



Education Practice Guide

for School-Aged Children and Youth

This practice guide supports the completion of Education Assessments for all school-aged children and youth served by CFSA. It also provides general information on education for parents, foster parents, attorneys, social workers, supervisors and SSAs.

Educational Decision Maker/Parental Engagement

Throughout a child's life, there are important decisions to be made related to their education. These decisions range from where to enroll in school, what classes an older youth needs to take towards graduation, or if a child or youth may need to be evaluated for special education services. When children are in foster care, it is not always clear who has the authority or right to make these decisions. Social workers must be aware of the legal mandates to understand who has the right and/or authority to make educational decisions on behalf of a child or youth. In addition, the agency and social worker should always take extreme care to assure that the child's birth parents are involved in the planning to the greatest extent possible.

A parent (birth or adoptive) or legal guardian maintains the legal right and authority to serve and participate as an educational decision maker for his/her child/youth unless:

- The child/youth reaches the age of majority based on the state's regulations,
- A court has terminated parental or guardian rights, or
- An authorized entity appoints an Educational Surrogate Parent (ESP) to make decisions related to special education.

In DC, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has the authority to appoint Educational Surrogate Parents (ESPs) to act on behalf of children/youth in need, or suspected of being in need of special education services who do not have a "parent" to make special education decisions on their behalf. The ESP Program appoints trained volunteers to act as special education decision makers. Social workers and other members of the public agency **cannot** serve as Surrogate Parents for children in special education.

Social workers must understand the role of educational decision makers and Educational Surrogate Parents for students on their caseload. Following are guidelines for determining a child's/youth's educational decision maker.

- If the parent is involved, willing, or able to serve as an educational decision maker, the social worker must encourage and support the parent in planning for his/her child's/youth's education.
- If the student's parent is deceased or has had parental rights terminated (TPR) and is suspected of needing or is enrolled in Special Education, CFSA will refer the child/youth to OSSE for appointment of a surrogate parent and notify DC Superior Court, Family Court. For children in regular education, educational decisions can be made between the foster parent and social worker only if the parent is not able or willing to do so.
- If CFSA has attempted to locate the parent and cannot find him/her and the child is in or is suspected of needing Special Education, CFSA will refer the student's case to OSSE and notify DC Superior Court,



Family Court. If OSSE is unable to locate the parent, it will assign an Educational Surrogate Parent.

- If the parent is involved in the case but does not actively participate in planning for the child/youth, or there are concerns about that parent's ability to serve as an educational decision maker, the social worker will consult with his/her supervisor, the CFSA Education Specialists as needed, and the AAG to determine the appropriateness of filing a motion with DC Superior Court, Family Court for appointment of an Educational Attorney and/or transfer decision-making to another individual involved on the case (i.e. foster parent, relative).

While social workers do not have the authority to act as or to appoint an ESP for children in special education, they have an important role in ensuring that a child or youth's educational goals and needs are met. Social workers and other child welfare staff often have valuable information that will help DC Superior Court, Family Court or OSSE determine who the educational decision maker should be. For example, a foster parent can be appointed as an ESP, but stability of the placement and the foster parent's commitment to remaining involved in the child's/youth's long-term educational planning should be considered. Additionally, social workers should be able to advocate for appropriate educational services and assistance for all children on their caseload. Social workers who have questions about a child or youth's educational needs should first consult with his/her supervisor and when needed, request consultation with a CFSA Educational Specialist.

Enrollment and Attendance

School attendance is important for academic success. When students are absent or experience excessive tardiness, they miss important learning opportunities and run the risk of falling behind academically. Parents, caregivers, schools, and communities (both public and private entities) must work as a team to support regular and consistent school attendance.

Excused absences are typically allowed for:

- A death in the student's immediate family.
- Illness of the student. A doctor's certificate is required for an absence of more than five days.
- Observance of religious holidays.
- Medical reasons, such as doctor appointments.
- Attendance of the student at a judicial proceeding as a plaintiff, defendant, witness, or juror.

Parents, guardians, or caregivers should contact school personnel regarding other circumstances for which the student may need to be excused. When a student returns to school after an absence, the caretaker should send a note with him/her to the teacher. The note should include the dates of and reasons for the absence. They should provide a doctor's certificate for medical appointments scheduled during the school day.

Enrolling Students in School

Parents have the right to choose the type of school their children attend each school year. Examples of types of schools are public, independent (Charter), non-public/private, parochial, or home school.

