



INTRODUCTION TO AB 490 POLICY BRIEFS

Background on California Assembly Bill (AB) 490

The Institute for Higher Education Policy estimates that foster youth change placements about once every six months, and some research suggests that they lose an average of four to six months of educational attainment each time that such a move is accompanied by a change in school placement.¹ Faced with these educational disruptions and other obstacles, it is no surprise that foster youth frequently fall behind in school and graduate from high school in lower numbers than their peers (around 50 percent of foster youth compared with 70 percent of their peers²).

In 2004 a comprehensive set of laws created by Assembly Bill (AB) 490 took effect to address the barriers to equal educational opportunity for California's foster children and youth. These laws apply to children who are declared dependents and wards³ of the juvenile court and whose cases are supervised by child welfare or probation agencies.⁴

Collaboration and Responsibility

The legislative intent of AB 490 was that "...educators, care providers, advocates, and the juvenile courts shall work together to maintain stable school placements and to ensure that each pupil is placed in the least-restrictive educational programs, and has access to the academic resources, services, and extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to all other pupils..."⁵

The Policy Briefs

In some places across California, there has been tremendous progress toward implementation of AB 490. In most places, however, there is a great deal more that can and must be done to support our youth. The Policy Briefs that follow introduce critical provisions of AB 490 and offer ideas for implementation that could improve educational opportunities for foster youth. They cover:

- Immediate enrollment in schools,
- Transportation,
- Partial credits, &
- Least restrictive educational placements.

¹ *Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth, A Primer for Policymakers*, Thomas R. Wolanin, The Institute for Higher Education Policy (December 2005), p. 29, available online at: <http://www.ihep.com/Pubs/PDF/fosteryouth.pdf> (last retrieved January 2, 2007)

² *Id.* at Executive Summary, p. v.

³ Under Welfare & Institutions Code (WIC) § 300, children who have been abused, abandoned or neglected are subject to jurisdiction of the juvenile court, which may declare them "dependents." Under WIC § 602, children who have violated a law while under 18 are subject to jurisdiction of the court, which may declare them "wards."

⁴ EC § 48853.5(a).

⁵ EC § 48850(a).