



## COVID-19: Supporting Students in Foster Care

August 24, 2020

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As the COVID-19 crisis continues, districts are making decisions about what school will look like during the 2020-2021 school year.

It is important to continue to address the educational needs of all students, paying close attention to vulnerable student groups such as children in foster care, and the impact the pandemic has had on students.

For educational stability, many children in foster care rely on services received in schools, including early intervention services, access to transportation, food, and health care, and connection to peers and trusted adults. The pandemic may have caused additional educational barriers for our students in foster care.

Now more than ever, it is vital that districts and schools think of ways to continue the communication between the school and the child welfare agency (CWA).

### **What can districts/schools do to build collaboration with the local child welfare agency?**

- Each district's foster care liaison should reach out to the CWA to share the local district's policy and guidelines for reopening for the 2020-2021 school year. The [Guidance on Safety Expectations and Best Practices for Kentucky Schools \(K-12\)](#) is an excellent resource for sharing and guiding discussions on how to support students in foster care.
- Schools should ensure contact information (email addresses, phone numbers, etc.) for foster families and caregivers is up-to-date for effective communication.
- Schools should check in with families and caregivers by phone, email or other methods to better understand how students in foster care are being impacted during this time and what supports are needed during extended closures or while implementing alternate learning schedules. Schools should share the school's plan for instruction and, if that plan includes virtual instruction, verify the caregiver has the proper equipment and know-how to access online learning platforms. In other words, does the caregiver need assistance accessing available tools and resources?
- Building the school and CWA collaboration is crucial during this time. Connect via phone or virtual meeting to discuss how social/emotional support for foster children can be implemented. The Kentucky Department of Education's (KDE) guidance document, [COVID-19 Considerations for Reopening Schools Supporting Student and Staff Wellness](#), addresses the planning and considerations that should occur to support the social and emotional well-being of students and staff.

### **Where can a district foster care liaison obtain an updated list of students in foster care within the district?**

- Districts can run reports from the Infinite Campus (District Edition) student information system. Foster care records are published to District Edition from State Edition based on data provided by Cabinet for Health and Family Services.



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- The QA Foster report produces aggregated foster care data and the supporting student level detail for quality assurance review. (Path: KDE State Reporting/KDE Reports/QA Foster).
- The [Foster Care Data Standard](#) provides state-specific information and Infinite Campus provides [instructions about using the Foster Care Tab](#), such as creating a new foster care record and printing a foster care summary report.

### Where can I find a list of districts' foster care liaisons?

- Each local school district has a foster care liaison. To find the foster care liaison in a district, visit KDE's [Foster Care webpage](#) and click on [Local Education Agency Points of Contact](#) on the right side of the page. LEA foster care liaison contact information also is located on the [Open House website](#).
- If the foster care liaison role is blank or incorrect, the update must be made in Person Role Manager via [KDE web applications](#). To add a foster care liaison, the role status must be set to "active" and a role start date entered. Please also ensure an email address is entered on the demographic screen. If a change occurs with personnel, the information also should be updated via [KDE web applications](#) | Person Role Manager. For additional technical questions and support, please email [Windy Newton](#).
- Local foster care liaisons should work closely with their local child welfare agency during these uncertain times to stay up-to-date on students entering foster care and/or experiencing placement changes. So, keeping local foster care liaison contact information current is of critical importance.

### How will transportation for foster students be affected during COVID-19?

- The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Section 1111(g)(1)(E) provides for ensuring the educational stability of children in foster care. ESSA Section 1112(c)(5)(B) describes the requirement to collaborate with the state or local child welfare agency to develop clear written procedures governing how transportation to maintain children in foster care within their school of origin, if in the student's best interest, will be provided, arranged and funded for the duration of time in foster care. These requirements remain unchanged.
- As districts work with their local child welfare agencies to develop written processes tailored specifically to each LEA's unique needs, several topics should be discussed and documented:
  - Transportation options that could be provided where no additional costs would be incurred;
  - How additional transportation costs will be addressed;
  - How disputes over transportation will be handled; however, the district must ensure that the child remains in his or her school of origin, which may include



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providing or arranging transportation, if necessary, while disputes over costs are pending resolution; and

- Other potential issues that may arise, such as:
  - Timeliness of implementation;
  - Duration and changes in transportation needs;
  - School activities beyond classes;
  - Coordination when other school districts are involved; and
  - Preschool students within the district.

Excerpted from the Ohio Department of Education's *Making A Transportation Plan: Implementing ESSA Transportation Requirements to Ensure School Stability*.

### What are some options for transportation of children in foster care?

- Children whose foster home is in the attendance zone for the school of origin will ordinarily not create excess cost, since the child will be able to ride on an existing route without creating additional costs. For children whose foster home is outside the attendance zone for the school of origin, there are several ways in which implementation could be accomplished, for example:
  - Option 1: If the child who is transported to the school of origin lives beyond the school of origin's attendance zone, yet adjacent, the child can be added to a current school bus route that serves their school of origin. The district will need to determine the extra time needed at the beginning of the bus route in the morning and the end of the bus route in the afternoon per day for the driver to transport the child and contract with the bus driver for the extra time necessary to serve the child. Along with driver pay, the excess cost should include any mileage associated with the lengthier bus route.
  - Option 2: If the child lives beyond the school of origin's attendance zone and would need to cross several boundaries in order to attend, the district may offer the foster parent or legal guardian reimbursement mileage for the transportation of the child to and from school. [Click here for standard IRS mileage reimbursement rates](#). The excess cost includes any mileage paid to the foster parent or legal guardian. Please refer to [Foster Care Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.
- Once the transportation procedures are collaboratively established and documented, it is essential that the foster care liaison work with the local child welfare agency to make transportation arrangements. This collaboration ensures that children in foster care needing transportation to the school of origin promptly receive such transportation in a cost-effective manner (ESSA Section 1112(c)(5)(B)(i)).
- KDE provides [COVID-19 transportation guidance](#) for districts which can be referenced for additional information. Starting on Page 3, the guidance discusses mitigation strategies for students which require masks, assigned seats and temperature checks prior



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to boarding. This information, as well as any additional district procedures, should be shared with the local CWA.

### What additional funding sources can be utilized for supporting foster care students during the pandemic?

- The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, Section 18003(d)(3), permits, for example, funds to be designated for activities to address the unique needs of low-income children, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth, including outreach and service delivery for each population. Funding can be earmarked for these populations of students at the district level to provide the support that is needed.
- The district finance officer may be able to advise on additional funding sources available at the local level to support students in foster care during this time.

### Resources

- [COVID-19 Updates and Information for P-12 Education](#): KDE's COVID-19 hub for information on educating, feeding, support and reopening guidance.
- [COVID-19 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund Guidance for LEAs](#): This guidance document provides an overview of the allocable and intended uses of the ESSER fund to support leaders in their decision-making processes.
- Kentucky Partnership for Families and Children Inc. prepared a [Compiled List of Resources for Families and Youth](#) that includes resources on how to support children during the COVID-19 crisis with information on the following topics:
  - Managing anxiety;
  - Discipline and behavior;
  - Depression awareness for educators, teens and parents;
  - Mindfulness; and
  - PBS Kids Apps.
- The [American Academy for Pediatrics](#) provides examples of ways foster families can provide support during the pandemic.
- [Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care](#) answers frequently asked questions for districts and schools.

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