

Stronger  
than

## INCREASING CROSS-SYSTEM AWARENESS



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**POSTCARD:** Provided by Foster Care Alumni of America - "Stronger than expected"

## CHAPTER 2

### Increasing Cross-System Awareness

#### TEXAS COMMITS TO IMPROVING EDUCATION OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS IN CARE

In 2010, the Supreme Court of Texas issued an Order Establishing the Education Committee of the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families (the Children’s Commission). The order charged the Education Committee to study the education challenges of students in foster care and develop recommendations to improve educational outcomes of students in the Texas foster care system. The order resulted in over 100 court, education, and child welfare stakeholders coming together over an 18-month period to listen and learn from each other, discuss and debate the issues, and ultimately develop the Education Committee’s recommendations. The recommendations can be found in the Final Report of the Education Committee, [“The Texas Blueprint: Transforming Education Outcomes For Children & Youth in Foster Care,”](#) which was submitted to the Supreme Court of Texas on May 3, 2012.

The core focus areas of the committee included:

- Judicial Practices
- Multi-Disciplinary Training
- School Stability and Transitions
- Post-Secondary Education
- Data and Information Sharing
- School Readiness
- School Experience, Supports, and Advocacy
- Future Collaboration



The Education Committee reached consensus on many recommendations, including changes to daily practices, modifications to education and child welfare policy, and amendments to the Texas legal framework.

In December 2012, the Supreme Court of Texas created by court order the Texas Blueprint Implementation Task Force—which included members from DFPS and TEA—to prioritize the Texas Blueprint recommendations and monitor implementation. In 2015, the Children’s Commission committed to long-term implementation by creating a standing Foster Care & Education Committee.

Since this time TEA, DFPS, the Children’s Commission, and other stakeholders have participated in state-level workgroups and committees focused on complex policy issues, collaboration, training, guidance, processes, and related matters for advancing the education of students in foster care in Texas.

Areas of focus include education decision-making, higher education, data analysis, information sharing, special education, residential treatment centers, ESSA implementation, confidentiality, transition planning, and higher education pathways.



## TEXAS FOSTER CARE & EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE REPORTS

Texas has engaged in cross-systems, collaborative work to address recommendations from the Texas Blueprint and advance the education of students in foster care in Texas schools:

- [Foster Care College Tuition & Fee Waiver Process: Flowchart](#)
- [Texas Blueprint Implementation Data Workgroup, "Texas commits to transform education outcomes of students in foster care."](#)
- [Foster Care & Education Committee, "Information Sharing Between Child Welfare and Schools: Maintaining Privacy and Promoting Educational Success."](#)
- [Regional CPS Education Consortia, "The Building Blocks to Engaging Community Stakeholders."](#)
- [Foster Care & Education Committee, "Statewide Survey on Local Collaboration Summary and One-pagers \(School, Caregiver, CPS, and Legal\)."](#)
- [Texas CASA, "Educational Advocacy Toolkit."](#)
- [Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, "Texas Higher Education Information and Resource Guide for Foster Care Liaisons."](#)
- [Foster Care & Education Committee, "The Road to College: Texas Foster Youth & Post-Secondary Education."](#)
- [Transition Planning Guide for Students in Foster Care Receiving Special Education Services](#)

Please visit the [Children's Commission Education Committee](#) website for more information.



## TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES (DFPS)

In Texas, DFPS<sup>18</sup> investigates allegations of child abuse and neglect, provides services to children and families, and monitors the state foster care system. DFPS also manages prevention and early intervention programs in the community, which aim to prevent delinquency, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of Texas children.

DFPS staff are responsible for:

- Providing services to children and families in their own homes;
- Placing children in foster care;
- Providing services to help youth in foster care make the transition to a successful adulthood; and
- Placing children in adoptive homes.

Every day, about 10,000 DFPS employees in more than 300 offices in 11 DFPS regions across the state protect the physical safety and emotional well-being of the most vulnerable citizens of Texas. Within each DFPS region there are a number of services and opportunities to support students in foster care.

Pursuant to Texas law, in some parts of the state, services are provided through a model called “Community Based Care,” in which entities referred to as Single Source Continuum Contractors (SSCCs) coordinate and oversee services (see *Chapter 4 for more information on the DFPS system*).

## COURT SYSTEM

Child Welfare, also referred to as Child Protective Services (CPS),<sup>19</sup> cases are heard by district, county court-at-law, or associate judges in courts with jurisdiction to hear family law matters. Depending on the county, some or all of the judges with jurisdiction in that county may hear the cases or one judge may be designated as the CPS judge. Additionally, there are multiple specialty judges who solely hear CPS cases; these specialty courts are referred to as Child Protection Courts. The Texas Family Code requires that courts hold periodic hearings during the time a child is in foster care. The court makes specific findings at each hearing and may enter additional orders to ensure that the child’s emotional, physical, and educational needs are being met while the child is in care.



