

FOSTERING STUDENT SUCCESS

Foster Care Interagency Procedures Manual

2023-2024



**School Board of Volusia County
DeLand, Florida**

In partnership with

**The Department of Children and Families
and
Community Partnership for Children**

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Procedures for School-Based Educational Interventions with Foster Care Students

Foster care students often experience difficulties as they move from their family home to multiple foster homes and, consequently, from school to school. A formal interagency agreement between the School Board of Volusia County, Florida, and the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), District 12, was established in June 2017. The agreement sets forth guidelines designed to promote and facilitate academic stabilization of foster care students. Both parties agree that students in the dependency system are at risk of experiencing behavioral problems which may lead to juvenile crime, truancy, suspensions, or expulsions.

DCF will provide, either directly or through providers, including Community Partnership for Children, the full range of foster care services under Florida Statutes and Administrative Rules. The intent of this manual is to provide specific procedures which create an awareness of the unique educational needs of students in foster care and provide supportive educational interventions.

These procedures are intended for children who have been removed from their parents' or primary caregivers' custody by the court and placed by the Florida Department of Children and Families / Community Partnership for Children in a licensed shelter, foster family, group home, or licensed residential facility. Key personnel who will assist with these procedures are:

Department of Children and Families (DCF)

- provide to the superintendent an updated bimonthly electronic list of children in foster care
- provide identity of the DCF/Community Partnership for Children caregiver and Case Managers assigned to each student
- provide foster care parents with the red folder which contains authorization for medical treatment, shelter order placing the child/youth into the custody of the State of Florida. As time goes on and the child is in care, the red book will contain paperwork from medical appointments, copy of the Judicial review, copy of the case plan from the parents, and photocopies of the child's birth certificate and social security card.
- serves as the first point of contact for educational information/assistance during a child protective investigation
- obtains/reviews educational records of school age youth
- communicates with the child's school regarding any excused absence(s) from school as a result of the initial intake/investigation activities
- participates in the Department of Children and Families/Community Partnership for Children multi-disciplinary staffing

Community Partnership for Children / Foster Care Designee

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

DCF Protective Investigator

- 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

Foster Care Point of Contact-Volusia County Schools

- primary liaison to the school system
- provides advocacy within the child welfare system on education matters
- consults with Case Managers, parents and providers as needed
- provides staff development to school, district, and agency personnel
- promotes collaboration between child welfare and educational personnel
- facilitates special transportation requests when required

School-Based Liaison / School Counselor or Principal Designee

- reviews education records of the child(ren) and designs appropriate interventions to insure educational progress of child
- initiates school-based processes (AIP, PST, IEP reviews, and 504 Plans), when appropriate
- consults with Foster Care Point of Contact, Case Managers, parents, and providers as needed

Records Management Specialists

- designee for records release, subpoenas, psychiatric reports, legal issues, and attorney questions
- attends court proceedings representing Volusia County School Board

Volusia County Schools

- provides attendance information for each student identified by DCF as under jurisdiction of dependency court to DCF and Community Partnership for Children to support attendance and agency collaboration
- provides student discipline and grades for these same students when requested
- provides training to educators and agency personnel, i.e., Community Partnership for Children, DCF, foster care parents, school social workers, school counselors, and administrators
- provides guidelines and procedures for the implementation of the agreement

School Enrollment and Registration for Foster Care Children

A school enrollment form for foster care children must be completed by the Case Manager and provided to the respective school for every child in state care attending a Volusia County public or charter school within 72 hours of enrollment. This school enrollment form includes critical demographic and contact information used to update the school district's databases. The enrollment form also addresses 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 enrollment form.

The school enrollment form provides the school personnel with a trigger for initiating the determination of the child's eligibility for Free and Reduced Lunch, as well as the establishment of special transportation when the foster placement is outside of the school's boundaries. A new school enrollment form should be given to the school: (1) at each new enrollment, (2) any time information needs to be updated, (3) or immediately after a child has been taken into custody.

Any time changes occur which affect the accuracy of student information (i.e., change of address or Case Manager, new orders affecting contact), an updated school enrollment form must be given to the school-based liaison within 72 hours.

