

The Accelerated School Transportation Procedures for Students in Foster Care

National research shows children in foster care are at high-risk of dropping out of school and are unlikely to attend or graduate from college. Frequent mobility of students in foster care is a barrier to their academic success. The *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015* (ESSA) requires that school divisions and child welfare agencies collaborate to develop and implement clear written procedures governing how transportation will be provided, arranged, and funded to maintain children in foster care in their school of origin during the time students are in foster care when it is in their best interest.

Under ESSA, transportation procedures for children in foster care must:

- Ensure that children in foster care needing transportation to the school of origin will promptly receive transportation in a cost-effective manner and in accordance with the child welfare agency's authority to use child welfare funding for school of origin transportation;
- Ensure that, **if** there are additional costs incurred in providing transportation to maintain children in foster care in their schools of origin, the division will provide transportation to the school of origin **if**:
 - the local child welfare agency agrees to **reimburse** the LEA for the cost of such transportation;
 - the division **agrees** to pay for the cost of such transportation; **or**
 - the division and the local child welfare agency **agree** to share the cost of such transportation.

The Accelerated School Transportation & Enrollment Plan for Students Placed in Foster Care

The Accelerated School will comply with applicable California law which provides that California schools need to include foster youth in the school accountability and funding systems to focus on the educational outcomes of foster youth. Foster youth will have access to the educational and other services they need to ensure that they are able to meet the same high expectations for all students.

Enrollment of Foster Youth

The presumption is that a student will remain in the school of origin (i.e., the school in which the child is enrolled or the last school in which the child was enrolled at the time of placement into out-of-home care); a student should only change schools if remaining in the school of origin is not in the child's best interest, as determined collaboratively by The Accelerated School and the child welfare agency.

The determination of a child's best interest in relation to school enrollment involves giving consideration to all factors relating to a child's best interest, including but not limited to:

- Preferences of the student, the parent, and any education decision-maker.
- Safety of the student.
- Educational needs and strengths (specialized language services, individual education plans (IEP), talented and gifted programming).
- Expected length of placement and the student's permanency plan.
- Number of schools the student has attended over the past few years and how transfers have impacted the student.

- Continuity in the student's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic background.
- Student's attachment to the school, including meaningful relationships with staff and peers.
- Whether the timing of the transfer would coincide with a logical juncture, such as the end of the school semester or school year.
- What school(s) the student's sibling(s) attend.
- How the length of the commute would impact the student.

If there is a difference of opinion regarding school enrollment between The Accelerated School and child welfare agency, the child welfare agency is considered the final decision-maker.

Foster youth may be identified at the time of enrollment by student self-report or by the student's Educational Right's Holder (ERH). In order to provide equal access to foster youth, the Foster Youth Liaison for The Accelerated School will ask the student or ERH to complete a Foster Youth Screening Questionnaire and the Foster Youth Initial Education Intake Form. The designee will then notify the Foster Youth Education Liaison. The Accelerated Schools Foster Youth Education Liaison will meet with the Foster Youth's ERH to discuss school of origin rights, complete the necessary enrollment paperwork and collect important documents, which may include proof of education rights, immunization records, transcript or report card, and Individualized Education Program, if applicable.

Upon acceptance into The Accelerated School, the Foster Youth Liaison will ensure that the foster youth will be allowed to enroll immediately in the same or equivalent classes as those he/she took at their old school, even if he/she is transferring mid-semester or if their ERH decides it is in their best interest, even if they do not have any of the required enrollment. Foster youth will be offered equal participation in extra-curricular activities regardless of try-outs or sign-up deadlines. The Foster Youth Liaison will keep a list of all foster youth, track their performance monthly and meet with families when students are struggling academically or behaviorally.

Foster Care Point of Contact

The Accelerated Schools Office Manager is designated as the Foster Care Point of Contact who will have primary administrative-level oversight of the District's services for children who are in foster care. He/she, or a qualified designee, shall be responsible for (1) providing any required assurances to applicable state and federal agencies that the District is complying with applicable state and federal requirements related to ensuring the educational stability of children in foster care; and (2) reasonably monitoring compliance with such assurances.

