

GUNTERSVILLE CITY SCHOOLS' FY24 FOSTER CARE PLAN

LEA Student in Foster Care Overview

Number of Students in Foster Care SY 2022-23 (Enrolled for Previous School Year): 2

Number of Students in Foster Care SY 2023-24 (Currently Enrolled): 1

List Agencies in Collaboration:

Albertville City School System, Arab City School System, Boaz City School System, Guntersville City School System, Marshall County School System, Marshall County Department of Human Resources

Policy Review and Revision (Describe how each agency in collaboration reviewed policies and the revisions made to policies as a result of reviews.)

Each participating agency reviewed enrollment and transportation policies/procedures currently in place. Enrollment policies/procedures include "CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE" in the "immediate enroll" list of student groups.

Each participating agency reviewed policies/procedures for "DISPUTE RESOLUTIONS" for CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE.

A transportation plan for students in foster care was developed jointly by the participating agencies. Each agency will be responsible for transporting students to its attendance boundary if it is determined to be in the child's best interest to remain in his/her school of origin. The school system in which the school of origin is located will transport the student from the attendance boundary to the school. Should the school of origin not be in a neighboring school system, the Department of Human Resources will provide transportation. "Best Interest Determination Forms" (see attached) will be completed with input from the Department of Human Resources.

Describe Collaboration and Coordination with Agencies (Include a list members, positions, signatures, and agencies):

A planning meeting was held on August 17, 2023 at the Arab City Schools' Professional Learning Center. (See attached sign-in sheet)

Andy Jones, Albertville City Schools; Stacie Pace, Arab City Schools; Margaret Mastin, Boaz City Schools; Jennifer Williams, Guntersville City Schools; Stephanie Wisener, Marshall County Schools; Sonya Murdock, Marshall County DHR; Heather Lowe, Marshall County DHR

LEAs and the Department of Human Resources will continue to partner throughout the school year in making informed decisions regarding children in foster care. All efforts will be made to remove barriers that may hinder the implementation of the Title I foster care provisions. It is a joint goal to ensure that the appropriate interventions and strategies are in place to support foster care students' success in school.

LEA(s) Point(s) of Contact:

Andy Jones, Albertville City Schools andrewjones@albertk12.org

Stacie Pace, Arab City Schools space@arabcityschools.org

Margaret Mastin, Boaz City Schools mmastin@boazk12.org

Jennifer Williams, Guntersville City Schools jenniferwilliams@gcboe.net

Stephanie Wisener, Marshall County Schools wisenersl@markshalk12.org

DHR Point of Contact:

Sonya Murdock, Marshall County Department of Human Resources sonya.murdock@dhr.alabama.gov

Heather Lowe, Marshall County Department of Human Resources heather.lowe@dhr.alabama.gov

2 C. F. R. §§ 200.331(d), 200.328(a); 34 C.F.R. §76.770; ESSA SECTION 1111(1)(e) - LEAs must implement the Title I educational stability requirements of children in foster care, including ensuring that:

- a child in foster care remains in his or her school of origin, unless it is determined that remaining in the school of origin is not in that child's best interest;
- if it is not in the child's best interest to stay in his or her school of origin the child is immediately enrolled in the new school even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment; and
- that the new (enrolling) school immediately contacts the school of origin, to obtain relevant academic and other records.

Describe procedures for implementing the above provisions.

A student in foster care will remain in his/her school of origin, unless it is determined that remaining in the school of origin is not in the student's best interest. If it is not in a student's best interest to stay in the school of origin, the student will immediately be enrolled (even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment) in a school in the system that serves the attendance area in which the student is living. [Reference: 20 U.S.C. §§6311(g)(1)(E)]

Arab City, Albertville City, Boaz City, Guntersville City, and Marshall County will engage in a collaborative process with the Marshall County Department of Human Resources (DHR) and foster parent(s) to determine the best interest of the student and ensure the student remains in the school of origin, if it meets the best interest of the child. If the best interest determination shows that it is not in the child's best interest to remain in the school of origin, the DHR caseworker, previous LEA, and foster parent(s) will collaborate with the new school to enroll the child immediately. The new enrolling school will contact the school of origin immediately to obtain the student's academic records. For continuity of care, the form and all supporting documentation will be maintained in the child's records.

