

# Partial Credit Model Policy and Practice Recommendations

Presented by the Child Welfare Council  
Child Development and Successful Youth Transitions Committee  
Partial Credit Workgroup  
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Melissa is a rising 11<sup>th</sup> grader who has lived in multiple foster and group homes throughout her adolescence. As a result, Melissa had attended 4 different high schools in 3 different school districts. When Melissa's school records were collected, her education attorney realized that Melissa was almost 50 credits off track for high school graduation and that many of these missing credits were due to the fact that she had not been issued partial credits when she transferred mid-semester. When approached, school districts cited a lack of school policy for how to award partial credits as a reason for why they could not award Melissa the credits she had earned. With the support of her educational attorney, including the provision of sample policies, two school districts issued Melissa partial credits. Today, Melissa is only 20 credits off track for high school graduation. She now has a plan to ensure that she can make up those credits and fulfill her dreams of going to a 4-year university.



*Youth names in stories presented have been changed*

*Stories of youth's experiences provided by the Alliance for Children's Rights*



## Partial Credit Model Policy and Practice Recommendations

The legislature's most recently approved budget has once again affirmed the State's commitment and responsibility to supporting the academic achievement of children placed in the child welfare system. Amidst a poignant shift away from categorical school funding, the legislature maintained dedicated financial support for California's innovative Foster Youth Services program and increased cross-system accountability by establishing foster youth as a required subgroup under the State's Academic Performance Index (API). This move toward increased accountability includes improved data-sharing between the California Department of Education and the California Department of Social Services, increasing capability for partnership and coordination in care.

These actions are examples of many important steps needed for collaborative bolstering of foster youth's academic achievement. For years, California's leadership has displayed strong resolve toward addressing the multiple barriers to foster youth's academic success. The effective implementation of protections for foster youth, however, has been mixed across the State's more than one thousand school districts. For instance, AB 490 and later bills require the award of partial credit to foster youth who transfer schools during the school year. Lacking guidance on how to calculate, communicate, and utilize partial credit, however, many schools have been unsuccessful in meeting the intent of the law in a timely, efficient, and standardized manner. The Child Welfare Council convened a Partial Credit Workgroup to come up with a cross-sector solution to this challenge that leverages the expertise and capabilities of all those who play a role in supporting the educational attainment of foster youth.

### Challenge Requiring a Cross-Disciplinary Response

Students in foster care are plagued with tremendous disparities in academic achievement. Recent research commissioned by the Stuart Foundation demonstrated that foster youth not only fair worse in terms of academic achievement than the general student population, but also have poorer outcomes than their peers matched by risk factors, such as poverty and special education status. Specifically, Stuart Foundation's recent report "At Greater Risk" found that:

- Only 40% of foster youth graduate high school, compared to 72% of the general population of 47% of a comparison population matched based on characteristics and risk factors.
- 80% of foster youth in 11<sup>th</sup> grade are performing below the level of proficiency in English Language Arts in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, compared to 52% of the general population and 64% of economically disadvantaged 11<sup>th</sup> graders.

According to data from the California Department of Social Services, last year school aged foster youth experienced an average of 1.6 home-placements in just that one year, with nearly a third having two or more placements and 5.4% having four or more placements. Such changes in home-placements are highly disruptive to a youth's academic progress and too often these changes are accompanied by a change in school placement. With every home-placement change, foster youth academic achievement is increasingly threatened. Stuart Foundations "At Greater Risk" report documents that youth that had three or more placements were 13% less likely to graduate than youth with fewer placements, while youth with five or more placements were 31 percent less likely to graduate.

Data also show that change in school placement is a challenge not only faced by foster youth. According to data provided by the CDE, there were more than 430,000 mid-academic year changes in school placement last year. Other populations that frequently change school placements include the 200,000 students who experience homelessness each year, the 60,000 students involved in military families, the estimated 40,000 students per year that are adjudicated and enrolled in juvenile court schools, and the approximate 200,000 migrant students. While the Child Welfare Council and its work groups are charged with monitoring, reporting and making recommendations to improve services to foster youth and youth in the child welfare system, there would be value in having a statewide policy for partial credits that applies to all youth who change schools during the course of an academic year. Not only would a single policy promote fair and equitable treatment for all youth, but it would also reduce administrative burdens associated with having more than one policies.

Barriers to educational success as a result of change in placement particularly relevant to foster youth include:

- Loss of education records, resulting in potential loss of academic credits and time spent in school and increased risk of dropping out of school.
- Difficulties adjusting to changing care and school environments, resulting in stress and behavioral problems.
- Loss of contact with persons familiar with their health, education, and welfare needs, resulting in inadequate care and inappropriate school placements.

California's legislature has made substantial efforts to limit change in school-placements among foster youth and, when necessary, provide measures that reduce the impact of school placement disruptions. AB 490 and subsequent legislation require the award of partial credit when foster youth transfer schools at any time, however current legislation does not create a uniform system for how partial credit should be calculated and awarded. Complications arise as practices differ between schools, districts, and counties. Many districts lack a formalized and broadly known policy for the award of partial credit. The Alliance for Children's Rights looked at over 80 school districts in Los Angeles County and found that only 14 school districts had policies requiring schools to issue partial credits to foster youth who transfer schools. Of those school districts, only 5 districts provided guidance to their schools on how to calculate partial credit.

