

# Education Guide

for Alaska Resource Families

Updated December 2022

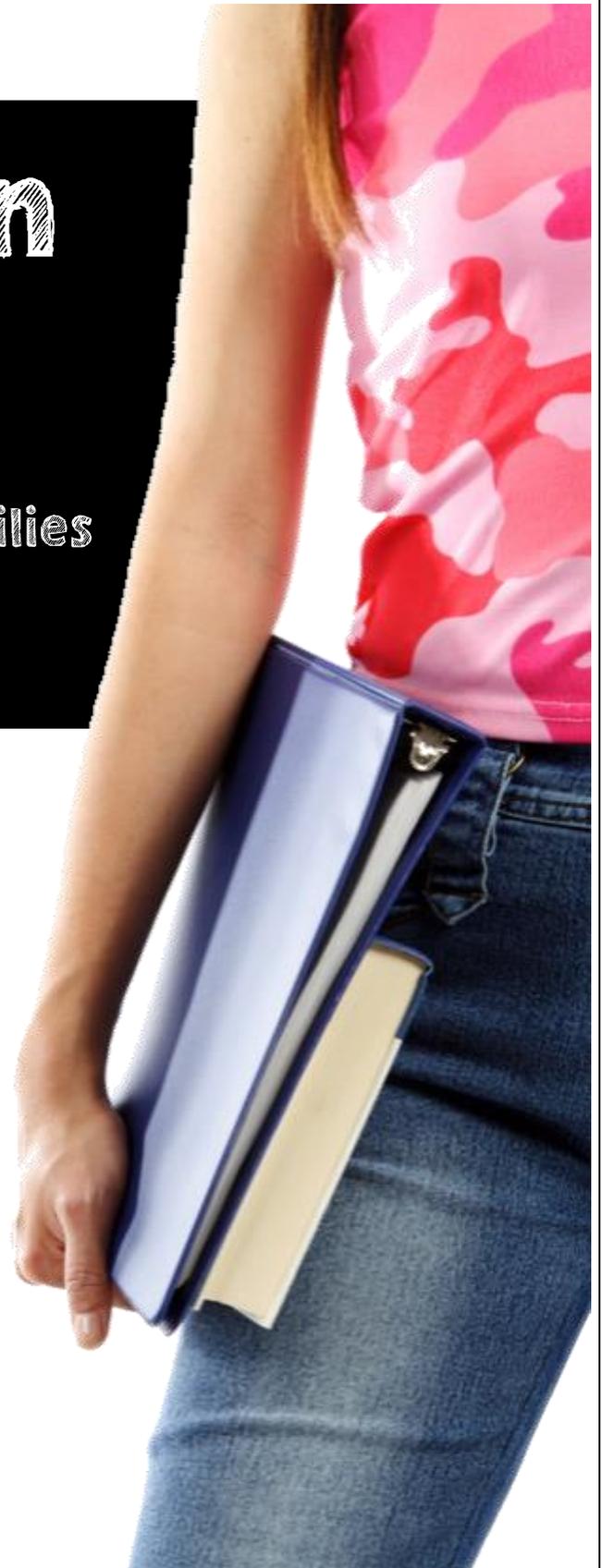
**Developed by**

Alaska Center  
for Resource Families

A Project of Northwest Resource Associates



This handbook was written and produced by the Alaska Center for Resource Family, a program of Northwest Resource Associates, through a grant from the State of Alaska Department of Family and Community Services Office of Children's Services.



## Table of Contents

### Contents

Introduction .....	3
Frequently Asked Questions .....	4
The Importance of School Stability .....	5
Enrolling Your Child in School .....	5
Grade Levels: What Parents Need to Know .....	7
Preschool: Children 3 to 5 Years Old .....	7
Kindergarten and Elementary School .....	8
Middle School .....	10
High School .....	11
Alternatives to Public Schools.....	14
Special Education .....	16
Free and Reduced Meals.....	16
Medication Management during the School Day.....	17
Sex Education.....	18
Students Participating in Surveys.....	18
Sports, Field Trips, and other School Activities .....	18
Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard.....	19
Teacher Conferences .....	19
Computers and School Work .....	19
School Websites .....	20
Homework .....	20
Transportation .....	20
Communicating with and Involving Birth Parents in the Child’s Education .....	23
Counseling and Guidance .....	23
School Discipline .....	24
Keeping Records.....	24

<b>Monitoring Attendance and Grades.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>What Is Confidentiality? .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Bullying.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Indian Education .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Additional and After School Programs .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>School Resource Officer (SRO) .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Tutoring Options .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Appendix A: Who Has the Final Authority? .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Appendix B: Common School Problems .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Appendix C: Important Legislation Concerning Foster Care and Education .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Appendix D: Special Education Law.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Appendix E: Becoming an Educational Champion for Your Child .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Appendix F: 10 Ways to Get Ready for Kindergarten .....</b>	<b>37</b>

## Acknowledgements

This guide was originally produced by the Alaska Center for Resource Families in 2016 and was written by John Bennett and Olivia Shears with assistance from Aileen McInnis. It was reviewed and updated in 2022 by Rachel Hanft, Jodi von Brandt, Maria Vanord, Kendall Musser, and Aileen McInnis. Past reviewers and contributors to this guide include Office of Children’s Services Licensing Managers Tandra Donahue and Yurii Miller, and by Social Services Program Officer Barbara Cosolito for accuracy. Thanks to Christie Reinhardt of the Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education and Christopher Fraczek, Coordinator of Mental Health and Disability Services with the Anchorage School District, for reviewing the sections on special education. The following foster parents reviewed this guide and contributed anecdotes supporting foster youth’s academic success: Barbara Turner, Sara Shahan, Tracy Charles, Trevor Snyder, Talia Wiacek, Marlys Powers, Liza Tran, and Peter Johnson.

**NOTE:** This Handbook strives to be accurate and up to date. However, policies and school district procedures may change or be slightly different in your area of the state. In cases of conflicting information, the regulations, statutes, and OCS policies and procedures take precedence over the information in this handbook. Direct any questions to your local OCS office.

## Introduction

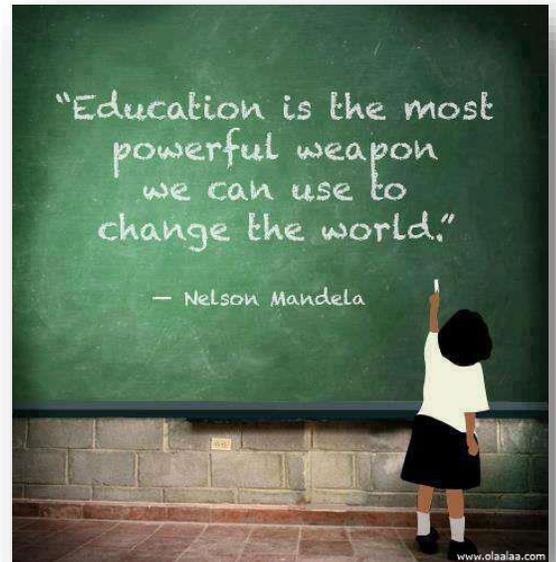
Children in out-of-home care are at a higher risk than their peers of falling behind in school academically. These children will benefit greatly if foster parents pay diligent attention to how they are doing in school. This handbook addresses basic education issues with an emphasis on areas where the experience is different for resource families.

There are references throughout this document to the **Alaska Resource Family Handbook**. Families can get a copy of the handbook from their licensing worker or they can download a copy from the State of Alaska Office of Children’s Services listing of publications at <https://dfcs.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/publications/default.aspx> or from the Alaska Center for Resource Families webpage at [www.acrf.org](http://www.acrf.org) under Training/ Publications.

Certain educational processes may need authorization from the OCS caseworker. However, caseworkers have many children on their caseloads and require extra time to coordinate meetings or meet the specific needs of a child. A good resource parent will be an advocate and make sure to alert the caseworker of his or her child’s needs so things get done on time.

This is *not* a “Special Education Handbook.” There is a brief section on special education, but special education is its own category and other handbooks are available to address its unique issues. (See a link to the “State of Alaska Special Education Handbook” under **Part II: Day to Day School Matters/ Special Education** and links to other Special Education resources in Appendix D: Special Education Law.)

**NOTE: For the purpose of this handbook, the information noted throughout applies to all resource families (foster, adoptive, legal guardians and kinship providers), unless specified with the term licensed foster families.**



**TO EARN CREDIT FOR READING THIS MATERIAL AND RECEIVE 2.0 Training Credits, fill out the universal ITP (Individual Training Plan) form at <https://form.jotform.com/222296367336159>.**

# Frequently Asked Questions

QUESTION	PAGE	ANSWERED UNDER THIS SECTION
When do young children begin kindergarten?	P.8	Kindergarten and Elementary School
What documents do I need to enroll my child into school?	P.6	What documentation will I need?
Who can give permission for school related activities?	P.5 PP.17-19	What is the foster parent responsible for?  Sex Education; Students participating in surveys; Sports, Field Trips, and other School Activities; and Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard.
Who can sign off on school documents?	P.30	<b>Appendix A: Who Has the Final Authority</b>
Who pays for school activities and supplies?	PP.8,10 & 11 P.18	What school supplies are required? Generic elementary student supply list  Sports, Field Trips, and other School Activities
What if my child needs to take medication during the school day?	P.17	Medication management during the school day
How will my foster child get transported to school? How do I set my child up for riding the school bus?	PP.20-21	Regular Transportation; Transportation and Field Trips; and Transportation Resources through Child in Transition/Homeless Programs
What alternative school options are available? Can my foster child attend a private school?	PP.14-15	Alternatives to Public Schools
Can I home school my child?	P.14	Alternatives to Public Schools
What is special education? What is an IEP?	P.16 PP.34-35	Special Education  <b>Appendix D: Special Education Law</b>
Are birth parents involved with the parent teacher conferences?	P.19 P.23	Teacher Conferences  Communicating With and Involving Birth Parents in the Child's Education
What records do foster parents need to keep?	P.6 PP.24-25	What documentation will I need?  Keeping Records
What information can be shared with school staff and what is confidential?	P.26	What is Confidentiality?
Are there before and after school programs available?	P.28	Additional and After School Programs
Do foster children qualify for free lunch?	P.16	Free and Reduced Meals
Can my foster child attend preschool?	P.7	Preschool: Children 3 to 5 years old

# Part I: Fundamentals

---



## The Importance of School Stability

Foster youth come into care with traumatic experiences. With the stress and trauma of their lives, they often struggle to focus on their education. For many, their school staff, friends and connections may be the only consistent and familiar part of their life. Moving them to a new school not only takes away their support system, it creates new losses and new sources of stress. Transferring a foster youth to the nearest school may be more convenient, but it creates tremendous disadvantages to the youth. According to the American Bar Association and Casey Family Programs:

- Youth in out-of-home care lose approximately 4 to 6 months of academic progress with each change in school placement.
- Nearly 58% of youth in foster care graduate high school by age 19, compared to 87% of the general population.
- Students in foster care score 16 to 20 percentile points below others in statewide standardized tests.

