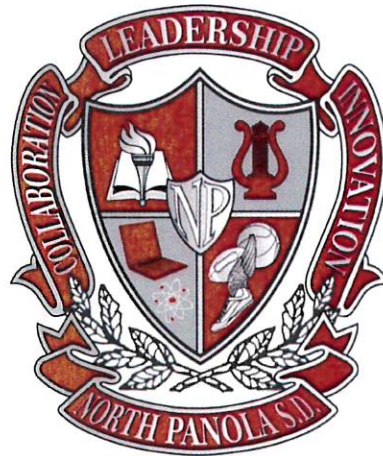


2021-2022 School Year

North Panola School District



Plan of Services to provide Educational Stability For Children in Foster Care

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NORTH PANOLA SCHOOL DISTRICT PLAN OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

North Panola School District in collaboration with the Mississippi Department of Child Protective Services (CPS) ensures that children placed in foster care have stability with regards to their education.

Definitions

District Point of Contact (DPC) – the person designated by the North Panola School District Superintendent to represent the District with regards to foster children being enrolled or withdrawn from the district. The District Point of Contact will communicate directly with the Regional Director of Child Protective Services. Dr. Deatrice White (dwhite@northpanolaschools.org) serves in this capacity.

School Point of Contact (SPC) – the person designated by the building level Principal to represent the school with regards to foster children being enrolled or withdrawn from the school. The School Point of Contact will communicate directly with the District Point of Contact. The School Point of Contact will ensure that any and all student records are obtained when a foster child enrolls in the local school and that any and all student records are provided to the Child Protective Service Case Work when a foster child withdraws from the local school. For NPSD, the school counselor serves as the SPC.

Regional Director of Child Protective Services (CPS) – the person from Child Protective Services that will communicate directly with the District Point of Contact and with the Child Protective Service Case Worker in charge of the case for a particular foster child.

Case Worker – the person from Child Protective Services who has been assigned the case of a child in foster care

Foster Child – a child to whom the custody has been appointed to Child Protective Services by a sitting judicial authority.

Foster Parent – the parent(s) to whom a foster child is currently residing.

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 annual 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 Point of Contact 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 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:

- Coordinate with the corresponding Department of Human Services (DHS),

- Lead the development of a process for making the best interest determination,
- Document the best interest determination,
- Facilitate the transfer of records and immediate enrollment,
- Facilitate data sharing with the child welfare agencies, consistent with FERPA and other privacy protocols,
- Develop and coordinate local transportation procedures,
- Manage best interest determinations and transportation cost disputes,
- Ensure that children in foster care are enrolled in and regularly attending school, and
- Provide professional development and training to school staff on the Title I provision and educational needs of children in foster care.

ENROLLMENT OF A FOSTER CHILD

Foster care parents, social workers or other legal guardians will be allowed to immediately enroll children in the North Panola 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 case worker:

- Power of attorney
- Affidavit
- Court Order

Resident Foster Children

Foster children residing within the district boundaries shall be enrolled as any other student who resides within the boundaries of the district. The SPC shall obtain any and all records pertaining to the student's current education.

Following the enrollment of the student, the SPC will complete the reporting document placing a copy on file in the office of the SPC while forwarding the original to the DPC and the Federal Programs director. The DPC will keep on file the original until the student withdraws, graduates from the North Panola School District, or the child is no longer in the care of Child Protective Services.

Non-Resident Foster Children

Foster children not residing within the district boundaries shall be enrolled once a determination has been made that it is in the best interest of the child to attend a school within the North Panola School District. The DPC, in collaboration with CPS, will meet with the SPC, Principal, Parents (if allowed), Foster Parents, and other interested parties. The meeting shall take place within 3 business days after CPS has sought to enroll the child in the North Panola School District or prior to CPS seeking enrollment in the North Panola School District.

A determination as to whether or not it would be in the best interest of the child to attend the school in the North Panola School District shall be made immediately following this meeting.

The North Panola School District recognizes the right of a foster child to attend the child's school of origin provided that it is reasonable.

Withdrawal of a Student by CPS

CPS has the right to withdraw students assigned to them by a judicial authority. The SPC, in this case, is responsible for providing as many educational records as possible to make any transition from the school of origin to the new school a smooth transition. Records not on file in the school office shall be forwarded the new school within 24 hours following a request by the school or CPS.

The SPC shall contact the DPC if he/she thinks it would be in the best interest for the child being withdrawn to remain in the school of origin. The DPC will immediately contact the Regional Director of Child Protective Services to relay the concerns of the SPC as well as possibly scheduling a time to discuss the child's educational placement.

IDEA Students

The IDEA, Part B directs school districts must 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 persons. The North Panola 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 North Panola 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;
- 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 PROCEDURES

The North Panola School District will collaborate with the DHS to develop and implement clear written procedures governing how transportation is provided to maintain children in foster care in their schools of origin. The North Panola School District will also work with DHS to reach an agreement in regards 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 North Panola 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.

Key Transportation Contact is the NPSD Director of Transportation

The mode of transportation for homeless and other highly mobile students is determined by the student's best interest.

School Administration's Role

1. Provide Transportation Director with information about the transportation needs and pickup location of homeless students.
2. Provide Transportation Director with the name of each student's grade placement, contact information, and classroom teacher's name.

