

# Success In School For Children and Youth In Care

Making the Provincial Protocol  
Framework work for you....

## Tips For School Leadership Teams

Compared to the general student population, children and youth in care are less likely to graduate from high school, often do poorly on Provincial Achievement Tests, and may fall farther behind in school or drop out as they get older. Research indicates they are also more likely to be suspended and expelled from school, have gaps in school attendance and exhibit special learning needs or challenges. Working with caseworkers, caregivers and the students themselves, educators can have a significant impact on improving results for young people in provincial government care through joint planning and implementing strategies for success.

*The Success in School for Children and Youth in Care – Provincial Protocol Framework (PPF)* is a joint initiative between Alberta Education and Children and Youth Services to support improved school outcomes and high school completion for children and youth in provincial government care. The

initiative supports and aligns with the Minister of Education's priority to increase broad-based supports for at-risk children and youth and improve high school completion rates; and the Minister of Children and Youth Services' focus on improving outcomes for children and youth in care.

School leadership teams, such as principals, assistant principals, point persons, inclusion specialists, guidance counselors and Aboriginal liaison staff have a critical role in helping all school staff members understand the unique needs of children and youth in care, and promoting educational programming that supports all students to succeed. School leadership teams work with school staff to support young people in care to be successful in school and, ultimately, in life. For additional information, visit [www.education.alberta.ca/ppf](http://www.education.alberta.ca/ppf).

### “ Youth in Care Say...

■ *“There is nothing someone in care wants more than to feel normal and belong, and to make mistakes that any other young person might, without the threat of being moved yet again. There are a lot of pressures for us to be perfect, and it seems even more intense when we're dealing with a bunch of other issues in our lives.”*

■ *“Switching schools is never easy. Please get to know me and allow time for me to adjust before deciding if you need to do an assessment to see where I am at.”*

■ *“Without making it too obvious, pull me aside and talk to me. Ask me what I need or want, rather than trying to guess. Tell me what I am doing right and ask how things are going. It may take a while for me to trust everyone.”*



## UNDERSTANDING THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE :

When children and youth in care speak about their school experiences, many share that they feel stigmatized, labelled and disconnected. As with other students, they also say they want to succeed in school and have adults in their lives who care, support, mentor and advocate for them. School leadership teams set the tone for a caring school atmosphere. With adults in their lives demonstrating understanding, realistic expectations and compassion for them, students in care experience increased success in school and in life.

Young people are not typically in control of the decision to be taken into care. The accompanying changes in their living situation can be extremely upsetting and disorienting, and often result in a move to a new school. School leaders who expedite the transfer of student records and recent assessment results are a major support when students in care must change schools. Youth in care said it is

frustrating to repeat assessments each time they change schools and living situations, and they would like a way for the assessments and information about coursework and requirements for graduation to follow them more easily. Children and youth in care have said they would like to have time to adjust to the new setting before new assessments are conducted.

Each young person has unique strengths, needs, desires and dreams. Children and youth in care said they want teachers to set the bar high for them and have the same expectations as they have of other students. They want to be acknowledged for their strengths, given help when it is needed and treated in the same manner as other students. They also acknowledged that when there are challenges to overcome, they appreciate discreet support and accommodations to help them through the difficulties.



# How Can I Support Educational Success for Young People in Care?

## WORK WITH STAFF TO :

- Identify one or more caring adults in the school who can commit to regularly touching base with students in care to ensure their school experience is going well, and help them to focus on their strengths and abilities.
- Ensure students are involved in their educational plan by building upon short- and long-term goals and identifying strengths and needs.
- Make positive phone calls to caseworkers and caregivers, celebrate successes and, where appropriate, set up positive contracts for school success with the child or youth in areas such as attendance, behaviour and/or achievement.
- Encourage and support positive relationships with peers in and out of school.
- Plan ahead for transition times and offer additional support if needed. For example, consider having a “buddy” for a new student, who will show the student around the school and share time with her or him at recess, lunch and other times. When appropriate, you may consider allowing the student to move to the next class a few minutes before the rest of the students when hallways are less crowded.
- Make sure that when a new student in care is registered, as much information as possible is gathered to help with planning and academic continuity, such as past academic achievement, enrolled courses, assessments and any special programming needs. Since neither the caseworker nor the caregiver may have this educational program information, school staff may need to call the previous school to expedite the transfer of student records and get preliminary information prior to the arrival of the records.
- Ensure young people in care participate in school field trips and extra-curricular activities by contacting the caseworker or caregiver if there is a question about obtaining required fees or consents.
- Encourage staff to help students to proactively talk with an adult that they trust about any issues or problems they are encountering in order to self-advocate.
- Include information about the PPF during staff meetings and as professional development at the beginning of each school year.
- Find alternatives to suspension and expulsions, such as allowing students to work at school, but removed from the other students, or consider having the student work in an alternate classroom or site that provides special assistance.

## WORK WITH AND SUPPORT POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ALL TEAM MEMBERS, INCLUDING CASEWORKERS, CAREGIVERS, SUPPORT PERSONNEL AND SCHOOL STAFF :

- Become knowledgeable about the unique needs of children and youth in care and make student success a priority within the school community.
- Support the work of the PPF initiative and ensure that core team members are supported and encouraged to work together positively.
- Facilitate participation of teaching staff in collaborative core team meetings.
- Host a get-together with local agencies that serve children, youth and families to connect and share information about roles and responsibilities.
- Build trust by sharing successes through notes, phone calls and e-mails and provide time to listen to each other and share in a safe and respectful environment.
- Where appropriate, share relevant information about significant experiences in the young person's life, past assessments, school experiences, critical incidents and medical diagnosis so the team can better understand difficult behaviours or emergent needs.
- Share information about current or prior behavioural needs that may pose a risk to the young person in care or someone else.
- Decide on a problem-solving process in case of conflict or difficulty within the team.
- Determine other community resources that can be accessed to support the young person.
- To ensure smooth transitions, agree on a process to inform each other about personnel changes.
- Evaluate progress regularly and work on issues or conflicts that may occur.
- Reduce the number of meetings whenever possible by combining the collaborative team meetings with other meetings such as student/parent/teacher conferences, program planning discussions or reviews.
- Set aside time on a regular basis to celebrate achievements of the students and the core team.
- Ensure that Aboriginal students, and those from other cultures, have the cultural supports they need.
- Encourage the use of the principles of Alberta's approach to collaborative practices based on wraparound principles to support the work of the team.

[www.education.alberta.ca/wraparound](http://www.education.alberta.ca/wraparound)

## MESSAGE FROM THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM TO CASEWORKERS AND CAREGIVERS :

Our school leadership team employs multiple strategies to ensure that all of our students are provided with a high quality education within an environment that is caring, respectful and safe for everyone. We want to work with you to make sure that your children and youth—our students—are successful by meeting regularly, providing needed supports and helping with transitions as needed. Please share enough information with us about the student to allow us to effectively support, supervise and provide an appropriate educational program for the young person we jointly care about and serve.