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LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY (LEA) FOSTER CARE LIAISONS: RESPONSIBILITIES & EXPECTATIONS



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CHAPTER 5

Local Educational Agency (LEA) Foster Care Liaisons: Responsibilities and Expectations

LIAISON INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Each school district and open-enrollment charter school is statutorily required to appoint at least one employee to act as a Local Educational Agency (LEA) Foster Care Liaison to facilitate the successful enrollment and transfer of records for students in the legal custody of DFPS when enrolling in or changing schools³⁷. Federal law also requires LEAs to

designate an ESSA Foster Care Point of Contact (POC) to coordinate with the local child welfare agency concerning immediate enrollment, education best-interest, transportation, collaboration, and other ESSA requirements³⁸ that support school stability for students in foster care.

DID YOU KNOW?

In Texas, the Regional DFPS Education Specialist serves as the child welfare agency ESSA Foster Care Point of Contact (POC) for LEAs. Beginning in the fall of SY2021-22, DFPS will notify every school district electronically of the Child Welfare ESSA POC. In return, LEAs are required to notify the DFPS Education Specialist of who the ESSA Foster Care POC is for the LEA.

While LEAs have a choice for who they designate for both of these roles, in many instances the ESSA Foster Care POC also serves as the LEA Foster Care Liaison. For the purposes of this chapter, ESSA Foster Care POC duties are included. The information in this chapter provides suggestions on best practices for liaisons based on statutory requirements and feedback from current Foster Care Liaisons, as well as partners across education, child welfare, and the courts.

TEA recognizes that there are many activities listed in this chapter that go beyond the statutory requirements for the LEA

Foster Care Liaison strictly speaking. Fulfilling the minimum statutory requirements may not always meet the full needs of students in foster care. That being said, LEA Foster Care Liaisons play an incredibly important role in advocating for the needs of students in foster care and coordinating with various school personnel and departments to ensure the required supports, practices, and best-practice strategies for serving students in foster care are implemented within LEAs.

Foster Care Liaisons are strongly encouraged to work in coordination with the Title I director, transportation director, McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison, dropout prevention/at-risk coordinator, special education staff, and other federal program staff to coordinate ESSA and other requirements for students in foster care within their LEAs.



LAW: Each school district and open enrollment charter school shall appoint at least one employee to act as a liaison to facilitate the enrollment in or transfer to a public school of a child in the district who is in the conservatorship of the state.³⁹



LAW: Each LEA must collaborate with the state or local child welfare agency to designate a point of contact if the corresponding child welfare agency notifies the LEA, in writing, that the agency has designated an employee to serve as a point of contact.⁴⁰





WHAT TYPE OF SCHOOL STAFF WOULD MAKE AN IDEAL DISTRICT FOSTER CARE LIAISON?

While there are no formal requirements about who should serve in the LEA Foster Care Liaison role, certain education professionals may be a natural fit considering their skills or existing job responsibilities. Specifically, those who:

- Have the authority to champion and lead multi-departmental efforts within the LEA;
- Work with mobile student populations or other special populations;
- Are familiar with enrollment, records transfer, existing community services, and student supports;
- Understand the unique challenges of students who are in foster care;
- Serve as a high-level administrator;
- Are directors and leaders in student support services; and/or
- Are counselors or counselor administrators.

The term **“liaison”** or **“LEA Foster Care liaison”** refers to the school district and open-enrollment charter school foster care liaison unless otherwise indicated.



LEA Foster Care Liaisons are responsible for building capacity and infrastructure within their district to support students in foster care and ensure LEAs fulfill both state and federal educational requirements. Ideally, they will also coordinate with individual campuses, community services agencies, caregivers, local colleges, and advocates involved with the child welfare system.

WHAT IS ASKTED?

AskTED is a real-time public database where each school district and charter school's foster care liaison is listed.

RESOURCES: Foster Care Liaison Information

TEA, [AskTED Directory](#). You can view and download district and charter school foster care liaison contact information in AskTED. Information is available by district, region, and county.

TEA, [Guidance on Locating Foster Care Liaison Information in AskTED](#).

TEA, [Foster Care and Student Success Newsletter](#). Subscribe for updates and information from TEA.



