



Georgia Division of Family and Children Services  
Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation Services

# Field Practice Guide for Educational Stability

## Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care

Education is critical to every child’s well-being and future success. Foster youth face many challenges on their road to academic success. Their exposure and experiences before and during foster care can have a real and devastating impact on their education. They may have experienced various forms of trauma including, but not limited to, abuse and/or neglect; separation from their families; and/or multiple school changes. With these occurrences, many children in foster care have emotional and behavioral challenges, developmental and cognitive barriers, high rates of school absenteeism, and disciplinary issues. Without proper support and intervention, poor academic performance, grade level retention, and high drop-out rates can and often result.

This Field Practice Guide for Educational Stability has been developed to assist Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) Case Managers and other direct service staff in navigating, understanding and administering policies, procedures, and practices established to improve educational outcomes for children and youth involved in the child welfare system. The more vigilant and committed we are as an agency to improving educational well-being outcomes, the more our performance will improve the safety and permanency for the children and youth we serve.

To assist the Division in ensuring the educational well-being of children and youth in foster care within Georgia, the Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation (EPAC) Unit was established. The unit is comprised of a team of Education Support Monitors (ESM) who provide education consultation to Case Managers and other direct service staff to promote educational stability.

academic supports and services.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act requires assurances of educational stability for children in foster care. The law requires certain activities to promote educational stability for children in foster care. It is important Case Managers partner with the EPAC staff and Local Education Agencies in the following activities to ensure educational stability and positive academic outcomes.

- Case Managers must refer children and youth between the ages of 5 to 17 years old to EPAC within 72 hours of entering foster care.

**A DFCS Student Educational Stability Plan (ESP) must be completed and uploaded by the DFCS Case Manager into GA SHINES for all school-age youth in foster care (5-17 years old). This document provides valuable information for Case Managers to utilize in case planning. A child does not have to be referred to EPAC in order for an ESP to be completed and uploaded into GA SHINES.**

- Case Managers should proactively consult with their regional Education Support Monitor regarding all educational issues including, but not limited to: Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), 504 Plans, Response to Interventions (RTI), Tribunals, Disciplinary Issues, etc.
- Case Managers should contact EPAC immediately regarding any situation that could result in a disruption of the educational stability of a youth in foster care.



# Educational Stability Practice Guidance

## Ensure the Appropriateness of the Child's Educational Setting

The DFCS Case Manager is responsible for ensuring the foster youth is in the appropriate educational setting. To assess educational setting appropriateness, the Case Manager must consider the following:

### PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✎ Ask the foster parent/custodian to sign releases of information in the event parent involvement is not immediately possible or accessible.
- ✎ Contact the “child’s school” (home school/ school of origin) when a child enters foster care to request social and educational information.
- ✎ Work with school administrators, CASA, ESM, and foster parents to determine if remaining in the school of origin is in the child’s best interest.
- ✎ Involve the foster parent/custodian/caregiver/ EPAC ESM in all education decisions. Communication is important!
- ✎ Pre-removal conferences or Family Team Meetings (FTM) are ideal settings for discussion of the educational needs of the child. Be sure to ask your regional EPAC ESM to participate.

## Child Should Reside in Close Proximity to the Home School

The stability and support the child receives at his/her current school may be the most stable area in his/her life during difficult times. The child should remain in his/her home school, unless not in the child’s best interest.

### PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✎ When a contractor or provider is involved in selection of the foster care placement, the Case Manager must ensure they have the educational information needed.

- ✎ Lack of transportation or lack of available foster homes is not an acceptable reason to move a child to a different school.
- ✎ Ask the foster parent/caregiver if they are willing to transport the child outside of the designated school zone.
- ✎ Utilize Family Team Meetings or pre-removal conferences to explore transportation options.

## Partner with the Local Education Agencies

Federal law requires that state child welfare agencies collaborate with local education agencies to improve educational stability for children in foster care. Local education agencies include the public or private schools, or districts. In accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), every school district must identify a Point of Contact (POC) for DFCS and have a Transportation Plan that outlines transportation procedures relative to ensuring children remain in their school of origin.

### PRACTICE TIPS:

- ✎ When a child enters foster care, contact the school of origin to obtain all applicable school records.
- ✎ If it is determined that a child will be moved to a new school, the child must be immediately enrolled in the new school.
- ✎ Attend education meetings.
- ✎ Ensure the EPAC ESM is made aware of any and all education meetings.






