EDUCATION





The kind of world we live in tomorrow depends—not partially—but entirely upon the type and quality of education of our children today.

—Martin Vanbee



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Educational Service Planning
Child's History + Professional
Assessment + Services

Health and life experiences influence every child's growth and development. Abuse, neglect, being separated from family, and in some cases, poor health can negatively affect a child's ability and readiness to learn. Luckily, most developmental and educational delays are only temporary. If addressed, experts confirm that early identification of delays, coupled with support services, can help children bounce back to reach their intellectual and educational potential.

DCFS Educational Services Procedures 314 requirements reflect the research on the educational needs of children in foster care. The educational planning process and policy given in this section summarize DCFS Educational Services Procedures. Information about Special Education and educational support programs available to children in foster care is also provided.

Gathering Information to Make Informed Decisions

The caseworker has the primary responsibility in educational planning for a child. He or she must meet definite deadlines set for the educational planning process. Information sharing and teamwork among the caregivers, the caseworker and the school is essential to the planning and decision making process. Caseworkers must complete an educational plan for a child *within 30 days of court-ordered temporary custody* using the information described below:

Medical History

In addition to looking for health and medical needs, the caseworker also reviews the child's Health Passport and other medical records to determine if *a child age three or older* may be eligible for special educational services, or a child under three may need Early Intervention Services.

Children three and over may be eligible for *special education* if they have any of these impairments: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disability, hearing impairment, cognitive disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment.

Developmental delays or risk of delays may be noted by medical providers in the child's Health Passport. All *children under three* receive an Early and Periodic Diagnostic Screening during the Comprehensive Health Evaluation, required within 21 days of the child entering foster care. Results of the screening should also be noted in the child's Health Passport.

Educational History

New School
Within 10 days of the child's enrollment, the caseworker is required to contact and interview the child's new teacher to discuss the child's educational strengths and weaknesses, and whom to call if problems begin to occur.

Implications for caregivers: Caregivers are not automatically included in this meeting. If you would like to have input or join in this meeting, talk to the caseworker.

Former School
The caseworker asks the former school to complete the child's educational history via an Educational Report form. *Within 10 days of the child leaving the former school*, the caseworker contacts the former school by phone or in-person to interview the child's most recent teacher and discuss the completion and return of the Educational Report form. The caseworker also reviews other school records: Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) for a child receiving special educational services, report cards gathered from the child's former school or caregiver, and attendance and discipline reports.

Other Interviews
The caseworker is also required to interview the child, the child's birth parents and caregivers to gather additional information about the child's educational history and current needs.

Timelines for Developing Educational Plans

Understanding caseworker deadlines is very important for caregivers to be able to have input into educational planning. There are specific DCFS forms that must be completed and kept in the child's case file. Form numbers are included here for your convenience in discussing the educational plan with the caseworker and in making requests for information.

Initial Educational Plan: Within 45 Days of Temporary Custody
An initial client service plan (CFS 497) must be completed within 45 days of temporary custody. In order to develop the service plan, all children entering DCFS care receive an Integrated Assessment, which includes an initial educational assessment, within 30 days of temporary custody. The caseworker is responsible to complete the initial educational assessment and document it on the CFS-407-4 within 30 days of placement. The CFS 407-4 is then used to develop the initial educational plan (CFS 497, Part III) which will be reviewed at the first Administrative Case Review (ACR) within 45 days of custody.

In some cases, it will be necessary to obtain professional educational assessments to determine the unique needs of the child. When professional evaluation reports

or assessments are not available within 30 days, the caseworker may develop an interim assessment using the CFS 407-4 to be incorporated into the initial educational plan.

Implications for caregivers: Any child placed with you after the first 45 days in foster care must have an educational plan in place. Reviewing the child's current educational plan with the caseworker prior to placement can help your family decide if your skills, time and energy can meet the child's educational needs, and the need for any necessary supports, such as special education services. After the child is placed in your care, you should be involved in developing an educational plan along with the caseworker and teachers.

Annual High School Plan: Within 30 Days of Temporary Custody
If the youth is attending high school when custody is taken, the assigned caseworker should conduct the Annual High School Academic Planning Meeting using the CFS 407-HS Annual High School Plan within 30 days of temporary custody. This will be used in completing the CFS 407-4, Education Profile (Assessment), as well as Part III of the Service Plan (CFS 497). If the youth is taken into custody during the months of April through June, the Annual High School Academic Planning Meeting will be waived until August of the following academic year.

