

Alabama Education Stability for Foster Students

LEA Student in Foster Care Overview

Number of Students in Foster Care (Enrolled for Previous School Year)

Number of Students in Foster Care (Currently Enrolled)

List Agencies in Collaboration:

Anniston City Schools - ACS
Calhoun County Board of Education - CCBOE
Calhoun County Department of Human Resources - CCDHR
Piedmont City Schools - PCS
Jacksonville City Schools - JCS
Oxford City Schools - OCS

Policy Review and Revision (Describe how each agency in collaboration reviewed policies and the revisions made to policies as a result of reviews.)

Meetings between ACS, CCBOE, CCDHR, PCS, OCS and JCS have effectively resulted in a collaborative establishment of a Foster Care Plan. Future meetings will be held in May or June to make informed decisions about children in foster care and to remove barriers that may hinder the implementation of the Title I foster care provisions. During these meetings, policies are reviewed and revised. It is our goal to ensure that the appropriate interventions and strategies are in place to support foster care students to succeed in school. All LEAs in collaboration have reviewed and revised board admission policy. These policies presently ensure students who are Homeless, Migrant, Immigrant, English language learners, or in Foster Care are allowed access to education and educational services. During the revision process, we plan to train school administrators and counselors to ensure the enrollment of foster care, homeless, migrant, and English language learners students shall not be denied or delayed due to any of the following barriers:

- Lack of birth certificate
- Lack of school records or transcripts
- Lack of immunization or health records
- Lack of proof of residency
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of a social security number
- Guardianship or custody requirements

LEA Student in Foster Care Responses

2 C. F. R. §§ 200.331(d), 200.328(a); 34 C.F.R. §76.770; ESSA SECTION 1111(1)(e) - LEAs must implement the Title I educational stability requirements of children in foster care, including ensuring that:

- A child in foster care remains in his or her school of origin, unless it is determined that remaining in the school of origin is not in that child's best interest;
- If it is not in the child's best interest to stay in his or her school of origin the child is immediately enrolled in the new school even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment; and
- That the new (enrolling) school immediately contacts the school of origin, to obtain relevant academic and other records.

Describe procedures for implementing the above provisions.

Delays in enrollment in school and disruptions to continuous education are not in the best interest of the child in foster care. Federal and state laws prohibit delaying a child's ongoing education.

Therefore, the school system and CCDHR will collaborate to immediately and appropriately continue the enrollment of a child in foster care seeking to remain in the school of origin or immediately and appropriately enroll a child in foster care if the best interest is to transfer to another school in the district or another school system in Calhoun County. Please note the following definitions:

- "Immediate" means no later than one school day after notification of intent to enroll or the day the student is present for enrollment.
- "Enrollment" means the child is attending classes and participating fully in school activities.

To begin the enrollment process, the child's CCDHR will notify the School System Foster Care Point of Contact of the intent to enroll a child who is in foster care. Other adults, as permitted by CCDHR may be required to assist with enrollment of the child, but the CCDHR will always direct the process and be the primary contact for school system staff members.

The school where the child most recently attended is responsible for transferring the education records of the child directly to the school where a child is seeking to enroll.

Only the following documentation may be requested for enrollment of a child in foster care:

1. Documentation that the child is in foster care, including:
 1. The parts of the most recent court order establishing legal custody; OR
 2. A letter on letterhead of Calhoun County Department of Human Resources that has custody of the child explaining that the child is in foster care.
1. Identification of the person who is authorized to enroll the student, including
 1. Documentation to the receiving school that identifies the person as a CCDHR caseworker, or someone else authorized to enroll the child; AND
 2. Photo identification

In addition, the school system may request that CCDHR present documentation establishing the foster child's current residence. However, lack of such documentation is not a reason to delay or deny enrollment, and CCDHR may present such documentation after the child is enrolled if it is not available earlier.

ESSA Section 1111(g)(1)(E)(i) - A description of how the LEA in collaboration with the local child welfare agency will ensure that in determining whether it is in the child's best interest to remain in his or her school or origin, and LEA takes into consideration all factors relating to a child's best interest.

Description of how the LEA will work with child welfare agencies to develop a clear policy or protocol on how to make best interest determinations including making every effort to gather meaningful input from relevant parties, in addition to required child welfare and school representatives, in deciding what school placement is in a child's best interest. Include a description of protocols in this description.

