



OVERVIEW

DCF EDUCATION POLICY FOR CHILDREN BIRTH THROUGH 22

What Research Tells Us about Educational Stability & Success in Child Welfare

- Each time a child changes school, s/he loses 4-6 months of knowledge and skills.
- Delayed enrollment and irregular attendance result in missed school days and poorer academic outcomes for children in foster care.
- 75% of children in foster care are behind by at least one grade.

But it also shows:

- Even one fewer school placement **doubles** the likelihood that a student will graduate high school.
- Access to early education and other supports to children under age 5 in foster care improves educational outcomes.

Why the Policy was Revised

Updated to reflect changes to federal and state statutes that require DCF to:

- Support children with disabilities in acquiring a “free and appropriate public education” (*IDEA, 2004*)
- Assure that children considered “homeless” receive entitlements (*McKinney-Vento, 2001*)
- Maintain educational stability, when possible (*Fostering Connections, 2008*)
- Permit foster/pre-adoptive parent to be special education decision-maker **upon placement** of child if parent is not (*Joint ESE/DCF Guidance, 2013*)

Expanded to address educational needs and attainment from **cradle to career**:

- For all DCF-involved children/youth, not just those in DCF care or custody.
- Early Intervention (EI) referrals for children from age birth to 3 with a supported 51B; pre-school screenings for children age 3 or 4 (or 2½ if child in EI);
- Transition planning with youth and young adults through age 22.
- Post-secondary support and guidance.

Guided by principles that call upon DCF to ensure that children/youth:

- Are prepared to enter school.
- Attend school regularly and on time.
- Maintain school placement stability.
- Are engaged and participate in appropriate school activities.
- Make academic progress.
- Have access to special education and related support services as needed.
- Have ongoing family engagement with school.
- Graduate high school with a plan for post-secondary education, training or employment.
- Continue to receive post-secondary support, as appropriate and available.

Basic Practices to Support Educational Success & Attainment

For all DCF-involved children/youth/young adults, DCF:

- Verifies and documents school enrollment and monitors attendance and educational progress (using a release when child is not subject of a 51A report or 51B is concluded).
- Works with families, placement providers and schools to address educational needs, particularly at 6 Week Placement and Foster Care Reviews and other case reviews and planning sessions.

When children/youth/young adults enter or are in DCF care or custody, DCF:

- Coordinates with families, placement providers and schools to promote educational stability and decision-making in the student’s best interest. DCF:
 - Arranges for the student to remain in current education educational setting, whenever possible (Fostering Connections Act); OR

- Facilitates enrollment in a new school, without delay, by requesting all necessary paperwork be transferred to the new school within 2-3 days after the student changes placement.

Identifying and Addressing Student's Special Needs

Special education evaluation – May be requested by the parent, DCF Social Worker, foster/pre-adoptive parent (after conferring with DCF) or any other person involved with the student, when it is suspected that the student may have a disability which prevents her/him from being able to progress effectively in regular education.

Special education decision-maker – Is the only one who can consent to a special education evaluation and sign an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

- Usually the parent, except when not in student's best interest.
- Can be the foster/pre-adoptive parent if s/he agrees and does not have a conflict.
- A Special Education Surrogate Parent (SESP) may have to be requested for a student in C&P custody placed in congregate care, when the parent will not be the special education decision-maker.
- By federal law, the DCF Social Worker cannot be the special education decision-maker.

Special education Team meetings – Should be attended by the:

- Parent (even if s/he is not the special education decision-maker);
- Foster/pre-adoptive parent or other placement provider (even if s/he is not the special education decision-maker); and
- DCF Social Worker (who can participate but cannot sign the IEP).

IEP appeal rights – The parent, foster/pre-adoptive parent or SESP has the right to reject the IEP or finding of no special needs and can request mediation and/or a hearing through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Bureau of Special Education Appeals.

Section 504 referral – Can be requested for a student with a qualifying physical or mental impairment that limits participation in school, if student does not meet the eligibility criteria for a special education evaluation.

Resolving Educational Concerns

DCF partners with families, placement providers and schools to address educational concerns such as academic performance or discipline, school setting, student hospitalization and quitting school.

Transition Planning and Case Closing

Post-Secondary Education Planning, Financial Assistance and Sustaining DCF Connection – DCF works with the anticipated caregiver and child (as appropriate to age and ability) to develop a transition plan that addresses educational needs, maintains educational continuity and promotes achievement. A specialized "youth readiness assessment" is completed with youth age 14 or older in DCF care or custody to evaluate skills for living interdependently in the community and to provide the basis for transition planning for high school graduation and beyond (with possible financial assistance) that may include sustained DCF connection.

"Chapter 688" Transition Planning – May be available for youth/young adult with severe qualifying disabilities. State law requires LEAs to initiate the process for a student whose special education entitlements will end, at least 2 years before s/he graduates high school or turns 22, whichever comes first. This process can start as early as age 16.

Provision of Educational Documents – Copies of all records maintained by DCF are provided to the child leaving DCF care or custody, including a list of the schools/educational programs attended with names/addresses/contact information, transcripts, grade level/program type upon leaving and any evaluations/standardized testing results.