Implications for caregivers: Any youth of high school age placed with you must have an Annual High School Plan completed in August of each high school academic year. The Annual High School Plan provides a method of planning for high school graduation and post-secondary goals. It is important that you support your high school student's participation in the plan in order to ensure their goals are considered. The Annual High School Plan is an invaluable tool to help you ensure that your student graduates from high school by tracking credits earned toward graduation.

Client Service Plan: Within 60 Days of Temporary Custody
The caseworker will finalize the initial client service plan (CFS 497) within 60 days of temporary custody. By this time, the caseworker will have determined the child's academic, social and extracurricular interests, strengths, goals and needs and will have documented them in Part III of the CFS 497. If additional educational assessments of the child were determined to be needed within the initial 30-day assessment period, reports should be available by now. If the reports are not available within 60 days, the caseworker will document an initial assessment on the CFS 407-4.

Implications for caregivers: Caregivers should be given copies of the child's portion of the service plan at placement and after each ACR. Therefore, if a child has been in foster care 60 days or longer, the child's needs in all of these areas can be easily discussed prior to placement with a new foster family.

Resources for Educational Support and Advocacy

Education Advisors

Education advisors are located in each DCFS region and are responsible for the overall coordination of educational issues within the regions. Education advisors provide ongoing technical assistance and training for caseworkers, education liaisons, school personnel, foster families, adoptive families and caregivers regarding educational early intervention services.

Caregivers whose foster care licenses are supervised by DCFS can reach an education advisor by calling the office near their home.

Chicago North	312-328-2607
Chicago Central	773-292-7732
Chicago South	773-371-6028
Cook Suburbs – North and Central	773-292-7725
Cook Suburbs – South	708-210-3051
Northern Region	815-967-3750 (Rockford) or 815-730-4342 (Joliet)
Central Region	217-557-3985 (Springfield) 309-730-7952 (Peoria) or 217-875-6797 (Decatur)
Southern Region	618-583-2125 (E. St. Louis) or 618-993-7134 (Murphysboro)

Education Liaisons

Private foster care agencies employ education liaisons to provide support to caregivers, caseworkers and school personnel with education issues that affect only the children served by their individual agency. Caregivers whose licenses are supervised by a private agency should call their agency to reach an education liaison.

Any caregiver seeking statewide information may call the DCFS/NIU Center for Child Welfare and Education Office at 815-753-8543 (Fax 815-753-0993).

Training

Foster caregivers are required to take the Educational Advocacy class, which provides extensive information on special education. Check with your licensing representative or the DCFS Office of Training at www.dcfstraining.org.

Special Education

In 1975 Public Law 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, guaranteed that all children, including disabled children have a right to a "free and appropriate public education." Federal special education law is reauthorized every four years. Today the former PL 94-142 is known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and can be found at 20 USC 1400 et seq. Implementing regulations can be found at 34 CFR Part 300, as amended 8/14/2006.

Special Education means specially designed instruction, in order to provide access to a free and appropriate public education and to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities from the ages of 3 through 21.

Who Provides Special Education Services?

Community agencies are contracted to provide special education services called Early Intervention Services for infants and toddlers, ages zero to three, and their families. (See pages 11-12.) Public school districts and schools directly provide or contract for special education services for children age three through 21.

Which Children are Eligible?

Children with the following disabilities may be eligible for special education services:

- mental impairment;
- specific learning disability;
- emotional disturbance;
- speech/language impairment;
- hearing impairment;
- visual impairment and blindness;
- orthopedic impairment;
- autism;
- traumatic brain injury;
- other health impairment;
- deafness;
- deaf-blindness;
- developmental delay; and
- multiple disabilities.

Instructional services may include special teaching techniques, materials, equipment, facilities and services. All special education services are to be provided at no cost to foster families.

Role of Foster Caregivers in Special Education

What is the Role of the Foster Caregiver?

A foster caregiver is defined as a "parent" in both the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Illinois' special education regulations. What this means is that federal and state law assign the foster caregiver with the authority and responsibility to serve as the "parent" in all matters regarding special education. An Educational Surrogate Parent (ESP) is required when a child is placed in residential care. Foster caregivers are encouraged to serve as the ESP for children in their care who move into residential care. When reunification is the goal, the foster caregiver and the child's parent can share in the educational responsibilities.

The caregivers have the responsibility to ensure that the school provides the student with a free, appropriate public education by:

- understanding the child and his or her educational needs, including the child's strengths, interests and abilities;
- requesting case study evaluations;
- signing consents for case study evaluations, the initial educational placement and educational re-evaluations;
- attending educational meetings, eligibility conferences and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings;
- negotiating for appropriate special education services;
- requesting complaint investigations, mediation and/or impartial due process hearings;
- participating in due process hearings related to the child's needs;
- seeking legal advice, when necessary, to advocate for the child's needs; and
- communicating with the student's caseworker regarding the student's educational needs.

