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# CASA Volunteer Education Advocacy



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## AGENDA

- Overview of CASAs Education Advocacy
- Understanding and Supporting the Educational Rights of Youth in Care
- Importance of Collaboration
- Education Advocacy Action Plan
- Confidentiality Revisited
- Common School Related Problems for Foster Youth
- Targeted Special Education Toolkit





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## UNIT 1: OBJECTIVES

- Understand the importance of education to the health and well-being of youth in care.
- Be able to identify educational issues for youth in care.
- Become aware of federal education laws.
- Understand how education advocacy fits within the CASA volunteer role.

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## The Four Components of a Volunteer Role

### INFORMATION GATHERING/INVESTIGATION

You carry out an objective examination of the situation, including relevant history, environment, relationships, and needs of the child.

### FACILITATION

You identify resources and services for the child and facilitate a collaborative relationship between all parties involved in the case, helping to create a situation in which the child's needs can be met.

### ADVOCACY

You speak up for the child by making recommendations regarding the child's best interests in a written court report.

### MONITORING

You keep track of whether the orders of the court and the plans of the child protective services agency are carried out, and you report to the court or collaborate with the child protective services agency when any of the parties do not follow those orders and plans.





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# YOUR EDUCATION EXPERIENCE



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## Facts about Foster Youth

- ❖ 15% of youth in foster care complete high school
- ❖ Only 3% graduate with a Bachelor's Degree
- ❖ 75% of youth in foster care operate below grade level
- ❖ 25% of foster youth end up homeless
- ❖ 25% of male foster kids end up in prison





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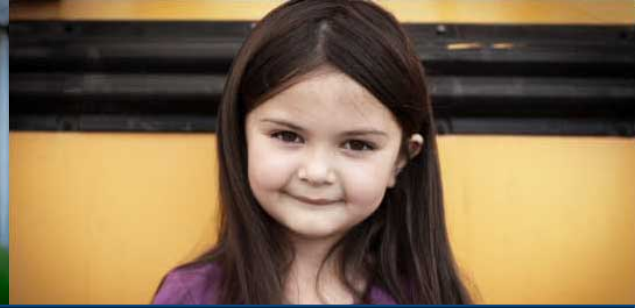


## EDUCATION EXPERIENCES WHILE IN FOSTER CARE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZc2UEPqQiA>



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# **LAWS SUPPORTING YOUTH IN EDUCATION**

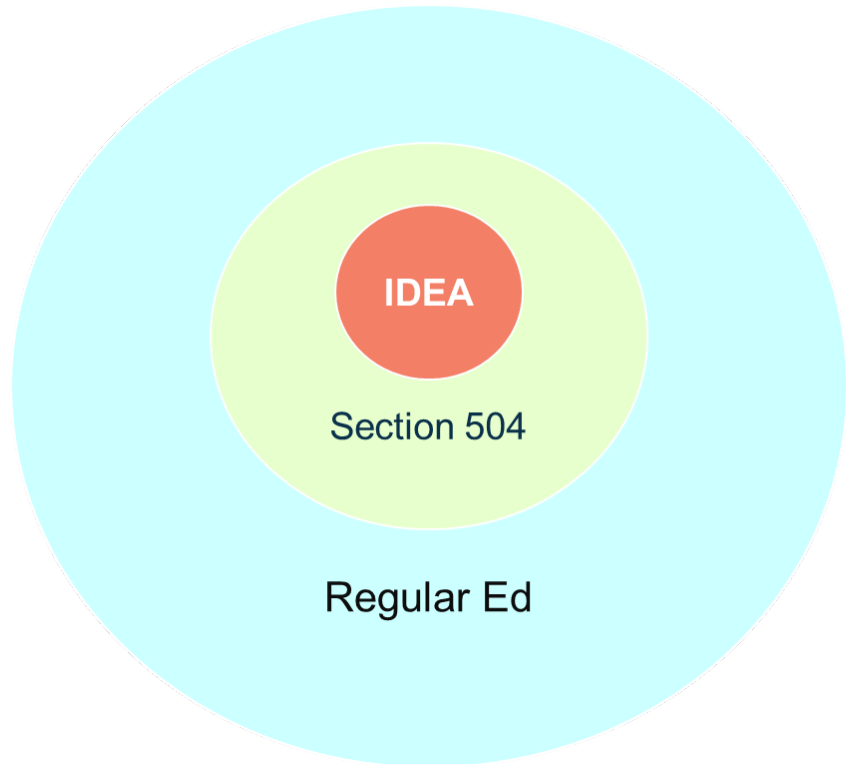




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# LAWS SUPPORTING YOUTH IN EDUCATION



# IDEA/IEP vs. 504 Plan

## Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA)/ IEP Eligible

The child must have a disability that adversely affects their educational performance, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

- Requires numerous evaluations from the school and other professionals
- Provides accommodations AND modifications
- Lengthy evaluation and implementation process
- Must be updated at least once a year

## Section 504 of the ADA

A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.

