



**WEST POINT CONSOLIDATED
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Foster Care Plan

**EDUCATIONAL STABILITY *for* CHILDREN *in*
FOSTER CARE**

2023 - 2024

West Point Consolidated School District Foster Care Plan

The West Point Consolidated School District (WPCSD) is committed to providing all students with sound educational experiences. We recognize that foster children are at an increased risk of grade retention, gaps in academic achievement, low high school graduation rates, and postsecondary enrollment. These provisions promote greater stability for children in foster care so that they can continue their education without disruption, maintain important relationships with peers and adults, and have the opportunity to achieve college and career readiness.

The educational stability includes assurances that (1) a child in foster care will remain in the child's school of origin, unless a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest in that school and (2) if a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest to remain in the school of origin, the child will be immediately enrolled in the school of residence, even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment.

LEA Point of Contact and Responsibilities

The superintendent will assign at least one person to serve as a Foster Care Child Liaison or Point of Contact (POC). The name of this person will be turned in annually to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) by September 30th of each year. If additional staff members are needed to meet the requirements, the district will make assignments as deemed necessary. The POC will work in the best interest of the child to ensure that all educational requirements are being met. The POC that is assigned to the position will have access to available training and materials to keep them informed of any changes in the Foster Care Regulations. The POC will work closely with state and tribal child welfare agencies to:

- Coordinating with the corresponding Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS) and the Mississippi's Child Welfare Agency (CWA),
- Leading the development of a process for making the best interest determination (BID),
- Documenting the best interest determination,
- Facilitating the transfer of records and immediate enrollment,
- Facilitating data sharing with the child welfare agencies, consistent with FERPA and other privacy protocols,

- Developing and coordinating local transportation procedures,
- Managing best interest determinations and transportation cost disputes,
- Ensuring that children in foster care are enrolled in and regularly attending school, and
- Providing professional development and training to school staff on the Title I provision and educational needs of children in foster care.

Decision-Making Process

A committee will meet to determine the appropriate placement of each foster care child. The committee will comprise of a representative from the MDCPS; student, if applicable; child's foster family; individual from the receiving school district; counselor; guardian ad litem; and biological parent, if determined by MDCPS or Court Order. In emergency circumstances the MDCPS has the authority to make an immediate decision regarding the school placement, and then consult with the local education agency and revisit the best interest determination (BID) of the child. The determining factors that may be evaluated include:

- Proximity of the resource family home to the child's present school;
- Safety considerations;
- Age and grade level of the child as it relates to the other best interests' factors;
- Needs of the child, including social adjustment and well-being;
- Child's performance, continuity of education and engagement in the school the child presently attends;
- Child's special educational programming if the child is classified;
- Point of time in the year;
- Child's permanency goal and likelihood of reunification;
- Anticipated duration of the placement;
- Preferences of the child;
- Preferences of the child's parent(s) or educational decision maker(s)
- The child's attachment to the school, including meaningful relationships with staff and peers;
- Placement of the child's sibling(s);
- Influence of the school climate on the child, including safety;

- Availability and quality of the services in the school to meet the child's educational and socioemotional needs;
- History of school transfers and how they have impacted the child;
- How the length of the commute would impact the child, based on the child's developmental stage;
- Whether the child is a student with a disability under the IDEA who is receiving special education and related services or a student with a disability under Section 504 who is receiving special education or related aids and services and, if so the availability of those required services in a school other than the school of origin; and
- Whether the child is an EL and is receiving language services, and if so, the availability of those required services in a school other than the school of origin.

*Transportation costs will not be considered when determining a child's best interests.

In the event of a disagreement regarding school placement for a child in foster care, the MDCPS should be considered the final decision maker in making the best interest determination. The MDCPS is uniquely positioned to assess vital non-educational factors such as safety, sibling placements, the child's permanency goal, and other components of the case plan. They MDCPS also has the authority, capacity, and responsibility to collaborate with and gain information from multiple parties including parents, children, schools, and the court in making these decisions.

Enrollment of Students

Foster care parents, social workers or other legal guardians will be allowed to immediately enroll children in West Point Consolidated School District. We understand that all necessary paperwork (birth certificates, shot records, academic records, special education records, etc.) may not be immediately available and want to provide a smooth transition for the student into our district. We will contact the home school district for the records and make adaptations as needed. After enrollment, the following guardianship or legal custody documents shall be provided for verification by the foster family or MDCPS:

- Power of attorney
- Affidavit
- Court Order

IDEA Students

The IDEA, Part B directs school districts to make a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) available to all eligible children with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). FAPE under IDEA includes the provision of special education and related services at no cost to the parents in accordance with a properly developed Individualized Education Program (IEP). Each child's placement decision must be made by a group of knowledgeable people. The West Point Consolidated School District will operate in accordance with all state and federal laws regarding special education students. Special education services will be provided to foster care students as they are to all students following the guidelines below.

