**Alabama Education Stability for Foster Students**

**LEA Plan: Escambia County Schools**

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| **Escambia County Schools: Students in Foster Care Overview** |
| Number of Students in Foster Care SY 17-18 (Enrolled for Previous School Year): 33  Number of Students in Foster Care SY 18-19 (Currently Enrolled): 33  Plan Approved by Escambia County School Board: September 13th, 2018 |
| **List Agencies in Collaboration:**  Escambia County Schools  Escambia County Child Services |
| **Policy Review and Revision (Describe how each agency in collaboration reviewed policies and the revisions made to policies as a result of reviews.)**  An initial, informational meeting was held in January of 2017 where all points of contact were made aware of the provisions required by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 for educational stability for students in foster care. Subsequent meetings through the remainder of the school year were arranged for review and revision of the policies and procedures set forth in this plan. For the new school year, the team met to review the plan and decide if any changes were needed after the initial year of implementation. It was determined by the committee that no revisions were necessary. The final plan was approved by all stakeholders before it was put before the Escambia County Board of Education. |
| **Describe Collaboration and Coordination with Agencies (Include a list of team members, positions, signatures, and agencies.):**  Escambia County Schools (Offices of Federal Programs and Special Education) coordinated with Escambia County Child Services and Poarch Band of Creek Indians (Family Services Department) agents to develop this plan. (See Points of Contact) |
| **LEA(s) Point(s) of Contact:**  Sarah Watkins, Federal Programs  Suzanne Barnett, Special Education |
| **DHR(s) Point(s) of Contact:**  Lynn Barnes (Escambia County DHR)  Tracie James-Mauldin (Escambia County DHR) |
| 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. |
| Escambia County Schools is committed to ensure the educational stability of all foster care students and offers the following assurances:   1. Determination of the educational placement of students in foster care based on the guidelines laid forth in this plan. 2. Full collaboration with state and tribal welfare agencies regarding the appropriate placement and transportation needs of each student. 3. Immediate enrollment of foster students with appropriate foster documentation, even in the absence of other required documentation. 4. Immediate contact of the foster student’s school of origin to obtain records to prevent gaps in the student’s education. 5. Placement of students with an IEP or EL students in an appropriate, least restrictive environment. 6. Immediate release of records for any foster student who is placed in another school district.   Foster Care Liaison for Escambia County:  Federal Programs Supervisor  251-368-0306  501 S. Pensacola Ave  Atmore, AL 36502 |
| 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. |
| Child service agencies will share information to Escambia County Schools through the appointed Foster Care Liaison (Federal Programs Supervisor). It will be the responsibility of the Supervisor to coordinate with Child Services on the implementation of all Title I provisions, as well as assistance with determination of foster children’s school placement.  The Escambia County Child Services agency has a protocol for determination on what is in the best interest of a child: to either remain at their school of origin or if they are to be moved to a new school. Escambia County Schools has a working relationship with Child Services, and was involved in the development of the criteria. The school system will work closely with the local child welfare agency in the determination of a foster child’s school and assist in immediate enrollment if that school is in Escambia County.  The state and tribal welfare agencies and Escambia County Schools assures that each placement of a foster child takes into account the appropriateness of the current educational setting and the proximity to the school in which the child was enrolled at the time of placement. Additionally, the state and tribal welfare agencies coordinates with the LEA to ensure the child can remain in that school, or if remaining in that school is not in the child’s best interest, an assurance that the child will be enrolled immediately in a new school and that the new school obtains relevant academic and other records. Protocols for determination the specific factors may vary depending on context, in order to make a holistic and well-informed determination, a variety of student-centered factors should be considered. These factors may include:   * Preferences of the child; * Preferences of the child’s parent(s) or education 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; * The 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, consistent with Title VI and the EEOA.   Transportation costs will not be considered when determining a child’s best interest, which is consistent with the program instruction released by HHS subsequent to the passage of the Fostering Connections Act  (source: ED And HHS Foster Care Non-regulatory Guidance) |
| 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 |
| The Escambia County School District will collaborate with state and tribal welfare agencies to develop and implement procedures regarding the transportation needs of a foster student remaining in their school of origin on a case-by-case basis. In cases where no additional transportation costs will be incurred in a foster student’s placement at their school of origin, the Escambia County School System will provide bus transportation (in district). The regular transportation policies in place in Escambia County will be followed when transporting students.  The following dispute resolution process will be followed if necessary:  If ECPS seeks to place a child in foster care in a school other than the school of origin or the school requested by the educational decision-maker, the educational decision- maker shall be provided written notice of his/her right to appeal the decision, including:  1. The contact information for the ECPS foster care point of contact and the SEA foster care point of contact.  2. An explanation of the reasons for the ECPS decision.  3. A step-by-step description of how to dispute the ECPS decision (Level I procedure), including a dispute form.  4. An explanation that if the educational decision-maker chooses to initiate a dispute, the student shall remain in the school of origin, receiving all appropriate educational services, until the dispute reaches its final resolution.  