ESSA Section 1111(g)(1)(E)(i) – A description of how the LEA in collaboration with the local child welfare agency will ensure that in determining whether it is in the child's best interest to remain in his or her school or origin, and LEA takes into consideration all factors relating to a child's best interest.

Description of how the LEA will work with child welfare agencies to develop a clear policy or protocol on how to make best interest determinations including making every effort to gather meaningful input from relevant parties, in addition to required child welfare and school representatives, in deciding what school placement is in a child's best interest. Include a description of protocols in this description.

Arab City, Albertville City, Boaz City, Guntersville City, and Marshall County will engage in a collaborative process with the Marshall County DHR to utilize current guidelines to make the best interest determinations for each student in foster care (see Best Interest Determination forms). The stakeholders will solicit input from all included parties, in addition to DHR and LEA representatives, to identify the school placement that is in the child's best interest. The following factors will be considered for the best interest determination for each student in foster care:

1. How long has the student attended this school? How well is she/he performing academically?
2. How many schools has the student attended over the past few years? This year? How have the past school transfers impacted the student?
3. How is the current school serving the student's academic needs, including gifted or special education, vocational opportunities and other interests? How could the new school serve these needs?
4. What are the student's academic and career goals? How would changing schools affect the student's ability to earn full academic credit, proceed to the next grade, graduate on time, or receive an industry credential?
5. How is the current school serving the student's social, emotional, and cultural needs? Does the student access school-based supportive services? How could the new school serve these needs?
6. Describe the nature, quality, and duration of the student's relationship in the current school. Specifically consider whether the student has a meaningful and supportive relationship with an adult at the school of origin. Consider where the student's go to school.
7. Does the current school climate support the student's needs? Does the student have peer support? Is he or she involved in extracurricular or other activities?
8. Is the student's new living arrangement to be short or long term? How is this impacted by school selection?
9. How would the commute to the current school impact the student? Consider the child's age and developmental functioning as well as the commute with various modes (e.g., car, school bus). Note: The cost of transportation cannot be a factor when determining best interest.
10. If the student must change schools, is it possible to time the transfer so it coincides with a logical time on academic calendars of the new school and the current school?
11. What other factors did the team consider when making this decision?

The team will use the following possible supporting documentation for best interest determination:

1. Report cards
2. Progress reports
3. Test Scores
4. Attendance Data
5. IEP or 504 Plan
6. E-mails from individuals consulted during the best interest determination process
7. Other relevant documents

ESSA Section 1112(c)(5)(B) Description of transportation protocols and procedures to include how additional costs for transportation will be calculated and funded as well as a policy for LEAs to resolve best interest disputes and interagency disputes related to transportation costs. Description must include how transportation and transportation costs will be monitored. (Include LEA and welfare responsibilities for providing transportation.) Description of Dispute Resolution Policy

Transportation for students in foster care will be provided in the same manner as provided to other students. Should it be determined that it is in the best interest of the child in foster care to remain in his/her school of origin that is outside the attendance boundaries of the school district, the student will be transported to the attendance boundary of the school district and the district in which the school of origin located will transport the child to school. If the school of origin is not located in a system that directly borders the school district, the Marshall County Department of Human resources has agreed to provide transportations to the school of origin.

ESSA Section 111(g)(1)(E)(ii)-(iii) Describe protocol for a child in foster care to be immediately enrolled in a new school.

Upon initial enrollment, students identified as being in foster care will immediately be enrolled even if enrollment documents are not presented. The Foster Care point of contact will schedule a "best interest determination" meeting with all necessary parties involved. This meeting may include a phone conference if all parties cannot meet within 24 hours.

TRANSPORTATION PROCEDURES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Children in Foster Care

Students in foster care will immediately be enrolled in school even in the absence of required documents. Transportation for students in foster care will be provided in the same manner as provided to other students. Should it be determined that it is in the best interest of the child in foster care to remain in his/her school of origin that is outside the attendance boundaries of the school district, the student will be transported to the attendance boundary of the school district and the district in which the school of origin located will transport the child to school. If the school of origin is not located in a system that directly borders the school district, the Marshall County Department of Human resources has agreed to provide transportations to the school of origin.

