

Child Welfare Agency and School District
SAMPLE PROTOCOL TO COORDINATE THE EDUCATIONAL STABILITY AND
CONTINUITY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN OUT OF HOME PLACEMENT
Fostering Connections to Success Act

I. BACKGROUND

According to the Project U-Turn report on the Philadelphia drop out crisis – *Unfulfilled Promise*¹ - a third of the young people that drop out of school in Philadelphia are or have been involved with the Child Welfare Agency (in foster or delinquent placement). The same study found that approximately 70% of the students who had a substantiated case of abuse or neglect during the high school years or had a foster care placement never finished high school. Moreover, 90% of the students who had a juvenile justice placement during their high school years ultimately dropped out. A significant contributing factor to the educational failure of many children and youth in foster care is placement changes, which historically have resulted in school moves and educational instability. Research shows that each school move in the elementary grades results in three months of lost learning. This Joint Protocol is a cross-systems effort between the Child Welfare Agency and School District to support school and educational stability even in instances when a child in foster care may change placement. In collaboration with the Mayor’s Office of Education and School District of Philadelphia, Child Welfare Agency recently launched an Education Support Center to track and support the educational needs of children and youth in placement and to remove educational barriers so that they can achieve in school and ultimately graduate from high school.

Recent federal legislation and state regulations - the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 and State Bulletin on the Educational Stability and Continuity for Children in Substitute Care – require that child welfare agencies develop strategies to improve the educational stability and continuity of children and youth in out of home placement in collaboration with local school districts. Moreover, the McKinney Vento legislation applies to certain categories of children in out of home placement; for example, children in emergency, temporary, respite, and/or kinship placements.

To effectively address the educational stability, continuity, and achievement of children and youth in out of home placement, the Child Welfare Agency, School District, and Family Court have developed a number of collaborative strategies. One of these strategies is to coordinate communication and, in some cases, transportation so that children in out of home placement can remain in their school of origin whenever possible or can be transferred immediately without disrupting their education. The following document describes the JOINT PROTOCOL to follow in order to effectively conduct this coordination.

The Child Welfare Agency provides most of its child welfare services through a network of contract providers. Because Child Welfare Agency contract providers provide day-to-day services to children and youth in out of home placement, they are authorized to enroll children in school, transfer them when needed, and conduct other school-related business on behalf of the child. For this reason, the terms Child Welfare Agency and Child Welfare Agency Provider are used throughout the document.

IMPORTANT: All Child Welfare Agency information, including that of a child is in foster care, must be kept strictly confidential. You may only share this information with other employees/representatives of the Philadelphia School District who specifically need this information in order to provide services to the child.

¹ Ruth Curran Neild, Ph.D., Robert Balfanz, Ph.D. (2006). *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia’s Drop out Crisis, 2000 – 2005*. Project U-Turn: Philadelphia, www.projectUturn.net

II. PROTOCOL BY SCENARIO

1. Children are placed by Child Welfare Agency in same neighborhood of the school of origin
 - a. Child Welfare Agency already places children as close to their community of origin as possible. New Child Welfare Agency placement protocols are now more specific about finding foster homes as close to the school of origin as possible.
 - b. If the foster, kinship, group home or placement address is located within 1.5 mile radius of the school, the foster parent or designated group home staff person is responsible for taking the child to school.
 - c. If the child is placed outside of the school's immediate catchment area but still within a 1.5 mile distance from the school, the child will continue to attend the school of origin and foster parent is responsible for taking the child to school.
 - d. Regardless of the foster home distance to school, foster parents are expected to participate in school based meetings for children in their care. The School District is not responsible for providing transportation assistance to foster parents to attend these meetings.
2. Children are placed by Child Welfare Agency in a different neighborhood from the one where the school of origin is located (outside of 1.5 mile radius)
 - a. In the majority of cases, Child Welfare Agency, Child Welfare Agency Provider and School will make every effort to maintain child in school of origin. Child Welfare Agency Provider will contact School Counselor about the placement change and to discuss the child's educational stability. If applicable, Child Welfare Agency Provider will make a request for busing/transportation services via the School Counselor (busing for children in 1- 6th grade and transpass/tokens for children in 7-12th grade). When applicable, the School District will implement an expedited process to address the transportation needs of children in out of home placement so that these children do not experience disruptions in their education due to lack of transportation. In addressing the educational stability of the child, Child Welfare Agency, Child Welfare Agency Provider, and School Counselor will consider the following important factors:
 - *The child's safety;*
 - *The child's ties to the current school;*
 - *Effort to keep siblings together*
 - *Whether the child's current program is appropriate to meet the child's educational needs;*
 - *The effect of a move on the child's academic performance;*
 - *The distance of the commute (this may need to be revisited after transportation arrangement has been scheduled)*
 - *Efforts to arrange for transportation;*
 - *Special Education programs and services*
 - *The length of stay expected in this placement.*
 - b. If Child Welfare Agency, Child Welfare Agency Provider, and Principal OR Principal Designee (for example, a school counselor) make a determination that a child cannot remain in school of origin due to safety or other important issues listed above, the child will be transferred no later than the next school day to the school closest to the new placement or, when applicable, to a

