

Ready to Succeed in the Classroom

Teachers' Ideas About How **Communities** Can Help Improve Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth in the Foster Care System



The issue of improving educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care is receiving some long-overdue attention, but the voices of classroom teachers have not been prominent in the discussions so far. To help fill this gap, a team from the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning and funded by the Stuart Foundation convened six discussion groups in late 2009 to explore how teachers and foster children and youth interact in the classroom. The discussion group sessions were held in three California counties (Fresno, Orange, and Sacramento).

This document is one of three highlighting “wish lists” from teachers who participated in these discussions. The wish lists capture teachers’ ideas about what would help them serve children and youth in foster care better, at three different levels: within their schools, at the district or administrative level, and outside the school system (within the broader community). Their ideas for *communities outside the schools system* are summarized below, followed by discussion questions that community groups and advocates that are based on the teachers’ wish lists. We encourage you to use these questions as a starting point for discussions in your community, and to add to the list.

Teachers expressed concern about the lack of concrete support they had sometimes witnessed from the larger community (including some foster parents). They wished for better screening, training and enforcement of who could become (and remain) a foster parent or group home staff member. Although many recognized that the demand for foster parents far exceeds the supply and that these measures might further restrict the options for foster children and youth, they also said, in the words of one teacher, “Our neediest kids deserve the very best.”

One teacher — a foster parent herself — noted that the foster parent approval process can be expedited for teachers (similar to the streamlined approval process in place for family members), taking as little as 30 days. Her experience was so positive and rewarding that she encouraged other teachers to consider becoming foster parents, and wished for a foster parent recruiting campaign geared specifically to teachers.

Teachers expressed concern about emancipating foster care youth at age 18. They wished for broader community support for their students in terms of guidance for job

seeking, college applications and matriculation, and life skills. They also wished for easier access to social workers on campus — especially for high school students nearing the age of 18.

Teachers also saw communities as largely untapped but potential allies for a range of resources and contributions that could help children and youth in the foster care system, from practical help with everyday school supplies to identifying recreational outlets, job shadowing and mentoring opportunities, and transition assistance for those aging out of the system.

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Discussion Questions for Communities: What Can **Communities** Do to Help Teachers Help Students in Foster Care?

- How can we strengthen standards, guidelines, enforcement, and training of foster parents?
- How can we encourage more teachers to become foster parents?
- What can our community do to change laws that emancipate foster youth at age 18?
- How can we work with social services agencies to bring social workers onto campuses to support students in the foster care system?
- What individuals and groups in our community could join forces to provide needed support for students in the foster care system — such as supplies, equipment, mentoring, job shadowing, and transition assistance?

The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning

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Ready to Succeed: Discussion Card for **Communities**