Caregivers must also:

- within two days after placement, enroll the child in school or if needed, pursue early intervention services for children three and under;
- attend school meetings and participate in early intervention services;
- talk to the child's teacher or others involved on a regular basis;
- work as a team with the child's caseworker; and
- represent the child in a positive manner.

Becoming a Surrogate for Other Children

Caregivers may also volunteer to be an educational surrogate for children who are in residential care or in the Department of Corrections, up to a maximum of 10 students a semester, providing those students are educated in facilities or schools in close proximity. To volunteer, call the surrogate parent coordinator, Illinois State Board of Education, at 217-782-5589.

Legal Supports for Caregivers: Special Education Law Project

DCFS contracts with the Legal Assistance Foundation to provide legal services to caregivers and caseworkers. Caregivers and caseworkers advocating with school districts should discuss these services with their education advisor or liaison before contacting their local Legal Assistance subcontractor listed below to ask for services, which are *free*.

Special Education Law Project Services

Technical Assistance in Obtaining Special Education Services
Caregivers, educational surrogates and caseworkers have to be assertive and understand their rights in requesting special education services and how to disagree within the special education system. The Special Education Law Project can legally advise caregivers, educational surrogates and caseworkers and may also participate with them in early intervention mediations and due process hearings, if appropriate.

Training on Law and Issues Related to Special Education and Early Intervention
Foster caregiver groups and individual agencies may request speakers and training through this program on the legal aspects of advocating for a child's special educational needs.

Participation in Mediation and Due Process Hearings
Advice and support to caregivers and educational surrogates on how to appeal Individualized Educational Plans, as well as on-site support during mediation and due process hearings are available. Legal representation for the child is also available, if needed.

Special Education Law Project Phonebook

For information, training, legal assistance and to request representation, call your local Special Education Law Project office:

County	***Phone***
Cook	*312-341-1070*
Boone, Bureau, Carroll, DeKalb, DuPage, Fulton, Grundy, Henderson, Henry, Iroquois, Jo Daviess, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Knox, LaSalle, Lake, Lee, Livingston, McDonough, McHenry, McLean, Marshall, Mercer, Ogle, Peoria, Putnam, Rock Island, Stark, Stephenson, Tazewell, Warren, Whiteside, Will, Winnebago and Woodford	*815-965-2134*
All remaining counties of Illinois	*618-394-7300*

Speaking the Language of Special Education

Free Appropriate Public Education means special education and related services that 1) Are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; 2) Meet the standards of the Illinois State Board of Education; 3) Include preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education; and 4) Are provided in conformity with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Home School is the school a child would attend if he did not have a disability. It is the school the child's brothers, sisters and neighbors attend. For preschoolers, it is the preschool, community center or other community environment.

Inclusion usually means placing a child in the neighborhood school with appropriate supports, aides and curriculum adaptations so that he can participate in classes with children without disabilities.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) IDEA requires each student with a disability to be provided with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is the blueprint for a child's daily school program and is reviewed each year by the child's caregiver, teachers and the specialists involved in his or her education. Caregivers, as the educational surrogates, are strongly urged to be involved in this process.

Individualized Family Service Plan is a written plan for children from birth through two years of age who are eligible for early intervention services under IDEA.

Integration involves taking a child out of a special education environment and placing him or her in a general education classroom for part of the school day.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) IDEA states that each student with a disability be placed in the "Least Restrictive Environment" (LRE). This means the student should participate in the general education setting with their typical peers during academic, nonacademic and extra curricular activities, with services and supports. The general education setting is preferred and the starting point for discussions on the student's needs for services and supports. Because of individual needs, some students may need a more restrictive environment. Considerations discussed at each IEP meeting should include the supports and services a student would need to be successful in the general education curriculum.

Mainstreaming means placing a student in a general education academic classroom.

Supplementary Aids and Services are defined by IDEA as supports a student requires in a general education classroom. They can be as simple as moving a child's desk so he can see the blackboard better or as complex as providing a student with an electronic communication system.

Preschool Children and Education

All children aged birth to five years receive a developmental screening upon entering foster care. The purpose of the screening is to identify any developmental delays quickly and connect the child to local preschool support programs. Developmental programs for children aged zero to five are aimed at helping them be ready and able to learn.

