



# Supporting the Academic Success of Foster Youth

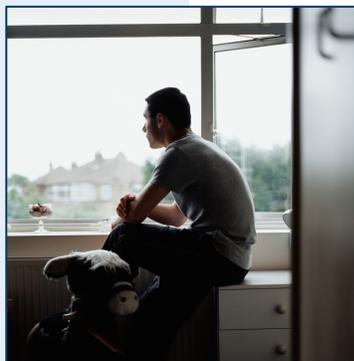
## Partial Credit Recommendations



Presented to the Child Welfare Council  
by the Child Development and Successful Youth Transitions Committee

*Each time I am placed in a completely different city than I had been living. I don't know anyone, not a friend, teacher or counselor and I am a stranger in a new family. I am totally unfamiliar with the high school and, once again, forced to begin over. Honestly, for quiet kids like me, nothing is easy, good, or feels permanent. My energy at school is taken just fitting in, looking for a safe spot and maybe, having someone to sit with at lunch. Everyone has their friends, their groups, their clubs, their teams, their safety zones. I am an outsider and a scared foster kid. I wonder if anything is going to work in my life?*

- Anonymous  
foster youth



## The Challenge

Foster youth are estimated to change placement once every six months. With every placement change, foster youth lose an average of six months of educational attainment<sup>1</sup>.

Barriers to educational success as a result of change in placement 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

As a result of these multitude of challenges, foster youth frequently struggle to achieve academic success<sup>2</sup>:

- 75% of foster youth are working below grade level
- 84% are held back by third grade
- 46% become high school drop outs
- Only 50% graduate from high school, versus 70% of their peers
- Only 20% enroll in post-secondary education, versus 60% of their peers



## Moving Toward a Solution

Meaningful legislative actions have been taken at a state and federal level:

**California's AB 490 (Chapter 862, Statutes of 2003)** includes multiple provisions that support the academic stability and success of foster youth:

- Right to immediate enrollment
- Timely transfer of records
- Right to partial credits
- Right to stay in school of origin when placed into foster care and when they are moved within foster care
- Right to equal access for education and extracurricular activities
- Enable social workers and probation officers to access education records
- Every school district and county Office of Education is required to have a foster youth educational liaison

The federal **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008** builds on prior law and requires that case plans ensure the educational stability of youth in foster care, including that students be allowed to remain in their school of origin and, if this is not in the best interest of the child, that they immediately be enrolled in a new school with all educational records transferred.

California **Chapter 224, Statutes of 2009**, amended Section 51225.3 of the Education Code, to allow a student in foster care who transferred schools in grades eleven or twelve to receive a high school diploma by meeting the state minimum requirements.

California **Chapter 472, Statutes of 2011**, added Section 51225.2 to the Education Code, to require school districts to award and receive partial credit for a student in foster care and prohibited a school district from requiring a student to retake any partial coursework which a student had already completed.

Most recently, the **Uninterrupted Scholars Act**, signed in to law in January 2013, has revised the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) to allow for caseworkers to access the academic records of students for whom they are legally responsible.

While these are significant and meaningful efforts, barriers remain to the consistent implementation of these legislative acts and the full achievement of their intent. One notable area of remaining challenges is in the award of partial credit. The Child Welfare Council is uniquely positioned to confront this cross-disciplinary challenge.

*They, the school folks, tell me everything should be one way. In reality, information shared between schools is not always correct, often the class you need is full or not available, you are told to take one class again, only to find out you had a passing grade. Counselors, teachers and administrators want to help but they are so busy with other bigger problems. With each school, each transfer, the reality of graduation fades. My credits are short, I have a failing grade, and there is so much work to be made up. I want to give up but I want to graduate and go to college. I want to be somebody.*

- Anonymous foster youth

## The Provision of Partial Credit

Current California law requires that partial credit be allowed but does not create a system for how that is done. Complications arise as school districts have adopted many different credit systems, which makes it difficult to award credit when students transfer from one district to another.