--From *Blueprint for Change: Education Success for Children in Foster Care*, 2008.

Recent legislation has demanded more accountability from schools and child protection agencies to make efforts to maintain school stability whenever possible for children and youth in foster care. The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) (ESSA), in coordination with the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, provides educational stability protections for the time students are in foster care. The laws provide that when students in foster care change living placements, they remain in their school of origin unless a determination is made that a school move is in their best interest. Resource parents are encouraged to discuss options with their team and family supports to get creative in finding a solution to maintaining children in their schools. When transportation or other reasons make this not possible, work with the team to make the transition the least disruptive you can, such as waiting for a natural breaking point during the school year, such as semester or summer break.

## Enrolling Your Child in School

### What is the foster parent responsible for?

Children in care are required to attend school. Enrolling a child in school is generally the responsibility of the resource family in which the child is placed. Your assigned caseworker will tell you what is known of the child's previous school experience including the child's strengths, special needs, or problem behaviors (such

as truancy or fighting). When children come into care, there is the expectation that the child shall be maintained in their school of origin whenever possible.

If children are entering school for the first time or need to be enrolled in a different school, resource parents should check with the school district to learn what documentation is needed to enroll their child. As a resource family, you have the responsibility for the child's daily school activities and for consenting to routine activities regarding education matters. You have the authority and responsibility to register the child in school, to provide consent to the child's participation in an elective course of study, and to provide the necessary school supplies expected by the school. Many schools require documentation identifying the foster parent for a child. This may be a drafted letter and may vary among school districts. If licensed foster parents have problems, they can request the necessary documentation from the child's caseworker.

### **When should I register my child?**

In most schools, **children must be five years old on or before September 1** to be enrolled in kindergarten for the school year. Most schools begin registration and enrollment during the first week of August. Check with your local school to find out specific dates and times. If the children in your home are returning to the same school, you may be able to register them online.

### **When a child moves to another school or school district**

The **Alaska Resource Family Handbook** states, "When a child in custody is moved from one placement to another that requires enrollment in another school district, the OCS assigned worker will ensure that enrollment for the child in the new school is done and all paperwork transferred. You will need to work with the assigned worker, and the child's parents, to update all necessary documents." When moving from one school to another within a school district, check with the school district to learn what is required.

### **What documentation will I need?**

Most schools require the following documentation for registering children to begin school. Resource parents should request these documents from the OCS caseworker upon receiving a child into their home.

- **Birth certificate** – A birth certificate is required for students entering kindergarten.
- **Proof of immunization** – A physical exam may be required for kindergarten. The school nurse may be able to look up records if the foster youth has been in school in Alaska for all of her or his school years.
- **Proof of residency** – This may include utility bills such as phone, water or electric.
- **Individual Education Plan** – (If applicable)
- **Section 504 Plan** – (If applicable)

### **Who can I contact with questions about enrollment?**

Contact your local school district staff with questions regarding the enrollment process. Please visit the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development's website for a link to your local school district. ([http://www.eed.state.ak.us/doe\\_rolodex/qinternet\\_1.cfm](http://www.eed.state.ak.us/doe_rolodex/qinternet_1.cfm)) Foster parents should contact their caseworker and or any previous school about missing documentation that is necessary for enrollment.

# Grade Levels: What Parents Need to Know

Preschool: Children 3 to 5 Years Old	
<p><b>General Considerations</b></p>	<p>Preschool helps young children learn skills and knowledge needed to enter school ready to learn. Children in OCS custody are not required to be enrolled in preschool, although it is beneficial for many children and may be a necessity for caregivers who work outside the home.</p> <p>The regulations require foster homes <i>to promote the physical, social, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional development of a child in care.</i> ( OCS Standard by Standard 7AAC 67.230). If children are not in preschool, resource families must consider how they will provide, in their homes, structure and healthy development that will prepare children for school. Children new to school or transitioning to a new school will benefit from parents who prepare them by explaining repeatedly what to expect and by taking them to the school and allowing them to enter and walk around as appropriate.</p>
<p><b>Class Times</b></p>	<p>Half days (a.m. or p.m.), full time (five days per week) or various schedules that the preschool may offer.</p>
<p><b>Eligibility Requirements</b></p>	<p><b>School District Preschools:</b> Different preschools have different requirements; for example, in some, a child must be potty-trained or be 3-5 years old. Most preschools require that children are four years old by Sept. 1st of that school year. Special criteria and boundary restrictions may apply, and there may be an application fee.</p> <p><b>Head Start:</b> Children in custody of the Office of Children’s Services automatically qualify for enrollment in Head Start programs. Information on Head Start programs in Alaska is available online at: <a href="http://akheadstart.org">http://akheadstart.org</a> and in this guide in Part II.</p> <p><b>Private Preschools:</b> Requirements will vary. Ask for guidelines from each facility and check to see about open houses or tours.</p> <p>In order for foster parents to receive a stipend for preschool costs, the preschool must be licensed by the state. A private preschool that has a child care license qualifies as “child care,” therefore allowing funding to be paid by the state. If a private preschool has been identified as an ideal educational environment for a child, but the facility does not have a child care license, contact your licensing worker about the process for the preschool to work toward becoming licensed, if they are willing. Resource families should confirm with the caseworker in writing, before enrolling a child in a private preschool.</p>
<p><b>Developmental Considerations</b></p>	<p>Some children may not have had any experience in a preschool setting, so parents will need to take care with preparation and transitions. Transitioning and separating from a caregiver may be especially difficult for a child who has been placed into foster care.</p> <p>Children who have been traumatized or prenatally exposed to substances may show delays.</p> <p><b>Transitioning from Preschool to Kindergarten:</b> Recent research suggests social and emotional competencies of children are important areas for children to develop from an early age; this means caregivers should help children feel loved, develop a sense of belonging and learn how to get along with others. Although children who enter kindergarten able to count and knowing their ABCs have an advantage, social and emotional competencies are greater predictors for future academic success. Foster children who have experienced abuse or neglect early in life, may benefit from extra support in learning social skills, dealing with feelings, and developing healthy attachments.</p> <p><b>For steps caregivers can take to prepare children transitioning into kindergarten, see Appendix F: 10 Ways to Get Ready for Kindergarten.</b></p>

# Kindergarten and Elementary School

<p><b>General Considerations</b></p>	<p><b>Kindergarten:</b> Kindergarten is not required in Alaska. Resource families should consider the age requirements, therapeutic needs and developmental stage of the child who qualifies to enter kindergarten. For most children, entering kindergarten at age five will be appropriate and expected from OCS. For some children, depending on their therapeutic needs, it may be appropriate to delay entering kindergarten until later.</p> <p><b>Attendance expectations:</b> Attendance and achievement are closely tied. Students in the classroom achieve at higher rates than those who are absent.</p> <p><b>What school supplies are required?</b> It is recommended that resource parents contact their school or receive a class syllabus before purchasing school supplies. The Office of Children’s Services recommends designating 5% of the foster care stipend for school supplies.</p> <p><b>Generic elementary student supply list:</b> (All classes / All grade levels)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PE shoes: 1 pair gym shoes with non-marking soles to be left at school</li> <li>• Backpack: 1 each, backpack or book bag to transport school work to/from home</li> <li>• Tissue boxes: 1 box facial tissues, 50-count or larger</li> <li>• Lunch bag: 1 each, lunch bag or box to transport school lunch to/from home</li> <li>• Pencils: 1 box # 2 pencils</li> <li>• Crayons: 1 box 24 or less</li> <li>• White glue: 1 each school glue, 4-oz bottle</li> <li>• Markers: 1 box 8 count, wide-tipped, washable (not permanent)</li> </ul> <p>Licensed foster parents should inform teachers of their role as foster parents in order to identify as the current caregiver for the student and provide basic insight into the emotional and behavioral state of the child. See section on “<i>What Is Confidentiality?</i>” in Part III.</p>
<p><b>Class Times</b></p>	<p>Most elementary schools begin at 9 a.m. and end at 3:30 p.m. Times may vary.</p>
<p><b>Eligibility Requirements</b></p>	<p>In most schools, <b>children must be five years old on or before September 1</b> to be enrolled in kindergarten for the school year.</p> <p><b>Immunizations Required:</b> Children in Alaska public and private schools must be immunized in accordance with state law unless they are exempted (for example, a religious or medical exemption). Foster parents cannot sign a religious exemption for a child in their care. Refer to the EPSDT/Healthy Child Schedule for required immunizations for each age level.</p>
<p><b>Other Considerations</b></p>	<p><b>Buses:</b> The bus route assigns an approximate pick-up and drop-off time and space. This may change with weather and traffic. Children new to the school may have trouble remembering routes, home address, and school information, so write this down for them and help them during the beginning of their stay. There may be restrictions on what a child can carry on the bus. If a child lives outside of the school area, buses will not pick up the child.</p> <p><b>Homework:</b> Homework will vary widely from school to school and class to class. Children will need to learn how to find out what the homework assignments are, how and when to do their homework at home, and how to develop a system to remember to hand it in. Parents can help children set up a structure for doing assignments and should keep involved to help a child be successful.</p>

# Kindergarten and Elementary School

## Developmental Considerations

### Considerations for emotional and social stages during elementary years

Children this age often:

- Show more independence from parents and family
- Understand more about their place in the world
- Pay more attention to friendships and teamwork
- Want to be liked and accepted by friends
- Start to form stronger, more complex friendships and peer relationships
- Find it more emotionally important to have friends, especially of the same sex
- Experience more peer pressure
- Become more aware of their bodies as puberty approaches. Body image and eating problems sometimes start around this age.

NOTE: Children with neurobehavioral disabilities, such as high functioning autism or FASD may not show delays until the challenges presented during elementary school.

