



Deer Creek Public Schools

Foster Care Plan

This plan is to address the requirements for foster care provisions under Title I of ESSA which will require State Educational Agencies and Local Educational Agencies to collaborate with Department of Human Services to ensure educational stability and minimize educational disruption for children in foster care.

FOSTER CARE PLAN

The guidance in the Foster Care State Plan is intended to eliminate barriers to the enrollment, attendance, and school success of children and youth in foster care, and provide such children and youth with the opportunity to meet the same challenging State academic achievement standards to which all students are held. The guidance will ensure that foster care children and youth have access to the same free, appropriate public education, including public preschool education, as provided to other children and youth, and that students in foster care are not separated from the mainstream school environment because of foster care placement.

DISTRICT POINT OF CONTACT AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Under the requirements of ESSA, Section 1112(c)(5)(A), Deer Creek Public Schools will designate a Foster Care Point of Contact to collaborate with the Child Welfare Agency (CWA) to ensure the appropriate school placement of children in foster care. The role and responsibilities for Foster Care Point of Contact may include:

- Coordinating with the corresponding CWA POC on the implementation of the Title I provisions;
- Leading the development of a process for making the best interest determination;
- Documenting the best interest determination;
- Facilitating the transfer of records and immediate enrollment;
- Facilitating data sharing with the child welfare agencies, consistent with FERPA and other privacy protocols;
- Developing and coordinating local transportation procedures;
- Managing best interest determinations and transportation cost disputes;
- Ensuring 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, as needed.

EDUCATIONAL STABILITY PROVISIONS

The district administration shall follow the guidelines set by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) to provide educational stability for children in foster care. OSDE provides the following guidelines and steps to be taken by the appropriate agency:

1. CWA notifies the Foster Care Point of Contact regarding which students are in foster care;
2. CWA informs the Foster Care Point of Contact about a child placement away from parents or guardians and for whom the child welfare agency has placement and care responsibility. The CWA must start collaboration and consultation with the district within 72 hours;
3. Such child enrolls or remains in the school of origin, unless a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest to attend the school of origin. The Foster Care Point of Contact and CWA should consult and make a joint determination in regard to the best interest of the child. In the event of emergency circumstances, the CWA has the authority to make an immediate decision regarding the school placement, and then consult with the district and revisit the best interest determination of the child.

4. OSDE highly recommends that LEAs reserve 1% of Title I funds to transport foster care students. If funds are not utilized, the district can reassign funds for usage in other Title I areas;
5. When a determination is made that it is not in such child's best interest to remain in the school of origin, the child is immediately enrolled in the school of residence by the child's foster parent or caseworker. To prevent educational discontinuity, ESSA, Section 1111(g)(1)(E) stipulates that enrollment must not be denied or delayed for children in foster care because documents normally required for enrollment have not been provided;
6. During the enrollment process, the following shall occur:
 - a) The caseworker notifies both schools within one (1) business day of making the decision and sends the required documents to both schools within two (2) business days of making the decision.
 - b) The receiving school shall immediately contact the school last attended by any such child to obtain relevant academic and other records.
 - c) The school of origin is required to transfer non-essential records to the receiving school within three (3) business days of receiving notice from the child welfare agency that the child will be changing schools.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

The district administration shall attempt to remove existing barriers to school attendance by foster children:

- Enrollment requirements that may constitute a barrier to the education of the foster child or youth may be waived at the discretion of the superintendent. If the district is unable to determine the student's grade level due to missing or incomplete records, the district shall administer tests or utilize other reasonable means to determine the appropriate grade level for the child.
- Fees and charges that may present a barrier to the enrollment or transfer of a foster child or youth may be waived at the discretion of the superintendent.
- Customary transportation policies and regulations may be waived at the discretion of the superintendent.
- Official school records policies and regulations may be waived at the discretion of the superintendent.
- The district shall make a reasonable effort to locate immunization records from information available or shall arrange for students to receive immunizations through health agencies and at district expense if no other recourse is available. Immunizations may, however, be waived for foster youth only in accordance with provisions of board policy on immunizations.
- Other barriers to school attendance by foster youth may be waived at the discretion of the superintendent.

STUDENT RECORDS

The Deer Creek School District will share education records with the DHS 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 and Tribal agencies. The type of documentation that should be shared between parties include:

- Best Interest Determination Form (School of origin; Receiving school)

- Transportation Agreement
- Student's school records
- Student's academic schedule
- Records of guardianship and custody

The foster family or Department of Human Services (DHS) will provide the district verification of guardianship or legal custody documents:

- Power of attorneys
- Affidavits
- Court Orders

DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The Foster Care Point of Contact will facilitate collaboration between DHS, the school in which the student will enroll, the Deer Creek Transportation Department, and district administration regarding enrollment, transportation, and student records. The Best Interest Determination Form (Appendix A) will guide the decision-making process regarding the school placement of a student living in foster care.