Even when partial credits are calculated by the sending school, it is not uncommon for the school receiving the student to apply these credits as "electives" rather than towards the

graduation requirements or specific subject areas that the original classes were in. This is counter to existing law that requires these credits be applied to equivalent courses. Given the lack of consistent and clear practice it is not surprising that so many foster youth are not receiving the credits they have earned, furthering their disadvantaged status by delaying their ability to graduate in a timely manner.

**Partial Credit Workgroup**

The Partial Credit Workgroup convened on May 6 and July 10, 2013 with membership from the California Department of Education, California Department of Social Services, California School Board Association, legislative aides, advocacy and philanthropy communities, former foster youth, and government and agency providers who serve foster youth and highly mobile students in the educational realm. Leveraging the collective efforts and expertise of the workgroup, recommendations for supporting more consistent award of partial credit were developed. These include: (1) establishing a statewide model policy for the award of partial credit that reflects the subject area and content covered; (2) defining roles, responsibilities, and timelines for operational practices; and, (3) support of effective implementation with increased awareness, training, and technical assistance. Partial Credit Workgroup participants include:

David Ambroz*, Former Foster Youth	Lynn Lorber, Office of Senator Carol Liu*
Patricia Armani, Los Angeles County DCFS	Christopher Maricle, CSBA
Keric Ashley, CDE	Alaina Moonves-Leb, Alliance for Children’s Rights
Andrea Ball, CSBA	Bode Owoyele, CSBA
Ken Berrick*, Seneca Family of Agencies; Alameda County Board of Education	Chris Reeve, Office of Assembly Member Mark Stone*
Vernon Billy, CSBA	Sara Rogers, Office of Leland Yee
Carol Brydolf, CSBA	Teri Self, San Bernardino Co. Children & Family Services
Teri Burns, CSBA	John Scribner, Sacramento County Office of Educ.
Paul Curtis*, California Coalition for Youth	Carol Sittig, San Bernardino County Children & Family Services
Judy Delgado, CDE	Whitney Staniford, CDE
Lori-anne Elinsky, San Bernardino County Children & Family Services	Norma Sturgis, Foster Youth Liaison, Los Angeles Unified School District
Cynthia Evans, Folsom Cordova USD	Theresa Thurmond, CDSS
Laura Faer, Public Counsel	Elizabeth Tarango, Foster Youth Services, Alameda County
Troy Fennel, Juvenile Justice Division, CDCR	Charlyn Tuter, CSBA
Paige Fern, Alliance for Children’s Rights	Brian Uslan, CDE
Lori Fuller, CDSS	Shantel Vachani, Public Counsel
Gail Gronnert, Office of Assembly Speaker John Pérez	Jackie Wong, Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg*
Sonja House, Foster Youth Services, Santa Clara County Office of Education	
Gordon Jackson*, Division Director, CDE	
Teri Kook*, Stuart Foundation	
Jacquelyn Levy, Sacramento Co. Office of Educ.	
	<u>Facilitators</u>
	Sylvia Pizzini, Health & Human Services Agency
	Wendy Durst, Seneca Family of Agencies

\* Member of the Child Welfare Council

John was entering yet another new school at the start of 11<sup>th</sup> grade. John's school career had been filled with disruptions, having attended 5 different high schools in 4 different school districts. In 9<sup>th</sup> grade, John spent no more than 3 months at



any single school. At one point, John was out of school for 5 weeks because of enrollment barriers. Upon reviewing John's records, his education attorney realized that John was never awarded any partial credits, and was therefore 40 credits off track for high school graduation. Feeling as though he didn't have much chance to graduate with his classmates, John and his education rights holder decided that it would be best for John to leave his regular public high school and enroll in an independent study program, even though this meant he would not receive the same academic supports as his peers. A thorough review of John's files revealed an estimated 15 partial credits that he was entitled to but had not received. John's educational attorney began working with each of his previous schools to get new transcripts issued that reflected these additional credits. Despite significant advocacy efforts, however, missing credits were still not awarded because no check out grades had been given and schools lacked policies for how to award partial credit. John and his team continue to advocate for the credits John has earned and have a plan that, together with his earned partial credits, will allow John to complete his missing credits and graduate with his classmates.

## Recommended Model Policy

The Partial Credit Workgroup reviewed a number of partial credit policies from across the state and observed various differences as well as core components. There are noted barriers, such as the diverse credit structures across districts, to implementing a statewide policy for awarding partial credit. The following model policy is designed to be both flexible enough to respond to these diverse systems as well as provide for consistency between and across districts. The Partial Credit Workgroup recommends this policy to be adopted by County Office of Education and district school boards, providing guidance to schools and staff on how to calculate partial credit for transferring students who have successfully completed assigned coursework.

### Guidelines for Calculating Partial Credits (based on a 5 credit per course structure):

0.5 credits = 7 class periods per subject

7-13 class periods = 0.5 credits per subject

14-20 class periods = 1 credit per subject

21-27 class periods = 1.5 credits per subject

28-34 class periods = 2 credits per subject

35-41 class periods = 2.5 credits per subject

42-48 class periods = 3 credits per subject

49-55 class periods = 3.5 credits per subject

56-62 class periods = 4.0 credits per subject

63-69 class periods = 4.5 credits per subject

70 + class periods = 5 credits per subject

- If a student is enrolled in an alternative mode of study (continuation school, independent study, etc.), that program must issue credits according to this recommended model policy or its approved credit plan, if such plan provides for the provision of partial credits.
- Upon receiving notification that a student will transfer schools, the sending school must issue 'check-out' grades. For each subject that the student is passing as of the student's last day of actual attendance, the school must also calculate partial credits. The school must include both partial credits and grades earned on an official transcript within 2 business days of notification of the student's transfer as required under Education Code §§ 49069.5, 48853.5 and 51225.2.
- Pursuant to Education Code §§ 48645.5, 48853.5 and 51225.2, when a student enrolls in a school before the end of a semester, the receiving school must request and honor "check-out" grades and partial credits awarded by the sending school and apply them to the same or equivalent course within 2 business days.

