

## School District “Point of Contact” for Students in Foster Care

### What is a “Point of Contact”?

In December 2015, the President signed the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) into law. Among other things, ESSA requires that school districts appoint “Points of Contact” for students in foster care, if the corresponding child welfare agency does so. As a “Point of Contact,” you have the unique opportunity to provide crucial supports and make key connections to ensure that students in foster care succeed in school.



## Rights of and Protections for Students in Foster Care Under ESSA



### School of Origin

The student has a right to remain in their school of origin, even if they move to a different home placement, unless it is not in their best interest to do so.



### Immediate Enrollment and Records Transfer

If the student changes schools, they must be enrolled immediately, even without required records. The enrolling school must immediately contact the prior school for academic and other records.

### Transportation to School of Origin

School districts and child welfare agencies must work together to ensure the student receives transportation for the duration of their time in foster care.



### What are the first steps I can take to get started as the foster youth “point of contact” (POC)?

- ✓ Identify and reach out to the child welfare agency’s “point of contact.” At your first meeting, review any existing MOUs, policies, or procedures, and set a recurring meeting time.

- ✓ Meet with your district leadership to learn about existing policies or plans in place related to students in foster care. Learn the process to amend these policies or develop new ones. Ask about resources available for providing training and support to teachers and school staff who work directly with students.



### **What can I do in my role as the foster youth POC regarding the student's right to remain in their school of origin?**

- Work with your district leadership and the child welfare agency to make sure there is a plan in place for making “best interest determinations,” i.e. for assessing whether it is in the student’s best interest to stay in their school of origin if a change in home placement occurs.
- Create and distribute sample meeting guides to standardize decision making.
- Take the lead on managing disputes around this issue.
- Ensure individual best interest determinations are always documented and implemented.



### **What can I do in my role as the foster youth POC regarding the student's right to transportation to their school of origin?**

- Convene district leadership and the child welfare agency to agree upon a transportation plan for students attending their school of origin. The plan should address if and how transportation costs will be shared by the district and the child welfare agency, how disputes will be resolved, and who will fund transportation while these disputes are being resolved.
- If disputes arise in the best interest determination and transportation planning process, take the lead on managing and resolving these disputes.
- Ensure individual transportation plans are always documented and implemented.



### **What can I do in my role as the foster youth POC regarding the student's right to immediate enrollment and records transfer?**

- Work with your district leadership and administrative staff to make sure that everyone is aware of the immediate enrollment and records transfer requirements and that these practices are followed consistently across school sites.
- Be the go-to resource for school staff that are having difficulty implementing these practices.



### **What can I do as the foster youth POC to support the educational success of students in foster care, generally?**

- Be the point person for communication and coordination with child welfare staff.
- Work with the child welfare agency point of contact to develop a process for ensuring the district knows which of its students are in foster care, so that schools can mobilize supports for these students.
- Work with teachers and school staff to monitor the attendance and course progress of students in foster care, to ensure they are attending, engaged, and learning.
- Partner with the point of contact at the child welfare agency to create a process for ensuring social workers are able to access the school records of the students they are working with. (This is allowed under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.)
- Help teachers and school staff who are working directly with students learn about the unique needs and rights of students in foster care. Training topics include trauma-informed care and a primer on the child welfare court process.

Thank you for all you are doing to help students in foster care succeed.

For more information, contact FosterEd New Mexico Director Grace Spulak at [gspulak@youthlaw.org](mailto:gspulak@youthlaw.org).