

Stability by Design: Supporting Students in Foster Care Through Strong School Systems

ESSA Academy

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**SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Agenda

- 1. Educational Stability Matters**
- 2. Common Barriers**
- 3. Blueprint for Success-System Solutions**





Agenda # 1

Educational Stability Matters



**School stability is the most powerful intervention we have
for students in foster care.**

**It can prevent academic loss, reduce distress, and
strengthen belonging.**

**Stability doesn't happen by accident — it happens by
design.**



Shared Responsibility

ESSA requires the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) to collaborate with the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) to ensure the educational stability of children in foster care. [ESSA section 1112(c)(5)(A)]

*Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act



Definition of Foster Care

“Foster care” means 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the child welfare agency has placement and care responsibility. (45 C.F.R. § 1355.20(a))

Under this definition, “foster care” includes, but is not limited to, placements in: Foster family homes; Foster homes of relatives (also known as “formal kinship care”); Group homes; Emergency shelters; Residential facilities; Childcare institutions; and Preadoptive homes.

**Foster Care is included in Title I, Part A*

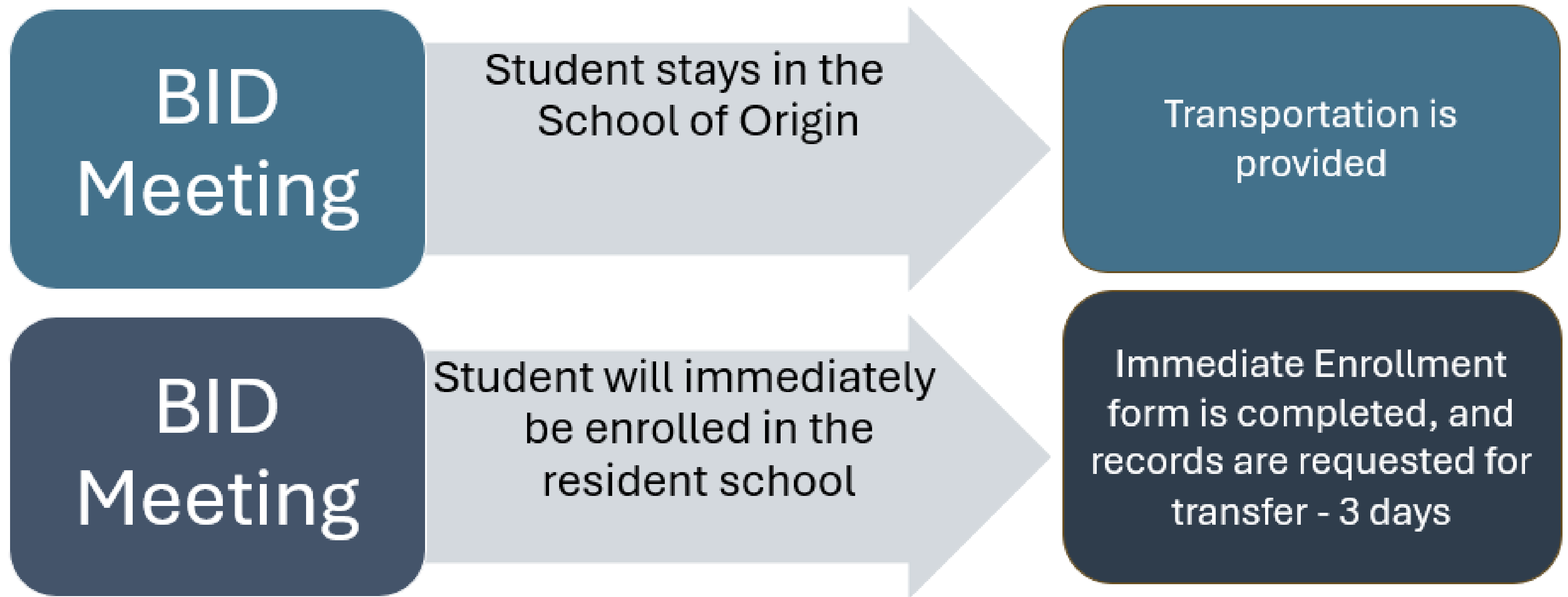


Educational Stability Provisions

State Level: SEA Points of Contact > State Collaboration > Guidance on School of Origin, Best Interest Determination (BID), Immediate Enrollment and Records Transfer > Data Sharing

Local Level: LEA Points of Contact > Local Collaboration > Removal of Barriers through BID, Immediate Enrollment and Records Transfers > Transportation Procedures > Funding
Transportation

Overview Process: When a student comes into foster care or has a placement change

