A higher percentage of children in foster care are receiving special education services; several studies show that children in foster care are between 2.5 and 3.5 times more likely to be receiving special education services than their peers not in foster care.[1] Studies also reveal that students in foster care are more likely than their peers to experience:

● academic difficulties,
● delays in academic progress,
● lower scores on assessments, and
● delays in evaluation for special education services and supports.

IEP teams must know the rights and responsibilities of foster parents, so that foster parents can be an informed member of the IEP team when making alternate assessment eligibility decisions. Information regarding the educational rights of parents of a student with a disability in foster care can be found in Louisiana's Educational Rights for Students with Disabilities Handbook. Additional information is available in the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guidance titled, Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care.

IEP teams can help increase academic outcomes for students in foster care by informing the foster parent(s) of their educational responsibilities and rights. Foster parents:

● are defined as parents in Louisiana's Educational Rights for Students with Disabilities Handbook and have the same responsibilities of biological or adoptive parents,
● advocate for their child,
● sign consent for a special education evaluation and/or special education services, if needed,
● participate on the IEP team,
● make decisions regarding their child's individual education programming and assessment participation,
● may revoke consent for the continued provision of special education and related services, if needed, and
● are able to request an IEP facilitator. Typically, an IEP Facilitator is brought in when parents and the school are having difficulties communicating with one another regarding the needs of the child.

IEP teams can further assist to increase the academic stability of students in foster care by:

● documenting and sharing education records, intervention data and progress with other schools, if the student transfers,
● completing educational evaluations in a timely manner,
● prioritizing evaluations due to the increased chance of unscheduled school changes during the school year, and
● documenting open evaluations in the SER system to help ensure seamless transition of evaluation completion and implementation of services.

IEP teams should understand the unique needs and educational history of students in foster care when making decisions during IEP meetings. This understanding and awareness of the rights of foster parents will help ensure academic needs are aligned with services, supports and appropriate assessments to measure the educational growth of students in foster care.

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[1] National Working Group on Foster Care and Education. (2014.) Fostering success in education: National factsheet on the educational outcomes of children in foster care. Retrieved from http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/OurWork/NationalWorkingGroup.aspx