MEMORANDUM

To: **Homeless Education Liaisons, Foster Care Points of Contact**
From: **Educational Stability Team**
Date: **April 10, 2020**
Subject: **Tips for ensuring educational stability during school closures**

We want to acknowledge your efforts ensuring that students who are highly mobile have access to remote learning opportunities during school closures. All the outreach and individual coordination is appreciated.

There has been a daily flurry of resources and updates that many of us can barely keep up with. We have, however, heard that it might be helpful to share a few tips for working with *our students experiencing homelessness, in foster care, in migrant, or in military families* to keep in mind as you go through all that information.

Enrollment:
- Students must continue to be enrolled and offered all the same learning opportunities as their peers.
- Enrollments should be maintained during this time.
- If a new enrollment is necessary, the district must not deny enrollment because school buildings are closed. The student should be enrolled and given access to all appropriate learning opportunities and services.
- For students who are homeless the dispute resolution process is available should the district feel enrollment is not in the student's best interest.

School of Origin:
- It is presumed to be in the student's best interest to remain enrolled in the school of origin. This is particularly true during school closures and as districts move to remote learning.

Best Interest Determinations for Students in Foster Care:
- For students in foster care, Best Interest Determinations (BIDs) must continue to be held collaboratively with DCF as students enter/change/leave placements. Any BID can be revisited at a future date.

Connecting with students in foster care:
- All students in foster care must have the same remote learning opportunities as their peers including access to needed technology and Wi-Fi.
- Regardless of a student's foster care setting, schools must collaborate with the student, their family and foster family, and those who are involved with supporting them to facilitate engagement in remote learning opportunities.
- For students placed in group homes, schools may need to work directly with program staff to facilitate engagement including access to the internet.
- Districts are encouraged to inform the educational decision maker for each student in foster care of the remote learning opportunities the student is engaged in. The Special Education Surrogate Parent (SESPs) should be informed about how a student's Individual Education Program (IEP) is being fulfilled.
- In all cases keeping DCF social workers informed/copied is a best practice.
- Foster care points of contact (POCs) are expected to continue to communicate with their DCF counterparts. POCs should continue to facilitate communications between school contacts (including teachers, special education staff and guidance counselors) and DCF social workers, education decision makers (EDMs) and, where assigned, SESPs.

Connecting with students who are homeless:
- All students who are homeless must have the same remote learning opportunities as their peers including access to needed technology and Wi-Fi.
- For families and unaccompanied youth who are doubled-up schools should keep in mind that students may not have access to the internet, adequate data or phone minutes. This is an equity issue that schools need to address to ensure full access to educational opportunities at this time.
- For families placed in shelters, schools may need to work with shelter staff to determine internet availability.
- Schools must work directly with the parent or unaccompanied youth to ensure student engagement.
- There have been concerns expressed by both shelter staff and school districts regarding communications with parents. Both parties are encouraged to work together for the educational benefit of the students.
- Collaboration and referral to the Family Resource Centers, local youth programs, support services and food and financial resources remain key to supporting students and families who are homeless.

Connecting with students who are in migrant families:
- Schools are encouraged to collaborate with the MA Migrant Education Program to identify students in migrant families and to support student engagement in remote learning, including access to needed technology and Wi-Fi.
- Schools must work directly with the parent(s) or out-of-school migrant youth to ensure student engagement.
- As with students who are homeless, schools should keep in mind that students in migrant families may not have access to the internet, adequate data or phone minutes. This is an equity issue that schools need to address to ensure full access to educational opportunities at this time.

Connecting with students who are in military families:
- Schools should work with parents of students in military families just as they would with other families.
- Please keep in mind that some students may come under the Military Interstate Children's Compact if their parent is in the National Guard and activated.

DESE Guidance:
- DESE guidance on remote learning, school meals, April Vacation, state and federal resources, and special education during school closures is posted here.
- Please visit DESE's Educational Stability page for general guidance for working with our highly mobile students.
- The regional liaisons and DESE staff are available for technical assistance on individual cases.

National Resources:
The following organizations cover students who are homeless or in foster care and offer webinars on the current school closures.

- National Center for Homeless Education
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
- Schoolhouse Connections