

## Working with Schools

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- ❖ All school districts have a **foster youth liaison** to help ensure that the educational needs of foster youth are met. The next step is to identify a foster youth liaison at each school site. PVUSD has already identified liaisons (an administrator or office staff person) at each school site. Michael will try to have a list of all of those contact people by the beginning of the '08-'09 school year.
- ❖ **How to initiate communication with a school:** Rich stated, “Don’t rely on a phone call. Phone calls can get lost.” Site visits and emails work better. Jennifer’s advice was: “Persistence is good; we appreciate persistence.” She reported to the group that office staff people are not used to CASAs or “other outside people” asking for access to students’ records, and the request can throw people off. *It is best to ask for the information in advance* (call, email, or stop by to make an appointment to come in & review the cumulative file). Make sure to bring your Order of Assignment to the school so they can make a copy of it for the student’s cumulative file.
- ❖ **What should be in a cumulative (or “cum”) file:**
  - Health record: vision/dental/hearing screenings & immunizations
  - Proof of address document
  - Emergency contact card
  - Teacher comments, report cards & curriculum from previous years
  - Standardized test results
  - English language development tests if student is English language learner
  - Student Success Team (SST) minutes
  - Notice of confidential SELPA file if student has special education services
  - Home language surveys (indicating language spoken at home)
  - Restraining orders
  - CASA’s Order of Assignment
- ❖ **What should not be in a cum file:**
  - Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)
  - Child Welfare (Family & Children’s Services) documents
  - Attendance records (are held by the Attendance Clerk)
  - Discipline records (are kept separately – ask office staff for access)
- ❖ If you see information in the cum file that shouldn’t be in there, inform the office staff and/or the principal.
- ❖ Make sure the student’s emergency contact card is up-to-date. The CASA volunteer’s information should be included on the card. *The school also would like to*

*know when a student reunifies (moves back home) and when the dependency case is dismissed.*

- ❖ Michael has developed a detailed Notice of Placement to be filled out by FCS social workers whenever a dependent child's home placement is changed. A copy of this completed form should be going to students' schools. The back of the form asks the social worker to fill out detailed information regarding whether or not a school change would be in the student's best interest.
- ❖ **How a CASA can help with a school change:** Ask the new teacher to check in with the previous teacher. Give the new teacher relevant academic and behavioral information about the student. Before the student's first day, bring the student to the school to take a tour and meet the office staff, administrators and teacher(s). Make sure the child's records are transferred to the new school in a timely manner.
- ❖ Make sure to request report cards; they will not automatically come to you, even if you hold the student's educational rights. If you request the student's report cards, you will be included on the distribution list & they will automatically come to you.
- ❖ **Truancy:** the State defines what an excused absence is. If the reason a student is absent is understood & agreed to by the school principal, even if it is not a State-defined excused absence (i.e., an extended family member died & the student went to the funeral), the school principal can block a truancy note from being sent to a parent. There is a difference between **tardy** and **late**. "Tardy" is defined as arriving to class less than ½ an hour after school starts. "Late" is arriving ½ an hour or more after school starts. This differentiation is related to identifying a student as truant or not.
- ❖ **Special Education:** Children are eligible for special education services beginning at age 3. The school districts are mandated to do a "child find," which involves assessing children early to determine whether or not they have special needs. Several other interventions should be tried before attempting to access special education services for a student. If a student is having difficulty in school, *the first step* is to talk with the teacher and caregiver about what the student's needs are, how long the student has been struggling, what help the student has received so far, and whether or not the student has been in any special programs or had an SST. All of those interventions should be tried first. If interventions have been attempted and the student is not progressing, a CASA, with assistance from a Case Supervisor, can *request that the student be assessed for special education services*. The CASA should bring the letter to SELPA (Special Education Local Planning Area) and *have the letter stamped with the date*. That letter will go to the student's school principal and to the school psychologist. If the CASA does not hold the student's educational rights, the educational rights holder will need to approve the request. If the CASA does hold the student's educational rights, *the school has 15 school days to respond to the request with an assessment plan for the student*. The **assessment plan** will list out the tools that will be used to assess the child based on the child's needs (e.g., speech; occupational therapy; etc.). The CASA has 15 days to get the signed

assessment plan back to the school district. The school then has 60 days to complete the assessment and call an **initial IEP meeting**. At the meeting, IEP team members will find out whether or not the student qualifies for special education services. If the student qualifies, the team will come up with *goals and objectives* to meet the child's needs. *Students are not put into special education programs simply because they have missed a lot of school.*