

FOSTERING STUDENT SUCCESS

**CHILD WELFARE AGENCY CASEWORKER'S
PROCEDURES MANUAL**

2003-2004

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

In partnership with

**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN & FAMILIES,
DISTRICT 10
&
CHILDNET, INC.**



PROCEDURES FOR SCHOOL-BASED EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS WITH FOSTER CARE STUDENTS

For the fifth year in a row, the School Board of Broward County and the Department of Children and Families has entered into an interagency agreement that sets forth guidelines which are designed to promote and facilitate the academic stabilization of foster care students. For the 2003-04 school year, ChildNet is added as a partner to this agreement. As different providers use different terminology for staff, the reference to "caseworker" in this manual is used to identify the individual legally responsible for all casework activities on behalf of a particular child in foster care.

Foster care students often "fall between the cracks" as they move from their family's home to multiple foster homes and, consequently, from school to school. The intent of this document is to provide procedures, which create an awareness of these students' unique educational needs and provide supportive educational interventions.

Students for whom the interagency agreement is intended are children who have been removed from their parent's or primary caregivers' custody by the court and placed by DCF/ChildNet in a licensed shelter, foster family or group home, licensed residential facility or any combination thereof.

Working closely with school personnel, the foster parent/caregiver, natural parent, and surrogate parent, if applicable, will increase the likelihood of these students becoming academically successful.

School personnel who assist with these procedures include:

District Guidance Liaison/Putting Families First- Prentis Johnson (954-321-3078)

- serves as the first point of contact for educational information/ assistance during a BSO child protective investigation
- obtains/ reviews educational records of school age youth
- communicates with the child's school in regards to any excused absence(s) from school as a result of the initial intake/ investigation activities
- participates in DCF/ChildNet multi-disciplinary staffings

Foster Care Designee (Individual at each school-see list)

- serves as the single point of contact at every public/ charter school
- facilitates registration process for in-coming/ transitioning foster students
- initiates special transportation requests
- coordinates activities with other school-based personnel (i.e. ESE, Social Worker)

Dependency Court Liaison- Debbie Winters (954-768-8903)

- serves as the liaison between the school system and courts
- attends shelter hearings
- processes special transportation requests
- tracks/ facilitates court ordered actions related to school concerns
- coordinates activities to promote student educational stabilization

Shelter Hearings:

The school district's Dependency Court Liaison attends the daily shelter hearings and will report the findings to the foster care designee so that appropriate school-based measures can be taken to support the child.

School Registration Information for Foster Care Children:

A School Registration Information for Foster Care Children form (aka the "salmon colored form") must be completed by the caseworker and provided to the foster care designee at the respective school for every child in state care attending a Broward public or charter school. This form, created collaboratively by DCF/ChildNet and the school system includes critical demographic and contact information used to update the school district's databases. The form also addresses specific concerns such as court orders or other stipulations, which may prohibit or limit the contact the child may have with parents or other individuals. Copies of such court orders must be attached to the salmon-colored form.

In addition, this form provides the school personnel with a trigger for initiating the child's eligibility for Free and Reduced Lunch, as well as the possibility of special transportation needs if the foster placement is outside of the school's boundaries. An original form should be given to the school at the time of a new registration, any time information needs to be updated or immediately after a child has been taken into custody.

Any time changes occur which affect the accuracy of information on the form (i.e. change of address, change of caseworker, new orders affecting contact), an updated form must be given to the school's foster care designee within 72 hours.

Immunizations

The Florida Legislature has established a 30-day waiver for proof of immunizations for students who are considered "homeless" by state definition. This does not encompass foster care children except those residing in a temporary shelter arrangement while awaiting a permanent foster home placement.

Placement Changes and Educational Stability

The school setting is often the most stabilizing environment for the foster care youth as they travel from community to community. It becomes an important focal point of their existence, in which relationships with school staff and peers can be established and maintained. School success for the foster care child takes on major significance since their ability to break the cycle of poverty in their lives is often based upon being educationally prepared for employment and their future.

Most children should remain at their current school unless it is determined that the child should change schools due to issues of safety or other circumstances that would

not be in their best interest. This decision should be made collaboratively by DCF/ChildNet, school personnel, and the new caregiver/provider. DCF/ChildNet is committed to, whenever possible, placing children in foster homes/settings within, or closest to, their home-school boundaries.

When placement within the boundaried school is not available the parties involved in serving the child shall decide if continued attendance at the student's current school or a change of school placement is in the child's best interest. In making that determination, staff should consider:

- The student's academic, social and emotional needs
- Safety or other risk factors
- Schedule/credit concerns for high school students (i.e. block vs regular schedule)
- Therapeutic services/relationships, such as those provided in EH/SED programs
- The previous mobility of the student as well as potential plans for reunification
- Travel distance and length of bus ride, given child's age/developmental level
- Ability for continued participation in before or after school activities/clubs
- Input from the student, if age appropriate

Movement between schools should preferably take place at logical breaks in the school year such as at the end of a marking period, semester, school year.

Our goal is to provide students with the best opportunity for school success.

School Transition:

If it has been determined that a change in the school placement is in the child's best interest, the child shall be withdrawn from their present school and registered at their new school by their caseworker. If a foster parent or caregiver is doing the registration the caseworker must ensure that all information, including an original completed salmon-colored form, along with relevant court orders in the interest of the child's safety, is provided for registration. The registration process should be conducted at the school in private to protect the child's confidentiality.

