

Ensuring Educational Stability for Youth in Foster Care – Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Topics: [Best Interest Determinations](#) | [Educational Support](#) | [Enrollment](#) | [Technical Assistance](#)

Page last updated: May 1, 2020 at 6:30 PM

Technical Assistance

Who is available to provide guidance to foster care points of contact at local education agencies (LEA) during the COVID-19 response effort?

The Pennsylvania Department of Education's Educational Stability for Youth in Foster Care Regional Offices continue to provide guidance and technical assistance to local education agencies and local child welfare agencies during the COVID-19 response effort. The most up-to-date contact information can be found on the [Educational Stability for Foster Care Youth in Pennsylvania website](#)[Opens In A New Window](#). You may also contact PDE's statewide foster care point of contact, Matthew Butensky, at mbutensky@csc.csiu.org or (717) 763-1661 x171.

Best Interest Determinations

Are Best Interest Determinations (BIDs) required during the COVID-19 response effort?

Yes. LEAs and local child welfare agencies should continue to complete the [Best Interest Determination School Placement Form](#)[Opens In A New Window](#). While school buildings are closed due to COVID-19 response efforts, foster care placements and changes in placements are still occurring; therefore, the process of determining school placement for a child in foster care among partners should continue.

The following recommendations are important to keep in mind as agencies complete the BID:

- Local child welfare agencies should continue to notify LEAs of a child's entry into foster care or change in placement as they occur.
- Consistent with [PDE's student enrollment and attendance guidance for all students](#), LEAs are strongly encouraged to allow a student to remain in their current school/district during the COVID-19 pandemic, if that is the student's preference and whenever feasible.

- Collaboration should include developing a plan to address the child’s education, school attendance, and the distance/length of the child’s commute when school buildings reopen.
- In the event that a BID indicates that a student in foster care needs to change schools, LEAs and child welfare partners should collaborate prior to withdrawing the student from the school of origin to ensure that the receiving school has a streamlined process for enrollment and can provide continuity of education.
- Pending any final BID, the school of origin should ensure that students in foster care continue to receive instruction or educational supports provided to all other students enrolled in the school through the local continuity of education plan.

Where can I find the tool developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) to complete a school placement Best Interest Determination (BID)?

The Best Interest Determination School Placement Form can be found on the [Educational Stability for Foster Care Youth in Pennsylvania websiteOpens In A New Window](#).

Enrollment

Should students in foster care remain enrolled and attend their school of origin during the COVID-19 response effort?

LEAs should follow [PDE’s student enrollment and attendance guidance for all students](#). Under the Every Student Succeeds Act’s (ESSA) foster care provisions, a child placed in foster care or experiencing a change in foster care placement should remain enrolled in the school of origin unless it is determined that it is not in the child's best interest to remain in that school. During the COVID-19 response effort, students in foster care should receive continuity of education from the school placement determined through the Best Interest Determination process.

Should LEA foster care points of contact be contacted regarding school enrollment and attendance related inquiries for youth in foster care?

Yes. Questions pertaining to school enrollment and attendance of youth in foster care should be directed to the foster care points of contact at the LEA. As always, LEAs and child welfare agencies are encouraged to collaborate on matters related to school enrollment or attendance of youth in foster care. Access the complete [LEA Foster Care Point of Contact DirectoryOpens In A New Window](#). As with all students, LEAs should establish a process for tracking student learning and ensuring that students in foster care are participating in continuity of education programming.

Are students in foster care still entitled to immediate enrollment during the COVID-19 response effort?

Yes. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), youth in foster care are entitled to immediate enrollment into a new school if it has been determined to be in their best interest to change schools. If it is necessary for a child in foster care to change schools during COVID-19 response efforts, LEAs should begin continuity of education as early as possible during the enrollment process.

What circumstances for youth in foster care may require new school enrollment during the COVID-19 response effort?

It is vital that LEAs and child welfare partners maintain communication and continue the Best Interest Determination (BID) process during the COVID-19 response effort. Currently, the proximity of foster care placement and the school of origin may be less of a consideration in determining which school is in the student's best interest. However, youth in foster care must be enrolled in the new school during the COVID-19 response effort if it is determined to be in the child's best interest to do so. For example, for a child in foster care exiting a children's institution, such as a group home or residential treatment facility, it may no longer be practical, feasible, or most importantly, in the child's best interest to maintain their education with the school of origin. Discussions among LEAs and the placing child welfare agency are critical to making a Best Interest Determination and providing continuity of education during the COVID-19 response effort.

Educational Support

How can LEAs ensure youth in foster care have equitable access to instruction and educational supports during the COVID-19 response effort?

Many children in foster care reside in a different school district than the one in which they attend school. Below are strategies LEAs can implement to support the educational needs of youth in foster care during COVID-19 response efforts.

- LEAs should ensure that foster families and youth are aware of all school resources offered during the COVID-19 response effort, through targeted outreach.
- LEAs should ensure that youth in foster care have the same access to instruction and other educational supports provided to all other students through the LEAs' continuity of education plans.
- LEAs should maintain open communication and collaboration with their child welfare partners. A directory of child welfare agency Education Liaisons can be found within the [Foster Care Point of Contact Directory](#)Opens In A New Window.
- LEAs should communicate any challenges supporting the educational needs of youth in foster care with the child's caregiver or placing child welfare agency.

Where can I find additional information to address the needs of students in foster care, such as meal programs and special education services?

Access [school guidance and answers to common questions on the PDE website](#). Information is updated as it is made available. Please check back frequently.

If you have additional questions, please submit them to pafostercare@csc.csiu.org.