

Frequently Asked Questions

Foster Care Liaisons

Is my district required to designate a foster care liaison?

A: Yes. The [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) contains key protections for students in foster care to promote school stability and success. ESSA requires the State Education Agency (SEA) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to collaborate with child welfare partners in an effort to improve the educational outcomes of children and youth in foster care. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) will be sharing information with the field through the district-designated foster care liaison. DCFS will be a critical partner while planning for full implementation. Districts will identify this point of contact through their Title I Part A application.

What are the duties of the district foster care liaison? A: A school district should carefully consider the roles of each position before assigning the district foster care liaison position to staff due to changes in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as reauthorized by [ESSA](#). It is critical that staff designated as the foster care liaison have the time and capacity to fulfill their responsibilities. The general role of the district foster care liaison is to facilitate district compliance with state and federal laws as they relate to children and youth in foster care and to collaborate with the Child Welfare Agency (CWA) and SEA in an effort to address educational barriers that prevent children and youth in foster care from being identified and then enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school. Some of the roles and responsibilities of the district foster care liaison may include:

- Leading and documenting the development of a process for making best interest determinations.
- Facilitating the transfer of records.
- Facilitating immediate enrollment.
- Serving as the primary contact person for CWA, SEA, and social workers.
- Facilitating data sharing with the child welfare agencies, consistent with the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) and other privacy protocols.
- Ensuring that children in foster care are enrolled in and regularly attending school.
- Managing best interest determinations and transportation cost disputes.
- Developing and coordinating local transportation procedures.
- Coordinating with the foster care program supervisor at the CWA.
- Attending training and professional development opportunities to improve district implementation efforts.
- Providing professional development and training to school staff on the Title I Part A provisions and educational needs of children in foster care, as needed.

Residency

What if the youth in care changes placement, changing their residency school?

A: When there is a change in a child's placement or living arrangement, it is most often beneficial for the child to remain in the same school. DCFS shall consult with the child as well as with local school personnel in both school districts when making this decision.

When the child is receiving special education services, the child's educational surrogate parent must also be consulted since the location of educational services for the child will be determined by the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Department youth may only attend education programs that have been accredited by the appropriate SEA. ([105 ILCS 5/10 20.12b](#))

How is residency defined for youth in care and is he or she able to stay in the same school, even if they reside outside the district's boundaries?

A: The school of origin for youth in care is the Illinois school district in which the child resides, whether placed by DCFS with a foster parent, a relative caregiver, or a residential facility. However, ESSA guidance regarding school stability indicates that when DCFS places a youth in a different school, the child in care may remain in their school of origin tuition-free if it is determined to be in their best interests. ([105 ILCS 5/10 20.12b](#)) Also note, when a youth is placed outside of Illinois, the last school district that provided at least 45 days of educational service is the responsible district of residence. ([105 ILCS 5/14-1.11a](#))

Enrollment

Are there guidelines regarding enrollment and transfers for youth in care?

A: Yes. A school may **not** prevent a foster care student from enrolling in a public school if they are lacking records regarding any of the following:

- Any history of placement in special educational programs.
- Any past, current, or pending disciplinary action.
- Any history of violent behavior, or behavior
- Any unpaid fines or fees imposed by other schools.
- Any health conditions affecting the student's educational needs.

If a student in foster care is enrolled in one school and transfers enrollment to another school -- either in the same school district or in another school district -- the sending school district or school shall transfer the student's education information and records ([ESEA section 1111\(g\)\(E\)\(iii\)](#)) to the receiving school within **two school days** after receiving a transfer request.

What are the responsibilities of the school district when a student with an IEP transfers?

A: It is the sending school's responsibility to ensure that the [ISBE 33-78](#) Student Transfer Form is sent to the new district. The school must also send all school student records to the new school within two days of receiving a request from DCFS or a receiving school district to ensure appropriate placement, services, and academic instruction is provided. (See the [Illinois School Student Records Act, 105 ILCS 10/8.1\(b\)](#).)

What if a current IEP is not available upon enrollment?