Enrollment and Immunization Documentation:

In addition to the above procedures, foster care students are required to follow the same procedures for school enrollment as all other Volusia County Schools' students. Under the McKinney Vento Act and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), an exemption for the immediate required enrollment documentation (i.e., immunization history, birth certificate, school records) is granted for students who are placed by the state in emergency or transitional shelters awaiting foster home or other permanent housing.

Students classified as "homeless," meaning individuals who lack a fixed, regular, or adequate nighttime residence, which include children who are sharing the housing of other persons, are living in emergency or transitional shelters, or are awaiting foster care placement, **must be immediately enrolled in school, even if they do not have required documents, such as school records, medical records, proof of residency, or other documents as prescribed by the McKinney-Vento Assistance Act.**

Students who have been placed in a foster care facility who do not have school records and wish to enroll in school need the following documents for *immediate* enrollment:

- a letter from the foster care facility which states the child's name, the name of the facility, and its address
- immunization records as indicated below:

Florida Statutes authorize school officials to permit transfer students who present proof of measles vaccination to attend school up to 30 school days until their records can be obtained **unless** transferring into a grade covered by a policy for two doses of measles vaccine and/or documentation of Hepatitis B vaccine series or Varicella. Students transferring into 7th–12th grades require an additional proof of a recent Tetanus-Diphtheria booster.

All other documents required of students enrolling or reenrolling in a Volusia County Public School should be secured for both classes of students when available:

- certified copy of birth certificate
- Florida physical (Form DH 3040)
- record of immunizations (Form DH 680)
- academic records, including Exceptional Student Education records, if applicable, and disciplinary records

The facility should be encouraged to provide the additional documents as soon as possible. However, delays in securing, or failure to secure these additional documents WILL NOT exclude a student housed in a foster care facility from initially enrolling in school.

NOTE: Federal Law does not give a deadline as to when records need to be obtained for children in foster care.

Educational Stability:

****By working closely with school personnel, the foster parent/caregiver, natural parent, or surrogate parent, if applicable, will increase the likelihood of future children becoming academically successful.***

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 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 educational pursuits.

Most children should remain at their current school, if possible, 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 the Case Manager, school personnel, the new caregiver, and others, including the parent, involved in the child's care and treatment. The Department of Children and Family Services and Community Partnership for Children is committed to, whenever possible, placing children in foster homes/settings within, or closest to, the last school of enrollment boundaries.

When placement within the last school of enrollment is not appropriate, 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, the following should be considered:

- 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 grading period, semester, or school year.

<p><i>Our goal is to provide students with the best opportunity for school success.</i></p>
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Placement Changes and School Transition:

If it has been determined that a change in the school placement is in the student's best interest, the child shall be withdrawn from their present school and enrolled at their new school by their Case Manager. If a foster parent or caregiver is doing the enrolling, the Case Manager must ensure that all information, including an original completed school enrollment form, along with relevant court orders in the interest of the child's safety, is provided for enrollment.

Transportation:

If the foster child will remain at their current school, the Case Manager must complete/update a school registration information form and provide the original copy to the Foster Care Designee. If special transportation services are needed because the new placement is outside the school's boundaries, the form should be forwarded to the Foster Care Point of Contact for handling. When the form is received the following procedures will be followed:

- The Foster Care Point of Contact will submit the information to the Transportation Department.
- The Transportation Department will notify the Foster Care Point of Contact of the approval status.
- The Foster Care Point of Contact will inform the Case Manager, care provider, and Foster Care Designee of the approval/denial.
- The Foster Care Point of Contact will present any appeals or exceptional circumstances with the Transportation Department.

DCF shall retain the responsibility to coordinate temporary transportation for students to and from school during the time that transportation by the school system is being arranged.

NOTE: Each address change requires a new transportation request which may also require up to ten business days to process.

Monitoring/Individual Planning:

The Case Manager will have the primary responsibility for coordinating/monitoring the support and educational interventions for the foster care student and to communicate with the school.

The Case Managers should direct their communication at a school to the Principal, School Counselor, and/or School Social Worker. Depending on the nature of the issue, the Principal or School Counselor may ask teachers, administrators, ESE Specialists, School Psychologists, or family counselors to aid.