Children aged birth to three years whose screening indicates a developmental delay must be immediately referred by the caseworker to the Illinois Early Intervention Program for an evaluation to determine if services are needed. If the infant or toddler needs services, the caregiver and caseworker team must arrange for the child to attend services. Infants and toddlers without developmental delays may be able to attend an Early Head Start program if available in your community.

Children aged three to five years must be enrolled in an early childhood education program. For children with disabilities, they must be enrolled in early childhood special education if eligible. Children without disabilities need to be enrolled in Head Start, if available in your community. Children at risk of school failure may be enrolled in a pre-kindergarten at-risk program if offered by your school district. If no publicly funded preschool program is available in your area, DCFS will pay for attendance in an accredited preschool program.

Children who have *developmental delays* are not learning new skills in a timely manner. Babies develop at different rates, but all babies do things that show they are developing normally, such as beginning to walk at about 12 months. Observing the way babies talk, if they remember things and people, how they play and the interactions with those around them tells us if they are developing normally or if they need some extra help.

How Do Caregivers Know If a Preschool Child Needs Developmental Help?

There are three ways developmental delays may be detected:

1) the child's medical and/or educational history may show a need for preschool or other services;
2) the HealthWorks physician may refer the child for further developmental screening; and
3) caregivers take a preschooler for a developmental screening after sensing or observing possible delays in development, after the initial placement in DCFS care.

What Preschool Services Are Available?

If a developmental screening shows your preschooler needs help in being ready for preschool or school, five types of developmental programs are available:

- early intervention services (ages 0-3);
- early Head Start (ages 0-3);
- pre-kindergarten (pre-K) for children at risk of academic failure (ages 3-5);
- preschool special education (ages 3-5); and
- Head Start (ages 3-5).

Information about these services follows on pages 11-12.

Educational Responsibilities of Caregivers of Preschool Children

Caregivers must:

- take a child for a developmental screening if she:
  - has just entered foster care; or
  - is referred by the HealthWorks primary physician; or
  - seems somewhat behind in development.
- work with the caseworker to enroll the child in a preschool support program, if needed;
- support the child's participation in home-based or community-based programs; and
- participate in the development and implementation of an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), if the child is found eligible for early intervention services or an IEP if the child is eligible for pre-special education services.

According to DCFS Policy, all children aged three to five years old must be enrolled in a preschool program. The first choice of programs for children should be the Head Start program. DCFS and Head Start have entered into an agreement to give children in foster care priority enrollment. Children with disabilities or at risk of school failure should be enrolled in Early Childhood Special Education or a pre-K at-risk program through the local school district. Check with your caseworker for availability of programs. If no publicly funded program is available, check with your caseworker about getting payment for an accredited preschool program.

Early Intervention (EI) Services (Ages Birth to 3)

Caregivers should routinely take a new baby or toddler placed with their family for an EI screening to ensure that the baby's development is on target.

Child and Family Connections Links Babies Birth to Three to EI Screenings and Services

The Child and Family Connections program is available to identify Illinois babies ages birth to three who have developmental delays and who will benefit from special help in getting ready for preschool and kindergarten.

Your local Child and Family Connections staff listed below can:

- answer questions about the child's development;
- schedule an appointment to identify what, if any, type of special services may be needed, including hearing and vision testing;
- tell you where to take the baby for services, if needed; and
- follow up with you to see how the baby is doing.

County		*Number*
Chicago	North	800-289-7990
	Southeast	800-862-1912
	Southwest	866-266-7167
	Central/West	888-283-2329
Cook:	Suburbs	
	North	800-585-1953
	Central	888-566-8228
	South	800-597-7798
	West	800-637-7181
Dupage		800-637-7181
McHenry		888-376-8828
Kane/Kendall		888-282-0997
Lake		888-939-3033
Grundy/Kankakee/LaSalle/Will		888-329-0633
Fulton/Hancock/Henderson/ Knox/McDonough/Mercer/ Rock Island/Schuyler/Warren		866-426-2160
Boone/Bureau/Marshall/ Ogle/Putnam/Winnebago		800-921-0094
Carroll/Dekalb/JoDaviess/ Lee/Stephenson/Whiteside		888-297-1041
Henry/Peoria/Stark/ Tazewell/Woodford		888-482-4300
Champaign/Ford/Iroquois/ Livingston/McLean/Vermilion		800-877-1152

