



EDUCATIONAL PLANNING FOR DCF-INVOLVED STUDENTS

Assuring academic success and educational attainment for Department-involved children and youth is an integral part of our practice responsibility. From birth through post-secondary education or employment, we have an obligation to assure that our students have all the opportunities available to them to be successful – school readiness skills; continued enrollment and attendance in school, preferably in the school of origin; access to a range of support, special education and targeted assistance to assure academic progress; and engagement in all school activities – to enable them to complete high school with a plan for post-secondary education, training or employment. To this end, this tipsheet was devised to assist you in addressing these activities.

- **DOCUMENT all activities described below in the electronic case record.**
- **PLACE HARD COPIES IN THE PHYSICAL CASE RECORD of any relevant documents [e.g., transcripts, IEPs (including signature page), assessments, progress reports, MCAS and other standardized testing reports, correspondence].**
- **REVISE DCF'S CASE PLAN as needed to address ongoing or future tasks required to meet the student's educational needs and goals.**

A. MAINTAINING EDUCATIONAL STABILITY

When a student in DCF care or custody enters or changes placement, the primary goal is to limit educational disruption, as much as possible, by keeping the student in his/her current school. The student is expected to remain in the current school unless it is not in the student's best interest. *(Required by the **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 – PL. 110-35**. See DCF/ESE Joint Memorandum, Dated June 1, 2012 Promoting Educational Stability and Success for Students in Foster Care)*

- **Plan for education stability** – Document in electronic case record how educational stability will be maintained **every time student enters or changes placement**, including the factors considered in making the educational setting decision, especially the proximity of the placement to the school student was attending when placed. Use **Notice to LEA** form to notify school of change in DCF care or custody status or placement.
- **When there is an emergency or other necessary change in placement** – Contact appropriate person in the school district about the change; plan with school, student, family and/or new placement to maintain school enrollment and routine. If it is not in the student's best interest to remain in current school, arrange for student to be enrolled without delay in new district and for immediate transfer of records, using the **Notice to LEA** form.
- **When there is a hospitalization** – Notify school of hospitalization. Arrange contact of appropriate person in the school district and for person to be invited to all appropriate treatment planning and discharge meetings to ensure successful transition. If the student is expected to remain in the hospital 14 days or longer, the school district is required to provide tutoring; it may be willing to provide it when there is a shorter stay.
- **If considered homeless under McKinney-Vento Education Act** – If a student is placed in a **STARR or TCU** program or any other temporary, non-fixed living situation, he/she is considered "homeless" and therefore eligible for educational services under the McKinney-Vento Education Act.
- Assure student continues to attend school in district where student lived prior to becoming homeless, OR

- Enroll student in new school district where STARR or temporary home is located.
 - ✓ Contact school district's **homeless coordinator** to arrange immediate enrollment.
 - ✓ Request transportation, if needed, through the school district(s).

B. PROMOTING TIMELY & SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

When changing school is in the best interest of a child/youth in DCF care or custody, or cannot be avoided, address the following to ensure educational disruption is kept to a minimum:

- **Complete Notice to LEA** and send to both current LEA and new LEA, notifying them of student's move and requesting all education records to be sent to the new LEA, within 2 weeks prior to the move or within 2 work days after.
- **Contact receiving (new) school to determine process and requirements for student enrollment**, e.g., register at school or parent information center, required documents, etc.
- **Obtain and provide to receiving (new) school any enrollment records not provided directly by sending school:**
 - ✓ current health/immunization (if unable to obtain, work with LEA; consider re-immunization)
 - ✓ birth certificate or birth record
 - ✓ current and previous transcripts (including all assessments, MCAS, etc.)
 - ✓ special education documents (IEPs, assessments, progress reports, etc.), as applicable
 - ✓ discipline records
 - ✓ attendance recordsand as applicable:
 - ✓ copy of DCF mittimus
 - ✓ foster/pre-adoptive parent's proof of residence
- **Contact guidance, adjustment counselor or principal** at new school to set up meeting and/or share information about and address the following issues prior to or at enrollment.
NOTE: Best practice is to accompany the student to the new school.
 - ✓ Review current academic credit information (and IEP, if relevant) to assist school in determining student's grade/level and negotiating course credits.
 - ✓ Discuss behaviors, history, emotional issues that affect management of student and safety of student and others, e.g., kinds of situations/actions that set student off, calming responses, student's strengths/interests, etc.
 - ✓ Identify needed support services, after-school recreational/sports activities, programs and tutoring, transportation.
 - ✓ Plan for regular communication among school guidance, out-of-home care provider, family and DCF worker.

C. MONITORING & MAXIMIZING EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS & ATTAINMENT

Regular attendance and active engagement in school life is essential for academic success.