**TIP:** Reach out to the local judges and lawyers who handle DFPS cases to enhance collaboration. Introducing the foster care liaison is a good place to start, as well as informing the court stakeholders of other LEA efforts to help students in foster care. Some judges have education-specific initiatives, so these connections can directly impact the experiences of students in foster care.

## EDUCATION SYSTEM

Texas has one of the largest public-school systems, composed of more than 1,202 independent school districts and charter schools that educate 5.4 million students each year. Of those, 51% of students were identified as at-risk for dropping out of school in the 2019–2020 school year, according to definitions adopted by the Texas Legislature.

### STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY (SEA):

TEA is the state educational agency (SEA) responsible for administering federal and state education laws and policies. Statewide educational leadership in Texas is provided by the [Commissioner of Education](#), the [State Board of Education](#) (SBOE), and the [State Board for Educator Certification](#) (SBEC). The head of the TEA is the Commissioner of Education, who is appointed by the [governor](#). The Commissioner is supported by a hierarchy of deputy commissioners, associate commissioners, division directors, and agency staff. The TEA and SBOE guide and monitor activities and programs related to public education in Texas. The SBOE consists of fifteen elected members representing different regions of the state. One member is appointed chair by the governor. The SBEC oversees all aspects of the preparation, certification, and standards of conduct of public school educators. The mission of TEA is to improve outcomes for all public-school students in the state by providing leadership, guidance, and support to school systems. TEA maintains a comprehensive website of resources and information for the public and works to implement statewide policy initiatives, including facilitating collaboration among education stakeholders on both the state and local levels. For information about foster care programs, please visit the [TEA Foster Care and Student Success webpage](#).



Commissioner Morath with Fort Bend ISD

## LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES (LEAS):

Texas has more than 1,200 Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) operating more than 8,800 public schools, including charter schools. Texas schools provide a free public education to students enrolled in grades Pre-K through 12.

## EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS (ESCS):

Texas has a regional education support system for LEAs called Regional Education Service Centers (ESCs). The support services and technical assistance ESCs provide to LEAs enables LEAs to operate more efficiently, implement legislative and commissioner initiatives, and assist in improving student performance. ESCs are funded through state, federal, and school district grants and contracts. Twenty independent ESCs provide services to school districts throughout the state. The ESCs are service organizations, not regulatory arms of the Texas Education Agency, and LEA utilization of ESC services is voluntary.



STEM and Work-Based Learning Tour, ESC Region 14



Every ESC has voluntarily designated an ESC Foster Care Champion to serve as a point of contact on foster care matters within their respective ESC region. ESCs offer professional development courses and some may host collaborative forums and joint trainings with child welfare partners, known as Education Consortia. Contact your local ESC to learn about opportunities, training, and supports that may be available to address the education of students in foster care. ESC Foster Care Champion contact information is maintained in AskTED. Locate your region's ESC Foster Care Champion by visiting the [AskTED Region Search](#) page, then selecting 'personnel' under information type and 'foster care liaison' from the drop down box under 'select roles'.



## EDUCATION SYSTEM'S ROLE IN HELPING IMPROVE EDUCATION OUTCOMES

Both state and federal lawmakers recognize that students in foster care are faced with numerous barriers and unique challenges that impact a student's school experience and educational outcomes. Thus, state and federal laws exist to identify students (while maintaining confidentiality), improve school stability, remove barriers when school moves occur, and spur collaboration between education and child welfare systems to promote educational success. The Texas Education Code (TEC) and ESSA have numerous provisions concerning students in foster care that will be discussed throughout this resource guide.

## INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION (IHE):

An institution of higher education is any public technical institute, public junior college, public senior college or university, medical or dental unit, public state college, or other agency of higher education as defined [TEC § 61.003](#).

## TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD (THECB):

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is a state agency that oversees all public, post-secondary education in Texas.

Texas institutions of higher education designate a foster care liaison to support and assist students in foster care and young adults with experience in foster care. A public institution of higher education is statutorily required to obtain the names of current and incoming students currently or formerly in DFPS conservatorship and provide that information to the institution's foster care liaison. The law also requires the institution to publicize the liaison's name and contact information along with the available support services.

For more information about higher education Foster Care Liaisons and assisting students with accessing higher education, visit [Texas Higher Education Foster Care Liaisons Information and Reference Manual](#)



