



July 21, 2020

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

Educational Opportunities for Children in Foster Care

Recommendation: That the School Committee approve the Educational Opportunities for Children in Foster Care Policy as detailed in the attached document.

Description: This Policy is required as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act and the Foster Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act.

This is a first reading of the proposed Educational Opportunities for Children in Foster Care Policy.

Supporting Data: Educational Opportunities for Children in Foster Care Policy.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "KS", written over the typed name.

Kenneth N. Salim, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the educational stability of students in foster care and their equal access to the same free and appropriate public education through high school graduation as provided to other students as required by law. Educational stability has a lasting impact on students' academic achievement and wellbeing, and the Cambridge School Committee is committed to supporting all efforts to ensure that students in foster care have equal access to high-quality, stable educational experiences.

Irrespective of the location of a foster care placement, students in foster care will continue to attend their school of origin, unless after a collaborative decision-making process, it is determined to be in the student's best interest to enroll in and attend school in the district in which the student resides in foster care. Enrollment of students in the district where they reside in foster care will take place immediately upon such a determination.

The Superintendent shall designate an appropriate staff person to be the Cambridge Public Schools' liaison and point of contact for foster care students to ensure that students can access transportation and other services to which they may be entitled and to ensure the educational stability of students in foster care.

Best Interest Determination

Decisions about whether a student in foster care should continue to attend the school of origin should be made collaboratively by DCF, the student (as appropriate), the student's family and/or foster family (or if different, the person authorized to make educational decisions on behalf of the student), the school and district of origin, and (when appropriate) the local district where the student is placed. Best interest determinations should focus on the needs of each individual student and take into account for unique factors about the student and their foster care placement. Every effort should be made to reach an agreement regarding the appropriate school placement of a student in foster care; however, DCF will finalize the best interest determination if the relevant parties cannot agree on the best school for the student to attend.

The Cambridge Public Schools can seek review of DCF's decision by utilizing a Foster Care School Selection Dispute Resolution Process established by DESE and DCF. Decisions made through this process are not subject to review. To the extent feasible and appropriate, the Cambridge Public Schools will ensure that a child remains in their school of origin while the disputes are being resolved to minimize disruptions and reduce the number of moves between schools.

Transportation

The district of origin must collaborate with DCF on how transportation will be provided and arranged to ensure that students in foster care who need transportation to remain in their school of origin will receive such transportation while they are in foster care. Transportation options may include using Title I funds, establishing regional collaborations among districts, coordinating with existing routes for transportation, seeking help from foster parent(s), etc. Absent other agreements between the district and DCF, the district of origin is responsible for providing transportation to and from the school of origin.

Immediate Enrollment

If it is in the best interest of a student in foster care to leave the school of origin, the student must be immediately enrolled in school in the district in which they reside in foster care. During enrollment of

students in foster care, DCF representatives will present the district with a form indicating that the student is in foster care, along with a state agency identification badge.

If the student does not have immediate access to immunization records, the student shall be permitted to enroll under a personal exception. Students and families should be encouraged to obtain current immunization records or immunizations as soon as possible, and the district liaison is directed to assist. Emergency contact information is required at the time of enrollment consistent with district policies, including compliance, with the state's address confidentiality program when necessary. After enrollment, the Cambridge Public Schools will immediately request available records from the student's previous school.

Attendance rights by living in attendance areas, other student assignment policies, or intra and inter-district choice options are available to students in foster care (homeless families) on the same terms as families who reside in the district. Accordingly, the Cambridge Public Schools will provide transportation services to school in a manner comparable to the transportation provided for all other students in the district.

Legal Reference: Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008