- **Monitor progress and update the electronic case record regularly**, as determined in consultation with supervisor, placement provider and/or parent, using information from contacts, written materials and/or meetings with school. A signed release of information signed by the parent/guardian will be needed for students in the custody of their parent/guardian or in DCF care, but not for students in DCF custody.
 - ✓ Student attends school daily and on time.

- ✓ Student is making progress as determined through receipt and review of periodic progress reports, report cards, MCAS and other standardized testing results. If failing MCAS, request tutoring through school.
- ✓ Parent and/or foster/pre-adoptive parent are invited to and attend school conferences, open houses, meetings, etc. at school.
- ✓ Parent and/or foster/pre-adoptive parent are engaged in student's educational attainment.
- ✓ Student is engaged in extra-curricular, after-school, recreational activities.
- ✓ Student has friends, social network.
- ✓ Student in foster/pre-adoptive placement is receiving free school meals. **Notice to LEA** form can be used to verify eligibility, if necessary

D. IDENTIFYING & ADDRESSING STUDENT'S SPECIAL NEEDS

When it is suspected that the student may have a disability which prevents her/him from being able to progress effectively in regular education, a request for a special education evaluation should be made by the social worker, parent, foster/pre-adoptive parent or any person involved with the child.

FOR ALL CHILDREN/YOUTH WITH SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED SPECIAL NEEDS

- **Verify that child under age 3 received an Early Intervention screening.**
- **Verify that child age 3 or 4 (or 2½ if she/he receives Early Intervention services) received a pre-school screening.**
- **Verify that the written request for special education evaluation** (or re-evaluation) for a student between the ages of 3-22 in DCF care or custody has been sent to the responsible school district, or request one using the **Notice to LEA** form or written letter that identifies the specific disability that you suspect the student may have [*see Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) Special Education Regulations 603 CMR 28.02 (7)*].
- **Verify that foster/pre-adoptive parent is assuming role of special education decision-maker for the student.** (*If the student has a permanency plan goal of reunification, consider having the biological parent continue as the special education decision-maker.*)
- **Verify that a SESP has been requested from the SESP Program for a student in DCF custody through a C&P, placed in community-connected residential treatment.**
- **Verify that consent for the initial evaluation has been signed by the parent, foster/pre-adoptive parent or SESP** and sent back to the school district. **NOTE: DCF social workers cannot sign consent forms or IEPs.**
- **Attend all Special Education Team meetings.** Know what is in the student's IEP, make sure it is being followed, advocate for changes when needed.
- **Discuss IEP with SESP, foster parent and parent** to assure shared knowledge and understanding.
- **Verify that copy of signed IEP has been requested and received and is placed in physical case record.**
- **Consider a Section 504 referral for a student with qualifying physical or mental impairment that limits participation in school,** if student does not meet the eligibility criteria for a special education evaluation.

TO SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY THROUGH SUSTAINED DCF CONNECTION AND BEYOND DCF INVOLVEMENT

➤ **Plan for High School Graduation & Beyond**

- ✓ For student age 14 or older with IEPs, assist schools in developing transition services plan for post-secondary education required by state and federal special education laws. Assure that current IEP upon graduation is sent to post-secondary institution to support the provision of accommodations, if requested.
- ✓ Assist school in initiating plan within 2 years of anticipated high school graduation. Arrange for student to be assisted with applications for post-secondary education or vocational training and provided with information by adolescent services staff about financial, housing, and social support, and other resources to assist with success in her/his chosen path.
- ✓ Arrange with school for review of academic credits to be performed prior to a student's starting senior year in high school, so that she/he is aware of the remaining requirements for graduation and what may be needed if she/he identifies higher education as a post-secondary goal.

➤ **Support Enrollment & Continued Engagement in Post-Secondary Vocational & Higher Education**

- ✓ Review with student her/his financial and educational progress prior to the start of each semester and again at the completion of each semester.
 - ✓ Monitor student's progress. Have student provide transcripts to demonstrate standing. If student does not meet requirements for progress in her/his chosen school, evaluate the need for resources or alternative planning. Assure that current IEP upon graduation is sent to post-secondary institution to support the provision of accommodations, if requested.
 - ✓ For students who are making progress, continue transition planning for subsequent semesters and support annual applications for state and federal financial aid and Department resources.
- **"Chapter 688" Transition Planning** – For information on transition planning for youth/young adults with severe qualifying disabilities, *see DCF Policy #86-012, Transitional Planning for Special Education Students Turning 22 or Graduating High School.*
- **Develop Case Closing Transition Plan for Educational Continuity** – Assemble and provide to student/family/next placement copies of all academic information maintained in DCF records, including names and addresses of schools attended while in DCF care or custody, transcripts, progress reports, IEPs, evaluations, standardized testing such as MCAS results, correspondence. Provide student and family with information on appropriate Department support programs for higher education.