



STATE OF GEORGIA
Division of Family and Children Services

Nathan Deal
Governor

Bobby D. Cagle
Director

January 30, 2017

Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal No. 2017-02

To: County Departments of Family and Children Services
DFCS Regional Directors
State Staff

From: Bobby D. Cagle, Director
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

Re: Child Welfare Policy Manual:
Chapter 10: Foster Care
10.13 Educational Needs
10.16 Childcare and Early Education
10.23 Case Planning

Purpose

The purpose of this Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal (CWSMT) is to announce revisions to Chapter 10 of the Child Welfare Policy Manual regarding educational stability, childcare and early education for children in foster care.

Discussion

10.13 Educational Needs

Research has shown that many children enter foster care already behind in school. In addition to the trauma of being removed from their homes, many of these children experience frequent changes in the school they attend. This increases their risk of falling further behind academically not to mention having to navigate new social norms at each new school. The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) believes that children in foster care need and deserve a positive school experience. It not only enhances their well-being, but also helps them successfully transition to adulthood. In addition, it increases their chances for personal fulfillment and economic self-sufficiency.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (FCA) requires that children who enter foster care remain in the same school they were attending prior to the removal. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 further emphasizes the importance of partnership between state and local educational agencies and child welfare agencies to ensure educational stability for children in foster care. In June 2016, the U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Health and Human Services (HHS) released a joint, non-regulatory guidance on the new ESSA foster care provisions that aims to underscore the need for these

agencies to collaborate on this important issue. DFCS has updated policy provisions to meet the requirements of this law, including:

1. The development of an Educational Stability Plan (ESP) for children in foster care. Consistent with the Every Student Succeeds Act, emphasis is placed on the fact that educational and child welfare agencies have a joint responsibility in this endeavor which requires consistent collaboration.
 - a. The ESP is to be developed within 30 days of a child entering foster care as part of the initial case planning process and updated at intervals consistent with the Case Plan, but no later than every six months.
 - b. The ESP and assurances must be included in the case plan.
2. The Wellbeing Section, Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation Unit (EPAC) has assigned an Education Support Monitor (ESM) to each DFCS region to assist with developing Educational Stability Plans and working in partnership with local educational agencies. The ESM will also help counties address disputes and other issues according to the dispute resolution process established with local educational agencies.

10.23 Case Planning

This policy was updated to include references to policy 10.13 Foster Care: Educational Needs to ensure that the Educational Stability Plans and assurances are incorporated into the case plan.

10.16 Childcare and Early Education

DFCS recognizes that young children (birth to 5 years of age) in foster care need to be connected to programs in their community that support early development and increase school readiness. In an effort to help these young children access early education and support the achievement of developmental milestones, policy 10.16 has been expanded to address both childcare and early education. Consequently, the title of the section has been changed to "Childcare and Early Education." The policy section:

1. Requires that all children birth to five years of age in foster care are enrolled in an early care and education program licensed by the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), and participating in Quality Rated, Georgia's tiered quality rating and improvement system (www.QualityRated.org). This includes:
 - a. Childcare programs;
 - b. Head Start and Early Head Start programs; and
 - c. Pre-K programs.

NOTE: Children in foster care are categorically eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start.
2. Updates the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) requirements to reflect program changes as the program no longer differentiates program requirements for foster parents and non-foster parents.
 - a. All families caring for children in DFCS custody have the same eligibility requirements.
 - b. Due to recent changes in CAPS policy, caregivers no longer have to meet a work requirement to be eligible for CAPS. As long as a child is in DFCS' custody, the caregiver's activity is 'protecting the child', which eliminates the need for employment verification.

- c. DFCS case managers now submit the Childcare Application and Referral for Child in DFCS Custody (Form 57) for all children in DFCS custody.
3. Provides additional information in the Practice Guidance section for Head Start, Early Head Start and Georgia's Pre-K Programs.

Implementation

This policy update is effective upon the release of this manual transmittal and is available on the Online Directives Information System (ODIS) at <http://odis.dhs.ga.gov/>.

Regional and County Leadership shall provide opportunities for staff to review and discuss the updated policy to ensure implementation. Please refer to Administration policy: 1.3 Access, Distribution and Review of Child Welfare Policies for the applicable requirements and procedures for policy review.

Questions regarding this policy release may be directed to the Field Program Specialist in your region. Regional staff may submit questions to the PPPDUnit@dhs.ga.gov.