

The Washtenaw Superintendents' Association Policy Guidelines for Improving Educational Outcomes of Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care

The Need

Teens “aging out” of foster care struggle to make the transition to independent living and are particularly vulnerable to under-education, unemployment, earnings below the poverty level, homelessness and poor health.¹ Schools can make a tremendous difference in the lives of these teens, serving as a point of stability and equipping them with the skills they need to be successful.

The Vision and Purpose

The public school districts in Washtenaw County, working together with Washtenaw ISD and the Washtenaw Workforce Development Board, envision a future where students in foster care, ages 14-21, are provided a stable learning environment, high educational expectations, and the supports necessary to meet state achievement standards and transition successfully to adulthood. Working through locally-appointed foster care education liaisons who are supported by WISD, schools will ensure these students are afforded the opportunity to stay in their school of origin, provided transportation to the school of origin, allowed to immediately enroll in school and supported to stay on track academically. We expect to serve 50-75 students a year.

Statement of Policy:

1. **LIAISON:** The local education agency will designate a staff person as a foster care education liaison to coordinate general awareness of this population’s needs, active identification of foster care youth in transition, immediate enrollment, proper school placement, transportation coordination, education support and when needed, transition support.
2. **SCHOOL STABILITY** - The local education agency serving each youth to be assisted under this policy shall, according to the student’s best interest, continue the student’s education in the school of origin despite placement changes, so long as it is in Washtenaw County, for the remainder of the academic year.
3. **TRANSPORTATION** –To maintain school stability, the local education agency will either help coordinate or provide transportation to the school of origin when it is needed.
4. **BEST INTEREST** – In determining the best interest of the student, the local education agency shall:
 - a. To the extent feasible, keep the student in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the student.
 - b. Provide a written explanation, including a statement of the right to appeal, to the student, if the local education agency sends such student to a school other than the school of origin.

¹ Collins, Mary Elizabeth. 2001 “Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Youths: A Review of Research and Implications for Policy.” *The Social Service Review*. 75:2. Goerge, Robert, Bilaver, Lucy, Lee, Bong Joo, Needell, Barbara, Brookhart, Alan, and Jackman, William. 2002. “Employment Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care.” (Chicago: University of Chicago and Chapin Hall Center for Children.)

- c. In the case of unaccompanied youth, ensure that the local liaison assists in school placement decisions and considers the views of the student.
5. IMMEDIATE ENROLLMENT – Washtenaw County schools shall immediately enroll students covered under this policy, even if the student is unable to produce the records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, medical records, proof of residency or other documentation.
 - a. The enrolling school shall immediately contact the school last attended by the student to obtain relevant records.
 - b. If the student needs to obtain immunizations, or immunization or medical records, the enrolling school shall immediately refer the student and the student’s foster parent(s) and/or advocate to the local liaison, who shall assist in obtaining necessary immunizations or related records.
6. EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT – School districts will not penalize this population for absences due to placement changes, court appearances or related court-ordered activities, but rather work creatively to keep the student on track. Similarly, schools will, whenever possible and in accordance with school policy, accept credit for full or partial coursework completed satisfactorily by the student and earned while attending a public school, juvenile court school or nonpublic, nonsectarian school.
7. TRANSITION SUPPORT – If a student must change schools due to placement changes, the district liaison shall work to support that transition by ensuring the following is done by schools:
 - a. Maintenance of any record ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization or medical records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records and evaluations for special services or programs, so that the records are available, in a timely fashion, when a student enters a new school or school district.
 - b. Timely transfer of records when a change of schools does occur.
 - c. Alert WISD staff of transfer and any special needs of students (i.e. special education, transportation, etc.).
8. DISPUTES - If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school,
 - a. The student shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, so long as it is the neighborhood school or school of origin, pending resolution of the dispute.
 - b. The student and foster parent or advocate shall be provided with a written explanation of the school’s decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the right to appeal.
 - c. The student and foster parent or advocate shall be referred to the local liaison, who shall carry out a dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible.
 - d. The liaison shall ensure that the youth is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.
9. DEFINITIONS
 - a. SCHOOL OF ORIGIN: The school that the student attended at his or her last placement or the school in which the student was last enrolled.