

**Alabama Education Stability for Foster Students
LEA Plan 2023-2024**

LEA Student in Foster Care Overview

Number of Students in Foster Care SY 2022-2023 (Enrolled for Previous School Year): **4**

Number of Students in Foster Care SY 2023-2024 (Currently Enrolled): **3**

List Agencies in Collaboration:

- Tuscaloosa City Schools
- Tuscaloosa County Schools
- Tuscaloosa 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.)

Tuscaloosa City Schools and Tuscaloosa Department of Human Resources Director and Point of Contact, reviewed the December 21, 2016 letter from State Superintendent, Michael Sentance, regarding Education Stability for Children in Foster Care. Tuscaloosa City Schools' Admissions and Attendance Policy was changed addressing foster children effective January 17, 2017. Resources such as the United States Department of Education Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care, Alabama State Department of Education Federal Programs training sessions, webinars, website resources and documents helped with implementation of the foster care provisions.

The plan was reviewed on August 15, 2023 for the 2023-24 school year. All parties were satisfied with the plan so no changes were made to the agreement except updating the number of currently enrolled foster care students.

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

- TUSCALOOSA CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM**
- Kara Bernal, Coordinator of Social Services, TCS Foster Care Point of Contact
 - Ms. Vertis Giles-Brown, Director of Federal Programs
 - Dr. James D. Pope, Deputy Superintendent
 - Mrs. Ingrid Edwards, McKinney-Vento Liaison
 - Dr. Tramene May, Coordinator of Attendance
 - Dr. Bruce Prescott, Director of Special Education Services
 - Mr. Ron Schappacher, Director of Transportation
 - Mrs. Kristi Garcia, Coordinator of ESL
 - Ms. Brittany Alex Morgan, ESL Social Worker

TUSCALOOSA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Ginger McGaughy, Director
Natasha King, Program Supervisor, Foster Care Point of Contact
Marshae Odum, Program Supervisor
Autumn Holeman, Foster Care Supervisor

An initial meeting was held on January 18, 2017 with Tuscaloosa City Schools Point of Contact, Tuscaloosa County Schools Point of Contact, Director of the Tuscaloosa County Department of Human Resources, and their Point of Contact to discuss requirements and begin collaboration. Additionally, representatives from the Tuscaloosa City Schools and the Tuscaloosa Department of Human Resources met at the Central Office of Tuscaloosa City Schools on May 3, 2017 to discuss the new provisions listed in, “Ensuring Educational Stability for Students in Foster Care,” and information gained in the Alabama State Department training session on April 18, 2017. We agreed and discussed what should be included in the foster student plan and how we will collaborate regarding transportation issues. A meeting held on September 26, 2022 reaffirmed this agreement.

LEA(s) Point(s) of Contact:

Tuscaloosa City Point of Contact

Kara Bernal, Coordinator of Social Services

DHR(s) Point(s) of Contact:

Tuscaloosa County DHR Point of Contact:

Natasha King, Program Supervisor

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.

The TCS Foster Care Point of contact will be notified about the Individualized Service Plan (ISP) meetings and forward information to the appropriate supervisor as well as the social worker assigned to the school in which the child/children in foster care attend. The social worker will provide feedback on significant relationships the foster child may have with staff and peers and the potential impact of changing schools may negatively affect the academic, social and emotional well-being of the student.

If a determination is made that a student should remain in his or her school of origin, the Tuscaloosa City Schools and Tuscaloosa County DHR will collaboratively determine what support and services are needed for the student to remain in the school of origin. The Tuscaloosa DHR Point of Contact will contact the Tuscaloosa City Schools Foster Care Point of Contact to meet the educational needs of the student.

If the ISP team determines it is not in the best interest of the student to remain in his or her school of origin, the student will enroll immediately in the new school even if no records were available for enrollment. The enrolling school will immediately contact the school of origin to obtain relevant academic and other 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.

Tuscaloosa City Schools Foster Care Point of Contact will collaborate with the Department of Human Resources and other agencies involved to ensure that appropriate representation is present at IEP, ISP and other such meetings where the best interests of the child are considered. To ensure adequate representation:

DHR contacts point of contact, who will then contact the school social worker to inform of the meeting to consider best interest placement.

The school social worker will contact all appropriate school personnel (to gather information from those who have knowledge of the child (counselor, principal, teacher) and contact other involved agency representatives who may have involvement with the child to inform them of the meeting so that all necessary information for decision-making is gathered. In doing so, all necessary viewpoints and/or persons will be involved in the meeting.

