

OFFICE OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Child Welfare & Student Support Initiatives



Highlights from the 2024–2025 school year include key initiatives by the Hawai'i Department of Education (Department) to strengthen support for students in foster care. In partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department formalized new data-sharing and procedural agreements, co-led statewide trainings on educational stability, and hosted a Child Safety Conference focused on child maltreatment, educational equity, and cross-sector strategies to support student well-being.

1. Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)

Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care in Hawaii

Effective: April 29, 2025

The Department and DHS established a Memorandum of Agreement and joint procedural guidance outlining shared responsibilities to ensure the educational stability of students in foster care.



Key Provisions:

- **Best Interest Determination (BID):** A collaborative decision-making process to determine the most appropriate school placement for a student entering or changing foster care placement.
- **Immediate Enrollment:** No student is denied or delayed enrollment due to incomplete records.
- **Transportation Coordination:** The Department and DHS ensure timely access to schools.

Implementation Support:

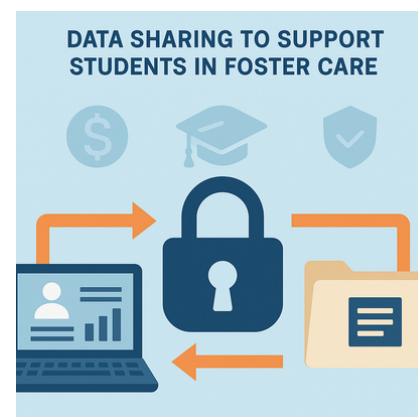
The Department and DHS conducted statewide in-person and virtual training sessions in June and July 2025, reaching over 200 school and CWS staff to support consistent implementation.

2. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Data Sharing to Support Students in Foster Care

Effective: March 7, 2025

This agreement enables secure, timely data sharing between the Department and DHS to support academic continuity, enhance coordination between educators and caseworkers, and ensure compliance with federal mandates such as ESSA, FERPA, and CAPTA.



Data Sharing and Technical Specifications Agreement (DSTSA)

The accompanying DSTSA outlines the specific data shared (e.g., attendance, grades, placement details), authorized users, and privacy protections.

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3. Safe and Supportive Schools: Child Safety Conference 2025

April 3–4, 2025 | Honolulu & Koʻolau Ballrooms

This conference brought together Department staff, DHS partners, and community organizations to strengthen systems of care for vulnerable students, including those in foster care.



The Department remains committed to ensuring that students in foster care are supported, seen, and successful through data-informed practice, strong interagency collaboration, and training that centers equity and lived experience.

Contact:

April Lum | Institutional Analyst – Foster Care

✉ april.lum@k12.hi.us | ☎ (808) 723-4192

Highlights:

- **Pre-Conference Session** with Family Strengthening Center on Child Maltreatment
- **Keynote:** Venus Rosete-Medeiros (CEO, Hale Kipa)
- **Sessions on Foster Care**
 - Educational Stability for Students Experiencing Homelessness and in Foster Care — Presented by April Lum and Toby Portner
 - Transitioning from Mandated Reporters to Mandated Supporters — Presented by Rachel Thorburn
 - Lived Experience Panel — Former youth in foster care and caregivers provided meaningful dialogue and offered different perspectives around system involvement for youth and families, facilitated by Epic 'Ohana
- **Additional Topics:** Trauma-informed care, adolescent brain development, and cross-agency collaboration.