It is important to note that using this proposed model, when calculating partial credits, the length of class period is irrelevant unless a student is in a block schedule. A school uses a block schedule if each class period is 90 minutes or longer. If a school uses a block schedule, each block schedule class period attended shall equal two class periods per subject.

Also important to note, this model partial credit policy is based on the assumption that the district awards 5 credits per course. While it is true that most districts statewide utilize a 5 credit per course structure, this is not a requirement. The Partial Credit Workgroup recognizes that some districts may assign different credit values per course. In such outliers, schools should calculate partial credit to confirm with their existing credit scale. When students transfer between schools with differing scales, the receiving school should convert the number of credits earned to match with their own system.

This proposed partial credit calculation method offers the following features:

- Improves the accuracy of information regarding the student's academic status because the grade transfers too, giving the receiving school information on the student's command of the subject matter, e.g., a "B" grade vs. a "D" grade.
- Counts actual instructional time in the classroom ("seat time") vs. enrollment in a class regardless of days attended.
- Requires students to attend an adequate number of class periods for instruction in course content before receiving a full semester worth of credits, but allows for a sufficient number of absences so that foster youth are not penalized for lapses in attendance when they transfer schools.

While the recommended model policy only explicitly applies to students in foster care, the Partial Credit Workgroup recognizes there are a variety of highly mobile students who are negatively impacted by failure to efficiently and effectively transfer earned credits. The Partial Credit Workgroup recommends that this model policy be used as guidance for schools for all populations of students, particularly highly mobile students such as homeless youth, migrant students, and military students who transfer at any time during the school year.

## **Recommended Roles, Responsibilities, And Timeline**

Foster youth are served in multiple systems of care and therefore the most efficient and effective award and recognition of partial credit requires a coordinated and specified system of responsibilities. The Partial Credit Workgroup recommends the following roles, responsibilities, and timelines for collaborative fulfillment of the intent and requirements of AB 490 and its progeny. Tasks are broken down by system level interventions and practices that respond to individual youth needs.

## RECOMMENDED SYSTEM LEVEL TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

AGENCY	RECOMMENDED TASKS
District School Boards/ County Board of Education	Adopt policy that requires award of partial credit and includes direction on how to calculate
County Office of Education and School Districts	Provide oversight of partial credit award processes, including accurate calculation, dissemination strategies, and compliance with timelines and responsibilities
Child Welfare Services/ Juvenile Probation	Ensure education of child welfare worker and probation officers on law, local policies, and their responsibilities
CDE	Lead ongoing efforts to increase awareness and support effective implementation through dissemination and evaluation activities
Schools	Establish system to identify foster youth and to calculate and issue partial credits and check-out grades, when notice is given that they are transferring to a new school as required by Education Code §§ 49069.5 and 51225.2.

## RECOMMENDED INDIVIDUAL STUDENT LEVEL TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

AGENCY	RECOMMENDED TASKS	TIMELINE
Child Welfare Workers/ Probation Officer	Notification of appropriate person at the local education agency (ie. school district AB 490 foster youth liaison, school registrar) of child's imminent school transfer as required by Education Code Section § 49069.5	Immediately
	Confirm and assist the timely calculation and transfer of partial credit	Within 2 business days of transfer
	Support process by which information about previous academic progress is available for use by the student's new school so that youth may be enrolled in the same or equivalent courses to those taken at sending school as required by Education Code Section 51225.2	Immediately
	Provide courts and Minor's attorneys with transcript that includes information on partial credit and grades in child's Health and Education Passport	By next court date
	Continue to monitor child's educational progress in new school setting	Ongoing

<b>Sending School</b> (Cal. Ed. Code §§ 49069.5, 51225.2)	Calculate partial credits and check-out grades according to the school district or County Office of Education partial credit policy	Within 2 business days of receiving notification that child is transferring schools
	Enter partial credit information and grades on official transcripts along with other required information	
	Send partial credit information and check-out grades to receiving schools	
<b>Receiving School</b> (Cal. Ed. Code §§ 48645.5, 48853.5, 51225.2)	Upon the child's enrollment, request student transcript with all partial credits and check out grades from sending school	Within 2 business days of request for enrollment
	Apply all partial credits to the same/equivalent course and place child in the same/equivalent courses to those enrolled in the sending school so that the child can complete a full semester worth of credits. Where the child was enrolled in a course required for graduation under Education Code § 51225.3, apply the partial credits to those courses and enroll the child in the same/equivalent course. If the same/equivalent course is unclear, contact the sending school for clarification.	
<b>AB 490 Foster Youth Liaisons</b> (Cal. Ed. Code § 48853.5)	Oversee the proper check out of the child from sending school, including the calculation and issuance of partial credits and check-out grades as required by Education Code.	Within 2 business days of receiving notification of imminent transfer
	Oversee the proper acceptance of partial credits and grades by sending school, application of such credits to same/equivalent courses, and placement of the child in the same/equivalent courses to those enrolled in sending school.	Within 2 business days of enrollment
<b>Juvenile Court</b>	Request social workers and probation officers include in court reports (1) whether the child changed schools, and, if so (2) whether sending school sent records, including partial credit and check-out grades, to the receiving schools, and (3) whether the receiving school gave credits to the youth and was able to appropriately place child in same/equivalent courses they were previously enrolled in at sending school	Next court date
	Request transcript that includes partial credits and grades earned from sending school be included in next court report	

