

Morgan County (052) Public District - FY 2025 - Consolidated - Rev 0 - Improvement Planning

Alabama Education Stability for Foster Students

LEA Student in Foster Care Overview

14 Number of Students in Foster Care (Enrolled for Previous School Year)

19 Number of Students in Foster Care (Currently Enrolled)

List Agencies in Collaboration:

Decatur City Schools (DCS)

Hartselle City Schools (HCS)

Morgan County Schools (MCS)

Morgan County Department of Human Resources (DHR)

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

Meetings between the LEAs and DHR are held annually, or as needed, to jointly make informed decisions about children in foster care and to remove barriers that may hinder the implementation of the Title I foster care provisions. During these meetings policies are reviewed and revised. It is our goal to ensure that the appropriate interventions and strategies are in place to support foster care students to succeed in school.

DCS, HCS, and MCS are reviewing and revising their board admission policy. These policies presently ensure all Homeless, Migrant, Immigrant and English language learners students are allowed access to education and educational services. During the revision process students who are placed in foster care have been included in the policy. The enrollment of foster care, homeless, migrant, and English language learners students shall not be denied or delayed due to any of the following barriers:

- Lack of birth certificate
- Lack of school records or transcripts
- Lack of immunization or health records
- Lack of proof of residency
- Lack of transportation

- Lack of a social security number
- Guardianship or custody requirements

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

Decatur City Schools, Hartselle City Schools, Morgan County Schools, and Morgan County Department of Human Resources met for an annual collaboration meeting on August 31, 2023.

DECATUR CITY SCHOOLS:

Melissa Scott- Supervisor of Federal Programs
LaToya Brown- DCS Foster Care Point of Contact
Chip Miller- Supervisor of Transportation

HARTSELLE CITY SCHOOLS:

Elisa Harris- Federal Programs
Dana Gladden- Mental Health Coordinator

MORGAN COUNTY SCHOOLS:

Honi Smith- Federal Programs Director
Rhonda Booth- Director of Special Services
Robert Elliott- Transportation Director

MORGAN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Tiffany Reeves- DHR POC/Quality Assurance Coordinator
Lainie Alexander- Director

LEA(s) Point(s) of Contact:

Honi Smith

DHR(s) Point(s) of Contact:

Tiffany Reeves

LEA Student in Foster Care Responses

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.

Delays in enrollment in school and disruptions to continuous education are not the best interest of the child in foster care. Federal and state laws prohibit delaying a child's ongoing education.

Therefore, the LEA and DHR will collaborate to immediately and appropriately enroll a child in foster care seeking to remain in the school of origin or if the best interest is to transfer to his or her local zoned school. Please note the following definitions:

- "Immediate" means no later than one school day after notification of intent to enroll.
- "Enrollment" means the child is attending classes and participating fully in school activities.

To begin the enrollment process, the child's DHR caseworker will notify the LEA Foster Care Point of Contact of the intent to enroll a child who is in foster care. Other adults, as permitted by DHR may be required to assist with enrollment of the child, but the DHR caseworker will always direct the process and be the primary contact for the LEA staff.

The school/district where the child most recently attended is responsible for transferring the education records of the child directly to the school where a child is seeking to enroll. The Foster Care Liaison for the enrolling school will contact the school of origin by phone or email to request relevant academic and other records.

Only the following documentation may be requested for enrollment of a child in foster care:

- 1) Documentation that the child is in foster care, including:
 - a) The parts of the most recent court order establishing legal custody; OR
 - b) A letter on letterhead of Morgan County Department of Resources that has custody of the child explaining that the child is in foster care.
- 2) Identification of the person who is authorized to enroll the student, including
 - a) Documentation to the receiving school that identifies the person as a DHR caseworker, or someone else authorized to enroll the child; AND
 - b) Photo identification

In addition, the LEA may request that DHR present documentation establishing the foster child's current residence. However, lack of such documentation is not a reason to delay or deny enrollment, and DHR may present such documentation after the child is enrolled if it is not available earlier. Appropriate documentation includes: DHR letter verifying the child's address, plus *one* of the following, as chosen by DHR or any other person authorized to assist with enrolling the child:

A lease, rent receipts, deed, or property tax bill, or

A utility bill

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.

The LEA and DHR presumes the child should remain in his/her school of origin to provide school stability and educational continuity for the child, unless contrary to the child's best interests. In the event of transfer to the local zoned school, the child shall be enrolled immediately and appropriately with all educational records provided to the new school, according to the procedures described below.

- DHR notifies the LEA that the child will be moving to a new residence and the necessary timeframe for determining the child's most appropriate school placement.
- The school provides DHR information on the appropriateness of the current educational setting and DHR will take into account this information and the distance from potential placements to the child's current school in the decision making process.
- DHR and the LEA POC jointly determine the child's best interest for school placement, in consultation with the child and other key partners.
- The best interest determination for school placement is completed within three business days after DHR notifies the school of the decision of the child's new residence; the child remains in the same school during that time, unless contrary to the child's best interest.
- DHR and the LEAs will jointly arrange for transportation. Payments for the excess cost of transportation expenses for the child to remain in the school of origin will be shared equally between the LEA and DHR.

