

Supporting Students in Foster Care

Collaboration Between Education and Child Welfare Agencies is Key



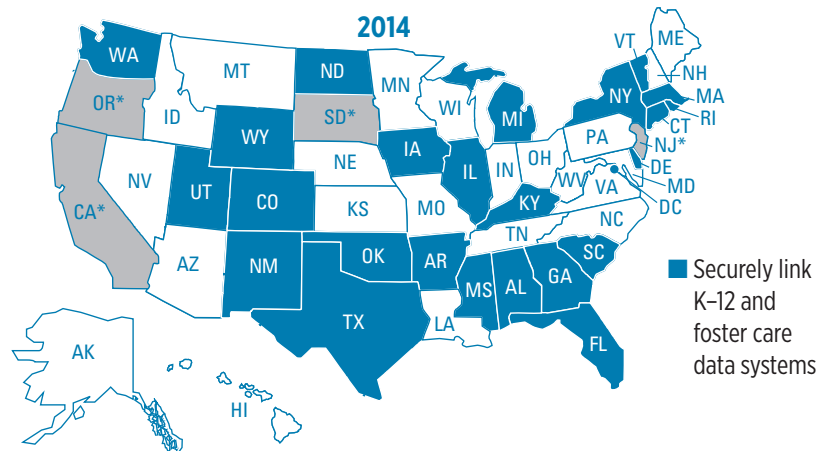
Why is it important to share education information among child welfare and state education agencies?

Studies demonstrate that students in foster care have the following characteristics:

- high rates of mobility between schools
- higher rates of school suspensions and expulsions
- high levels of being held back and dropping out
- delayed enrollment when school changes occur
- lower achievement in reading and math
- far lower high school and college graduation rates

State education agencies and child welfare systems can securely share key data to ensure that students in foster care are supported throughout their educations and experience improved education outcomes.

By securely sharing limited, critical information about how students in foster care fare in education, the K-12 and child welfare sectors can collaborate more effectively to best support these students. According to *Data for Action 2014*,* 24 states and the District of Columbia report that they securely link K-12 data systems with foster care data systems.



*The Data Quality Campaign's *Data for Action* is a series of analyses that highlight state progress and key priorities to promote the effective use of data to improve student achievement. California, New Jersey, Oregon, and South Dakota did not participate in 2014. For more information, including contact information for state respondents, visit www.dataqualitycampaign.org/DFA2014.

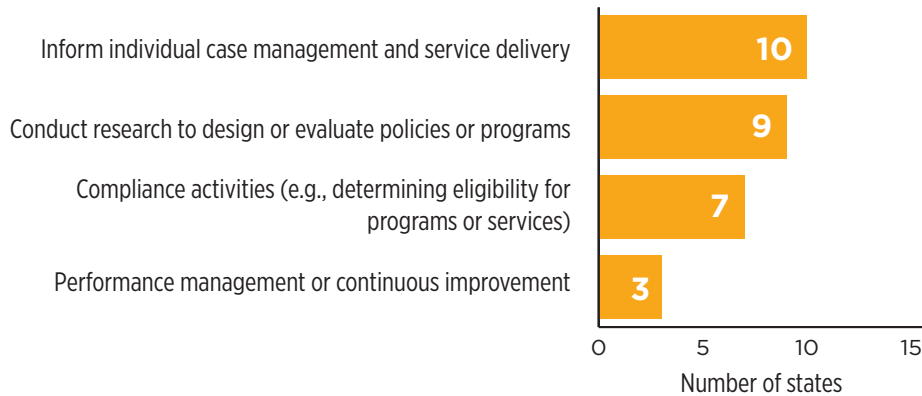
With access to current education data, child welfare staff can help the highly mobile students in foster care achieve school success by providing support such as the following:

- ✓ helping with timely enrollment and transfer of credits if a school change is needed
- ✓ identifying the need for educational supports
- ✓ working with school staff to address attendance and discipline issues
- ✓ assisting with transition planning to post-school activities such as higher education

Sharing aggregate-level data (e.g., school mobility rates for all children in foster care in a county) among child welfare and education agencies can improve the work of these agencies through the following:

- ✓ increasing accountability among state and local agencies
- ✓ helping stakeholders advocate for better laws, better policies, or increased funding
- ✓ identifying systemic problems and creating needed policies or targeted interventions
- ✓ tracking progress over time

In those states where data are shared among child welfare and education agencies, information is shared for a variety of purposes.



State Spotlight: California

In an effort to understand the educational outcomes of students in foster care in California, the [Stuart Foundation](#) supported a study that links child welfare and education data to create an educational snapshot for students in K-12. The [report](#), developed by The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning at WestEd and the University of California, Berkeley, details a previously “invisible achievement gap” between children in foster care and other students, including students with low socioeconomic status, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

Researchers found that students in foster care constituted an at-risk group that was distinct from low socioeconomic students. Students in foster care were more likely than other students to change schools during the school year. Students in foster care were also more likely than the general population of students to be enrolled in the lowest performing schools, and high school students in foster care had the highest dropout rate and lowest graduation rate.

The research findings spurred widespread state attention and reform, including a change to the local control funding formula governing school funding, which now includes students in foster care as a targeted group in need of support, and a legislative requirement of a bi-annual report by the state Department of Education on the education outcomes of students in foster care.

To learn more, read *Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care, How Can State Law Support School Continuity and Success for Students in Foster Care?*, *Education Records of Children in Foster Care*, and *The Invisible Achievement Gap: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in California’s Public Schools*.



The **Legal Center for Foster Care and Education** provides training and technical assistance on data and information sharing. The Legal Center provides examples of what has worked in other jurisdictions, assesses legal strategies, and assists in drafting memoranda of understanding that delineate the role of each stakeholder, protect children’s and families’ privacy rights, and ensure quality and reliability.



The **Data Quality Campaign (DQC)** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, national advocacy organization committed to realizing an education system in which all stakeholders—from parents to policymakers—are empowered with high-quality data from the early childhood, K-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems. To achieve this vision, DQC supports state policymakers and other key leaders to promote effective data use to ensure students graduate from high school prepared for success in college and the workplace.