

Homeless and Foster Youth Guidelines for School Staff

District Liaison

Every School District has a designated Homeless Youth Liaison and Foster Youth Liaison. In your district this may not be the same person. The role of the liaison is to assist with immediate enrollment, determine appropriate placement, arrange transportation, and guarantee smooth transfer of records. Know the name and phone numbers of your liaison(s) and notify him/her when foster or homeless youth first enroll. Refer all questions or concerns about the enrollment or treatment of homeless and foster youth to the liaison.

Immediate Enrollment

Unlike other children, homeless and foster youth must be immediately enrolled in school. Immediate enrollment is generally defined as the same or the following day. Even if the child is unable to produce records such as proof of immunizations, birth certificate, proof of residency or possess the clothing normally required for school enrollment, he or she must be enrolled. Arrangements can be made to obtain records as soon as possible, but lack of documentation should not prevent immediate enrollment. An unaccompanied youth -- that is a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian -- also has the right to immediate enrollment.

School Records

Homeless and foster youth may have attended many schools in a short period of time so school records may be scattered. Get a thorough educational history from the parent so that the appropriate records can be obtained. Try to determine if the youth was receiving special education services. If so, it is important to notify the school or district special education coordinator.

School records for foster youth must be requested from previous schools within two business days of enrollment. The previous school must transfer the records within two days and may not refuse because of unpaid fines or other restrictions. Federal law allows school records to be transferred to the new school without a parent's signature. A student may not be dis-enrolled from a school or penalized because school records have not been received. If this occurs contact your district liaison.

Because of the necessity of immediate enrollment it can be difficult to place children in the appropriate classroom setting. It may be necessary to contact the previous school by phone to determine the grade of the child, whether they were receiving special ed services or a 504 Plan, to learn of any behavioral concerns or whether the student was suspended or expelled. Former teachers, counselors or administrators can be contacted to determine this information.

Emergency Card

Homeless youth often lack a fixed residence. Therefore they may not have a permanent address or telephone. Be sensitive when requesting this information

and try to get appropriate emergency contact information. Ask parents to update the information as it changes.

With foster youth it is important to know who has legal custody of the child. Encourage the social worker and/or probation officer to keep the school informed of any changes in custody.

Access to Records

For foster youth, the person holding education rights may not be the parent(s) or even the foster parent. If there is a question about educational rights, ask your district foster youth liaison. Schools must provide the person holding educational rights, the social worker, and/or probation officer access to all of a child's records.

When a homeless or foster youth enrolls in another district, you may not withhold the transfer of records to the new district because of missing textbooks or unpaid fines.

Student Grades and Credits

If a foster youth's residential placement is changed, the child's grades and credits must be calculated as of the date the child left school. No lowering of grades is allowed to occur as a result of a change of placement. Partial credits must be calculated. If the child is absent from school due to a verified court appearance or related court ordered activity, no lowering of his or her grades may occur as the result of the absence. Schools must accept for credit full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed by the pupil while attending public, juvenile court school, or nonpublic, non-sectarian school even if the school is not accredited.