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## Press Release

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### **Advocates for Children and SCO Family of Services Develop Parent Toolkit to Improve the Education Experience of Children while in Foster Care**

*Report offers key recommendations for parents, foster care agencies, and schools*

**September 29, 2017 (Glen Cove, NY)** — As families across the nation shift their attention back to school, two nonprofits have teamed up to improve the education experience for New York's children in foster care and their families.

Advocates for Children of New York, an agency that works to ensure high-quality education for students who face barriers to academic success, and SCO Family of Services, a leading provider of social services to children, adults, and families in under-resourced communities, announced the launch of a Parent Toolkit, an easy to use guide that provides recommendations and resources to enhance parent involvement in their child's education while in foster care. The Toolkit helps parents navigate the education system while embracing the important role they play in their children's academic success and achievements.

Active participation by parents has been shown to have substantial benefits to the child, parent, and school, with outcomes including improved self-esteem, increased confidence in parenting skills, and higher levels of student achievement. Moreover, studies have shown that children in foster care who regularly engage in school discussions and activities with parents and caregivers are more likely to achieve permanency than those who do not engage.<sup>1</sup>

“By emphasizing parents’ rights in the education realm, recognizing their input, and acknowledging their desire to see their children succeed, we can encourage and empower parents to take a more active role in their children’s education when they are apart and be better prepared for when their children return home,” remarked Douglas O’Dell, executive director, SCO Family of Services.

“Parent engagement can have a dramatic impact on a child’s education, and the recommendations contained in the report demonstrate that more can be done to fully engage parents in their children’s education while in foster care,” remarked Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children. “These recommendations provide a road map for involving parents who have often felt excluded and focus on shared education planning and decision-making, with parents serving as both advocates for their children and partners with schools and foster care agencies.”

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<sup>1</sup> Foster Care & Education Q&A; Legal Center for Foster Care & Education, 2009

The Toolkit accompanies a jointly produced report, *Empowering Parents so Children Succeed*, and is the product of a three-year partnership between Advocates for Children and SCO Family of Services. The agencies also interviewed parents and child welfare experts, observed family visits and planning meetings, and participated in Individualized Education Program meetings for children with special needs to help develop the report's recommendations for foster care agencies.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Actively engage birth parents in their children's education throughout their time in foster care, from intake to final discharge.
2. Incorporate deliberate conversations with birth parents about education into regular case practice.
3. Inform birth parents of their right to be involved in their child's education.
4. Support birth parents' involvement in their child's education by consistently sharing school records with parents and facilitating contact with schools.
5. Continue to use the special education process as a strategy to engage birth parents.
6. Deliberately plan for school prior to trial discharge and support parents throughout the process.

The full report and toolkit, including reproducible workflows, templates, and handouts, is available online at [www.sco.org/toolkit](http://www.sco.org/toolkit) and [advocatesforchildren.org/policy\\_and\\_initiatives/policy\\_reports](http://advocatesforchildren.org/policy_and_initiatives/policy_reports).

#### **About Advocates for Children of New York**

Since its founding in 1971, Advocates for Children of New York has been protecting the education-related needs of children most at risk of academic failure or school-based discrimination due to such factors as poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, language barriers, immigration status, homelessness, or involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice system. AFC's mission is to promote access to the best education New York can provide for all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. AFC uses integrated strategies to advance systemic reform, empower families and communities, and advocate for the educational rights of individual students.

#### **About SCO Family of Services**

SCO Family of Services helps vulnerable New Yorkers build a strong foundation for the future. We get young children off to a good start, launch youth into adulthood, stabilize and strengthen families and unlock potential for children and adults with special needs. We enable New Yorkers to meet life's challenges with support, care and acceptance. SCO has played a vital role delivering human services in communities throughout New York City and Long Island for more than 100 years. For more information, please visit [www.sco.org](http://www.sco.org).