If the child's school of origin is a Deer Creek Public Schools and the child is placed in a foster home outside of the district boundaries, the Foster Care Point of Contact will work with DHS and/or the foster family to determine if the school of origin remains the school of best interest for the child. This determination will primarily take the following into consideration:

- The wishes of the child;
- The wishes of the foster family (according to state law);
- The wishes of DHS;
- The distance and time required for travel;
- The safety of the child;
- Any applicable services available at the school of residence vs. the school of origin.

Additional considerations for the most appropriate school placement of a student living in foster care are found in Appendix A: Best Interest Determination Form.

If there is 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 (unless State law or policy dictates otherwise). 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.

TRANSPORTATION PROCEDURES

The district must collaborate 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, when in their best interest. If the Best Interest Determination for a student living in foster care has been made for school placement which requires a special transportation arrangement, the Foster Care Point of Contact will notify the district transportation department of the need to arrange a meeting attended by the interested parties, which may include the DHS representative,

the foster parent, the school administrator, the transportation department, and the Foster Care Point of Contact. The Homeless/Foster Care Transportation Request Form (Appendix B) will clarify the decisions made about the transportation needed for a student living in foster care if the student's address and school placement require a special transportation arrangement. The Homeless/Foster Care Transportation Request Form also addresses the additional costs and the parties responsible for paying the additional costs for transportation of foster care children.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND COSTS RELATED TO TRANSPORTATION

Once the Best Interest Determination has been made, the Director of Transportation, the Foster Care Point of Contact, and the DHS representative will collaborate to determine the most cost-effective manner of transportation.

CWA receives funds under Title IV-E, and some of these funds may support the transportation costs to maintain the child in the school of origin. Therefore, CWA must ensure that transportation is provided when needed, and will be the agency mainly responsible for paying the transportation costs within the first 72 hours. Foster care parents may agree to provide and pay for the transportation to the school of origin, but if this is not an option, the district shall ensure transportation for the foster care children is provided, and reach an agreement with CWA in regards to covering the transportation costs as outlined by ESSA. The district and the CWA should aim to reach an agreement in regard to how the transportation will be provided, arranged and funded for the duration of the child's time in foster care.

Additional costs for transportation (whether in-district or out-of-district) will be financed through one of the following methods as provided for under the ESSA and federal regulation (ESEA 1112(c)(5)(B)):

- DHS agrees to reimburse Deer Creek Public Schools for any additional cost;
- Deer Creek Public Schools agrees to pay for the additional cost;
- Deer Creek Public Schools and DHS agree to share the additional cost.

Additional costs are calculated by the district Transportation Office and take into account the availability of district vehicles, the distance of the child's residence from the nearest applicable bus stop, and any related fuel and staffing costs necessary in order to provide transportation.

The time required for the district to arrange transportation varies depending upon a number of factors such as current demand, availability of staff and/or vehicles, and location of student. For this reason, the foster family or DHS will need to arrange for temporary transportation of the child(ren) for at least one week; however, the average time required to establish school district transportation is usually less than this.

While Deer Creek Public Schools generally believes that the school of best interest for a child is most often their school of origin, this is not always the case. In some cases, the commute time and/or distance is so great that transporting the child would have a negative impact on the child's social and/or academic life. For this reason, Deer Creek Schools provides the following general guidance on what the district considers to be a reasonable commute distance and time.

- Commute distance: 20 miles
- Commute time (one way): 30 minutes (accounting for traffic)

DISPUTE RESOLUTION

It is recognized that both Deer Creek Public Schools and DHS will act with the best interests of children in mind; however, since both parties are approaching this issue from different perspectives, disputes will naturally sometimes occur. In the event of a dispute regarding the transportation or enrollment of a child in foster care the following will be followed:

- While the dispute is ongoing, the child(ren) in question must be enrolled in and attending school. If the dispute revolves around which school is the school of best interest for the child, the child shall remain in the school they currently attend until the dispute is resolved, unless arrangements already implemented allow the child to attend the school of origin.
- The district will provide transportation until such time as the dispute is resolved (ESEA 1112(c)(5)(B)(i)).

