

FACT SHEET

Caregiver's Guide

On PreK-12 Education and Related Services

INTRODUCTION

This fact sheet is designed to provide caregivers with the information necessary to support the educational process for children in foster care in Florida. Effective parenting by caregivers requires a loving commitment to the child and their safety and well-being. Well-being is supported by the caregiver's attention to their child's education. Children are influenced by many things, including the beliefs, words, and actions of parents, caregivers, and case managers. When these adults demonstrate that education is a priority, children are more likely to value it as well.

PARENTS/CAREGIVERS ARE THE FIRST TEACHERS

- ✓ Reading ability is strongly related to academic and vocational success. Helping a child with language development, as early as possible, can improve the child's opportunity for success in school.
- ✓ Sharing stories, songs, and books with your child helps develop language and literacy skills and sends a strong message that learning to read and write is important.

SCHOOL READINESS

"School readiness" refers to the development of certain basic skills that a child needs in order to learn. For additional information on this subject, please visit the Ounce of Prevention website at <http://www.ounce.org> and the Early Learning Coalition websites at <http://www.elcofnwflorida.org> and <http://www.elcbigbend.org>.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND ATTENDANCE

- ✓ **Immediate Enrollment:** Florida law requires that each child in care be immediately enrolled in school. A standard registration form has been developed to facilitate enrollment. You may obtain this form from your child's case manager.
- ✓ **On Time, Every Day:** All children must attend school **regularly**. It is very important to make getting your child to school on time a priority.
- ✓ **School Policies:** Each school district develops a policy for school attendance. Ask for a copy of the attendance policy from your child's school and follow the established policies and procedures.
- ✓ **Excused Absences:** At the beginning of the school year, or when your child is initially enrolled at the school, request a school calendar. Alert the school and your child's teachers about anything significant going on in their life that may affect school performance and/or result in absences.

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

- ✓ Involvement with a child's school by parents, foster parents, and caregivers makes a positive difference in the educational outcomes of children in care.
- ✓ Encouraging your child to participate in school-related events and activities, and providing transportation, is one way that a caregiver can make a difference. Going a step further and getting personally involved in school activities sends a powerful positive message to your child.

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS/EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- ✓ Consider enrolling your child in afterschool programs. They typically provide fun, safe, and constructive environments lead by caring professionals that successfully bridge the time between the regular school day and home.
- ✓ Afterschool and extracurricular activities can enhance and reinforce academic lessons learned while also providing social and emotional growth opportunities.

For more information about the education of students in Foster Care, contact:



Bureau of Exceptional Education & Student Services
325 W. Gaines Street, Suite 644
Phone: (850) 245-7851
<http://www.fldoe.org/ese/StudentSupport.asp>



GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Graduation requirements vary from year to year, depending on the year in which a student enters ninth grade. Ask the school counselor or view *Graduation Requirements* at <http://www.fldoe.org/BII/StudentPro/grad-require.asp> for current information regarding graduation requirements.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

- ✓ Florida has a variety of standardized assessments including the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), Florida Writes, and end-of-course assessments (EOC). More information about the FCAT can be found at <http://fcats.fldoe.org/default.asp> and <http://fcats.fldoe.org/fcat2/>, and details on EOC can be found at <http://fcats.fldoe.org/eoc/>.
- ✓ Many schools provide support and information to students/parents regarding reducing test-taking anxiety. Ask a teacher or school counselor for specific test-taking tips for your child.
- ✓ There are two national standardized tests that your child should consider taking. The Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) determines eligibility for the National Merit Scholarship Program and helps students prepare for the SAT. The PLAN test (ACT's test for 10th graders) is also a valuable tool for students to discover their strengths and weaknesses so they can develop a plan for success when they take the SAT or ACT. **Any child who is eligible for free or reduced lunch may receive a voucher/fee waiver for the SAT and ACT.**

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OPTIONS AND SPECIAL PROGRAMS

- ✓ **Dual enrollment** is an acceleration program that allows high school students to earn credit toward high school completion and a career certificate, associate, or baccalaureate degree at a Florida public postsecondary institution at the same time.
- ✓ Most high schools offer **Advanced Placement (AP)** classes that allow students to take college-level courses at the high school.
- ✓ The **International Baccalaureate (IB) program** is a pre-university program for highly motivated secondary school students to earn college credit. A diploma that allows graduates access to universities worldwide is awarded at the completion of the IB program.
- ✓ Florida now provides e-learning, through the **Virtual School**, either full-time or on a course-by-course basis, to fill educational gaps or serve a student's unique needs.
- ✓ **General Educational Development (GED)** tests are a group of five subject tests that, when passed, certify the taker has American high school-level academic skills. A GED certificate or credential is the equivalent of earning a high school diploma.
- ✓ **Performance-Based Exit Option** is an alternative route to graduation for eligible students who may not graduate with their cohort group because of credit deficiency, low grade point average, or being overage for their grade.
- ✓ **Special diplomas** are available to students with disabilities who are not able to meet the requirements for a standard diploma.

SCHOOL CONFERENCING

- ✓ **Schools welcome the opportunity** to meet with parents (and guardians, such as foster parents and relative caregivers). Regular communications with teachers and school staff can facilitate higher student achievement.
- ✓ **Schedule a conference** through the school's counselor upon receiving a child into your care or if problems arise at a later time. Counselors can help resolve school-related issues.
- ✓ **Poor academic performance and/or behavior** may be reasons to request a conference or additional support from the school. Florida public schools use a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) process to meet student needs that involves Problem-Solving/Response to Intervention (PS/RtI). For more information on PS/RtI visit <http://www.florida-rti.org>.

WHEN A CHILD HAS, OR IS SUSPECTED OF HAVING, A DISABILITY THAT AFFECTS LEARNING OR ACCESS TO LEARNING

- ✓ A *disability* may interfere with learning or access to learning. A child's disability may result in emotional, behavioral, learning/processing, cognitive, health, or developmental issues.
- ✓ If you suspect your child may have a disability, ask the school for help. Parents (caregivers) or teachers may request referrals for assessments. For children receiving Pre-K services, ask the Early Learning Coalition to assist. Always keep your child's case manager informed.