



## Stability Protocol for Students in Foster Care

**This document is designed to increase stability and provide consistency for students as well as highlight needed collaboration between School Districts and the Department of Social Services.**

### **Education is a vital part of stability for students in foster care:**

Frequent changes in placement significantly challenge educational stability for students in foster care. The inconsistency in placements disrupts access to educational resources and continuity in academic instruction. As students transition between different placements, they may encounter delays in enrollment, gaps in assignments, and other emotional stressors, all of which can hinder their ability to focus on and succeed in school. Unfortunately, these disruptions can lead to decreased academic performance, increased absenteeism, and higher dropout rates, ultimately impacting their long-term educational outcomes and future opportunities.

This instability is often caused by a quick change in placement, where a student is withdrawn from their School of Origin (SOO), followed by the lack of permanent placement options. There are strategies that can assist in mitigating disruption and meet the educational needs of the student in foster care. Local School Districts and DSS County Offices should utilize these opportunities to exercise collaboration and increase educational stability for students in foster care.

In accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act Title I, Part A requirement, when a student comes into foster care or experiences a placement change or disruption, a [Best Interest Determination](#) (BID) meeting is required to decide school placement. This process should be completed as expeditiously as possible, within three business days of the placement change.

### **Please take these items into consideration when navigating educational instability:**

1. A student should NOT be withdrawn from their SOO until a BID meeting is conducted, and it is determined that changing schools is in the student's best interest.
2. BID participants should discuss the following questions to promote educational stability (addressed in question #3 on the BID document). 'Is the student's new living arrangement expected to be short- or long-term? How is this impacted by school selection?'
3. If a student receives individualized education services, this must be discussed in the BID, as the Individualized Education Program (IEP), Individualized Language Acquisition Plan (ILAP), accommodations plan under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), etc., may require specific considerations. A representative of the IEP team should attend the BID meeting for a student with an IEP. Please reference the Office of Special Education Services (OSSES) Addendum for more guidance. If unsure if the student has an IEP or you are unable to find an IEP, contact an OSSES representative to clarify.
4. DSS may utilize its Regional Day Centers (when educationally appropriate) to accommodate students during the school day when they are unable to attend their SOO. These day centers are operated by

staff who can offer technical support to students while they access their education. These centers also have computers available for students to use.

5. It is important for DSS to be mindful of the student's educational device and any other district-owned material; if a student is coming into care for the first time, this device should be retrieved at the time of removal or change of placement. In accordance with the technology needs for each option, school districts are encouraged to allow the student to retain the district's device when appropriate.
6. If issues, concerns, or disagreements arise, involve the appropriate local level contacts, including the District's Foster Care Point of Contact and the DSS Regional Education Specialist. If necessary, utilize the District's dispute process.

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## **Foster Care Glossary of Terms**

**Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 and Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965:** Includes the Federal and State Statutory (S.C. Code Ann. § 59-38-10) requirements for students in Foster Care through Title I Part A.

**Foster Care:** 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the Child Welfare Agency (CWA) has placement and care responsibility.

**School of Origin (SOO) (could be referred to as Home School):** School of Origin is the school the student was enrolled in when first placed into foster care. If a student's foster care placement changes, the school of origin would then be considered the school in which the student is enrolled at the time of the placement change.

**Best Interest Determination (BID):** A meeting that discusses the factors that must be considered when making decisions about a student's appropriate educational placement. The local DSS caseworker is responsible for initiating the BID meeting. The caseworker should collaborate with the LEA to schedule a BID meeting prior to the student entering custody or a placement change and invite the potential placement district if a move is likely.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP):** This document ensures that a student with a disability identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) receives services, supports, and accommodations that will ensure their academic success and access to the learning environment.