### Considerations for thinking and learning stages during elementary years

Children this age often:

- Show rapid development of mental skills
- Learn better ways to describe experiences and talk about thoughts and feelings
- Have less focus on themselves and more concern for others
- Face more academic challenges at school
- Become more independent from the family
- Begin to see the points of view of others more clearly
- Have an increased attention span

<h1>Middle School</h1>	
<b>General Considerations</b>	This is a time of significant changes in classrooms and classroom topics, and academic challenges are more difficult than in elementary school. There may be more homework, social activities, and clubs for youth to participate in. In many large communities, middle schools have far more students than elementary schools.
<b>Class Times</b>	Most middle schools begin at 8:15 a.m. and end at 2:45 p.m. Times may vary.
<b>Other Considerations</b>	<p><b>What grades are youth in who attend middle school?</b> Most middle schools serve either 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade or 7<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Check with your local school district to learn their policy.</p> <p><b>What school supplies are required?</b> This will vary from school to school. Typically, students carry books and supplies to school in small backpacks, and are responsible for pens, pencils, paper, gym shoes, and gym clothes. Check with your child’s school to learn their policy.</p> <p><b>Changing schedule:</b> Middle school often includes homerooms, switching classrooms, using a locker, and moving around between classes. Students may have only five to ten minutes between classes. Schedules may be different from day to day, and organizational skills become more important. This might be challenging for youth with sensory challenges or executive functioning deficits. To help your youth organize her or his day, you could provide a 3 ring binder to separate all subjects. This can make changing classes easier. Or encourage her or him to color code subjects to help keep papers and tablets separate.</p> <p><b>Activities:</b> More extracurricular and after school activities begin in middle school. Participation in sports includes an activity fee. There is usually a way to request that the fee be waived, especially for youth in foster care. Some school districts offer an after-school activity bus to transport children home who are staying late for sports; however, this bus may not take the child out of the school’s zone.</p> <p><b>Clothing:</b> Middle schools may have dress codes such as no inflammatory symbols on tee shirts or no wearing of coats in the classroom, or may have requirements around a second pair of shoes for gym class. Always get a copy of the Student Handbook from the school your child is attending and read it for more information.</p>
<b>Developmental Considerations</b>	<p><b>Considerations for emotional and social stages during middle school years</b> Youth this age often:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore gender/sexual identity</li> <li>• Show more concern about body image, appearance, and clothes</li> <li>• Focus on themselves, going back and forth between high expectations and lack of confidence</li> <li>• Experience more moodiness and emotional extremes</li> <li>• Show more interest in and influence by peer groups</li> <li>• Express less affection toward parents; sometimes might seem rude or short-tempered</li> <li>• Feel stress from more challenging school work</li> <li>• Develop eating problems</li> <li>• Feel a lot of sadness or depression, which can lead to poor grades at school, alcohol or drug use, unsafe sex, and other problems</li> </ul> <p><b>Considerations for thinking and learning stages during middle school years</b> Youth this age often:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have more ability for complex thought</li> <li>• Are better able to express feelings through talking</li> <li>• Develop a stronger sense of right and wrong</li> </ul>

# High School

<p><b>General Considerations</b></p>	<p><b>What grades are youth in who attend high school?</b>          Most high schools serve students from 9<sup>th</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. However, some high schools may begin in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Check with your local school district to learn their policy.</p> <p><b>What school supplies are required?</b>          See <i>Middle School</i>. Some tools might be required for specific classes depending on subject.</p>
<p><b>Class Times</b></p>	<p>Most high schools begin at 7:30 a.m. and end at 2:00 p.m. Times may vary.</p>
<p><b>Other Considerations</b></p>	<p>Every high school has a Student Activity Guide (usually found on its web page) that outlines the expectations, rules, and guidelines for students. Make sure to get a copy. High school hallways can be noisy and chaotic; some high schools in Alaska are very large. Work with your youth on his familiarity with the school and his schedule, especially if you anticipate issues with sensory stimulation or confusion. For a new student in your home, you may need to go with her or him before or after school to tour the school, walk the route between classes, and find her or his locker ahead of time.</p> <p><b>Technology requirements:</b> Educational technology is important at all levels of education especially at the high school level. Districts and schools set safety policies for internet use and use iPads, laptops and computers in a variety of settings. Schools may also have policies around the use of cell phones and other electronics. Some classes may be available online. Many schools use an online based communication platform (such as Zangle) for parent communication.</p> <p><b>Extracurricular activity and sports:</b> These are an important part of high school life. Foster youth should be encouraged to pursue interests if possible. Remember to secure permission ahead of time for high risk activities (such as football) and support the youth by providing transportation (or helping to arrange transportation) and attending events the child is in. Foster youth can apply to have activity fee waived for events. Usually there is a simple application process for this.</p> <p>High schools may have “open campus,” which means students are free to go off school grounds and out of the building.</p>

# High School

## Graduation Requirements and Beyond

A big concern in high school is to encourage youth to complete their education and not drop out. Foster youth who are not supported in school run a high risk of dropping out before graduation. For youth who are struggling, alternative schools within the district may provide a compatible learning environment.

### **What are the requirements to graduate from high school?**

Many youth in care have had little continuity or guidance in their schooling and run the risk of moving through high school without earning the credits they need to graduate. Become acquainted with your child's class counselor or advisor and find out exactly what your child will need to graduate. Discuss this with the youth and be sure he or she signs-up, *each semester*, for classes that will keep her or him on track. Below are the standards as stated on the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development website as amended in April of 2015.

- 4 AAC 06.075. High school graduation requirements. (a) Each chief school administrator shall develop and submit to the district board for approval a plan consisting of district high school graduation requirements. The plan must require that, before graduation, a student must have earned at least 21 units of credit.
- (b) Specific subject area units-of-credit requirements must be set out in each district plan and must require that, before graduation, a student must have completed at least the following:
- (1) language arts - four units of credit;
  - (2) social studies - three units of credit;
  - (3) mathematics - two units of credit for students graduating from high school on or before June 30 2017, and three units of credit for students graduating from high school on or after July 1, 2017;
  - (4) science - two units of credit; and
  - (5) health/physical education - one unit of credit.
- (c) Transfer students who have earned 13 units of credit while in attendance outside the district may, at the discretion of the district, be excused from the district subject area units-of-credit requirements.
- (d) Beginning January 1, 2009, the three units of credit in social studies required under (b)(2) of this section must include one-half unit of credit in Alaska history or demonstration that the student meets the Alaska history performance standards. The provisions of this subsection do not apply to a student who Register 213, April 2015 EDUCATION AND EARLY DEV.

Some schools, such as the Anchorage School District, have standards more stringent than the state. Check with your youth's high school for its requirements. For youth on IEPs, a "Transition Plan" must be part of the IEP when or before the youth turns 16. For more on this, see **Appendix D: Special Education Law**.

Foster youth nearing graduation should be working with the OCS Independent Living Skills Specialist in the region or be made aware of ETV (Education, Technical and Vocational) funds or the University of Alaska Scholarship Program for Youth in Care.

**Education Training Voucher Program:** In an effort to provide integrated services and promote normal life experiences to youth aging out of foster care, the Child Welfare Academy (CWA) will provide postsecondary education support, intensive case management, and assistance to youth as they navigate the college system. Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds are administered through the CWA. Eligible youth can apply for up to \$5000 per academic year to be used for books, fees, housing and other academic needs. CWA will manage funding for foster youth to attend college or vocational programs that will lead to gainful employment. For further information contact the Child Welfare Academy at (907) 786-6720 or <https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/childwelfareacademy>. Scholarships available for foster youth can be found at: <http://www.fc2success.org/programs/scholarships-and-grants/>

# High School

## Developmental Considerations

### Considerations for emotional and social stages during high school years

Youth this age often:

- Explore gender/sexual identity
- Have more interest in intimate/sexual relationships
- Go through less conflict with parents
- Show more independence from parents
- Have a deeper capacity for caring and sharing and for developing more intimate relationships
- Spend less time with parents and more time with friends
- Feel a lot of sadness or depression, which can lead to poor grades at school, alcohol or drug use, unsafe sex, and other problems

### Considerations for thinking and learning stages during high school years

Youth this age often:

- Learn more defined work habits
- Show more concern about future school and work plans
- Are better able to give reasons for their own choices, including what is right or wrong

**Obtaining a Driver’s License:** Learning to drive and obtaining a license is a complicated task for many high school aged foster youth. Enrolling them in a driver education program can help them develop skills and confidence, but the effectiveness of such programs often requires practice outside of class. Spending time teaching a teenager to drive can be an invaluable way to bond with her or him – as long as you have the patience.

For a foster parent to teach a youth to drive, the following are required:

- A signature of authorized adult (from the child’s parent or legal guardian)
- Proof of insurance
- A driver’s license or instructional driving permit to operate a motor vehicle
- A letter of support from the authorized adult
- According to the **Alaska Resource Family Handbook**, “A youth in state custody may drive a vehicle only with Department approval by the OCS Protective Services Manager II, a Chief Juvenile Probation Officer, or the Juvenile Justice Deputy Director.”

For more on this, see the **Alaska Resource Family Handbook** under “Driving.”

**Independent Living Skills:** Youth at the high school level should also be taught and encouraged to learn day-to-day living skills such as cooking, washing clothes, figuring out transportation, making appointments, and learning to manage money.

# Alternatives to Public Schools

Recent legislation demands more accountability for schools and child protective services to maintain a child in his school of origin. Resource families should consider the temporary nature of the child’s placement and the long-term permanency plan for the child before disrupting the flow of that child’s education. However, as children and youth stay in care for an extended period of time or move into a more permanent situation, resource parents may consider other forms of education that might be more beneficial for a child than his or her current school. Consult with the child’s OCS worker before you begin this process. The **Alaska Resource Family Handbook** states, “If you want to consider a private school or homeschooling for the child in your care, discuss the matter with the child’s assigned worker.”

<p><b>Charter Schools</b></p>	<p>Charter schools are within the public-school district. A charter school is publicly financed but operated by parents, educators and/or companies who have gone through an application process and meet stringent requirements set forth by the local school board. Charter schools usually differ from more traditional schools by focusing on a particular subject matter, curriculum, or teaching method. Students may live anywhere in the school district to attend a charter school but need to apply and may be subject to a lottery for admission. There may be a waiting list for some schools. Some charter schools provide resources for families interested in home schooling their children. The Alaska Department of Education &amp; Early Development website offers more information and a Charter School Directory.  <a href="https://education.alaska.gov/alaskan_schools/charter">https://education.alaska.gov/alaskan_schools/charter</a>  <b>SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESOURCE PARENTS:</b> Charter schools ask for participation by parents. Usually parents need to provide transportation to the school – that means no bus service.</p>
<p><b>Correspondence Study Programs</b></p>	<p>Correspondence programs are funded by the state and provide individual learning plans for each student enrolled. They are an aid to home schools that opt to become enrolled and adhere to the requirements. They may also provide an annual student allotment to a parent or guardian of a student enrolled in the correspondence study program to help meet instructional expenses for the enrolled student. Go to  <a href="https://education.alaska.gov/alaskan_schools/corres/pdf/correspondence_school_directory.pdf">https://education.alaska.gov/alaskan_schools/corres/pdf/correspondence_school_directory.pdf</a> for a list of correspondence schools throughout the state.  <b>SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESOURCE PARENTS:</b> Correspondence schools may help youth complete diploma requirements. Requires oversight by parent.</p>
<p><b>Home Schooling</b></p>	<p>Home schools are not required to enroll in a correspondence study program, but cannot receive student allotments unless they are enrolled. Correspondence study programs may provide services throughout the state of Alaska or just to students within their district. Home schools not enrolled in the correspondence study program are not affiliated with the local school district, though home schooling must adhere to school guidelines and home schooled students are entitled to certain supports from the local school district.  <b>SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR LICENSED FOSTER PARENTS:</b> You must secure OCS and birth parent approval before enrolling a foster child in home schooling. Home schooling requires increased participation on the part of the parent. OCS is often reluctant to approve home schooling unless for very specific purposes.</p>

<p><b>Alternative Schools</b></p>	<p>An alternative school is a public school within the public-school district – usually middle or high school – that offers nontraditional curriculum and teaching and learning methods and falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education. Alternative schools on the high school level are often aimed at students who haven’t done well in traditional classrooms, and such students are often better able to maintain attendance and graduate when enrolled in alternative schools. Contact your local school district to find out what’s available in your area.</p> <p><b>SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESOURCE PARENTS:</b> Alternative schools are often considered if a youth is not doing well in a traditional academic setting or is at risk for dropping out or has special needs such as pregnancy, parenting or incarceration.</p>
<p><b>Private Schools</b></p>	<p>Private schools are not run by the government, they are not affiliated with the local school district, and they charge for tuition. They may have a religious affiliation, an academic college preparatory focus, or focus on a specific curriculum philosophy (such as Montessori). Students must apply for admission.</p> <p><b>SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR LICENSED FOSTER PARENTS:</b> According to the <b>Alaska Resource Family Handbook</b>, “Children in care should attend school through the local school district. A child may be enrolled in a private school only when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child’s parents (if appropriate) and the child agree to a private school;</li> <li>• The child had been attending a private school at the time that custody was initiated and the school provides continued educational continuity for the child;</li> <li>• The school meets the standards of the Alaska Department of Education;</li> <li>• No cost to OCS will be incurred.</li> </ul>

## Part II: Day to Day School Matters

---

### Special Education

Foster children show a much higher rate of disability than the general population due to experiences of poor prenatal care, addiction, neglect, abuse and trauma.

