

# Alabama Education Stability for Foster Students Choctaw County 2023-2024 Plan



## LEA Student in Foster Care Overview

Number of Students in Foster Care SY 2019-2020 (Currently Enrolled): four (5)  
 Number of Students in Foster Care SY 2020-2021 (Currently Enrolled): three (2)  
 Number of Students in Foster Care SY 2021-2022 (Currently Enrolled): one (4)  
 Number of Students in Foster Care SY 2022-2023 (Currently Enrolled: three (4)  
 \*number in ( ) indicate DHR number

### List Agencies in Collaboration:

Choctaw County Department of Human Resources (DHR)  
 Choctaw County School System (CCBOE)

### Policy Review and Revision (Describe how each agency in collaboration reviewed policies and the revisions made to policies as a result of reviews.)

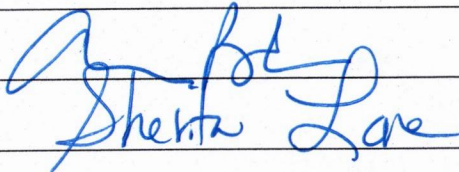
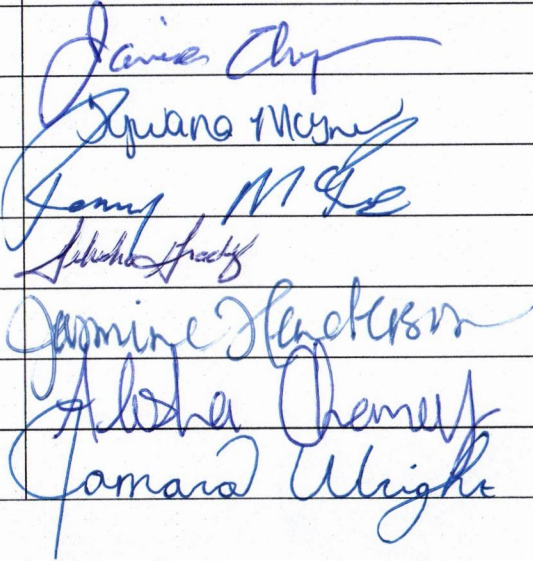
The Choctaw County School System began policy review after the receipt of the Alabama State Superintendent's December 21, 2017 memorandum on Education Stability for Children in Foster Care. In January 2017, district personnel requested additional guidance from Alabama Federal Programs Department (ALSDE) staff regarding timeframes and revision to existing policies. The admission policy governing student enrollment of special populations was amended in March of 2017 to include Children in Foster Care. School district personnel participated in ALSDE training sessions and webinars. State resources were shared with the DHR Point of Contact (POC) in June 2017 to facilitate the collaborative process. A meeting was held in June of 2017 to develop the Foster Care Plan. Collaborative review of the plan ensues yearly among school district and child welfare personnel.

The Alabama Department of Human Resources revised its policy/procedure regarding the enrollment of children in foster care. As a result of the revision, foster parents are now permitted to enroll children in school who are placed in their care. Foster

parents must comply with DHR requirements for enrolling children. DHR personnel will provide school personnel with prior notification of impending enrollment of a student by a foster parent.

Describe Collaboration and Coordination with Agencies (Include a list of team members, positions, signatures, and agencies.):

On August 23, 2023 representatives from the Choctaw County School System met with DHR staff to review and revise the LEA's Foster Care Plan. Participants discussed implementation of the previous plan and updated pertinent plan components.

Choctaw County Department of Human Resources	Signatures
DHR Director	
DHR Service Supervisor	
DHR Supervisor	
Choctaw County School System	
Janice Chapman, CSCTP Elementary Therapist	
Tywana McGrew, CSCTP Secondary Therapist	
Ronny McRae, Transportation Supervisor	
Tikisha Grady, Social Worker	
Jasmine Henderson, Special Education Coordinator	
Alisha Chaney, Federal Programs Support Specialist	
Jamara Wright, Federal Programs Director	
LEA(s) Point(s) of Contact: Tikisha Grady & Jamara Wright	
DHR(s) Point(s) of Contact: Acretia Black & Sherita Love	

2 C. F. R. §§ 200.331(d), 200.328(a); 34 C.F.R. §76.770; ESSA SECTION 1111(1)(e) - LEAs must implement the Title I educational stability requirements of children in foster care, including ensuring that:

- A child in foster care remains in his or her school of origin, unless it is determined that remaining in the school of origin is not in that child's best interest;
  - If it is not in the child's best interest to stay in his or her school of origin, the child is immediately enrolled in the new school even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment; and
  - That the new (enrolling) school immediately contacts the school of origin, to obtain relevant academic and other records.
- Describe procedures for implementing the above provisions.