Parents/guardians should enroll children who reside at home (in-home cases). The social worker should encourage the parent's/guardian's active participation in educational planning and decision making.

For answers to questions or to overcome barriers regarding school enrollment, consult an Educational Specialist.

All children/youth in out-of-home care must have a school enrollment packet completed before the first day of school and anytime the child/youth changes schools. This process must be followed for all students regardless of type of school or school jurisdiction. In addition, tuition contracts must be completed for students attending a public school outside of the District of Columbia. Specific instructions, forms, and guidance can be found online by clicking [Tip sheet for School Enrollment](#).

Home Schooling

In the District of Columbia, specific guidelines govern home schooling, and OSSE has oversight authority. General information and the regulations that govern home school instruction are available by following the “Home Schooling” link at www.osse.dc.gov. A parent or legal guardian who chooses to home school in the District must submit an “Intent to Home School Form” to OSSE (available online) for the coming school year by August 15th or at least 15 days before starting to home school.

For guidance on home schooling in other jurisdictions, contact the superintendent’s office for that state.

Addressing Class Attendance Issues

When a child repeatedly skips the same class or classes, it is important to identify the underlying issues so that an appropriate plan can be put in place. Typical reasons youth may be skipping particular classes include boredom, conflict with the teacher, or social/academic challenges.

When concerns arise about class attendance, parent(s), caregivers, social workers, and other members on the student’s team (as described in the “Teaming” sections of the CFSA Practice Models) should:

- Meet with the child/youth to find out more about what is going on. After having an idea of the issue(s), facilitate a meeting with the teacher and/or school counselor.
- Develop a behavioral plan that includes incentives/consequences. Involve youth in constructing the plan so it is meaningful to them.

Addressing Truancy and Other Attendance Issues

Truancy is willful absence from school by a minor (under age 18) with or without approval, parental knowledge, or consent. Truancy policies vary across jurisdictions. In the District, all uniformed law enforcement officers are responsible for truancy enforcement. If the police pick up a truant, s/he may be transported in a police vehicle to the Student Attendance Intervention Center. Parents are then notified and receive an intake consultation and resource support. Parents and students must then attend a truancy conference at a local school.

It is important to assess factors contributing to irregular school attendance. Explore underlying causes with parents, caregivers, and others who know the child/youth well. Parent(s), caregivers, the student’s educational decision maker, or the social worker should contact the school to see what specific interventions or protocols can be followed to address attendance issues. Schools may do investigations, develop an Attendance Intervention Plan, or convene truancy conferences.

For students attending a District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) who miss 10 or more days of school within an advisory period, the school makes a report to the CFSA hotline. After 15 unexcused absences, DCPS issues a truancy court referral through its Student Intervention Services Branch. After 20 days, DCPS officially drops the student from the school’s enrollment, and the student must then re-enroll to return to a DCPS school. After 30 or more absences, a student in secondary school receives a failing grade in that course, and a student in elementary school will not be promoted.

When youth ages 12 to 18 are habitually absent from school without justification, a Person in Need of Supervision (PINS) petition may be considered. The school typically initiates a truancy PINS petition by referring it to court social services, who screens the referral and decides whether or not to move forward. For youth 12 and over, the juvenile section of the Office of the Attorney General will file a petition against the

youth when he/she is subject to compulsory school attendance and is habitually truant, disobedient of the reasonable and lawful commands of his/her parent, guardian, or custodian, and is in need of care or rehabilitation. Additionally, a PINS case can be referred to the courts for the parent of a child under the age of 12 who is not attending school. The goal of a PINS petition is to ensure that youth are receiving necessary and proper services and are attending school; however, ultimately youth and parents could face significant penalties, including possible detention.

For DCPS guidance on attendance and truancy issues, visit their website at [DCPS Truancy](#)

Foster Care Placement Change

Sadly, many children and youth in foster care experience foster care placement disruptions. Disruptions can have an adverse impact on a child/youth school stability and academic performance. For many of these young people, their academic profiles show multiple school changes, which often results in poor educational performance and outcomes.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 sets forth an important requirement for state agencies to improve educational stability for all children in foster care. This legislation requires child welfare agencies to coordinate with local schools to ensure that children/youth remain in their school of origin, unless to do so would not be in the young person's best interest. At the point of entering foster care, the social worker, the family, the child/youth should convene a team meeting to discuss and plan for the child/youth's educational needs. (Refer to the Practice Model sections on "Teaming" to determine team composition.) The team's decisions should address where the child/youth attends school; supports needed to ensure optimum academic performance (i.e., transportation assistance, tutoring, etc); and information sharing with school(s), teachers, and other individuals working with the student in an academic capacity. Discussion of academic needs and performance should continue throughout the child's/youth's involvement in the child welfare system.