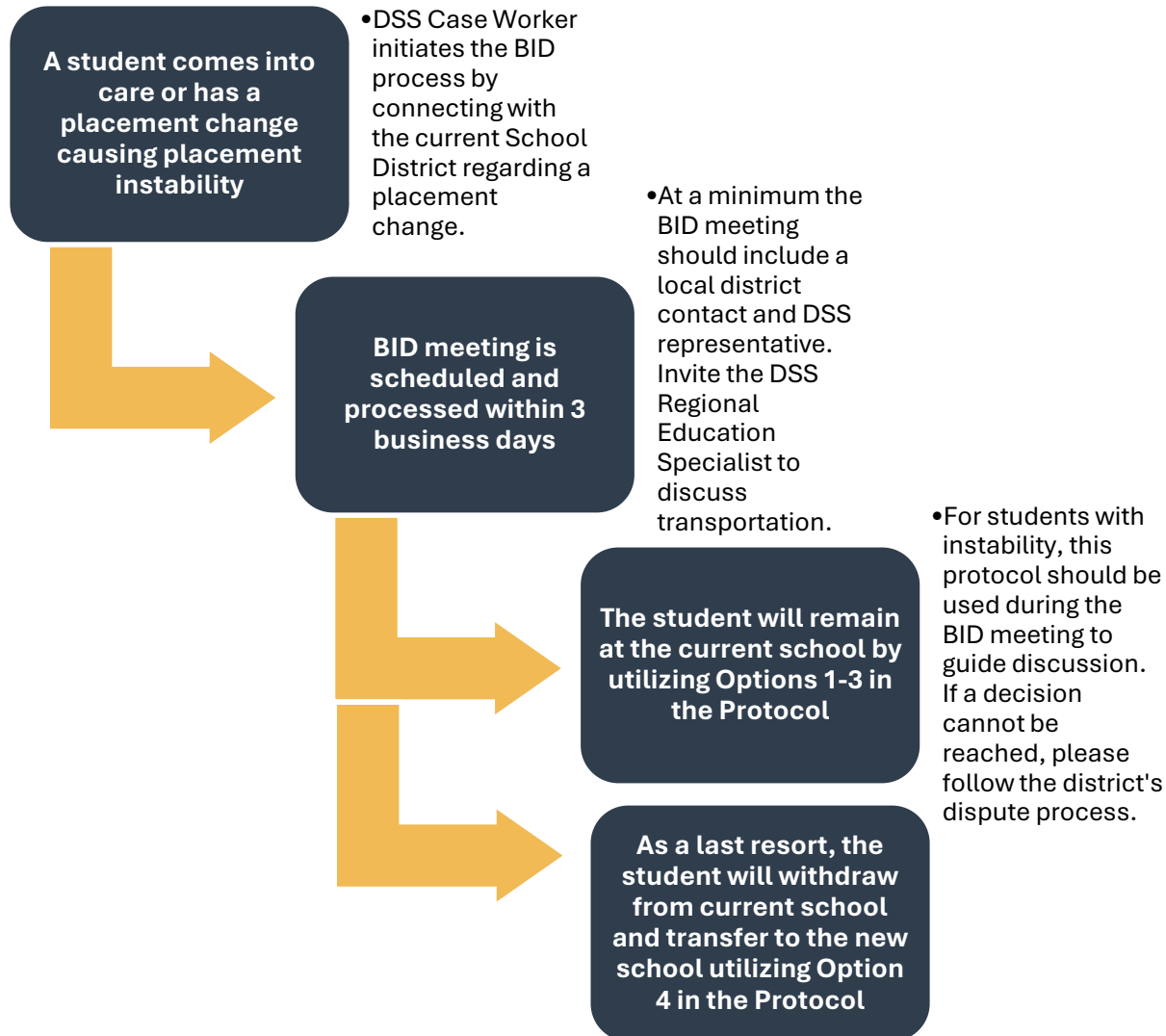
**504 Plan:** The 504 Plan is a plan developed to ensure that a student who has a disability identified under the law receives accommodations that will ensure their academic success and access to learning.

**Individualized Language Acquisition Plan (ILAP):** This plan provides information about a Multilingual Learner and the support they must receive in order to have meaningful and equal access to the curriculum.