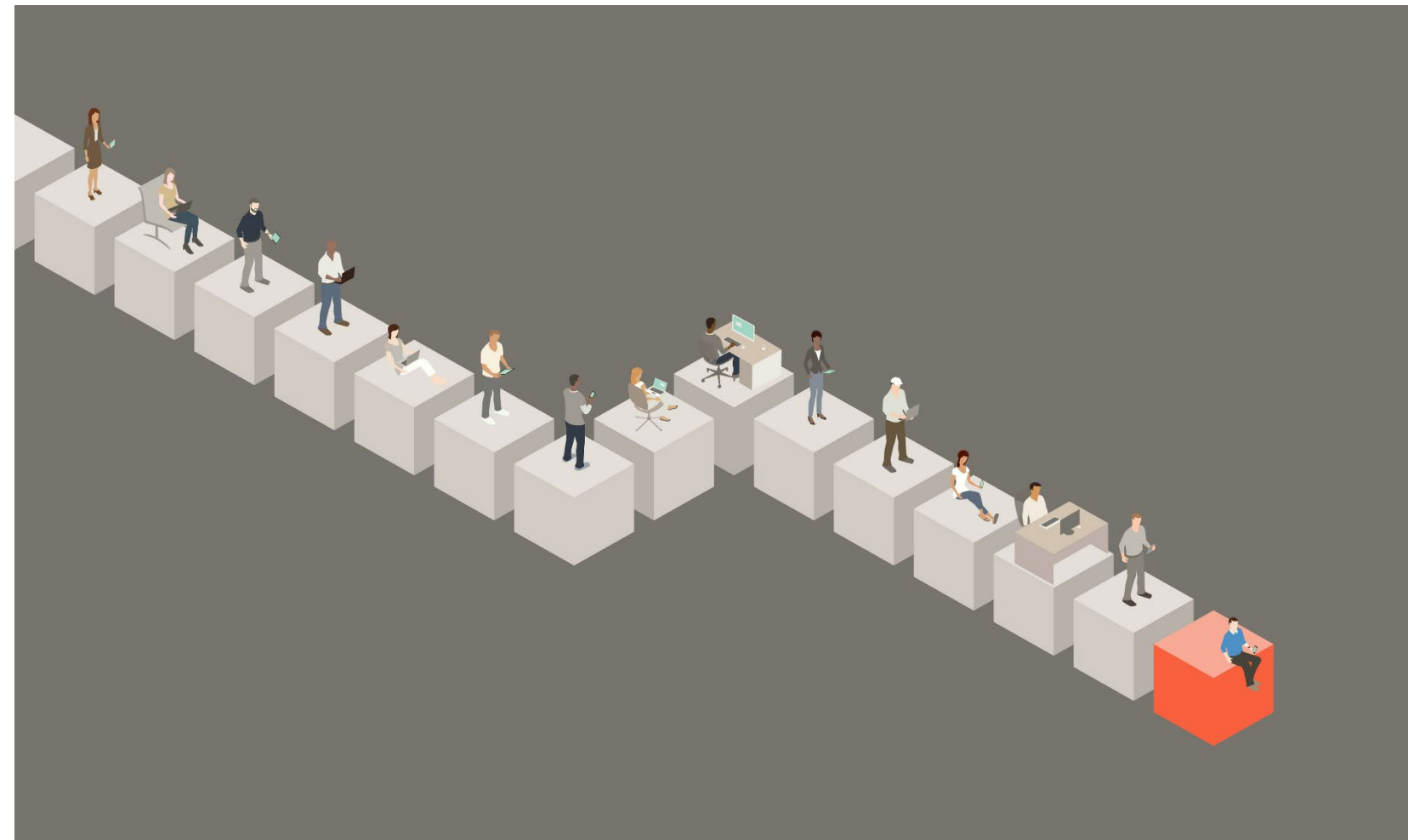


Students should not be withdrawn from PowerSchool until a BID has been completed

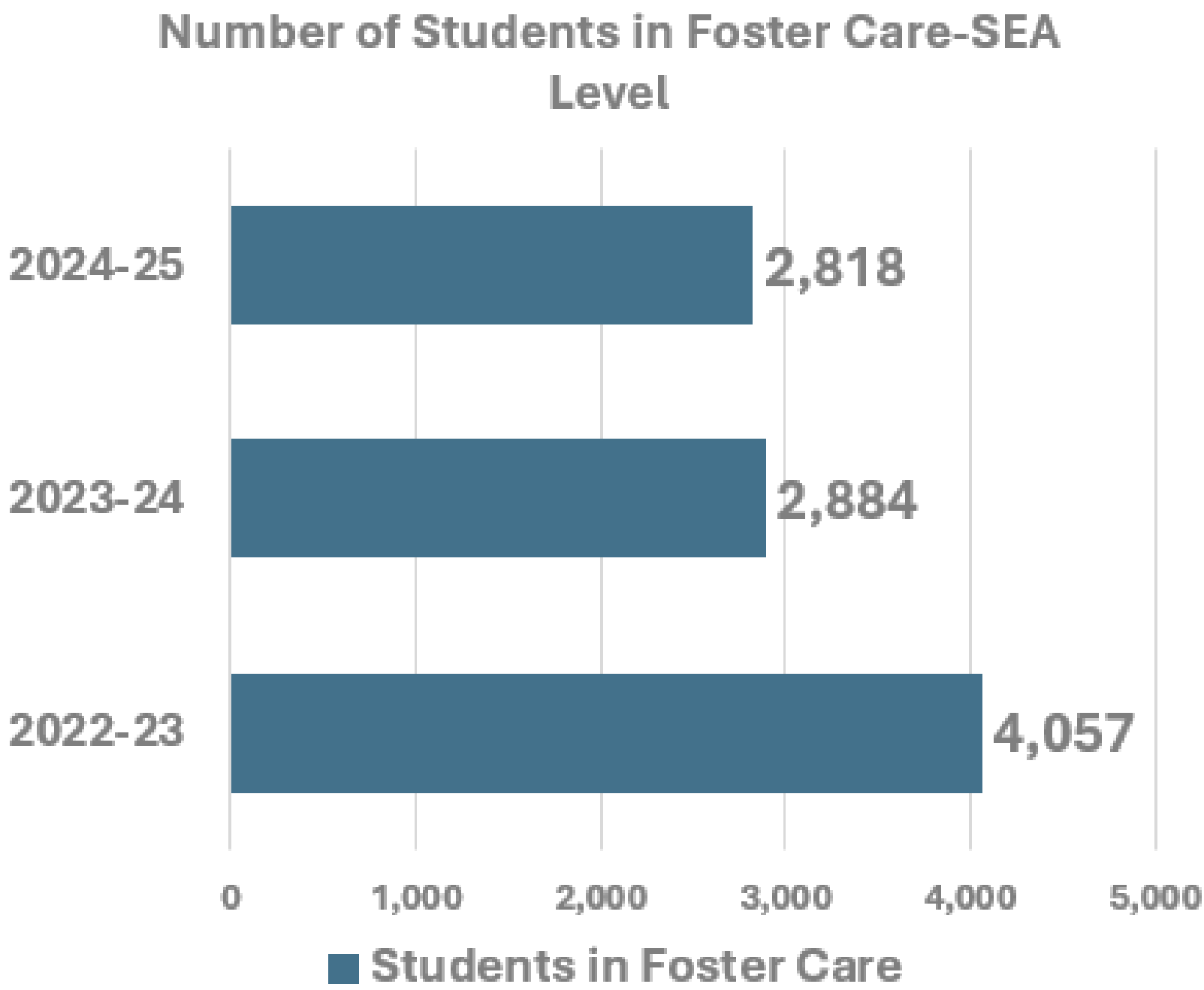


State Foster Care Data

Setting the Stage



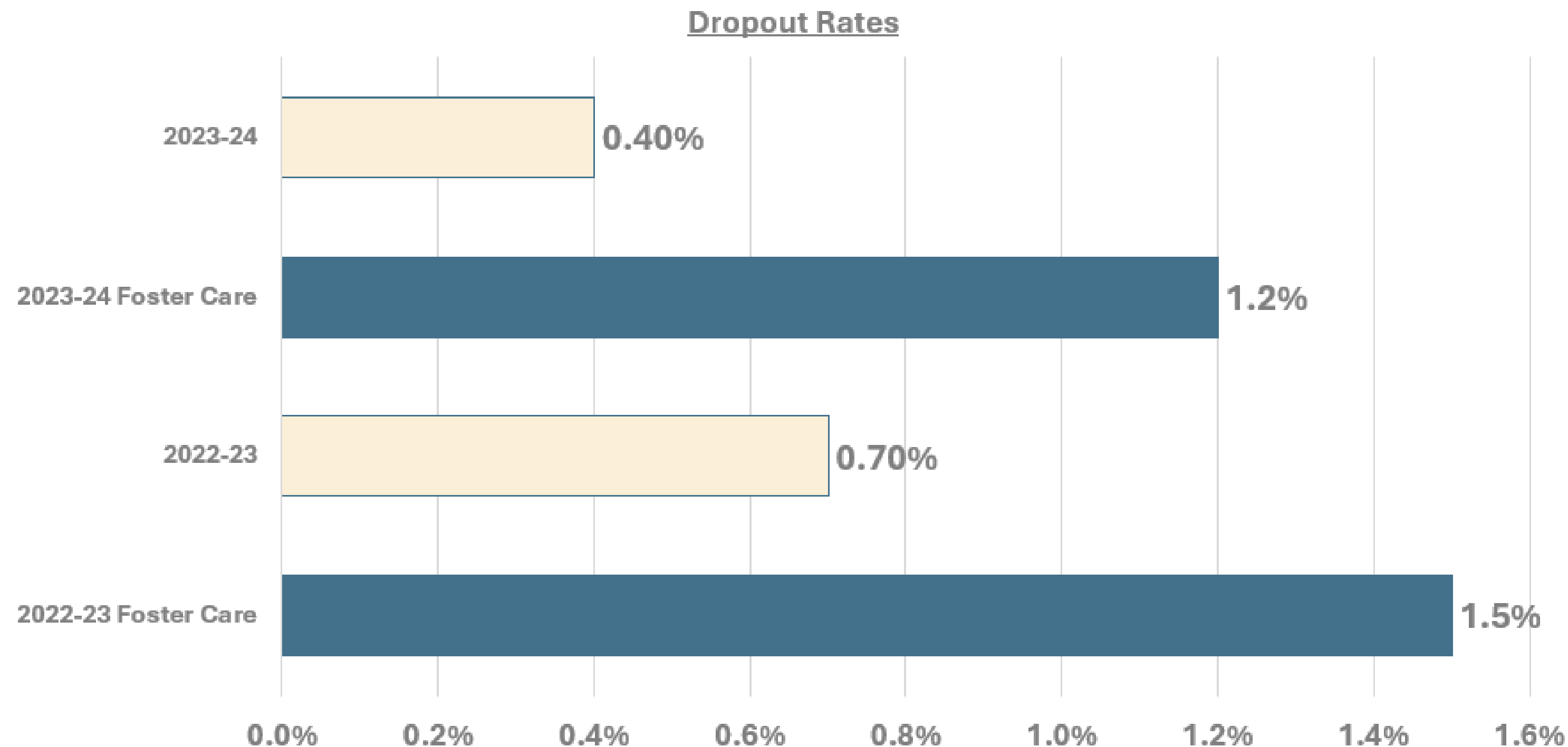