Special Transportation:

If the determination is made to maintain the child at their current school, the caseworker must complete/update a salmon-colored form, and provide the original to the foster care designee. If special transportation services are needed because the new placement is outside the school's boundaries:

- The caseworker should make the request to the foster care designee
- The foster care designee shall complete the transportation request form and fax it to the dependency court liaison. (Only foster care designees should complete this form). The appropriate sections of the IEP will be attached if the child receives ESE services.
- The dependency court liaison will enter the information into the transportation database
- The transportation department will notify the dependency court liaison of the approval status

- The dependency court liaison will inform the caseworker, care provider and foster care designee of the approval/denial
- The Dependency Court Liaison will troubleshoot any appeals or exceptional circumstances with the Transportation Department.

Transportation requests may take up to 10 days to be processed. The caseworker is responsible for ensuring temporary transportation for the child until the school district has determined the appropriate transportation option.

Whenever feasible, the first transportation option to be considered will be bus stops which already exist or the addition of new stops on an existing route such as those for magnet programs, ESE clusters, near-by schools, etc.

The second option to be considered will be to pay foster parents at the district reimbursement rate to transport the child (two round trips per day). This option must receive prior approval by the school district.

NOTE: Each address change requires a new transportation request, which may also require two weeks to process.

Monitoring/Individual Planning:

Each principal will identify a foster care designee. The foster care designee will have primary responsibility for coordinating/monitoring the support and educational interventions for the foster care student and to communicate with the caseworker.

Caseworkers should direct their communication at a school to the foster care designee. Depending on the nature of the issue the designee may include or direct the caseworker to other school personnel who are able to provide detailed assistance. These individuals may include teachers, administrators, ESE specialists, school social workers, school psychologists, or family counselors.

If there is a need to develop interventions to assist/support the student, a child support/child study/intervention assistance team would review all of the data collected and determine whether there is a need to develop an intervention plan. If a plan is indicated, one is written that addresses the student's academic, social, emotional, or behavioral needs.

When a student is suspected of having a disability, the procedures in the Special Programs and Procedures for Exceptional Students will be followed to determine eligibility.

Role of Foster Care/Natural Parents:

Unless prohibited by court order, natural parents may represent or participate in their child's educational decisions, including the determination of special education needs. Parents should be encouraged to maintain their role in these processes, especially if the goal is reunification. The Code of Federal Regulation 34CFR 300.13 prohibits DCF, ChildNet or any other agency employee vested in the care of the child to sign in lieu of the parent for ESE purposes.

Foster care parents are extended the same rights as other parents. They should be encouraged to participate in conferences with the student's teachers and receive information and provide input about grading, attendance, behavior, ESE records, Section 504 rights, etc.

Surrogate Parents:

When a child living in foster care has, or is perceived to have a disability, the need for a surrogate parent must be determined by the school district on a case by case basis. The foster parent may serve as the parent for educational purposes if the parent is unavailable or is prohibited by the court and there are no more than four (4) total children in the home. If there are more than four (4) children, the foster parent should remain actively involved but a surrogate parent, as defined in IDEA, must be appointed for children:

- a) for whom the court has terminated the parents' rights;
- b) for whom a determination has been made that reunification is not the goal;
- c) as determined on a case by case basis, are entitled by law to a surrogate but who do not fit the criteria as identified in a) or b)

The determination of whether or not an ESE, or potentially ESE, foster care student requires a surrogate parent should be made in collaboration with the school district's **Due Process Coordinator, Grace McDonald at 767-8544.**

Children residing in any type of congregate care setting such as shelter facilities, group homes or residential treatment centers will require a surrogate if they meet any of the criteria listed above. Under no circumstances may an employee or caregiver employed by, or under contract with, the student's child caring agency sign as the parent.

By federal regulation, caseworkers and agency personnel involved in the care of the child are prohibited from serving as the parent for ESE purposes.

Information Sharing:

The existing interagency agreement allows DCF/ChildNet and the school district staff to share information about a student. DCF counselors/private provider case managers shall present picture ID when requesting information about a student from a school. School staff shall photocopy the ID and file the request in the confidential student folder with the foster care designee. Each party agrees to maintain the confidentiality of the student.

Truancy:

Each week the school district electronically forwards the daily attendance of foster care children to DCF/ChildNet for distribution to their caseworkers. Caseworkers should review this report to determine appropriate actions/interventions. Schools are expected to follow the same absentee/truancy procedures for foster care students as for all others.

Discipline Issues:

Foster care youth are expected to follow the same Student Code of Conduct guidelines as all other students. It is the intent of the school district to treat all students in an equitable manner. To do that requires exploration of options relating to school-based infractions. Alternatives to suspension, as opposed to external suspension, shall be considered whenever possible for foster care students.

If a caseworker has concerns related to a foster care student, he/she may contact the foster care designee. The foster care designee will notify the principal and will link the caseworker to the administrator at the school who can best address concerns or issues. It is anticipated that the vast majority of issues can be resolved through the collaboration of the caseworker and school staff. In the event the issue is still unresolved, the caseworker may contact the school principal directly. If the concern is unresolved after meeting with the principal, the caseworker and supervisor may contact the area director. To identify the appropriate director and phone number, please contact the appropriate Area Office.

North Area:	(954) 786-7860
North Central Area:	(954) 765-6755
South Central Area:	(954) 712-1500
South:	(954) 680-5430



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