

LEARNFARE

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A. Overview

The current Learnfare requirements reflect a change in criteria regarding student attendance and parental participation in school conferences for families who are eligible to receive Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) administered by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). A family receiving TCA could jeopardize its eligibility if a minor child in the home is determined by the school to be either a habitual truant or a dropout. Additionally, eligible TCA parents must participate in school conferences, once each semester, for each dependent child of compulsory school attendance age.

B. School Attendance

Pursuant to Florida Statutes, Section [1003.26](#), regular school attendance is required for children between the ages of 6 and 18, which includes teenage parents under the age of 18 receiving cash assistance for their children. A student who attains the age of 16 during the school year is no longer subject to compulsory school attendance beyond the date which they attain that age, if the student completes a formal [Declaration of Intent to Terminate Enrollment](#) with the district school board. The student’s parent/guardian must also sign the declaration of intent to terminate enrollment. A 16- or 17-year-old student who drops out of school is not excluded from being reported to DCF, because the Learnfare statute identifies eligible students as those who have been determined by the school to be either a habitual truant or a dropout.

Florida Statutes, Section [414.1251](#)(1), requires DCF to reduce the TCA for an eligible parent’s dependent child or for an eligible teenage participant who is not exempt from school attendance requirements and who has been identified as a habitual truant or as a dropout.

Pursuant to Florida Statutes, Section [1003.01](#)(8), a habitual truant is defined as a student who has accumulated 15 unexcused absences within 90 calendar days with or without the knowledge or consent of the student’s parent/guardian. A dropout is defined in Florida Statutes, Section [1003.01](#)(9), and includes all students who are assigned a withdrawal code that is reported as a dropout code (DNE, W05, W13, W15, W18, W21, W22, W23).

C. Parent/School Conference Requirements

According to section [414.1251](#)(2), Florida Statutes, each Learnfare Program participant (parent or caretaker relative) with a school-age child is required to have on-site, off-site, or telephone conferences with an appropriate school official during each semester to assure that the participant is involved in the child’s educational progress and is aware of any existing attendance or academic problems. The conference must address acceptable student attendance, grades, and behavior. DCF must notify schools of Learnfare eligible students so that the required conferences are held. When needed, the [School Verification](#) (form CF-ES 2623) should be used to verify school attendance. The responsibility to arrange for a conference each semester is placed on the parent or caretaker. A participant who without good cause fails to partake in the required conferences is subject to sanction.

D. School District’s Responsibility

School districts are required to notify DCF by electronic means when an eligible child is either a habitual truant or a dropout. Upon notification of the pending sanction, the school social worker will collaborate with the child’s school to ensure that all necessary interventions have been attempted prior to any referral by the school social worker to DCF.

Verification of compliance with attendance requirements should be documented by an authorized school official using the [Student Compliance with Attendance Requirements: Verification to the Department of Children and Families for the Learnfare Program](#) verification form.

E. Data Reporting Procedures

The Department of Children and Families will create and transmit the Learnfare list to the Northwest Regional Data Center by the 25th of each month. The list will be county-specific, and will identify all school age children (children ages 6 through 18) of temporary cash assistance clients. Each local school district will download its file and annotate the file by inserting the following codes as applicable:

Code	Definition
01	The child is truant
02	The child is a dropout

The status should be left blank if neither applies. For students who are coded as 01 or 02 in the Sanction Reason Code, the student’s school name and address should be entered on each student record. For students who are coded 02 in the Sanction Reason Code, identify the date on which the student was identified as a dropout.

F. Student Services Follow-up Guidelines

Each school social worker will receive the list of the Learnfare students on or about the 25th of each month, if the students are in attendance at a school served by that social worker. In most instances the students on the list will have missed at least 15 days of school. Before a student's name is submitted back to the Department of Children and Families, the district wants to ensure that all of the necessary requisite steps have been taken to provide services to the student and the family. School social workers are asked to carefully review the names on the list(s) they receive and work with school staff to determine whether the parent has been sufficiently involved in their child's educational process to improve attendance.

Following are questions that can act as guidelines for making a determination on whether a student's name should be submitted to DCF:

- Has the student's teacher or team level met with the parent?
- Has the Problem Solving Team met to review the case, outline interventions, and offer services? If so, has the parent been involved in this process?
- Has a referral been made to the school social worker for services?
- Has an [Attendance Contract](#) (form 2001042 – *English or Spanish*) been completed which outlined possible interventions?
- What services have been offered to the student and parent (such as referral to community agencies or community services)?
- Has a referral been made to CINS/FINS? ([Referral Form for Centralized Intake Stewart-Marchman-Act Behavioral Healthcare](#) – form 2004238.) If so, has the parent been cooperative and working with the school staff?

If the parent is cooperative and working to improve the student's attendance, a referral to DCF may not be necessary. However, if the parent or student has been referred to court or not been cooperative, the student's name should possibly be considered for submission for sanctions. The school social worker usually addresses the attendance only, not the parent/school conference.

The MIS department must forward the list of recommendations to DCF on the 10th of each month, in which case it is important that the list of names with the appropriate recommendations be returned by the school social workers to the Learnfare Program Liaison by the 5th of the following month (i.e., if the list is received on the 25th of October, it must be returned by the 5th of November), so a report can be completed/submitted to MIS by the 7th of the month.

G. Department of Children and Families' Responsibilities

The list must be retransmitted by MIS back to DCF by the 10th of each month in order to have a data exchange response posted to the DCF specialist on the night of the 10th. Upon electronic notification, DCF staff will review the case record to determine if good cause exists for failure to participate in regular school attendance. If good cause does not exist for regular school attendance, the sanction (reduction of case assistance) will be imposed. The DCF specialist will notify the temporary cash assistance participant of the action, and within a prescribed period of time will remove the non-compliant child from the TCA group. Because of this activity, the child will no longer be cash eligible, and their name will not reappear once removed from the case file.

If the parent/guardian of the habitually truant or dropout child does not agree, DCF procedures allow them to request a fair hearing. The child may be reinstated or added back to the case under the following circumstances: (1) following the truant child's substantially improved attendance during a subsequent grading period; or (2) after the dropout child enrolls in a public school, receives a high school diploma or its equivalent, enrolls in preparation for a General Educational Development (GED) test, or enrolls in other educational activities approved by the district school board. Improved attendance is defined as "being present in school for at least 30 consecutive school days with no unexcused absences." The count starts over following an unexcused absence during the 30-day period. Excused absences are allowed during the 30-day period; however, it extends the length of time to satisfy the 30-day criteria by one day for each day's absence.

The child will be added back to TCA benefits during a subsequent grading period following verification of compliance with school attendance requirements by an authorized school official. Verification of compliance should be documented on the [Student Compliance with Attendance Requirements: Verification to the Department of Children and Families for the Learnfare Program](#) form.

H. Confidentiality

Any list of truant children or dropouts provided to DCF by Florida school districts shall remain confidential as provided by law. Any list of TCA recipients provided to the school district by DCF shall also remain confidential as provided by law. Each agency will protect the rights of students and recipients with respect to records created, maintained, and used by public institutions within the state.

For additional information regarding driver license procedures, contact Student Services, ext. 20513.