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:

Parents should be encouraged to maintain their role in these procedures unless parental rights have been legally terminated. The Code of Federal Regulation 34 CFR 300.13 prohibits the Department of Children and Families/Community Partnership for Children, or any other agency employee vested in the care of the child to sign in lieu of the parent for ESE purposes.

The school district should make educational decisions, including ESE, in the best interest of the child in the following order: (1) court order, (2) parent, (3) foster parent who meets criteria, or (4) surrogate parent assigned by school district. They should be encouraged to participate in conferences with the student's teachers and receive information, concerning promotion, attendance, behavior, ESE records, Section 504 rights, etc.

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

Surrogate Parents:

When a child living in foster care has, or is suspected of having a disability, the need for a surrogate parent must be determined by the school district on a case-by-case basis.

Information Sharing:

The Interagency Agreement allows the Florida Department of Children and Families/ Community Partnership for Children and the school district staff to share information about a student in foster care. Case Managers shall present picture ID when requesting information about a student from a school, and school staff shall verify that this individual has the right to be provided this information. Each party agrees to maintain the confidentiality of the student.

For children under protective supervision, the parent is required to sign a release of information granting another individual the right to obtain educational information or records from the schools.

Truancy:

The Florida Compulsory School Attendance Law, Florida Statute 1003.21, requires that all children who have attained the age of 6 years by February 1 of any school year, or who are older than 6 years of age but have not attained the age of 16, attend school regularly during the entire school year. When a student has been absent from school for 5 unexcused days within a calendar month or 10 unexcused absences within a 90-calendar-day period, the student's primary teacher shall report to the school principal. The principal shall, unless there is clear evidence that the absences are not a pattern of attendance, refer the case to the school's Child Study Team (i.e. PST). For assistance with attendance problems, please contact the School Social Services Department at (386) 734-7190, ext. 38356.

Discipline Issues:

Foster care youth are expected to follow the same Code of Student Conduct and Discipline 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 appropriate for students.

If a Case Manager has concerns related to a foster care student, they may contact the School-Based Liaison. The School-Based Liaison will link the Case Manager to the administrator at the school who can best address the concerns or issues. It is anticipated that most issues can be resolved through collaboration of the Case Manager and school staff. If further intervention or clarification is needed, the Case Manager should contact the Foster Care designee for assistance.

Disputes:

In a case where a dispute occurs regarding the determination of best interest, or the provision of other educationally related services for a child or youth in foster care, the following process must be used:

1. **Level I:** Direct appeal is to the district's foster care designee.
2. **Level II:** If unresolved at Level I, the dispute is appealed to the local school district superintendent or their designee.
3. **Level III:** If the dispute continues to be unresolved, the final appeal (Level III) is to Florida Department of Education (FDOE) foster care designee Iris Williams.

If a dispute arises over school selection, enrollment in a school, or the provision of other educational services, the child or youth shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought and educational services will be provided, pending resolution of the dispute.

*If a dispute over transportation expenses arises, the school district must provide transportation services while payment disputes are being resolved. Every effort must be made to collaborate with the department of Children and Families (DCF) or other Supervising Agency and the aggrieved parties to resolve the complaint or dispute at the local level before it is sent to FDOE.

Disputes may only be filed by the caregiver or the educational decision-maker appointed by the court. The two parties may not use the school district dispute resolution process to resolve disagreements amongst themselves.

Dispute Resolution Process:

If a school district seeks to place a child or youth in foster care in a school other than the school of origin, or the school requested by the caregiver or educational decision-maker in consultation with the youth, the individual making the request shall be informed in a language and format understandable to that person of their right to appeal the decision made by the school district and they shall be provided with the following:

1. The written contact information for the LEA designated Foster Care Liaison and the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) Foster Care Designee, with a brief description of their roles.

