



Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care

DFCS Field Practice Guide

Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care:

Education is critical to every child's well-being and future success. To ensure educational success, children and young people in the child welfare system require our assistance and support.



Foster youth face many challenges on their road to academic success. Their exposure and experiences before and during foster care can have a real and devastating impact on

their education. They may have experienced various forms of trauma including but not limited to abuse and/or neglect; separation from their families; and/or multiple school changes. With these occurrences, many children in foster care have emotional and behavioral challenges, developmental and cognitive barriers, and high rates of school absenteeism and disciplinary issues. Without proper support and intervention, poor academic performance, grade level retention, and high drop-out rates can and often result.

This DFCS Field Practice Guide has been developed to assist DFCS case managers and other direct service staff in navigating, understanding and administering policies, procedures, and practices established to improve educational outcomes for children and youth involved in the child welfare system. The more vigilant and committed we are as an agency to improving educational well-being outcomes, the more our performance will improve safety and permanency for the children and youth we serve. The following guide and tips will serve as a resource to help strengthen your practice and engagement skills for educational stability in foster care and child protective service programs.

Educational Stability Defined:

To assist DFCS in ensuring the educational well-being of youth in foster care, the Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation (EPAC) Unit was established. The unit is comprised of a team of Education Support Monitors (ESMs) who provide educational consultation to case managers and other direct service staff to promote educational stability. The unit also provides statewide oversight for the procurement of educational services that include tutoring and other academic supports. It is important DFCS Case Managers partner with the EPAC unit and its staff in the following activities to ensure positive educational stability outcomes.

Fostering Connections requires assurances of educational stability for children in foster care. The law requires certain activities, such as the following, to promote educational stability for children in foster care.

- Within 72 hours of entering foster care, youth should be referred to EPAC to complete a diagnostic educational assessment.
- Within 30 days a completed assessment, an Educational Action Plan (EAP) will be uploaded into GA SHINES and DFCS Case Managers may use the EAP for case planning.
- Case Managers should proactively consult with their regional ESM regarding all educational well-being issues including, but not limited to: Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), 504 Education Plans, Response To Interventions (RTI), Tribunals, Disciplinary Issues, etc.
- Case Managers should contact EPAC immediately regarding any situation that could result in a disruption of the educational setting of a youth in foster care.

- Case Managers should advise EPAC of significant changes in the youth’s case including, but not limited to: placement moves and case closures.

Educational Stability – Practice Guidance:

Ensure the appropriateness of the child’s educational setting: The DFCS case manager is responsible for ensuring the foster youth is in the appropriate educational setting. To assess educational setting appropriateness, the case manager must consider the following:

PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✎ Ask the foster parent/custodian to sign releases of information in the event parent involvement is not immediately possible or accessible.
- ✎ Contact the “child’s school (home school/school of origin)” when a child enters foster care to request social and educational information.
- ✎ Involve the foster parent/custodian/caregiver, EPAC ESM in all education decisions. Communication is important.
- ✎ Pre-removal conferences or Family Team Meetings (FTM) are ideal settings for discussion of the educational needs of the child. Be sure to ask your regional EPAC ESM to participate.

Child should reside in close proximity to the home school: The stability and support the child receives at his/her current school may be the most stable area in his/her life during difficult times. The child should remain in his/her home school, unless not in the child’s best interest.



PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✎ When a contractor or provider is involved in selection of the foster care placement, the case manager must ensure they have the educational information needed.
- ✎ Lack of transportation or lack of available foster homes is not an acceptable reason to move a child to a different school.
- ✎ Ask the foster parent/caregiver if they are willing to transport the child outside of the designated school zone.
- ✎ Utilize Family Team Meetings or pre-removal conferences to explore transportation options.

Work with the Local Education Agencies. Federal law requires state child welfare agencies collaborate with local education agencies to improve educational stability for children in foster care. Local education agencies include the public or private schools, or Area Education Agencies.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✎ When a child enters foster care, contact the school of origin to obtain all applicable school records.
- ✎ Attend education meetings.
- ✎ Ensure the EPAC ESM is made aware of any and all education meetings.

Use of Technology to Support Educational Stability: DFCS has a data sharing agreement with the GA Department of Education (GaDOE). With this agreement, DFCS case managers have access to GaDOE Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) which provides educational records of youth in the education system.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✎ Ensure that every school-aged child in foster care has a GA Testing Identification Number (GTID) listed in SHINES.
- ✎ Utilize the access to the SLDS to upload attendance records and unofficial transcripts into GA SHINES.

- Always update the Educational Detail Page in GA SHINES to reflect the most current educational information.

Attendance and Transfer of Records (Within 10 Days): Georgia law requires every school-aged child in foster care, ages 6-16, to be enrolled as a full-time elementary or secondary school student or to have completed secondary school. DFCS is responsible for ensuring when a child in foster care changes schools, the receiving schools receives academic transcripts within 10 days of notification from the DFCS case manager. A child should miss no more than one (1) day of school during the transfer process.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- Establish a tracking system to track 10-day requirement.
- Follow-up with the receiving school to ensure they received transcripts. Work with schools to resolve any barriers.

NOTE: Policy reference “Educational Needs” 10.4

Support Educational Stability through Child Protective Services: An unaccompanied youth is defined as a youth not living in the physical custody of his/her parent or guardian who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night time residence, including youth awaiting foster care placement meets the requirement of McKinney-Vento. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) require that the needs of homeless children be addressed.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- At intake, if a youth is unaccompanied homeless, the intake staff should complete an EPAC referral (Form 176) and identify the child as unaccompanied.
- Submit completed referral to EPAC@dhs.ga.gov.
- EPAC will forward the referred youth’s information to their respective school district’s Homeless Liaison.

NOTE: Policy reference “Receiving Intake Reports” 4.1 and 4.4

Regional EPAC Education Support Monitors		
Region 1 & 2	Marilyn Peters	404-803-8196
Region 3: Cherokee and Douglas	Jenny Summerlin	404-710-0840
Region 3: Floyd, Polk, Paulding and Haralson	Michele Lobdell	404-895-7833
Region 3: Bartow	Christopher Jones	404-805-5601
Region 4	Autumn Shepard	404-772-1954
Region 5 & 7	Robin Brooks	404-519-9771
Region 6 & 9	LeAnne Worley	404-821-8890
Region 8	Vacant	Vacant
Region 10	Amie Henry	404-293-4295
Region 11	Mary Mollay	404-617-4884
Region 12	Victoria Green	TBD
Region 13	Brandi Blackmon	404-895-3613
Region 14 (A-L)	Shantel Tate	404-345-3416
Region 14 (M-Z)	Josette Franklin	404-657-0088
Region 15: Cobb	Jenny Summerlin	404-710-0840
Region 15: Gwinnett	Christopher Jones	404-805-5601

Educational Stability Transportation Funding Request Protocol:

All youth entering into foster care should remain in their home school/school of origin. Often, foster care placements do not result in a change in educational setting however, there are instances when a placement may be located outside the school district that is affiliated with the child/youth’s home school/school of origin. When these situations occur, it may be necessary to support the current school placement with transportation services.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- Complete the *Educational Stability Checklist* to assist you in determining the appropriateness of the youth’s current educational setting.
- Refer to COSTAR Manual, Section 3006/UAS 518 for additional guidance.
- Requests may be subject to a state office qualitative review.