Deer Creek Public Schools Foster Care Enrollment and Transportation Plan

Best Interest Determination

Though the specific factors may vary depending on context, in order to make a holistic and well-informed determination, a variety of student-centered factors should be considered. These factors include the appropriateness of the current educational setting and proximity of placement. [ESEA section 1111(g)(1)(E)(i)]. Listed in no particular order, these factors may include:

1. safety considerations;
2. the proximity of the resource family home to the child's present school;
3. the age and grade level of the child as it relates to the other best interests factors;
4. the needs of the child, including social adjustment and well-being;
5. the child's performance, continuity of education and engagement in the school the child presently attends;
6. the child's special education programming if the child is classified;
7. the point of time in the school year;
8. the child's permanency goal and likelihood of reunification;
9. the anticipated duration of the placement;
10. preferences of the child;
11. preferences of the child's parent(s) or education decision maker(s)
12. the child's attachment to the school, including meaningful relationships with staff and peers;
13. placement of the child's sibling(s);
14. influence of the school climate on the child, including safety;
15. the availability and quality of the services in the school to meet the child's educational, social, and emotional needs;
16. history of school transfers and how they have impacted the child;
17. how the length of the commute would impact the child, based on the child's developmental stage;
18. 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
19. 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, consistent with Title VI and the EEOA.

Best Interest Determination Evaluation

Child's Name: _____			
Birthday: _____ Age: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____			
Current District: _____ Current Site: _____			
<i>Student will remain in the current school unless consideration of the following factors indicates a change of school placement is in the child's best interest (check all that apply.)</i>			
	School of Origin (A)	Receiving School (B)	Other Previous School Attended (C)
<p>Which school will better meet the relational needs of the child? Select all that apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Siblings <input type="radio"/> Relationships with peers <input type="radio"/> Relationships with staff <p>Describe the relationship connections at current school:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>List strategies for maintaining important connections should other best interest determination be made:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>			
<p>Which school will better meet the individual academic needs and challenges of the child? Select all that apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> IEP <input type="radio"/> 504 Plan <input type="radio"/> Gifted Program <input type="radio"/> Career Tech <input type="radio"/> EL Services 			
<p>Which school will better meet the social/emotional needs and challenges of the child? Select all that apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Social <input type="radio"/> Emotional <input type="radio"/> Safety 			
<p>Which school will better meet the unique needs and interests of the child? Select all that apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Extracurricular Activities <input type="radio"/> Sports <input type="radio"/> Other <p>Student will describe the areas of desired school involvement:</p> <p>_____</p>			
<p>Which school best will meet the permanency goal and likelihood of reunification with parents or siblings?</p>			
<p>Which school is more appropriate for the child's age and length of travel? Explain: _____</p>			

Describe the child's transfer history. _____			
Which school does the student prefer to attend? Explain: _____ _____			
Which school does the caregiver or current placement provider recommends the student attend? Explain: _____ _____			
Identify strategies for successful transition to new school and/or support in current school: _____ _____ _____			

Supporting Documentation

Attach any supporting documentation used to determine best interest of child:

- Report Cards
- Progress Reports
- Achievement Data (test scores)
- Attendance Data
- IEP or Section
- 504 Plans
- Other: _____

Determination

Based on the information provided and considering the best interest of the child, the team has determined the following school is the most appropriate educational placement for the child:

Team Members

LEA Representative: _____
Printed name *Signature*

CWA Representative: _____
Printed name *Signature*

Education Decision Maker: _____
Printed name *Signature*

Other: _____
Printed name *Signature*

Homeless/Foster Care
Transportation Request Form

Date: Student ID: D.O.B. Male: Female:

School of Attendance: Grade: School Year:

Legal Full Name: Last First Middle

Pick-up Address: Street City Zip

Additional Information (Name of Shelter; Location of Pick-up; etc.)

Drop-off Address: (If different) Street City Zip

Responsible Adult Name: Phone #:

Transportation Needed (Check One): AM Only PM Only AM-PM Other:

Special Equipment Needed:

Student is (Check One): Homeless In Foster Care

Student's School of Origin: District:

Distance from Residence to School of Origin: miles Est. Commute (One-Way): minutes

Closest Deer Creek Bus Stop Address:

Estimated Pick-up Time: Estimated Drop-off Time:

If applicable, what is the additional cost of transport for this child? \$ per month

For Foster Care Students

Will transportation be supplemented by DHS? (Check One): Yes No If yes, amount: \$

By signing below, I acknowledge we have received and understand the Transportation Agreement. Copies should be provided to each party below.

Parent/Guardian/DHS Rep: Date:

Student: Date:

Homeless/Foster Liaison: Date:

Transportation Rep: Date: