

# Promoting School Success for Foster Children

## A Desk Guide for Caseworkers

### Purpose

This desk guide is intended to serve as a resource for child welfare staff to promote school success for children in the child welfare system. The guide contains:

- A **School Enrollment Checklist** for when a student is placed in out-of-home care;
- An overview of **2015 Wisconsin Act 161**, a law that advances information sharing between child welfare agencies and educational agencies;
- Information on the **Education Passport**;
- **Best Practices** for child welfare staff;
- Information on the federal **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**;
- **National Resources** on foster children and education.



## School Enrollment Checklist

### IF THE STUDENT WILL REMAIN IN HIS/HER CURRENT SCHOOL

- Notify the school of the student's placement in out-of-home care and arrange for immediate transportation (**Out-of-Home Placement or Recommended Placement Notification Form**).
- Work with the school and caregivers to develop a sustainable transportation plan (Every Student Succeeds Act).
- Ensure the student has necessary items he/she may need to continue attending school (e.g., clothes, supplies).
- Provide the school a copy of any applicable release forms to establish ongoing communications (including the Education Passport).

### IF THE STUDENT NEEDS TO BE ENROLLED IN A NEW SCHOOL

- Notify the school of origin that the student has been placed in out-of-home care.
- Notify the new school of the student's placement in out-of-home care and provide the school a copy of any applicable educational release forms (**Out-of-Home Placement or Recommended Placement Notification Form**).
- Assist the school district in obtaining copies of the student's pupil records (transcripts and credits, class schedules, etc.) from the school of origin.
- Ensure that the following information is provided to the new school:
  - The student's address and the responsible party for educational matters. This includes contact information for caseworkers, out-of-home care providers, and birth parents (except when prohibited by court).
  - School services provided to the student (e.g., Individualized Education Plan (IEP)/504 plan).
  - Information that pertains to the student's safety and the safety of others.

All of this information can be found on the Education Passport form.

- Ensure that high school students meet with the new school counselor to review classes and credits required for graduation. If possible, attend this meeting with the student. Advocate for transfer of all credits, including partial credits for students moving mid-semester.

## 2015 Wisconsin Act 161

Enabling child welfare workers to receive or access timely and accurate educational data is a critical factor to improving school success for children in foster care. **2015 Wisconsin Act 161** allows child welfare workers to access education records without parental consent, codifying into state law the federal Uninterrupted Scholars Act (**Public Law 112-278**) enacted in 2013. Specifically, Act 161 amends state statutes related to the confidentiality of public records in the following ways:

- School districts may disclose pertinent education records, without parental consent, to a state or local child welfare agency or tribal organization authorized to access a student’s case plan when the agency is legally responsible for the care and protection of the student.
- Information shared with caseworkers engaged in the child’s education may not be further disclosed to other entities except as ordered by a court.

County child welfare agencies will still be expected to follow the current practice of seeking parental consent for disclosure of their child’s educational records to the child welfare worker. Act 161 enables the child welfare worker to access the child’s educational records in situations where it is not possible to obtain parental consent on a timely basis (e.g., the parent cannot be located or is unresponsive).

## Education Passport

The Education Passport is a document designed to notify a school that a child is entering, changing, or leaving care. Whenever a child enters care, changes placement, or exits care, child welfare workers are advised to provide school staff with the Education Passport form, for the purpose of sharing information to promote the school success of the child.

The Education Passport is available in the state SACWIS system. Education information is pre-filled from other tabs within SACWIS in order to generate **the form**. See **this guide** for more information on how to generate the form.

Education Passport			
Use of Form: Whenever a student enters care, changes placement, or exits care, child welfare workers are advised to share the Education Passport form to school staff for the purpose of sharing information to support the educational success of the Student. Personal information you provide may be used for secondary purposes (Privacy Law, s.15.04(1)(m), Wisconsin Statutes).			
<b>Basic Information</b>			
Date Form Completed:	09/01/2015 (mm/dd/yyyy)	Date of Exit:	(mm/dd/yyyy)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student in Care <input type="checkbox"/> Student Exiting Care			
Name – Student	Badger, Bucky T.	Birthdate – Student (mm/dd/yyyy)	05/13/1998
		Age	17
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	
Student ID	777555	Cell Number	(414)111-1111
		Email Address	Bucky.Badger@gmail.com
<b>Education Information</b>			
Current School	Wisconsin School - 555 5th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53222	Current School District	Milwaukee - 3619
		Current Grade	10th
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Individualized Education Plan (IEP)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Specialized Program(s)			
		If yes, what program(s)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Is this a School Transfer?			
		If yes, from what school	
<b>Child Welfare Agency</b>			
Agency Name	State Central Office		
Agency Address	1 W. Wilson, Room 527, Madison, WI 53702		
Name – Caseworker	Office Number	Email Address	
Cake, Caitlin	(414)453-1400	Caitlin.Cake@agency.gov	
	Cell Number		
Name – Supervisor	Office Number	Email Address	
Smith, Caitlin S.	(414)292-4200	Caitlin.Smith@agency.gov	
	Cell Number		
<b>Out of Home Care Provider</b>			
Name – Out of Home Care Provider	Address (Street, City, State, Zip Code)		
ABC Group Home			
Cell Number	Email Address	Telephone Number	
	ABC Group Home - candy.cane@ABCGroupHome.org	(414)123-4567	