- Requires medical documentation of the impairment
- Provides accommodations that allow the student to participate in activities with their peers.
- Plans can be created and implemented immediately
- Must be updated at least once a year or when there are changes in the severity of the impairment



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## UNIT 2: OBJECTIVES

- Understand where, and from whom, sensitive information can be accessed regarding educational planning.
- Become familiar with terminology used with education systems and records.
- Practice developing successful action plans for effective education advocacy.



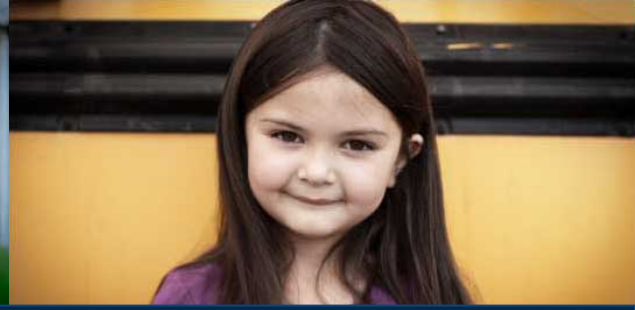
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# JOSHUA'S STORY



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## ACTIVITY

### **WHAT ELSE DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?**

List 5 questions that you have after reading about Joshua.



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# DEVELOPING A PLAN

Georgia CASA Education Advocacy  
Quick Reference Guide

Education Advocacy Checklist





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## EDUCATION ADVOCACY ACTION PLAN RATIONALE

- Helps create a CASA Education File for youth served by CASAs
- Gathering the information and documents will help CASAs determine the specific needs of their assigned youth
- Does not require advanced knowledge of educational issues to complete
- Provides objective data about the educational needs of youth in care



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# Education Advocacy Action Plan

- CASA Appointment Order
- Transcript
- IEP?
  - Date last updated?
- 504 Plan?
  - Date last updated?
- Behavior Intervention Plan?
- Report Cards
- Teacher/Counselor Contact Information
- Request EPAC Evaluation
  - If already completed, request the report.
- Meet with Child and Foster/Group Home About Education
- Meet with School Personnel and Stakeholders
- Obtain & Review Copy of Education Records at School
- Check SLDS Records in the Parent Portal



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# Understanding Education Terminology

Acronym Alphabet Soup

Glossary



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## UNIT 3: OBJECTIVES

- Become familiar enough with schools to advocate for youth's educational needs to the courts.
- Practice information gathering regarding school and identify supports and allies for the youth.
- Review information sharing guidelines and revisit the concepts of privacy and confidentiality.



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# Getting What You Need



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**COLLABORATE, COLLABORATE,  
COLLABORATE!**





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**CASA EDUCATION ADVOCACY WORKS BEST WHEN  
CASA VOLUNTEERS **PROACTIVELY** REACH OUT TO  
SCHOOL PERSONNEL **SEEKING RECORDS/UPDATES**  
AND **ASK TO BE INCLUDED** IN ALL MEETINGS.**

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## Education Records Review Tips

- The permanent record available upon request
- IEPs and 504 plans should be reviewed annually (Check the dates)
- If the child has an IEP, request a surrogate parent from the school if the birth family is not available.
  - A surrogate parent represents the student with disabilities in those circumstances where a parent or guardian would usually be responsible for representing educational interests
  - CASAs can serve as surrogate parents (online training is available)

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## Education Records Review Tips

- Review previous report card grades and look for any trends
- Review any notes by previous teachers or counselors
- Ask to be added to the parent portal (SLDS)
  - The parent portal includes historical testing information, attendance records, special and/or gifted education status, current grades, etc.



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## **ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES** **(SCHOOL DISTRICTS)**

Utilize established procedures for accessing child records.

Utilize established procedures for accessing real time data/ information from a child's records (SLDS Parent Portal).



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# EPAC Collaboration

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## WHAT IS EPAC?

