



# ARIZONA DEPARTMENT of CHILD SAFETY

September 11, 2023

Involve families, caregivers, and youth in education decisions.

- Define school of origin and any acronyms when discussing ESSA.
- Be clear and honest with team members, including caregivers, that determining if a child will be moved to a different school is not solely their decision. Explain that the child has a say in the decision.
- Communicate with caregivers, the child depending on age, biological parents when appropriate, and CFT members, that the LEA is responsible for maintaining the child in the school of origin until the best interest determination meeting is concluded.
- Assess the unique needs of the child in collaboration with the LEA, DCS, and providers to achieve educational stability for the child.
- If at all possible, prior to changing a child's living arrangement, communicate with potential caregivers about the child's school of origin and expectations that the child remain in the school.
- The DCS Specialist will coordinate, schedule and facilitate with the LEA, parent, caregiver, and interested parties to arrange a BID discussion or meeting.

## Following the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act

**School stability improves children's educational success. The federal Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires a child in foster care to remain in his or her school of origin unless it is not in the child's best interest.**

- Children in foster care frequently face delays in school enrollment or they are placed in the wrong classes or schools, due to missing, incomplete, or delayed school records and documentation.
- School instability makes it difficult for a child to develop supportive relationships with teachers or peers.
- Unplanned school changes may be associated with delays in a child's academic progress, leaving students to fall behind their peers.
- Children in foster care experience higher levels of residential and school instability compared to their peers.

**A best interest determination meeting is required if there is a change in the living arrangement of the child/youth.**

- It is imperative that the DCS Specialist, out-of-home caregiver, Local Education Agency (LEA), and parent/guardian or IDEA parent meet promptly when there is a change in the child/youth's living arrangement.
- The purpose of the determination meeting is to ensure that a child in foster care remains in the school of origin through the development of solutions to overcome identified barriers.
- The best interest determination meetings may occur in association with a Child & Family Team Meeting (CFT), case plan staffing, Team Decision Making (TDM) meeting, or another meeting when all identified parties are available to attend.
- The Best Interest Determination and Transportation Plan form (CSO-1348A) can help direct the meeting and decision-making process.
- The school of origin must make accommodations to support the child's attendance at the school of origin until the best interest determination meeting can be completed.

**Many factors must be considered during the best interest meeting to determine if the child will remain in the school of origin or transfer.**

- preference of the child, the child's parent(s), or education decision maker;
- the child's sibling(s) school;
- influence of the school climate on the child, including safety;
- the availability and quality of the services in the school to meet the child's educational and socio-emotional needs;
- history of school transfers and how they have impacted the child;
- the length of commute and how it impacts the child, based on the child's developmental stage;

### What is the school of origin?

- The school of origin is the school that a child is enrolled in at the time of entry into out-of-home care.
- If a child's living arrangement changes, the school of origin is the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of the change.

To access the contact person at the LEA the child is attending view;

<https://www.azed.gov/fostercare/foster-care-liaisons>

### Who is an Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Parent?

- The IDEA parent is the person responsible for making decisions about special-education evaluations or services.
- The IDEA parent should be the biological or adoptive parent if possible.
- A guardian authorized to act as the child's parent who has been granted educational rights by the court may serve as the IDEA parent.
- If a biological or adoptive parent or guardian cannot serve as the IDEA parent due to severance of their parental rights, a court order, or their whereabouts are unknown, then a foster parent or kinship caregiver may serve as the IDEA parent.
- If these options are not available, the Dept. of Education is responsible to appoint a surrogate parent.
- The DCS Specialist or group home staff members cannot authorize special education services, evaluation, or provide written consent for IEP's.

- the child's need to finish a school semester or year;
- participation in extracurricular activities;
- any potential loss of credits that may occur due to changing schools in the middle of a term or semester; and
- the child's special education needs.

### Both DCS and the LEA are responsible to provide supports to assist caregivers to keep a child in the school of origin.

- When a child has a potential to move to a different school, the LEA and DCS should collaborate to keep the child in the school of origin until the Best Interest Determination Meeting is held and a plan is developed. The LEA and SEA have flexibility to keep the child in the current school as long as it is in the child's best interest.
- ESSA points of contact are available in each DCS region to:
- develop partnerships with local school districts;
- provide training on ESSA requirements; and
- consult with DCS Specialists to address educational stability issues that are not resolved at the local level.

### Transportation needs are often the most significant barrier to maintaining a child in the school of origin. There are several resources and options to consider.

- Unlicensed out-of-home caregivers can receive mileage reimbursement for transporting a child in their physical custody for educational purposes, with Program Administrator preapproval.
- See DCS 03-16, Foster Parent Travel Reimbursement for more information.
- Foster parent reimbursement rates include the costs of routine travel, which includes travel to and from school.
- Contracts require group homes to comply with ESSA and provide routine transportation for the child.
- Identify other supportive adults in the child's life who may be able to assist with transportation before and after school.
- Determine if the school provides transportation through an existing school bus route or other service.
- The caregiver may arrange a carpool with a trusted adult.
- Depending on the child's age, developmental needs, and whether it is safe to do so, consider public transportation.
- Ask if the caregiver has any flexibility in work schedule, tele-working, or working in an alternative location.

**After careful assessment and problem solving it may be determined that it is not in the best interest of a child to stay in the school of origin.**

- Some reasons a child may need to change schools include: lack of safety at the school of origin; the school is unable to meet the child’s special needs; the distance and travel time to the school of origin from the child’s placement is unreasonable.
- If it is not in the child’s best interest to stay in his or her school of origin, the child is immediately enrolled in the new school, even if the child does not have the normal records required for enrollment.
- The new school immediately contacts the previous school to obtain any relevant academic or other records.
- The DCS Specialist completes the Best Interest Determination form (CSO-1348A) to document the reasons it is best for the child to change schools.

**ESSA Regional contacts are available to help answer questions from DCS Specialists and Supervisors.**

Region	Contact	Email Address
<b>Northwest</b> (Mohave, Coconino, Yavapai, & La Paz County)	Caryn Wagner	<a href="mailto:Caryn.Wagner@azdcs.gov">Caryn.Wagner@azdcs.gov</a>
<b>Maricopa West</b> (Western Maricopa County)	George Johnson	<a href="mailto:George.Johnson@azdcs.gov">George.Johnson@azdcs.gov</a>
<b>South</b> (Yuma, Pima, Santa Cruz & Cochise Counties)	Czarina Valdez	<a href="mailto:Czarina.Valadez@azdcs.gov">Czarina.Valadez@azdcs.gov</a>
<b>Northeast</b> (Pinal, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Navajo & Apache Counties)	Sarah LaRue	<a href="mailto:Sarah.LaRue@azdcs.gov">Sarah.LaRue@azdcs.gov</a>
<b>Maricopa East</b> (Eastern Maricopa County)	Skylar Anderson	<a href="mailto:Skylar.Anderson@azdcs.gov">Skylar.Anderson@azdcs.gov</a>

**DCS Statewide Education Mailbox – Contact the Education Point of Contact mailbox to elevate barriers and questions with providing educational stability for children in foster care**

- [EducationPOC@azdcs.gov](mailto:EducationPOC@azdcs.gov)

**Resources for caregivers**

- Guidance on the Foster Care Provisions in Title 1, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015.
- US Department of Education, Every Child Succeeds Act.
- Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care.