County	*Number*
Logan/Mason/Menard/Sangamon	888-217-3505
Clark/Coles/Cumberland/ Dewitt/Douglass/Edgar/Macon/ Moultrie/Piatt/Shelby	800-758-2705
Bond/Christian/Clay/Crawford/ Effingham/Fayette/Jasper/ Lawrence/Macoupin/Montgomery/ Richland	888-459-5437
Clinton/Franklin/Jefferson/ Marion/Washington/Williamson	800-661-0900
Alexander/Hardin/Jackson/ Johnson/Massac/Perry/Pope/ Pulaski/Union	888-340-6702
Adams/Brown/Calhoun/Cass/ Greene/Jersey/Morgan/ Pike/Scott	888-222-9592
Madison/Monroe/Randolph/ St. Clair	888-594-8364
Edwards/Gallatin/Hamilton/ Saline/Wabash/Wayne/White	800-463-2759

An updated list of EI programs can also be found through the HELP-ME-GROW line at 800-323-4769 (TDD 800-547-0466). After calling your local screening program, if you still have questions about services for a child under 3, call the DCFS Early Childhood Services director at 312-814-1864.

Eligibility of Children
Children aged birth to three with certain conditions may be eligible for EI Services. The condition and also the percentage of delay are used to determine eligibility for services. Contact your nearest child and family community office to determine if your child is eligible.

Early Intervention Services
If a baby is determined through an assessment to be delayed or eligible for early intervention services, he may be entitled to receive these services:

- assistive technology/devices and services
- audiology services
- family training, counseling & home visits
- health services
- medical diagnostic services
- nursing services
- nutrition services
- occupational therapy
- psychological services
- service coordination
- social work services
- special instruction (developmental therapy)
- speech/language pathology
- vision services
- physical therapy
- transportation to services

An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed around the EI needs of each baby. EI services may be provided either inside or outside the home.

Early Childhood Special Education (Age 3-5)

Children ages three to five with certain disabilities may be eligible for special education services through the public school district. A list of eligibility categories may be found on page 5 of this section. The caseworker or caregiver can refer the child to the responsible public school district for an evaluation to determine the child's eligibility for special education services. (See page 11.)

Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) (Age 3-5)

If a three- to five-year-old child is not eligible for preschool special education, she may be eligible for a pre-kindergarten program offered by your local public school district. School districts are not required to offer pre-K, but many of them do. Pre-K programs include screening, evaluation, education and parent involvement. A history of significant neglect and/or abuse may place a child at risk for school failure and qualify the child for pre-K. The child's caseworker or caregiver will make a referral to the school district.

Head Start (Age 3-5, and sometimes, under 3)

Head Start is a government funded preschool program designed especially for disadvantaged children. The program's goal is to prepare these young children for success in grammar school. Some young children need additional structure and exposure to ideas, people and activities, and Head Start programs can provide these experiences. National research has shown that children who participate in Head Start are more likely to stay in school and graduate.

Head Start programs meet children's emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. Children with disabilities are also entitled to participate in Head Start programs. Early Head Start programs also serve children under three.

SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

Educational Responsibilities of Caregivers of School Age Children

Caregivers must:

- enroll the child in school *within two school days of placement*. If the child is not attending school by the third day, contact the caseworker;
- provide information and have input into educational planning;
- keep personal information confidential and, when there are questions, consult with the caseworker about what school personnel need to know before disclosing information;
- assist with homework as needed;
- attend parent/teacher conferences;
- pick up and sign report cards;
- alert the caseworker to school, disciplinary and attendance problems, including truancy;
- encourage children to participate in school-related and extracurricular activities;
- understand who can give consents for school-related activities and request consents from the caseworker, if you do not have the authority;
- support the concept of the importance of a good education in word and action;
- act as educational advocates for children and youth in their care with the school, the caseworker and DCFS; and
- be familiar with the educational support and advocacy resources discussed on page 4.

Enrollment in School

Age Requirements

Children aged five or older by September 1 are required by DCFS policy to be enrolled in school. Every child in foster care, at a minimum, is expected to be enrolled in school or training until he or she graduates or reaches age 18. Special educational services are available until the child reaches age 22, if necessary. (Students may, by law, attend school until age 21 or until they receive a diploma.)

Enrollment Deadlines

Caregivers must enroll a child in school as soon as possible after placement or within two days after placement. If the child is not attending school within two days, caregivers must ask the caseworker for help on, or before, the third day following placement. If the caseworker cannot enroll the child by the fifth day after placement, he or she is expected to notify their education advisor or liaison.

School Choice

Usually a child will attend the caregiver's local neighborhood public school, but not always. For those school districts that offer school choice, the caregiver and caseworker team should make choices based upon the best educational and personal interests of the child. In the case of disagreement over school attendance, the caseworker has the responsibility for determining best educational interests of the child.