- The Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation (EPAC) Unit was established to assist DFCS in ensuring the educational well-being of youth in foster care.
- The Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation (EPAC) Unit provides educational assessments to children and consultation to case managers and other direct service staff to promote educational stability.





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## KEY DFCS POLICIES TO REMEMBER

- Educational Stability DFCS Field Practice Guide
- Youth should remain in their school of origin whenever possible.
- EPAC Assessments should be completed and uploaded to SHINES within 30 days.
- A child should miss no more than (1) day of school during the transfer process.
- Funding may be available to transport a child to their school.



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## **ADDITIONAL KEY DFCS POLICIES TO REMEMBER**

- A referral has to be made to the EPAC Unit before the child can be evaluated
- Once evaluated, the child has to be below grade level in math and/or reading to be eligible for services
- If the child is below grade level, EPAC will not provide any tutorial or supportive services until all resources have been explored by the school district.





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## **DFCS EDUCATION SUPPORT MONITORS (ESM)**

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## SUGGESTED EPAC ADVOCACY STEPS

- Check with the case manager to see if a referral has been made; if it has not, ask them to do so or offer to assist.
  - *Remember referrals are required for all school aged children in care*
  - *This form can also be submitted by anyone who knows the DFCS Case Manager SHINES ID*
- Check on the status of the assessment
  - *It should be completed within 30 days.*



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# INTERVIEW WITH JOSHUA



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## ACTIVITY

### INTERVIEW WITH JOSHUA: WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Work in pairs to develop a couple of sentences about what you learned during the interview about:

- Foster Home
- School
- Family Relationships
- Educational Needs



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## **EDUCATION ADVOCACY CHECKLIST:**

### **REVIEWING COMMON EDUCATION ISSUES**



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## COMMON SCHOOL RELATED ISSUES FOR FOSTER YOUTH

- Enrollment Problems
- Inappropriate Classroom Placement
- Inappropriate Disciplinary Procedures
  - *Missing Behavior Intervention Plans*
  - *School Exclusions*
  - *Failing to follow school board policy or student handbook*
- Managing Expectations

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## ENROLLMENT PROBLEMS

- Check School Board Policies
- Missing Documentation and Forms
  - *Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-133(b), schools or (LEAs) are required to immediately enroll a student who is in the physical or legal custody of the Department of Human Services (DHS) or the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).*
  - *If DFCS Case Manager requests a transfer of files in writing, the school must obtain the records within 5 days.*



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## INAPPROPRIATE CLASSROOM PLACEMENT

Placements may not be appropriate based on the IEP

- Ask to have a surrogate parent appointed by the school district for all children identified under IDEA
  - *DFCS Case Manager cannot sign IEPs or act a "parent" under IDEA*
- When possible, visit the school unannounced during the time period when the child should be receiving special education services
- Ask if the child is on track to receive an regular high school diploma





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## INAPPROPRIATE DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

- Missing Behavior Intervention Plans
  - *Check to see if a BIP has been written for every child that has been diagnosed with a condition that may cause behavioral disruptions*
- School Exclusions
  - *Ask for a copy of school documentation when a child is sent home for behavioral disruptions*
  - *Contact CASA staff and child attorney immediately if a school plans to send a child to a tribunal hearing*
- Failing to follow school board policy and/or student handbook
  - *Review the school board policy and student handbook*
  - *Ask if the punishment fits the level of severity*

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## MANAGING OUR EXPECTATIONS

- Gifted children often appear to have ADHD
  - *The child may be capable of doing the work, but gets distracted easily.*
  - *Suggest offering an enrichment activity after the required work is completed.*
- State Longitudinal Data System
  - *Use the GTID number or parent portal to review the historical information about the child.*
- Transcript Review
  - *Ask the guidance counselor to help you review transcripts and help create a plan for graduation.*
- Pragmatic Goals
  - *Consider the age, motivation level and goals for each child-- then work collaboratively to create realistic goals.*



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# Who Needs to Know?

Confidentiality Revisited





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# EDUCATION RESOURCE GUIDE





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# **SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVOCACY TOOLKIT**

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## RESOURCES

- Local CASA Program
- GA CASA- [www.gacasa.org](http://www.gacasa.org)
- Local School Board Policy
- GA Appleseed- [www.gaappleseed.org](http://www.gaappleseed.org)
- Georgia Department of Education- [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org)
- EPAC- <http://epac.dhs.ga.gov/>

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Questions?