Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care:

Education is critical to every child's well-being and future success. Children and young people in the child welfare system require our assistance to help them be successful.

Children and youth in foster care 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 abuse and/or neglect; they were separated from their families; and they may have to change schools or homes multiple times. With these occurrences in mind, understandably, many children in foster care have emotional and behavioral issues, developmental and cognitive barriers, and high rates of absenteeism and disciplinary issues. Without proper support and intervention, poor academic performance, grade level retention, and high drop-out rates can result.

This practice guide has been developed to assist DFCS case managers and other direct service staff in navigating, understanding, and how to best administer policies, procedures, and practices established to improve educational outcomes for children and youth involved in child welfare. The more vigilant and committed we are as an Agency to improving educational well-being outcomes, the more our performance will improve safety and permanency for the children and youth we serve. The following tips will serve as a resource to help strengthen your practice and engagement skills regarding educational stability in foster care and child protective service programs.

Educational Stability Defined:

DFCS has an education focused unit called EPAC. EPAC stands for Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation. The unit is staffed with Education Support Monitors (ESMs) that provide educational consultation to case managers and other direct service staff who promote educational stability. Additionally, the unit provides statewide oversight for procurement of educational support services. Make sure you work with the EPAC unit and its staff in the activities below to ensure successful educational stability outcomes.

Fostering Connections requires assurances of Educational Stability for children in foster care. The law requires certain activities, such as the following, to promote educational stability for children in foster care.

- Within 72 hours of entering care, refer all youth for diagnostic educational assessment

- Within 30 days a completed assessment and educational action plan will be uploaded into GA SHINES, Case managers use this for case planning.

- Case Managers should consult with ESM proactively regarding all educational well-being issues (including IEP, 504, RTI, Tribunal, Disciplinary Issues, etc…). This supports team decision making.

- Case Manager should contact EPAC immediately regarding any situation that could result in a disruption of child/youth educational setting.

- Case Managers should advise EPAC of significant changes in the case including placement moves and case closures for appropriate delivery of services.

- For more information about EPAC, visit: http://dfcs.dhs.georgia.gov/epac

Ensure the appropriateness of the child's educational setting: The DFCS case manager is responsible for ensuring the child in foster care is in the appropriate educational setting. The case manager must consider.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- Ask the parent to sign releases of information in the event parent involvement is not immediately possible.

- Contact the "child's school (home school/school of origin)" when a child enters foster care to request social and educational information.

- Involve the parent/caregiver/EPAC ESM in all education decisions.

- Pre-removal conferences or Family Team Meetings (FTM) are ideal settings for discussion of the education needs of the child. (ask EPAC ESM to participate)

Child Should reside in close proximity to the home school: The stability and support the child receives at his current school may be the most stable thing in his life at this difficult time. The child should remain in his 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.

Work with the Local Education Agencies. Federal law requires 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 Area Education Agencies.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- When a child enters foster care, contact the school of origin to obtain all applicable school records.

- Attend education meetings.

- Ensure the EPAC ESM is made aware of any meetings.

Use of Technology to Support Educational Stability: DFCS has a data sharing agreement with the GA Department of Education (GA DOE). With this agreement, DFCS case managers have access to GA DOE Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) which provides foster youth educational records.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- Ensure that every school-aged child in foster care has a GA Testing Identification Number (GTID) listed in SHINES

- Utilize the access to the SLDS to 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 10 Days): Georgia law requires every school-aged child in foster care, age 6-16, to be enrolled as a full-time elementary or secondary school student or to have completed secondary school. DFCS is responsible to ensure, when a child in foster care changes schools, the receiving schools receives transcripts within 10 days of notification from the DFCS case manager. A child should miss no more than 1 day of school during the transfer process.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- Establish a tickler system to track 10-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" 10.4

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, including youth awaiting foster care placement meets the requirement of McKinney-Vento. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) require 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 (Form 176) and identify the child as unaccompanied.

- Submit completed referral to EPAC@dhr.state.ga.us

- EPAC will forward the referred youth's information to their respective Homeless Liaison.

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

EPAC Education Support Monitors:

Region 1 & 2	Marilyn Peters	404-803-8196
Region 3	Christopher Jones	404-805-5601
Region 4 & 13	Corneil Montgomery	404-895-6668
Region 5 & 7	Robin Brooks	404-519-9771
Region 6 & 9	LeAnne Worley	404-821-8890
Region 8 & 10	Jennifer Williams	404-576-7598
Region 11 & 12	Mary Mollay	404-617-4884
Region 14	Robin Stewart	404-858-9236
Region 15	Suzette Ennis	404-617-5645

Educational Stability Transportation Funding Request Protocol: All children and youth entering foster care should remain in their home school/school of origin. 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 may be necessary to support the current school placement with transportation services.

PRACTICE TIPS:

- Complete the *Educational Stability Checklist* which will assist you in determining the appropriateness of the current educational setting.

- Refer to COSTAR Manual, Section 3006/UAS 518 for additional guidance.

- Request may be subject to a state office qualitative review.