Many districts lack a formalized and broadly known policy for the award of partial credit. Yet across California there exist strong examples of policies and procedures for awarding credit. Examples of model policies include:

### Hemet Unified School District:

Board Policy 6173.1

*Foster youth, homeless or unaccompanied youth, who exit the school district prior to the end of a grading period, will be issued partial credit based on the number of days enrolled and the course grade to date.*

*1-9 days - No credit/no grade*

*10-16 days - ? credit per subject*

*17-23 days - 1 credit per subject*

*24-30 days – 1.5 credits per subject*

*31-37 days – 2 credits per subject*

*38-44 days – 2.5 credits per subject*

*45-51 days – 3 credits per subject*

*52-58 days – 3.5 credits per subject*

*59-65 days – 4 credits per subject*

*66 -72 days – 4.5 credits per subject*

*73+ days – 5 credits per subject*

### Los Angeles Unified School District:

From LAUSD Policy Bulletin (2004)

*A general guide of 12 hours of instruction is equivalent to 1 credit.*

*The number of hours is based on a 60 minute hour. The AB490*

*Advocate shall be cognizant of the instructional hours for each course based on the school's schedule and calendar (i.e. year-round/multi-track calendar, Copernican schedule, block schedule) in order to determine the partial credit earned, following the guidelines below:*

*12-23 hours of instruction is generally equivalent to 1 credit*

*24-35 hours of instruction is generally equivalent to 2 credits*

*36-47 hours of instruction is generally equivalent to 3 credits*

*45-54 hours of instruction is generally equivalent to 4 credits*

*55-60 or more hours of instruction is generally equivalent to 5 credits*



*I had always heard high school is supposed to be the best and most memorable time of your life. Finally the day arrives. You are a freshman walking through the halls of high school with a group of childhood friends. You know exactly what to expect, from the teachers, classes, clubs, and sports teams – it is so exciting and the future is so bright. Sadly, that is a dream of how it is supposed to be. Instead, for a foster teen like me, I find myself moved from one home, one school, one community to another.*

*Each time I am placed in a completely different city than I had been living. I don't know anyone, not a friend, teacher or counselor and I am a stranger in a new family. I am totally unfamiliar with the high school and, once again, forced to begin over. Honestly, for quiet kids like me, nothing is easy, good, or feels permanent. My energy at school is taken just fitting in, looking for a safe spot and maybe, having someone to sit with at lunch. Everyone has their friends, their groups, their clubs, their teams, their safety zones. I am an outsider and a scared foster kid. I wonder if anything is going to work in my life?*

- Anonymous foster youth



*Kids like me really do want to graduate from high school and go to college – we deserve this. The stumbling blocks and walls of frustration are many.*

*People like you can help kids like me navigate the maze of classes, transfer and credit requirements with new laws to ensure we get a fair hand. We need credits to transfer, time to make-up missing work, and when justified, a chance to re-take a failed class. Help us achieve high school graduation and the chance to directly enter college. Help stop this crazy generational cycle of abuse, neglect and school failure.*

*Kids like me, foster kids, are worth your time and effort.*

*Help us achieve school success.*

- Anonymous foster youth

## Model Policies, continued

### Sacramento County Office of Education/Foster Focus:

Sacramento County Office of Education has been a leader in addressing challenges that result from foster youth changing placements, particularly in their development of the Foster Focus database that is now used in more than 25 school districts across the state. Included on the Foster Focus website is a tool to calculate Partial Credits earned by entering the total number of days in a term, the days the student was enrolled (some school districts use the number of days the student attended) and the total number of credits possible in the term per class. The percentage of days the youth was enrolled/attended is used to determine the partial credit score:

$$\frac{\text{Number of days enrolled(attended)}}{\text{Number of total days in the term}} = \frac{\text{Partial Credits Earned}}{\text{Total possible credits per class}}$$

## Recommendations

The issue of partial credit is well suited for the Child Welfare Council to address given:

- Our **VISION** that every child is prepared for the transition into adulthood and being a contributing member of society.
- Our **MISSION** to serve as a forum to advocate for effective strategies and resources to improve outcomes for children.
- Our **GUIDING PRINCIPLE** to collaborate across systems to improve outcomes for foster youth.

Expediency to address the issue of partial credit is of great importance. Not one more foster youth should be faced with the additional burden of having to struggle with getting the credits that he or she has earned.

To address this issue, the Child Development and Successful Youth Transitions Committee will facilitate a convening of key education leadership parties, tasked with developing cohesive policy and implementation strategies for awarding partial credit statewide.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Wolanin, *Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth: A Primer for Policy Makers*. The Institute for Higher Education Policy. December 2005, 29. <http://www.ihep.org/Publications/publications-detail.cfm?id=58> (Outside Source) (accessed December 20, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Assembly Bill (AB) 490, Chapter 862, Statutes of 2003. An overview of AB 490 (Steinberg, *Helping Foster Children Make the Grade*) developed by the California Youth Connection, Children’s Advocacy Institute, and Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles (2004), appears at the end of this report in Attachment E. The complete law can be viewed at <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov> (Outside Source).