Transportation Director's Role

1. Communicate regularly with the District Homeless Liaison and principals of schools which serve homeless students and other highly mobile students.
2. Establish procedures to receive information about the transportation needs and pickup location of homeless students and other highly mobile students.
3. Train bus drivers on the rights and needs of students, as well as on the need for sensitivity and confidentiality.
4. Develop a bus routing system that can respond flexibly and quickly to new "pickups."
5. Work with parents or guardians to arrange for transportation that is in the student's best interest, including transportation to and from the school or origin, if necessary.

Children in foster care will be entitled to transportation services in the same manner as all other children in the school district. In addition to regular transportation routes, the school district will collaborate with the CPS when transportation is required to maintain children placed in foster care in a school of origin outside their usual attendance area or district

when it is in the best interest of the student. The DPC will invite appropriate district officials, CPS, and officials from other districts or agencies to promptly arrange cost-effective transportation for the student. These agreements will cover how the transportation will be provided, arranged, and funded for the duration of the child's time in foster care.

If the child remains in their school of origin and moves outside the current school's attendance zone, the LEA must collaborate with the local MDCPS to develop and implement clear written transportation procedures in accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 299.13(c)(1)(ii). The two entities must establish a system that expedites transportation for children placed in foster care. The goal is to maintain educational stability for the student. There are various modes of transportation available for students. Examples of no-cost or low-cost options for transportation that LEAs and the MDCPS could explore include whether:

- MDCPS will arrange for the child to be dropped off at a school bus stop for the school of origin;
- MDCPS will arrange for the foster parent or other designee to transport the child to school (mileage reimbursable through foster care maintenance payments);
- MDCPS and the LEA will review pre-existing bus routes or stops close to the foster care placement that cross district boundaries, such as bus routes for magnet schools and transportation for homeless students as required by the McKinney-Vento Act;
- MDCPS and the LEA will determine if the child is already eligible for transportation covered by other programs;
- MDCPS and LEA will address how the child welfare agency will use foster care maintenance payments and administrative funds to pay for transportation to the school;
- MDCPS and LEA will specify how "additional costs" of transportation will be calculated, to delineate clearly the LEA's responsibility to provide transportation when there are no additional costs;
- MDCPS and LEA will specifically describe how transportation to the school of origin will be provided in situations where there are no additional costs; and
- MDCPS and LEA will specify the timing and procedures for the child welfare agency to reimburse the LEA for transportation costs.

In the event of a dispute between the LEA and MDCPS concerning the cost of transportation, the two entities must consider what is in the best interest of the student. If the disagreement continues, the cost will be divided equally between the LEA and MDCPS. The dispute shall be brought before the state appointed POCs (Teresa , MDE and Cynthia Moore-Hardy, MDCPS). Current transportation expenses shall remain in effect until a decision is rendered to maintain the student's status quo.

Funding Source for Transportation

In addition to state and local funds that may be available for providing transportation, certain federal funds may be available to cover additional transportation costs to the school

of origin for students in foster care. Districts may use Title I funds to pay for additional costs needed to transport children in foster care to their schools of origin.

Additionally, Title IV-E funds which are earmarked for the child welfare training program was created as part of the Child Welfare and Adoption Assistance Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) to support training in both foster care and adoption services. These funds are provided through the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services to aid with reasonable transportation costs that will enable foster care students to attend his or her school of origin. LEAs will need to consult with MDCPS regarding individual student's eligibility of Title IV-E child welfare funds. It is important to note that if a foster care student receives Title IV-E reimbursement, it is only available for the federal portion of transportation costs; LEAs are responsible for the non-federal portion. Cost-sharing to meet the match requirements for federal reimbursement is allowable, and is one way for LEAs and MDCPS to collaboratively meet their responsibilities for providing transportation and maximize use of available federal funds.

Multiple factors are utilized in determining reasonable transportation, including costs, distance, and duration. The MDCPS has sole authority in determining which cost to include in a child's foster care maintenance payment. These factors must be considered and part of the plan developed collaboratively between the LEA and local MDCPS.

Furthermore, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* requires that districts must ensure that transportation is provided for a child in foster care, regardless of whether the district provides transportation otherwise. This requirement includes students in foster care who attend public preschools. If an LEA offers a public preschool education, an LEA must meet the Title I requirements for children in foster care in preschool, including ensuring that a child in foster care remains in his or her preschool of origin, unless a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest. (See *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* Section 1111(g)(1)(E)).

Additional costs incurred in providing transportation to the school of origin should reflect the difference between what an LEA otherwise would spend to transport a student to his or her assigned school and the cost of transporting a child in foster care to his or her school of origin. U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services (2016), Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care-Question 27 (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf>)

Note

MDCPS shall take reasonable steps to ensure that school-age foster children are registered for and attending accredited schools within three business days of initial placement or any placement change, including while placed in shelters or other temporary placements. (Olivia Y., et al v Barbour, et al. (Civil Action No. 3:04CV251LN)

CONFIDENTIALITY

Title I foster care provisions allow data sharing to improve educational outcomes for children. NPSD recognizes that sensitive student information may be shared by child welfare agencies and commits to ensuring children in foster care are properly supported in a way that respects student privacy. In all cases, NPSD will comply with all statutory requirements to protect student privacy, including FERPA and any other privacy requirements under Federal, State, or local laws.

This plan has been developed and approved based on guidance provided by the *Joint Guidance document created by the Mississippi Department of Education and Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (2016)*. In the event changes are made prior to the annual review and approval of this document, the revised procedures and expectations will be followed.