## Best Practices

**Document and update education information regularly in SACWIS**

**Task: Document education-related information on a regular basis and use Education Passport form when appropriate.**

**Work with partners and student's school to address general educational needs**

**Task: Hold a school planning meeting as soon as possible to identify roles and responsibilities, as well as any educational needs of the student.**

- Identify and agree upon roles and responsibilities, including a school point person (e.g., teacher, counselor, school social worker).
- If there are academic concerns, request the school to complete a thorough assessment and provide appropriate intervention and support services.
- Discuss any physical, emotional or behavioral health issues that may adversely affect the student's ability to learn, interact with others appropriately, or attend school regularly. If applicable, review IEP/504 plan.
- Identify any needed supports or services (e.g., tutoring, evaluations, counseling).
- Identify any extracurricular or after-school activities the student currently does or wants to participate in.
- Discuss the student's visitation plan and other appointments; try to schedule during non-school hours.

**Establish a communication plan with caregivers and school to review student's progress**

**Task: Monitor student's progress through regular check-ins and meetings.**

- For example, meet at least once each semester with the parent, out-of-home care provider, and the school point person to monitor the student's academic progress.
- Review items from initial planning meeting and set goals.

**Ensure student is prepared to progress to the next grade level**

**Task: Support the student to make sure he/she is prepared to progress to the next grade level.**

- Work with the out-of-home care provider to monitor the student's academic progress and test scores.
- Advocate on behalf of the child to the school for appropriate services to address any academic aptitudes, delays, credit recovery, etc.

**Ensure student is prepared for high school graduation and postsecondary education and/or training**

**Task: Support the student to make sure he/she is on track for high school graduation.**

- Work with the student to identify graduation requirements and monitor progress in meeting those requirements, paying particular attention to **credit accrual and recovery**.
- Ensure the IEP team focuses on transition planning for a student in special education and ensure the alignment of different plans.
- Collaborate with Independent Living (IL) Coordinator for additional resources and information to help support education progress and planning.

## Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

In December 2015, Congress passed the **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**, an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that mandates new protections for children in foster care. The key provisions of ESSA are outlined below\*:

**School of origin:** State plans must include assurances that foster children remain in their school of origin, unless there is a determination that it is not in their best interest to do so. Factors in determining best interest include proximity and appropriateness of the educational setting.

**Immediate enrollment:** When a foster child does not remain in the school of origin, the student must immediately be enrolled in a new school, regardless of whether the student can produce the records typically required for enrollment.

**Records transfer:** When a foster child changes schools, the enrolling school must immediately contact the previous school to obtain academic and other records.

**State-level point of contact:** The Department of Public Instruction must designate a point of contact for child/tribal child welfare agencies; this may not be the same person as the state's McKinney-Vento coordinator.

**Local-level point of contact:** Local education agencies (school districts) must identify a point of contact if the child/tribal child welfare agency identifies an agency point of contact to the local education agency.

**Transportation:** The local education agencies must collaborate with state or local child/tribal child welfare agencies to implement clear written procedures regarding transportation and maintaining youth in their school of origin. Such procedures should include how cost-effective transportation will be provided, arranged, and funded, in a timely manner, to prevent disruption of a child's education.

**Data disaggregation:** States must provide disaggregated data on foster children. Annual state report cards must contain information on student achievement for foster children. The report cards must also contain information on high school graduation rates for foster children, including four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates and, at the state's discretion, extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rates.

**Homeless definition:** Students "awaiting foster care placement" are removed from the definition of homeless youth in McKinney-Vento. For states that have statutory laws that define or describe the phrase "awaiting foster care placement," this change will take effect two years after ESSA enactment.

\*Source: National Center for Youth Law



## National Resources

### U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE

Provides information on relevant laws, guidance, and technical assistance materials related to educational support for students in foster care.



<http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/index.html>

### NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR PERMANENCY AND FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Provides technical assistance and resource materials on addressing the education needs of children involved in the child welfare system, including information on data and information sharing; state examples of child welfare/education collaborations; resources on early childhood education; K-12 education; postsecondary education; state reports and resources, along with webcasts on various topics.



<http://www.nrcpfc.org/is/education-and-child-welfare.html>

### LEGAL CENTER FOR FOSTER CARE & EDUCATION

Provides a strong voice at the national level for the education of children in foster care, a central clearinghouse of information on foster care and education, as well as training and technical assistance across the country.



<http://www.fostercareandeducation.org>