

Best Interest In School of Origin Decisions: A Checklist for Decision Making

(Adapted from the San Diego County Interagency Agreement for Providing Educational Support to Students in Foster Care And the Texas Homeless Education Office)

Decisions regarding school selection should be made on a case by case basis, giving attention to the circumstances of each student. The following information and checklist may help Child Welfare Services staff and the Educational Rights Holder in discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

Background and Law:

Studies consistently show that school stability is critical for academic achievement. Therefore, the law allows a youth to remain in their school of origin, if the youth, the person holding educational rights and the school district foster care liaison determine that remaining in the school of origin is in the best interest of the child.

When a child is going to change residences, whether this is due to initial entry into the foster care system or a placement change afterwards, the first key decision is whether or not the child will remain in the same school. The Federal Fostering Connections legislation states that the child's case plan must contain the following assurances:

- The placement 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 placement agency has coordinated with the person holding the right to make educational decisions for the child and appropriate local educational agencies to ensure that the child remains in the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement or, if remaining in that school is not in the best interests of the child, assurances by the placement agency and the local educational agency to provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school and to provide all of the child's educational records to the new school. WIC §16501.1(f).

48853.5 (e)(6) The educational liaison, in consultation with, and with the agreement of, the foster child and the person holding the right to make educational decisions for the foster child, may recommend, in accordance with the foster child's best interests, that the foster child's right to attend the school of origin be waived and the foster child be enrolled in a public school that pupils living in the attendance area in which the foster child resides are eligible to attend.

Key Considerations:

- How long is the placement expected to last and what is the permanent plan?
- How many schools has the child attended this year? The past few years?
- How strong is the child academically?
- Which school does the child prefer? Why?
- Would the timing of a transfer coincide with a logical juncture such as after testing, end of semester, or end of the school year?
- How would the length of commute impact the child?
- Does the youth have any anxieties about the upcoming move or changes in his/her life?
- Are there any safety issues to consider?
- Is the current school in Program Improvement (PI)?
- If so, how are students that are demographically similar to the student performing academically?

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Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Remaining in the Same School (School of Origin) Considerations		Transferring to a New School Considerations	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Continuity of Instruction <i>Student is best served at the same school due to prior history.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Continuity of Instruction <i>Student is best served at a different school due to his or her history/future.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Age and grade placement of the student <i>Maintaining friends and contacts with peers is critical to the student's meaningful school experience and participation. The student has been in this environment for an extended period of time.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Age and grade placement of the student <i>Maintaining friends and contacts with peers is <u>not</u> critical to the student's meaningful school experience and participation. The student has attended the school of origin for only a brief time. The student has destructive or dangerous relationships at their school of origin.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic Strength <i>The child's academic performance is weak, and the child would fall further behind if he/she transferred to another school.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic Strength <i>The child's academic performance is strong and at grade level and the child would likely recover academically from a school transfer.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Social and emotional state <i>The child is suffering from the effects of mobility, has developed strong ties to the current school, does not want to leave, or involved in school related or extra-curricular activities.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Social and emotional state <i>The child seems to be coping adequately with mobility, does not feel strong ties to the current school, does not mind transferring to another school, or is not involved in school related or extra-curricular activities.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education and/or special needs <i>The advantage of remaining in the school of origin outweighs any potential disadvantages presented by the length of the commute.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education and/or special needs <i>Shorter commute may help the student's concentration, attitude, or readiness for school. The new school can meet all of the necessary educational and special needs of the student.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal safety of the student <i>The school of origin has advantages for the safety of the student.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal safety of the student <i>The new school has advantages for the safety of the student.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Student's need for special instruction <i>The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the school of origin.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Student's need for special instruction <i>The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the new school.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Length of anticipated stay in a temporary or permanent location <i>The student's current living situation is outside the school of origin attendance area, but his/her living situation or location continues to be uncertain. The student will benefit from the continuity offered by remaining in the school of origin.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Length of anticipated stay in a temporary or permanent location <i>The student's current living situation appears to be stable and unlikely to change suddenly. The student will benefit from developing relationships with school peers who live in his or her community.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic Performance Ranking <i>The school is in program improvement, but the student is connected (academically or socially) to the school which outweighs transferring to a new school or higher performing school.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic Performance Ranking <i>The school of origin is in Program Improvement and the new potential school will meet the educational needs of the student. The new school can provide more academic support services and greater opportunities than the school of origin.</i>