Moving Outside the District — Remaining in the Current School

Caseworkers may decide, after careful study, that it is in the child's best interest to remain in the same school after moving outside the school district. For example: The caseworker of a 17-year-old may decide to keep the student in the same high school and neighborhood where he has lived his whole life to give him a greater chance of graduating.

Tuition

Under the School Code, if the caseworker and DCFS determine that continuing the child's current school is in her best interest, the school district cannot charge the tuition normally charged to children who do not reside in the district.

Implications for Caregivers:

Clarify which school the child will be attending and the transportation arrangements with the caseworker prior to placement. Work to encourage a team approach with the caseworker for educational decision making.

Transportation

If the caregiver/caseworker team determine that the child should remain at the current school, the caseworker should ask the school district to provide transportation. Unfortunately, the School Code does not require the school district to provide transportation in these cases. Therefore, if the school district refuses to transport, the caseworker must work with you to arrange transportation. The decision of the school district is not subject to appeal.

Private Schools

Students who may be eligible for scholarships, and want to attend private grade or high schools, should discuss their desire with the caseworker. Caregivers who are interested in a child attending a *private school* through a scholarship or by paying tuition themselves on behalf of the child should consult with the caseworker. DCFS does not pay private school tuition, uniform costs, or transportation to and from school. If the caregiver wishes to enroll a child in a religious-based school, consent by the parent for religious instruction must be obtained on the appropriate DCFS form.

Home Schooling

Children in foster care generally may not be home schooled.

Obtaining Records for Children New to Foster Care

The caseworker is responsible for requesting a child's records from the former school or preschool program *within five days after DCFS has assumed custody of the child.* According to the Illinois School Code, the former school has 10 days after receipt of the request to send the child's school record to the new school. If the child is receiving special education services, the caseworker must also see that the child's most recent Individualized Educational Program (IEP) is made available to the new school.

Caregivers will need to obtain the following minimum information from the caseworker in order to enroll their foster child within two days of placement:

- DCFS 906 form;
- certified copy of the child's birth certificate;
- transcript from former school;
- ISBE Student Transfer form from previous school;
- immunization records;
- proof of dental and vision exams;
- a copy of IEP if child is in special education; and
- a copy of the medical card.

Addressing Adjustment/Emotional Problems Early

When a child is having difficulty adjusting within your family or at school, problems can occur in attendance, schoolwork or homework, or behavior at school. Don't wait! Request assessments for the youth from the caseworker if the child's adjustment or emotional problems appear to be causing him/her any type of problem at school.

School Attendance

School-age children must attend school *every day school is in session*, unless they are too ill to attend or have a contagious disease, per DCFS policy.

A child or youth may not be kept out of school:

- as a form of discipline;
- due to behavior problems;
- because he is moving to a new foster family or changing foster placement;
- for the caregivers' convenience, such as baby-sitting younger children or leaving early on vacation;
- for the convenience of the caseworker or agency, such as arranging a visit during the school day to avoid driving in traffic after work or to avoid paying overtime rates; or
- for other reasons not related to their physical or clinical condition.

Exception: Children may be absent from school to attend Administrative Case Reviews (ACRs) and court hearings, if necessary. In either case, the child's attendance should be to have input and be heard — not to visit with parents or siblings.

Caregivers must:

- make sure school-age children attend school every day, unless they are ill;
- report absences due to illness immediately to the school office;
- request daily classwork and homework assignments, and help the child make them up;
- obtain excused absences from the school, in accordance with school policy;
- request tutoring for ill children from the school district and caseworker during an extended absence;
- notify the caseworker whenever the child has an unexcused absence;
- request all daily class work and homework assignments and assist the child in their completion if the child is suspended for disciplinary reasons. Notify the caseworker and education advisor or liaison immediately; and
- contact the caseworker immediately to request assistance if the child is expelled from school for any reason.

Not Permitted: Denying Visits or School Activities as Punishment

Children cannot be denied visits or contact with their family by phone, mail, or in person as punishment for school performance. Access to school activities, such as field trips or performing in a school play, cannot be used as a means of punishment for school-related problems.

Attending school every day is very important for a child's self-esteem and social and educational development.

Truancy

If a caregiver suspects, or is notified by the school that the child in their care is truant, the caseworker must be notified immediately for help in addressing this issue. The caseworker is responsible for tracking and addressing truancy with the involvement of the caregivers.

Homework

Children are given increasing responsibility for homework with each grade level. Make sure you understand how and when your child's teacher assigns homework.