The majority of youth with medical or developmental disabilities who come into care have not had any prior evaluations, diagnosis or early intervention services.

Often, it is the foster parent who initiates special education evaluations, eligibility, and services.

According to Federal Special Education laws (34 CFR 300.30), a foster parent or relative can be the “parent” for the purpose of special education. An education surrogate parent is not required for a child who lives with a foster parent “if the foster parent affirms in writing that the foster parent is able and willing to serve as the parent of the child for purposes of special education, and that the foster parent expects the child to continue living with the foster parent on an ongoing basis.” (4 AAC 52.600) If your child is on an IEP (Individualized Education Program), it is important to be in contact with her or his case manager and Special Education department chair to ensure that services are being provided. Each student on an IEP has a case manager – this is the teacher who drafts the IEP and makes sure that the correct services are being provided to ensure success and appropriate education.

For more information about special education, including sample forms, go to the State of Alaska Special Education Handbook at

[https://education.alaska.gov/TLS/SPED/pdf/Handbook/AK\\_SPED\\_Handbook.pdf](https://education.alaska.gov/TLS/SPED/pdf/Handbook/AK_SPED_Handbook.pdf) . At the back of this guide, **Appendix D: Special Education Law** also gives an overview of Special Education Law. Stone Soup Group ([www.stoneoupgroup.org](http://www.stoneoupgroup.org)) is the identified Parent Training Information Center for Alaska. They produce an easy-to-understand “Alaska Special Education Parent Handbook” and have staff available for education and support.

*“The [school] issue that brought us the most difficulty is probably dealing with an IEP. There is much to know about them, and for the most part, learning through immersion has been fine. The issue we had come up earlier this year led us to believe that there was a good chance our kiddo would be getting expelled. I was pretty stressed about that for the first month or two of the school year, because the principal was telling us that if certain behaviors continued, they would eventually lead to expulsion. However, at an IEP review, we brought up the issue with the teachers and they assured us that would not be the case; that a child cannot be suspended based on behaviors that are addressed in the IEP. A great weight was lifted off our shoulders at that point, but a lot of stress could have been avoided if we had known that in the first place. What I learned is that teachers know a lot about IEPs, and if I had talked to a teacher instead of only talking to the principal and OCS, I would have learned this information sooner. Fortunately, this kiddo has a wonderful teaching team!”*

*- Sara, Foster Parent*

### Free and Reduced Meals

Free or reduced-price meals are offered to students in public schools and nonprofit, private schools through a program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. All children in state custody placed in out-of-home care are categorically eligible for free meals at school without application, regardless of your income. The **Alaska Resource Family Handbook** states, “Contact your child’s school for more information on the School Lunch Program. Schools should not engage in practices that may cause students to feel embarrassed or stigmatized. Contact the school if you are concerned about the handling of its lunch program. Remember that special care should be taken not to make the child feel awkward about receiving a free lunch.”

# Medication Management during the School Day

The following section is excerpted from the **Alaska Resource Family Handbook** and addresses medications and foster children:

A resource family may administer prescription medication, and special medical procedures to a child only as authorized by a doctor or legally-authorized health provider and written permission from the child's parent or the assigned worker. In an urgent situation or after hours, the provider can contact the "on call" assigned worker to get telephonic permission to administer the medication. The provider will need to follow up with the written permission from the child's assigned worker.

Written permission must first be obtained for the administration of prescription medication from the parent of the child in care, or the assigned worker when a new medication is prescribed. If the department is the legal guardian, written permission must be obtained from the assigned worker. If a child is taking prescription medicine, keep the medication in its original container. This container should have a label showing the date filled, the expiration date, instructions, and the physician's or health provider's name. Document all prescribed medications on the Medical, Dental, and Medication Record (06-9180).

## **Discard unused medication**

- Non-controlled substance medication: Crush the medication in a zip lock type bag and mix with coffee grounds, dirt etc. and dispose in the trash. Make sure containers are blacked out so medication and client information is not readable.
- Controlled substance medication: Determine if your area has a local drop off location for medications. If your area does not have a drop off location, give the medication to your assigned worker for disposal.

Do not save the medicine used with one child to treat another, even if you think the child has the same illness! Keep all medications out of the reach of children. For common illness or injury, a resource family can use over-the-counter drugs if authorized by the assigned worker. The *Consent for Emergency and Routine Medical Care* form authorizes the provider to administer commonly used over the counter medications. Use these medications only according to directions on the medication label unless a health provider indicates otherwise. If you receive different directions from your health provider, get those instructions in writing, and incorporate these instructions into the child's medical records.

Parental consent for emergency and routine medical care is not required, since custody court orders authorize the department to consent to minor or emergency treatment. Routine/minor medical care includes administration of non-prescription and commonly used over-the-counter medication in accordance with the manufacturer's label.

## **Necessary Documentation for Medication during the School Day**

Resource parents will need to contact the school nursing office to begin the process for coordinating medication administration for students during the school day. There are various forms available that will need to be turned in depending on the medication administration needs. Forms may be required for students who need:

- long term non-prescription medication
- long term prescription medication
- short term prescription medication
- Non-prescription (over-the-counter) medication
- Short term medication request for out-of-district travel

## Sex Education

Some schools offer courses in sex education but Alaska schools are currently not required to teach sex education. Resource parents may sign the permission slip for a child to attend special classes or consult with the assigned OCS worker if you have concerns. The topics of sexual and reproductive health needs and access to sexual and reproductive health care can be challenging to address due to the developmental differences between youth of different ages and different lived experiences, the impact of traumatic childhood experiences on adolescent development and sexual behaviors, and the attitudes and concerns that birth parents, foster parents, and caseworkers may have related to adolescent sexuality.

## Students Participating in Surveys

Resource parents may need to sign permission slips to participate in or opt out of certain surveys conducted with middle school or high school students. One example of such a survey is *The Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, a statewide school-based survey of high school students administered in cooperation with the Department of Education & Early Development. This anonymous survey examines a minimum of six categories of adolescent behavior and is administered every two years with students in grades 9 - 12. Resource parents can contact the State Youth Risk Behavior Survey Coordinator with the State of Alaska at [YRBS@alaska.gov](mailto:YRBS@alaska.gov) for more information.

## Sports, Field Trips, and other School Activities

According to OCS policies and procedures, resource families may sign permission slips for routine activities such as school trips, Scout events, extra-curricular activities, enrichment activities or non-high-risk sports activities. Foster parents can sign for over-night activities and transportation to activities if the youth's absence from the home is less than 72 hours and does not include plane or ferry travel, travel outside the state, or travel paid for by OCS. Out of State trips require advance consent from the assigned caseworker. Notify your assigned worker if the field trip will take the child away from home for longer than 72 hours, or will take place out of state. Travel out-of-state requires at least 14 days' notice and out-of-country travel requires additional notice for required permissions. OCS must approve all out-of-state travel of a child in care. For requests requesting funds for travel, contact [fcs.ocs.special.needs.hotline@alaska.gov](mailto:fcs.ocs.special.needs.hotline@alaska.gov) or 1-855-60-FUNDS. Planned in state trips lasting less than 72 hours can be approved by the resource family who is demonstrating reasonable and prudent parent standard in their decision making. However, air flights or ferry travel may require additional documentation and approval, contact your OCS PS Specialist.

Resource parents are expected to use a “reasonable and prudent parent standard” in making decisions about these activities, meaning that the parent makes a sensible parenting decision that balances the health, safety and best interest of the child with the need to encourage emotional and developmental growth in a child.

Foster parents are expected to actively encourage the interests and activities of the children in their care. Seek out programs offered by the schools or community organizations that might be of interest to your child (such as Little League, swimming, skiing, school sports, Scouting, theater) or cultural activities (such as beading, drumming or dancing) and encourage your child to take part. These activities are helpful to your child's social development and sense of personal competence. Some children are self-motivated in this area, but most require someone like you to help them get started. The Office of Children's Services recommends designating 12% of the foster care stipend for general recreation, including school activities. For activities that cost more than the stipend will cover, schools may waive activity fees for children in foster care, or special requests may be made through OCS. Friends of Alaska's Children in Care program also can provide “camperships” and other grants for activities for children and youth in foster care. For further information, resource parents can review the **Financial Handbook for Newly Licensed Foster Parents** available through ACRF.

## Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard

Foster parents must obtain advanced permission from the caseworker for high-risk activities, including contact sports or activities of moderate risk that are not common to the community. Permission from the caseworker or possibly birth parent is needed for field trips or activities that take a child away from his home for longer than 72 hours, travel outside the state, or travel paid for by OCS. For normal permissions or decisions regarding participation in school activities, social events, cultural events or extra-curricular activities that do not involve high risk, foster parents can make the decision based on a “reasonable and prudent parenting standard.” That means, foster parents are asked to consider the abilities and developmental stage of the child to determine if this activity is appropriate, as well as what is considered normal for children of a similar age in the community where they reside. All safety standards set in regulations must be followed (such as wearing life jackets when boating), and activities that interfere with family contact must be approved by caseworker or birth parent.

## Teacher Conferences

The **Alaska Resource Family Handbook** states, “It is important that you involve yourself in the child’s school progress and activities; this shows the child that you are interested and that you care. Your relationship with school should be like any other parent/school relationship. Attend all parent-teacher conferences concerning the child and keep the assigned worker informed of the child’s progress or problems in school. If you detect problems that require special help, tell your assigned worker so you both can advocate with the school. Keep copies of report cards and progress reports and share with the child’s parents and assigned worker. Most importantly, you should involve the child’s parents in all aspects of the child’s schooling and school activities, such as inviting the parent to parent-teacher conferences, school concerts, or sports activities.” You can also involve birth parents in IEP, 504 and Behavior Intervention Plan meetings when appropriate.