school that more appropriately meets his/her needs. A child in out of home placement should not miss a day of school while records are being transferred from one school to another.

- In the rare case where there is disagreement between Child Welfare Agency, Child Welfare Agency Provider, and School Counselor regarding whether a child should stay in the school of origin or transfer to a new school, the following Child Welfare Agency and School District Contacts must receive an email notification of the disagreement no later than two business days from the day when Child Welfare Agency/Child Welfare Agency Provider and School Counselor had the conversation that led to disagreement. These two contacts will coordinate case review and/or conference call to resolve the concerns.

Child Welfare Agency

NAME

Child Welfare Agency Education Support Center

CONTACT INFO

School District

NAME

Interagency Coordinator

CONTACT INFO

- c. Regardless of the foster home distance to school, foster parents are expected to participate in school based meetings for children in their care. The School District is not responsible for providing transportation assistance to foster parents to attend these meetings.

3. Emergency, Overnight, Respite, or Temporary Placements

- a. In the case of any emergency, overnight, respite, or temporary placement, the child will continue attending the school of origin and transportation arrangements will be made by the School District if the location of the emergency, overnight, respite, or temporary placement is beyond the 1.5 mile radius.
- b. Once the child is in a more stable placement, Child Welfare Agency Provider will provide update to School Counselor and Child Welfare Agency Provider and School Counselor will follow the procedures described in # 1 and 2 above.

4. Children and youth whose out of home placement arrangements, school setting, educational program, and/or other life circumstances are very complex and do not fit those described in #1 – 3 above

- a. There may be situations when a yellow bus route does not exist. In these cases, the Child Welfare Agency/Child Welfare Agency Provider AND School Counselor need to communicate to make efforts to develop an alternate plan for the child. If there are serious concerns by Child Welfare Agency/Provider and/or School Counselor, the persons listed below must be contacted to facilitate the alternate planning process.
- b. When a child's situation is very complex, whether due to child welfare, delinquency, homelessness, behavioral health, or other serious issues – and if the child is in the custody of the Department of Human Services – the case will be reviewed by the School District's Office of Specialized Instructional Services, Child Welfare Agency Education Support Center, and SDP

and Child Welfare Agency counsel if applicable. An email or call must be made immediately and simultaneously to the following two people:

Child Welfare Agency

NAME

Child Welfare Agency Education Support Center

CONTACT INFO

School District

NAME

Interagency Coordinator

CONTACT INFO

III. AVAILABLE SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT AND CHILD WELFARE AGENCY

- Upon request by a school or regional office, the School District's Office of Specialized Instructional Services and/or the Child Welfare Agency Education Support Center can provide coaching, consultation, and or training to school staff on addressing the needs of children who have just entered foster care or changed placements during the days and weeks after the child's placement.
- Upon request by a school or region, the Child Welfare Agency Education Support Center can provide comprehensive training on child welfare issues affecting children and youth – from reporting child abuse and neglect to referring families to voluntary community services, to addressing the educational needs and stability of children and youth in out of home placement.
- Upon request by Child Welfare Agency or Child Welfare Agency Provider, the School District's Office of Specialized Instructional Services can provide training to child welfare professionals on the variety of instructional and behavioral supports available for children and youth attending schools in the School District of Philadelphia, accessing and navigating such supports, and on Special Education services and processes.