At the meeting, input from all involved parties will reveal background information and other pertinent data to consider for making the decision.

Determinations are made after feedback from all relevant parties is shared. When determining whether it is in the student’s best interest to remain in his or her school of origin, the

Individualized Service Plan Team will consider such factors as:

- **Preferences of the child;**
- **The child’s attachment to the school, including meaningful relationships with staff and peers;**

- **Preference of the child's parent(s) or educational decision maker(s)**
- **Placement of the child's sibling (s);**
- **Influence of the school climate on the child, including safety;**
- **The availability and quality of the services in the school to meet the child's educational and socio-emotional needs;**
- **History of school transfers and how they have impacted the child;**
- **Length of the commute to the school of origin and its impact on the child, based upon the child's developmental stage;**
- **Whether the child has an identified disability under IDEA or Section 504 and if required services and related aids are available in a school other than the school of origin;**
- **Whether the child is an English Learner and is receiving language services and, if so, the availability of services in a school other than the school of origin.**

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

When the ISP Team determines it is the best interest for the student to remain in his or her school of origin, the following procedures will be used to transport students:

- 1. Tuscaloosa County DHR will reimburse foster parents for out of zone transportation of students to their school of origin within the Tuscaloosa City Schools attendance zone.**
- 2. Tuscaloosa County DHR will coordinate transportation for all students placed in foster homes or in the home of a caregiver outside of the Tuscaloosa City Schools attendance zone.**
- 3. If the foster parent(s) is unable to transport the student to the school of origin, Tuscaloosa County DHR will make arrangements with DHR volunteers who will transport the student to and from school. The Tuscaloosa County DHR will reimburse volunteers for the cost of transporting the student to the school of origin.**
- 4. If transportation arrangements cannot be made with the foster parent(s) or the Tuscaloosa DHR volunteers, the DHR Point of Contact and the TCS Foster Care Point of Contact will work collaboratively to review other possible modes of transportation. Such planning may include the provision of school bus transportation within existing routes or the development of a new bus route within the school zone cluster whenever feasibly possible.**
- 5. If the cost of transporting a student to his or her school or origin becomes excessive, the DHR Foster Care Point of Contact and the TCS Foster Care Point of Contact will work collaboratively to determine if other funding sources may be available through the school system. This plan may include the sharing of transportation costs for a designated amount of time, reimbursement of costs equal to the daily rate of transportation cost for bus**

transportation for the student prior to entering foster care, and other similar provisions whenever possible. Additionally, a portion of LEAs Title I funds will be set aside to be used for transportation, if needed.

Description of Dispute Resolution Policy

If Tuscaloosa City Schools seeks to place a child in foster care in a school other than the school of origin, or the school requested by Tuscaloosa County DHR, they shall be provided written notice of their right to appeal the decision.

To dispute the district’s decision related to school selection (best interest), or enrollment for a student in foster care, Tuscaloosa County DHR must request a 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 for Tuscaloosa County DHR.

To appeal the district’s decision, please complete Tuscaloosa City Schools Foster Care Dispute Form, and submit it by 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 kbernal@tusc.k12.al.us with the subject “Foster Child Appeal”**
- **Return the paper form to any Tuscaloosa City School; or**
- **Submit the paper form directly to the office of the superintendent at the following address:**
Tuscaloosa City Schools
C/O Superintendent
1210 21st Avenue
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35401

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

The Tuscaloosa City School System amended the system’s Admissions and Attendance policy effective January 17, 2017 to specifically ensure students in foster care are allowed to enroll immediately in school, even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment. The enrolling school will immediately contact the school of origin to obtain relevant academic and other records. School assigned social workers will assist in this process.



TUSCALOOSA CITY SCHOOLS

FOSTER CARE DISPUTE FORM

Student Name:

School in which enrollment is requested:

Tuscaloosa County DHR believes the school in which we are seeking enrollment is in the student's best interest because:

We believe the student has a right to attend this school because:

If you 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 Tuscaloosa County DHR Point of Contact, and the student (if appropriate within five (5) business days, and the conference will take place as expeditiously as possible. Within five (5) business days of the personal conference, superintendent or designee will inform Tuscaloosa County DHR Point of Contact of the decision in writing. Tuscaloosa County DHR Point of Contact will be able to appeal to the State if the local resolution is not satisfactory.

Tuscaloosa County DHR Point of Contact: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____