Best Interest Determination

The presumption is that a student will remain in the current school; a student should only change schools if remaining in the current school is not in his/her best interest. The caseworker or custodial agency point of contact should complete this worksheet in collaboration with school personnel. For continuity of care, the worksheet and all supporting documentation are to be maintained in the child's records.

Student's Name : _____

Address: _____

Custodial Agent Representative and Contact Information: _____

Current School System: _____

Current School: _____ Grade: _____

Potential New School: _____

Schools the Student Previously Attended (if known): _____

District of Residency: _____

Meeting Facilitator: _____ Date of Meeting: _____

Supporting Documentation Attached:

Attach any supporting documentation used in making the determination of best interest. (The following is a checklist of sample documents that may be considered. The list is not intended to be exhaustive.)

- Report Cards
- Progress Reports
- Achievement Data (Test Scores)
- Attendance Data
- IEP or 504 Plan
- E-mails of correspondence from individuals consulted

Best Interest Determination

ROLE	PRINTED NAME	SIGNATURE	CONTACT
Student			
Parent			
Custodial Agency Representative			
Student Guardian Ad Litem			
School Guidance Counselor			
School Administrator			
LEA Foster Care Point of Contact			
Other			

Best Interest Determination

A representative from the school of origin should be knowledgeable about the child and able to provide feedback on significant relationships that the child may have formed with staff and peers and how changing schools would impact his or her academic, social, and emotional well-being. Based on the individual situation, this person could be a teacher, counselor, coach, or other meaningful person in the child's life.

The LEA and county child welfare designee should consult other relevant parties, such as the child, depending on age, foster parents, biological parents when appropriate, education decision maker(s), and other relatives for their perspectives on which school the child should attend during his or her time in foster care, consistent with the child's case plan. If a child has an IEP or a Section 504 plan, then the relevant school staff members would also need to participate in the best interest decision process. If the child is an EL, this may also affect the relevant school staff members who would need to participate in the best interest decision process. Factors to be considered when making Individualized Service Plan (ISP) team decisions regarding school placement(s):

1. How long has the student attended this school? How well is she/he performing academically?
2. How many schools has the student attended over the past few years? This year? How have the past school transfers impacted the student?
3. How is the current school serving the student's academic needs, including gifted or special education, vocational opportunities and other interests? How could the new school serve these needs?
4. What are the student's academic and career goals? How would changing schools affect the student's ability to earn full academic credit, proceed to the next grade, graduate on time, or receive an industry credential?
5. How is the current school serving the student's social, emotional, and cultural needs? Does the student access school-based supportive services? How could the new school serve these needs?
6. Describe the nature, quality, and duration of the student's relationship in the current school. Specifically consider whether the student has a meaningful and supportive relationship with an adult at the school of origin. Consider where the student's go to school.
7. Does the current school climate support the student's needs? Does the student have peer support? Is he or she involved in extracurricular or other activities?
8. Is the student's new living arrangement to be short or long term? How is this impacted by school selection?
9. How would the commute to the current school impact the student? Consider the child's age and developmental functioning as well as the commute with various modes (e.g., car, school bus). Note: The cost of transportation cannot be a factor when determining best interest.
10. If the student must change schools, is it possible to time the transfer so it coincides with a logical time on academic calendars of the new school and the current school?
11. What other factors did the team consider when making this decision?

Best Interest Determination

Initial Placement or Changes in Placement

- _____ It is in the best interest of the student to remain in the school of origin.
- _____ It is in the best interest of the student to **not remain** in the school of origin.
- _____ The student will be immediately enrolled in the new school.
- _____ The new school will request the student's records the same day from the school of origin.
Enrollment means attending and actively participating in class.
- _____ The school of origin will send the student's records within a timely manner.

Every Student Succeeds Act requires the LEA to:

1. Ensure that a child in foster care remains in his or her school of origin, unless it is determined not to be in the child's best interest; and
2. develop in partnership, consistent with the SEA and local child welfare agencies, procedures that ensure that transportation is provided, arranged, and funded for students in foster care.

