

### **PHILOSOPHY/PURPOSE**

Children in care deserve to remain in their own school system if at all possible. If it is not possible for the child to remain in his or her own school system, the child needs to have the transition to his/her new school be as supported and planned as possible.

This policy and practice will provide child welfare caseworkers with guidelines and strategies that support positive educational outcomes for children in the custody of the state of Maine. It includes strategies that guide the enrollment in and transfer between schools that ensure a smooth transition to a new school that is sensitive to the individual needs of each child. The desired outcomes of this policy and practice will be improved educational outcomes for youth in care, good interagency collaboration, and best practice guidelines. Every child in care deserves to have the best possible educational experience while in care whether s/he remains in the same school system or not.

Data regarding Maine youth in foster care tell us that:

- 40% of youth in foster care repeat one or more grades.
- 33% of youth are at least one year behind.
- 65% were absent between 2 and 4 weeks from school during the previous year.

According to the Child Welfare League of America, completing high school and beyond is a pre-requisite for self-sufficiency and independent living. Education is a change agent for youth in foster care to obtain employment and a living wage, empowering them away from relying on the public welfare systems as adults.

Education creates hope for succeeding in the adult world, especially for youth lacking family support and/or financial resources. Former youth in care emphasize that placement stability and high expectations from workers and teachers were related to their positive educational attainment.

Frequent school disruptions force children and youth in care to adjust and re-adjust to the new teachers. Research shows that each time a child changes school, s/he loses approximately four to six months of grade attainment.

### **LEGAL BASE:**

Title 20-A MRSA Sections 5201, 5202, and 5205

### **POLICY:**

#### **FOR CHILDREN WHO COME INTO DHHS CUSTODY:**

When a child comes into the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services, every effort will be made to find a placement for him/her within his or her own school district.

If a placement is not available within the child's own school district, efforts will be made to place the child near his or her own school district, so that it is possible for the child, under a superintendent's agreement, to continue attending his or her own

school for the remainder of the current school year. School district staff and/or the child's surrogate parent (if the child is a special education student) will work together to arrange for transportation for the child to attend his or her own school through the end of the current school year.

Should the child have to be placed outside of his/her own school district, the DHHS caseworker will look for opportunities to find a placement for the child back in his or her own school district to ensure that the child does not lose academic credits. The DHHS Family Team Meeting process should be used to explore possible placement options for the youth.

**FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE CURRENTLY IN DHHS CUSTODY:**

For children who are already under DHHS custody, and who are placed outside of the school district that they were in prior to coming into care, every effort will be made to find a placement in the child's original school district.

Exceptions to this policy are:

1. There are safety concerns for the child should he or she be returned to his/her original school district.
2. The child expresses that he or she does not wish to return to his or her original school district.

**TRANSFERRING FROM ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT TO ANOTHER SCHOOL DISTRICT:**

If the child must move from his or her current placement to another placement outside of his or her current school district, then efforts will be made to find a placement for the child that is close enough to the former school district so that, under a superintendent's agreement, the child may at least complete the current school year at the school he or she was attending prior to the move. The school district and/or surrogate parent (if the child is a special education student) will work with the prior school district to arrange for transportation for the child to his or her prior school for the remainder of that current school year.

In addition, DHHS caseworker can contact the Keeping Maine's Children Connected Liaison for the prior school and/or new school district. The KMCC Liaison will either work with the DHHS caseworker directly or identify a person who can work with the caseworker to ensure that the transition for the child to the new school is made as smoothly as possible. The KMCC database includes the names of KMCC Liaisons for each school district at the following address:

[www.maine.gov/education/speced/kmcc/index.htm](http://www.maine.gov/education/speced/kmcc/index.htm)

- The DHHS caseworker will contact the prior school as soon as he or she knows that the child will be leaving that school to request that the child's school records be immediately sent to the new school that the child will be attending.
- The DHHS caseworker will also contact the new school's liaison or their designee before the child enrolls in the new school to provide information regarding the child's transition to the school.
- If the child who is transferring to a new school is a special education student, the DHHS caseworker will contact the child's surrogate parent as soon as possible so that the surrogate parent can immediately request that a Pupil Evaluation Team meeting (PET) be scheduled at the child's new school.

- If possible, the DHHS caseworker will attend the child's first PET at the new school to provide the school with the important information needed to develop an appropriate Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the child.
- If the child is not a special education student, the DHHS caseworker will contact the appropriate school personnel, prior to the child's enrolling in his/her new school, to inform the school that the child will be enrolling, to discuss the child's needs, and to answer any questions that the school staff may have.
- If possible, the DHHS caseworker should meet the school staff in person either before enrolling the student in school, or shortly after the child is enrolled in school.

## **PRACTICE:**

### **I. Integration with Family Team Meetings:**

- Family Team Meetings should be scheduled around any planned or unplanned school transfers for children in care. These should be held either before the child transfers to his/her new school, or shortly after the child has transferred to the new school. The appropriate school staff from both the child's former school and the child's new school will be invited to attend any scheduled Family Team Meeting where the child's educational goals will be discussed.

### **II. When a Child Must Leave Their Current School:**

- DHHS caseworkers will ensure, in collaboration with the child's care provider, that the child is able to say good-bye to friends, gather addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses during planned moves. In a crisis situation, the caseworker should try to help the child use other means of communication to say good-bye. The caseworker will ensure that the child is provided with stamps and calling cards so that the child has the opportunity to say good-bye, or maintain contact with friends and teachers at his/her previous school.

### **III. When a Child Enters a New School:**

- When a move is a planned one, the DHHS caseworker will notify appropriate school personnel that a child will be transferring into a new school with at least week's notice.
- In emergency move situations the DHHS caseworker should contact the new school as soon as possible after the child has moved.
- Children should not be enrolled in school without at least one day's notice to the school.
- The DHHS caseworker will locate the school district's liaison person on the Keeping Maine's Children connected (KMCC) database [www.maine.gov/education/speced/kmcc/index.htm](http://www.maine.gov/education/speced/kmcc/index.htm) and inform them at least 24 hours in advance of a child entering school.
- The DHHS caseworker will ensure that the child will visit the new school prior to his/her admission. The caseworker may arrange for a familiar person, such as the caregiver, to accompany the youth for the visit.
- The DHHS caseworker will ensure that the child has a contact person (go-to person) at the new school to check in with on the first day and thereafter as needed. (school social worker, guidance counselor, school secretary, or principal)
- The DHHS caseworker will provide clarifying information for the child, for his or her care provider, and for school personnel regarding various roles and responsibilities (who to contact in the case of an emergency, who should be notified about Pupil Evaluation Team (PET) meeting, and who will attend parent/teacher conferences, etc.)
- The DHHS caseworker should ensure that the "Athletics/Field Trip" release form is signed by the DHHS caseworker, which will then allow the caregiver to sign individual

permission slips allowing the child to participate in field trips, play school sports, and attend other school related activities. This will ensure that children in care can fully participate in school activities for the current school year. (see Public Law Chapter 309, H.P. 779 LD 1136)

- The DHHS caseworkers will minimize the need to remove a child from school for appointments unless absolutely necessary.