

SOCIAL WORKER TIP SHEET: BACK to SCHOOL FALL 2020

IN-PERSON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Issued: October 2, 2020

This tip sheet is for Department of Children and Families (DCF) Social Workers to utilize when considering the best educational settings for children in foster care whose schools are offering in-person school attendance or a hybrid that offers the choice of in-person and/or remote learning.

Due to the ongoing efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, school districts across the Commonwealth are responding to local considerations to provide a range of in-person and remote educational scenarios. In many communities, schools are combining in-person with online learning and allowing parents/caregivers to choose this “hybrid” option or all online learning. DCF recognizes the importance of in-person learning for children in care as the best way to ensure continued educational and social emotional growth. DCF also recognizes the challenges of in-person learning during this pandemic.

Given the changes and choices facing caregivers this fall, Social Workers, along with Foster Parents and Congregate Care Providers, should give special attention to how children will be receiving their education. Due to the challenges of remote learning for some children, DESE has asked schools to offer in-person classes for children in special education, children who are homeless, and foster children.

Social Workers should facilitate conversations between parents, Foster Parents, Providers and relevant school district contacts to troubleshoot any problems that arise. With circumstances constantly changing, school arrangements for some children will likely need to be revisited.

With the tip sheet below as a reference, DCF can help promote a collaborative decision-making process to help all children receive the best education possible during this challenging time. None of the information in the tip sheet replaces any public health guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Commonwealth, or any specific instructions from an individual school district. This document simply suggests questions to guide appropriate decision-making for each child given his or her specific needs and the options available to them.

<p>Persons to Engage in Discussion, as applicable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The child’s Educational Decision Maker (EDM)* ▪ Child/Youth ▪ Educator familiar with the student's needs ▪ Parent/Guardian ▪ Foster Parent ▪ Lead Agency Education Coordinator ▪ Congregate Care Program Staff ▪ Special Education Surrogate Parent (SESP) ▪ Educational GAL appointed by the court
<p>Child/Youth’s School District Plan for In-Person School Attendance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the child’s school district planning to do this fall regarding reopening? ▪ Is there a choice regarding in-school or at-home learning? ▪ Who are the key school contacts for the child/youth?
<p>Cloth Face Coverings</p>	<p>All children/youth in second grade and higher will need to wear a face covering (aka mask) throughout most of a day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can the child/youth independently follow the national Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for use of a cloth face covering? ▪ Are there any medical or behavioral health conditions that prevent the child/youth from wearing a cloth face covering? If yes, what condition? ▪ If a child/youth is capable of wearing a cloth face covering, what is the estimate for how long the youth is able to wear it without removing it?
<p>Maintaining Distance When Possible and Enhanced Cleaning</p>	<p>All children/youth will be required to maintain distance from others when in school when possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Will the child/youth be able to independently maintain the required distance from peers and adults when in school – in classrooms, halls, the lunch line, outside time? <p>Regular washing of hands or use of hand sanitizer will be required throughout the school day.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is the child/youth able to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer independently? ▪ If no, what level of assistance is needed (e.g., hand-over-hand, prompting)?
Higher Risk Populations or Other Medical Condition	<p>The CDC website describes certain people at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the child/youth fall into, or anyone they come into regular contact with fall into a higher risk category? If so, which category? ▪ Does that child/youth have any other medical condition that should be considered in deciding if the child/youth can safely attend school in-person?
Transportation	<p>All children taking a school bus will be required to wear cloth face coverings for the trip.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How will the child/youth be transported to school? ▪ Will the child/youth be able to wear a cloth face covering continuously during transport to and from school without adult assistance? ▪ Will the child/youth be able to sit alone in a seat during the entire ride?
Child/Youth with IEPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If the child/youth is on an Individualized Education Program (IEP), what is the school district's plan for providing the child required education services listed in the IEP? ▪ Does the child/youth have a special education surrogate parent?
Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If the child has an IEP, what is the school district's plan for

	<p>providing the child with required education services? If remote learning is preferred, can the child’s needs be met via this option?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If the child receives specific services such as physical therapy or counseling at school, how will that service be provided? Will the child be able to engage and benefit in this format? ▪ Are there other resources needed to support a child? Including, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1:1 tutoring ▪ Chrome Book / Electronic Tablet ▪ Internet Access ▪ Adaptive equipment ▪ Other educational material
<p>Other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If parent(s)/guardian(s) or EDM shared any concern or opinion about their child/youth attending in-person school, what is it?
<p>Decision Making Process</p>	<p>(See Matrix for Educational Programming Decision Making for more details)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For children/youth in foster care, the child’s social worker should contact the child’s foster parent to discuss school options, the considerations listed above, and process for making the decision about the best learning environment. ▪ For children/youth in congregate care, the Congregate Care Provider will send information consistent with the above considerations to the child/youth’s DCF social worker. ▪ If the child/youth has a Special Education Surrogate Parent (SESP) or other EDM, the Social Worker will provide all available information to inform their decision. ▪ In cases where there is no SESP or other EDM with authority for educational decisions, the Social Worker, together with their Supervisor and Manager (and, if needed, the Area Office Education Coordinator) will make the final decision on whether the child/youth will attend in-person schooling.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The EDM or Social Worker will inform the school of the decision. The Social Worker will inform the child/youth’s parents/guardians, the Foster Parent (if they are not the EDM) and the Congregate Care Provider of the decision. <p>NOTE: If the parent/guardian or Foster Parent is unable to facilitate the child’s participation in educational services or there is not agreement on what will meet the child’s needs, it is anticipated that the Social Worker/Supervisor will convene a meeting to discuss concerns and identify steps to ensure an appropriate plan and/or supports are in place for the child/youth.</p>
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The above items are aligned with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) to ensure the safety of all participants and to prevent further spread of COVID-19 and are consistent with guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

* To determine the EDM please see [DCF Education Policy for Children Birth-22](#), PDF version page 18.

Additional Resources

[DCF List of School District Fall Learning Plans](#)

[DESE COVID-19 Guidance Documents](#) (Including Comprehensive Special Education Guidance for the 2020-21 School Year)

[Special Education Surrogate Parent Program](#)

If you have questions or need assistance, please contact DCF Education Manager, Jim Morrison (James.J.Morrison@mass.gov).