

# Fostering Graduation Success for Vulnerable Students 2019, S.B. 662

The Fostering Graduation Success for Vulnerable Students Bill, or S.B. 662, supports students experiencing education disruptions by ensuring access to timely graduation and the full range of educational opportunities. The bill defines a “student experiencing an education disruption” as any student from K-12th grade who has at least one school change in a year because of experiencing homelessness, an adjudication of dependency or delinquency, or a court-ordered voluntary placement or custody agreement. Without targeted support, youth who are forced to change schools due to experiencing homelessness, or foster care or juvenile justice system involvement, are at high risk of not graduating from high school. **Senate Bill 662 helps youth experiencing education disruptions achieve school success through graduation planning, credit transfer requirements, and targeted educational supports.**

## WHY DOES PENNSYLVANIA NEED S.B. 662?

Despite hard work, students experiencing education disruptions often cannot graduate because they change schools mid-year before earning full credit, their new school will not honor credits earned, or they didn't have the opportunity to take a course that is a graduation requirement for their final school. Schools may be hesitant to re-enroll youth with experience in the juvenile justice or foster care system because of concerns related to placing these students, who are typically older, in classes with younger students or because of the pressure to exclude students with poor standardized text scores. **We can make a difference in these young people's lives by eliminating barriers to success through supporting the Fostering Graduation Success for Vulnerable Students Bill.**

**“Since leaving placement I have been in three different schools. While in foster care I have been in eight different homes including foster homes, group placements, and mother baby homes (programs specific to helping moms). Right now, I am 19 and still in 10th grade because two years of schoolwork is gone.” – Alex**

## KEY PROVISIONS OF S.B. 662

- **Assigns a Point of Contact to Assist the Youth:** Directs the school to appoint a point of contact to assist the student's transition to the new school. The point of contact works with the student and key players to determine appropriate classes and connect the student with opportunities like extra-curriculars, career and technical training, post-secondary preparation, and remediation or tutoring services if needed.
- **Creates a Graduation Plan for High School Students:** Supports students towards timely graduation. It would document partial and full credits the student earned previously, clarify the credits still needed to graduate, and specify any needed remediation, tutoring, credit waivers or credit recovery options.
- **Promotes Equal Access to Education:** Allows students experiencing an education disruption the opportunity to participate in sports, extra-curriculars, and other specialized programs even if they start late. It ensures students can take required courses and earn credits in their new school.
- **Facilitates Timely Transfer of School Records:** Directs receiving schools to request a student's school records within two days of enrollment and gives the previous school two days thereafter to provide all requested records.
- **Provides Make-up and Diploma Options:** When youth are behind, provides options for schools to waive local requirement or offer make-up options such as testing, summer school, after-school or online credit recovery to help the youth graduate on time. If those options do not suffice, the bill describes alternative district and statewide diploma options.

## BARRIERS TO GRADUATION SUCCESS

- **Enrollment Problems:** Students frequently experience delays getting their educational records transferred to their new school, delaying their ability to re-enroll. As a result, youth may be placed into inappropriate classes, forced to an alternative school or GED program, or unable to re-enroll promptly or at all. Many students sit out of class, losing valuable learning time.
- **Unequal Education:** Unfortunately, many juvenile justice and residential facilities offer fewer essential courses required for graduation, which automatically creates a frustrating barrier for youth. Often, the curricula fail to align with state standards. Roughly 60% of youth who have experienced homelessness do not graduate on time, while 66% of youth with juvenile justice involvement never graduate. Only 75% of youth with experience in foster care graduate from high school or get a GED by age 21, compared to 92% of Pennsylvania's general population.
- **Changing Schools Hinders Credit Attainment:** Each school district or charter controls how long a youth must be in attendance before they can attain credit. Some districts do not provide credit to any youth unless they are enrolled for a full semester. As students switch schools due to system involvement or experiencing homelessness, they often fall far behind.
- **Difficulty Transferring Credits:** Youth may be prevented from receiving credits because of delays in school record transfers—or a failure of the school to send records at all. Youth and their families may not know how to request or obtain transcripts. Schools may refuse to accept credits from schools offering courses with different titles, content, or structure than their own. Some schools may refuse to provide any credits or partial credit even when courses appear on a youth's transcript.
- **Barriers to School Engagement:** Youth may be excluded from a full school experience. Joining sports, extra-curricular activities, and career/technical training can help connect students with their school community and foster academic success—especially when the student has experienced disruption in their living situation.

“I was told I only had a half of credit for Spanish, a class I had never taken before. I was then told that I would need to start from the 9th. I was really upset and did not want to be 17 years old and in the 9th grade again all because the schools didn't keep track of my credits. I dropped out of school for one year and then went to the E3 Centers in Philadelphia to get help to get my GED. In the E3 I got my GED within six months.” – Brit

By passing S.B. 662, we can help eliminate these barriers and support students to graduate on time. Questions? Contact Reynelle Brown Staley ([rstaley@elc-pa.org](mailto:rstaley@elc-pa.org)) or Kate Burdick ([kburdick@jlc.org](mailto:kburdick@jlc.org)).



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