Parent conferences are a valuable tool in the education of any child. During conferences, the teacher and parent or guardian have the opportunity to talk about important information that will help the student throughout their education. Conferences offer parents the opportunity to find out how their child is getting along with classmates, how they are progressing in school, and what can be done at home to build on their strengths and overcome challenges. In elementary school, parents will have scheduled conferences with teachers. At the middle school level, a student-led, teacher-supported conference model may be used. In high school, time with the teacher may be brief, but parent participation is still an important way to show support. Individual conferences can always be scheduled.

## Computers and School Work

Computers and digital literacy are a part of today’s school culture and are a necessary skill that children and youth need to learn to participate in the world today. Some teachers require work to be “typed.” If you don’t have computer access or internet access in your home, consider how this might impact your child’s ability to perform at the same level as their peers. If you haven’t been in school in a while or are unfamiliar with how computers are used in the classroom, talk to the teacher or do some research about what you as a parent need to know about use, safety, the internet, and boundaries. The Internet opens up a wide world of helpful educational sites (such as Khan Academy) that can be helpful in tutoring children in specific areas or helping them research. Many classrooms are supplementing classroom time with internet resources and on-line learning.

# School Websites

Most school districts have websites, and most individual schools within each district, have their own websites. Becoming familiar with your child’s school’s website can keep resource parents aware of homework, attendance, and upcoming activities. Resource families can utilize information online to prevent many school problems from occurring, such as truancy, incomplete homework, and children being unprepared for projects and activities. To find your district and the individual school your child may be attending, follow this link to a statewide map of school districts:

[https://education.alaska.gov/alaskan\\_schools/alaska-district-map](https://education.alaska.gov/alaskan_schools/alaska-district-map)

# Homework

Homework can start quite early in a child’s schooling. Your grade school child (even your kindergartner) may have homework. Your middle school child will have homework on most nights, and your high school student will have an hour or more on most nights. Regular contact with your child’s teachers, whether in person, by phone or email, or by visiting a website, will help you know what is expected of your child. Parents who spend time with their children as they work on homework can expect better results than parents who remain detached. Your child needs to do the work her or himself, but your guidance and encouragement will go a long way in nudging the child toward completion and success.

*“I think transporting children to the school they have been attending is ideal. If you can keep kids in the same school, it’s a great way to keep some familiarity in their life. In the past I’ve had to get three different kids to three different schools before 9a.m. It was hard, but that is why structure is so important and we made it work.”*

*-Barb, Foster Parent*

Children need a quiet, orderly place with a minimum of distractions. Some people do concentrate better while listening to music, but many do not. If your child says they study better when listening to music, consider letting them demonstrate that. Most children also benefit from a regular time to do their homework. It could be after they get home from school or after dinner, but a consistent routine will produce more successful study skills. If you check on their homework every day, they will get used to that and it will become part of the pattern of their lives. Consistent messages from you about the importance of school and school work and your high expectations will help the child understand her or his role in this. See **Appendix E, Become an Educational Champion for Your Child** for more on this.



# Transportation

## Regular transportation

Transportation is provided for students in many school districts throughout Alaska. Bus stops are established in accordance with the local School District Transportation Department criteria. Parents should contact their local neighborhood school for detailed information regarding bus routes, time of pick up and drop off, as well as bus rules for students.

## **Special needs transportation**

Some school districts are able to offer special needs transportation accommodations as part of the student's Individual Education Program (IEP). For more information, contact your local school district.

## **Field trips and activities**

Field trips and activity transportation (such as sports) may also be provided by local school district buses for school related activities. Under the “reasonable and prudent parent standard,” resource parents have the authority to give consent for transportation for these trips. However, if trips require financial assistance from OCS, these funds need to be applied for and approved before the event. Foster parents must also obtain advanced approval from the caseworker if the child will be away from the foster home for more than 72 hours, or the activity will take child out of state or the travel will be by ferry or plane. Foster parents can refer to the **Alaska Resource Family Handbook** or contact their licensing worker with additional questions regarding travel.

## **Transportation Resources**

Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, school districts are required to provide students who are homeless with the same educational rights as other students. Students who are homeless have the right to stay in their school for the duration of the school year and the district is obligated to provide transportation assistance while the family is homeless. Until recently, the definition of “homeless” included children and youth waiting for foster care placement or in emergency foster care. The 2015 *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) removes “awaiting foster care placement” from the definition of “homeless” for purposes of the McKinney-Vento Act as of December 10, 2016. Refer to Transportation assistance may or may not be able to be provided through the local Child in Transition (CIT) or Families in Transition (FIT) program in your school district. Check with them for resources.

According to the Alaska Office of Children’s Services policies and procedures, “If it is in the child’s best interest to remain in the same school and the child’s placement is located outside the boundary of the school the child attended prior to the placement, the worker will address the availability of transportation to school. If the school district does not provide transportation, the worker will consider other options, including a Request for Funds (RFF) for:

- a. reimbursing the foster parent for the mileage in excess of 50 miles/week incurred to transport the child to and from school;
- b. providing the child with a bus pass if local public transportation is available and it is appropriate for the child to travel alone, considering the child’s age and development level; or
- c. if all other options have been exhausted, arranging for transportation by taxi if it is safe, considering the child’s age and developmental level, for the child to travel alone in a taxi. One RFF for the duration of the school term should be submitted and approved.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Further Training Courses for Resource Families Concerning Education  
*Available through the Alaska Center for Resource Families [www.acrf.org](http://www.acrf.org)  
Call 1-800-478-7307 or contact your local ACRF Office*

### **Self-Study Courses**

- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Preschool & Elementary Educational Issues (4 Credits)
- The Internet: What Parents Need to Know (2.5 Credits)
- Education and Youth in Foster Care (3.0 Credits)
- The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (1.5 Credits)

### **Information Packets (All 1.0 Training Credit)**

- Adoption in the Schools
- Adoption: Child Readiness in the School
- Alaska Special Education Guide for Parents, (Spanish Version Available)
- Bullying and Children
- Cyberbullying
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Effects: Educational Issues
- Helping Students Develop Their IEPs
- Helping the Traumatized Child at Home and School
- Helping Your Young Child Emotionally and Socially at School
- Special Education: IDEA for Children Birth to Three
- Special Education: IDEA for Children Age Three and Up
- Quality Early Care and Education: A Guide for Alaska's Families
- Teaching a Student with Attention Deficit Disorders (Spanish Available)
- Educational Champion Series: Communication with Child and School
- Educational Champion Series: Beliefs, Expectations and Aspirations about Education
- Educational Champion Series: Preparation for Higher Education

### **Videos and Webinars: (All 1.0 Training Credit)**

- When I Send my Kid to School—Practical Pieces of Parent Wisdom of Working with the Schools
- IEPs and 504 Plans: Special Education and The Foster Parent's Roles and Responsibilities
- Alaska Native Education Resources—Title VI Indian Education Supports
- ESSA: Enrollment and Stability and Transportation
- Foster Youth School Stability: Working with the Anchorage School District

## Part III: Being Involved and Advocating for Your Foster Child

---

### Communicating with and Involving Birth Parents in the Child's Education

Birth parent involvement in the day to day activities at school will vary amongst families. Birth parents may or may not choose to be involved in their child's school life. Regardless of the birth parents' previous level of involvement, resource parents are encouraged to keep birth parents informed about a child's progress in school. When possible, resource parents are encouraged to establish a relationship with the birth parents early in placement. If you feel comfortable and you have the approval of the caseworker, invite birth parents to school activities involving their child. When your relationship with the birth parent is new, it might feel awkward to think about attending meetings together, but the partnership works best when you both focus on what the child needs to be successful in school. Attending conferences, IEP meetings, and extracurricular school functions together can provide great opportunities for resource parents and birth parents to collaborate and support the child. Give birth parents as much advance notice as possible (and, if appropriate, a reminder closer to the event date) of events involving the child such as athletic events, theater presentations, concerts, and awards presentations. Birth parents should also get advance notice of parent-teacher conferences or open house dates.

It may help to talk with the birth parent about what is expected of you as a licensed foster parent so the birth parent understands that it is your responsibility to give and receive

information with school staff. Foster parents should keep report cards, progress reports and test results and make copies available to the birth parent and OCS caseworker. If there are different opinions about how to partner with each other, resource parents should contact their caseworker or licensing worker for further guidance. Resource families can also contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families for support and information about working with birth parents.

*"I think as foster parents we need to keep family connections and learn not to be so judgmental towards families. The biggest and most valuable lesson I learned is when you get all the information about a child, do not let it define the child. I had a special needs child that they said had an IQ of 70 and although he had issues, he graduated in all 'regular' classes and passed the benchmark exams all by himself."*

*-Tracy, Foster Parent*

### Counseling and Guidance

Guidance counselors in the school system can provide an array of support for youth and families. They can provide referrals and resources for academic needs, various school forms, and resource lists for basic needs, mental health, and family resources. A primary role for guidance counselors in middle and high school is to help youth develop goals and explore options for continuing education and to assist youth with financial aid and scholarship options. Guidance counselors may also be able to help address issues with children skipping school or wanting to drop out. Resource families can contact their local school district to identify their child's guidance counselor.

# School Discipline

According to *Alaska Statute 14.33.110-.140*, “Each school district must have in place a school disciplinary and safety program. The purpose of the program is to implement community standards of school behavior that are developed with the collaboration of students, parents, guardians, teachers, school administrators, and advisory school boards in each community; and to protect and support teachers who enforce standards of student behavior and safety in the classroom.”

Every school has to have a program in place, but those programs will vary among districts. Contact your school district for details on detention, suspensions, expulsion for truancy, bringing banned substances to school, and bullying. Below are State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development definitions.

## **Detention:**

There is no official definition for “Detention.” However, the term is sometimes applied to short-term, supervised time-out during a school day for minor offenses. Students given Detention are expected to serve it the same or next day, or risk being assigned In-School Suspension. Contact your child’s school for their policy.

## **In-School Suspension:**

Instances in which a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular classroom(s) for disciplinary purposes but remains under the direct supervision of school personnel. Direct supervision means school personnel are physically in the same location as students under their supervision.

## **Suspension:**

Instances in which a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular school for disciplinary purposes to another setting (e.g., home, behavior center).

## **Expulsion:**

An action taken by the local educational agency removing a child from his/her regular school for disciplinary purposes for the remainder of the school year or longer in accordance with local educational agency policy.

**NOTE:** A student with a disability who has an IEP cannot be suspended for more than 10 cumulative days without a Manifestation Determination meeting being held. This is a meeting to decide whether the behavior that led to the suspension or expulsion was because of the child’s disability. This meeting must be held before a school placement change can be made.

# Keeping Records

Licensed foster parents are required and encouraged to keep many different kinds of records related to the child in their care. When it comes to education related records, keep records of your child’s medical history, report cards, progress reports, test results, disciplinary actions, Special Education findings (IEPs, 504 plans, etc.), and awards or achievements. Share these with the child’s birth parents and the assigned OCS worker. You can have a separate file to keep these items together or use the child’s placement packet (sometimes called “the red folder”) that should come with the child. Foster parents are also in a position to keep other important documents from a child’s school. Drawings, awards, poems, citations of citizenships, class photos, pictures of friends, souvenirs from field trips — all of these paint a picture of a child’s life. These may not be required but are just as important to keep and pass on to a child’s birth family or a child’s next placement.

