

# **FOSTERING STUDENT SUCCESS**

**CHILD WELFARE AGENCY  
PROCEDURES MANUAL**

**2004-2005**

**THE SCHOOL BOARD OF BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA**

**In partnership with**

**CHILDNET, INC.**

**&**

**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN & FAMILIES**



# PROCEDURES FOR SCHOOL-BASED EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS WITH FOSTER CARE STUDENTS

Foster care students often experience difficulties as they move from their family's home to multiple foster homes and, consequently, from school to school. A formal interagency agreement between the school district and child welfare sets forth guidelines designed to promote and facilitate academic stabilization of foster care students. The intent of this document is to provide specific procedures, which create an awareness of these students' unique educational needs and provide supportive educational interventions.

These procedures are intended for children who have been removed from their parent's or primary caregivers' custody by the court and placed by ChildNet in a licensed shelter, foster family, group home, or licensed residential facility .

Key personnel who assist with these procedures include:

## **District Guidance Liaison/SafePlace- 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 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 (754-321-2122)**

- 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

## **Educational Services Specialist- Michele Jarrett/ChildNet (954-816-6928)**

- primary liaison to the school system
- provides advocacy within the child welfare system on education matters
- consults with Child Advocates, parents and providers as needed
- participates in school-based conferences and IEP staffings, as requested
- promotes collaboration between child welfare and educational personnel

*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 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 Child Advocate 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 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 or Child Advocate, new orders affecting contact), an updated form must be given to the school’s Foster Care Designee 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 Broward County students. An exemption for the immediate required enrollment documentation (i.e. immunization history, birth certificate, school records) is granted for students who meet the federal/state definition of “homeless”. Children placed by the state in emergency or transitional shelters awaiting foster home or other permanent placement meet this exemption.

### **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 the Child Advocate, school personnel, the new caregiver and others, including the parent, involved in the child's care and treatment. 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, 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 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 Child Advocate. If a foster parent or caregiver is doing the registration the Child Advocate 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 Child Advocate 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 Child Advocate 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 Child Advocate, 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 business days to be processed. The Child Advocate 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). A Reimbursement Application For Private Car Transportation form must be completed and approved by the school district prior to selecting this option.

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

The Child Advocate 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 Child Advocate 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 should participate in their child's educational planning, including the determination of special education needs. Parents should be encouraged to maintain their role in these processes, unless parental rights have been legally terminated. The Code of Federal Regulation 34CFR 300.13 prohibits 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.

*By federal regulation, Child Advocates 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 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 less than five (5) total children in the home. If there are five (5) or more children, the foster parent should remain actively involved but a surrogate parent must be appointed for children:

- a) for whom the court has terminated the parents' rights;
- b) for whom the parents whereabouts or identity is unknown; or
- 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, will be determined by school system personnel based on information and documentation provided by the Child Advocate.

Children residing in any type of congregate care settings, such as shelter facilities and group homes, or residential treatment programs, including specialized therapeutic foster homes, 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.

### **Information Sharing:**

The existing interagency agreement allows ChildNet and the school district staff to share information about a student in foster care. Child Advocates 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.

For children under protective supervision a consent form signed by the parent is required to obtain educational information or records from the schools.

### **Truancy:**

Each week the school district electronically forwards the daily attendance of foster care children to ChildNet for distribution to the Child Advocates. These reports should be reviewed 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 students.

If a Child Advocate has concerns related to a foster care student, he/she may contact the Foster Care Designee. The Foster Care Designee will link the Child Advocate to the administrator at the school who can best address the concerns or issues. It is anticipated that the vast majority of issues can be resolved through the collaboration of the Child Advocate and school staff. If further intervention or clarification is needed the Child Advocate should contact the Educational Services Specialist at ChildNet for assistance.



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