

Foster Care Guidance for Secretaries and Registrars

Definition of Foster Care

Students are in foster care if they are in the custody of Washington state due to abuse and/or neglect, regardless of living arrangement. Foster care is intended to be a temporary solution until a permanent living arrangement is found.

Students who qualify as foster care are students who are the “subject of a dependency proceeding” (under the placement and care responsibility of DCYF) which include:

- Foster Home
- Residential Facility
- Relative
- Group Home
- Emergency Shelter
- Pre-adoptive Home
- Trial-Return-Home
- Includes Tribal Child Welfare and Unaccompanied Refugee Minors

Foster Care Student Rights

Foster care students are protected both federally and in Washington State to ensure their educational stability. These are some rights to be aware of as a secretary or registrar.

- Immediate Enrollment
 - Enrollment **must not be denied or delayed** because documents normally required for enrollment have not been provided. This includes:
 - Medical records, immunization records, health plans or documentation of life threatening conditions including medications.
- Transportation
 - Foster Care Students are entitled to transportation to their school of origin (the school they were attending when they went into placement) for the duration of their time in foster care.
- Unexpected or Excessive Absences
 - Districts are required to monitor unexpected or excessive absences of dependent youth.
 - Districts must proactively support the youth’s schoolwork, so the student does not fall behind and to avoid suspension or expulsion based on truancy.



Best Interest Determinations

When a student enters foster care or experiences a placement change while in foster care, the school they are attending at the time is their school of origin. The change in placement triggers a process that requires a Best Interest Determination Meeting. This meeting involves multiple stakeholders from school, child welfare, and guardians meeting to determine which school is in the best interest of the student. While that meeting is scheduled and takes place, the student in foster care will remain in their school of origin. **Students in foster care should not be enrolled in or unenrolled from a school unless this meeting has taken place.** *You can find more information about Best Interest Determinations [here](#).*

Role of Secretary/Registrar

Your role is very important in getting Foster Care students access to the services they are entitled to because you may be the first person to be in contact with them, their social worker, and/or their new foster parent/caregiver when they arrive at your school.

- Inform the district foster care liaison immediately about the enrollment of foster care student. *Don't know who your district Foster Care Liaison is? You can find them [here](#).*
- Notify your Building Point of Contact that the student is in foster care. *Don't know who your school Building Point of Contact is? You can find them [here](#).*
- Check with your district to see if there is a process/procedure you must follow when students enter foster care.
- Enroll the child immediately, even if they lack records normally required for enrollment. The immediate enrollment of foster care students without records normally required is mandated under law.
- If a student is in foster care, forward copies of any forms filled out by DCYF/CPS for the child, to the Foster Care Liaison within 24 hours of receipt. For example, the [School Notification Form](#).
- In your district student information system, we recommend (but it is not required) to designate:
 - Family 1: Foster parent/caregiver
 - Family 2: Caseworker (should receive all academic information like grades, schedule, attendance, testing results etc.)
 - Family 3: Biological Family (unless the court has revoked their educational rights/decision making)

Role of the Foster Care Liaison

The Foster Care Liaison and Foster Care Building Point of Contact will work with the Foster Care student to get them the services they are entitled to by law.

Once the Foster Care Liaison has been notified of foster care student they will:

- Coordinate transportation
- Schedule a Best Interest Determination Meeting
- Communicate with the Director of Food Services (free meals at school)
- Ensure students fee and fines are paid by DCYF
- Contact family to determine any additional education needs
- Notify appropriate school staff as to the students who are in foster care

Alternative Education Enrollments and/or Unenrollment

Per [WAC 110-148-1525](#), alternative learning experience instruction is prohibited for all children in the care and custody of DCYF, unless approved by a court ruling. The alternative learning experience (ALE) is public education where some or all of the instruction is delivered outside of a regular classroom schedule. If there is an attempt to enroll a student into an ALE program within a school district or outside of the school district, please contact your school district Foster Care Liaison immediately.