Transportation

_____ The student will remain in the same school.	_____ A change in school placement is needed.
Transportation will be provided by: _____	Enrollment in the new school must take place without interruption. The student will be enrolled in
Responsible party/parties for transportation cost: _____	School: _____
_____	System: _____
_____	on Date: _____
_____	The person responsible for enrolling the student in the new school is: _____



GUNTERSVILLE CITY SCHOOLS

EXCELLENCE IN ALL WE DO

Approved 08/2023

Level I: Superintendent or Superintendent's Designee

1. Initiating Level I Dispute

To dispute the LEA's decision related to school selection (best interest) or enrollment, an educational decision-maker must request dispute resolution in writing by submitting a dated appeal letter specifying the school in which enrollment is sought and the basis for seeking enrollment in that school. The appeal letter must include the name and contact information (phone, email and mailing address) for the educational decision-maker.

The educational decision-maker must submit the appeal letter within five (5) school days of receiving from the LEA written notice of the right to dispute the decision. The letter may be submitted via an email with the subject "_____ "Foster Child Appeal," or delivered to any school to the attention of the superintendent. Regardless of how the appeal letter is submitted, the school or LEA shall ensure the LEA's superintendent or designee receives it immediately.

The submission of the appeal letter by email or delivery to any school initiates the dispute. From that point, the student shall remain in the school of origin until the dispute reaches its final resolution. The student shall be provided with all appropriate educational services for which the student is eligible during the pendency of the dispute. Students attending their school of origin during the pendency of the dispute will be entitled to receive transportation. The LEA will provide or arrange transportation during the dispute. Once the dispute is resolved, transportation will be provided pursuant to the local transportation procedures.

2. LEA Decision

The superintendent, or superintendent's designee, will arrange for a personal conference to be held with the educational decision-maker; the student (if appropriate); and in foster care situations, with at least one representative from the local child welfare agency. The personal

conference will be arranged within five (5) business days of the LEA's receipt of the Level I appeal letter and will take place as expeditiously as possible.

Within five (5) business days of the personal conference, the superintendent, or superintendent's designee, will inform the educational decision-maker of the decision in writing, using the contact information provided in the appeal letter. The superintendent or designee may consult with the LEA appropriate point of contact in making the decision. The written decision provided to the educational decision-maker must include:

1. A copy of the complete Level I appeal packet.
2. The decision rendered at Level I by the superintendent or designee and an explanation for that decision.
3. Instructions regarding how to file a Level II dispute, including the name, phone number and email address of the SEA appropriate point of contact.

If the educational decision-maker disagrees with the Level I decision and wishes to appeal to Level II, the educational decision-maker shall inform the LEA superintendent or designee of the intent to appeal to Level II within five (5) school days of receipt of the LEA's Level I decision. If the educational decision-maker does not appeal within five (5) school days, the child shall be enrolled and provided all appropriate educational services in the school determined by the LEA. If that school is not the school the child had been attending during pendency of the dispute, the LEA will prioritize minimizing the disruption to the child's education in effecting the transition to the new school.

Level II: State Education Agency (SEA)

1. Initiating the Level II Dispute

If the student's educational decision-maker disagrees with the decision rendered by the LEA's superintendent or the superintendent's designee at Level I, he/she may appeal the decision to the SEA. To appeal to Level II, an educational decision-maker must request an appeal in writing by submitting a dated appeal letter, which must include:

- The school in which enrollment is sought and the basis for seeking enrollment in that school.
- The name and contact information (phone, email and mailing address) for the educational decision-maker.
- A copy of the previous appeal letter submitted by the educational decision-maker.

- A copy of the decision rendered by the LEA at Level I.

The letter must be submitted via an email to the SEA point of contact, with the subject “_____ “Foster Child Appeal.” The letter must also be submitted to the LEA superintendent via an email with the subject “_____ “Foster Child Appeal,” or delivered to any school to the attention of the superintendent. The appeal letter must be submitted to both the SEA and LEA superintendent within five (5) school days of receiving the Level I appeal decision from the LEA.

The LEA has an additional five (5) school days from its receipt of the educational decision-maker's appeal letter to submit its response to the appeal letter to the SEA coordinator, via an email with the subject “_____ (Homeless, Migrant, Immigrant, Limited English Proficient, or Foster) Child Appeal.” Documents submitted by either party after the applicable deadlines will not be considered.