## Recommended Dissemination and Implementation Support Activities

Increasing awareness and understanding of recommended policy and practices is key to successfully addressing the inconsistent award of partial credit. Recommended strategies leverage resources and networks of workgroup participants and target multiple sectors of those responsible for supporting the academic achievement of foster youth.

TARGET	RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES
<b>Foster Youth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Welfare Council provides sample handouts to be distributed by Child Welfare Workers to students in foster care</li> <li>• Design and implement information-sharing strategies in partnership with current and former foster youth to appeal and be most accessible to students. These may include alternative means such as Facebook or other social media outlets, teen club meetings, California Youth Connection, placement packets, ILP Coordinators, school counselors and AB 490 liaisons, group home and FFA providers, Foster Ed Connect.org, minor’s attorneys, resource fairs, probation camps and halls, and kinship navigator/support program providers</li> </ul>
<b>Caregivers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Welfare Council provides sample flyers, for Child Welfare Services, FFA agencies, CASA, birth parents, education rights holders, and kinship organizations to distribute to caregivers via placement packets, trainings, and/or with foster care payment checks</li> </ul>
<b>School District Personnel</b> (teachers, school staff, AB 490 foster youth liaisons)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CDE provides sample training online that includes successful models for awarding partial credit</li> <li>• County Offices of Education train education staff using sample training curriculum or one of their individual design</li> <li>• School district liaisons train school staff using sample training curriculum or one of their individual design</li> <li>• CSBA and CDE market webinar for education staff</li> </ul>
<b>Child Welfare Workers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Welfare Council provides sample flyers, training curriculum, and other materials to be disseminated by CDSS to all counties to support on going education and training about the educational needs and right of foster youth, including the award of partial credit</li> </ul>

<p><b>School Boards</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSBA posts model policy on GAMUT system as a resource for district and county school boards</li> <li>• CSBA shares information with local school boards and encourages the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) and California Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) to advise their memberships</li> </ul>
<p><b>Education Advocates</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster Youth Education Task Force advises membership about availability of training on new universal policy and direct them to contact their respective Foster Youth Liaisons</li> </ul>
<p><b>Youth serving agencies</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CDSS, CDE and local boards inform staff of youth-serving agencies, particularly those serving child welfare involved, homeless, and other highly mobile youth, about partial credit policy and model practice so that they can in turn inform youth receiving their services</li> </ul>
<p><b>Juvenile courts and attorneys</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email Juvenile Judges brief fact sheet on partial credit and suggested role in overseeing appropriate award and continuity of student’s educational attainment</li> <li>• Partner with the AOC to consider and, if desired, implement educational/training opportunities at dependency overview course and Beyond the Bench conference</li> <li>• Brown Bag Trainings and presentations at monthly meetings</li> </ul>

An online training curriculum should be considered as an efficient way of disseminating needed information. To support the sustainable and effective support and training on needed information, Child Welfare Title IV-E Training Funds should also be considered.

## Appendices

The included appendices have been provided as reference to efforts that have already been undertaken by workgroup participants and as resources for further action by those able to contribute to efforts to collectively address the challenge of the inconsistent award of partial credit.

### TABLE OF APPENDICES

1. Current Law
2. Frequently Asked Questions
3. *Partial Credit Calculation Table* Handout for Registrars
4. "School Interrupted: Designing a partial credit policy that works" by Carol Brydolf, CSBA writer, published May 8 2013 on CSBA blog (<http://blog.csba.org>)
5. "Executive Director's note: From star thrower to star catcher" by Vernon Billy, CSBA, published in California Schools Magazine, Summer 2013
6. "Foster Youth Granted the Right to Partial Credit in Mid-year Transfers", by Ken Berrick, Alameda County Office of Education Board President, published in The Core, Spring 2013

## 1. Current Law

The California Education Code clearly delineates the rights of students to receive partial credits for all work satisfactorily completed if the transfer schools in the middle of the school year.

As to all students, **California Education Code § 48645.5(a)** requires that “(e)ach public school district and county office of education shall accept for credit full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed by a pupil while attending a public school, juvenile court school, or nonpublic, nonsectarian school or agency.”

For pupils in foster care, **California Education Code § 51225.2** provides:

(b) Notwithstanding any other law, a school district and county office of education shall accept coursework satisfactorily completed by a pupil in foster care while attending another public school, a juvenile court school, or a nonpublic, nonsectarian school or agency even if the pupil did not complete the entire course and shall issue that pupil full or partial credit for the coursework completed.

(c) The credits accepted pursuant to subdivision (b) shall be applied to the same or equivalent course, if applicable, as the coursework completed in the prior public school, juvenile court school, or nonpublic, nonsectarian school or agency.