Meetings between the LEA and DHR are held annually, or as needed, to jointly make informed decisions about children in foster care and to remove barriers that may hinder the implementation of the Title I foster care provisions. It is our goal to ensure that the appropriate interventions and strategies are in place to support foster care students to succeed in school.

When a student is taken into care, DHR will invite the LEA Point of Contact to Individualized Service Plan (ISP) meetings where best interest determination will be made. School representatives will make every effort to attend or provide input. An absentee form will be provided by DHR in the event of an absence.

The best interest determination consist of several student-centered factors that include the appropriateness of the current educational setting and the proximity of placement. The LEA and DHR should make all reasonable efforts to include in the best interest determination process other individuals who have knowledge of the child. Participation may occur through phone calls, teleconferences, emails or other electronic means, as well as by meeting in person.

In addition to the DHR caseworker, individuals who may have knowledge of the child might include:

- The child him/her self

- Child's birth parent(s) or prior custodian
- Individual the child would like to participate
- Parent Surrogate for educational decisions, if applicable
- School representative
- Classroom teachers
- School counselors
- Special education coordinator if the child has an IEP or 504 plan
- LEA Transportation Department
- Coaches
- Relatives who are caregivers or residential care providers
- Child's attorney; and
- Court Appointed Special Advocate

Factors to assess in determining the child's best interest for school placement include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The student's age
- The student's emotional needs
- The school attended by the student's siblings
- Length of time student is expected to remain at the current placement and the possible location of housing intended to be long-term
- Distance of commute and the impact it may have on the student's education and other student-centered, transportation-related factors including travel time
- The preferences of the student, the birth parents or prior custodian as appropriate, and the student's foster parent(s) or current placement provider
- School stability and educational continuity
- Time remaining in the academic year

- Personal safety, attendance, academic progress and social involvement of the student in the current school
- The impact transferring the student to a new school may have on his/her needs and progress academically, emotionally, socially and physically
- Availability of classes to avoid credit loss and for the timely graduation or promotion

Best Interest Determination forms should be completed at the ISP meeting. The caseworker shall document the best interest determination in the child's case file, including factors considered, participants involved in the collaborative process, the determination for school placement, and the placement made. Documentation of the best interest determination shall be maintained in both the DHR child case file and the school's student cumulative record. If a change in placement is determined to be in the child's best interest, the school representative shall send this documentation to the new school as part of the student's cumulative record.

See Attachment A: Best Interest Determination Placement Form

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

For each student in foster care remaining in his or her school of origin the LEA and DHR will work collaboratively to provide, arrange, and fund transportation for the duration of the child's time in foster care.

Wherever possible, and where it is in the student's best interest, the LEA buses and/or other modes of transportation should be utilized for transportation according to the following procedure:

- The LEA will advise DHR within 5 schools days whether it is able to transport the student in question by school bus or alternative approved transportation, and if so, the LEA will arrange transportation within 5 school days.
- During the interim period of up to 5 school days during which the LEA is arranging transportation, DHR will make all reasonable efforts to provide alternative transportation to ensure that the child does not miss school.
- In the event of additional cost the LEA and DHR will share the cost equally. The LEA will bill DHR for the cost of transportation services provided by the LEA buses, and billing will be verified through student attendance records only.
- The LEA Transportation Director and the Chief School Financial Officer will develop a rate to be charged for the cost of bus transportation according to state regulations. Rates, cost and billing will need to be discussed on an individual basis of need and circumstance as it pertains to the best interests of the foster child.
- DHR will provide a contact for billing purposes, including a name, address, telephone number, and email address to ensure bills are directed to the proper individual and are paid promptly.

- Payments of bills will be due within 30 days of receipt.

If the LEA advises DHR that it cannot transport a student by school bus, DHR and the LEA will collaborate to arrange for safe and timely transportation, using one or more of the following options;

- Foster parents reimbursed at the State mileage rate using Title IV E Foster Care Maintenance Payment
- Friends, relatives and neighbors of the child or foster parent reimbursed at the state mileage rate;
- Employees of DHR and residential programs;
- Public transportation paid at the established rate
- Contracted transportation

ESSA Section 1111(g)(1)(E)(ii)-(iii) Describe protocol for a child in foster care to be immediately enrolled in a new school.

Delays in enrollment in school and disruptions to continuous education are not in the best interest of the child in foster care. Federal and state laws prohibit delaying a child's ongoing education.

Therefore, the LEA and DHR will collaborate to immediately and appropriately enroll a child in foster care seeking to attend his or her local zoned school, whether he or she is enrolling in school for the first time or is transferring following a change in foster care placement and a determination that transfer would serve his or her best interest. Please note the following definitions:

- "Immediate" means no later than one school day after notification of intent to enroll.
- "Enrollment" means the child is attending classes and participating fully in school activities.

To begin the enrollment process, the child's DHR caseworker will notify the LEA POC of the intent to enroll a child who is in foster care. Other adults, as permitted by DHR may be required or permitted to assist with enrollment of the child, but the DHR caseworker will always direct the process and be the primary contact for the LEA staff.

DHR need not produce the child's school record at the time of enrollment in order to enroll the child in school. The school/district the child most recently attended is responsible for transferring the education records of the child directly to the school where a child is seeking enrollment.