The Accelerated Schools Foster Care Point of Conduct, or a qualified designee, will:

- Act as the District's primary liaison for the representatives of child welfare agencies who also have responsibility for ensuring the educational stability of children in foster care.
- Coordinate with the points of contact and other appropriate representatives of child welfare agencies and of other educational agencies on the implementation of the Title I provisions related to ensuring the educational stability of children in foster care.
- Work with administrators and other District personnel to periodically review existing policies, procedures, practices, and data to identify and develop proposals to remedy and remove barriers that children in foster care may face in the school enrollment and admission processes, in regularly attending school, in accessing applicable support services (such as school counselors), in accessing academic programs, academic activities, or co-curricular activities, or in receiving appropriate credit for prior academic work.

- Assist appropriate child welfare agency representatives in making “best interest of the child” education decisions, including particularly the determination of whether or not it is in a child’s best interest to remain in his/her school of origin or to enroll in a new school.
- Facilitate the continued enrollment of a child in foster care in his/her school of origin; or, if remaining in the school of origin is determined not to be in the child’s best interest, facilitate the child’s immediate enrollment in a new school even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment.
- Request, facilitate, and confirm, as applicable, the timely transfer of student records any time a child in foster care will be enrolling in a school (within or outside of the District) other than the school the child is currently attending (or most recently attended).
- Coordinate the implementation of local transportation procedures related to children in foster care and the resolution of any transportation cost disputes, in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer and in accordance with established procedures.
- Facilitate the sharing of student record information with child welfare agency personnel in a manner that is consistent with applicable legal requirements, any applicable record sharing agreements, and established District policies and procedures regarding the maintenance and confidentiality of student records.
- Ensure that children in foster care attending schools in the District have access to and receive the educational services and supports and specialized programming for which they are eligible.
- Coordinate professional development activities and resources and serve as a local resource, as needed, for other District staff related to the Title I provisions and the educational needs of children in foster care.
- Coordinate the collection and appropriate reporting of any data that is needed to meet the established legal requirements related to children in foster in care.

Transportation Planning:

The Accelerated School recognizes that in the absence of any separate state or federal transportation obligation that may apply in a specific situation, the federal law related to the educational stability of children in foster care establishes transportation-related obligations that are shared among the school district of residence, the school district of attendance (if different), and the applicable child welfare agencies.

When such transportation is required by federal law and when a District school is the particular child’s school of origin, the District’s procedures addressing the transportation of children in foster care to their schools of origin are as follows:

1. A representative of the relevant child welfare agency or the child’s agency-designated foster parent or adult caregiver should give clear notice to The Accelerated School, as soon as practical, that a child in foster care needs, or may need, transportation to a District school that is the child’s school of origin. Such notice may be given in writing or verbally directly to The Accelerated Schools Foster Care Point of Contact or his/her designee.
2. When The Accelerated School is notified that a child in foster care needs, or may need, transportation to a District school serving as the child’s school of origin, The Accelerated Schools Foster Care Point of Contact, or his/her designee, will promptly take steps to establish an individualized plan that addresses how transportation to maintain the child in his/her school of origin will be arranged, provided, and funded for the duration of time that the child is in foster care and attending the school of origin. The transportation plan for the child shall be established in consultation with appropriate staff, appropriate representatives of the child welfare agency (such as the child’s caseworker), representatives of any separate resident school district (if

applicable) and may also include obtaining input from others who may be involved in education or other decision-making for the child, such as the foster parent or other designated caregiver.