Under some circumstances, it may be in the student's best interest to change schools. Factors to consider include the potential impact on the youth's academic performance, safety, length of commute, and time remaining in the school year among others. When the team is unable to make a best-interest determination, the social worker should submit a [Universal E-Referral](#) and request an Education Planning Staffing or Consultation with a CFSA Education Specialist.

Changing an Educational Venue

When the team determines that it is in the best interest of a child/youth to transition to a new school, consider the following points.

- Can the child/youth finish the school year in his/her current school placement? If transportation is an issue, submit a universal e-Referral requesting private transportation. A CFSA Education Specialist will review the circumstances and make a determination.*
- If the child/youth must transition to the new school before the end of the school year, can s/he transition during a natural school break (i.e., semester break, vacation, etc.)?*
- Ensure the educational record is transferred to the new school within 48 hours of the change.*
- Ensure the child/youth has appropriate clothing and/or school uniforms for the first day of school.*
- Ensure that transportation is arranged through the social worker, foster parent, or private transportation (submit a universal e-Referral) for the first few days of school until permanent arrangements can be made.*
- Submit a new enrollment packet to a CFSA Education Specialist and the new school.*

Performance and Supportive Services

Educational achievement is a critical component of overall child well being. Parents, guardians, social workers, and other members of the team need to take responsibility for identifying and addressing the young person's educational needs. Since children and youth come to the attention of CFSA with a range of academic experiences and performance levels, it is important to identify and nurture strengths while also addressing areas in need of improvement.

Tips for Providing Academic Support

Ensure birth parents, foster parents, or other caregivers maintain regular contact with the child's/youth's teacher(s), school counselor, administrator, etc. Encourage them to . . .

- Express to the child/youth and reinforce expectations regarding school achievement and behavior.
- Take a regular and active interest in the child/youth's educational activities.
- Develop structured homework and study times throughout the school year and summer.
- Ensure the child/youth attends school regularly.
- Encourage the child/youth to pursue extracurricular activities.
- Get to know the child/youth's friends.
- Attend school meetings (i.e., PTA, IEP, etc.) and/or volunteer at school.
- Consistently acknowledge and reward the child's/youth's efforts at school.

Tips for Action Based on Academic Performance

• Above Grade Level and/or Demonstrates Above-Average Intellectual or Other Abilities

- Discuss with caregiver(s) their strategies to assist the student in enhancing academic performance and possible opportunities to supplement and enhance learning.
- Work with the educational decision maker to meet with the teacher to request additional work for the child/youth and to obtain recommendations for and assistance in maintaining/enhancing the child/youth's academic performance.
- Explore enrichment programs or advanced learning options within the school and community.
- For youth in high school, consider placement in college preparatory tracks or schools and Advanced Placement (AP) courses.
- Explore convening an IEP meeting to assess the child/youth for Gifted and/or Talented services.

• At Grade Level

- Discuss caregiver strategies to assist the student in enhancing academic performance and possible opportunities to supplement and enhance learning.
- Meet with individual teachers to obtain recommendations for and assistance in maintaining/enhancing academic performance.
- If the student receives special education services, obtain a copy of the IEP. Meet with the teacher and/or special education coordinator to discuss the program and determine if additional testing or strategies should be implemented or if the child/youth should be considered for placement in a less restrictive environment.
- Assist the caregiver in understanding goals and objectives of the IEP, if applicable.

• Below Grade Level

- Assess the level of parental involvement.
- Encourage increased involvement through attendance at PTA meetings, communicating consistently with teachers, and visiting the child's/youth's classroom.
- Encourage caregiver(s) to meet with the child's/youth's teacher(s) to discuss reasons for educational concerns, to identify strengths and areas needing improvement, and to develop pre-referral interventions (if available in the school district).
- Explore school- and community-based supports that will help bring the student up to grade level.
- Discuss with caregiver(s) the range of learning supports available and assist them in pursuing the appropriate actions. Potential learning supports include:
 - **Tutoring**—Review the guidelines available online at [Tutoring Tip Sheet](#) to determine if the

child/youth is eligible for tutoring services.