The following are examples of various types of records that families may encounter. Some records are required to be kept by foster parents (per licensing regulations and OCS policies), while with other records, it is highly recommended for best practice and meeting the needs of the child. Once a child leaves the foster family’s home, records should be returned to the Office of Children’s Services caseworker or transferred over to the child’s new caregiver.

RECORD	REQUIRED	SUGGESTED
Medical and mental health records	X	
Report cards and progress reports	X	
Educational test results		X
Disciplinary actions	X	
Special Education findings (IEPs, 504 plans)	X	
Placement Packet (also called “the red folder”)	X	
Lifebooks, cards, mementos, photos, drawings		X
Immunization and dental records	X	
Contacts with the school (emails, mail correspondence, notes from phone calls)		X
Awards/achievements		X

If you find yourself in the position to advocate for a child’s special needs in school, your recordkeeping will help you to advocate effectively on behalf of the child. It is good idea to keep a log of important contacts with the school such as emails, phone calls, visits, mail correspondence, and notes from parent-teacher conferences. Track dates and times of contacts, note the name of the person you spoke to or emailed, and the basic content of the communication. Make a note if a secretary says the person you were looking for will call you back or that she’ll deliver a message. Get the secretary’s name and keep it on file so you can develop a relationship with her or him. Some licensed foster parents find it helpful to have a separate email specifically for foster parent related business.

## Monitoring Attendance and Grades

Because of the obstacles many children in care face, most will benefit from parents who closely monitor their attendance and grades. Attendance and achievement are closely tied. Students in the classroom achieve at higher rates than those who are absent. If your child’s school doesn’t automatically contact parents when children are absent – and you are concerned about your child skipping school or class – ask the person at the attendance desk if he or she would do so in your child’s case. The only way to ensure your child is attending class and on target to succeed is to track attendance and communicate regularly with school staff.

Many schools (especially middle and high schools) post student grades. You may be able to go to the school website and enter a code to access how your child is doing in her or his classes. If this is not an option, close contact with your child’s teacher(s) is also a good way to keep tabs. Most teachers won’t mind regular emails asking for a child’s current status.

It is important for resource families to promptly investigate and address the root cause of any issues regarding grades or attendance. Children with attention or distractibility issues often do their homework and then fail to turn it in. Some children may be struggling with their academics or being bullied but not communicate their challenges to the adults in their life. Due to the variety of issues that may arise for youth in foster care, resource parents may need to seek support and work closely with their caseworker and school staff.

*“I believe it’s important to make yourself known at the school, not by being over bearing, but showing my presence and involvement, so I can establish a good relationship with school staff and advocate for my child’s needs in school. I communicate with all school staff, teachers, principal, nurse (for medications), and front office staff. I like to ask school staff, ‘what do you need from me to help my child succeed?’ ”*

*- Barb, Foster Parent*

# What Is Confidentiality?

As a resource family, you are expected to keep the child and family's personal information confidential. The child's caseworker will be sharing essential educational, behavioral and medical information with you about the child. The standard of sharing that information with others who are working with that child in the school setting is on a "need to know" basis to provide appropriate care and safety for the child and other children.

## **Confidentiality in General – when working with people in the school setting who don't have a direct role in supporting or educating your child:**

- Avoid identifying a child as a foster child whenever possible.
- You should not share any background information, family history, or information about parents with any extended family member, relative, neighbor, friend, or acquaintance who asks.
- You should not allow media photographs or videos or interviews to take place with the child without permission of the caseworker and the birth parent. (This does not include school pictures.)
- You should not share any information concerning the birth parent, including identifying information, treatment participation, or information about OCS involvement.
- When using social media such as Facebook or Instagram, you must not include the names or personal information about children in state's custody or post an identifying photo of a child in care on any internet site.

## **What can you share with school staff and people directly supporting and educating your child?**

- You may share basic information about the child's behavior and medical condition that would help **school staff working directly with your child.**
- Information may be released to **school officials** as necessary to acquire the provision of consultation or services for a child or to enable a caregiver to provide appropriate care for the child and protect the child's safety. These would include teachers, principals, nurses, counselors, coaches, office and other school staff directly working with the child, such as a special education aide or bus attendant.
- Information may be released on a "need to know" basis to provide appropriate care and safety to other **out-of-home care providers** such as childcare or preschool staff, before and after school staff, baby sitters, alternative caregivers and respite providers.
- Information may be released to **consultants and service providers** as necessary to acquire the provision of consultation or services for a child or to enable a caregiver to provide appropriate care for the child and protect the child's safety. These would include service providers such as tutors, psychologists, pediatricians, and occupational therapists.

If resource parents have questions about information that can be requested or shared with the school, they should contact the caseworker, their licensing worker or the Alaska Center for Resource Families for further guidance.

## Part IV: Additional Considerations

---

### Bullying

The Alaska State anti-bullying law includes the terms “harassment,” “intimidation” and “bullying.” Resource families should be aware of the Alaska Statute regarding bullying and should contact the specific school their child is part of to find the exact policy regarding bullying at school and online.

**Alaska Statutes (AS 14.33.200- 14.33.250) Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying** require that (as of July 1, 2007), “each school district shall adopt a policy that prohibits bullying of any student, report any incidents resulting in suspension or expulsion for harassment, intimidation or bullying to the Department of Education and Early Development, and afford protections against reprisals for individuals to report suspected incidents to school officials.”



Resource parents should be aware of the different types of bullying that occur with today’s generation. Online bullying or cyberbullying is willful and repeated harm (i.e., harassing, humiliating, or threatening text or images) inflicted through the Internet, interactive technologies, or mobile phones. It is a term that is becoming all too familiar for many youths. **A survey of more than 6,000 10-18-year-olds from June to August 2021 found that about 50% of children had experienced at least one kind of cyberbullying in their lifetime, according to the report ([internetsafety101.org](http://internetsafety101.org)).** Children and youth are not able to escape from bullying at school with our society being connected online 24/7. Many youths gravitate towards instant messaging, e-mail, web

pages, text messaging, and blogging, which results in their becoming potential targets—all day, every day. Bullies can opt to remain anonymous by creating temporary e-mail accounts and pseudonyms for various programs, although some youth will openly bully others online. See [www.internetsafety101.org](http://www.internetsafety101.org) for examples of types of cyber bullying. For additional information, see **Appendix B: Common School Problems**.

### Indian Education

Indian Education programs throughout the State of Alaska are available to support the efforts of local educational agencies, Indian tribes and organizations, postsecondary institutions, and other entities to meet the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives so that these students can achieve to the same challenging state standards as all students. Most Indian Education programs are housed under the Federal Programs Departments in school districts, because they are receiving funding from Federal programs to support Indian Education.

Each school district in Alaska has its own Indian Education Program. The school districts in most rural areas may not have a formalized Indian Education Program because they may already be providing culturally responsive practices for students. Anchorage, Fairbanks, North Slope, and the Yukon Kuskokwim School Districts have formal programs in place for students. The Lower Kuskokwim School District has a Yup’ik Immersion Program and North Slope has an Inupiaq Education Program. **It is recommended that resource parents contact the local school district to find out what direct or indirect services are available to students.**

Links to Indian Education Websites:

- North Slope Borough School District: <https://www.nsbds.org/en-us/inupiaq-education-c8d869a3>
- Fairbanks North Star Borough School District: <http://www.k12northstar.org/departments/ane>
- Yukon-Koyukuk School District: <https://www.yksd.com/domain/25>
- Lower Kuskokwim School District:  
[https://www.lksd.org/departments/instructional\\_programs/federal\\_programs](https://www.lksd.org/departments/instructional_programs/federal_programs)
- Mat Su Borough School District: <https://www.matsuk12.us/Page/25952>
- Anchorage School District: <http://www.asdk12.org/titlevii/>
- Juneau School District: <https://www.juneauschools.org/en-US/teaching-and-learning-support-a44b8d2e/juneau-indian-studies-program-a02068e9>

## Additional and After School Programs

### Alaska Head Start Programs

Head Start is a national program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children. The program engages parents in their children's learning and helps them in making progress towards their educational, literacy and employment goals. Significant emphasis is placed on the involvement of parents in the administration of local Head Start programs. Children in custody of the Office of Children's Services qualify for enrolment in the Head Start programs. More information on the Head Start programs in Alaska is available online at: <http://akheadstart.org>

### Boys & Girls Clubs Alaska

Boys & Girls Club's mission is to empower and inspire the diverse youth of Alaska to reach their full potential by offering them hope, opportunity and a safe environment. For more information, go to <http://www.bgcalaska.org/>

### Camp Fire

Camp Fire serves more than 5,000 Alaska youth through four programs, including a Rural Program, Before & After School Program, Summer Programs and Community Centers. Resource families can contact Camp Fire directly to find out locations for the programs listed below.

**Rural Program:** The Rural Program through Camp Fire provides swimming and cold-water survival instruction and a full range of day-camp activities to children and teens living in Alaska's rural communities. The program promotes healthy life skills and choices such as boating safety instruction, arts and crafts, cooperative games, hikes, camp-outs, teen activities, service projects and community events. Camp Fire typically serves 27 communities across Alaska.

**Before & After School Program:** Camp Fire operates licensed school-age child-care programs in several communities each day, for students in grades K to 6. Programs are located in elementary schools where the participants are enrolled, creating consistency for the children and easing the burden of transportation for parents. Before and after school care helps working families and keeps kids safe while offering them challenging activities and learning experiences.

**Summer Programs:** Each summer, Camp Fire provides more than 1,400 youth with opportunities to learn new skills, challenge themselves, see new places, get outside their comfort zones while feeling safe and supported, make friends, and create memories that will last a lifetime.

**Community Centers:** The Community Center programs provide a safe and nurturing environment for nearly 100 youth daily from low-income neighborhoods, at no cost to families. Similar to the before and after school programs, community centers keep kids safe while offering them challenging activities and learning experiences, and focus on establishing caring, mentoring, adult relationships, nurturing their social and emotional growth, and promoting healthy life choices.

## School Resource Officer (SRO)

Most communities in Alaska assign police officers or other law enforcement staff to the middle and high schools in the school districts, with services also available to the local elementary schools as needed. School Resource Officers (SROs) provide educational programs, act as a liaison between the school and the department, and provide student mentoring and assistance. The SRO also handles any reports of crime or public safety related matters that occur on their school's campus, and, in some cases, other schools in the community. The role and services offered by the SRO may vary slightly throughout the State of Alaska, although many of them focus on safety programs, truancy, alcohol and drug prevention, and crime prevention. Many rural communities also have a law enforcement officer or VPSO assigned to help provide assistance in the schools with children. Resource families can contact their local law enforcement agency to find out more.

## Tutoring Options

Throughout Alaska, students can get live homework help free! Contact your local school district to get detailed information about the free tutoring program at [tutor.com](http://tutor.com). The program is available through any computer (PC or Mac) or mobile device with an internet connection. It is offered seven days a week from 1 p.m. to midnight Alaska Time.

