **The education and distance learning page includes learning at home resources, technology for distance learning, and [Special Education and Early Intervention Tips During COVID-19 Pandemic](#).**

- [California Alliance of Caregivers](#) (CAC) is a nonprofit organization representing the voice of relative and non-relative caregivers to promote the well-being of children in foster care. CAC holds a weekly, facilitates virtual support group to connect caregivers to resources and information. CAC provides training, support, and connection to education resources. See Supporting Distance Learning training and more at www.cacaregivers.org/education.
- [Parents and Caregivers for Wellness](#) (PC4W) is a project of the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission. PC4W provides on-going statewide virtual education for Parent & Peer Partners; and parents of children with mental health needs. Trainings are translated into Spanish. PC4W connects families to immediate needs assistance, information, and support.
- [Children's Law Center](#) of California (CLC) is a nonprofit, public interest law firm that provides legal representation for tens of thousands of children impacted by abuse and neglect. **They have educational resources listed such as virtual field trips, learning websites, free subscription lists, and webinars.**

General Resources

- [Families In Schools](#) has compiled a list of resources, including **webinars, support services such as health care and housing, and supplemental educational** resources to help foster youth, their caregivers, and mentors navigate distance learning, COVID-19, career and college preparation, and much more.
- [Education Reimagined](#) is committed to justice, inclusion, and equity, and leads with a transformational vision for the future of education in America. **Their distance learning page has a table of contents that jumps down to resources that are relevant to your needs including tips, guides, and tools for distance learning engagement.**
- [California College Pathways](#) is a statewide partnership that provides resources and leadership to campuses and community organizations to help foster youth succeed at community colleges and four-year universities. Campus support programs that are specifically designed for foster youth can be a great resource while attending college. **Program services vary considerably and can include personal and academic counseling, financial assistance, housing, mentoring and much more.**

Resources for Caregivers

The following resources are provided as starting points for caregivers that may need additional information:

- [Coronavirus Response and School Reopening Guidance](#)
Information and resources regarding CDE's COVID-19 response efforts, including the guidance document for safely reopening schools for the 20-21 school year.

- [COVID–19 Assessment FAQs](#) Frequently asked questions related to the COVID–19 coronavirus and assessment.
- [Getting Internet Access: Available Plans](#)
- [Internet for All Now – Affordable Internet Offers](#) The California Emerging Technology Fund has provided access to affordable offers, as well as a number to call 1-844-841-INFO (4636) to assist parents:
- [CDE Webinars](#)
- [Alliance for Children’s Rights, Identifying the Needs of Caregivers and Children During Distance Learning](#)
- [Supporting School Stability for Youth in Foster Care During Virtual Learning](#)