

# Foster Care Building Points of Contact

Students in foster care have unique educational needs that often go unnoticed; they also have specific rights under [federal and state law](#). The building point of contact should know which students in the school are in foster care and what rights those students have.

**Day 1: Welcoming Students to a New School** When students in foster care must change schools, several vital objectives should be completed on the student's first day. If the student has an [IEP or 504 plan](#), connect with their special education teacher or case manager immediately. Ask the DCYF caseworker to complete a [School Notification Form](#).



Building points of contact should ensure the student:

- ☐ Has someone to welcome them, introduce them to key people at the school (teachers, school counselor, principal), and give them a tour of the school.
- ☐ Has their schedule and knows how to get to class.
- ☐ Is provided all necessary school supplies.
- ☐ Knows where the cafeteria is and the process for getting lunch.
- ☐ Knows how they are getting to and from school.
- ☐ Knows how to find their locker, the bathrooms, the nurse's office, etc.

**Weeks 1 and 2: Helping Students Settle into a New School** Building points of contact should ensure:

- ☐ All [fees/fines](#) are paid (sports, books, etc.).
- ☐ Student has online access to grades and homework.
- ☐ Student and caregiver know the attendance policy of the school. Student has an adult to help with homework.
- ☐ Student and caregiver know about available extracurricular activities.
- ☐ Student has access to necessary technology (WiFi in the home, Chromebook/Tablet, etc.).

## Who is in "foster care"?

Students who are the "subject of a dependency proceeding" qualify for the foster care provisions. Students may be in a foster home, relative placement, group home, trial-return-home or other placement deemed suitable by child welfare. In Washington state, the primary child welfare agency is the [Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#) (DCYF), although students under the sole jurisdiction of tribal child welfare and Unaccompanied Refugee Minors also qualify.

## Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as Reauthorized by the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA 2015\)](#)

### KEY PROVISIONS:

**School Placement [Best Interest Determinations](#):** Children placed into foster care must remain in their school of origin, even when placed outside the district, unless a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest.

**[Immediate Enrollment](#) and [Records Transfers](#):** If a determination is made that remaining in the school of origin is not in a child's best interest, the student must be immediately enrolled in their new school. Enrollment must not be denied or delayed because documents [normally required for enrollment](#) have not been provided.

**Collaboration:** School Districts and OSPI are required to collaborate with child welfare agencies.

**[Transportation](#):** Students in foster care are entitled to transportation to school of origin, even if it's outside of the school or district boundaries.

# Point of Contact Best Practice



## Academics

- ♦ Connect with your [district foster care liaison](#) to identify students in your school. Communicate regularly about any issues or concerns.
- ♦ Respect the student's privacy. Be discreet about their involvement in the child welfare system. Check with the student before disclosing their status.
- ♦ Ensure the school has a complete academic record for the student, including current [IEP or 504 plan](#), transcripts, and other support plans such as the [High School and Beyond](#)

**More Information can be found in the [Guide to Supporting Children in Foster Care](#)**

[Plan](#) (HSBP), if applicable. Help track down missing records or documents to complete the student's record.

- ♦ Work with the school to facilitate [on-time grade level progression](#) and graduation by consolidating unresolved coursework and providing alternative opportunities for credit accrual.
- ♦ Provide excused absences and make up opportunities for time missed for mental health & medical appointments, court attendance, parent/sibling visits, or other child welfare appointments. [Best Practices for Improved Attendance](#)

## Connections and Support:

- ♦ Engage the student in the school community. Inform them of and help them join extracurricular activities, regardless of their enrollment date.
- ♦ Connect students with [learning activities outside of school](#). Research shows that creating optimal conditions for learning wherever kids spend time can boost student motivation and engagement—whether in or out of school
- ♦ Identify and communicate with adult advocates and decision-makers involved with the student. Remember the decision-maker may still be the child's parents (even if not living with them) or another person appointed in that role. Also, communicate with the student's caseworker, foster parent, attorney, [Treehouse education staff](#), [guardian ad litem](#), and [court-appointed advocate](#).
- ♦ Ensure the student has at least [one supportive adult](#) at school. If not, help them to identify a teacher, counselor, coach, or other trusted adult. Consider cultivating trust with [one-on-one time](#).

## School Culture

- ♦ Understand the [impact of trauma](#) and be aware that most students in foster care have experienced some form of trauma. Use [trauma-informed strategies](#) when engaging students in foster care.
- ♦ Support an [inclusive](#) and [culturally responsive](#) school community, where all students feel welcome.
- ♦ Listen to and amplify [student voice](#), particularly for [historically marginalized](#) populations.