



Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care Practice Bulletin 1 of 5



developmental and cognitive barriers, and high rates of absenteeism and disciplinary actions.

Without proper support and intervention, poor academic performance, grade level retention, and high dropout rates can result. While this engagement is critical for all children in foster care, it is especially important when the children are (or should be) in special education, and when older youth are preparing to transition to adulthood. New laws and improved practice can improve education outcomes for youth involved in Iowa's foster care system.

NEW Federal Law: Enacted October 7, 2008, *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* amended parts B and E of Title IV of the Social Security Act. The law included many provisions to benefit children and youth in foster care, such as significant requirements to promote educational stability for children in foster care. Primarily, responsibilities were delegated by the law to the child welfare agency, in Iowa, the Department of Human Services (DHS). Specifically, the DHS must include a plan for ensuring the educational stability of every child in foster care. To comply with this new federal law, the Iowa legislature enacted new state laws or amended existing laws (SF 152).



Education Stability Practice Series:

This practice bulletin is the first in a five part series, developed through a collaboration involving DHS, DE, and the courts. DHS will release the Education Stability Series over the next year. The series will examine policies, procedures, and practices to improve education outcomes for children involved in child welfare. The series will specifically examine education stability for children in foster care, Early Access (birth to 3), special education, and transition.

Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care:¹

Education is critical to every child's well-being and future success. Children and young people in the child welfare system require our assistance to help them be successful.

Children and youth in foster care face many challenges on their road to academic success. Their exposure and experiences before and during foster care can have a real and devastating impact on their education: they experienced abuse and/or neglect; they were separated from their families; and they may have to change schools or homes multiple times. Understandably, many children in foster care have emotional and behavioral issues,

According to *Fostering Connections*, a child's DHS case permanency plan must provide:

- `` (i) assurances that the placement of the child in foster care takes into account the appropriateness of the current educational setting and the proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement; and
- `` (ii)(I) an assurance that [DHS] has coordinated with appropriate local educational agencies ... to ensure that the child remains in the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement; or
- `` (II) if remaining in such school is not in the best interests of the child, assurances by [DHS] and the local educational agencies to provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school, with all of the educational records of the child provided to the school.''

Educational Stability defined: *Fostering Connections* requires assurances of "educational stability" for children in foster care. The law requires certain activities, such as the following, which, when practiced, will promote educational stability for children in foster care.

1. Education of Foster Children in Iowa, February 2008



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I. Evaluate the appropriateness of the child's

educational setting: The DHS caseworker is responsible to ensure the child in foster care is in the appropriate educational setting. The caseworker must consider not only the physical location of the school, but also whether the child's educational needs are met. Such a determination requires the involvement of the parent, teachers, caretakers, and school personnel.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✓ Ask the parent to sign releases of information in the event parent involvement is not immediately possible.
- ✓ Contact the "home school" when a child enters foster care to request social and educational information.
- ✓ Involve the parent in all education decisions.
- ✓ Pre-removal conferences or Family Team Meetings are ideal settings for discussion of the education needs of the child.

II. Child Should Reside in Close Proximity to the Home

School: The stability and support the child receives at his current school may be the most stable thing in his life at this difficult time. The child should remain in his home school, unless not in the child's best interest.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✓ When a contractor or provider is involved in selection of the foster care placement, the caseworker must ensure they have the educational information needed.
- ✓ Lack of transportation or lack of available foster homes is not an acceptable reason to move a child to a different school.
- ✓ Utilize Family Team Meetings or pre-removal conferences to explore transportation options.

III. Work with the Local Education Agencies. Federal law requires state child welfare agencies collaborate with local education agencies to improve educational stability for children in foster care. Local Education Agencies include the public or private schools, or Area Education Agencies.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✓ When a child enters foster care, contact the home school and request the school send you information on all meetings and copies of all correspondence.
- ✓ Attend education meetings.

IV. Transfer Records within 5 Days: When a child entering foster care changes schools, Iowa law requires school records to be transferred within five school days. In addition, Iowa law requires every school-age child in

foster care, age 5-16, to be enrolled as a full-time elementary or secondary school student or to have completed secondary school. The DHS case manager is responsible to ensure, when a child in foster care changes schools, the receiving school receives transcripts within 5 days of notification from the DHS case manager.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✓ Establish a tickler system to track 5-day requirement.
- ✓ Follow-up with the receiving school to ensure they received transcripts. Work with schools to resolve any barriers.

V. Consent Forms and other Necessary Papers: The parent or legal guardian is authorized to sign consent forms unless a court order specifically delegates this responsibility to another party, such as a foster parent or case manager.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✓ If foster parents are designated to sign forms, provide them with a copy of the court order, if not already provided.

Education Outcomes by the Numbers

Iowa Research Indicates: DHS case reading data indicates that over 95% of 2,354 children reviewed between August 2008 and June 2009 had their educational needs assessed and met.

- ✓ The Iowa Aftercare Services Program assists youth 18-21 who have "aged out" of foster care attain education goals. Youth entering Iowa Aftercare in (SFY 2009):
 - 71% received a high school diploma
 - 10% completed high school via GED
- ✓ Of those who exited aftercare in SFY 2009:
 - 89% finished high school or received a GED.
 - 2% completed a vocational certificate
 - 2% earned an Associate's Degree

Resources and Technical Assistance:

1. Additional information is located under Education at http://dhsintranet/field/asp/svc_results.asp.
2. Foster Care and Education: Tools and Resources for Improving the Education Success of Children and Youth in Foster Care, available at: <http://www.abanet.org/child/education/NationalEducationBrochure.pdf>
3. Addressing the Educational Needs of Children in Foster Care: A Guide for Judges, Advocates and Child Welfare Professionals, available at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/justiceforchildren/PDF/EducationalNeeds.pdf>.