Guidance Counselors assigned to each student can also refer students to individualized tutoring options, some of which may charge a fee for services. Some communities also have Indian Education Programs that provide culturally responsive education and recognize, respect and use student identities and backgrounds to create optimal learning.



**“Every kid is one caring adult away from being a success story.”**

*– Josh Shipp, Former Foster Youth, Author & Motivational Speaker*

This handbook was created to help provide resources families with information regarding the processes, needs, considerations, and resources related to a foster youth's education. Some resource families may be helping a child enter the school system for the first time; others may have raised several children who have successfully gone through the public school system. Regardless of a resource family's experience with the school system, there will likely be some new considerations in helping a foster youth along the journey to a successful educational outcome.

***How will you make a positive impact on the life of your child's educational path?***

## Part V: Appendices

### Appendix A: Who Has the Final Authority?

The following chart answers this question for many situations. If you find a situation not addressed in the chart, consult your caseworker. **BP = Birth Parent, FP = Foster Parent, OCS = Office of Children's Services**

Area of concern	Who	More on this
<i>Enrolling the child in school</i>	FP	Get needed paper work from OCS.
<i>Producing the documentation needed to enroll children in school</i>	FP	Get documents from OCS. Keep available for future use.
<i>Purchasing school supplies</i>	FP	Use monthly stipend. If extraordinary needs, contact the Special Needs Commodities Unit.
<i>Seeing that high school students are on track to graduate</i>	FP	See <b>P. 12</b> , <i>What are the requirements to graduate from high school?</i>
<i>Permission for field trips, non-contact sports and extracurricular activities</i>	FP	FP signs but approval needed for activities that take a child away from home for more than 72 hours.
<i>Permission for contact sports, high risk activities, and trips over 72 hours away from home</i>	OCS	FP must secure approval from OCS and possibly BP if it interferes with family contact.
<i>Attending teacher conferences and open houses</i>	FP	FP is encouraged to invite BP if appropriate.
<i>Transportation to school</i>	FP	FP Provides or Most schools have busses. If out of district and assistance is needed, Foster Care Liaison or OCS may help.
<i>Transportation to extracurricular activities</i>	FP	FP can arrange for child. Most programs have busses.
<i>Involving birth parents in school activities</i>	FP	See <b>P. 19</b> , <i>Teacher Conferences</i> and <b>P. 23</b> , <i>Communicating and involving Birth Parents in the Child's Education</i> .
<i>Signing report cards</i>	FP	
<i>Providing prescription medication to school nurse to be taken by student at school</i>	FP	See <b>P. 17</b> , <i>Medication management during the school day</i> .
<i>Keeping records pertaining to school</i>	FP/OCS	Save all school records and make them available to OCS. Records should go with the youth if he leaves your home.
<i>Monitoring grades and attendance</i>	FP	See <b>P. 25</b> , <i>Monitoring Attendance and Grades</i> and <b>P. 20</b> , <i>Homework</i> .
<i>Withdrawing a child from school or moving to a different school</i>	OCS	Need Best Interest Meeting with School, GAL and OCS. OCS makes final decision.
<i>Child's personal appearance</i>	Depends	FPs need BP permission to make significant changes to the child's personal appearance, such as cutting off long hair, piercings and tattoos. Basic personal appearance upkeep does not require BP permission.
<i>Sex education</i>	FP	FP can give consent. FP is encouraged to check with OCS and BP on this.
<i>Special Education</i>	FP/OCS	OCS will make initial decision, but once a child is on an IEP, FP becomes the authority.
<i>Signing off on IEPs</i>	FP	See <b>P. 16</b> , <i>Special Education</i> .
<i>What school a child attends</i>	OCS	Efforts to keep child in home school. If move is needed, need Best Interest Meeting with school, GAL and OCS. OCS makes final decision.

# Appendix B: Common School Problems

## **1. What if there is conflict between my child and her/his teacher(s)?**

Establishing a relationship with your child's teacher(s) can help to prevent conflict between your child and her or his teacher(s). It is inevitable that children will come across some conflict or issues with a teacher over the course of their years in school. The website [www.schoolfamily.com](http://www.schoolfamily.com) has many tips on working through conflict between students and teachers, including the following:

- Communicate with the child's teacher(s) about what the foster parent can do to help problem solve.
- Help the child find ways and words to approach their teacher(s) to problem solve.
- Continue to demonstrate respect for the teacher(s).
- Role-play with the child to practice interactions they may have with their teacher(s).
- Advocate and request a meeting with the teacher(s) and principle if necessary.

## **2. What if my child needs tutoring services?**

The first place to start when children need tutoring services is to discuss options that the child's teacher(s) recommend based on the individual child's needs. Resource families can contact their local school district or Indian Education program, to find tutoring services.

## **3. What if my child is being bullied?**

The first place to start is by communicating with the school staff, including teacher(s), security, and the principle. Foster youth are at risk for being bullied (including online bullying) because they often change schools, and may appear "different" from their peers or exhibit academic or behavioral problems. By law, every school district should have a policy that prohibits harassment, intimidation or bullying of any student and have a policy for reporting and dealing with reported harassment or bullying. (Reference Alaska Statutes 14.33.200-14.33.250)

## **4. What if my child is bullying others?**

Resource parents will need to learn the facts about their child's behaviors, discuss them with the child and school, and come up with a plan to address the behaviors and support the child in practicing safe and positive behaviors with their peers. Children who have experienced trauma and learned aggressive behaviors early on, may struggle more with changing verbally and physically aggressive behaviors. Contact the child's teacher and principle to problem solve together. Let the teacher know that you are willing to work with the school to help stop your child from bullying, or visit [www.stompoutbullying.org](http://www.stompoutbullying.org). Resource parents can also contact ACRF for their most recent trainings on bullying and cyberbullying.

## **5. What if my child is skipping school?**

Foster parents should discuss and look into the reasons a child does not want to attend school. Examples of why a child is skipping school may include: learning challenges, bullying, conflicts with staff or other students, etc. Contact your caseworker, members of the team or ACRF to get guidance on addressing the needs of your specific child. In many areas, there are School Resource Officers (SROs) available who may be able to help with truancy issues. Contact your local SRO. Resource parents can support and advocate for a child's needs when issues arise that result in a child skipping classes. It may also be helpful to share with the child, the possible academic consequences of skipping school.

## **6. What if my child refuses to go to school?**

Foster parents should consider the reasons a child does not want to attend school. Contact your child's teacher(s), caseworker, other members of the team, or ACRF for guidance on addressing the needs of your specific child. In many areas, there are School Resource Officers (SROs) available that may be able to help with truancy issues. Contact your local SRO. The team may also need to discuss the most appropriate school setting and possibly look into other school options.

## **7. What if my youth wants to drop out of school?**

Again, consider the reasons a child does not want to attend school. Contact your child's teacher(s), caseworker, other members of the team, birth parents (if parental rights are still intact) or ACRF for guidance on addressing the needs of your specific child. The team may need to discuss the most appropriate school setting and look into other school options. The team will need to create a plan to address the youth's educational needs and meet them in some way.

# Appendix C: Important Legislation Concerning Foster Care and Education

Educational rights of children and youth in foster care are impacted by state OCS policies and procedures but there are also important federal laws that guide those rights. As an educational champion for your child, you should be aware of some federal legislation that guides the rights of children and youth in care. This section briefly summarizes some of those laws.

**Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** – In 2015, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA)* was reauthorized as the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* with some major provisions that impact students in foster care. For the first time, the ESSA contains key protections for student in foster care to promote school stability and success, and requires collaboration between schools and child protection agencies. Amongst the highlights of the reauthorization act is the removal of the “Awaiting Foster Care Placement” language from the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Other requirements on child welfare agencies include ensuring foster children remain in their school of origin; providing school transportation when necessary; designation of local points of contact in both child welfare and education agencies; immediate enrollment in school and transfer of records when a school change is necessary; removal of barriers to enrollment in charter schools for children in foster care; and annual reporting of student achievement and graduation rates. As a result of this legislation, school districts and OCS have set up systems to work closer together to maintain youth in their school or origins by providing transportation services, the establishment of “best interests” meetings when school changes are being considered, and in many schools, establishing foster care liaisons who serve as the connection between school districts and child protective services.

**Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008** – *The Fostering Connections Act* seeks to promote education stability for foster children and requires child welfare agencies to include “a plan for ensuring the educational stability of the child while in foster care” as part of every child’s case plan. As part of this plan, the agency must include assurances that the system will strive to keep kids in the school they were in or close to the school they were in when they came into placement. It also requires that if remaining in such school is not in the best interest of the child, the case plan must include assurances by the child welfare agency and the local educational agencies that children will be promptly enrolled in the new school and that the agency will provide all of the educational records of the child to the school. Additionally, *Fostering Connections* supports the well-being of children in out-of-home care by requiring states to provide assurances in their Title IV-E state plans that every school-age child in foster care, and every school-age child receiving an adoption assistance or subsidized guardianship payment, is a full-time elementary or secondary school student or has completed secondary school.

**Uninterrupted Scholars Act (USA)/ FERPA** – The *Uninterrupted Scholars Act*, signed into law and effective on January 14, 2013, revises the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* to make it easier for child welfare agencies throughout the United States to access the education records of children who are their charges in order to meet the educational needs of the students. The USA specifically authorizes schools and school districts to release a student’s education records to an agency caseworker or other representative of a state or local child welfare agency, or tribal organization that has the right to access the child’s case plan when the agency or organization is legally responsible for the care and protection of the student.

**The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act** – The *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* requires all school districts to provide students who are homeless with the same educational rights as other students. Students who are homeless have the right to stay in their school for the duration of the school year and the district is obligated to provide transportation assistance while the family is homeless. This program varies around the state and is variously called something similar to *Child in Transition* or *Families in Transition*. In the past, children placed in foster care on an emergency basis were eligible for this program for transportation assistance to help remain in their school or origin, but as of December 10, 2016, will no longer be eligible.

**Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (H.R. 4980; 113th Congress)** – This bill was passed in 2014 and will be implemented in the upcoming years in Alaska. The most important part of this bill related to education is that the bill requires states to: (1) develop a reasonable and prudent parent standard for a child's participation in age or developmentally appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities; and (2) apply this standard to any foster family home or child care institution receiving funds under title IV part E. This means that as part of a child or youth's daily living, *they should have regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age or developmentally-appropriate activities including school and after school activities.*

**The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act** offers assistance to help current and former foster care youths achieve self-sufficiency. Activities and programs include, but are not limited to, help with education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support and assured connections to caring adults for older youth in foster care. *The Educational and Training Vouchers Program (ETV) for Youths Aging out of Foster Care* was added to the Chafee Act in 2002. ETV provides resources specifically to meet the education and training needs of youth aging out of foster care. The funds are going to assist foster youth and eligible former foster youth in attending post-secondary education and training programs.

