

Educational Stability for Foster Youth

Michigan Department
of Human Services



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Dwayne B. v. Granholm, et al.

**VIII.A.5(a,b,c) Provision of Educational Services:
pages 36-37 (FOM 722-6)**

- DHS shall:
 - Ensure each child is screened for general and educational needs within 30 days of his/her entry into foster care.
 - Take reasonable steps to ensure that school-aged foster children are registered for and attending school within 5 days of initial placement or any placement change.
 - Make reasonable efforts to ensure the continuity of a child's educational experience –
 - Keeping the child in a familiar or current school and neighborhood, when this is in the child's best interests;
 - Limiting the number of school changes.



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Legal Basis for Implementing Federal & State Laws

- Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008
- McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001
- Michigan Law 2009 PA 186-187



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Fostering Connections Act *Educational Provisions*

- Child welfare agencies **must** include within the case plan assurances of the educational stability.
- DHS **must** ensure that child welfare agencies:
 - Consider appropriateness of school and proximity to school of origin when making foster care placements.
 - Work with schools to ensure child remains in the school in which the child is enrolled at time of placement.



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Fostering Connections Act

Educational Provisions

- If remaining in same school is not in the *best interest* of the child, the case plan must include assurances the child welfare agencies have worked with the schools to:
 - Provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school; and
 - Provide all of the educational records of the child to the school.



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Fostering Connections Act

Educational Provisions

- Requires states to provide assurances that every school-age child in foster care (or receiving subsidized guardianship or adoption payments):
 - Is a full-time student;
 - Has completed secondary school;
 - Or if incapable of attending school due to a documented medical condition, documentation of such is required.



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McKinney-Vento Act

- Designed to increase school enrollment, attendance and success of children and youth who “lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.”
- The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Homeless Education Office considers a foster care placement temporary until a child/youth has been in the care of the same foster parent for a minimum of six continuous months.



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New Policy Requirements



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Educational Screening

- An initial assessment of the child's educational needs and strengths must be completed.
- Each child must be screened for education needs within 30 days of his or her entry into foster care.



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Timely Enrollment & Attendance

- A child must to be enrolled in and attending school full-time within 5 days of initial placement or any placement change, including while placed in congregate care or emergency placements.



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Immediate School Enrollment & Provision of School Records

- McKinney-Vento Act allows for the immediate enrollment of a foster child within the school even if school records or other needed documentation is not readily available.
- Michigan law (MCL 380.1135(4)) requires a public school when enrolling a transfer student to request a copy of the student's previous school record within 14 days after enrollment.
- The sending school must forward a copy of the records within 30 days of the request.



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Continuity of the Child's School Setting

School Placement Decisions:

- Must be weighed by considering the *best interest* factors.
- Are made on a case-by-case basis, identifying and allowing for individual needs and circumstances.
- Include coordination and collaboration with the local school district and the homeless education liaison.
- Are made by engaging the parent or guardian, along with the child in the school preference decision.
- The local school district must enroll the child in the school the FC worker selects.



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Continuity of the Child's School Setting

- Children and youth entering care or changing FC placements are to continue their education in their current school, unless this is not in the child's **best interest**.



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Making *Best Interest* Decisions

- **The local liaison and school staff should always be involved in the best interest decisions in order to:**
 - Provide input on academic, social and emotional impact that changing schools may have on the child, the child's progress and services.
 - Help determine which programs at the 2 schools are comparable and appropriate for the child.
 - Provide information on the commute to the schools in terms of the distance, mode of transportation and travel time.



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Best interest factors foster care workers need to consider regarding school placement include:

- The parent's or guardian's and child's school of preference.
- Educational input from school personnel and educational liaison.
- The child's:
 - Social and emotional state.
 - Academic achievement/strengths/weaknesses.
 - Continuity of relationships.
 - Special education programming.
 - Extracurricular activity participation.
 - Distance/travel time to and from current school/new placement and the impact on the child.
 - Supportive relationships and/or services.
 - Length of anticipated stay in placement and the permanency plan.



Best Interest
Other Questions to Consider

- How many schools has the child attended over the past few years?
- How would changing schools affect the child or youth's ability to earn full academic credit, proceed to the next grade or graduate on time?
- What schools do the siblings attend?



Transportation



Transportation is essential to ensure school stability and promote educational success.



- Under the McKinney-Vento Act local education agencies are to provide transportation to the eligible children and youth with the local liaison and school district arranging the transportation.
- FC workers must provide the information necessary in a timely fashion to schools/homeless education liaison to facilitate transportation.



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Transportation



- School transportation is a significant expense and logistical challenge for school districts.
- Local economy may pose cost issues.
- Cooperation between education and child welfare agencies is essential to ensure the expense and challenges of transportation do not pose a barrier to the student in out-of-home-care.



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Supporting Transportation Taking a Proactive Approach

FC workers need to work with the schools to develop cost-effective and appropriate transportation plans by:

- Providing information on a child's move as early as possible.
- Offering reasonable transportation options when possible (i.e. youth provided YIT bus pass to attend nearby school of origin, discussing transportation to school with foster parent/relative, asking relative if another relative could transport child to school).



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Transportation Costs Fostering Connections Act

- When a child/youth is no longer eligible for transportation services under the McKinney-Vento Act, DHS will have the full responsibility for transportation payment and coordination.
- The Fostering Connections Act includes payment for reasonable transportation in the foster care maintenance payment (i.e. payment to foster parents).
- FC workers **must provide oversight** to ensure transportation expenses are provided through one funding source at a time.