3. The transportation plan for the child will be in writing and will include the following information:
 - a. A transportation strategy for providing transportation to and from the school of origin on school days, inclusive of identifying:
 - i. the mode(s) or method(s) of transportation,
 - ii. the person or entity responsible for providing the transportation, and
 - iii. if applicable, the person or entity who is responsible for making any specific arrangements that are necessary to the implementation of any method or mode of transportation.
 - b. To the extent applicable, a description of how the child's school-related transportation will be funded, particularly when the planned transportation involves additional costs as defined under applicable laws and regulations.
 - c. Identification of any further approvals that must be obtained or any contracts or intergovernmental agreements that must be executed in order to implement the transportation plan (e.g., for purposes of funding).
 - d. A communication protocol that The Accelerated School, representatives of the applicable child welfare agency, and other relevant persons (such as the child's foster parent) will use in order to:
 - i. address any questions or concerns that arise with the transportation plan (including considering possible adjustments to the child's transportation plan),
 - ii. communicate to The Accelerated School, as soon as possible, any relevant changes in the child's out-of-home placement that are relevant to the transportation plan, including prompt communication to The Accelerated School from the child welfare agency who is responsible for the child's care and placement that there is a likely or imminent change in the child's status as a child who is in an out-of-home placement (e.g., that the child will be exiting foster care).

Transportation Strategies:

Applicable federal law requires procedures to ensure that children in foster care who need transportation to the school of origin promptly receive that transportation, and to ensure that such transportation is arranged and provided in a cost-effective manner that is reasonable under the specific circumstances. Possible methods of transportation, the reliability, safety, distance, and overall commuting time associated with possible methods, and the effect that particular transportation arrangements may have on the child's education and well-being are factors that are relevant to consider for purposes of both the educational placement decision (i.e., whether the student should attend his/her school of origin) and in preparing a transportation plan for a child who is placed at his/her school of origin.

The cost of transportation may not be considered when determining which school enrollment is in a child's best interest, but the cost and funding of different possible methods of transportation are relevant in arranging a transportation plan for a child who is placed at his/her school of origin.

Multiple factors will be considered and addressed when determining transportation options for foster care students, including: safety for the student and other students being transported;

student age; length of commute; and distance. Information about these factors will be provided so that the best interest determination will be comprehensive and will include consideration of cost-effective measures.

Situations where funding for school transportation has already been designated should be considered, for example:

- The out-of-home caregiver is provided funding to assure the child's transportation.
- The child has transportation written into his or her individualized education plan (IEP) because of disability related needs, where the District is obligated to provide transportation as part of the child's IEP as a "related service" under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA).

Consideration on how to make transportation cost-effective shall be considered, for example:

- By foster parents (through the foster care payment).
- By group home staff as an Extraordinary Payment.
- By volunteers as individuals or through social organizations.
- Existing public school bus routes (including, for example, a foster parent driving the child to meet a bus for the school of origin along the existing route).
- Public transportation (based on safety, disability, age, etc.).
- Taxis or other private transportation services (based on safety, disability, age, etc.; perhaps with a reduced-cost service contract).
- Walking within a reasonable walk zone (based on safety, disability, age, etc.).

Duration of Transportation

Transportation will be provided for the duration of the student's time in out-of-home care as long as it continues to be in the child's best interest to remain in the school of origin.

To the extent the procedures above conflict with any specific written agreement that Wallis Annenberg High School reaches with a child welfare agency or other party, the specific written agreement shall govern the interactions involving The Accelerated School and such agency or other party.

Funding:

If the student has an IEP that includes provisions for specialized transportation, transportation must be provided by the school division responsible for the student's Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Based on California's special education regulations, any alternative special education placement, whether public or private, assumes specialized transportation is part of the IEP and must be provided for the student to receive FAPE.

If The Accelerated School can offer an existing means of transportation at no additional cost, there will be no cost to the social services agency.

If The Accelerated School can provide transportation but will need to modify a route or create a new option, the cost that will be charged to the Social Services agency will be calculated. This calculation is not required until the best interest determination has been completed and the decision to maintain the current school enrollment is made. The Social Services agency should explore whether the student is eligible for IV-E or CSA funds to be used to cover the cost. The school division's Title I, Part A funds may be used to assist with excess transportation costs if

funds exist after covering mandated responsibilities (such as transportation for students experiencing homelessness).