

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Child and Family Services Agency



Administrative Issuance: CFSA-10-2

TO: All CFSA and Contracted Agency Staff

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RE: Educational Stability for Children and Youth Entering or In Foster Care

Research shows that on average, a child in foster care may change schools two to three times per year; and with each move, a child falls three to six months academically behind their classmates. Further, almost half of foster youth nationally do not complete high school. The Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) believes that children and youth in foster care deserve equal access to positive academic experiences as their non-foster care peers and therefore is committed to improving educational stability for all young people in care.

To address the issue of school stability, *The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* requires that child welfare agencies partner with local education agencies (LEAs) to ensure that children and youth in care have educational stability while in foster care. Educational stability means:

1. Keeping children or youth in the school he/she attended prior to entering foster care or when there is a change in foster care placement, unless it is not in the child or youth's best interest to remain at the school.
2. When it is best for the child or youth to transfer to a new school, the child welfare agency and the LEA will work together to ensure the immediate enrollment and transfer of educational records to the new school.

CFSA recognizes that enabling children and youth to remain in their school of origin will allow for consistency and stability in their education and improve their chances for academic success. Therefore, in its commitment to adhere to best practice standards as well as federal legislation, CFSA requires that all CFSA and contracted private provider staff make educational stability a priority when assessing a child's placement needs.

This administrative issuance provides guidance to CFSA and private agency staff for determining whether children and youth should remain in their school of origin when entering foster care, or changing placements while in care. If you have any questions regarding this issuance, please contact your Program Administrator.

Criteria for determining continued placement in the child or youth's school of origin:

Foster children and youth shall remain in their school of origin at the time they enter foster care unless it is determined that it is not in their best interest to do so. If the child or youth is currently in foster care and is changing placements, the social worker, placement staff and the Innovative Family Support Services Administration (IFSSA) educational specialist shall exhaust all efforts to have the child or youth remain in the school of current enrollment, if it is in the best interests of the child or youth.

1. CFSA and contracted private provider staff shall use the Educational Best Interest Determination Guidelines (see attachment A) to help inform decisions regarding the best school placement. CFSA and contracted private provider staff shall also consider the following when determining whether it is in the child's or youth's best interest to remain in their school of origin:
 - a. Is the child or youth safe if he or she remains in his or her school of origin or school of current enrollment?
 - b. All case planning factors shall be considered, including why the child or youth came into care, the permanency goal, the anticipated length of stay in care, identification of potential relative placement caregivers that reside in close proximity to the school of choice?
 - c. The level of parental involvement and his or her access and proximity to the child or youth's school, school activities and school personnel?
 - d. The child's or youth's safety when travelling to and from school, i.e., is the child safely able to utilize the transportation being considered based on the child's or youth's developmental functioning, age, and level of mental or physical disability?
 - e. The length of time it takes to travel to and from the home school?
 - f. Is the child or youth likely to abscond from school?
 - g. Is the school placement appropriate for the child or youth's academic needs (i.e., is the child or youth currently receiving/or scheduled to receive special educational services?)
 - h. Does the child or youth have siblings and/or other close relationships with individuals who attend the school?
 - i. Does the child or youth wish to remain in the school?
 - j. Does the child or youth have any "significant ties" with school officials or staff (i.e., teachers, counselors, etc.)
 - k. What is the child's connection with/or involvement in school activities?
 - l. Is there a need for before- and after-school care that is provided at or in close proximity to the home?
2. The determination of whether a child or youth remains in the same school should be made collectively with parents, the child or youth, resource providers, guardian ad litem, and other significant parties when feasible.

Note: Family involved meetings, such as FTMs, and other teaming meetings may serve as an opportunity for all team members to discuss a child or youth's academic performance and his or her school placement needs. However, CFSA and contracted private provider staff remain ultimately responsible for teaming with the individuals named above to determine if a child or youth will remain in his/her school of origin or current school placement. Additionally, the social worker and other members of the child or youth's team must discuss and ensure that the necessary supports, such as transportation and special education services, are considered, planned for and implemented.

3. Unless there is a safety risk, the social worker, social service assistant (or designee) shall transport the child or youth to his or her school of origin until school placement considerations are assessed, a school placement decision is made, and the necessary supports (i.e. transportation) are arranged and implemented.

4. Once it is determined that the child or youth is to remain in the school of origin, the social worker and the child or youth's team shall discuss the transportation needs and options (i.e. family members, foster parent, public transportation, etc.). If private transportation is required, the social worker (or designee) shall make a referral to the IFSSA education specialist by submitting an electronic referral form (see Attachment B) to cfsa.ftmu@dc.gov.