Jennifer Watley, MSW/LSW
1301 Shapiro Rd.
Deland, FL 32724
jmwatley@volusia.k12.fl.us
386-734-7190 extension 20856

Dianne C. Martin, MSW
VCS Superintendent Designee
Deland, FL 32724
dmartin@volusia.k12.fl.us
386-734-7190 extension 20765

Iris Williams, MSW
325 W. Gaines Street - Suite 1502
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400
Iris.Williams@fldoe.org
850-717-4491

2. A simple, written, step-by-step description of how to dispute the school district's decision and the contact information of the person designated to receive the dispute. Caregivers or educational decision-makers should be able to easily complete the steps to initiate the dispute process. Individuals submitting disputes shall have the opportunity to submit a dispute to the district via email. These disputes shall be treated with the same legitimacy as a dispute submitted in any other format. School districts should respond to disputes in the same format in which they were received or as requested by the student's caregiver or educational decision-maker. No dispute should be rejected because it is not on the appropriate form; however, individuals filing disputes will be held to the process and timelines outlined in this document.

3. Written notice of the right to enroll and attend immediately in the school requested by the student's caregiver or educational decision-maker while the dispute is being resolved.

4. Written notice of the right to appeal to the state if the district-level resolution is not satisfactory and applicable timelines.

Level I: Designated LEA Foster Care Liaison:

If a caregiver or educational decision-maker wishes to dispute a school district's decision related to the determination of best interest or the provision of other educationally related services for a student in foster care:

1. The caregiver or educational decision-maker must file a request for dispute resolution with the district's foster care liaison by submitting a letter or email that initiates the dispute resolution process. The request for dispute resolution must be submitted by the caregiver or educational decision-maker to the district foster care liaison within fifteen (15) business days of receiving notification that the district intends to enroll the student in a school other than the school of origin or the school requested by the caregiver or educational decision-maker. The caregiver or educational decision-maker may submit the request directly to the foster care liaison, or they may submit the request to the school where the dispute is taking place. If the request is submitted to the school where the dispute is taking place, the school shall immediately forward the request to

the district's foster care liaison. If the district's foster care liaison is unavailable, a school district designee may receive the request to initiate the dispute resolution process.

2. The foster care liaison must log the receipt of the dispute, including the date and time, with a written description of the situation and the reason for the dispute.

3. Within five (5) business days of their receipt of the dispute, the foster care designee must decide on the dispute and inform the caregiver or educational decision-maker in writing of the result. The foster care designee must include the following documents in their notification:

- a. A copy of the original dispute, which was filed at Level I,
- b. The decision rendered at Level I by the LEA foster care liaison, and
- c. Any additional information from the caregiver or educational decision-maker. Instructions regarding how to file a Level II dispute.

4. If the caregiver or educational decision-maker disagrees with the decision made at Level I and wishes to move the dispute resolution process forward to Level II, the caregiver or educational decision-maker shall notify the district's foster care liaison of their intent to proceed to Level II within ten (10) business days of receipt of notification of the Level I decision.

LEVEL II: LEA Superintendent or Superintendent's Designee:

1. If the student's caregiver or educational decision-maker disagrees with the decision rendered by the district's foster care liaison at Level I, they may appeal the decision to the local school district's superintendent, or the superintendent's designee, (the designee shall be someone other than the district's foster care liaison) using the appeals package provided at Level I.

2. The superintendent, or superintendent's designee, will arrange for a personal conference to be held with the student's caregiver or educational decision-maker, the youth if appropriate, and at least one representative from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or other supervising agency. Personal conferences can occur in-person or over the phone. The personal conference will be arranged within five (5) business days of the notification to the district that the caregiver or educational decision-maker intends to proceed to Level II of the dispute resolution process. Once arranged, the meeting between the superintendent, or superintendent's designee, the caregiver or educational decision-maker, and DCF or other supervising agency representative is to take place as expeditiously as possible.