- **Summer School**—Discuss with caregiver(s) if the child/youth could benefit from the additional academic support that summer school provides.
- **Retention**—Discuss with caregiver(s) if it is in the child's/youth's best interest to remain in the same grade for an additional school year to master the appropriate grade-level knowledge and skills.
- **Evaluation/Testing**—Request, or Family Court may order, a developmental or psycho-educational evaluation (depending on the age of the child) to determine whether a specific learning or other disability may be affecting academic performance.

When suggestions above do not help to improve academic performance of children/youth performing below grade level, consider the following options:

Student Support Team Meeting

With the caretaker or educational decision maker, explore the possibility of requesting a Student Support Team (SST) or similar meeting through the school, which may include developing a Response-to-Intervention (R-t-I) Plan. For more information, visit [DCPS Student Support Team](#) online.

Special Education

Discuss with the educational decision maker whether they wish to request a formal evaluation for special education services for the child/youth. For more information, visit [DCPS Special Education](#) online.



Section 504

Some children with disabilities may not qualify for accommodations under the IDEA but may be entitled under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, if they have a disability that “substantially limits a major life activity”. While Section 504 does not specifically mention learning disabilities, learning is considered a major life activity.

If the caregiver believes the child/youth should qualify for protections under Section 504, contact the school about an evaluation. If an evaluation is warranted and the child/youth is deemed eligible for services under Section 504, a team composed of the caregiver and various school personnel will meet to consider

the child's/youth's disability, how it affects the child's/youth's education, and what services would be most appropriate to help the child/youth and to develop a 504 Accommodation Plan.

A 504 Accommodation Plan outlines modifications necessary for the child/youth to have the opportunity to perform at the same level as his/her peers. For more information, visit [FAQ_Education of Children with Disabilities](#) online.

Health and Well Being

To be enrolled in school, a child/youth must be current on immunizations. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommended immunization schedule can be found online at [Center for Disease Control](#).

If you find a child/youth on your caseload is not up to date on immunizations, discuss this with the parent/guardian. When the parent is unable to provide information or to get the young person properly immunized, consult a nurse in the CFSA Office of Clinical Practice (OCP).

If a child/youth is demonstrating troubling behaviors at school, explore internal school resources first, including contacting the teacher or guidance counselor. If the child/youth is connected to a Core Service

Agency, contact the child's/youth's community support worker for consultation. If the child/youth needs to be connected to a Core Service Agency for therapeutic support, submit an OCP Medical Service Referral form.

If a child/youth is having a mental health crisis and needs emergency intervention, Children and Adolescents Mobile Psychiatric Services (ChAMPS) provides professional clinical staff 24 hours a day for crisis intervention. They can be reached at **202-561-7000 or 202-481-1450**.

If the child/youth demonstrates continuing discipline problems in school, the parent or educational decision maker can request a Student Support Team (SST) meeting through the school (as mentioned under "Performance and Supportive Services" above). The team, including the parent, will assess the student's academic and behavioral challenges in order to identify goals and support strategies. For additional information about accessing the Student Support Team, visit [DCPS Student Support Team](#) online.

Special Education Services

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act Amendments of 2004 is a federal special education law that requires schools to provide a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities. These services are described in the student's Individual Education Program (IEP). The Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) must review a child's/youth's IEP at least once a year. The team reviews to see whether the child/youth is achieving his/her annual goals and to revise the educational program as needed. The team may review and revise an IEP more often at either the request of the school or the educational decision-maker. If concerns arise about appropriateness and/or implementation of a student's IEP, the parent or educational decision-maker should first address the issue with the school. However, if concerns persist, contact the DCPS Critical Response Team at 202-442-5400 for assistance. The CFSA Educational Specialist may also be contacted for support.

Supportive Services

If an Educational Assessment indicates supportive services needs, OCP's Innovative Family Support Service Administration provides the following education support services for all CFSA involved families:

- Tutoring
- Transportation (public and private options)
- Education Consultation and Staffings



To access these services, please submit a universal e-Referral (available on the Intranet) to cfsa.ftmu@dc.gov. Please attach a copy of the Education Assessment.

Additional Resources and Links

Individual jurisdictions may have specific requirements and guidelines. Visit the following websites for further guidance:

- **District of Columbia schools:** <http://dcps.dc.gov>
- **DC Charter Schools:** <http://www.dcpubliccharter.com/>
- **Maryland schools:** <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org> **Virginia schools:** <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/>

If you have additional questions after reviewing this Tip Sheet, consult an Education Specialist at CFSA or your agency.