The Choctaw County School System will be provided names of children in foster care by the Choctaw County Department of Human Resources. Once a child has been identified the LEA will ensure educational stability by allowing the student to remain in the school of origin unless it is determined not to be in the best interest of the child. If it is determined by the welfare agency and the school district that it is in the best interest of the child to leave the school of origin, then the child will be enrolled immediately in the new school even in the absence of documents normally required for enrollment. Every effort will be made to determine the best interest of the child with input from the welfare agencies, school social worker, and other representatives as needed. Decision will be based on the age of the child, biological and foster care parents (when appropriate), school staff and welfare agency to determine the impact on the child's academic, social and emotional well-being. Determination will be made as quickly as possible in order to prevent educational discontinuity for the child. If the welfare agency and the school system cannot agree regarding school placement, the child welfare agency will be the final decision maker. If the disagreement of school placement is among parents, education decision makers and others the dispute resolution process will be implemented and the child will stay in the original school of origin until the dispute is resolved. If transportation is needed to remain in the school of origin the LEA will coordinate and share the costs with the local welfare agency to ensure that transportation is provided, arranged and funded

The Choctaw County School System and Choctaw County Department of Human Resources will work collaboratively to ensure compliance with applicable federal and state laws in providing proper service to children in foster care. A team approach will be utilized to make best interest decisions for said children. Foster Care Team composition will include persons who have the best interest of the child at heart (e.g. school system and DHR points of contacts or designees, school administration and counselor,

social workers, select teachers, coaches, transportation supervisor, the child, education decision maker, other individuals who have intimate knowledge of how placement decisions might impact the child). Designees will be knowledgeable of ESSA requirements for children in foster care. The team will be responsible for executing Individual Service Plans (ISPs) for children in foster care. Where applicable, DHR POC and/or designee will attend Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings.

The school system POCs will arrange training for school office personnel regarding enrollment policy and procedures for children in foster care to ensure that they are enrolled immediately with or without the regular required documents and that school counselors immediately request/send student records from schools of origin/to enrolling schools. In cases where students are placed by out-of-county DHR, the school counselor will notify the LEA social worker, who will collaborate with local DHR to ensure services. The DHR POC will assist in records acquisition and serve as the liaison between the school system and various child welfare departments.

Where DHR no longer holds custody rights of a student in foster care, the custodial parent/guardian may withdraw said student with proper guardianship documentation.

A quarterly review of student data and notification of team members of the student count will be the responsibility of the school system POC. Increases in count will trigger a team meeting, if warranted, to ensure accuracy of data and appropriate student services.

ESSA Section 1111(g)(1)(E)(i) – A description of how the LEA in collaboration with the local child welfare agency will ensure that in determining whether it is in the child’s best interest to remain in his or her school or origin, and LEA takes into consideration all factors relating to a child’s best interest.

Description of how the LEA will work with child welfare agencies to develop a clear policy or protocol on how to make best interest determinations including making every effort to gather meaningful input from relevant parties, in addition to required child welfare and school representatives, in deciding what school placement is in a child’s best interest. Include a description of protocols in this description.

The School System Point of Contact and the Department of Human Resources Point of Contact and other relevant parties (people who know the child; parents/legal guardians) will meet to determine the best interest of the child regarding school placement. Meeting/consultations may be face-to-face and/or virtual. ALSDE best interest determination guidance will be shared with DHR POCs and guide decision making of the Foster Care Team. The team will consider the following:



- Child's preference,
- Child's age
- Views/preference's of the parents or the person with education decision-making rights,
- Child's attachment to school, including meaningful relationships with staff and peers,
- Placement of the child's siblings,
- Whether the child has an identified disability under IDEA or Section 504 and if required services and related aids are available in potential schools,
- Whether the child is an English Learner and is receiving language services and if so, the availability of service in potential schools,
- Availability and quality of services in the current and potential schools to meet the child's educational and socio-emotional needs,
- Influence of school climate on the child, including safety,
- History of school transfers and how they have impacted the child, and
- Length of commute to the school of origin and its impact on the child, based upon the child's developmental stage.

Potential supporting documents for best interest determination may include but are not limited to: report cards, IEP, 504 Plan, EL Plan, progress reports, test scores, attendance data, email correspondences from individuals consulted during the determination process.

ESSA Section 1112(c)(5)(B) Description of transportation protocols and procedures to include how additional costs for transportation will be calculated and funded as well as a policy for LEAs to resolve best interest disputes and interagency disputes related to transportation costs. Description must include how transportation and transportation costs will be monitored. (Include LEA and welfare responsibilities for providing transportation.) Description of Dispute Resolution Policy

When the school of origin is determined to be in the best interest of the child, the school system POC will work with its Transportation Supervisor and DHR POC in providing transportation. Strategies will include but are not limited to the following methods:

- The school district will provide in-county transportation via traditional bus services, including route adjustments and team transport from one attendance zone to another, where feasible,

- Foster parent transportation from one attendance zone to another for school attendance, and
- Bus transportation and/or foster parent transportation to out-of-county schools.

DHR will reimburse the school district for additional transportation costs. Additional costs will be the difference between what the school district would spend to transport a student to his or her assigned school and the cost of transporting a child in foster care to his or her school of origin. The reimbursement rate will be the state rate for bus transportation. The school district will provide DHR with a monthly mileage log and invoice which will be payable in accordance with accounting timeframes. Likewise, DHR will reimburse foster parents for transportation cost at the state rate for personal vehicles. DHR will establish the process and pay schedule for foster parent reimbursement. DHR will utilize Title IV-E and State Flexibility Funds as reimbursement funding sources for eligible children in foster care.