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Documentation



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Required Documentation

- All educational information and related tasks, activities and contacts must be documented within the case service plan.
- At the initial placement or any placement change, the narrative within the case service plan must include the following:
 - The placement decision and appropriateness of the current educational setting and the proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled.
 - The best interest factors and the input of the parent or legal guardian, and the education liaison.
 - Verification that the child is enrolled in and attending school full-time within 5 days of placement or change of placement.
 - Verification from the new school that the child's school record was received within 30 days of enrollment.



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Required Documentation Continued

- The initial screening results
- Special education information, if applicable.
- Description of provided services or activities to meet the child's educational needs.
- Discussion of the transportation plan.
- Document the child/youth's full-time school status.



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Implementation-The Caseworker's Role



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Caseworker's Role

- Become familiar with resources that are available.
- Become knowledgeable of federal and state laws to increase ability to advocate for children.
- Develop partnerships with schools to decrease barriers.
- Develop partnerships with the local homeless education liaisons.
- Document efforts to support the child's educational stability.



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EDUCATION PLANNERS



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Dwayne B. v. Granholm, et al.

VIII.A.4.b(v) Supports for Children Transitioning to Adulthood pgs. 35-36

- By October 2009, DHS shall hire 14 regional Education Planners who shall provide consultation and support to youth age 14 and older in accessing educational services and in developing individualized education plans, including identifying all available financial aid resources.



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Foster Youth & Educational Outcomes

- At the age of 21, 25% did not have a diploma compared to 11% of a national sample.
- A Midwest study found that 58% of foster youth had their diploma at age 19, compared to 87% of their same-age peers.
- A recent report found that between 10% and 30% of former foster youth enroll in college, while 60% of other youth attend college.
- Statistics on foster youth reveal that of the foster youth who enroll in a higher educational program, less than 2% actually complete a bachelor's degree.



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Why These Outcomes?

- School mobility
 - Foster youth attend an average of 6 different schools.
 - When moving so often, students never “catch up” to other students.
 - Different districts are at different points in lesson plans.
 - Delay in record transfer from previous school. This leads to incorrect class placement.



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What will an Education Planner Do?

- Provide technical assistance and training.
- Act as a liaison between the education system and the foster care system.
- Advocate for students and teach youth to advocate for themselves.
- Ensure that Michigan's Policy and Fostering Connection guidelines are being followed.



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Education Planner Role continued:

Provide specific assistance:

- In developing long-term educational goals.
- In the transition between high school and post-secondary education.
- In the educational transition between residential facilities and the return to the community.
- In the transition from the educational system to the workforce.
- In record transfer between schools when a move is unavoidable.



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Target Population

- Youth in foster care ages 14 years and older.

Initial Priority Youth:

- High School Seniors (college bound, workforce bound, military, credit recovery etc.).
- Youth that are below the appropriate grade level.
- Youth who have experienced multiple changes in placement or school.



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Data

- In November 2009, 4,686 youth 14 and older were in Michigan's foster care system.
- 989 (21.1%) of these foster youth were listed as a Special Education student.
- Education Planners will cover 4151 (88.6%) of the youth in the 28 county cluster.
- 870 (88%) of the Special Education Students.



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Location of Education Planners

- Wayne: 4 (1753)
- Macomb: 1 (325)
- Oakland: 1 (344)
- Genesee: 1 (349)
- Kent: 1 (264)
- Ingham, **Eaton**, Barry: 1 (233)
- Muskegon, Ottawa, Allegan: 1 (171)
- **Calhoun**, Kalamazoo, Branch, Hillsdale: 1 (189)
- **Jackson**, Washtenaw, Lenawee, Monroe: 1 (194)
- Isabella, Midland, Saginaw, Bay, Arenac: 1 (156)
- Berrien, **Cass**, St. Joseph, Van Buren: 1 (173)



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Educational Success & Permanency



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- Educational success is a potential positive counterweight to abuse, neglect, separation, and impermanence for foster youth.
- Positive school experiences enhance well-being, support a more successful transition to adulthood and increase chances for personal fulfillment and economic self-sufficiency, as well as the ability to contribute to society.*



*Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care, National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, December 2008.

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Educational Success Outcomes

- Children receive the education they need to make progress
- Hallmarks of progress/success
 - Graduation from HS
 - Standardized tests/performance at/above grade level
 - Attend school regularly
 - Fewer school changes
 - Fewer discipline problems
 - Receive special education services they need
 - Higher education attainable
- Improves permanency outcomes for foster youth



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Indicators of Permanency

- Increase in adoptions, reunifications and planned permanent placements
- Decrease in length of time a child is in child welfare system
- Decrease in number of living placements
- Decrease in referrals to JJ placements
- Lifetime stability



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Implications for Education Planners

- Educate Foster Care Workers and School Personnel on:
 - Implications of educational stability and school success on youth achieving permanency and overall improved well being of youth.
 - Best interest factors in determining whether a child remains within their school of origin.



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Implications for Education Planners

- Support foster care workers by collaborating with the McKinney Vento Liaisons on:
 - Developing a process for determining best interests w/caregivers, family, education liaison, and school staff.
 - Developing a process to request services and inform the school of a foster care child's needs, placement moves, etc.
 - Immediate school enrollment if not remaining in the same school.



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Implications for Education Planners

- Record transfer and documentation within 30 days.
- Developing a process between schools and DHS for transporting youth.
- Documentation of compliance with Fostering Connections and the consent decree.
- Documentation of educational needs and strengths for service plans.



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VOICE 3 – Quotes

- On College:
 - “Post-secondary education is required to get most jobs in the world today. Most foster youth cannot afford college” - Jerome
- On Success
 - “If you have that *one* person, you have a chance”
 - “Success is a do-it-yourself project” - Channel



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Educational Experiences of Youth in Foster Care

Betty & Brandon

