



## LEGAL CENTER FOR FOSTER CARE & EDUCATION

### Who We Are

The Legal Center for Foster Care and Education (Legal Center) provides national technical assistance and expertise at the federal, state, and local level and to a wide range of advocates and stakeholders. We promote promising practices and reforms that support the education of children in foster care.

#### **The Legal Center is a strong voice at the national level for the education of children in foster care.**

The Legal Center has provided support to administration leaders at the Departments of Health and Human Services and Education, and formal comments to proposed regulatory changes or administration guidance that impact children in care. The Legal Center is a long standing member and leader in the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, a group of 15 national organizations dedicated to improving education outcomes for children in foster care. Furthermore, the Legal Center provides support for a broad network of advocates and policymakers from around the country focused on improving education outcomes for children in out-of-home care and created and operates an active foster care and education listserv of over 750 members from around the country.

#### **The Legal Center is the central clearinghouse of information on foster care and education.**

The Legal Center houses and maintains a national foster care and education website ([www.ambar.org/LegalCenter](http://www.ambar.org/LegalCenter)), which serves as an up-to-date resource for materials, events, and information. The website contains a database of materials and examples from across the country,

searchable by state or topic, as well as publications authored by the Legal Center on relevant topics.

**The Legal Center provides training and technical assistance across the country.** Since the Legal Center was founded in 2007, we have provided training and technical assistance to virtually every state to help them implement policies supporting the educational success of youth in foster care.

### Project History

In 2007, in collaboration with Casey Family Programs, three nationally respected advocates for the educational rights of children in foster care - the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, the Education Law Center and the Juvenile Law Center - formed the Legal Center for Foster Care and Education to provide technical assistance and information on legal and policy matters affecting the education of children in the foster care system and to advocate for reforms that will improve educational outcomes for these children. In recent years, the Legal Center has received additional support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Stuart Foundation.

### Technical Assistance to States

Our state technical assistance is wide-ranging, but often includes:

#### **IDENTIFYING KEY GOALS AND**

**PRIORITIES:** One of the Legal Center's first initiatives was to develop a framework for reform for advocates struggling to eliminate barriers to the educational success of children in care. Using the

**Blueprint for Change: Education Success for Children in Foster Care**, Legal Center staff guide states through a process of identifying their strengths and areas needing improvement, and prioritizing their policy and practice goals.

### **CONVENING NEEDED**

**STAKEHOLDERS:** The Legal Center works with states to identify the key players needed at the table, including representatives of child welfare, education, and the court, assists with strategies to bring (and keep) those groups together to address foster care and education issues, and facilitates cross-agency discussions on critical areas for reform.

### **ADDRESSING DATA COLLECTION AND INFORMATION-SHARING ISSUES**

**ISSUES:** The Legal Center has expertise in data collection and information-sharing, and can assist jurisdictions in identifying what information needs to be shared across systems and the mechanisms that must be in place to allow for information-sharing to occur, including addressing federal and state confidentiality laws. The Legal Center has developed a number of publications on this issue, including the comprehensive manual and accompanying tools found in **Solving the Data Puzzle: A How-To Guide on Collecting and Sharing Information to Improve Educational Outcomes for Children in Out-of-Home Care**.

### **PROMOTING POSITIVE COURT PRACTICES**

**PRACTICES:** As experienced lawyers, the Legal Center is comfortable working with the judiciary on improving educational outcomes for youth in care. The Legal Center has provided technical expertise to courts, played a key role in promoting changes to court rules to better address the needs of youth in care, and provides analyses of and training regarding best practices in the courtroom.

### **IMPLEMENTING FOSTERING**

**CONNECTIONS:** The Legal Center assists states in developing plans to implement the education provisions of the Fostering Connections Act. Our **Fostering Connections Implementation Toolkit** not only details the provisions of the law, but also outlines state examples and practical strategies to best serve the needs of youth in each jurisdiction. Our work in each jurisdiction is catered to the specific needs, laws and policies, and practice in that state.

### **BUILDING KNOWLEDGE OF RELATED LAWS AND POLICIES**

**ISSUES:** The Legal Center has broad legal expertise in a wide range of child welfare and educational laws and policies affecting youth in care. One example includes helping states address the special education needs of youth in the foster care system, and publishing a **Special Education Decisionmaking Series** to help guide jurisdictions on this complex issue.

### **Adaptable Tools for States**

- **Screening Tools for Child Welfare and Education Agencies**
- **Step-by-Step Guides for Educators**
- **Juvenile Court Rules**
- **Trainings for Judges, Advocates, Child Welfare and Educators**
- **Data-Sharing Agreements**
- **Interagency Memoranda of Understanding**