



Advocates for Children of New York  
Protecting every child's right to learn

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**FOSTERING SUCCESS IN NEW YORK STATE**

**Case Studies on  
Educational Stability for  
Children in Foster Care**

March 22, 2010

### **Latisha**

Latisha entered foster care with her siblings when she was seven years old. They had been living in a park with their family, where Latisha and her sister were both severely sexually abused, including being prostituted out to strangers. Over the years, the girls developed significant emotional difficulties. During sixth grade, Latisha was taken advantage of sexually by other students on multiple occasions, necessitating a school transfer. In addition to her emotional struggles, Latisha also has learning disabilities.

When she was twelve years old, Latisha was removed from the foster mother she had lived with for the last five years and placed in a new foster home. It was in the same school district, so she didn't need to change schools. When Latisha changed homes again, however, she was placed in a neighboring school district. Although her old school was only about two miles away from her new foster home, the district refused to approve a school bus, and Latisha was forced to change schools again because her new foster mother could not get her to school every day on her own.

Latisha's transportation problems were not over when she enrolled in school in the new district. At that point, she had just started eighth grade, and when her social worker tried to arrange a school bus for her, the school told her they didn't bus eighth graders because they are expected to take public transportation. Her social worker explained that Latisha was too vulnerable to travel on her own and that she had multiple special needs, but the school district would only approve bussing for her if she had medical documentation proving that specialized transportation was required. Latisha's social worker was able to gather documentation from Latisha's psychiatrist, but it took nearly two months for the district to approve and set up the school bus. The stress on the foster family nearly disrupted Latisha's foster placement again – the family's adult daughter had to move back home to pick Latisha up from school every day, and both parents had to take substantial time off of work, putting their jobs at risk.

As a ninth grader, Latisha was placed in a high school that does not have the special education services that she needs. Instead of small special education classes, she is enrolled in large inclusion classes with over thirty students. Latisha is failing several of her classes and barely passing the others. Most likely, she will have to move schools again. This would be her fifth school in three years.



**Kevin**

Kevin was in kindergarten when he came into foster care. At intake, the Family Court judge ordered that Kevin and his siblings remain in the same elementary school. They had been placed in a foster home in a neighboring school district. At first, their foster mother took the children to school herself, but the travel was making her late to work. After two weeks, she informed Kevin's caseworker that she was going to lose her job if she kept getting to work late every day.

Kevin's caseworker asked the school principal to help. He supported keeping the children in his school, but school district officials said they could not route a bus across district lines. Kevin's caseworker asked supervisory staff and, ultimately, the Director of Transportation to bus Kevin and his siblings, but the Director explained that he was not authorized to provide bussing to the children, whatever the court order said. After missing two weeks of school, the three children were enrolled in the local school near their foster home. Less than a year later, they returned to their birth mother's care and their original school.

**Clark**

Clark was 11 years old and in sixth grade when he came into foster care. He was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and had been hospitalized several times. Several months after entering foster care, Clark was moved to a foster home in a neighboring school district pending an emergency Children's Services investigation against his foster mother. Clark's new foster parent was reluctant to enroll him in a new school because Clark wanted to move back with his first foster parent. Clark's foster parent couldn't bring Clark to school himself because he had five other children in the home who all attended different schools. His foster parent requested a school bus so that Clark could continue to attend his old school, but the school refused to bus him across district lines.

Clark had been out of school for over a week when he was transferred to a third foster home, only a couple of miles from his initial foster placement. When Clark's new foster mother brought him back to his old school, school staff refused to admit him because it was no longer his zoned school. Clark became extremely upset, shouting that everyone hated him and that he wanted to kill himself.



Clark eventually moved back to his first foster parent and subsequently returned to his old school, but he missed nearly a month of school during this entire process.

### **Jeremiah**

Jeremiah was in third grade when he came into foster care in New York City. He previously had attended school outside of the city, and his birth mother had no report cards or other school records to give his foster care agency. When his foster mother tried to enroll Jeremiah in school, the school refused to admit him, even though the foster mother had paperwork from the agency stating Jeremiah's age and the last grade he completed.

Jeremiah's foster mother asked the foster care agency for help, and was informed that city regulations require schools to enroll students in an age-appropriate grade pending the receipt of records from a former school district. His foster mother returned to the school. School staff still refused to admit Jeremiah and told his foster mother she could show them any paper she wanted, but Jeremiah wasn't coming to school without a report card. Jeremiah missed two weeks of school before the agency could obtain the records from Jeremiah's old school district.

### **Sabrina**

Sabrina entered foster care when she was 13 years old. She was diagnosed with severe emotional disturbance and required a small, special education class in a specialized school to address her behavioral needs. Sabrina attended a citywide program in Queens where she received counseling and special education transportation. When she came into foster care, she was placed with her grandmother in Brooklyn. Sabrina's grandmother had physical limitations that made it impossible for her to bring Sabrina to school every day.

Sabrina's caseworker asked the school to change her bus route so that she could be picked up at her grandmother's house, but the school said they were not authorized to bus a student from another borough. When the caseworker contacted the citywide school district to request approval for bussing, district staff told her they would look into it. After two weeks and multiple phone calls, the caseworker still had not gotten an answer about the school bus, so Sabrina's grandmother went to the Office of Student Enrollment in Brooklyn to get a new special education school for Sabrina.

The enrollment office refused to give Sabrina's grandmother a school placement because Sabrina's mother's name, and not her grandmother's, was listed in the computer system. Sabrina's caseworker called the enrollment officer to explain



that the grandmother was now Sabrina's foster parent, but no one returned her calls. The foster care agency had to contact the Borough Enrollment Director and District Superintendent in order to get a placement for Sabrina, which was ultimately even further from her grandmother's home than the school in Queens. The new school then refused to enroll Sabrina, telling her grandmother that they were too far and she should get a school closer to home.

The agency made more phone calls to district staff before Sabrina was finally enrolled in school, after being out of school for nearly 30 days. Three months later, Sabrina returned to her mother's care. The commute to the school in Brooklyn was too much for Sabrina and her mother, and her old school in Queens had given her seat to another student, so Sabrina was forced to change schools yet again.



### **Alicia**

Alicia was a 5-year-old child with special needs who lived with her family in temporary housing. When Alicia's mother became overwhelmed caring for her children in a shelter, they entered foster care and were placed with a relative. Alicia enrolled in kindergarten in a school where she received a lot of support and made significant academic progress, particularly with her speech and language skills. Despite two subsequent changes in foster homes, Alicia was able to stay at the same school.

Eventually, the family was reunited in the shelter system, and Alicia received bussing from the shelter to school, as required by the McKinney-Vento Act. However, when Alicia's mother found permanent housing, the school told her that Alicia would have to transfer to a school closer to home if she wanted transportation services, because students could not be bussed across borough lines. Transportation officials at the school district confirmed this statement.

After concerted advocacy on the part of Alicia's parent and social worker, the school district agreed to route Alicia on a school bus so that she could remain at the same school. When reunification with her birth mother proved unsuccessful, Alicia returned to the home of the relative who had cared for her when she first entered foster care. During this nearly three-year period, Alicia's only source of stability was her school placement, where she continues to make academic progress.