A: Enrollment of the foster care youth should not be delayed even if their IEP is not yet available. The school should work immediately on obtaining the records from the youth's previous school. If the IEP is available at the time of enrollment, the IEP should be adopted and implemented if the foster or education surrogate parent indicates satisfaction that the current IEP and new district deems appropriate. If it is not, then an IEP meeting shall be scheduled and parental notice must be given within 10 days of enrollment to develop a new IEP. The current IEP must be implemented during this time. ([DCFS Procedure 314.80 \(a\)\(2\)](#))

Are youth in care eligible for the National School Lunch Program?

A: Yes, all youth in care are eligible for the program. Upon enrollment, the DCFS Placement/Payment Authorization form must be completed and submitted by DCFS. ([Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010, PL 111-296, Sec. 102](#))

Are youth in care eligible for school fee waivers?

A: Children who are wards of the state are entitled to a waiver of all applicable school fees covered in the enrolling school district's fee policy required under ([105 ILCS 5/2 3.96](#)), which shall, at least, include the fees charged for all textbooks and instructional materials.

Children in foster care are considered eligible for free meals, whether a school determines eligibility for a fee waiver through the National School Lunch Program application or through a separate application process. Thus, they automatically receive school fee waivers. Foster care payments made by DCFS for the care of the child in foster care may not be counted as parental income. (Also, see https://www.isbe.net/Documents/waiver_of_fees.pdf.)

Who pays for school textbooks and supplies for youth in care?

A: Illinois school districts are required to provide free use of required textbooks and instruction materials for youth in care. ([105 ILCS 5/2-3.96](#)) DCFS pays a flat fee to assist caregivers for basic school supplies for each youth in care each year.

Money

Who pays for additional transportation costs?

A: LEAs must cover the standard cost of transporting a child in foster care to the school of origin. If there are additional costs incurred in providing transportation to maintain children in foster care in their school of origin, the LEAS will provide transportation to the school of origin.

- LEAs that incur additional transportation costs for transporting a DCFS foster care student to their school of origin will be reimbursed 50 percent of their actual costs by DCFS. The other 50 percent is claimable as Regular Transportation expenditures.

Other funding options include:

- Title I (but funds reserved for comparable services for homeless youth may not be used for transportation);
- Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, if the student is eligible;
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act funds, if the student has an =IEP that includes provisions for specialized transportation must be provided for prekindergarten-grade 12 special education students enrolled for the regular and/or summer terms who require special transportation as defined in the IEP and approved as a related service on the IEP Student Tracking and Reporting System. DCFS special education youth in care transportation costs are reimbursed at 100 percent and claimed separately via the Special Education Individual Orphanage claim.
- State special education transportation funds, if the student has an IEP;
- Local funds.

Can Title I Part A set-aside funds to be used to fund foster care liaisons?

A: Yes. An individual paid, in whole or in part, with Title I Part A funds may serve as the foster care liaison. Districts opting to use Title I Part A funds for this purpose need to explain this in their Title I Part A plan.

What kind of services can Title I Part A funds (including set-asides and other funds) pay for?

A: Title I Part A funds, including those under the optional set-aside, can be used to serve students in foster care in both Title I Part A and non-Title I Part A schools. The services should support student success in school and should help students meet academic achievement standards. Districts opting to use Title I Part A funds for this purpose need to provide a description in their Title I Part A plan.

Are there any other sources beyond Title I for funding to investigate?

A: Yes, look into:

- Regular Orphanage Tuition Section 18-3 Excess Cost at https://www.isbe.net/Documents/orphanage_instructions.pdf.
- Special Education Pupil – Orphanage at <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/3120-sped-orphanage.pdf>.

For additional information on the above topics, see *Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care* at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf>.

Also, see

Educating and Supporting Our Children: A Guide to Education for Children and Youth in DCFS Care in Illinois at [https://www2.illinois.gov/dcf/brighterfutures/growingminds/Documents/CFS1050-90-5 A Guide to Education.pdf](https://www2.illinois.gov/dcf/brighterfutures/growingminds/Documents/CFS1050-90-5_A_Guide_to_Education.pdf).