

Preston Public Schools
School Foster Care Plan
2021-2022 School Year

Introduction and Background

Children in foster care often and inadvertently change schools, which along with enrollment delays and record transfers can have a significant disruptive impact on their academic progress. Studies have shown that children in foster care face an increased risk of grade retention, gaps in academic achievement, low high school graduation rates, and postsecondary enrollment.

Recognizing these adverse educational outcomes, the foster care provisions under Title I of ESSA require State Educational Agencies (SEAs) and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to collaborate with Child Welfare Agencies (CWAs) to ensure educational stability and to minimize educational disruptions for children in foster care.

Among other things, the educational stability includes assurances that (1) a child in foster care will remain in the child's school of origin, unless a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest to remain in the school, and (2) if a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest to remain in the school of origin, the child will immediately be enrolled in the school of residence, even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment. These will help ensure that children in foster care experience minimal disruption to their education during moves or placement changes.

District Assurances

- Each placement of the child in foster care takes into account the appropriateness of the current educational setting and the proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement.
- The state CWA will coordinate with appropriate LEAs to ensure the child remains in the school in which the child is enrolled at time of placement.
- If it is not in the best interest of the child to return to the resident school, the child will immediately be provided the appropriate enrollment to the Preston District.
- The Preston Public School District will gather and maintain educational records and promptly send them to any district to which the student moves.

Point of Contact (POC)

Under the requirements of ESSA, Section 1112(c) (5)(A) each LEA must “designate a point of contact if the corresponding CWA notifies the LEA, in writing, the agency has designated an employee to serve as a point of contact for the LEA.” In the Preston Public School District, the point of contact is **Kim McCullah, Foster Care Coordinator (FCC)** in Special Services. The FCC will work in the best interest of the child to ensure that all educational requirements are being met. The FCC will utilize training and materials to remain educated in most current Foster Care Regulations. The FCC will work closely with state and tribal CWAs to:

- Coordinate the corresponding CWA on the implementation of Title I provisions;
- Lead process for making the Best Interest Determination;
- Document the Best Interest Determination;
- Facilitate the transfer of records and immediate enrollment;
- Facilitate data sharing with CWAs, consistent with FERPA and other privacy protocols;
- Coordinate local transportation procedures;
- Manage Best Interest Determination and transport cost disputes;
- Ensure children in foster care are enrolled in and regularly attending school; and
- Provide professional development and training to school staff on the Title I provisions and educational needs of children in foster care.

Determination of Child’s Best Interest for School Placement

A committee will meet to determine the appropriate placement of each foster care child. The committee will comprise the site administrator or LEA representative, the FCC, and a member of the CWA. The committee will make a joint determination in regards to the best interest of the child. Individuals who may have knowledge of the child may include; but are not limited to: OKDHS representative, Tribal Welfare Worker, District FCC, the child, the child’s birth parents (if allowed), the child’s foster parents, assigned surrogate parents, school administrators, teachers, counselors, social workers, child’s attorney, CASA, school staff.

Factors used to determine Best Interest may include, but are not limited to: child’s age, child’s emotional needs, child’s educational programming needs, siblings and where they attend, safety needs, length of time expected at placement and permanency goal, location of placement and/or length of travel and impact on education, preference of child, parents, or foster parents, time remaining in academic year, school continuity, school climate needs, availability of classes and credit loss, the child’s status as a student with a disability under IDEA, the level of services needed and availability in the school, the child’s status as ELL, language services needed, and availability in the school.

*Documentation of Best Interest of the child will be on Best Interest Determination Form.

**In the event of emergency circumstances, OKDHS has the authority to make an immediate decision regarding school placement, and then consult with FCC to revisit the Best Interest Determination.

Enrollment

Foster care children may be brought to school for enrollment by their foster parents, social workers, or other legal guardians. The child shall be immediately enrolled in the school of residence by the child's foster parent or caseworker. To prevent educational discontinuity, enrollment must not be denied or delayed for children in foster care because documentation is not provided.

The receiving school shall immediately contact the FCC to identify students as foster care. The school and/or FCC will immediately contact OKDHS caseworker and the last school attended to obtain relevant records.

After enrollment, legal custody documents shall be provided for verification. Examples include Power of Attorney, Order of removal, Placement Agreement, or written verification on OKDHS letterhead with badge.

IDEA Students

The IDEA, Part B directs school districts to make a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) available to all eligible children with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). FAPE under IDEA includes the provision of special education and related services at no cost to the parents in accordance with a properly developed IEP. Each child's placement decision must be made by a group of knowledgeable persons. The Preston School District will operate in accordance with all state and federal laws regarding special education students. Special Education services will be provided to foster care students as they are to all students, following guidelines below.

- Educational Placement will be determined annually and will be based on the child's IEP in accordance with the child's individual needs.
- The child will be placed in the least restrictive environment and unless they require some other arrangement, they will attend the school that he/she would attend if not disabled.
- Timely and expedited evaluations and eligibility determinations for highly mobile children with disabilities will be made when possible.
- Children in foster care will have access to related aids and services that are designed to meet their educational needs.

- Children will have access to comparable services including summer and extended year services if applicable.
- Children in foster care will not be discriminated against and are considered a protected group.

ELL Students

The Preston Public School District will ensure that EL students in foster care will participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs by doing the following:

- Identifying and assessing all potential EL students in a timely, valid and reliable manner;
- Provide EL students with a language assistance program that is educationally sound and proven successful;
- Sufficiently staff and support the language assistance programs for EL students;
- Ensure that EL students have equal opportunities to meaningfully participate in all curricular and extracurricular activities;
- Avoid unnecessary segregation of EL students;
- Ensure that EL students with disabilities are evaluated in a timely and appropriate manner for special education and disability-related services and that their language needs are considered in these evaluations and delivery of services;
- Meet the needs of EL students who opt out of language assistance programs;
- Monitor and evaluate EL students in language assistance programs following federal guidelines
- Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the school district's language assistance program and progress of each student.
- Ensure meaningful communication with parents/guardians of the student.

Disputes

If there is a disagreement regarding school placement for a child in foster care, the CWA (OKDHS) should be considered the final decision maker in the Best Interest Determination. The CWA is uniquely positioned to assess vital non-educational factors such as safety, sibling placements, the child's permanency goal, and other components in the case plan.

Student Records

The Preston Public School District will share education records with CWAs that are allowed under FERPA. This allows educational agencies to disclose without parent consent to educational records, including IDEA, of students in foster care to State and Tribal agencies. This also allows distribution of records without consent of a parent to Law Enforcement and CWAs

for the purpose of investigation of child abuse or neglect, even if the student is not in foster care.

Transportation

Preston Public Schools will collaborate with the CWA to develop and implement clear written procedures governing how transportation is provided to maintain children in foster care in their schools of origin. The District will also work with the CWA to reach an agreement in regards to covering the transportation costs. The agreement will cover how the transportation will be provided, arranged and funded for the duration of the child's time in foster care. Each agreement can/will vary greatly because the needs of each child will be considered in making transportation decisions.

The regular transportation policies by the District will be followed in transporting foster care students. Drivers will be appropriately licensed, certified, and with the required DMB and background checks. Various public school vehicles may be used to transport students depending on circumstances. Students that must be transported out of state will be school board approved as required by Oklahoma Law.

Students living in Preston boundaries, but attending other school districts will need to contact school of origin for setting up transportation. ESSA guidelines are designed to allow foster students to have an equal educational opportunity as other students. Examples include return trips home from school after extra-curricular activities or activities that require a parent to transport students to and from the school outside normal hours.