

Best Practices: Immediate Enrollment for Children and Youth in Foster Care

Educational Stability

In December 2015, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), and, for the first time, included specific requirements addressing the unique needs of students in foster care. These provisions also ensure that, if it is not in their best interest to remain in their schools of origin, students in foster care are enrolled in their new schools without delay. Promoting greater stability for students in foster care is essential so that they can continue their education without disruption, maintain important relationships with peers and adults, and have the opportunity to graduate from high school and achieve college- and career-readiness.

What does “Immediate enrollment” mean?

Immediate enrollment means that, if a Best Interest Determination process indicates that it is in a student in foster care’s best interest to change schools, the student is fully enrolled, **even without typically required documents**, as soon as practicable (e.g., within 3 business days) to avoid educational discontinuity. A student is not fully enrolled if a student is not attending school or fully participating in classes, extracurricular activities, and out-of-school and summer opportunities.

What records should the enrolling school request from the school of origin?

The enrolling school should request all records typically required for enrollment, as well as records relevant to that student’s prior academic experience. Such records might include:

- Immunization records
- Academic transcripts
- Class enrollment history, including any advanced or remedial courses
- Attendance records
- An IEP or 504 plan, if applicable
- Other records necessary or required by the receiving district



How quickly should the school of origin transfer records to the enrolling school?

To minimize educational discontinuity and to ensure that the student can fully participate in coursework and extracurricular activities at their enrolling school, the school of origin is required per [RCW 28A.225.330](#) to provide relevant records to the enrolling school within two (2) business days.

Once a student in foster care is enrolled, can the enrolling school require documentation typically required for student enrollment?

Yes. Once a student in foster care is immediately enrolled in their new school, the student and their caregivers are responsible for providing the documents typically required for enrollment in the school. The immediate enrollment requirement is intended to ensure educational stability for students in foster care and, as such, ensure that students are not unduly delayed from coursework due to school transitions. Once a student in foster care is enrolled in their new school, the educational agency should work with the relevant child welfare agencies to gather any outstanding records required for enrollment.

Enrollment Strategies

Foster Care Liaisons and Building Points of Contact should collaborate with DCYF, local Tribal Child Welfare, and DSHS' Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program to establish an enrollment protocol for students in foster care. Potential strategies include:

- Work with DCYF and other child welfare agencies to create enrollment procedures for youth in foster care.
- Ensure necessary staff are informed of the enrollment protocol for students in foster care by providing staff training.
- Share [Foster Care Guidance for Secretaries and Registrars](#) with school secretaries and registrars so they better understand the unique enrollment requirements of students in foster care.
- Determine the average length of time it takes between when students attempt to enroll and when they actually are participating fully in school, and create processes to shorten this time, if needed.
- Have counselors meet with caregivers and youth during registration to eliminate the need for additional trips to the school to arrange services for students in foster care.
- Accept previous school records directly from caregivers or child welfare staff.
- Contact the previous school for assistance with placement decisions until records are received.
- Create new school records for students whose records are damaged or missing.