The student shall remain in the school of origin until the dispute reaches its final resolution. The student shall be provided with all appropriate educational services for which the student is eligible during the pendency of the dispute. Students attending their school of origin during the pendency of the dispute will be entitled to receive transportation. The LEA will provide or arrange transportation during the dispute. Once the dispute is resolved, transportation will be provided pursuant to the local transportation procedures.

2. SEA Decision

The Level II decision will be made by a panel including the SEA point of contact, another SEA staff, and if applicable, a representative of the state child welfare agency. The panel shall make a final decision within thirty (30) days of receipt of the dispute. The SEA point of contact will forward the final written decision to the educational decision-maker and the LEA superintendent. The written decision must include:

1. A copy of the complete Level II appeal packet.
2. The decision rendered at Level II and an explanation of that decision.

The LEA must implement the SEA's decision in full, immediately.

The SEA shall maintain a record of all disputes related to the children. For every type of dispute regarding a child in foster care, the LEA and local child welfare agency will make every effort to resolve the dispute collaboratively at the local level. All parties are encouraged to seek assistance from the Foster Care Point of Contact at the State Education Agency (SEA), and the Education Coordinator at the State Child Welfare Agency (or similar personnel) prior to any dispute.

Date:

To: **Educational Decision-Maker**

Delivered via: **Preferably a reliable email address to ensure delivery**

Guntersville City Schools has determined that the appropriate school placement for **Student Name** is **School Name**. We understand this is neither the school of origin nor the school requested by the student's educational decision-maker. Therefore, we are providing this explanation of our decision and information about how the educational decision-maker may appeal the decision.

We have determined that it is in the student's best interest to attend **School Name** because:

The educational decision-maker may appeal this decision by completing the attached Dispute Form, signing it, dating it, and submitting it by **(insert date ten school days from date of this letter.**

If the educational decision-maker chooses to initiate a dispute, the student shall remain in the school of origin, receiving all appropriate educational services including transportation, until the dispute reaches its final resolution. Once the Dispute Form is received, the superintendent or designee will arrange for a personal conference with the educational decision-maker; the student (if appropriate); and in foster care situation, at least one representative from the local child welfare agency within ten (10) business days. The conference will take place as expeditiously as possible. Within five (5) business days of the personal conference, the superintendent or designee will inform the educational decision-maker of the decision in writing. The educational decision-maker will be able to appeal to the State if the local resolution is not satisfactory.

If you have questions about this decision or how to appeal, please contact:

Mrs. Jennifer Williams, Guntersville City Schools
Foster Care Point of Contact
jenniferwilliams@gcboe.net
256-582-3159

Alabama State Department of Education: Federal Programs
1-334-694-4516

Dr. Molly Killingworth, Alabama State Department of Education Federal Programs Director
mkillinworth@alsde.edu

Ms. Sally Meek, Alabama State Department of Education, Foster Care
sally.meek@alsde.edu

To appeal the LEA's decision, please complete this form and submit it by the date indicated on the Written Notice you received from the school. You may submit this form by any of the following methods:

- Scan and email it to ***Email Address*** with the subject (Foster Child Appeal);
- Return the paper form to any school in this school system; or
- Submit the paper form directly to the office of the superintendent at 4200 AL Hwy 79 South, Guntersville, AL 35976.

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Student Name: _____

School in which enrollment is sought: _____

I am the educational decision-maker for this student, and I believe the school in which we are seeking enrollment is in the student's best interest because:

I believe the student has right to attend this school because:

If you would like to provide additional information, please attach it to this form.

The student shall remain in the school of origin, receiving all appropriate educational services including transportation, until the dispute reaches its final resolution. Once this Dispute Form is received, the superintendent or designee will arrange for a personal conference with the educational decision-maker; the student (if appropriate); and in foster care situations, at least one representative from the local child welfare agency within five (5) business days. The conference will take place as expeditiously as possible. Within five (5) business days of the personal conference, the superintendent or designee will inform the educational decision-maker of the decision in writing. The educational decision-maker will be able to appeal to the State if the local resolution is not satisfactory.

Educational decision-maker name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____