South Carolina Foster Care Data – Number of Students



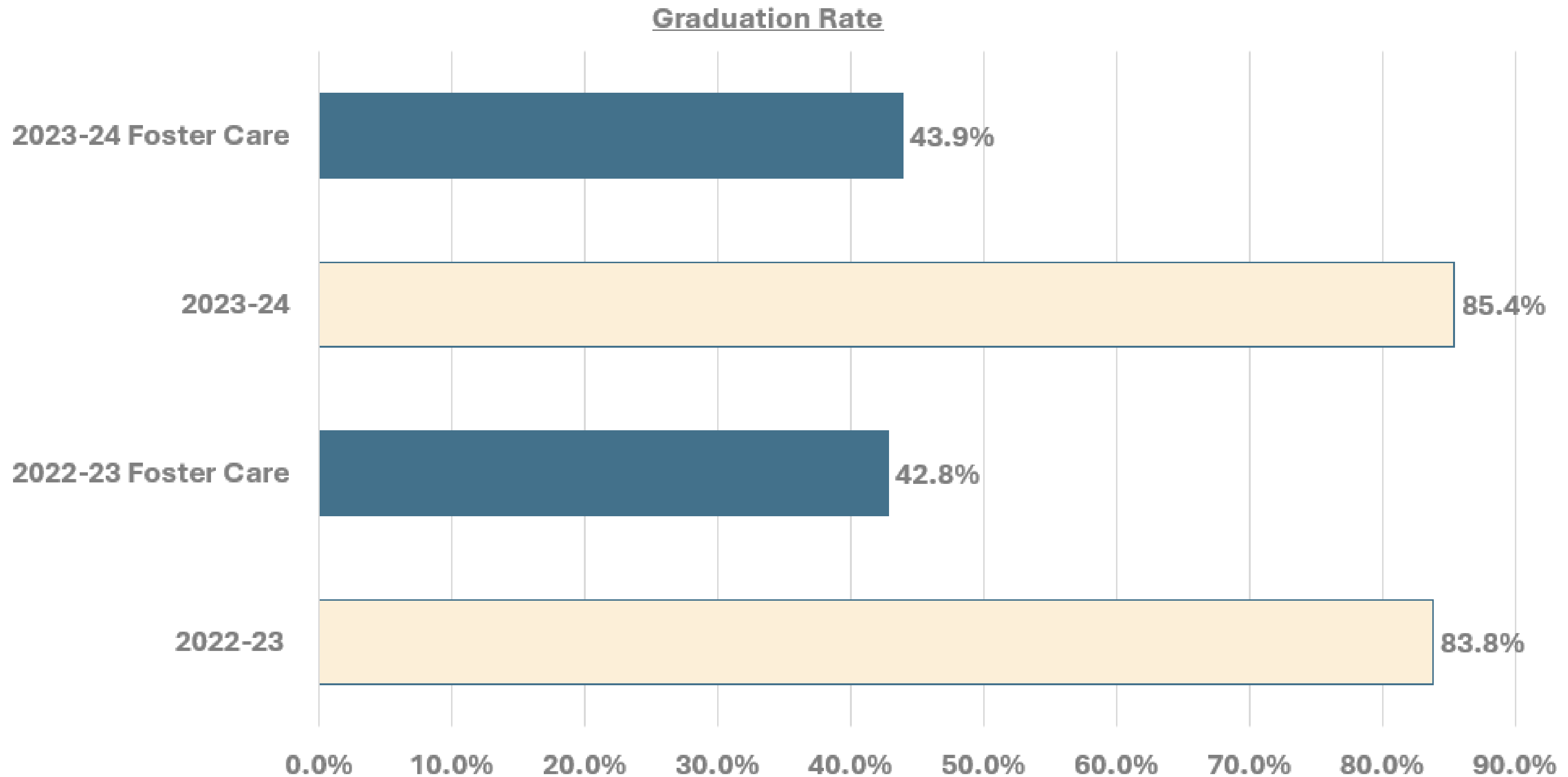
School Year	LEA Number	SEA Number	Number of Moves
2022-23	5,791	4,057	1,734
2023-24	5,050	2,884	2,166
2024-25	4,837	2,818	2,019