Be sure to:

- check daily to see if the child has homework, has completed it, or needs help;
- help each child with homework, or get him or her the help needed; and
- enforce a "no TV until completing homework" rule.

Parental Notification

Unless parental rights have been terminated, parents have the right to continue to be involved in their child's education and participate in school events. Parents may be notified of disciplinary reports, report cards, school reports, teacher conferences, field trips, honors and awards ceremonies, extracurricular activity performances, school graduation and other school-related activities which are appropriate for any parent's participation.

Responsibilities of Caregivers of Children in Grades K-8

Caregivers should:

- know the school's disciplinary policies and where and how to call in absences;
- regularly communicate with the child's teacher;
- check the child's book bag for notes, homework and things that should not be taken to school. Weapons, or objects that could be perceived or used as weapons, should never be taken to school;
- obtain school supplies or uniforms required by the school or ask the caseworker for help;
- determine the before and after-school activities that the child is interested in and help and encourage her to enroll and attend regularly;
- keep school photos, artwork, report cards and mementos in a Lifebook or file for each child;
- attend parent-teacher conferences and school programs in which the child participates;
- pick up report cards as required by the school and share them with the caseworker; and
- check with the caseworker about tutoring, summer school or a referral for a special education Comprehensive Case Study Evaluation (CSE), if the child is failing one or more subjects or is below grade level.

Responsibilities of Caregivers of High School Students

Caregivers should:

- advocate for the youth's current and future educational needs with the teachers, counselor and school district;
- help the youth enroll in the correct high school classes/programs that:
  - are required for graduation;
  - meet the youth's interests and plans for the future; and
  - match the youth's abilities and fit with his or her goals.

Caregivers of college-bound students should help identify:

- which courses are required for admission to college;
- which courses and activities will most likely help the student get a scholarship; and
- which foreign languages are available.

Caregivers of students who are below grade level in reading or math, should clarify with the school whether or not remedial courses count toward graduation.

Transfer Planning

Enrolling in high school or transferring to a new high school requires careful planning. Caregivers need to be involved with the youth and caseworker in the annual high school plan process.

Caregivers should get written information from the high school, including:

- descriptions of classes or programs offered;
- graduation requirements, including specific required classes and number of credits;
- dress code, showing what is required and/or allowed;
- a list of school fees;
- driver's education requirements and enrollment guidelines;
- disciplinary policies: tardiness to school or classes; truancy from school or cutting classes; disturbances in classrooms, corridors, or on school property; infractions of rules or other behavior problems; and
- where and how to call in absences due to illness.

Caregivers should also help the student determine:

- which credits received at the former school count, or do not count, toward graduation, and plan additional courses so she does not have to lose a year. Or, determine if any substitutions are allowed for any of these requirements;
- whether the student can continue the same foreign language, if desired;
- available elective courses; and
- after these consultations, how many credits are necessary for graduation and when the student will graduate — by age 18, 19, 20, or 21?

General Educational Development (GED)

The high school diploma is preferred. Youth in foster care may only be enrolled in a GED program if they are ineligible to be enrolled in a public school district. A youth is ineligible for regular school enrollment when he or she has been expelled or is over age 19 and cannot graduate by age 21. If your student fits this description, consult with your caseworker and educational personnel about enrolling in an Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) certified GED program.

Planning for the Future

If the permanency goal for your high school student is independent living or self-sufficiency, educational planning or vocational planning should begin no later than age 14. There are many resources, including DCFS sponsored scholarships, available to children and families to assist students in preparing for educational opportunities after high school. See Section 7, pages 22-29 for DCFS-sponsored Independent Living and Youth Development programs for high school and college youth. The DCFS website www.youthincare.illinois.gov outlines many resources for youth transitioning to adulthood.

School Expenses

Food and Textbooks

All children in foster care are eligible for the Free School Lunch Program and certain school fee waivers. It is important to request an application for the Free School Lunch Program for each of the children in your care. Once an application for a child in DCFS care is completed, the child must be provided with **free**:

- lunch (including milk) and breakfast (if offered); and
- required textbooks and instructional materials.

Each school district and/or the caseworker can assist you in obtaining these free items or programs.

Common School Fees

School districts have individual policies regarding the waiver of other common school fees, such as:

- graduation;
- yearbooks;
- field trips;
- driver's education;
- school health services;
- prom tickets;
- musical instrument rentals;
- lab fees;
- activity fees; and
- other fees.