LEAs in Calhoun County will engage in a collaborative process with the Calhoun County DHR to utilize current guidelines to make best interest determinations for each student in foster care. The stakeholders will solicit input from all included parties, in addition to DHR and LEA representatives, to identify the school placement that is in a child's best interest. The cost of transportation will not be a factor in determining the child's best interest. The following factors will be considered for the best interest determination for each student in foster care:

- The child's preference
- The views of the parents or the person with education decision-making rights
- The child's attachment to school and staff
- The placement of the child's siblings
- The availability and quality of services in the current and potential schools to meet the child's education and social/emotional needs
- School climate/safety
- The impact of a school transfer, including the commute
- Guardian ad Litem – GAL
- School Counselors/Private Counselors
- Distance of commute and the impact it may have on the student's education and other student-centered, transportation-related factors including travel time but not travel expenses
- Time remaining in the academic year
- Availability of classes to avoid credit loss that may hinder graduation or promotion
- School Based Coach, or Extracurricular Sponsor – if the student is involved in after-school activities
- Special Education Representative if the child has an IEP
- The child's special needs

Additional supporting documents to be considered in documentation of best interest determination:

- Report cards
- Progress reports
- Test Scores
- Attendance Data
- IEP or 504 Plan
- E-mails from individuals consulted during the best interest determination process
- Other relevant documents

The DHR caseworker will document the best interest determination in the child's case file, including factors considered, participants involved in the collaborative process, the determination for school placement, and the placement made. The best interest determination will be made in a timely manner within the first 3-5 days of the initial contact to determine the best interest of the student. Parties involved in the decision making will include, but are not limited to LEA staff, Calhoun County DHR foster care caseworkers, other DHR representatives, foster parents and other stakeholders as applicable. Documentation of the best interest determination will be maintained in the Calhoun County DHR child case file and the school's student cumulative record. The best interest decision may be revisited, if the student's situation changes to meet the needs of the student. If a change in placement is determined to be in the child's best interest, the school representative will send this documentation to the new school as part of the student's cumulative record.

When a student is taken into care, CCDHR will invite the School System Representatives to the Individualized Service Plan (ISP) meetings where best determination will be discussed and included. School representatives will make every effort to attend or provide input.

See Appendix A: Best Interest Determination Placement Form

See Appendix B: Best Interest Determination Dispute Resolution

ESSA Section 1112(c)(5)(B) Description of transportation protocols and procedures to include how additional costs for transportation will be calculated and funded as well as a policy for LEAs to resolve best interest disputes and interagency disputes related to transportation costs. Description must include how transportation and transportation costs will be monitored. (Include LEA and welfare responsibilities for providing transportation.)
Description of Dispute Resolution Policy

For each student in foster care remaining in his or her school of origin the School System Point of Contact and CCDHR will work collaboratively to provide, arrange and fund transportation for the duration of the child's time in foster care.

Wherever possible, and where it is in the student's best interest, the buses should be utilized for transportation according to the following procedure:

- The PCS will advise CCDHR within 3 school days whether it is able to transport the student in question by school bus and if so, the PCS will arrange transportation within 5 school days.
- During the interim period of up to 5 school days during which the PCS is arranging transportation, CCDHR will make all reasonable efforts to provide alternative transportation to ensure that the child does not miss school.

If the PCS advises CCDHR that it cannot transport a student by school bus, CCDHR and the PCS will collaborate to arrange for safe and timely transportation. CCDHR will assume the responsibility of authorizing the means of transportation, using, but not limited to one or more of the following options;

- Employees of DHR and residential programs;
- Any person approved by DHR;
- Contracted transportation

CCDHR and the PCS agree to pay for transportation mileage on the following plan:

- The PCS Transportation Director and the Chief School Financial Officer will compute the average daily rate of transporting a PCS student. This determines the base amount to be applied toward daily mileage expenses.
- In the event there are additional daily mileage expenses, the PCS Title I Foster Care Set Aside and CCDHR will share the remaining cost equally.
- PCS will pay the mileage and bill CCDHR

ESSA Section 1111(g)(1)(E)(ii)-(iii) Describe protocol for a child in foster care to be immediately enrolled in a new school.

Delays in enrollment in school and disruptions to continuous education are not in the best interest of the child in foster care. Federal and state laws prohibit delaying a child's ongoing education. Therefore, the School System Point of Contact and CCDHR will collaborate to immediately and appropriately enroll a child in foster care seeking to attend his or her local zoned school, whether he or she is enrolling in school for the first time or is transferring following a change in foster care placement and a determination that transfer would serve his or her best interest.

To begin the enrollment process, the child's CCDHR caseworker will notify the School System POC of the intent to enroll a child who is in foster care. Other adults, as permitted by CCDHR may be required or permitted to assist with enrollment of the child, but the CCDHR caseworker will always direct the process and be the primary contact for school system staff.

CCDHR need not produce the child's school record at the time of enrollment in order to enroll the child in school. The school the child most recently attended is responsible for transferring the education records of the child directly to the school where a child is seeking enrollment.