School of Origin Transportation for Youth in Foster Care

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History/Context

Legislation

❖ 2003: California passes AB 490
❖ 2008: Federal Legislation - The Fostering Connections to Success & Increasing Adoptions Act
❖ 2015: Federal Legislation - Every Student Succeeds Act

Imposes requirements on local education agencies (LEAs) and child welfare agencies to create agreements to provide and pay for transportation for youth in foster care to attend their schools of origin when they are removed from their homes or change foster care placements.
What is School of Origin?

❖ A school of origin is the school a youth attended at the time they entered care, the school they most recently attended, or any school within the last 15 months with which they have a connection (e.g. part of a sports team, relationships with peers and teachers, etc.).

Why is School of Origin Important?

❖ When foster youth are removed from their home or change placements, they are also often forced to change schools.

❖ It takes four to six months for a child to recover academically from the disruption of changing schools.

❖ Increasing school stability improves educational outcomes for youth in foster care and makes it more likely for children to develop long-term relationships with teachers or peers at a time in which it is crucial to have supportive permanent connections with adults for the benefit of youth mental health and well-being.
Pilot and Evaluation

- Children and Family Services (DCFS), County Office of Education (LACOE), Office of Child Protection (OCP), and LA Unified School District (LAUSD) implemented a $6 million two-year pilot, between 2017 and 2019, to provide and fund school of origin transportation immediately.

- Collected data on needs, costs, and lessons learned.
  - Flexible transportation methods needed to ensure youth school of origin rights, as many times youth are often placed in foster homes that are located in another school district and other transportation methods (e.g., bus routes, public transportation, caregivers, etc.) were not feasible to transport youth across district lines to their schools of origin).
Los Angeles County Implementation Efforts

Outreach and Agreements

❖ OCP convened DCFS, LACOE, and school districts to conduct outreach and facilitate sign-on to transportation agreements.
   ❖ Agreements included cost-sharing language, with a 50/50 split between DCFS and districts to cover the costs of a private vendor contracted by the County.

❖ To date DCFS, LACOE, 12 charter schools, and 51 school districts in LA County, which serve 85% of the County’s foster youth, have signed on to the transportation agreements.
Child welfare and district partners have shared that **lack of sustainable funding** to meet this unfunded mandated is a challenge to successfully sustaining this work.

- Already-limited foster youth funding, for both districts and local child welfare agencies, is needed for other vital foster youth supports (such as tutoring, mental health resources, and supports to mitigate learning loss from the pandemic)
- The existing State Education Travel Reimbursement (ETR) program can be leveraged by caregiver to pay for private vendor school of origin transportation, but current rates do not cover a majority of these costs
- Need for sustainable braided funding solutions for both child welfare and education partners to leverage for flexible transportation methods

- Transportation funding for **enrichment activities**
Thank you!

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