Foster Care Data - Dropout



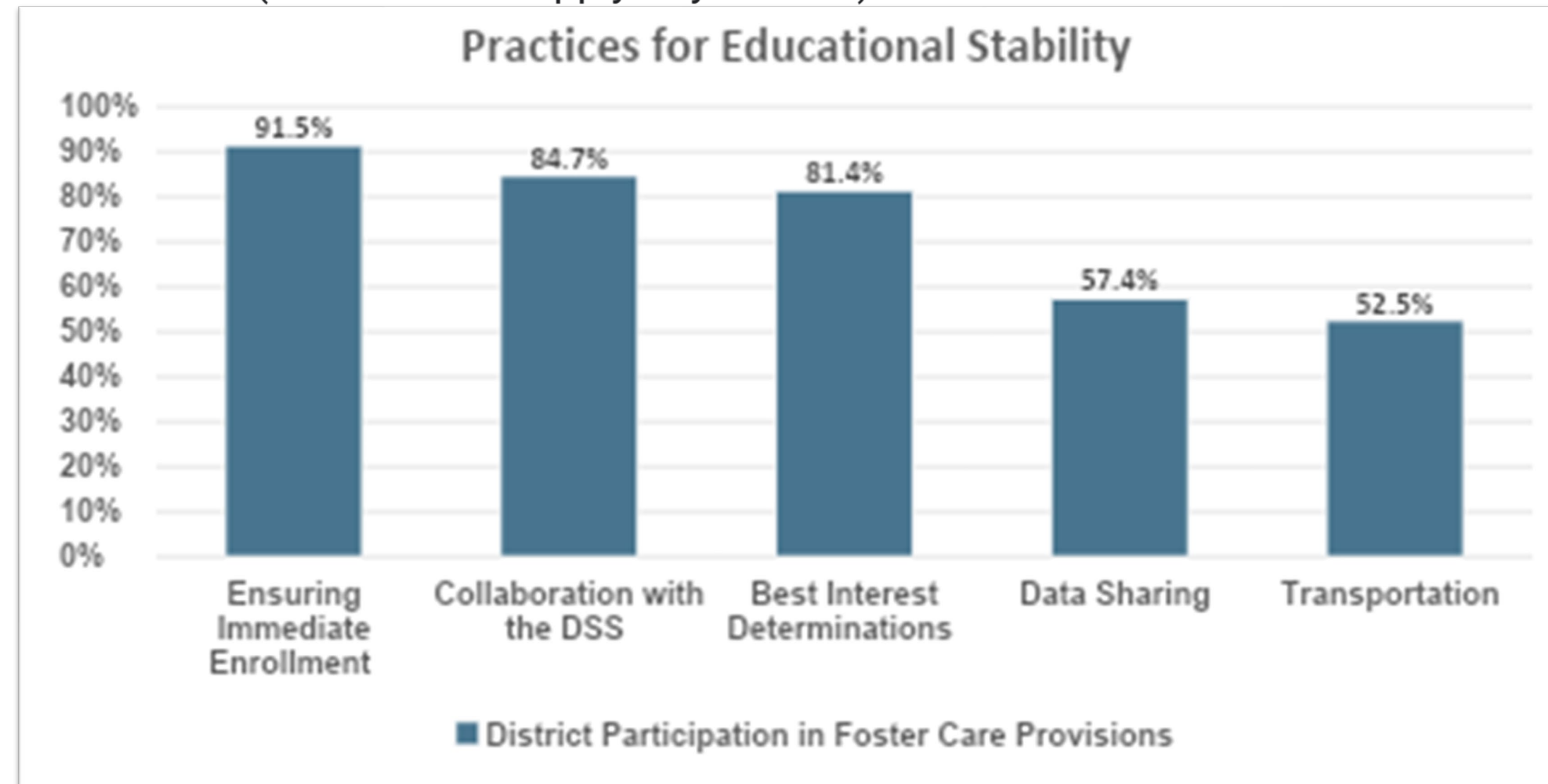
Foster Care Data - Graduation



Educational Stability

Which activities has your LEA participated in this school year to help ensure educational stability for students in foster care? (check all that apply to your LEA)

59 responses



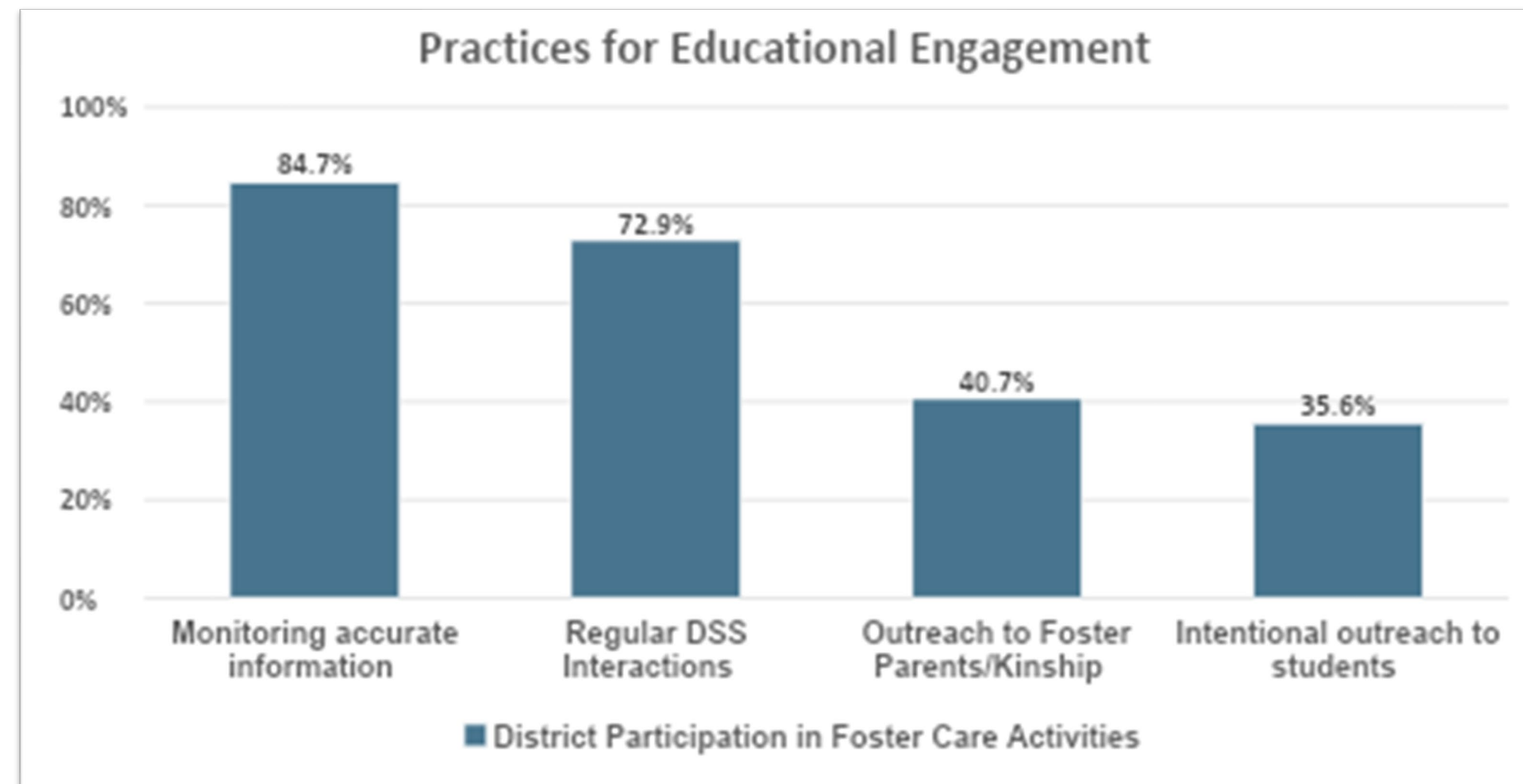
Celebrate: High Immediate Enrollment
Growth Area: BIDS and Transportation



Educational Stability (cont.)

