



# DCF Legislative Testimony

March 10, 2026

**TESTIMONY OF:** Rebecca Gerhardt, Director of Permanency, Department for Children and Families

**TESTIMONY ON:** 2024-2025 KSDE/DCF Foster Care Report Card

## DCF | FOSTER CARE REPORT CARD

Chair Erickson and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present information on the 2024-2025 Kansas Foster Care Annual Academic Report Card. This annual education report card for students in foster care is a continuing opportunity for KSDE and DCF to learn about the needs of students experiencing foster care.

KSDE and DCF staff continue to co-facilitate Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) meetings. In January of 2025, the United States Department of Education (DoE) and Health and Human Services (HHS) released joint guidance on ESSA for the first time. As a result, DCF and KSDE partnered for most of the first 3 quarters of the year reviewing that guidance and revising our established processes for the Best Interest Determination (BID) meetings. Best Interest Determination meetings allow a student in foster care, when possible, to remain in their school of origin and require all child and family wellbeing stakeholders to cooperate in providing support to the student. As a result of the guidance and ongoing meetings, KSDE developed a formal BID form which is now in effect, and KSDE and DCF held a joint convening of local education agency and child welfare agency points of contact. DCF and KSDE leadership provided joint guidance to education and child welfare professionals regarding ESSA, BID, current practices and upcoming changes. Breakout groups allowed education and child welfare staff to reflect and make connections.

Based on the success of that convening, KSDE is hosting several foster care learning opportunities for 2026 alongside DCF staff. We continue to develop our partnership and are focusing on improving communication between both systems this year. Topics to be covered during these convenings include a review of the BID process, Special Programs (such as JDCs and PRTFs) and Foster Care, Ensuring Stability through Transportation Feedback and Challenges, and Special Education and Foster Care.

Collaboration between DCF, KSDE, CMP Educational Coordinators, and local school districts are leading to success stories for individual youth:

- During the Fall of 2025, a local school district and CMP educational liaison worked with a 17-year-old student, just a few credits short of graduation, who was struggling to find placement stability. This student was able to enroll in an in-house educational program with a local residential provider. Within two months, the student had finished the courses necessary for graduation. This student is now focused on learning about post-secondary institutions and considering colleges.
- In another part of the state, the collaborative work of the CMP Educational Liaison and school district allowed a sibling set to remain together at their school of origin by establishing transportation for the students despite an out-of-district placement. The siblings were able to stay after school for tutoring services and extra-curricular activities without transferring transportation responsibility to the foster home. The relationship built during that experience now supports other students in the district, as both CMP and district staff are better prepared to cooperatively support students' best interests.
- For another student, a placement with a relative was found and approved. The youth expressed in a Team Decision Making meeting that she did not want to change schools. The CM and Educational Liaison worked together with two school districts and were able to maintain this student at the school of origin with transportation assistance from the school.

DCF looks forward to continuing to partner with KSDE and local school districts to equalize outcomes for youth in foster care with all students throughout the state. We continue to see progress. Highlights of the 24/25 school year include:

- The number of youth experiencing the need for foster care continues to fall. While the need for foster care has fallen, the number of school-age children experiencing foster care has risen from 5,580 in the 23/24 school year, to 5,865 in the 24/25 school year.
- The **graduation rate** for all students in foster care continues to increase.
  - The graduation rate has risen from 64.6% during school years 22/23 to 72% in school years 24/25.
  - The graduation rate gap between students experiencing foster care and the all-student population continues to narrow. During school year 22/23 the gap was 23.6% and fell to 19% in school year 24/25.
  - This is the second year in a row where the growth in graduation rate for students in foster care outpaced the graduation rate growth in the all-student population.
- The **attendance rate** for youth experiencing foster care, currently at 89%, has remained relatively steady over the past 3 years.
  - While this is lower than the attendance rate for the all-student population, the gap is less than 5% for all groups and subgroups of students experiencing foster care and the all-student population.
- Generally, rates of **chronic absenteeism** for all students and for all students experiencing the need for foster care have remained steady since the 23/24 school year. The gap between students experiencing foster care and for all students has also remained steady at 17%.
- The **dropout rate** for students in foster care has continued to decrease, as has the gap between student populations.
  - During the 22/23 school year 5.1% of students experiencing foster care discontinued their education without graduating. This fell to 3.7% in school year 24/25. In the 24/25 school year the all-student dropout rate saw a slight increase from 1.2% to 1.3%.
  - The gap between the student population and students experiencing foster care continues to narrow. It dropped from 3.5% in the 22/23 school year to 2.5% in the 24/25 school year.
- Kansas students experiencing foster care experienced greater success in being **promoted to the next grade level**, narrowing the gap between students experiencing foster care and the all-student population.
  - All racial groups experienced an increase in promotion rate during the 24/25 school year when compared to the 23/24 school year.
  - During school year 23/24 the gap between the all-student population and students in foster care was 5%. During the 24/25 school year, this dropped to 2.4% (a more than 50% reduction).
  - Female students experienced a 3% decrease in the gap between those experiencing foster care and the full student population (from 5.3% to 2.3%), while male students experienced a narrowing of the gap to 2.2%.
- More Kansas students in foster care are being **promoted to the next grade** at all grade levels except 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. The gap between the all-student population and students experiencing foster care continues to narrow for nearly all grade levels.

