
ESTD  1855

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Foster Care Plan

Tuscumbia City Schools
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Foster Care Plan

This plan is to address the requirement for foster care provisions under Title I of ESSA which require State Educational Agencies (SDE) and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to collaborate with Child Welfare Agencies (CWAs) to ensure educational stability and minimize educational disruptions for children in foster care.

Tuscumbia City Schools is committed to provide all students with sound educational experiences. We recognize that foster children are at an increased risk of grade retention, gaps in academic achievement, low high school graduation rates, and postsecondary enrollment. These provisions promote greater stability for children in foster care so that they can continue their education without disruption, maintain important relationships with peers and adults, and have the opportunity to achieve college and career readiness.

The educational stability includes that (1) a child in foster care will remain in the child's school of origin, unless a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest to remain in the school and (2) if a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest to remain in the school of origin, the child will be immediately enrolled in the school of residence, even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment.

Assurances

- Each 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.
- The state child welfare agency will coordinate 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.
- If it is not in the best interest of the child to return to the resident school, the child will immediately be provided appropriate enrollment in Tuscumbia City Schools.
- Tuscumbia City Schools will gather and maintain educational records and promptly send them to any district where the child moves.

Foster Care Child Liaison (POC)

Tuscumbia City Schools will assign at least one person to serve as a Foster Care child Liaison, or Point of Contact (POC). The Foster Child Liaison will work in the best interest of the child to ensure that all educational requirements are met. The liaison that is assigned to the position will have access to available training and materials to keep them informed of any changes in the Foster Care Regulations. The liaison will work closely with state and child welfare agencies to:

- Coordinate with the corresponding child welfare agency,
- Lead the development of a process for making the best interest determination,
- Document the best interest determination,
- Facilitate the transfer of records and immediate enrollment,
- Facilitate data sharing with the child welfare agencies, consistent with FERPA and other privacy protocols,
- Develop and coordinate local transportation procedures,
- Manage best interest determinations and transportation cost disputes,
- Ensure that children in foster care are enrolled in and regularly attending school, and
- Providing professional development and training to school staff on the Title I provisions and educational needs of children in foster care.

Committee

A committee will meet to determine the appropriate placement of each foster care child. The committee will be comprised of the site administrator or LEA representative, the Foster Care Liaison, and a member of the CWA. In emergency circumstances, the CWA has the authority to make an immediate decision regarding the school placement, and then consult with the LEA and revisit the best interest determination of the child. The determining factors that may be evaluated include:

- Proximity of the resource family to the child's present school,
- Safety considerations,
- Age and grade level of the child as it relates to the other best interest factors,
- Needs of the child, including social adjustments and well-being,
- Child's performance, continuity of education and engagement in the school the child presently attends,
- Child's special educational programming if the child is classified,
- Point of time in the year,
- Child's permanency goal and likelihood of reunification,
- Anticipated duration of the placement,
- Preferences of the child,
- Preferences of the child's parent(s) and or educational decision maker(s),
- The child's attachment to the school, including meaningful relationships with staff and peers,
- Placement of the child's sibling(s),
- Influence of the school climate on the child, including safety,
 - Availability and quality of the services in the school to meet the child's educational and socioemotional needs,
- History of school transfers and how they impacted the child,

- How the length of the commute would impact the child, based on the child's developmental states,
- Whether the child is a student with a disability under the IDEA who is receiving special education and related services or a student with a disability under Section 504 who is receiving special education or related aids and services, and if so, the availability of those required services in a school other than the school of origin, and
- Whether the child is an EL and is receiving language services, and if so, the availability of those required services in a school other than the school of origin.

Note: transportation costs will not be considered when determining a child's best interests.

In the event of a disagreement regarding school placement for a child in foster care, the child welfare agency should be considered the final decision maker in making the best interest determination. The child welfare agency is uniquely positioned to assess vital non-educational factors such as safety, sibling placements, the child's permanency goal, and other components of the case plan. The child welfare agency also has the authority, capacity, and responsibility to collaborate with and gain information from multiple parties including parents, children, schools, and the court in making these decisions.

Enrollment of Students

Foster care parents, social workers or other legal guardians will be allowed to immediately enroll children in Tuscumbia City Schools. We understand that all necessary paperwork (birth certificates, shot records, academic records, special education records, etc.) may not be immediately available and we want to provide a smooth transition for the student into our school system. We will contact the school of origin for the records and make adaptations as needed. After enrollment, the following guardianship or legal custody documents shall be provided for verification by the foster care family or CWA:

- Power of Attorney
- Affidavit
- Court Order
- Placement Letter (either on enrollment or within five days after enrollment)

Upon enrollment, the counselor or designated enrollment person at the school will immediately contact the Federal Programs Director and/or his designee.

The guidance counselor for the student in foster care will serve as a member of the ISP (Individual Service Plan) committee for the student to provide an avenue of communication between the school and DHR.

IDEA Students

The IDEA, Part B directs school systems to make a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) available to all eligible children with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). FAPE and IDEA includes provision of special education and related services at no cost to the parents in accordance with a properly developed Individualized Education Program (IEP). Each child's placement decision must be made by a group of knowledgeable persons.

Tuscumbia City Schools will operate in accordance with all state and federal laws regarding special education students. Special education services will be provided to foster care students as they are to all students following the guidelines below:

- Educational placement will be determined annually and will be based on the child's IEP in accordance with the child's individual needs,
- The child will be placed in the least restrictive environment and unless they require some other arrangement, they will attend the school that he/she would attend if not disabled,
- Timely and expedited evaluations and eligibility determinations for highly mobile children with disabilities will be made when possible,
- Children in foster care will have access to related aids and services that are designed to meet their education needs,
- Children will have access to comparable services including summer and extended school year services, if applicable.
- Children in foster care will not be discriminated against and are considered a protected group.

EL Students

Tuscumbia City Schools will ensure that EL students in foster care will participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs by doing the following:

- Identifying and assessing all potential EL students in a timely, valid and reliable manner,
- Providing EL students with a language assistance program that is educationally sound and proven successful,
- Sufficiently staff and support the language assistance programs for EL students,
- Ensuring that EL students with disabilities are evaluated in a timely and appropriate manner for special education and disability-related services and that their language needs are considered in these evaluations and delivery of services,
- Meeting the needs of EL students who opt out of language assistance programs,
- Monitoring and evaluating EL students in language assistance programs following federal guidelines,
- Continuing to evaluate the effectiveness of the language assistance program and progress of each student,
- Ensuring meaningful communication with the parents of EL students.

Transportation

Tuscumbia City Schools will coordinate with the CWA to develop and implement clear written procedures governing how transportation is provided to maintain children in foster care in their schools of origin. Tuscumbia City Schools will also work with the CWA to reach an agreement in regards to cover the transportation costs. The agreement will cover how the transportation will be provided, arranged, and funded for the duration of the child's time in foster care. Each agreement can/will vary greatly because the needs of each child should be considered in making the decision on transportation.

Student Records

Tuscumbia City Schools will share education records with the CWA that are allowed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This allows educational agencies to disclose without parental consent educational records, including IDEA, of students in foster care to state agencies.