5. Timelines for resolution of the dispute at each level.  6. Notice of the right to appeal to the SEA if the local-level resolution is not satisfactory.  The educational decision-maker must submit the appeal letter within five (5) school days of receiving from the ECPS written notice of the right to dispute the decision. The letter may be submitted via an email with the subject “Foster Child Appeal,” or delivered to any school to the attention of the Federal Programs Supervisor. Regardless of how the appeal letter is submitted, ECPS shall ensure the superintendent or designee receives it immediately.  The submission of the appeal letter by email or delivery to any school initiates the dispute. From that point, the student shall remain in the school of origin until the dispute reaches its final resolution. The student shall be provided with all appropriate educational services for which the student is eligible during the pendency of the dispute. Students attending their school of origin during the pendency of the dispute will be entitled to receive transportation. ECPS will provide or arrange transportation during the dispute. Once the dispute is resolved, transportation will be provided pursuant to the local transportation procedures developed collaboratively between the ECPS and local child welfare agencies.  The superintendent, or superintendent’s designee, will arrange for a personal conference to be held with the educational decision-maker, the student (if appropriate), and at least one representative from the local child welfare agency. The personal conference will be arranged within five (5) business days of the ECPS receipt of the appeal letter and will take place as expeditiously as possible.  Within five (5) business days of the personal conference, the superintendent, or superintendent’s designee, will inform the educational decision-maker of the decision in writing, using the contact information provided in the appeal letter. The superintendent or designee may consult with the ECPS foster care point of contact in making the decision. The written decision provided to the educational decision-maker must include:  1. A copy of the complete Level I appeal packet.  2. The decision rendered at Level I by the superintendent or designee and an explanation for that decision.  3. Instructions regarding how to file a Level II dispute, including the name, phone number and email address of the SEA foster care point of contact.  If the educational decision-maker disagrees with the Level I decision and wishes to appeal to Level II, the educational decision-maker shall inform the superintendent or designee of the intent to appeal to Level II within five (5) school days of receipt of the ECPS Level I decision. If the educational decision-maker does not appeal within five (5) school days, the child shall be enrolled and provided all appropriate educational services in the school determined by ECPS. If that school is not the school the child had been attending during pendency of the dispute, ECPS will prioritize minimizing the disruption to the child’s education in effecting the transition to the new school.  If the student’s educational decision-maker disagrees with the decision rendered by the LEA’s superintendent at Level I, he/she may appeal the decision to the SEA. To appeal to Level II, an educational decision-maker must request an appeal in writing by submitting a dated appeal letter, which must include:   The school in which enrollment is sought and the basis for seeking enrollment in that school.   The name and contact information (phone, email and mailing address) for the educational decision-maker.   A copy of the previous appeal letter submitted by the educational decision- maker.   A copy of the decision rendered by the LEA at Level I.  The letter must be submitted via an email to the SEA foster care point of contact, with the subject “Foster Child Appeal.” The letter also must be submitted to ECPS superintendent via an email with the subject “Foster Child Appeal,” or delivered to any school to the attention of the superintendent. The appeal letter must be submitted to both within five (5) school days of receiving the Level I appeal decision from the LEA.  The LEA has an additional five (5) school days from its receipt of the educational decision-maker’s appeal letter to submit its response to the appeal letter to the SEA foster care coordinator, via an email with the subject “Foster Child Appeal.” Documents submitted by either party after the applicable deadlines will not be considered.  The student shall remain in the school of origin until the dispute reaches its final resolution. The student shall be provided with all appropriate educational services for which the student is eligible during the pendency of the dispute. Students attending their school of origin during the pendency of the dispute will be entitled to receive transportation. The LEA will provide or arrange transportation during the dispute. Once the dispute is resolved, transportation will be provided pursuant to the local transportation procedures developed collaboratively between the LEA(s) and local child welfare agencies. |
| ESSA Section 111(g)(1)(E)(ii)-(iii) Describe protocol for a child in foster care to be immediately enrolled in a new school. |
| The state and tribal welfare agencies and Escambia County Schools will ensure the prompt enrollment of all students in foster care. Welfare agencies shall provide appropriate foster documentation, and the receiving school will enroll that student regardless of the possession of other required documentation:  “Children in foster care who change schools frequently may not have the documentation required to enroll in a new school. In addition, failure of schools to promptly transfer records to the new school can lead to further delays in enrollment. These delays can negatively impact attendance and lead to other adverse consequences, such as being incorrectly enrolled in classes and not receiving the necessary academic services. When a determination is made that remaining in the school of origin is not in a child’s best interest, SEAs and LEAs must ensure that a child in foster care is immediately enrolled in his or her new school even if the student does not have the required documentation. The enrolling school must then contact the student’s prior school for relevant records”. (ESEA section 1111(g)(1)(E)(ii)-(iii)).  Escambia County Schools will immediately enroll foster students in an age-level appropriate grade and contact the child’s previous school to obtain records to prevent adverse interruptions in the student’s education. |