Which methods has your LEA used to connect or engage with students in foster care this school year? (check all that apply to your LEA)

59 responses



Celebrate: High monitoring students/correct coding

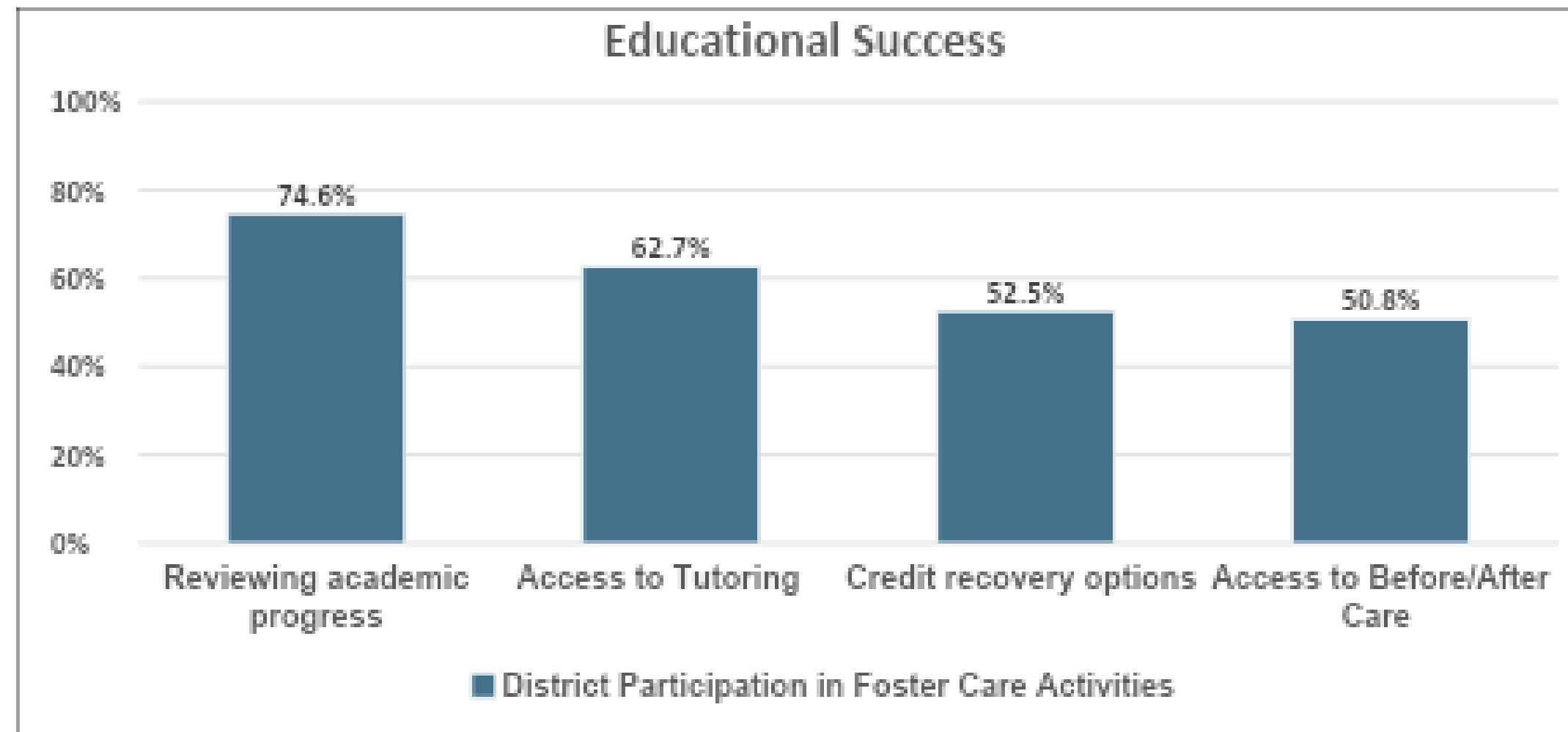
Growth Area: Intentional outreach to student and family



Educational Stability (cont.2)

What activities has your LEA provided to help accelerate learning and close learning gaps for students in foster this school year? (please check all that apply to your LEA)

59 responses



Celebrate: High in reviewing academic progress

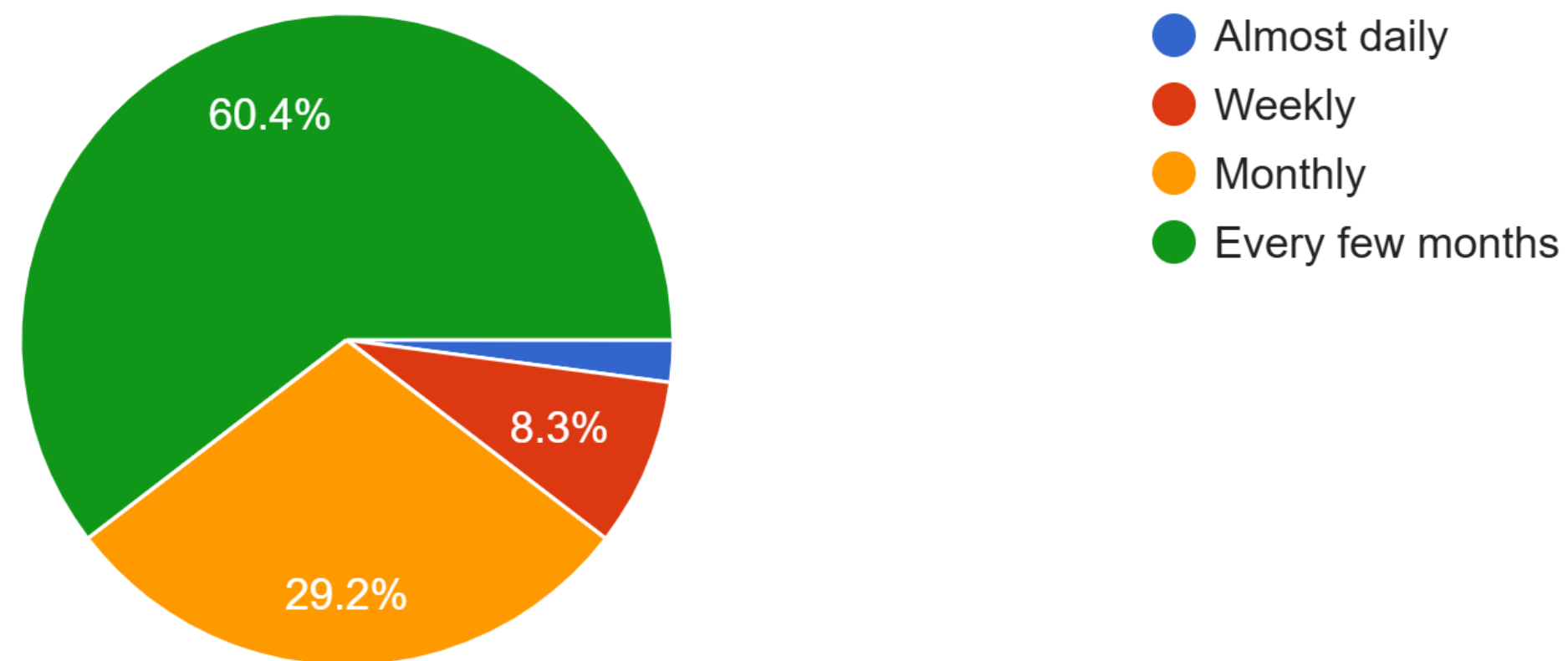
Growth Area: Access to specific services to mitigate learning loss



Best Interest Determinations Frequency

If you answered "yes" (participated in BIDs), approximately how frequently did you participate? (only pick one option)

48 responses



1 District mentioned almost daily, with 4 mentioning weekly

About 80% of LEAs stating YES to BIDs is sharing monthly or every few months!