(d) A school district or county office of education shall not require a pupil in foster care to retake a course if the pupil has satisfactorily completed the entire course in a public school, a juvenile court school, or a nonpublic, nonsectarian school or agency. If the pupil did not complete the entire course, the school district or county office of education shall not require the pupil to retake the portion of the course the pupil completed unless the school district or county office of education, in consultation with the holder of educational rights for the pupil, finds that the pupil is reasonably able to complete the requirements in time to graduate from high school. When partial credit is awarded in a particular course, the pupil in foster care shall be enrolled in the same or equivalent course, if applicable, so that the pupil may continue and complete the entire course...

In addition, **California Education Code § 49069.5** provides:

(b) The proper and timely transfer between schools of pupils in foster care is the responsibility of both the local educational agency and the county placing agency.

(c) As soon as the county placing agency becomes aware of the need to transfer a pupil in foster care out of his or her current school, the county placing agency shall contact the appropriate person at the local educational agency of the pupil. The county placing agency shall

notify the local educational agency of the date that the pupil will be leaving the school and request that the pupil be transferred out.

(d) Upon receiving a transfer request from a county placing agency, the local educational agency shall, within two business days, transfer the pupil out of school and deliver the educational information and records of the pupil to the next educational placement.

(e) As part of the transfer process described under subdivisions (c) and (d), the local educational agency shall compile the complete educational record of the pupil including a determination of seat time, full or partial credits earned, current classes and grades, immunization and other records, and, if applicable, a copy of the pupil's plan adopted pursuant to Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ([29 U.S.C. Sec. 794](#) et seq.) or individualized education program adopted pursuant to the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ([20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400](#) et seq.).

(f) The local educational agency shall assign the duties listed in this section to a person competent to handle the transfer procedure and aware of the specific educational recordkeeping needs of homeless, foster, and other transient children who transfer between schools.

(g) The local educational agency shall ensure that if the pupil in foster care is absent from school due to a decision to change the placement of a pupil made by a court or placing agency, the grades and credits of the pupil will be calculated as of the date the pupil left school, and no lowering of grades will occur as a result of the absence of the pupil under these circumstances....

## 2. Frequently Asked Questions

Through the process of developing the recommendations and seeking guidance from a broad spectrum of involved parties, a variety of questions and concerns have arisen. The Partial Credit Workgroup has thoughtfully considered these and provides the following questions and answers as further explanation of the decision-making process.

### 1. Why are partial credits necessary for foster youth?

School instability prevents many foster youth from earning the credits needed to graduate from high school. Most students in foster care are forced to transfer schools repeatedly throughout high school, often in the middle of the semester. Lapses in attendance and varying school curricula set foster youth back when they enroll in new schools because they are unable to make up the material that they missed. When graded based on how they perform at the end of a semester, many foster youth who transfer schools struggle to pass classes and earn credits. After several school transfers, many foster youth drop out of high school and never receive a high school diploma or GED.

Partial credits help ensure that foster youth are not academically penalized when they transfer schools by awarding them credit for all work satisfactorily completed at previous schools. Partial credits also prevent foster youth from having to repeat coursework previously completed, thereby allowing them to take those classes needed to graduate from high school.

### 2. Why is a statewide, standardized policy necessary?

California Education Code §§ 49069.5 and 51225.2 require sending school districts to issue and receiving school districts to accept partial credits to foster youth who transfer schools during the academic year. However, that law did not provide uniform guidelines to school districts on how to issue these partial credits. As a result, school districts have either failed to adopt a formalized partial credit policy or created many different methods for calculating partial credits. For example, in Los Angeles County, only 5 of the 83 school districts provide guidelines to their schools about how to calculate partial credits. None of these school districts use the same methodology. As a result, school districts do not understand how and when to issue partial credits and therefore, often never award students credits they have earned.

A statewide, standardized partial credit policy is needed eliminate the complications that arise when students transfer between school districts because the same method of calculation would be used by all school districts. The responsibilities of all schools to issue and accept partial credits of outgoing and incoming foster youth will be clearly defined. School districts will also be able to hold each other accountable because the same policy will apply to schools statewide, thereby helping to ensure that foster youth receive all credits they have earned.

### 3. What population of students does the proposed model partial credit policy cover?

The Child Welfare Council and this workgroup have been tasked with addressing the issue for foster youth and as such the proposed statewide policy only applies to students in foster care because. Education Code § 51225.2 requires all school districts to issue and accept partial credits for foster youth who transfer schools during the academic year.

Education Code § 48645.5(a) requires partial coursework satisfactorily completed by any student in the state to be accepted by all public school districts and county offices of education. Therefore while the proposed model policy is only explicitly intended to be applied to foster youth, districts and the students they care for may be well served by using these guidelines to issue partial credits to other students, including other populations of highly mobile youth that transfer schools regularly, like migrant, adjudicated, and homeless youth.

#### **4. Why does the model policy use the 1 credit per 14 class periods breakdown?**

There is great variation among partial credit policies adopted by school districts in California. School districts award 1 credit for anywhere between 10 and 16 class periods attended. The proposed policy uses the 14 class period breakdown because it provides an appropriate balance between requiring foster youth to attend an adequate number of classes to earn a full semester worth of credits and not penalizing them for lapses in attendance that occur when they are forced to transfer schools. The 14 class period breakdown requires foster youth to attend 70 class periods to earn 5 credits, while allowing them to miss up to 20 class periods for absences, many of which may be related to their status as foster youth as they switch schools or attend court hearings.

