

### **Public Law 110-351 Fostering Connections: Educational Stability**

The child's case plan must contain:

"(I) an assurance that the State [or local child welfare agency] has coordinated with appropriated local educational agencies (as defined under section 9101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) to ensure that the child remains in the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement;

(II) if remaining in such school is not in the best interests of the child, assurances by the State agency and the local educational agencies to provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school, with all of the educational records of the child provided to the school."

## **Importance of Educational Stability**

Educational success is an immensely important factor in a child's wellbeing, ultimately impacting their successful transition to adulthood and future economic stability. Studies indicate that with each school move, children on average fall 4 to 6 months behind their classmates. Children in foster care often experience multiple placement moves and school changes during their foster care stay. When a child changes schools, it impacts them in multiple ways. Here are some possible impacts:

- A child's school may be changed in the middle of a school year; disrupting the child's learning; and
- Credits from the previous school's classes may not be completed; thus affecting their advancement to the next grade level or for older children, loss of credits toward timely graduation.
- When a child is enrolled in a new school, frequently there is a time lapse for the new school to receive the child's prior school records; the school may place them in classes regardless;
- Once school records are finally received, it is often learned that the child was placed in unsuitable classes, which may disrupt their educational progress further; and
- Classes may need to be changed and appropriate classes may not be available, the child may struggle in their classes;
- The child may encounter hardships in the new school, i.e., new teaching style, different curriculum, new teachers, new friends, etc;
- Often children miss several days to a week or more of school during the process of enrolling them into a new school, this further disrupts their education.

These are a few examples of obstacles that impede a foster child's educational progress. Studies also indicate that two thirds of foster children do not graduate on time from high school; children in foster care are 44% less likely to graduate from high school; and only 3 percent graduate from college.

## **Making Best Interest Decisions**

In order to make informed decisions about selecting the school that is in a foster child's best interest, it is important to have as much practical information as possible. The school or district staff can play an instrumental role in assisting with choosing the school that is in a student's best interest. The school may be able to:

- Provide input on the academic, social, and emotional impact that transferring to a new school may have on the child.
- If the child has special education needs, provide input on the impact that changing schools may have on the child's progress and services. If a school change is indicated, ensure that evaluations and/or services are not interrupted.
- Help determine which programs at the two schools are comparable and appropriate for the child.
- Work with caseworkers to develop immediate and long-term plans for the student, ensuring that the student's education is not interrupted and considering the anticipated duration of the child's out-of-home placement and permanency plan.
- Expedite the transfer of school records when it is determined that it is in the best interests of a child to transfer to a new school.

## Key Questions to Consider When Making a School Selection

1. How long is the child's current placement expected to last?
2. What is the child's permanency plan?
3. How many schools has the child attended over the past few years? How many schools has the child attended this year? How have the school transfers affected the child emotionally, academically, and physically?
4. How strong is the child academically?
5. To what extent are the programs and activities at the potential new school comparable to or better than those at the current school?
6. Does one school have the programs and activities that address the unique needs or interests of the student that the other school does not have.
7. Which school does the student prefer?
8. How deep are the child's ties to his or her current school?
9. Would the timing of the school transfer coincide with a logical juncture such as after testing, after an event that is significant to the child or at the end of the school year?
10. How would changing schools affect the student's ability to earn full academic credit, participate in sports or other extra-curricular activities, proceed to the next grade, or graduate on time?
11. How would the length of the commute to the school of origin impact the child?
12. How anxious is the child about having been removed from the home and/or any upcoming moves?
13. What school do the child's siblings attend?
14. Are there any safety issues to consider?

## School Selection: A Checklist for Decision Making

*(adapted from the Texas Homeless Education Office)*

School of Origin Considerations		Local Attendance Area of School Consideration	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Continuity of Instruction</b> Student is best served due to circumstances that look to his or her past.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Continuity of Instruction</b> Student is best served due to circumstances that look to his or her future.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Age and grade placement of the student</b> Maintaining friends and contacts with peers is critical to the student's meaningful school experience and participation. The student has been in this environment for an extended period of time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Age and grade placement of the student</b> Maintaining friends and contacts with peers in the school of origin is not particularly critical to the student's meaningful school experience and participation. The student has attended the school of origin for only a brief time.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Academic strength</b> The child's academic performance is weak, and the child would fall further behind if he/she transferred to another school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Academic strength</b> The child's academic performance is strong and at grade level and the child would likely recover academically from a school transfer.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Social and emotional state</b> The child is suffering from the effects of mobility, has developed strong ties to the current school, and does not want to leave.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Social and emotional state</b> The child seems to be coping adequately with mobility, does not feel strong ties to the current school, and does not mind transferring.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education and/ or special needs</b> The advantages of remaining in the school of origin outweigh any potential disadvantages presented by the length of the commute.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education and/ or special needs</b> A shorter commute may help the student's concentration, attitude, or readiness for school. The local attendance area school can meet all of the necessary educational and special needs of the student.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Personal safety of the student</b> The school of origin has advantages for the safety of the student.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Personal safety of the student</b> The local attendance area school has advantages for the safety of the student.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Student's need for special instruction</b> The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the school of origin.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Student's need for special instruction</b> The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the local attendance area school.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location</b> The student's current living situation is outside of the school-of-origin attendance zone, but his/her living situation or location continues to be uncertain. The student will benefit from the continuity offered by remaining in the school of origin.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location</b> The student's current living situation appears stable and unlikely to change suddenly; the student will benefit from developing relationships with school peers who live in his/her local community.