If you need help in obtaining or understanding the school district's policy about these, or any other school fees, ask your caseworker and/or agency for help. **The caseworker should clarify the policy and make an appropriate request for reimbursement from the school district, your private agency or DCFS. Ask!**

Summer School Enrollment and Book Fees

If the child in your care is required by the school district to attend summer school, or needs summer school to graduate or advance to the next academic grade level, or is behind, ask the caseworker to request that the school district waive summer school fees for the child. If the school district refuses the caseworker's request, the caseworker should submit a request to DCFS for payment with a copy of the school district's refusal notice.

School Clothes and Supplies

The monthly foster care payment reimburses caregivers for a child's clothes, including school clothes and/or uniforms. DCFS caregivers receive $50 for school supplies each school year. Private foster care agencies have individual policies about helping caregivers obtain school supplies.

Transportation To and From School

The child's caseworker is responsible for working with the local school district to ensure appropriate transportation to and from school. The child's personal allowance, or any other portion of the foster care payment, is NOT to be used to pay for school transportation.

FREE = Distance

Most school districts are mandated to provide school transportation for students who live 1½ miles or more from their school and who live one mile or more from public transportation.

FREE = Hazardous Conditions

If traffic conditions constitute a serious hazard to the safety of the walking student living within 1½ miles of the school, local school districts may provide *free* transportation. The child's caseworker can ask the local school district to submit an "Application for Determination of Serious Safety Hazard" to the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) to obtain this reimbursement to the school district, thus providing the student free transportation.

FREE = Students with Disabilities

The local school district must provide whatever transportation is necessary for a child with a disability when that transportation will enable the child to benefit from school. Students with disabilities who have "transportation services" included in their Individualized Education Program (IEP), or their Section 504 plan, are to be provided transportation free of charge regardless of the student's distance from school or to public transportation. When transportation services are not provided or the child does not qualify for these services, caregivers are reimbursed for school transportation costs incurred for the child. Caregivers are not required to use board payments or the child's allowance to pay for school transportation for youth in their care.

Tutoring

Sometimes tutoring is needed for children who are having difficulty maintaining satisfactory progress in school, or who miss school due to a temporary condition such as extended illness. *School districts are not mandated to provide tutoring unless tutoring is part of the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for children receiving special education services.*

If you believe the student needs tutoring, *after consultation with the teacher*, talk to the caseworker. If the caseworker and/or the supervisor disagrees, ask the caseworker to talk to the teacher. The caseworker must request tutoring from the school district. If the school district refuses, the caseworker may request that DCFS purchase tutoring services, upon written recommendation from the teacher. DCFS will pay for tutoring services only after all other resources (i.e. school districts, volunteer programs) have been exhausted.

Caregivers have typically requested tutoring when the child has:

- changed schools and needs remedial help;
- received one or more failing grades;
- been retained one or more academic years;
- had an extended absence from school; or
- been recommended for tutoring by the school.

EDUCATIONAL RECORDS

DCFS requires the caseworker to keep the following educational records in each child's file:

- school report cards or progress notes;
- Education Profile (assessment) (CFS 407-4);
- Scholastic Summary (education plan) section of the Client Service Plan;
- completed Education Report form and Education Records Transfer Request (CFS 407-2);
- Education Report (CFS 407);
- Eligibility Conference reports;
- Individualized Education Program (IEP) (children in special education);
- Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) (children aged zero to three in early intervention programs);
- Educational Surrogate appointment letters for children in residential care or the care of the Department of Corrections; and
- Annual High School Academic Plan (CFS 407-HS)

If you have questions about educational plans for the child, ask the caseworker to see the records. Caregivers can be helpful to caseworkers in providing input about children and should be aware of the child's educational plan.

Caseworker Updates

Within 10 days after the child's enrollment and prior to each six month Administrative Case Review (ACR) the caseworker will meet (via phone or in person) with the school, early childhood education program or early intervention program. During this contact, the caseworker will review the instructions for the Education Report Form (CFS 407) and its quarterly completion. The caseworker will also update the education records in the child's case file, discuss any anticipated problems, and facilitate a working relationship with the school.

Implications for foster caregivers: If you would like to be included in these meetings with the school talk to your caseworker. Make sure the caseworker has your input about your child's educational needs.

Confidentiality of Information

Personal information about a child and his or her family is confidential and should be shared only with school personnel and other parties who "need to know" to meet a child's educational needs. Teachers or other school personnel often try to gather as much information about the child as possible to make educational decisions about what the child needs, but much of this information may really not be necessary for them to work with the child. Be sure to discuss and come to a conclusion with the caseworker about what the teacher and school needs to know. Avoid disclosing information that the caseworker feels is confidential. General confidentiality guidelines are contained in Section 8, pages 20-23.