***Educational Stability is a TEAM effort!***

## Use of Technology to Support Educational Stability

DFCS has a data sharing agreement with the GA Department of Education (GaDOE). With this agreement, DFCS Case Managers have access to the GaDOE Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) which provides educational records of youth in the education system. This system also documents whether or not a child is a student with a disability (SWD) which informs the Case Manager of the existence of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).



### PRACTICE TIPS:

-  Ensure that every school-aged child in foster care has a GA Testing Identification Number (GTID) listed in SHINES. This 10-digit number can be found on Georgia Milestone Standardized Test results or other school documents and is often referred to as the child's "State ID".
-  Utilize the access to the SLDS to secure and upload attendance records and unofficial transcripts into GA SHINES.
-  Always update the Educational Detail Page in GA SHINES to reflect the most current educational information.

## Attendance and Transfer of Records (Within 30 Days)

Georgia law requires every school-aged child in foster care, ages 6-16, to be enrolled as a full-time elementary or secondary school student or to have completed secondary school. DFCS is responsible for ensuring when a child in foster care changes schools, the receiving school receives academic transcripts within 30 days of notification from the DFCS Case Manager. Children must be *immediately* enrolled in their new school even when all documents are not available. A child should miss no more than one (1) day of school during the transfer process.

### PRACTICE TIPS:




-  Establish a tracking system to track 30-day requirement.
-  Follow-up with the receiving school to ensure they received transcripts. Work with schools to resolve any barriers.

**NOTE:** Policy reference "Educational Needs" 10.13

## Support Educational Stability through Child Protective Services

An unaccompanied youth is defined as a youth not living in the physical custody of his/her parent or guardian who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night time residence. Youth that meet this definition, are eligible for services through McKinney-Vento. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) requires that the needs of homeless children be addressed.

### PRACTICE TIPS:


-  At intake, if a youth is unaccompanied homeless, the intake staff should complete an EPAC referral (use online form submission – see below) and identify the child as unaccompanied/homeless.
-  Case Manager should make immediate contact with the Homeless Liaison in the child's school district to alert that person that the child is homeless.
-  Submit referrals online at <http://epac.dhs.ga.gov>




**NOTE:** Policy reference "Receiving Intake Reports" 4.1 and 4.4

## Educational Stability Transportation Funding Request Protocol

All youth entering into foster care should remain in their home school/school of origin if it is determined to be in their best interest. Often, foster care placements do not result in a change in educational setting however, there are instances when a placement may be located outside the school district that is affiliated with the child/youth's home school/school of origin. When these situations occur, it will be necessary to collaborate with local school districts to support the current school placement with transportation services.

### PRACTICE TIPS:

-  Complete the *Educational Stability Checklist* to assist you in determining the appropriateness of the youth's current educational setting.

-  Contact the local school districts Point of Contact to discuss their Foster Child Transportation Plan.
-  Refer to COSTAR Manual, Section 3006/UAS 518 for additional guidance.
-  Requests may be subject to a state office qualitative review.

## **Every Student Succeeds Act**

### *Educational Stability Provisions for Children in Foster Care*

#### **Legislation Overview**

*In December 2015, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The provisions within ESSA take effect on December 10, 2016 and require State Education Agencies (SEA) and Local Education Agencies (LEA) to partner with child welfare agencies to ensure the educational stability of children in foster care. While the provisions within ESSA do not create new requirements for child welfare agencies, they mirror and enhance similar provisions within the Fostering Connections Act.*

*New requirements highlight the need to provide educational stability for children in foster care, with particular emphasis on collaboration between SEAs, LEAs, and child welfare agencies to ensure that students in foster care have the opportunity to achieve at the same high levels as their peers. These provisions emphasize the importance of limiting educational disruption by keeping children who move in foster care in their schools of origin, unless it is determined to be in their best interest to change schools. These provisions also ensure that, if it is not in their best interest to remain in their schools of origin, children in foster care are enrolled in their new schools without delay. In implementing these provisions, SEAs, LEAs, and child welfare agencies must ensure compliance with other applicable laws, such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), among others. Taken in totality, these provisions promote greater stability for children in foster care so that they can continue their education without disruption, maintain important relationships with peers and adults, and have the opportunity to achieve college- and career-readiness.*

“Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care.” 23 June 2016. Web.  
<<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf>>