

Report Highlights



Foster Care Education Initiative

Department of Education • Department of Human Services

Performance Audit • February 2022 • 2053P

Key Concern

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) has not effectively used available data to track the educational performance of students in foster care in order to help the Foster Care Education Initiative (Initiative) achieve its goals. Our analyses of CDE’s educational data, along with analyses conducted by CDE, show that students in foster care are not achieving educational success compared to other students in the state.

Key Findings

- CDE’s “aspirational” goals for the Initiative are to help students in foster care excel academically, complete courses, advance to the next grade level, and continue on a path to postsecondary success. CDE reports data points about students in foster care that are specifically required by state and federal law, such as graduation rates. However, CDE does not track other metrics that could provide insight about how foster care students are performing academically.
- Our analyses of CDE’s educational data suggest that the Initiative may not be progressing toward meeting its aspirational goals. For example, for the 2018-2019 school year:
 - On average, foster care students scored about 100 points lower than other students on the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) Science test, and 20-30 points lower on both the CMAS Math and English Language Arts tests.
 - Foster care students scored an average of 822 on the SAT, while their peers averaged 1001. The score range for the SAT is 400 to 1600.
- CDE does not track and publicly report on the number of schools that students in foster care attend each year, even though this metric could provide insight about a factor that can affect a student’s academic achievement. Our analysis found that a higher proportion of students in foster care attended more schools during the 2018-2019 school year than other students. During the school year, 474 foster care students attended 3 different schools, 106 students attended 4 different schools, and 34 students attended 5 or more schools.
- The Department of Human Services (DHS) did not provide CDE with a complete list of all children who were in foster care during Fiscal Year 2019. Data that we obtained directly from DHS included 8,457 children in foster care during Fiscal Year 2019, compared to the 6,038 (71 percent) foster care children included in the data that DHS provided to CDE.
- CDE did not flag at least 273 children in its system as being in foster care even though they were between 6 to 16 years old, which are the ages that children are required by law to be in school. We also identified 149 foster care children between the ages of 4 to 5 years, and 104 foster care children between 17 to 21 years, who CDE did not flag in its system, but who could also be attending school or receiving services through the public school system.

Background

- In 2008, the General Assembly declared that children in foster care “deserve access to the same opportunities that are enjoyed by other students” and enacted requirements aimed at improving those students’ educational stability.
- In 2012, as part of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, CDE launched the Foster Care Education Program, which it later rebranded to be an “initiative,” to help students in foster care excel academically.
- CDE is statutorily required to use student-level data for accountability, program improvement, and research, as well as to perform other activities to coordinate with child welfare education liaisons who work with students in foster care.
- Since 2013, CDE and DHS have had a data-sharing agreement in place to share relevant information on children in foster care at the state level.

Recommendations Made

10

Responses

Agree: **10**

Partially Agree: **0**

Disagree: **0**