#### **5. Why does the model policy provide for the issuance of credits in .5 credit units?**

As foster youth proceed through high school, their chances of transferring schools multiple times increase. In some cases, foster youth may transfer schools several times in a single semester. The proposed policy requires schools to issue credits in .5 credit increments in order to recognize all of the work the foster youth has completed. For example, if only whole credits were awarded, a student who attended 20 class periods would only receive 1 credit even though they were one class period shy of reaching the 2 credit threshold. By using .5 credit increments, that student would receive 1.5 credits. Since a majority of foster youth struggle to remain apace in credit accumulation with their peers, it is important that the proposed policy provide a credit scheme that is the most beneficial to foster youth.

In addition, field professionals working with highly mobile youth are quick to discuss the motivational component of partial credits. If a youth knows their stay in a school will be very short, as they often do, they are very unlikely to be motivated to do coursework that they will not be getting credit for. Providing unrealistic expectations for minimum days attended in a class in order to earn credits will significantly hinder the ability of schools and teachers to effectively engage students during these difficult times.

While the Partial Credit Workgroup places high importance on fully capturing the efforts of students in foster care, significant consideration has also been given to ensuring that the policy is simple enough to be implemented consistently by people such as teachers and school registrars who are impacted by many competing demands and busy schedules. Using .5 credit increments does not create additional work for sending schools since the methodology for determining the number of credits is the same as if credits are awarded using only whole credits. The designated school personnel (likely the registrar) simply counts the total number of class periods attended by the student for each class and then divide by 7. To facilitate this

process, a sample registrar flyer has been provided that includes guidelines as well as a table that can be used to match class periods attended to credits earned.

**6. To which schools should the proposed partial credit policy apply?**

In general, the proposed partial credit policy applies to all schools, including comprehensive and alternative schools. Alternative high schools include continuation schools, independent study programs, and juvenile hall schools. Many of these schools issue credits on an accelerated schedule. However, unlike comprehensive schools, these alternative schools, in general, do not issue credits based on a seat-time calculation. Rather, alternative schools should issue credits according to their current credit plan. Therefore, the proposed policy recommends alternative schools issue partial credits according to the proposed policy only if their existing credit policy does not provide for the issuance of partial credits to foster youth.

**7. Why is the model policy based on a 5.0 credit per subject per semester scale?**

An overwhelming majority of schools in California award 5.0 credits per subject every semester to students who satisfactorily complete the required coursework. In order to provide clear guidelines regarding partial credits, the proposed policy requires all schools to issue partial credits based on this 5.0 credit scale. The recommended policy does not obligate schools currently following a different scheme to alter their general credit policies. Rather, the proposed policy recommends that sending schools issue credits according to their partial credit policy and send to the receiving school a copy of these credits on an official transcript as well as a copy of their policies for issuing credits. The receiving schools would then convert those credits to conform to their credit policies. For example, if School A awards 1 credit to students for each subject they complete each semester, when a foster youth transfers from School A to School B (which awards 5 credits per semester) in the middle of the semester, School A would award the foster youth .5 credits on its transcript. School B would convert these partial credits to conform to its credit scheme and therefore, the child's new transcript would reflect it as 2.5 credits. This policy will help not only provide clear guidelines to schools, but will also help achieve consistency.

**8. Who has the responsibility to issue partial credits—the sending or receiving school?**

Consistent with current state law, the proposed statewide policy requires sending schools to provide “check-out” grades for students based on the coursework completed as of the student's last day of actual attendance. The sending school must also calculate and issue partial credits for each class the student earned a passing grade. An official transcript with these grades and credits should be produced and sent to the student's new school within 2 business days. Receiving schools must request an official transcript from the student's sending school within 2 days of the student's enrollment and honor all grades and credits issued from the sending school and apply such credits to the same/equivalent course.

**9. Why is the policy based on instructional seat time instead of a substantive assessment?**

Using seat-time to calculate partial credits is not only the most efficient way for calculating partial credits, but it is also the fairest method. In addition, Education Code Section

49069.5(e) already requires the sending school to make a “determination of seat time” when providing partial credit information to the receiving school. The proposed policy will allow sending schools to calculate partial credits by simply looking to their attendance logs, adding up the number of class periods attended, and dividing the total number of class periods by 7. This method will not blindly grant foster youth credits for simply attending class. Rather, foster youth will only receive these partial credits if they were satisfactorily completing their classes at the time of the transfer. If the sending school determines, based on check out grades, that the foster youth earned the partial credits, then the receiving school must honor and accept these credits. Receiving schools cannot require foster youth to pass a separate assessment before honoring partial credits awarded by sending schools. No other population of students is required to pass a separate exam to verify whether credits previously awarded should be honored. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to require foster youth to satisfy any additional requirements. Moreover, current law, California Education Code 51225.2(a) makes it clear that receiving schools “shall accept coursework satisfactorily completed” from the sending school.

#### **10. How can receiving schools know what courses/requirements to apply partial credits to?**

Given graduation and college attendance requirements, it is of the utmost importance that credits not only be received but that they be applied toward the requirements to which they are intended to meet. Often, the name or basic information provided for a course (i.e. Calculus 1) provides the information needed to determine how the credits earned should be applied. At times, however, such designation may not be as simple. In such cases, registrars have been able to use school’s websites or contact them directly to obtain a course’s syllabus in order to determine the most equivalent course at the receiving school to which these credits should be applied. The University of California Doorways website (<http://www.ucop.edu/doorways/>) also provides information as to which courses at a given school fulfill a-g requirements, providing additional information that may be useful in determining equivalency.

