

Suggested Practices to Improve Educational Outcomes of Children Living in Foster Care

Recommendations for School Districts

1. Ensure school principals or designated staff members are forwarded copies of notification from caseworkers as to which children/youth are in foster care.
2. Partner with the child welfare agency, the parent(s), and foster parent(s) to develop an education stability plan. If possible, allow the child to stay in her/his school of origin. The school of origin is defined as the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of foster care placement.
3. Consider these factors when making educational placement decisions:
 - Appropriateness of the current educational setting and the proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of foster care placement;
 - Desirability of maintaining educational stability for the child;
 - Immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school if remaining in the school of origin is not in the best interest of the child; and,
 - Determination of the most effective way to provide transportation to the child's school of origin, and how transportation costs will be allocated.
4. Within each school, designate either:
 - a. One staff person to be responsible for all foster care issues, or
 - b. Choose individual staff members to monitor the academic progress of individual students (e.g., school counselor, homeless liaison, school social worker, teacher).
5. Obtain copies of pupil records from the student's previous school district, consistent with Wis. Stat. sec. 118.125(4). Ensure the student receives academic credit, including partial credit, for coursework at the prior school.
6. Notify the county caseworker of the contact information for the district staff member responsible for any students in foster care.
7. Send the caseworker the school schedule of district activities, including parent-teacher conferences.
8. Send the parent, foster parent, and caseworker copies of the school calendar, student handbook, and any other school materials furnished to parents of students enrolled in the school.
9. Ensure the student is provided any and all school services to which the student is entitled, including, but not limited to, alternative education programs and instruction and services for at-risk students, consistent with Wisconsin statutes.
10. Notify the caseworker, parent, and foster parent of any programs that may assist with postsecondary goals, e.g., Talent Incentive Program (TIP), Early Identification Program (EIP), and Gear Up through the Wisconsin Educational Opportunity Program (WEOP).

11. Monitor attendance, academic progress, and credit accrual toward high school graduation. Notify the caseworker, parent, and foster parent of any challenges or difficulties to the extent permitted by law.
12. For students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), coordinate transition planning with the caseworker.
13. Ensure any sharing of student information will be consistent with federal and state laws governing pupil records. A release form signed by the parent or a court order is necessary to authorize disclosure, Wis. Stat. sec. 118.125 (2) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) - 34 C.F.R. Part 99.

Recommendations for Child Welfare Agencies

1. Discuss with both the parent and foster parent the importance of:
 - Developing an educational stability plan, as part of the child's case plan, while the child is in foster care.
 - Engaging in school activities, including parent-teacher conferences.
 - Giving authority to the foster parent to authorize the child's participation in school activities not part of the regular school day (e.g., field trips).
2. Consider these factors when making educational placement decisions:
 - Appropriateness of the current educational setting and the proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement;
 - Discussion with the local educational agency of the desirability of maintaining educational stability for the child;
 - Determination of immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school if remaining in the school of origin is not in the best interest of the child;
 - Determination of the most effective way to provide transportation to the child's school of origin;
 - Arrangements for the foster parent to receive additional federal funding to cover education-related transportation costs for children in their care; and,
 - Need for the child to attend school full-time or complete secondary school.
3. Send copies of notification as to which children/youth are in foster care to the school principal or the building designee, including caseworker contact information. The notification should include who should be contacted for what kind of educational or legal issues.
4. If necessary, assist the school district in obtaining copies of the student's pupil records from the school district previously attended.
5. Notify the parent and foster parent of the school contact person.
6. With the parent and foster parent, meet at least once each semester with a representative of the school (e.g., classroom teacher, school counselor) to review academic progress, including credit accrual toward graduation.
7. Notify the school contact person of any issues or incidents outside of the school day that may affect the school performance of the student.

8. Ensure the youth is provided access to appropriate adult transition services. For youth with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), coordinate transition planning with the school.
9. Ensure any sharing of information will be consistent with federal and state laws that govern disclosure of child welfare records, Wis. Stat. sec. 48.78(2)(b), 48.981(7)(a)17., 938.78(2)(b)1.