Data Takeaways

We have a lot of work to do, but some clear points to gather momentum and improve outcomes.

- (1) Increase collaboration with DSS and other local partners
- (2) Strengthening emphasis on BIDs
- (3) Commitment to educational stability throughout transitions
- (4) Multi-level approach to improved Graduation Rate.





Agenda # 2

Common Barriers



Turn and Talk – Local Barriers

1. Enrollment
2. Transportation
3. Records
4. Belonging/Supports

Which barrier is the **most fragile** in your district.

- Why did you choose this area?
- What breaks down most often?



Barriers to Educational Success



Placement & school
instability



Delayed enrollment
& records transfer



Credit transfer
challenges



Over-/under-
identification for
special education



High discipline rates



Unfamiliar
educational settings

Barriers to Immediate Enrollment

Documentation and Paperwork:

Delays are frequently caused by **missing or incomplete documents such as the BID, proper paperwork** (including the immediate enrollment form), academic records (especially for high school students), or a student's IEP.

Communication and Coordination Issues:

Lack of communication or miscommunication between the LEA, DSS caseworkers, or the foster parent is a common reason for enrollment delays.



Barriers to Immediate Enrollment cont.

Specific District Policies and Procedures:

Policies that are connected to special education, alternative school and/or reinstatement can cause large delays and postpone immediate enrollment.

Definition of Immediate Enrollment is:
Fully Participating in School Activities, not just enrollment on paper only.

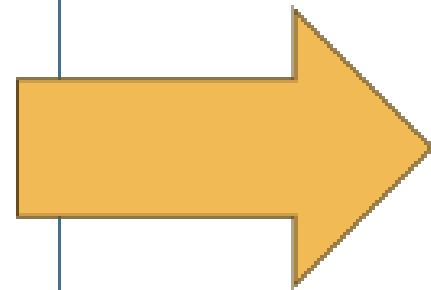
Foster Parent Involvement:

Foster parents not having the necessary documentation from the social worker, or not communicating with the school, contributes to delays.



Placement Instability

BIDs must happen before students are withdrawn from their current school, especially for middle and high school students.



- ✓ Rapid placement change can happen but should not lead to a quick withdrawal from School of Origin (SOO).
- ✓ A student should NOT be withdrawn from their SOO until a BID meeting is conducted, and it is determined that changing schools is in the student's best interest.
- ✓ Mitigate disruptions and support students' educational needs.
- ✓ BID participants should discuss the following questions to promote educational stability (addressed in question #3 on the BID document). 'Is the student's new living arrangement expected to be short- or long-term? How is this impacted by school selection?'
- ✓ Collaboration must happen to provide stability



Agenda # 3

Blueprint for Success



Ways to Improve Educational Stability

Collaboration and Communication:

Working with DSS on transportation and collaborating with districts, assisting with transitions to and from residential treatment, and coordinating placements for in-state and out-of-state moves.

Administrative/Procedural:

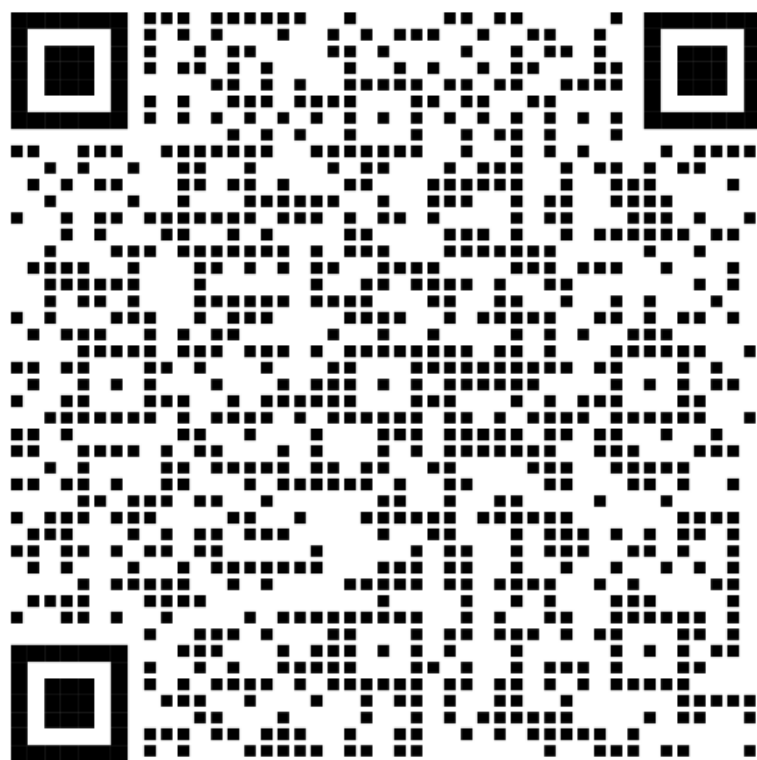
Monthly review for proper coding and mentioning difficulty collaborating with DSS agencies to complete Best Interest Determinations (BID's).

Intentional Programs and Activities:

Utilizing C4 Ministries, 21st Century Afterschool Program, Summer Reading Camps, Tutoring Opportunities, Boys and Girls Club of America, Parent University for At Risk Students - GRIT Summer Camp, and Alternative Education Programing (EXCEL Academy, R1 Virtual Academy, etc.)



Stability Memo



Stability Protocol for Students in Foster Care

This document is designed to increase stability and provide consistency for students as well as highlight needed collaboration between School Districts and the Department of Social Services.

Education is a vital part of stability for students in foster care:

Frequent changes in placement significantly challenge educational stability for students in foster care. The inconsistency in placements disrupts access to educational resources and continuity in academic instruction. As students transition between different placements, they may encounter delays in enrollment, gaps in assignments, and other emotional stressors, all of which can hinder their ability to focus on and succeed in school. Unfortunately, these disruptions can lead to decreased academic performance, increased absenteeism, and higher dropout rates, ultimately impacting their long-term educational outcomes and future opportunities.