- In 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades students in foster care experienced a *higher* rate of promotion to the next grade level than the all-student population.
- More than 90% of students experiencing foster care at all grade levels, except 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade, are promoted to the next grade. Even for students in those highest grades, the gap between students experiencing foster care and the full student population has narrowed. With 11<sup>th</sup> graders narrowing the gap by 4.2%. Tenth graders experiencing foster care narrowed the gap by 2.7%.
- The percent of students experiencing foster care who access **at-risk preschool programs** continues to rise. More than 90% of preschool aged students in foster care access such a program. This is nearly 16% higher than the all-student population. At risk preschools provide services to children who are at risk of entering kindergarten socially, emotionally, or academically unprepared for success.
- **Mental Health Intervention Teams (MHITs)** continued to be available in 81 school districts during the 24/25 school year. These teams served 8.5% of the foster care population compared to .8% of the all-student population.
  - Usage of MHIT services by students experiencing foster care continues to increase. In the 24/25 school year there was a 1.2% increase in usage of MHIT services by students experiencing foster care while the reach in the total student population remained steady. All reportable racial groups experienced an increase in the percentage of students participating in MHIT services.
- Kansas schools continue to focus on **academic preparedness for post-secondary success**. This measures the number and percentage of students who scored 3 or 4 on state assessment testing. Both youth experiencing foster care and the all-student population have experienced increased percentages in all core subject areas. A wider gap between students experiencing foster care and the all-student population is present in the 24/25 school year when compared to prior years. This is most pronounced when looking at the difference in math scores.

These assessments capture point-in-time achievements for a cohort of youth in a specific grade and represent a small part of a student’s overall educational experience. Assessments are not completed by every student every year; rather, only certain grades and certain times of year are assessed by this tool. Thus, while these data points can help provide perspective, it is just one part of a student’s educational progression.

(see: [https://ksassessments.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-23\\_Kansas\\_Assessments\\_Overview\\_Calendar.pdf](https://ksassessments.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-23_Kansas_Assessments_Overview_Calendar.pdf))

While the report shows many areas of success, there remain opportunities for growth – especially when considering disciplinary action and time out of school that results from that disciplinary action:

- Kansas students in foster care experienced increased amounts of **in-school suspensions** over both the 22/23 and 23/24 school years. These students also experienced an increase in the average number of days suspended.
  - When compared to the all-student population, 6.1% more young people experiencing foster care had in-school suspensions, and those suspensions were on average a day longer in duration than the all-student population.
- Students experiencing foster care also experienced an increase in **out-of-school suspensions**. The percentage of students in foster care receiving an out of school suspension rose by 4.7% to 12.7%. This is 9.5% more than the total student population.

- Students in foster care experienced an average of 5.3 days of suspension, which is approximately half a day longer than the full student population. African American and Hispanic students experienced suspensions that were a day or more longer than the full student population of a similar race.
- Few students in Kansas experience **expulsion**. Only .1% of the full population (346 students) and .2% of the foster care population (11 students) experience expulsion from school.
  - When a student in foster care experiences expulsion, their education is disrupted for nearly 16 days longer than a student in the all-student population. Additionally, for students in foster care the number of days continues to rise, from 92.3 days in the 23/24 school year to 111.6 days in the 24/25 school year. This small number of students is, on average, expelled for 62% of the school year. The average number of days is higher than in the past 2 years but remains lower than the average days in the 21/22 school year (151.3 days).

We appreciate the opportunity this report presents not only for improvement of outcomes but maintaining and increasing collaboration with our colleagues at KSDE. We look forward to continuing our efforts to create meaningful reports so productive conversations can occur locally. DCF is committed to using this data and the insights it provides to improve policy and practice.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this annual report, I am happy to answer any questions at the appropriate time.