



## TREEHOUSE TIPS: Collaborating with Schools

Proactively building a collaborative team before challenges arise is crucial in mitigating educational barriers for students in foster care. These students often face complex obstacles such as frequent changes in living arrangements and emotional trauma, which can significantly impact their academic success. These barriers are most effectively addressed when parents, caregivers, social workers, and other members of the youth's support team work together with school and district staff to provide comprehensive support and personalized interventions.

Here are some helpful tips on how to effectively collaborate with school teams:

- **Build Relationships:** It is beneficial to build rapport with school personnel before concerns arise. Ask for an informal meeting for the whole team to get acquainted, attend teacher conferences and other school events, and proactively establish a process for home-school communication. Below is a list of possible key contacts to have at the school and district level. Most districts have a staff directory on their website with staff emails and/or phone numbers, which can be a helpful tool.
  - Foster Care Liaison: Each district has a designated Foster Care Liaison who works to ensure the implementation of state and federal laws related to students experiencing foster care, including Best Interest Meeting when a student experiences a change in placement.
  - Building Point of Contact: Each school has an assigned point of contact for students experiencing foster care who provide building-level support and resources.
  - Building Administration: Most schools are led by a principal and at least one assistant principal, who is usually responsible for school discipline.
  - General Education Teacher: A student may have one or multiple general education teachers, depending on their grade level, who can provide information regarding their behaviors and discuss their overall academic progress.
  - IEP Case Manager: This staff member is responsible for monitoring a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) if they receive special education services.
  - Director of Special Services and/or Special Education: These staff members manage programs and services for students with disabilities to ensure schools are equipped to provide the appropriate supports.
  - School Counselor: In most schools, the school counselor is responsible for managing 504 Plans and they often work with students on developing social/emotional skills. At the middle and high school levels, counselors also create student schedules and help to ensure students are enrolled in their required courses.
  - School Psychologist: A school psychologist conducts special education evaluations with students and presents results to the team to guide decision-making regarding appropriate special education services.
  - Native Student and Family Advocate/Liaison: This specialist implements culturally focused interventions specifically for Native American students and families.

- **Communicate Clearly:** At the beginning of a meeting, clearly state your expectations, and goals for the collaboration. During the meeting, create an action plan with the team, including timelines for completion and specific steps necessary to move the plan forward. Following the meeting, create an email thread that includes the whole team and send a follow-up email that summarizes the action plan and take-aways from the meeting.
- **Establish Roles and Responsibilities:** Youth experiencing foster care have large support teams, thus it is important that everyone involved understands each other's roles and responsibilities. To assist with this process, begin each meeting with introductions. It can also be beneficial to pass around a sign-in sheet at meetings (or request that contact info be added to the chat in a virtual meeting) to obtain everyone's contact information and their role in the student's life.
- **Be Creative:** Every youth experiencing foster care is going through a unique set of circumstances. Therefore, "out of the box" thinking is often needed to find solutions to issues such as transportation, credit recovery and course work, evaluation timelines, etc.... Furthermore, with large support teams, it can be difficult to find times that work well with everyone's schedules. Being flexible with scheduling and offering virtual meeting options can help ensure the involvement of as many team members as possible.
- **Keep Records:** Document all your communication with school and district personnel. Organize any emails, meeting notes, and educational records received so that they can be easily referred to if needed. Remember the motto: "If it's not written down, it didn't happen."

### Frequently Asked Question (FAQ):

***When would it be appropriate to request a school meeting?*** School meetings can be requested by any member of the youth's team at any time during the school year if there are questions, concerns, or barriers a student is facing. Below are some examples of specific circumstances when a school meeting is recommended or required:

- There are academic and/or behavior concerns, and the team would like to collaborate on how to best address the student's needs.
- Changes need to be made to a student's 504 Plan or IEP.
- A student is experiencing harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying at school.
- To discuss disciplinary action, such as a suspension or expulsion, and if applicable, have a Manifestation Determination meeting per the guidelines in [WAC 392.172A.05146](#).
- A student moves home placement outside of their current school boundary. In such instances, as outlined in [RCW 28A.225.350](#), a Best Interest Determination meeting is required before enrolling the student in a new school.

### Make a referral for Educational Advocacy!



If you have any questions or concerns about a student's education, make a referral to Treehouse's advocacy program! To qualify for Educational Advocacy, youth must have an open dependency or have shelter care status. Scan the QR code or click the link below to complete the referral process:  
<https://referrals.treehouseforkids.org/>

