



## Case Practice Model

# OVERVIEW FOR SCHOOLS 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.

And from DCF data we know that:

- 75% of children/youth in DCF Foster Care (placement with foster/pre-adoptive parents and in congregate care) will be reunited with their families within 12 months.
- The median time for reunification is about 6 months.

## Why the Policy was Revised

To enhance the well-being of children and youth by promoting educational stability and academic achievement through regular, education-focused communication with students, their families and our community partners, especially schools.

**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, through:

- 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.

**How Schools Can Support DCF-Involved Students** - Support DCF practices below and sound educational "best interest" decisions and educational planning by:

- sharing information about student's academic and school performance;
- collaborating in discussions;
- helping to identify potential kin/other placement options when students need placement; and
- facilitating enrollment WITHOUT DELAY (current school transfers records; new school enrolls student)

## **Basic Practices to Support Educational Success & Attainment**

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

- Verifies school enrollment and monitors attendance and educational progress.
- Works with families, placement providers and schools to address educational needs.
- Includes schools in case reviews and case conferences.

### ***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 educational setting, whenever possible; OR
  - Facilitates enrollment, without delay, by requesting transfer of all necessary paperwork to the new school within 2-3 days after a 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 usually the parent, except when not in the student's best interest, even when the student is in DCF care or custody.
- Upon DCF placement, 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:** The following should all be invited to attend:

- Parents (even if they are not the special education decision-maker);
- Foster/pre-adoptive parents or other placement providers (even if they are not the special education decision-maker); and
- DCF Social Workers (who can participate but cannot sign the IEP).

**Strengthening Educational Well-being** - DCF partners with students, families, placement providers and schools to enhance educational stability and academic achievement by:

- Maintaining regular contact with school personnel to monitor progress;
- Addressing concerns re: academic performance or discipline, school setting, student hospitalization, quitting school; and
- Notifying schools when students' circumstances change.

**Transition Planning and Case Closing** - For students in DCF care or custody, DCF:

- Promotes **planning for high school graduation and beyond, including possible financial assistance and sustained DCF connection** (or return to DCF care).
- Provides copies of all DCF **educational records** to the student 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.
- May be responsible for completing **Chapter 688 transition planning** for some youth/young adults in DCF care/custody who have severe qualifying disabilities; however, LEAs initiate the process by completing a referral as early as age 16.