Options to Provide Educational Stability	Additional Instructions
1. Student to remain enrolled in their current school, and transportation is provided to the SOO.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Student is not withdrawn from their current school.</li> <li>✓ DSS Case Worker collaborates with the District Foster Care Point of Contact to provide transportation to and from school.</li> <li>✓ This process is laid out on page 4 of the <a href="#">BID document</a>.</li> <li>✓ The Regional Education Specialist should be part of this conversation to assist with arranging transportation.</li> </ul>
2. Student to remain enrolled in SOO and receive assignments from current teachers to complete while at a DSS Day Center or other location.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Student is not withdrawn from their current school.</li> <li>✓ DSS Case Worker collaborates with the District Foster Care Point of Contact to coordinate a process to keep the student connected with academic requirements.</li> <li>✓ Student remains enrolled and keeps their computer/device to access instruction, if applicable.</li> <li>✓ Student will log onto the district-specific platform (Google Classroom, Schoology, etc.) to engage in their learning, if applicable.</li> <li>✓ Student can be coded as 'virtually present' or 'alternate education setting' in PowerSchool to note student's participation.</li> <li>✓ District should utilize pacing guides, virtual tutoring services, and other appropriate supports.</li> <li>✓ DSS provides support at the day centers for students to access additional support while engaging in their learning.</li> </ul>
3. Student utilizes a virtual education platform (such as Edgenuity, Acellus, VirtualSC, or other option).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Student is not withdrawn from their current school.</li> <li>✓ Student remains enrolled in the current school, dependent on the specific program and the <a href="#">District's Proficiency Based System</a>.</li> <li>✓ <a href="#">Virtual SC</a> is a statewide program where the district will sponsor a student to access available courses or credit recovery. See dates and deadlines <a href="#">here</a>.</li> <li>✓ Depending on the needs of the virtual platform, the DSS Case Worker collaborates with the District Foster Care Point of Contact to provide the next steps for accessing the virtual educational program.</li> </ul>
4. Student will enroll in the Richland County DSS Office resident school as a last resort option. (Reference E-5 in Ensuring Educational Stability and Success for Students in Foster Care, Non-Regulatory Guidance, November 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Student is withdrawn from their current school.</li> <li>✓ DSS Case Worker collaborates with District Foster Care Point of Contact to transfer records to the new school.</li> <li>✓ DSS Regional Educational Specialist facilitates connection with the new district's Foster Care Point of Contact for immediate enrollment.</li> <li>✓ New school utilizes virtual, in-person programs to help students receive credits that might otherwise be lost during school transitions, if applicable.</li> </ul>

## Flowchart for the Protocol





## Addendum

### Guidance: Considerations for Enrolling a Student with an IEP Following a Foster Care Placement Change

When a student in foster care who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) experiences a change in placement, careful consideration must be given to the best interest determination (BID) regarding school enrollment. The following guidance is intended to assist the BID team, such as social workers and local educational agency (LEA) liaisons, in navigating this process.

#### Understanding “Change of Placement” in Different Contexts

a. **Foster Care Definition:**

In child welfare terms, a “change of placement” refers to a change in the child’s living arrangement or home address (e.g., from one foster home to another, or from a foster home to another facility)

b. **IDEA Definition:**

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a “change of placement” refers to a change in the educational program or services provided to a student with a disability. This may include changes in the amount, type, setting, or intensity of services.

It is important to note that a change of home address due to a foster care placement **does not automatically require** a change in the student’s educational placement under the IDEA. The educational team must still ensure that the student continues to receive services that are **comparable** to those in their current IEP.

#### Best Interest Determination (BID) Considerations

1. When a student with an IEP experiences a placement change, the BID process should include a member from the IEP team familiar with the student. **Who might be invited to participate in the BID discussion**

*This list is not exhaustive due to the individualized needs of the student, and everyone may not necessarily be involved; however, all individuals should be familiar with the student if they are providing input.*

School psychologist	Speech-language pathologist (SLP)
Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)	General education teacher
Special education teacher	Special education teaching assistant
Any related services professional (e.g., occupational therapist, physical therapist, etc.)	LEA representative/building or district administrator

#### 2. Continuity of Services



- a. Will the new school be able to implement the IEP as written?
- b. Are comparable services available at the new school?
- c. Is there a risk of regression or disruption to learning due to the transition?

**3. Availability of Comparable Services**

- a. Under the IDEA, the receiving school is required to provide comparable services to those outlined in the student's existing IEP until the new IEP team convenes and adopts or revises the IEP.

**4. Transportation and Accessibility**

- a. Can transportation be arranged to maintain the student in their school of origin if it is in the student's best interest?
- b. Does the IEP include transportation as a related service?

**5. Role of DSS case worker in the transition process**

- a. Contact the Special Education Director in the district to obtain contact information for an IEP team representative to attend the BID process.
- b. Ensure all educational records are collected for seamless transition between schools/districts.

**6. Role of representative of the IEP team member familiar with the child in the transition process**

- a. Describe the child's strengths and weaknesses
- b. How has the child handled other transitions (e.g., substitute teacher, change in school day, etc)?
- c. Is there a strong positive or negative relationship with adults and peers in the current setting?