

## Professional Development Activity on Team Power and Authority

Because of the school counselor–administrator team’s government-given sovereignty, the team often has to make difficult decisions about students in order to advance education. This becomes complicated when students with exceptional circumstances dictate additional consideration of which many may be legally prescribed. The following activity helps team members view legal implications surrounding a topic most school counselor–administrator teams—no matter their global location—will deal with: students in foster care.

### Time Frame

The team should allow thirty to sixty minutes for this activity.

### Materials

This activity requires a facilitator, a computer with internet access, and a projector.

### Process

One team member should volunteer as facilitator. The facilitator should take the following five steps.

1. Use the computer to access at least one of the following video clips about students in foster care. Play the video with the projector so all team members can watch simultaneously. As a minimum, the team should watch the “#Action4FosterYouth: Not Invisible” video. The others are recommended if time and interest allow.
  - “**#Action4FosterYouth: Not Invisible**”: This almost four-minute video (at <https://bit.ly/2G6Taag>) presents a challenging student perspective.
  - “**Education Experiences While in Foster Care**”: This almost seven-minute video (at <https://bit.ly/2rtd5p1>) presents a more promising student perspective.
  - “**Educational Stability for Foster Care Students**”: This almost nine-minute video (at <https://bit.ly/2RVkk5e>) has some perspectives specific to the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) and Florida that have nationwide implications.
  - “**ReMoved**”: This almost thirteen-minute video (at <https://bit.ly/1o6YQ3m>) is one child’s personal foster care story.

Keep in mind that video links often become defunct. If these are no longer available, search online for *education and foster care video*.

2. As a team, discuss the following questions to consider the social-emotional and academic impact of being a student in foster care.
  - What is your reaction to the video?
  - Did the video affirm how you perceive the issues students in foster care may experience, or did the video challenge your perceptions?
  - What is one aspect of the video that struck you as impactful? Discuss its implications for the team.

3. Approximately four hundred thousand children are in U.S. foster care, and research indicates that they are at “high risk of dropping out of school and are unlikely to attend or graduate from college” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). As a team, discuss the following questions.
- Considering the students in the video, is the team prepared for this challenge?
  - What are the local, state, and national policies related to students in foster care?
  - What is the legal status of students in foster care?
  - Who is the student’s legal guardian? Often it is Child Protective Services (CPS), which impacts information sharing, consent to talk with others, decision making, and paperwork signing.
  - Do the Title I requirements for ensuring educational stability apply? The U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (2016) “Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care” (<https://bit.ly/29k4Fv1>) provides guidance.
  - What background information does the team have or need? Case workers, education records, and other student-specific information, as well as biological parents, if possible, are all good information sources.
  - Is the team prepared to translate this student’s behaviors to others? *Counseling Today* writer Bethany Bray (2017) says translation means explaining what motivates a behavior. Much of that behavior, listed here, is trauma-related. The recommended video “ReMoved” evidences several of these behaviors.
    - Attachment issues
    - Nightmares
    - Anxiety
    - Separation anxiety, including trouble being alone
    - Developmental delays, including being behind in speech, language, and school subjects
    - Tantrums
    - Difficulty sticking to routines
  - Assuming students in foster care exhibit these trauma-related behaviors, how will the team address them if they impact the school day? The behavior might include disrupting teaching and learning for the student as well as other students. Will the student be disciplined the same as other students who are not suffering trauma might be for similar behaviors?
  - Students in foster care often experience frequent transitions, changing homes or schools, or changing from instructional time to non-instructional time. How can the team build capacity for transitions? Resilience resources such as *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Dweck, 2006) and *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (Duckworth, 2016) can be useful.

- Knowing postsecondary success is challenging for students in foster care (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), what capacity for offering college and career resources and assistance does the team possess? The U.S. Department of Education's (2016) "Foster Care Transition Toolkit" ([www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/youth-transition-toolkit.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/youth-transition-toolkit.pdf)) offers capacity-building guidance.
4. Conclude the meeting by discussing next steps.
    - Are there implications for other schools in the district?
    - What resources or supports does the team need?
    - Should the team discuss other exceptional issues, such as students with trauma?
    - How did this activity raise the team's awareness of students in foster care through a legal lens in terms of individual rights balanced against the school's need to advance educational purposes?
  5. The team should review its school district's McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 policies. This federal law provides guidelines for districts relative to homeless students. The team should complete this, the Professional Development Activity on Team Power and Authority, prior to reviewing policies so team members can determine their level of understanding. Beginning with policy does not put a human face on the individuals who are in the foster care system.

## Results

Participation in this activity supports the impact the school counselor–administrator team has with the power and authority it is afforded for building-based decision making. Effectively using this power and control through a legal lens enhances team functioning.

*Bray, B. (2017). Fostering a brighter future. Counseling Today. Accessed at <https://ct.counseling.org/2017/02/fostering-brighter-future> on November 8, 2018.*

*Duckworth, A. (2016). Grit: The power of passion and perseverance. New York: Scribner.*

*Dweck, C. S. (2006). Mindset: The new psychology of success. New York: Random House.*

*U.S. Department of Education. (2016). Students in foster care. Accessed at [www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/index.html) on November 11, 2018.*

*U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2016). Non-regulatory guidance: Ensuring educational stability for children in foster care. Accessed at [www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf) on November 8, 2018.*