BEST PRACTICES for Developing a District System to Identify and Designate Youth in Foster Care Within Your Student Information System

STEP 1

Decide which 'Foster Youth' Definition to use when Identifying and Designating Within the SIS

The Foster Youth Learning Network (Network) recommends identifying and designating all AB 490 youth (i.e., all youth in foster care and on probation, regardless of where they live) because: (1) knowing who these youth are is the first step in trying to meet their needs and serve them; (2) the laws and protections for youth in foster care apply to all of these youth; and (3) this allows for the collection of local data and its use in a continuous improvement cycle to improve the education outcomes of youth in foster care.

STEP 2

Identify Youth in Foster Care Through Multiple Sources

Data Matching: ★

• CALPADS — The Network found they were able to identify youth in foster care faster by increasing the frequency that they looked at and integrated their CALPADS foster youth data match from monthly to weekly and by quickly integrating this match into their student information system (SIS). ◆

• County Data Match Systems — The Network recommends increasing the use of local county data matching systems (e.g., Los Angeles County Education Passport System or AB 2083 data sharing Memorandum of Understandings) to identify and designate youth in foster care faster.

Child Welfare/Probation Notification: When the home placement is changed for a youth in foster care or on probation, all county placing

★ **PRACTICE TIP |** Districts can identify youth in foster care who enter the system without being detained from their parents (i.e., youth are not showing up to enroll but are already within their enrolled student population) when they are added to the list in these data matches.

◆ **PRACTICE TIP |** Despite best efforts at accuracy, and weekly updates, CALPADS (which relies on accurate data being submitted from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS)) has been found by districts in the Network to sometimes indicate that a youth's foster care case is open, even after confirming through a local data match with the child welfare agency or through a youth's social worker that the foster care case is closed. Further, other districts have found that youth with open foster care cases, who continue to live with their biological parents, are sometimes not reported by CDSS through CALPADS as having an open foster care case.

agencies (including child welfare and probation) have a legal responsibility to notify the: (1) youth's attorney, Education Rights Holder (ERH), and court no more than one court day after making the placement decision; (2) district of the date the student will be leaving as soon as they become aware of the need to move the student; (3) district ten days prior to moving a special education student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP); and (4) district when a student is placed into Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP).[8] If this notification is occurring consistently and within the legal timeline, it can be used to quickly identify youth in foster care.

At Enrollment: For youth living in foster or relative homes, the Network recommends utilizing an online or paper enrollment processes to ask carefully crafted screening questions to identify youth in foster care. ▲ The Network recommends using Screening Questions for Youth in Foster Care in a district's enrollment process to ensure the largest majority possible of youth in foster care are identified at enrollment. +

For youth living in Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP), the Network recommends building relationships and processes with STRTP staff such that they identify the youth living in their placement directly to a specified staff member at the district office and work collaboratively to gather all necessary enrollment paperwork (e.g., Individualized Education Programs (IEP), transcripts, etc.), at the same time as completing the normal online or paper registration packet.

The Network recommends verifying foster care status through multiple methods, when possible, to ensure the accuracy of your local data. Student information systems can be modified to include a verified/confirmed button that can be checked when the district is confident that a youth has foster care status. While awaiting confirmation, the Network recommends ensuring youth are granted access to whatever supports and resources are available to the maximum extent possible.

▲ **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION |** Screening questions should be designed to avoid retraumatizing youth or the people caring for them. This will require training for enrollment staff on how to present the request for information in a sensitive way, as well as carefully worded questions. Training curriculum should also consider avoiding the use of labels (e.g., foster youth, homeless youth) because youth will often not identify with those labels and this can become a barrier to serving them. We also recommend that, when labels are necessary, utilizing 'youth first' language (i.e., youth in foster care instead of foster youth). This language humanizes the experiences of youth as people first, respects them as individuals, and defines their experiences in the foster care system as secondary to their individual identities.

+ **PRACTICE TIP |** Identifying youth at enrollment also allows for immediately addressing school stability and immediate enrollment issues and for utilizing all 30 days of the AB 167/216 notification timeline.

