

Best Practices: Best Interest Determination Meeting Process

1) Notification

DCYF notifies the LEA of origin of a new placement in foster care or when a change in foster care placement occurs through the School Notification Form. A change in foster care placement triggers the Best Interest Determination process.

- The School Notification Form can be accessed at <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/node/1812>

2) Schedule Best Interest Determination Meeting

Upon receipt of the School Notification Form, the Foster Care Liaison of both the School of Origin and the receiving district will schedule the Best Interest Meeting in collaboration with the DCYF Regional Education Lead. LEAs, in collaboration with child welfare agencies, are encouraged to complete a BIDM process **within three (3) business days** of the time of placement in foster care. In situations where a student will experience a planned foster care placement change, LEAs and child welfare agencies are encouraged to complete the BIDM process prior to the planned placement change.

- [Sample Scheduling Email](#)

3) Attendees and Formats

Anyone who can add meaningful input regarding the student and which school placement is in their best interest should attend. To reduce the size and attendance of Best Interest Determinations, if there are multiple people from an agency that have input, please designate one (1) person to attend the meeting on behalf of the agency. Format for the meeting should be decided based on participants ability to attend. A list of suggested attendees can be found [here](#).

- [Sample Meeting Agenda](#)

If a necessary or optional attendee cannot attend the meeting, they can submit their considerations and comments to the school district Foster Care Liaison or DCYF Regional Education Lead on the Attendee Input Form.

- [Attendee Input Form](#)



4) Meeting Procedure

Input from participants is vital in making informed decisions regarding school placement. There are many factors to consider for student stability and success. The meeting is a collaborative process and is focused on the Best Interest of the student. It is not a determination made by one agency or person.

- [Considerations and Questions for Best Interest Determination Meeting](#)

5) Best Interest Determination: Stay at School of Origin

If the determination is to remain in the school of origin, the next steps are: 1) arrange transportation and 2) ensure that the school Building Point of Contact is aware of student status.

- [School Placement Decision](#)
- [Transportation Shared Cost Procedure](#)

6) Best Interest Determination: Move to New School

If the determination is to move to a new school, the next steps are: 1) expedite transfer of records; 2) arrange transportation; and 3) communicate with LEA peers at new school for a warm hand-off.

- [School Placement Decision](#)
- [Enrollment Guidance](#)

School Determination

Parties to the Best Interest Determination process must presume that remaining in the school of origin is in the student's best interest, unless the Best Interest Determination meeting suggests that attending another school, including any public school the student has attended previously, is in the student's best interest.

Purpose of Best Interest Determination Meetings

To ensure the Best Interest Determination meeting focuses on the well-being and educational success of each student, the decision-making process should be fair and unbiased. Best Interest Determinations must happen when there is a change in placement for the student in foster care.

Best Interest Determinations are not intended to review educational or behavioral concerns, address crises, or reconsider a previous decision because a school is struggling to meet the student's needs. Best Interest meetings are also separate from IEP meetings and do not replace that process. An exception to this rule is if the student expresses a preference to return to a previous school, in which case a Best Interest Meeting may be scheduled to reassess school stability.

If you have any questions about when and how to conduct a Best Interest Determination, please reach out to the Foster Care Education team at OSPI by emailing fostercare@k12.wa.us

Documenting Best Interest Determination Meetings

To keep track of your school district Best Interest Determination Meetings, you can download and customize the [Example: Best Interest Determination Tracking Database](#). This will allow your school district to have documentation of these required meetings.

Special Circumstances to Best Interest Determination Meetings

A Best Interest Determination Meeting is triggered when there is a change in placement for the student in foster care. However, there are rare circumstances in which a meeting to discuss an educational transition may take place.

Examples of these circumstances include (but aren't limited to):

- If a student is moved to a foster care placement far away (for example, Seattle to Spokane, or Vancouver to Moses Lake) an educational transition meeting would be appropriate as opposed to the Best Interest Determination Meeting since the school of origin is not a feasible option.
- A student requests a school change due to safety, academic, or access concerns. Student voice is imperative to understanding their educational journey. If they have concerns about their ability to achieve educational stability and success, then an educational transition meeting may be warranted.
- A natural transition point such as summer. If a student is transitioning into a feeder school in the upcoming school year or has had a defined change in placement that is long term, an educational transition meeting may be warranted.
- If there is a restraining order surrounding the student that prevents them from attending their school of origin, an educational transition meeting will need to be held.

These special circumstances are on a case-by-case basis. Please reach out to the OSPI Foster Care team if you have any questions.

Short Term Placements

Students in foster care may be moved to a foster home or DCYF facility for a short term or temporary placement. One example of this is when students are moved to another foster home during respite for their normal foster home caregivers. These situations are not necessarily considered a change in placement as they are temporary. During this time, if possible, the school of origin should provide educational and academic support to maintain the school of origin rights. Whether it is through online assignments or physical paper homework, the student has a right to continue their educational career during the short term placement without school disruption.