- Educational placement will be determined annually and will be based on the child's IEP in accordance with the child's individual needs
- The child will be placed in the least restrictive environment and unless they require some other arrangement, they will attend the school that he/she would attend if not disabled.
- Timely and expedited evaluations and eligibility determinations for highly mobile children with disabilities will be made when possible.
- Children in foster care will have access to related aids and services that are designed to meet their educational needs.
- Children will have access to comparable services including summer and extended school year services if applicable.
- Children in foster care will not be discriminated against and are considered a protected group.

EL Students

The West Point Consolidated School District will ensure that EL students in foster care will participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs by doing the following:

- Identifying and assessing all potential EL students in a timely, valid and reliable manner;
- Provide EL students with a language assistance program that is educationally sound and proven successful;
- Sufficiently staff and support the language assistance programs for EL students;
- Ensure that EL students have equal opportunities to meaningfully participate in all curricular and extra-curricular activities;
- Avoid unnecessary segregation of EL students;
- Ensure that EL students with disabilities are evaluated in a timely and appropriate manner for special education and disability-related services and that their language needs are considered in these evaluations and delivery of services;
- Meet the needs of EL students who opt out of language assistance programs;
- Monitor and evaluate EL students in language assistance programs following federal guidelines;
- Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of school districts language assistance program and progress of each student;
- Ensure meaningful communication with the parents of the students.

Transportation

The West Point Consolidated School District will collaborate with the MDCPS to develop and implement clear written procedures governing how transportation is provided to maintain children in foster care in their schools of origin. The West Point Consolidated School District will also work with the MDCPS to reach an agreement in regard to covering the transportation costs. The agreement will cover how the transportation will be provided, arranged, and funded for the duration of the child's time in foster care. Each agreement can/will vary greatly because the needs of each child should be considered in making the decision on transportation.

The regular transportation policies approved by the West Point Consolidated School District will be followed in transporting foster care students. Drivers will be appropriately licensed, certified, and with the required DMV and background checks. Various public-school vehicles may be used to transport students depending on the circumstances. Students that must be transported out of state will be school board approved as required by Mississippi law.

Withdraw of Student

When the district has determined it is in the best interest of the child to leave the school of origin, the enrolling district will:

1. Ensure enrollment in the new school takes place on the same day the student is enrolled, even if the child is unable to provide records normally required for enrollment.
 - a. A student in foster care must be enrolled by the MDCPS representative.
 - b. The District will confirm, in writing, the person responsible for making educational decisions. If a student is removed from the school by anyone other than a MDCPS employee the district will notify MDE immediately, unless a court order states otherwise.
 - c. The District will contact the school last attended (school of origin), within one (1) school day of enrollment, to obtain relevant academic and other records.
2. Update the student database and contact information for the student within one (1) school day of notification of enrollment from the custodial agency (MDCPS).
3. Ensure the student is assigned to a school in the district in the same manner and according to the same process used for all other students in the district.
4. Give foster children transferring into the District credit for full and/or partial coursework completed at their school of origin, in accordance with the District's policy on transfer credits.
5. Ensure each student in foster care shall be provided services comparable to other students in the school of attendance.
6. Ensure that it is documented that a student was withdrawn prior to the best interest determination, if applicable.

Student Records

The West Point Consolidated School District will share education records with the MDCPS that are allowed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This allows educational agencies to disclose without parental consent educational records, including IDEA, of students in foster care to State and Tribal agencies. Information needed by the receiving school district shall include, but is not limited to:

- Proof of age;
- Immunization records;
- Cumulative education file if the child is attending a public school.
- Copy of the current IEP if the child is eligible for special education services;
- Copy of the current Section 504 Plan, if the child has a Section 504;
- Copy of health records kept by the school; and ,
- Any other pertinent information needed to assist the enrolling school in providing appropriate educational services.

The inability to receive records shall not delay student enrollment. Once a foster student is disenrolled by MDCPS, no other sharing of information shall occur. The District will comply with all state and federal law to protect student privacy.

Appendix

Definitions

Best Interest Determination (BID) – refers to the collaborative process between MDCPS and local school districts based on the individual student’s unique best interests. The determination involves input from multiple parties to make decisions about whether a student placed in foster care should continue to attend his or her school of origin.

School of Origin – refers to the school that a student was attending at the time of placement in foster care or the last school the student attended, despite a change in home. To ensure continuity in education, remaining in the school of origin is preferred.

School District of Origin – refers to the Mississippi school district in which a school of origin is physically located.