The school district will utilize Title I funds reserved for foster care transportation to aid reimbursement efforts. These funds will be used for transporting children who are not eligible for transport via DHR Title IV-E and State Flexibility Funds.

### **Dispute Resolution – Education Decision Maker**

An education decision maker must request resolution in writing by submitting a dated appeal letter (form attached) specifying the school in which enrollment is sought and the basis for seeking enrollment in that school should he or she disagree with the best interest placement decision. The letter must be submitted within five (5) days of receiving the school district's written notice of the right to dispute the decision and it must include the contact information (phone, email, and mailing address) for the education decision maker. The appeal letter may be submitted by any of the delivery systems listed below:

- scan and email to Tikisha Grady at [tgraham@choctawal.org](mailto:tgraham@choctawal.org) or Jamara Wright at [jwright@choctawal.org](mailto:jwright@choctawal.org) with the subject "Foster Care Appeal,"
- return the paper form to any Choctaw County School at the Attention of Federal Programs Department, or
- submit a paper form directly to the Central Office at 107 Tom Orr Drive, Butler, Alabama 36904.

The school district POCs will arrange a timely conference with the education decision maker, the student (if appropriate), and DHR POC. Within five (5) business days of the conference the school district POC will provide the education decision maker with a written appeal decision that includes:

- a copy of the complete Level I appeal packet,

- the Level I decision and explanation for the decision, and
- instructions on how to file a Level II dispute to the State Foster Care Point of Contact, Sally Meek, via email at [smeek@alsde.edu](mailto:smeek@alsde.edu) or via telephone 334-694-4527.

The state decision will constitute final resolution. Educational services will be provided throughout the dispute process.

### **Dispute Resolution – Interagency Transportation**

Choctaw County School System and the Choctaw County Department of Human Resource are committed to providing education stability to children in foster care. To that end, should a transportation dispute arise, Choctaw County School System will provide transportation to the pre-determined school without disruption. The agency that had been paying for transportation prior to the dispute will continue to pay until the dispute is resolved. If transportation was not provided previously, the LEA will arrange and provide the transportation while payment disputes are being resolved by the Alabama State Department of Education. The school system or DHR may submit a dispute resolution request to the State Foster Care Point of Contact, Sally Meek, via email with the subject “Foster Child Transportation Dispute” at [sally.meek@alsde.edu](mailto:sally.meek@alsde.edu) or via telephone 334-694-4527. The dispute resolution request must include :

- a complete explanation of the basis of the dispute, with all pertinent facts,
- the name and contact information of the people who have been addressing the dispute, thus far, on behalf of both the school system and DHR (phone, email and mailing address), and
- details of how the agencies have attempted to resolve the dispute at the local level prior to appealing to the state.

The state agency will make a final decision within thirty (30) days of receiving all information related to the dispute. The decision shall be the final resolution.

ESSA Section 111(g)(1)(E)(ii)-(iii) Describe protocol for a child in foster care to be immediately enrolled in a new school.

When it is determined that in the best interest of the child, they must leave the school of origin, the child must be immediately enrolled in the new school even if they don't have the required documentation. The enrolling school shall immediately contact the school last attended to obtain the child's records. The school of origin shall transfer records. School staff responsible for enrolling students are trained in the enrollment procedures for foster care students. The enrollment of foster care children and youth shall not

be denied or delayed due to any of the following barriers:

- Lack of birth certificate
- Lack of school records or transcripts
- Lack of immunization or health records
- Lack of proof of residency
- Lack of transportation
- Guardianship or custody requirements
- Student fees
- Student books
- Student equipment return

The LEA will also ensure that foster care children are regularly attending and fully participating in school and that their educational needs are being met. The school system point of contact will assist school staff in the process, if needed. Applicable school personnel will be trained on the law and local procedures to ensure compliance.





Choctaw County Schools System  
Federal Programs Department  
Foster Care Dispute Form

Student Name:	
School in which enrollment is sought:	

I am the educational decision-maker for this student, and I believe the school in which we are seeking enrollment is in the student's best interest because:

I believe the student has a right to attend this school because:

Enter additional information you believe to be important to the decision-making process.

The student shall remain in the school of origin, receiving all appropriate educational services including transportation, until the dispute reaches its final resolution. After conferencing with the education decision-maker, the student (if appropriate), and local child welfare agency point of contact, the school system will inform the education decision-maker of the decision in writing within five (5) business days of receiving the dispute form. The educational decision-maker will be able to appeal to the Alabama State Department of Education if the local resolution is not satisfactory. The State Foster Care Coordinator, Sally Meek, may be reached via email at [smeek@alsde.edu](mailto:smeek@alsde.edu) or via telephone at 334-694-4527.

Education Decision-Maker's Name <i>(please print)</i>			
eMail Address		Contact Number	
Education Decision-Maker's Signature			