

# Foster Care & Education

## *COVID-19*

April 2020

### **Making Students in Foster Care a Priority During the COVID-19 Crisis: What Local Education Agencies Can Do to Help**

As schools focus on addressing the education needs of all students during the COVID-19 crisis, schools must pay attention to vulnerable student groups, including students in foster care. This challenge to address education is intensified during this unprecedented time with most public school systems closed throughout the country. When schools partner with child welfare agencies successfully, both agencies can work to meet the needs of children in foster care and keep them on track for educational success. Schools can start by focusing on three major areas: collaborating with child welfare partners; providing direct support to students and their caretakers; and giving priority attention to students in foster care with disabilities.

#### **TIPS FOR LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES (LEAs)**

##### **1. Partner with Child Welfare Agencies**

- **Create new and maintain existing collaborations with child welfare agency partners.** Remember, child welfare agencies are also responding to the COVID-19 crisis and attempting to provide for the safety, permanency, and well-being of all children in the child welfare system.
- **Provide child welfare partners clear information about what is being offered** to children and families and how they can help message and connect those students and families with the support and opportunities the LEA is and will be providing.
- **Ensure all youth in care are benefiting from the food and meals** offered during school closures. Free school meals (all children in foster care are categorically eligible) are a fundamental support for children and families in foster care.
- **ESSA school stability rules still apply.** School stability, even when living placements change (including remaining in a school of origin if in the child's best interest or immediately enrolling in a new school), will be important to continue even during building closures.

- **Maintain clear information about where children are living and attending school during this crisis**, and if any living placement changes occur. This helps ensure their seamless transitions back to school when districts reopen. While placement and school stability should still be paramount, it is anticipated that this crisis will result in moving some children in foster care (i.e., health issues with caretakers; stressors of caring for special needs children without school support; financial and job insecurities disrupting previously stable placements).

## 2. Connect Every Child in Foster Care with School Resources

- **Include foster families and youth in targeted outreach efforts by your school** to connect them to meals, technology offerings (including internet connectivity, hotspots, computers, laptops and tablets), and any other services and support being provided to students in need.
- **Work with child welfare partners to minimize barriers** students and families experience to accessing these supports (i.e., help with accessing or setting up technology; rides or delivery to access meals).
- **Ensure school stability during school building closures, even if living placements change.** Maintaining school stability via virtual school offerings during closures should be prioritized for continuity with teachers, peers, and coursework. Best interest decisions can be revisited once schools reopen.

## 3. Target Support for Students in Special Education

- **Ensure individualized instruction is designed and creative solutions found to address the unique needs of students in special education** during school building closures. Remember that the student is still protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and protections still apply.
- **Target supports for students in special education and their families to ensure placement stability.** Parenting children in foster care with disabilities without the benefit of school and school-related services will add significant stressors in the home.
- **Work closely with child welfare partners to address all of the complex needs** that might arise within the family of the child with special needs to increase supports and ensure a coordinated response.

**RESOURCES**

- **U.S. Department of Education COVID-19 webpage:**  
[www.ed.gov/coronavirus COVID-19](http://www.ed.gov/coronavirus COVID-19)
  
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Admin. on Children and Families, Children’s Bureau COVID-19 webpage:**  
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/covid-19-resources>