

MEMORANDUM

TO: DCF STAFF, Superintendents, Directors of Charter Schools,
OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: Commissioner Angelo McClain, Department of Children and Families
Angelo McClain
Commissioner Mitchell D. Chester, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Mitch D. Chester

RE: Promoting Educational Stability for DCF-Involved Children and Families

DATE: June 1, 2012

We are writing to update you on Massachusetts' efforts to implement the education requirements of the federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*. Fostering Connections is a federal child welfare law that was enacted to improve services for foster children and youth involved in the child welfare system.

Several key provisions of the law focus on the importance of maintaining educational stability for children in the care or custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF), in order to promote academic continuity and success. Specifically, the law requires DCF to:

- Ensure that foster children and youth are enrolled in and attending school;
- Consider educational stability when identifying foster placements;
- Place foster children in proximity to their schools of origin when possible;
- Coordinate with local school districts to ensure students can remain in the school they were attending prior to entering foster care or prior to any change in placement unless it is not in the child's best interest; and
- Ensure that foster children are enrolled in a new school without delay if they need to change schools.

These new education mandates create a significant new responsibility for the child welfare system. They also create an opportunity for improved collaboration between DCF offices and local schools to work jointly to support educational stability and to improve educational outcomes for foster children and youth.

The law requires DCF to actively consider the appropriateness of the educational setting and the proximity to the home school when identifying foster placements, *and* to work with local school officials regarding the feasibility of allowing students to continue to attend their current school, even if they are placed outside of the school district. In the event that a student must change schools, the law requires DCF to work with the local school district to enroll such student without delay. For more information about the Fostering Connections to Success Act please visit:

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/fosteringconnections/>.

Changing schools can be incredibly disruptive, especially for children coming into DCF care or custody. Research shows that it significantly interferes with learning and that even a single change can delay educational progress for up to six months. Our agencies are committed to working together, and with all of you, to ensure that foster children and youth have access to the stable and high-quality educational experiences they need to support their school and life success.

To realize this commitment, we have formed an interagency working group that is developing additional information, assessing the need for funding or other supports, and determining protocols and procedures for implementing this law. In the near future, we will also be providing training opportunities for both DCF and school personnel on the provisions of the law and strategies for effectively implementing its requirements.

We will notify you as additional information and resources become available. In the meantime, we encourage DCF staff and school administrators and counselors to work together to provide the support, stability and educational opportunities to foster care children and youth that will help them succeed in school. For assistance at DCF, please contact Susan Stelk, Manager of Education Services, at 617-748-2340 or susan.stelk@state.ma.us. For assistance at ESE, please contact John Bynoe, Associate Commissioner, at 781-338-6303 or jbynoe@doe.mass.edu. Thank you for your commitment to improving the lives of young people in the Commonwealth.