3. The local superintendent, or superintendent's designee, will provide a decision in writing to the caregiver or educational decision-maker with supporting evidence and reasons, within five (5) business days of the personal conference. It is the responsibility of the district to verify receipt of the written notification regarding the superintendent's Level II decision. The district should provide:

- a. A copy of the caregiver or educational decision-makers initial dispute, which was filed at Level I, along with the Level I decision.
- b. The decision rendered at Level II by the LEA Superintendent or their designee; and

- c. Any additional information from the caregiver or educational decision-maker and/or foster care liaison.
 - d. Instructions regarding how to file a Level III dispute– including the physical address and email address of where to submit their dispute.
4. If the designated caregiver or educational decision-maker disagrees with the decision made at Level II and wishes to move the dispute resolution process forward to Level III, he or she shall notify the district's foster care liaison of their intent to proceed to Level III within ten (10) business days of receipt of notification of the Level II decision.

LEVEL III: Florida Department of Education (FDOE):

1. The district superintendent or their designee shall forward all written and electronic documentation to the FDOE School Social Work Consultant, Iris Williams, within five (5) business days of receiving notification of the caregiver or educational decision-maker's intent to file a Level III dispute.
2. The caregiver or educational decision-maker may also submit related documentation to FDOE for review, within the five (5) business days after notifying the school district of their intent to file a Level III dispute.
3. The entire dispute package, including all documentation and related paperwork, is to be submitted to FDOE in one consolidated and complete package via email or the US Postal Service. It is the responsibility of the district to ensure that dispute package is complete and ready for review at the time it is submitted.
4. The FDOE School Social Work Consultant, and/or other appropriate agency staff, shall make a final decision within fifteen (15) business days of receipt of the dispute.
5. The final decision will be forwarded to the local school district's foster care liaison for distribution to the caregiver or educational decision-maker, the DCF representative engaged by the school district at Level II, and the local superintendent.
6. The decision made by FDOE shall be the final resolution for placement and the provision of services for a child or youth in foster care in the district.
7. The office of the school district superintendent shall maintain a record of all disputes related to the placement of children and youth in foster care.

Designated Foster Care Liaison and District Homeless Liaison

Jennifer Watley, MSW
1301 Shapiro Dr. Building 8
DeLand, FL 32724
386-734-7190 extension 20856
[**jmwatley@volusia.k12.fl.us**](mailto:jmwatley@volusia.k12.fl.us)

Designated FDOE Foster Care Representative

Iris Williams, MSW
325 W. Gaines Street - Suite 1502
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400
[**Iris.Williams@fldoe.org**](mailto:Iris.Williams@fldoe.org)
850-717-4491

APPENDIX A



Title I (Part A) Foster Care Assurances – Checklist for School Personnel

Once the form is completed send the original to the District Foster Care Liaison, DeLand Transportation, Building #8. Retain a copy for the School-Based Foster Care Contact.

School: _____ Date Began: _____

Student Name: _____ Student ID: _____

Completed By: _____ Title: _____ Ext: _____

The following checklist should be completed on each student when identified as foster care. Please record the date for each item in the space provided. Indicate N/A if an item does not apply.

Date or N/A

_____ Assess student's educational needs (designated/appropriate school personnel to complete within 24 hours)

- Review registration information and enrollment history in Volusia County
- Request prior school records/cumulative folder and ESOL/ESE records, if applicable
- Contact prior schools and gather pertinent information needed for placement or services
- Follow-up on "in process" requests or referrals from prior school
- Refer to PST Problem-Solving Team for meeting when records are received

_____ Complete in FOCUS for Foster Care Coding

_____ Notify the Café Manager (via e-mail, note, or phone) that this student receives free meals immediately and once identified, remains eligible for the remainder of the school year

_____ Notify the classroom teacher(s) of the student's status (confidential information)

_____ Provide school supplies, if needed

_____ Identify additional family members enrolled in other Volusia County Schools (list names and schools)

_____ Refer any student lacking required medical records (physical, birth certificate, immunizations) to the District Foster Care Liaison (student has 30 **school** days to return information)

Types of records missing: _____

_____ Complete a variance form if student has moved out of his/her zoned school

_____ Coordinate transportation with the District Foster Care Liaison for out-of-zone students

- Bus routing

_____ Make referral to any of the following, if there are additional significant concerns:

- School Counseling Services for academic, behavior or other concerns
- Health Services for vision or hearing referrals, medication issues, etc.
- School Social Work Services for social service needs, home/school communication.

Contact the District Foster Care, ext. 20856, regarding any concerns or questions.

