

Information Sharing with Schools

A Desk Guide for Caseworkers

Purpose

This guide is intended to be a resource to assist child welfare staff in collaborating and sharing information with schools. Specifically, the guide contains:

- A School Enrollment Checklist for when a student is placed in out-of-home care for students remaining in his/her current school and for students enrolling in a new school;
- Federal and state laws regarding information sharing between child welfare agencies and educational agencies;
- Information about the new Education Passport form on SACWIS.
- Information sharing best practices for child welfare staff;
- Background information on the importance of information sharing for educational stability and success; and
- Additional resources for successful collaboration between child welfare and educational agencies.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, also known as the Fostering Connections Act, requires child welfare to include a plan for ensuring the educational stability of children in foster care as part of each child's case plan. Under the Act, educational agencies and child welfare agencies are obligated to coordinate efforts to ensure the educational stability of students in foster care. A key piece of this coordination is information sharing.

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 (see Education Passport section on Page 2) and arrange for immediate transportation.
- Work with school and caregivers to develop a sustainable transportation plan.
- Ensure the student has necessary items he/she may need to continue going to school (e.g. clothes, supplies, etc.).
- Provide the school a copy of any applicable release forms to establish ongoing communications.

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. Use the Education Passport form in SACWIS.
- 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 given 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 the student needs (e.g. IEP or 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 credit needed for graduation. If possible, attend this meeting with the student. Advocate for transfer of all credits, including partial credits for students moving mid-semester.

Information Sharing Laws

While laws exist governing the confidentiality of private records for child welfare agencies and educational agencies, the laws should not prevent communication between the systems. The intent of the statutes is to allow “the confidential exchange of information” between child welfare agencies and educational agencies, recognizing that the best interests of the child are served when all parties communicate with one another.

Federal laws allow states some latitude in regulating certain aspects of information sharing. In Wisconsin, county agencies are authorized under [Section 48.78](#) and [Section 938.78](#), the Children’s Code and Juvenile Justice Code of the Wisconsin Statutes, to share confidential information with schools in order to support the child’s educational needs. Any information that the school obtains under these statutory sections must be kept confidential as required under [Section 118.125](#) of the Wisconsin Statutes and the federal [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#).

School records may be shared with foster parents and child welfare agencies if the parent or guardian gives written permission to do so or a court orders such release, as authorized by [Section 118.125](#). Permission is typically given through a written consent form which may vary by county. Obtaining this permission allows the school district to communicate with the foster parent and child welfare staff at the same time it communicates with the parent or guardian.

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 share the Education Passport form to school staff for the purpose of sharing information to support the educational success of the child. Information in the passport includes:

- Basic demographic information about the child;
- The child’s current school and if he/she was enrolled in any special programming;
- Contact information for the child welfare agency, out-of-home care provider, and parent(s)/guardian(s)/custodian(s);
- Information for school staff to promote school success, such as positive attributes and interests; and
- Exit information, such as name(s) of person(s) child resides with.

The Education Passport is available in the state SACWIS system. Education information is pulled into one place in the system in order to generate the notification form. For more information on the Education Passport, please visit the [Office of Youth Services Web site](#).

INFORMATION THAT CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES CAN DISCLOSE TO SCHOOLS

SECTION 48.78(2)(B), WISCONSIN STATUTES

- Notice that a child is in foster placement/awaiting foster services.
- Information and contact restrictions (who can access child)
- Contact information of caseworker(s).
- Notification when caseworker changes.
- Behavior triggers and prevention suggestions.
- Positive attributes and interests.
- School relevant safety concerns.
- Past school and home mobility.
- Out-of-home care provider information.
- Level/type of trauma.
- List of out of school services and contacts.
- Foreshadowing of upcoming events
- Events/appointments that will interfere with school.
- Caseworker’s treatment plans/goals and how school can support them.

SECTION 48.396(2), WISCONSIN STATUTES

- Copy of court orders with proper consent of parent or guardian or youth age 14 or older.

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 and 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 complete a thorough assessment and provide appropriate intervention and support services.
- Discuss any physical, emotional or behavioral health issues that impair the student's ability to learn, interact appropriately, or attend school regularly. If applicable, review IEP or 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: Keep track of 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 next 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 with the school system for appropriate services to address any academic aptitudes, delays, or credit recovery.

Ensure student is prepared for high school graduation and higher education or postsecondary 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 (credit accrual and recovery).
- Ensure the IEP team focuses on transition planning for student in special education and make sure different plans align.
- Work with IL Coordinator for additional resources and information to help support education progress and planning.

Background

Research shows that youth in out-of-home care are less likely than their peers to have a high school diploma, earn enough money to support themselves, or participate in post-secondary education or training. One major challenge is the high rate of school mobility for youth in care, both when they are initially removed from home, and when they change living placements while in care.

When youth in care change schools, they may experience delays in enrollment, inappropriate school placements, lack of education support services, and difficulties in transferring course credits. Youth in care often lack a strong advocate to help navigate obstacles associated with changing schools. Moreover, studies have shown students lose approximately 4 to 6 months of academic progress with each change in school placement.

A joint study conducted by DPI and DCF in 2012 determined that 44% of children in out-of-home care in Wisconsin - and 38% in Milwaukee - attended more than one school in a single year.

These poor outcomes are not due to lower educational aspirations of foster youth, but rather factors beyond the child's control that make it difficult to achieve academic success. There are many adults and systems involved in a foster child's life, often resulting in a lack of ownership and coordination from adults when it comes to overseeing a child's education. Education and postsecondary planning are often not a priority due to all that is taking place in the life of a child and their family case.

Schools and child welfare agencies are obligated to coordinate efforts to ensure the educational stability and success of children in foster care under the Fostering Connections Act. Collectively, we can improve the outcomes for youth jointly served by schools and child welfare systems.



General questions about this desk guide can be directed to:

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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, and 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, and training and technical assistance across the country.



<http://www.fostercareandeducation.org>