**The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** is a major act that affects many of our children and youth in care who require special education services. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities. A summary of this law is given in **Appendix D**, but resource parents should know IDEA is the law that governs intervention and special education. It addresses the educational needs of children with disabilities from age 3 to age 18 to 21 in cases that involve 14 specified categories of disability, and outlines the procedures for the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each student who is found to be eligible under both the federal and state eligibility/disability standards. The IEP is the cornerstone of a student's educational program. It specifies the services to be provided and how often, describes the student's present levels of performance and how the student's disabilities affect academic performance, and specifies accommodations and modifications to be provided for the student.

In addition, children with disabilities who qualify for special education are also automatically protected by Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* and under the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. Section 504 also provides certain protections to students who may not qualify under one of IDEA's specific categories of disabilities. In general, Section 504 prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in all programs and activities conducted by recipients of federal financial assistance.

IDEA also defines who is a parent and can be involved in the IEP and decision-making process. Parent means amongst others, a biological or adoptive parent of a child; A foster parent, unless State law, regulations, or contractual obligations with a State or local entity prohibit a foster parent from acting as a parent; or a guardian generally authorized to act as the child's parent, or authorized to make educational decisions for the child. However, in Alaska, foster parents can act as “parents” in special education under Alaska Statute **4 AAC 52.600. Qualifications and duties of surrogate parent**

(d) *The appointment of a surrogate parent is not required for a child who lives with a foster parent, if the foster parent affirms in writing that the foster parent is able and willing to serve as the parent of the child for purposes of special education, and that the foster parent expects the child to continue living with the foster parent on an ongoing basis.*

# Appendix D: Special Education Law

Foster parents should talk to their OCS worker and the school district as soon as special education becomes a consideration. The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development’s “Special Education Handbook” can be an invaluable tool for parents of children receiving special education services. Find it at their website.

**About the laws:** There are two main laws pertaining to special education, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), and Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act*. IDEA opens more doors and provides more services than 504 for those children who qualify, and children receiving IDEA services are automatically covered under 504. However, many children who do not qualify for services under IDEA, do qualify under the broader guidelines of 504, and 504 law is an excellent path to services for many of those children. What follows here pertains to IDEA. For more on 504 law, refer to the website [WrightsLaw.com](http://WrightsLaw.com) for a comprehensive look at this resource.

**Children under five:** You do *not* have to wait until your child is school age to receive free special education services for her or him. IDEA covers eligible children from birth to age 21 (or high school graduation, whichever comes first). Early Intervention (birth to age 3) and Early Childhood Special Education (age 3 to 5) apply to preschool age children. If you suspect that a learning disability or any condition might hold your child back in school, you can have the child evaluated at no cost to you. Such conditions could include emotional, behavioral, physical or intellectual limitations. Request an evaluation in writing to the director of special education in your school district (and to your child’s teacher if your child is attending school). Include your child’s age and any information about why you suspect a disability. NOTE: Early Intervention programs are referred to as “Infant Learning Program” in many parts of Alaska.

**Evaluations:** Every child in this country is entitled to a “free and appropriate public education” – often referred to as FAPE. The word, “free,” means that you do *not* have to pay for appropriate services or evaluations. Contact your OCS worker and school district to proceed.

**Eligibility for special education:** The following disability categories have been identified as qualification for IDEA eligibility: 1) Cognitive Impairment; 2) Specific Learning Disability; 3) Emotional Disturbance; 4) Deafness; 5) Hearing Impairment; 6) Deaf and Blind; 7) Orthopedic Impairment; 8) Visual Impairment; 9) Speech or Language Impairment; 10) Other Health Impaired; 11) Multiple Disabilities; 12) Early Childhood Developmental Delay; 13) Autism; 14) Traumatic Brain Injury. In Alaska, “**Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder,**” has been added under the list of “other health impairments” that may affect a child’s educational performance. In addition, it says that any of these health conditions listed under “Other Health Impaired” must be diagnosed by a licensed physician or a licensed nurse practitioner.

Please note that the presence of one of these disabilities doesn’t necessarily qualify a child for IDEA eligibility; the disability must sufficiently impair the child’s academic progress. For more detailed information on these categories, see the **Alaska Special Education Handbook** on the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development under Student Learning/Special Education.

**The IEP:** A primary component of IDEA is the Individualized Education Program (sometimes called Individualized Education Plan) or IEP. The IEP is the system for determining how the school will meet your child’s educational needs. A meeting is set up to include the parents (and any appropriate experts or advocates – you may invite anyone you choose to attend the meeting with you), school representatives, and, when appropriate, the student herself or himself. This team works together to determine a program that is in the best interest of the child. The school cannot set up such a meeting without the parents’ involvement. And the parents can call for a new meeting any time they feel that the old plan is not meeting their child’s needs. A representative from the school will write up the results of the meeting, which will include information on the student’s present level of educational performance; measurable annual goals, special education, aids and

services to be provided; and the amount, duration and frequency of these services. The school will provide the parents with a copy of this write-up.

**Transition Plan:** Under IDEA, transition services must be included in the IEP that will be in effect when a student reaches age 16. However, transition services can begin when the student is younger if the IEP team agrees that it is appropriate.

Transition services are decided at the IEP meeting. Besides the usual IEP team members, the school district should invite representatives from other public agencies who are likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services. Your child, whose preferences and participation are key transition factors, will also be invited. Because transition services are decided by the IEP team, all of your IEP rights apply.

In considering the activities to include in a transition plan, it is helpful for parents to first discuss their child's desires for vocational, educational, independent living, and other goals for the future.

**Examples of Transition Services:**

- |                         |                                      |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| -Instruction            | -Job training                        |
| -Community experiences  | -Instruction in daily living skills  |
| -Employment development | -Post-school adult living objectives |
| -Vocational evaluation  |                                      |

If an agency other than the school district does not provide the agreed-upon services, the IEP team must meet to develop other approaches to achieve the transition objectives.

**“Notice of Procedural Safeguards: Parental Rights for Special Education”:** Ask for this document or download it from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development website. It explains, in plain language, how to navigate the tangled path to obtaining benefits for your child with special needs.

**Other Resources to Know for Parents To Help Understand Special Education Services**

- **Stone Soup Group Parent Information and Training Center Stone Soup Group**  
[info@stonesoupgroup.org](mailto:info@stonesoupgroup.org) (907) 561-3701 <https://www.stonesoupgroup.org/> Online intake form, Parent Navigators Available
- **Mat Su LINKS Community Parent Resource Center** (907) 373-3632  
<https://linksprc.org/home/cprc/> Resource Listing, Individual and Group Training Sessions
- **Alaska Special Education Parent’s Guide**  
<https://education.alaska.gov/tls/SPED/docs/ParentResourceGuide%20ADA.pdf>
- **Alaska Family (Disability) Directory** <https://www.asdk12.org/Page/1368> A resource directory of events and resources for families of children with disabilities throughout the state and home to AK Connection. Alaska’s Statewide disability newsletter.

# Appendix E: Becoming an Educational Champion for Your Child

Youth who enter foster care may have to move to a new school and then often experience more moves throughout the time they are in care. Youth in foster care need caregivers who can be their ***Educational Champions***. Resource families can have a huge impact on the educational outcomes for youth by clearly establishing their ***beliefs, expectations and aspirations*** about education with youth they work with.

## **TIPS FOR EDUCATIONAL CHAMPIONS WHO ARE CAREGIVERS**

- Understand that what you think and say about education can have a big impact on how the child feels about education.
- Know that your belief in the child’s ability to succeed in school, and your high expectations and aspirations for the child, can help build up the child’s self-confidence and improve his/her performance in school.
- When you are talking to the child about school, be aware that your words may impact how the child thinks and feels about education, and about his/her own ability to do well in school.
- Remember: if you believe that you have the ability to help the child in school, then you will help the child in school.
- You have the power to motivate the child and help the child learn. Don’t be afraid to ask questions or seek help so that you can become a confident and assertive educational champion.
- Show and tell the child that you believe education is important.
- Let the child hear you express excitement about school and interest in learning new things.
- Talk to the child about the ties between school and the future – like getting to go to college, having good job options, and being financially secure.
- Keep a folder or scrapbook of the child’s best schoolwork. This will show the child that you value his/her hard work and achievements.
- If your schedule allows it, think about signing up to volunteer in the child’s classroom or at a school event.
- Attend school meetings and events, such as: back to school nights, teacher conferences, other school events in which the child is participating (science fair, spelling bee, etc.).

**For more information *Being an Educational Champion for Your Foster Child*, please visit: <https://foster-ed.org> or take a look at the *Arizona FosterEd Tool Kit* at <https://foster-ed.org/fostered-arizona-2020-arizona-foster-care-education-toolkit/>**

# Appendix F: 10 Ways to Get Ready for Kindergarten

**1.** Create a routine over the summer. Give your child a bedtime (8 p.m. is great!) and stick to it.

**2.** Have your child practice writing her first name, or practice uppercase letters.

**3.** Use counting in your daily activities. Count how many steps it takes to get to the mailbox or the park. Count out fruit, napkins, cups, etc.

**4.** Take your child with you to the grocery store, post office and library. Talk with them about what they're seeing, hearing and touching. It's all part of learning.

**5.** Visit your local library and help your child get a free library card. Then use the card to visit the library each week and borrow a book. Talk about the books you read. Ask questions like:

- What was your favorite part of the story?
- Which part did you like the least?
- Half way through the story, ask your child what they think will happen at the end and what makes them think that?

**6.** Let your child practice their independence by allowing them to make certain choices (“Do you want an apple or a banana?”) and by encouraging them to try new things and to problem solve.

**7.** Set a limit to the amount of TV your child watches (1-2 hours should be the maximum). When possible, watch TV with them and talk about what you see.

**8.** Prepare a “study spot” for your child and supply it with crayons, paper, scissors and other kindergarten “tools.” Set aside time each day for your child to draw there. Once school starts, this can become the time and place where your child does their homework.

**9.** Help your child know or be able to do the following before they enter kindergarten:

- Know their name, address and telephone number.
- Use the bathroom on their own and button and zip their clothes.

- Share and play with other children. This will help them adjust to their new kindergarten classroom.

**10.** Read, Read, Read! (In English or any native language.)



Photo by LRK Studios, LLC.

For more helpful tips, visit [www.asdk12.org](http://www.asdk12.org)

# Alaska Center for Resource Families

[www.acrf.org](http://www.acrf.org)

## Regional Offices

---

### *Fairbanks*

815 Second Avenue, Suite 202  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701  
**1-907-479-7307 or**  
**1-800-478-7307**  
FAX: 1-907-479-9666  
[acrf@nwresource.org](mailto:acrf@nwresource.org)

### *Anchorage*

840 K Street, Suite 101  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
**1-907-279-1799 or**  
**1-866-478-7307**  
FAX: 1-907-279-1520  
[acrfsc@nwresource.org](mailto:acrfsc@nwresource.org)

### *Mat Su*

**Physical:** 5050 Dunbar Street, Suite A2  
**Mailing:** PO Box 876844, Wasilla, Alaska 99687  
**1-907-376-4678**  
FAX: 1-907-376-4638  
[acrfsc@nwresource.org](mailto:acrfsc@nwresource.org)