

Back-to-School Checklist: Desk Guide

ACTION

RESOURCES

Best Interest Determination (BID) & Enrollment

- Identify students who are in need of a best interest determination (BID), including students who have entered care during the summer, have changed living placements over the summer, or who may be starting at a new school this school year.
- Review your jurisdiction's BID policies and any caseworker checklists, if applicable.
- When a BID is needed, collaborate with your agency's education POC to participate in a student-centered BID process, including assistance with notice to all relevant parties (e.g., student, parents, foster resources/caregivers, education decision-makers, school staff) and information gathering about whether it would be in a student's best interest to remain in their school of origin.
- Work with your agency's education POC to ensure schools are engaged in the BID process and decision, particularly for students with special educational needs, behavioral or mental health needs, language access needs, and/or tribal affiliations (there may be additional factors to consider for these students during the BID).
- Ensure that each student on your caseload is enrolled in school at the start of the school year (or as soon as they enter foster care during the school year) with a classroom assignment/class schedule and access to extracurricular activities.

- [ESSA Implementation Toolkit](#)
- [Sample Best Interest Determination Worksheet \(Wisconsin\)](#)
- [School Stability for Students with Disabilities in Foster Care: Intersection of Federal Laws](#)

Transportation

- Ensure that a documented transportation plan is in place for students who require transportation to remain in their school of origin, including interim transportation.
- If there is any dispute about who will be responsible for transportation, reach out to your agency's education POC and review your jurisdiction's policies on transportation and dispute resolution. Remember that a child typically must remain in their school of origin while any disputes regarding transportation costs are being resolved.

- [Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care: Transportation Procedures](#)
- [Individual Student Transportation Plan-Template](#)

- Ensure that the child and their caregiver(s) understand the transportation plan, including contact information, bus number, and pick-up and drop-off times.

Education Decision Maker, Collaboration, & Information Sharing

- Ensure that you know who the education decision maker (EDM) is for each child on your caseload. Keep in mind that this will typically remain the child’s parent (i.e., the caregiver from whom the child was removed) unless there is a court order limiting the parent’s education decision-making rights and appointing someone else to be the child’s EDM.

- Ensure that the child’s school has up-to-date contact information for the child (e.g., current caregiver, parent, address, caseworker, EDM, and any court orders limiting parent contact).

- Encourage schools to maintain a direct line of communication with the child’s current caregiver, in addition to the child’s parent, whenever possible. Make sure schools know that regardless of a parent’s custodial or decision-making rights, parents typically will still have the right to access their child’s educational information and participate in meetings, unless there are court orders limiting their right to do so.

- If the school uses any parent portal to provide families with updates, ensure that the current caregiver and parent both have access to these portals (unless otherwise restricted by court orders). Remind schools that the student’s address might need to be redacted in some cases.

- Ensure that student records are transferred by the beginning of the school year for students in foster care that will be attending a new school, including IEPs and evaluations for students receiving special education services.

- [Identifying Special Education Decision Makers for Children in Foster Care](#)
- [Toolkit to Support Parent Involvement in Education when their Children are in Foster Care](#)

Other Steps for School Success

- Provide school supplies and personal care items to students in foster care when necessary, including shoes, outfits, culturally-appropriate haircare, Chromebooks, chargers, or other needed supplies.

- Arrange school tours and other supportive services like test bus rides for children and their caregivers.

- When considering a school change for a child receiving special education services, tour the school to ensure that the school can appropriately meet the child’s needs.

- [Resource on culturally-appropriate haircare: Foster Love Project Black Hair Care Resources](#)
- [Sample Tips for School Visits](#)
- [Sample Tip Sheet: What to Ask During a School Visit for Students in Special Education](#)

<p><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure each student in foster care is attending and participating in school regularly and on-time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Attendance Works for more resources, including Student Attendance Success Plan templates.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> When IEP meetings are needed, ensure that the parent/EDM (if different from the parent) participate in the meeting and know they can invite anyone else with relevant information to attend as well. Prepare by meeting with the parent/EDM in advance and reviewing goals, concerns, and questions for the school. Participate in those meetings when requested.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample IEP Meeting Checklist (NYC)
<p><input type="checkbox"/> If a student is experiencing issues with school discipline, speak to the parent/EDM about next steps to obtain supports within the school setting. Consider asking for positive behavioral supports to be put in place, which could include requesting a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource on Functional Behavioral Assessment Process (from Pennsylvania) • Sample letter requesting a FBA and BIP and see Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (Virginia) for other template letters • Examples of Positive Behavioral Intervention Strategies
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Consider making referrals to additional services to supplement what the school is providing—including tutoring and counseling.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample tutoring resources
<p><input type="checkbox"/> If unaddressed issues remain or complicated education issues arise, including enrollment challenges, school discipline, or complex special education issues, reach out and collaborate with your state and local POCs. Seeking additional support for legal advocates in your community may be necessary to ensure the educational rights of the student are protected and enforced.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Child Welfare Agency Education Contacts • State Educational Agency Foster Care Points of Contact