Ready to Succeed in the Classroom

Teachers' Ideas About How *Schools* Can Help Improve Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth in the Foster Care System

The issue of improving educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care is receiving some long-overdue attention, but the voices of classroom teachers have not been prominent in the discussions so far. To help fill this gap, a team from the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning and funded by the Stuart Foundation convened six discussion groups in late 2009 to explore how teachers and foster children and youth interact in the classroom. The discussion group sessions were held in three California counties (Fresno, Orange, and Sacramento).

This document is one of three highlighting "wish lists" from teachers who participated in these discussions. The wish lists capture teachers' ideas about what would help them serve children and youth in foster care better, at three different levels: within their schools, at the district or administrative level, and outside the school system (within the broader community). Their ideas for *individual schools* are summarized below, followed by discussion questions for school staff, teachers and principals that are based on the teachers' wish lists. We encourage you to use these as a starting point for discussions at your school, and to add to this list.

A t the top of the "within schools" list was a better, faster system for communicating to teachers that they had a child or youth in foster care in the classroom. Late, incomplete, or non-existent paperwork was a common refrain. Teachers also wanted fuller information on these students — not just their academic performance, but information that could better serve these children, including attendance, interests, physical health, mental health, and previous successes.

Teachers also wished for more streamlined procedures within their schools — such as one counselor working with all children and youth in foster care and thus familiar with their situations, or a team approach in which all of a student's teachers have opportunities to compare approaches and strategize about how to help the child achieve success in school. Teachers wished for more support as they worked with children and youth in foster care — professional development (on behaviors, how to create structure in the classroom, and community resources available to them), mentors, more planning time, and contact lists or flow charts for accessing support within schools and districts. Several teachers mentioned that certain teachers within their schools were particularly effective with children and youth in foster care, and that it would be helpful to be able to create an individualized schedule for these children, with hand-picked teachers throughout their school day.

On behalf of their students, teachers called for more counseling and social work resources on site, resources for children not performing at grade level, more

frequent and accessible life/social skills training for students who had not received much of this at home, more physical activity and recreational options, access to supplies for those who needed them, and extra help and tutoring for writing skills. They also thought youth in the foster care system (along with many others) would benefit from conflict management sessions and some type of peer support — either one-on-one, and/or in small groups.

Discussion Questions for Schools:
What Can *Schools* Do to Help Teachers Help Students in Foster Care?

- What is the best way for us to let teachers know a foster child is in the classroom?
- What can we do to move paperwork (IEPs, assessments, transcripts, etc.) faster from school to school?
- How can we learn more about non-academic information for a fuller picture of a student in the foster care system (e.g., a student's interests, health, talents)?
- Is it possible to assign one counselor within the school to all attending students in the foster care system?
- What are opportunities for offering more professional development geared to improving educational outcomes for foster children and youth (e.g., regarding behaviors, discipline, structure in the classroom, community resources)?
- What will it take to build in more planning time for teachers with students in the foster care system?
- Who can help us create school- (and district-) specific flow charts and contact information that make it easier to find and access support for students in foster care?
- Can we assign students to teachers known to succeed with foster students?

- How can we bring more counseling and social work resources for these students on-site?
- What resources are available to provide more help (e.g., mentoring, tutoring, assessments) for students in foster care who are not performing at grade level?
- Can our school offer more ongoing life skills classes (especially conflict management/resolution) to support students in the foster care system, especially in high school?
- How can we create more opportunities for physical activity and recreation for students in foster care?
- How can we procure and distribute school and recreational supplies to students in foster care who need these items and are not receiving them from their foster parents or group homes?
- In what ways can we boost writing skills for these students? In-class opportunities? Intensive tutoring? Something else?
- Can we find ways to connect foster students to their peers through peer-to-peer support and functions?

Ready to Succeed in the Classroom

Teachers' Ideas About How *Schools* Can Help Improve
Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth in the Foster Care System