

<i>Policy</i>	<i>Title</i> EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE	<i>Code</i> JFABF
---------------	--	-----------------------------

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the educational stability of students in foster care. The Holliston Public Schools (HPS) provides students in foster care equal access to the same free and appropriate public education as other students as required by law from preschool through receipt of a high school diploma, certificate of attainment or certificate of completion. Educational stability has a lasting impact on students' academic achievement and wellbeing, and the School Committee is committed to supporting district and community efforts to ensure that students in foster care have access to high quality, stable educational experiences.

Foster care refers to 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the child welfare agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes, but is not limited to, placement in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and pre-adoptive homes. To the extent required under applicable law, a child in foster care under this policy also includes children who the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has determined are awaiting a foster care placement.

Children in foster care preschool through receipt of a high school diploma, certificate of attainment or certificate of completion shall have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education as provided to other children in HPS. They shall be provided the services and have access to the programs and activities that are offered to other children attending HPS, including educational services for which the children meet eligibility criteria. This includes but is not limited to pre-school, special education, Title I programming, programs and services for English Language Learners, career and technical education programs, and school nutrition programs.

For students whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) place them in out-of-district approved private or public special education schools or collaboratives, the district of origin is the district in which the student was enrolled at the time of DCF placement.

Irrespective of the location of a foster care placement, students in foster care will continue to attend their school of origin, unless after a collaborative decision-making process, it is determined to be in the student's best interest to enroll in and attend school in the district in which the student resides in foster care. Enrollment of students in the district where they reside in foster care will take place immediately upon such a determination.

The superintendent shall designate an appropriate staff person to be the district point of contact for students in foster care. HPS and the point of contact will collaborate with DCF to ensure that students can access transportation and other services to which they may be entitled.

Best Interest Determination

Decisions whether a student in foster care should continue to attend the school of origin should be made collaboratively by DCF, the student (as appropriate), the student's family and/or foster family (or, if different, the person authorized to make educational decisions on behalf of the student), the school and district of origin, and (when appropriate) the local district where the student is placed. Best interest determinations should focus on the needs of each individual student and account for unique factors about the student and his or her foster care placement. Every effort should be made to reach agreement regarding the appropriate school placement of a student in foster care; however, DCF will finalize the best interest determination if the relevant parties cannot agree on the best school/district for the student to attend.

HPS can seek review of DCF's decision by utilizing a Foster Care School Selection Dispute Resolution Process established by DESE and DCF. Decisions made through this process are not subject to review. To the extent feasible and appropriate, HPS will ensure that a child remains in his or her school of origin while the disputes are being resolved to minimize disruptions and reduce the number of moves between schools.

Transportation

The district of origin must collaborate with DCF on how transportation will be arranged and provided to ensure that students in foster care who need transportation in order to remain in their school of origin will receive such transportation while they are in foster care.

Transportation options may include establishing regional collaborations among districts, coordinating with existing routes for transportation, seeking help from foster parent(s), etc. Absent other agreements between the district and DCF, the district of origin is responsible for providing transportation to and from the school of origin.

Immediate Enrollment

If it is in the best interest of a student in foster care to leave the school of origin, the student must be immediately enrolled in the district in which he or she resides in foster care. During enrollment of students in foster care, DCF representatives will present the district with a form indicating that the student is in foster care, along with a state-agency identification badge.

If the student does not have immediate access to immunization records, the student shall be permitted to enroll under a personal exception. Students and families should be encouraged to obtain current immunization records or immunizations as soon as possible, and the district point of contact shall assist in these efforts. Emergency contact information is required at the time of enrollment consistent with HPS policies, including compliance with the state's address confidentiality program when necessary. After enrollment, the district will immediately request available records from the student's previous school.

First Reading:	December 12, 2019
Second Reading:	January 16, 2020
Third Reading:	Waived
Policy Adopted:	January 16, 2020
Policy Amended:	
Policy Reviewed:	
Legal References:	Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act)
Policy Cross Reference:	
Procedure Reference:	