Note: Transportation services can take up to three (3) business days to be arranged and implemented.

5. The social worker shall document the reasons and the decision-making process related to the determination for the child or youth to remain in the school of origin/current school or to be transferred to a new school, in the case plan and in FACES on the Contact Screens. The case plan must also document considerations related to the appropriateness of the current educational setting.

When Children and Youth Transfer to a New School

If it is determined that the child or youth cannot remain in his or her home school because it is not in his or her best interest, CFSA and contracted private provider staff shall ensure that the child or youth makes an immediate transition into an alternate school placement. This transition must include the transfer all school records, which must occur immediately but no later than two (2) business days after the request has been made.

1. It is the social worker and foster parent's responsibility to ensure that children and youth are immediately enrolled to the new school when it is determined to be in the child's or youth's best interest.
2. Enrolling in a District of Columbia school: A social worker or foster parent may enroll a child or youth if he or she is being enrolled in a DC school, public or charter. The documents listed below must be presented to the IFSSA educational specialist for review prior to enrolling the child or youth in school. The IFSSA educational specialist will immediately, but no later than the start of the next school day, review the packet for completeness and return it to the social worker. Once the packet is approved by the IFSSA education specialist the social worker or foster parent must present the documents below to the new school at the time of enrollment:
 - a. Most recent commitment court order from DC Superior Court with the child or youth's name, date of birth and legal status.
 - b. The name and address of the foster parent.
 - c. The social worker must show a current employee ID badge if he or she is enrolling the child or youth.
 - d. The CFSA Student Enrollment Form.
 - e. The CFSA Enrollment and Withdrawal Form (Attachment C) to obtain a signature from a school representative (i.e. Principal and Registrar) verifying enrollment of the child or youth. The signed form must be returned to the IFSSA education specialist within two (2) business days of enrollment.
3. Enrolling in a school outside of the District of Columbia: It is preferred that children and youth being enrolled in a school outside of the District of Columbia be enrolled by the foster parent whenever possible. The documents listed below must be presented to the IFSSA educational specialist for review prior to enrolling the child or youth in school. The IFSSA educational specialist will immediately, but no later than the start of the next school day, review the packet for completeness and return it to the social worker. Once the packet is approved by the IFSSA education specialist the foster parent must present the documents below to the new school at the time of enrollment:
 - a. Most recent commitment court order from DC Superior Court with the child or youth's name, date of birth and legal status.
 - b. CFSA Student Enrollment Form

- c. Tuition contract
- d. The CFSA Enrollment and Withdrawal Form to obtain a signature from a school representative (i.e. Principal and Registrar) verifying enrollment of the child or youth. The signed form must be returned to the IFSSA education specialist within two (2) business days of enrollment.

Note: Counties outside of the District of Columbia may require additional documents to prove residency and complete its registration process. The specific requirements for each county are available on the CFSA intranet and www.cfsa.dc.gov.

- 4. Once the child or youth has been enrolled in his or her new school the social worker must ensure the withdrawal of the child or youth from the school last attended and the immediate transfer of school records to the new school. In order to initiate this, the social worker shall complete the following:
 - a. Withdraw the child or youth from the school he or she was attending by completing the withdrawal paperwork provided by the school.
 - b. The social worker must obtain a signature from a school representative (i.e. Principal or Registrar) on the CFSA Enrollment and Withdrawal Form to verify withdrawal of the child or youth. This form must be returned to IFSSA education specialist within two (2) business days of the child or youth's withdrawal.
 - c. Complete the records request form(s) provided by the last school attended. The school will immediately, but no later than two (2) business days, transfer the child or youth's school records directly to the new school.
 - d. The social worker or foster parent should follow up with the child or youth's new school within two (2) business days of the records request to confirm the transfer. If the records were not transferred, the social worker (or designee) should contact the IFSSA education specialist for assistance.
- 5. The social worker shall document all interaction and information regarding the new school placement in both the FACES Education and Contact screens.
- 6. The social worker shall also include assurances in the child's or youth's case plan that demonstrate that the enrollment into the new school was in the child or youth's best interest and occurred immediately. Dates of transfer of the student and transfer of the records should be documented in FACES on the contact screens as well as in the case plan.

Fair Hearings to Appeal Service Decisions

The social worker shall notify the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of a child or youth, as well as the youth, who is of an appropriate age and maturity level, and aggrieved by the agency's home school placement decision, of the right to a fair hearing. (See *Fair Hearings Policy*).