## **PARTIAL CREDIT CALCULATION TABLE**

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Please count the total number of class periods attended by the student for each course during their enrollment.

Provide the credits earned as well as the current grade earned in the course on an official transcript to the receiving school.

Educational information and records of students must be provided to the receiving school within 2 business days of obtaining the transfer request as required by CEC § 49069.5.

<b># OF CLASS PERIODS ATTENDED</b>	<b>CREDITS EARNED</b>
7-13	.5 Credits
14-20	1.0 Credits
21-27	1.5 Credits
28-34	2.0 Credits
35-41	2.5 Credits
42-48	3.0 Credits
49-55	3.5 Credits
56-62	4.0 Credits
63-69	4.5 Credits
70	5.0 Credits

\* Based on a 5 credit course

\*\* For block schedule courses, count each class period of attendance as 2

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## School interrupted: Designing a partial credit policy that works

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By Carol Brydolf, CSBA writer

Representatives from the Legislature, the California School Boards Association, the California Department of Education, a host of public and private children’s interest groups, county offices of education and school districts gathered at CSBA’s offices in West Sacramento this week to tackle a tough problem: How to standardize the rules for awarding partial credit to students forced by difficult life circumstances to change schools frequently.

The aim of the meeting was to increase support and improve educational outcomes for foster youth, homeless students, military kids and other students whose educations are interrupted by transfers from school to school partway through the academic year.

At present, there is no standardized policy for calculating such partial credit, and practices vary widely across school districts—causing problems for governing boards and threatening the sometimes fragile academic success and well-being of some of California’s most vulnerable students, who are already at high risk for dropping out.

Participants at the May 6 meeting hope to come up with a policy that will work for everyone. The group is scheduled to meet again this summer, with the aim of submitting final recommendations in September to the [Child Welfare Council](#)—a state advisory body that tracks how well state agencies are serving the children in their care.

Negotiating all those different partial-credit rules and policies is difficult for students and their families and creates “an operational nightmare” for LEAs, said Teri Burns, CSBA’s senior director for policy and programs and a school board member in the Natomas Unified School District in Sacramento County.

Alameda County Office of Education board member Ken Berrick, immediate past president of the California County Boards of Education association and a member of CSBA’s Board of Directors, was instrumental in organizing the meeting. Berrick works directly on the issue of support for vulnerable children and families as president and CEO of the Seneca Family of Agencies.

“We’re after a very simple goal. All we want is a standardized methodology,” Berrick said. “Kids are telling us: ‘Just give us credit for the work we’ve done.’ ”

Sylvia Pizzini, Assistant Secretary with the California Health Human Services Agency, also played a major role in convening this gathering of experts and advocates. She said she was impressed by the “expertise and passion” displayed at the meeting.

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## Executive Director's note: From star thrower to star catcher

By: Vernon Billy

Published in the California Schools Magazine

Summer 2013

Even with all the controversy surrounding the implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula and new accountability measures for local educational agencies, most CSBA members agree with the premise that directing more resources to students in need is a constructive first step in reforming the state's school finance system. Without question, some of the neediest students in our system are the more than 55,000 school-age children and teens in California's foster care system. According to "At Greater Risk," a recent report released by the Stuart Foundation, foster youth "graduate from high school, enroll in community college, and persist in community college for a second year at lower rates than not only students in the general population but also other disadvantaged students." These students struggle in school at higher rates than other students due to the physical or psychological trauma associated with abuse, neglect and separation from family, friends and teachers and disruptions in their living environments as they are moved into and out of residential placements. This situation triggers school attendance problems and frequent school transfers.

According to data from California's Child Welfare System Case Management System, 70 percent of the students in foster care move three or more times during their school-age years. With this much disruption to their educational program, it is no wonder that less than half of all foster youth graduate from high school. However, there are policy options that we can promote and champion to help these students succeed.

The plight of foster youth in our state, and the efforts to help them academically, remind me of the famous essay called "The Star Thrower," also known as the Starfish Story. The famous line from that essay is: "It made a difference for that one." As beautiful and as touching as this story is, I prefer the version of the story that appears at the bottom of this page, which was written by foster care parents. The moral of this new version of the story provides an important lesson for all of us—we need systemic change to make a real difference.

Just as the older man in the story urged the younger man to address the "real problem," so too are we at CSBA committed to addressing the real problem that contributes to low high school completion rates: California schools lack a standardized policy for awarding partial credit to foster youth based on the days of attendance in the course and the grade earned at the time of the transfer to another school. These students struggle to graduate because of school attendance interruptions and school transfers due to changes in their living arrangements. By creating a standardized policy for awarding partial credit from all LEAs, many more foster care youth may earn the credits needed to graduate.

I recognize that no single policy change will guarantee our foster care youth academic success, but I'm hopeful that CSBA and other key stakeholders can continue to work together to identify and address policy changes, such as the partial credit issue, that may be hampering their academic success. Working with Ken Berrick, a former member of CSBA's Board of Directors and current member of the Alameda County Office of Education Board of Trustees, we have already hosted a meeting of various stakeholders to discuss

standardizing the rules for awarding partial credit to these students. The meeting included representatives from the Legislature, the California Department of Education, county offices of education, school districts, and public and private children’s interest groups. The dialog was passionate and comprehensive, and progress was made in that first meeting to shape recommendations that would guide the development of sample statewide policy language for awarding partial credit. The group will reconvene this summer, with the goal of making a policy recommendation in September to the Child Welfare Council, a state advisory council.

