

Education Advocacy, Part 1

A student's foster care experience should not impact a child's educational success. CASA's role is to ensure that appointed children receive the same supports and services, requiring individualized attention to the child's needs, standing in the gap to understand the child's needs and ensure they're met by information gathering.

General Education Advocacy Practices:

Consult with the student regarding whether there are any issues in school performance, relationships, or other education needs or requests;

Consider whether the student is in the most appropriate school setting and whether an alternative school setting, charter school, magnet program, virtual educational program, state school, or specialized program might be in the best interests of the student;

Review any previous assessments. Note the student's learning styles, preferences, and areas of need. Is there enough information?

Is the information being utilized? What information is missing?

Consider whether the student has satisfactory grades and gradelevel academic skills. Ensure the student has assistance with homework and receives tutoring services from local school and/or DFCS. If there are current academic supports in place, are they effective? What might be missing?

Contact the student's teachers and counselors to monitor educational progress and attendance;

Advocate for participation in extracurricular, sports, and supplemental activities and ensure the unique student has the requisite supplies, motivation, interest, and transportation to participate. These experiences offer resilience-building and connections;

Advocate for fewer school placements and identify any logistical barriers to the current or future education placement (timing of enrollment, distance to placement, length of transportation, etc.);

Request that the student remain in his or her school of origin whenever it is in the best interests of the student to do so;

Verify the student's attendance and number of absences for the court report. Account for missed instruction because of the structure of the foster care experience (court appearances/ evaluations/ familial time) or barriers noted in the previous bullet; and

Determine whether the student exhibits any behavioral issues in school and whether that has led to in or out of school suspensions/loss of academic instruction.

Age-Specific Strategies:

Recommend that a pre-school aged student is enrolled in a qualityrated, early childhood education program;

Ensure that a high-school aged student is aware of their postsecondary options and has assistance in completing applications for acceptance, financial aid, and preparation for entrance exams, etc.; and

For students in high school, who are missing graduation credits, investigate online credit recovery programs or other supports for this important diploma.

Behavioral Supports:

Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) is an approach schools can use to promote school safety and a positive school culture for the entire school community. When PBIS is implemented well, schools teach students about behavior expectations and strategies;

The focus of PBIS is prevention, not punishment;

When a student experiences loss of academic instruction via the use of in-school or out-of-school suspension, contact school and other parties and providers to secure behavioral/mental health supports and continued academic instruction;

When a student code of conduct violation allegedly occurs, review the Student Handbook and incident report documentation to ensure both that the school has implemented the progressive discipline plan and the student understands the violation and consequences; and

Disciplinary Tribunals are required to be held when the principal recommends expulsion or suspension of greater than 10 days. Ensure the student is represented by an attorney in a disciplinary tribunal.