This instability is often caused by a quick change in placement, where a student is withdrawn from their School of Origin (SOO), followed by the lack of permanent placement options. There are strategies that can assist in mitigating disruption and meet the educational needs of the student in foster care. Local School Districts and DSS County Offices should utilize these opportunities to exercise collaboration and increase educational stability for students in foster care.

In accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act Title I, Part A requirement, when a student comes into foster care or experiences a placement change or disruption, a [Best Interest Determination](#) (BID) meeting is required to decide school placement. This process should be completed as expeditiously as possible, within three business days of the placement change.

Please take these items into consideration when navigating educational instability:

1. A student should NOT be withdrawn from their SOO until a BID meeting is conducted, and it is determined that changing schools is in the student's best interest.
2. BID participants should discuss the following questions to promote educational stability (addressed in question #3 on the BID document). 'Is the student's new living arrangement expected to be short- or long-term? How is this impacted by school selection?'
3. If a student receives individualized education services, this must be discussed in the BID, as the Individualized Education Program (IEP), Individualized Language Acquisition Plan (ILAP), accommodations plan under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), etc., may require specific considerations. A representative of the IEP team should attend the BID meeting for a student with an IEP. Please reference the Office of Special Education Services (OSSES) Addendum for more guidance. If unsure if the student has an IEP or you are unable to find an IEP, contact an OSSES representative to clarify.
4. DSS may utilize its Regional Day Centers (when educationally appropriate) to accommodate students during the school day when they are unable to attend their SOO. These day centers are operated by

<https://ed.sc.gov/newsroom/school-district-memoranda-archive/education-stability-protocol/stability-protocol-for-dss-and-scde-attachment/>



Ideas to Improve Immediate Enrollment

Strict Policies and Procedures:

Many districts instruct schools, registrars, and staff to enroll students immediately or the same day they are contacted by the foster parent/DSS, often with the goal of exceeding the 3-business day requirement.

Training and Communication:

Ensuring timely enrollment is achieved through training staff (registrars, counselors, liaison, administrators) on the expectations and the urgency of the process, and maintaining constant communication and collaboration between the LEA, schools, DSS, foster parents, and other relevant parties.

Follow-Up and Accountability:

Local Foster Care Points of Contact often follow-up with school staff to ensure immediate enrollment occurs and hold schools accountable for adhering to the timeline.

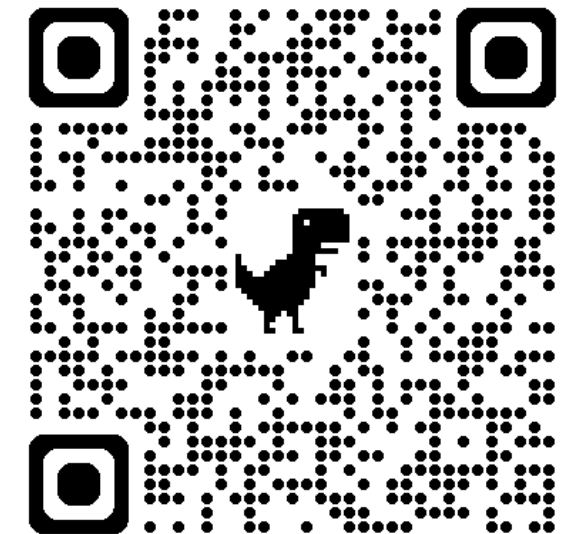


Encouraging Cross Community Connections

Local Districts are encouraged to form [collaborative teams](#) with DSS and other stakeholders at the local level

The Goal: Establish regular meetings to address:

- Educational Stability
- Service Coordination
- Family Engagement
- Shared Strategies



Collaborative local effort aimed at improving educational stability

Remember to include community partners in trainings and share policies and procedures of the district.

Stakeholder Group	Suggested Roles
Local School District	Foster Care Point of Contact, Special Education Coordinator, School Counselor, Transportation Coordinator
County DSS Office	Foster Care Case Managers, Regional Education Specialist, DSS County Leadership
Group Homes & Residential Providers	Program Director, Case Manager, Education Coordinator
Community-Based Organizations	Youth advocacy groups, mental health providers, tutoring services, faith-based organizations
Foster Parents & Kinship Caregivers*	A representative with lived caregiving experience
Youth with Lived Experience*	Young adults who have aged out of foster care
Legal Representatives	Guardian ad litem, family court liaison
Healthcare Providers	Behavioral health specialists, school-based health coordinators



Funding Educational Stability

Several funding streams explicitly support the "educational stability" provisions for students in foster care, recognizing the importance of maintaining consistent schooling.

- Title I, Part A and D of the ESEA
- Title IV, Part A of the ESEA
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program (Title IV, Part B of the ESEA)
- Title IV-E of the SSA (through DSS)
- Chafee Funds and ETV



Possible Uses for Foster Care

Title I Part A Set-Aside for transportation:

The additional costs that come with transporting a student to their school of origin, as well as providing other services to students in foster care.

ESEA section 1112(c)(5)(B)

Funding the position(s) for LEA Foster Care Points of Contact:

Looking at the time and capacity required to meaningfully engage with and serve students in foster care

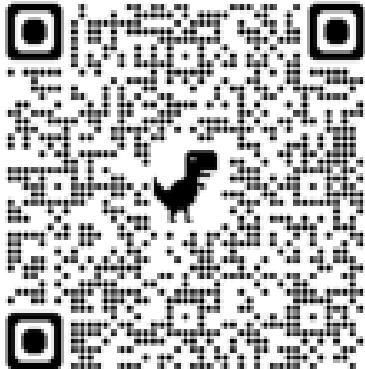
ESEA sections
1111(g)(1)(E)(iv) and
1112(c)(5)(A)

School wide programs:

Providing academic support for students in foster care like counseling school-based mental health programs, mentoring services and other strategies to support students' overall well-being and development



Addressing the Educational Needs of Foster Children

Authors: Joseph B. Ryan, Zachary Hurley, and Kristina N. Randall from Clemson University	Recommendations	
	Resiliency-focused teaching	• Create physically, emotionally, and academically safe learning environments • Build trusting relationships through consistency and transparency • Understand behavior as communication rather than defiance • Avoid punitive or escalating responses • Support educator wellness to prevent burnout
	Mentoring programs	• Improved mental health and quality of life • Enhanced self-esteem and peer relationships • Better educational outcomes • Sense of belonging and stability • Preparation for independent living 
	Expand coordination between schools and child welfare agencies	• Designated Liaisons: Regular communication between school and child welfare contacts • Best Interest Decisions: Collaborative school placement choices with youth input • Rapid Records Transfer: Quick sharing of records to prevent enrollment delays • Transportation Support: Arrangements to maintain school stability when possible • Joint Training: Cross-agency collaboration for increase continuity



Build Your District Stability Blueprint

- ✓ **Notification protocols:** Ex. When a child enters foster care, who is notified within 1 hour? PowerSchool alerts/checklists
- ✓ **Enrollment procedures:** Is DSS trained on these procedures?
- ✓ **Communication pathways:** Create a diagram showing who contacts whom and within what timeframe.
- ✓ **Transportation decision-trees**
 - Step 1: Best Interest is School of Origin
 - Step 2: LEA + DSS consultation
 - Step 3: Cost-sharing determination
 - Step 4: Arrange transport
 - Step 5: Documentation + communication
- ✓ **A 24-Hour Response Plan:** Rapid response flowchart



Build Your District Stability Blueprint cont.