In our capacity as policy leaders, we are more than Star Throwers, saving one youngster at a time. Instead, I see us as Star Catchers—actively working together to catch the foster care “stars,” before they fall (or are beached, as the story suggests), by establishing the policy pathway that will enable them to thrive and shine in our schools. As Star Catchers, we do as the story suggests ... we save thousands, turning the tide on a long-overdue systemic problem, and fulfill our moral obligation to the foster care youth of this state.

### **The star thrower**

—adapted from an essay by Loren Eiseley

A wise man, walking along a beach, saw a young man picking up objects and throwing them into the ocean. The wise man asked,

“What are you doing?”

The young man said, “Throwing starfish into the ocean.”

“Why?” asked the wise man.

He replied, “The tide is going out. If I don’t throw them in, they’ll die.”

The wise man said, “But, young man, there are miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile. You can’t possibly make a difference.”

The young man bent down, picked up yet another one and threw it into the ocean. “It made a difference for that one,” he said.

The wise man then asked: “Have you considered why these starfish are washing up on the shore?”

He led the young man to a hilltop overlooking the ocean. “Do you see that fisherman? He’s using dynamite to kill the fish so he can skim them off the surface. The dynamite explodes and destroys the mussel beds below, dislodging thousands of starfish. So, if you want to save the starfish, stop the fisherman! You showed compassion by saving one at a time. But you could seek justice by stopping the fisherman. Then, you’ll save legions.”

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# Foster Youth Granted the Right to Partial Credit in Mid-year Transfers

by Ken Berrick, CCBE Immediate Past President and Board Member, Alameda COE

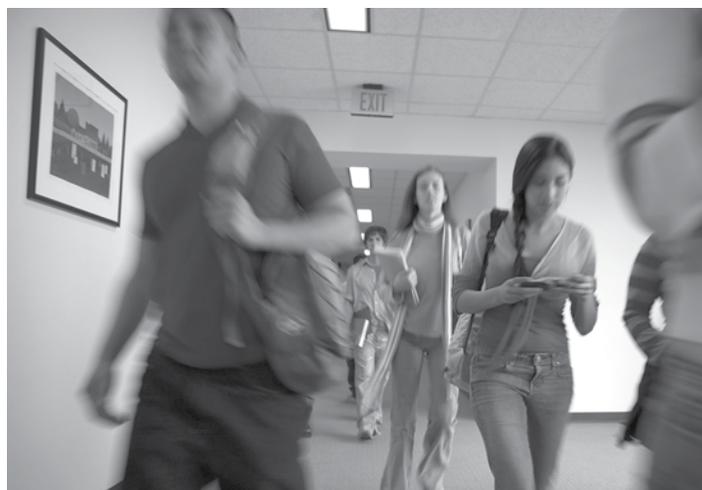
Members of the California School Boards Association are participating in a workgroup convened by the state's Child Welfare Council to address a persistent obstacle faced by foster children. Changing schools mid-semester can pose significant challenges to students who struggle to adjust to new school environments, peers and teachers. The complexity of this experience is compounded for foster youth, who simultaneously experience changes in caretakers and communities. Far too often foster youth lack the consistent, stable adults in their life who can advocate for appropriate enrollment in classes and the efficient transfer of academic records. Such challenges contribute to the poor academic outcomes experienced by many California foster youth, including reported dropout rates as high as 46 percent.

In an effort to improve these outcomes, the Legislature enacted AB 490 (Chapter 862, Statutes of 2003) which, among other requirements, grants foster youth the right to partial credit when transferring schools mid-semester. Many school districts and counties have developed thoughtful and effective methods for awarding and receiving partial credits. Yet without specific guidelines from the state, many school districts and counties lack policies and have inconsistent practices for the award and acceptance of partial credit.

The Child Welfare Council's Partial Credit Workgroup consists of legislative, school board, Department of Education, Foster Youth Services, Child Welfare Services and consumer representatives. The purpose of the workgroup is to review existing policies and practices that districts and county offices of education have implemented to develop a proposed uniform model, and to devise an implementation strategy for statewide dissemination.

The issue of determining a consistent practice for awarding partial credit was called to the attention of the Child Welfare Council because of its impact on foster youth, and coming up with a uniform strategy can benefit all of our state's highly mobile students, including homeless youth and children in military

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families. Concerted efforts to address the policies and practices of awarding partial credit stands to benefit not only the 60,000 children in foster care, but more broadly the 430,000 students across the state each year who transfer schools mid-school year.

For foster youth, educational achievement can be the leverage that lifts them out of the generational cycles of abuse that have resulted in their removal to out-of-home care and provides them the tools and opportunities that lead to safe, loving and successful futures. Establishing policies and supporting the consistent award and acceptance of partial credit does not solve the myriad challenges that impact foster youth; however, this simple effort by school board members and district leadership will eliminate an unnecessary obstacle faced by foster youth who are already burdened with far too many.

The Child Welfare Council Partial Credit Workgroup plans to provide a report documenting the results of this effort to CSBA membership and other stakeholders in July. For more information on the workgroup's efforts, please contact Sylvia Pizzini, assistant secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services at [spizzini@chhs.ca.gov](mailto:spizzini@chhs.ca.gov). ■