8 Cal. Educ. Code §§ Sections 48852, 49069.5(c); California Rule of Court 5.651(e).

STEP 3

Gather Additional Information

The Network recommends gathering additional information for youth in foster care and building a Student Information System Page for Youth in Foster Care to hold this information, in addition to the information gathered for all other students. Aeries has also released a Beta on organizing information related to youth in foster care. You can also learn about what Orange County is doing with its real time data for youth in foster care in its Aeries system.

STEP 4

Designate Youth in Foster Care in your Student Information System

Choose a Designation: The Network recommends utilizing a non-descript visual icon within your SIS to clearly indicate who your youth in foster care are so they are easily identified and served. ✳ Long Beach Unified School District's (USD) Student Information System (SIS), Synergy, utilizes a blue house icon. Alhambra USD's SIS, Power School, utilizes a yellow star. Aeries, utilized by Bonita and West Covina USDs, utilizes Code 190/Foster Program. Pomona USD's SIS uses a wingding. Alhambra USD uses a descriptor, STAR Youth. ●

Identify Who Will Designate Youth: Network districts with a smaller number of youth in foster care (e.g., 100-250) recommend training front desk staff at schools to designate youth in foster care within the SIS at enrollment because the workload is not too burdensome. Network districts with a larger number of youth in foster care (500+) recommend designating youth within the SIS at the district level to ensure accuracy. ■ The Network recommends centralizing data input whenever possible as a method to increase its accuracy and reliability.

✳ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION |** The Network recommends using a nonspecific icon/label that includes both youth in foster care and involved in the juvenile justice system to ensure that youth, especially those involved in the juvenile justice system, are not easily identifiable for differential treatment at the school site level.

● **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION |** A 2015 study in Los Angeles about youth involved in the juvenile justice system found that 83% had previous contact with the child welfare system.[9] This means that a vast majority of youth involved in the juvenile justice system have been subject to the same home instability and trauma that youth in the child welfare system experience. This also means that the same types of trauma informed education services, including positive behavior interventions, would benefit youth involved in the juvenile justice system as well as youth in the foster care system.

■ **PRACTICE TIP |** If information is uploaded directly from another system (e.g., online enrollment system) which could possibly be incorrect (e.g., if a person enrolling the child is self-identifying), districts can create a drop-down menu that allows a district staff member to indicate whether the information is confirmed as correct or not (e.g., through contact with a youth's social worker).

9 McCroskey, et. al. 2015 Crossover Youth: Los Angeles County Probation Youth with Previous Referrals to Child Protective Agencies. <https://www.datanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/CrossoverYouth.pdf>.

Identify Who Has Permissions: The Network recommends providing different levels of permissions for school site and district level staff due to their differing needs and uses of information including the identity of youth in foster care or involved in the juvenile justice system and other confidential information included in their student record. ★

STEP 5

Set Up Automatic Notifications

Once youth in foster care are designated within the SIS, the Network recommends using a process for notifying relevant staff once a youth in foster care is enrolled. ◆ SISs can be modified to automatically send a push notification or email to the Foster Youth Liaison so they know a new student has arrived and needs to be served, including a copy of the screening form. ▲

★ **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION |** Who has legitimate educational interests, within your district, to know who youth in foster care or involved in the juvenile justice system are (e.g., teachers vs. counselors vs. school site administrators)? Protecting the privacy of a youth who has experienced trauma is important to their sense of safety and security. Protecting the privacy of a youth involved in the juvenile justice system is important so they are not singled out for differential treatment. Allowing school site staff to see the icon/code so they know they need to treat the student with special care is important to address everyday issues such as behavioral incidents caused by trauma triggers or absences for court attendance. The Network recommends full access to a student's records for youth in foster care or involved in the juvenile justice system be reserved for highly trained or specialized staff such as Liaisons or School Based Social Workers. Thoughtful privacy protections for youth in foster care or involved in the juvenile justice system should weigh what information is necessary to allow different district staff to do their jobs against protecting the confidentiality rights of youth. Youth in foster care themselves should help to inform policies in this area to the greatest extent possible.

◆ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | In Alhambra Unified School District's SIS, Power School, the yellow star icon for youth in foster care is programmed to pop up on all other SIS screens so this special designation for youth in foster care is impossible to miss when looking at the student's education records.

▲ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | Pomona Unified School District's SIS, Q, automatically populates students onto the Foster Youth Liaison's computer screen immediately after they complete the online enrollment and screening process so the Liaison can begin evaluating the youths' needs.