✓ **First 48 hours checklist**

- ☐ Immediate enrollment completed
- ☐ Records requested
- ☐ Schedule issued
- ☐ Appropriate staff notified
- ☐ Safety + climate supports in place
- ☐ School of Origin determination documented

✓ **Record-transfer protocol:** Who requests the records? IEP?

✓ **Admin/Principal and other staff cheat sheets**

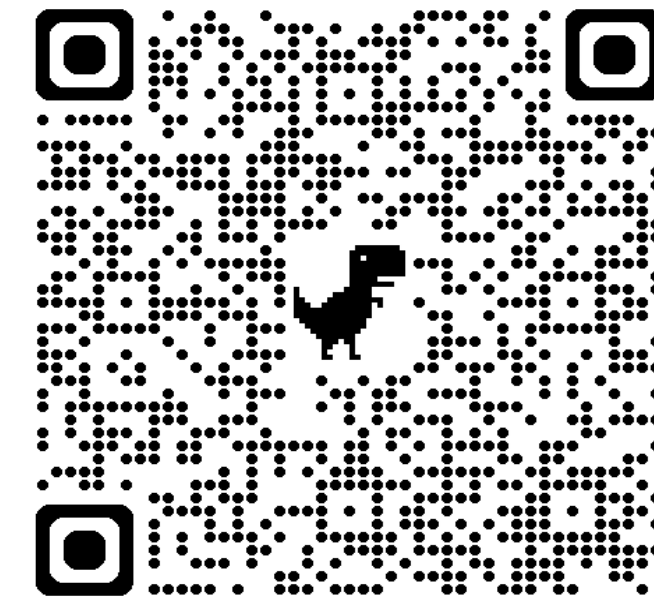
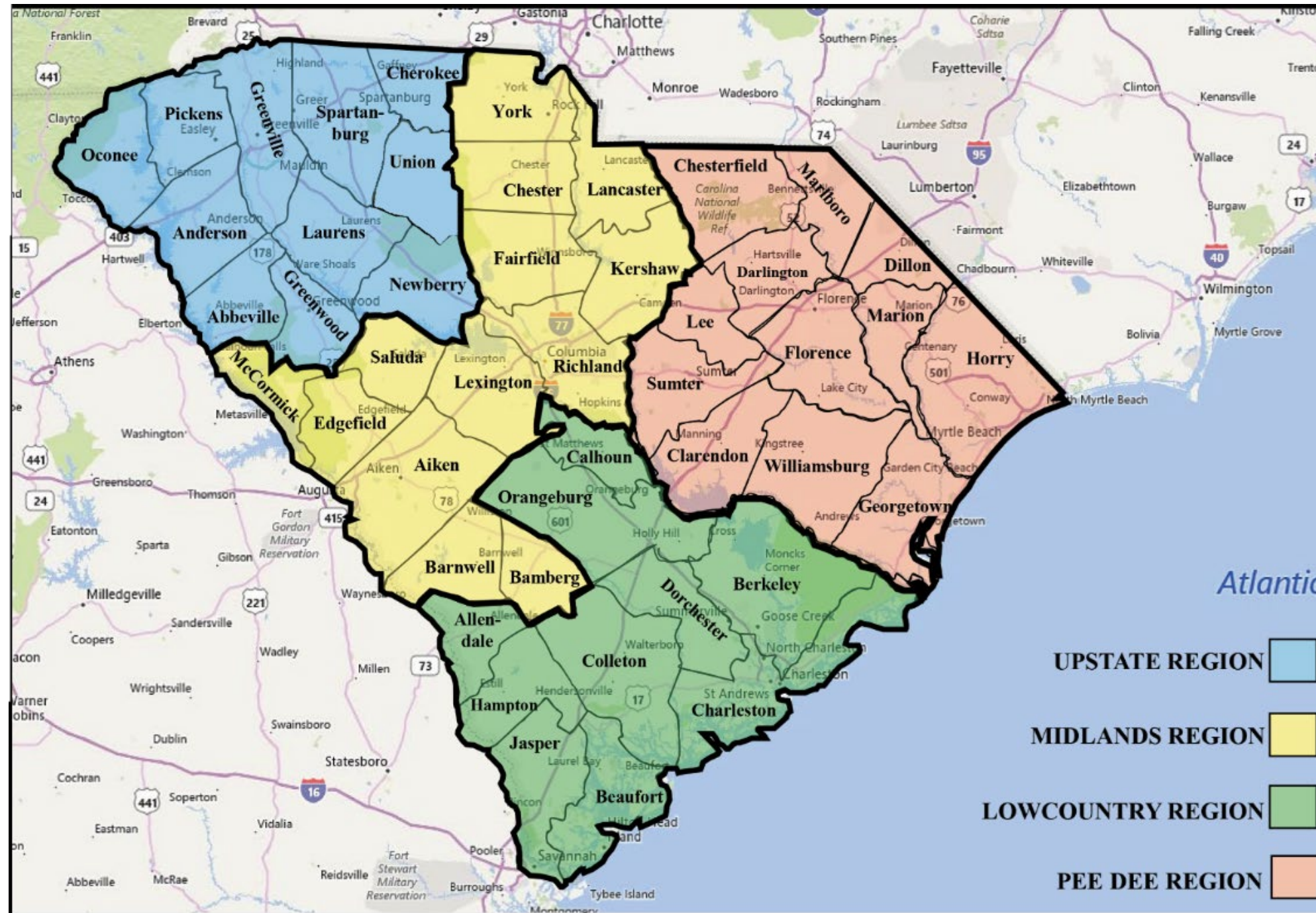
✓ **Student Supports**

- Welcome plan
- Mentor assignment
- Counseling touchpoint
- Classroom adjustment considerations

✓ **Where are the gaps or disconnects?** Troubleshoot and make changes as needed



DSS Region State Map



Shana Charles, State Point of Contact

- ❖ Tahmeka Pigott-Murphy, Upstate
- ❖ Megan Temple, Midlands
- ❖ Laverne Latham, Low Country
- ❖ Brittany Gibson, Pee Dee



DSS and SCDE Foster Care Team Contacts

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Foster Care Resources

- [Dear Colleague Letter \(ED\)](#)
- [Children's Bureau Letter \(DHHS\)](#)
- [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#)
- [SCDE Foster Care Website](#)
- [Best Interest Determination Important Information](#)
- [Best Interest Determination Placement Forms](#)
- [Immediate Enrollment Form](#)
- [District Foster Care POC List](#)
- [Non-Regulatory Guidance - U.S. Department of Education](#)
- [Blueprint for Change: Education Success for Children in Foster Care](#)





ed.sc.gov