

Data Exchange for Students in Foster Care

State Snapshots 2022



Data Exchange for Students in Foster Care

Why is data sharing between State educational agencies and child welfare agencies important?

Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) requires interagency collaboration between State educational agencies (SEAs) and State child welfare agencies (State CWAs) to support students in foster care. Nonregulatory guidance¹ released by the U.S.

Departments of Education and Health and Human Services encourages data sharing between local educational agencies (LEAs) and local child welfare agencies (local CWAs). Additionally, under the ESEA, every SEA must, each year, publicly report the academic achievement and graduation rates for the students in the foster care student subgroup. To ensure that SEAs publicly report data that are accurate, educational agencies must collaborate with child welfare agencies to identify the members of this student subgroup.

Students in foster care are a highly mobile student population and, as a result, face frequent school placement changes as they experience transitions within the child welfare system. With intentional, frequent collaboration, educational agencies and child welfare agencies can often minimize the number of school placement changes that these students experience; similarly, where a school placement change is unavoidable, such collaboration allows educational agencies and child welfare agencies to minimize the impact of a school change. While interagency collaboration can take many forms, the exchange of data between educational agencies and child welfare agencies can help stakeholders track a student's academic progress, recognize the impact of school placement changes, and identify interventions to support each student. In its most basic form, a data exchange between educational agencies and child welfare agencies helps schools and school districts ensure that they know which students are in foster care, allowing each student to receive the Title I, Part A services to which the student is entitled. Additionally, data sharing between child welfare and educational agencies supports systems in identifying needed resources, measuring progress, and implementing system-level change to improve outcomes for students in foster care.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study, conducted by American Institutes for Research with its partners at Westat Insight and in consultation with the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, under a contract with U.S. Department of Education, explored the data-exchange practices that SEAs have with State

¹ U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Non-Regulatory Guidance Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care*. Published June 23, 2016 https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/09/Non-Regulatory-Guidance_06-23-2016.pdf.

CWAs for the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Through this study, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) set goals to:

- determine the prevalence of data-sharing agreements between SEAs and State CWAs;
- identify data exchange practices in different States; and
- highlight SEA success stories for establishing and using data-sharing agreements.

The study involved two key phases: (i) an environmental scan of publicly available data and resources and (ii) interviews with a number of SEAs about their data-sharing practices. These data-sharing snapshots are based on the information gathered during both phases of the study.

Which SEAs were interviewed?

Foster care points of contact at SEAs from California, Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, Montana, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin were interviewed for this study. These States vary in geography and size, as well as method of data sharing and reporting.

What was the purpose of the interviews?

Interviews with selected States were conducted to obtain more detailed information about the data exchange policies. The study team conducted eight semi-structured interviews with key staff responsible for implementing the exchanges (i.e., one interview per State). Through the interviews, the study team sought to learn about the genesis of the data-sharing agreements within each State, the basic mechanics of each interagency data exchange, and the impact of the interagency collaboration on each SEA's program for students in foster care.

What is the purpose of the data-sharing snapshots?

The data-sharing snapshots provide an overview of how each SEA interviewed for this study shares data with its State CWA partner (and, potentially, LEAs). The snapshots provide information about the creation of the data-sharing policies, the processes used for implementation, the uses of the shared data by SEAs and State CWAs, and the challenges associated with implementation.

States and other stakeholders can use these snapshots to understand how SEAs across the country collaborate with State CWAs to support students in foster care and to generate ideas for improving their Statewide collaborative efforts. States are encouraged to contact the States profiled in the snapshots to learn more about State-specific practice.

What are the limitations of the data-sharing snapshots?

The information shared is limited to data found during an environmental scan of documents and a one-time interview with SEA and/or State CWA leaders from the profiled States. As such, the

information contained in the snapshots does not present a full picture of each State's practice related to interagency collaboration and data sharing.



FOR MORE INFORMATION about these snapshots, contact the U.S. Department of Education (FosterCare@ed.gov).