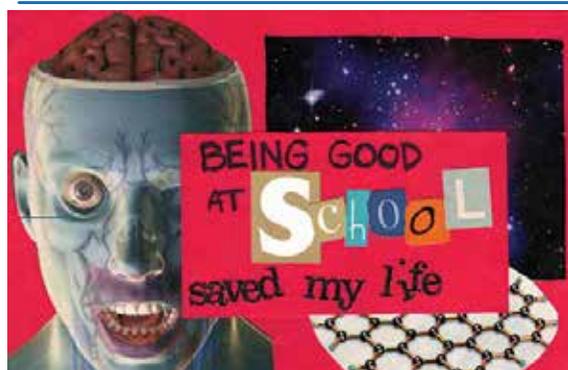
## WORKFORCE SYSTEM

### TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION (TWC):

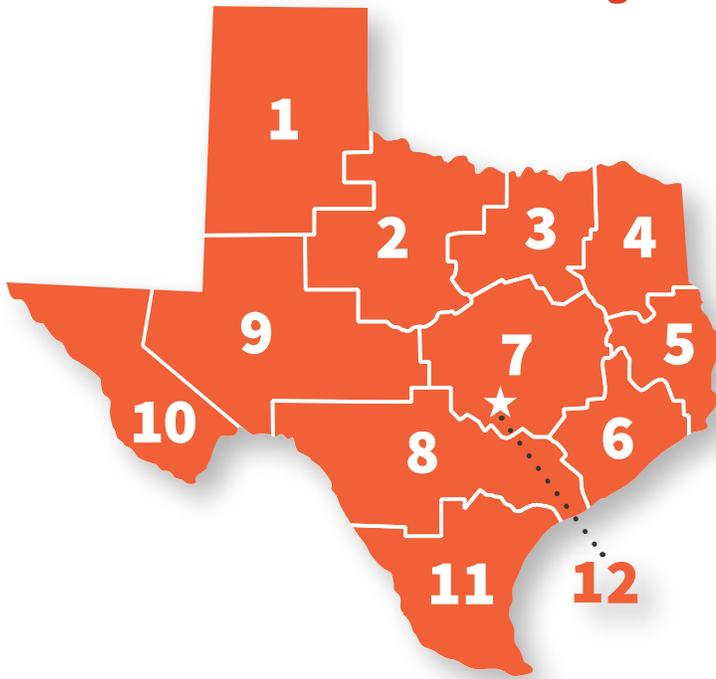
Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is the state agency charged with overseeing and providing workforce development services to employers and job-seekers of Texas. TWC strengthens the Texas economy by providing the workforce development component of the governor's economic development strategy. TWC is part of [Texas Workforce Solutions](#), a local and statewide network comprised of TWC's twenty-eight workforce development boards and their contracted service providers and community partners. This network gives employers and job-seekers local access to workforce solutions and statewide services at numerous Workforce Solutions offices. The major functions of TWC include developing the workforce, providing support services including childcare for targeted populations participating in workforce training and adult education and literacy services, providing services for people with disabilities to obtain training and employment, and administering unemployment benefits and tax programs. Eligible youth in foster care receive priority over all other equally qualified individuals—except eligible veterans—in the receipt of federal- and state-funded TWC services. For more information visit [TWC Foster Care Programs](#).



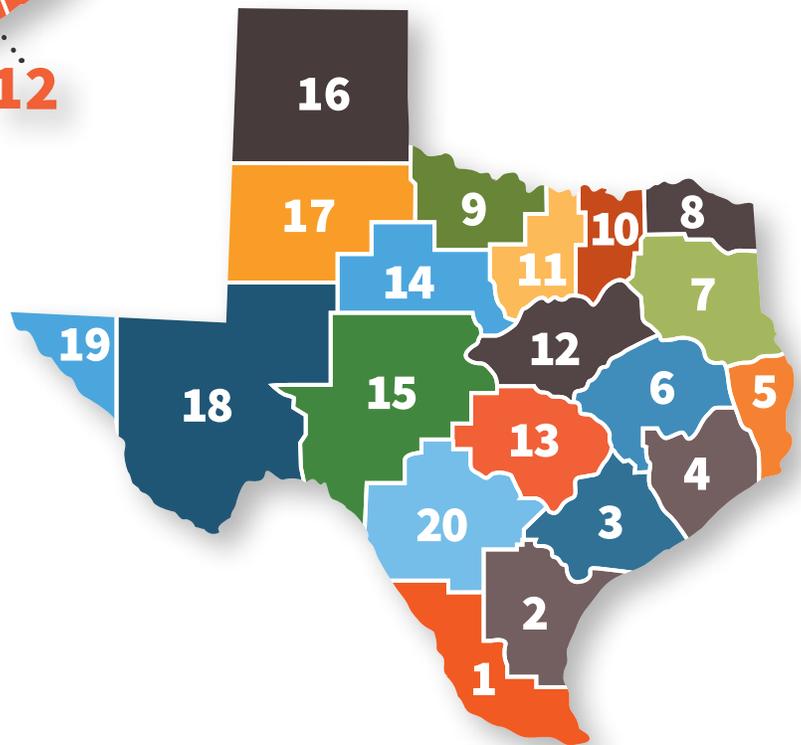
**TIP:** DFPS and ESC service region boundaries differ. It is important to clarify which type of region is being referred to when working with partners from the child welfare system. As Community-Based Care rolls out across the state, the DFPS map will change. See the [Community Based Care](#) webpage for the most up-to-date map and which contractors are operating in each area.



### DFPS Regions



### ESC Regions



Map of: [Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Regions](#)

Map of: [Texas Education Service Center Regions](#)