ANNUAL REMINDERS

1. Notify TEA of Liaison via AskTED

- » Local education agencies (LEA) must submit foster care liaison contact information to TEA through the Texas Education Directory, AskTED:
 - » School districts must submit this information through the district's AskTED administrator. (Add link to [AskTED](#) administrators listings)
 - » Charter schools must submit their foster care liaison to the Charter School Division at TEA directly via (512) 463-9575 or CharterSchools@tea.texas.gov. Include your liaison's name, email address, and phone numbers. This information will be added to the AskTED directory.

Please contact your district's AskTED administrator or TEA's Charter School Division immediately if there are any changes. LEAs are required to keep the liaison information up-to-date and should have a regular process for notifying the LEA's AskTED coordinator if there is a change.

2. Remind District and Campus Leaders of LEA Foster Care Liaison Appointment

LEAs are encouraged to annually distribute an informal letter to campus and district leaders in order to increase awareness and promote effective practices within the district. Include information about the responsibilities of the liaison, importance of school stability for students in foster care, student identification, and the statutory provisions that support students in foster care. These letters may be sent out electronically with other district and campus communications to increase awareness and strengthen support for students in foster care.

3. Notify the Regional DFPS Education Specialist of LEA Foster Care Liaison Contact Information

LEAs must provide the ESSA Child Welfare Point of Contact (DFPS Education Specialist) the name and contact information of the LEA Foster Care Liaison, as required by federal law. Beginning in SY2021-22, the contact name and information for the ESSA Child Welfare POC will be provided annually to the LEA by DFPS to further support coordination and collaboration. If the LEA does not receive communication from DFPS, then the DFPS Education Specialist most likely is the Child Welfare Point of Contact. DFPS maintains contact information for DFPS Education Specialists by [DFPS Region](#) and by [county](#).

4. Designate and Train Individual “Campus Champions” for Students in Foster Care

Best practices suggest identifying individual campus champions to share the work of the foster care liaison and to ensure students in foster care are served appropriately and effectively at each campus within the LEA. Campuses have flexibility as to whom they designate. The liaison may coordinate with designated campus champions to provide trainings and streamline communication processes to ensure campuses work in a uniform and coordinated manner. Campus champions may assist with implementing new school transition requirements for students in foster care.⁴¹

A foster care campus champion can support the LEA Foster Care Liaison by being a point of contact at their campus to help:

- » **Facilitate effective enrollment and withdrawal:** When questions or issues arise upon enrollment or withdrawal, campus champions may offer face-to-face interaction to help resolve matters quickly and strengthen caregiver and student engagement.
- » **Ease student transition:** Campus champions may introduce themselves to the student and caregiver, arrange a campus tour, and check in with the student regularly within the first two weeks of school enrollment to support and ease the transition of being a new student. They may also participate in enrollment conferences, assemble welcome packets, and provide support with other new school transition requirements for students who are homeless or in substitute care.⁴²
- » **Coordinate across departments:** Campus champions may coordinate across departments to ensure each area is aware of student needs and promptly provide necessary supports.
- » **Organize individualized and enhanced campus level support:** Campus champions are familiar with campus personnel and may link them together to support student access to individualized services and activities that promote an enriched and well-rounded school experience for students in foster care.
- » **Keep the foster care liaison informed of campus level concerns:** Campus champions are well-connected to the unique needs of their campus and may communicate the trends, needs, and progress of foster care related affairs to the LEA Foster Care Liaison to formulate solutions, improve practices, and inform targeted training topics.



13 KEY ACTIVITIES FOR LEA FOSTER CARE LIAISONS

Note that not all of the activities below must be completed by the liaison. The liaison may delegate appropriate tasks to the ESSA Foster Care POC or the foster care campus champion.



Serve as ESSA foster care point of contact and coordinate related responsibilities (See *Chapter 8: Introduction to the Every Student Succeeds Act*, on page 88.)

- ✓ Notify DFPS of the LEA Foster Care Point of Contact.
- ✓ Work with DFPS to support education best-interest decisions.
- ✓ Collaborate with DFPS and the LEA transportation department to secure transportation for students to the school of origin, when necessary. See the [ESSA Transportation Procedures](#) guidelines for more information.
- ✓ Ensure students are immediately enrolled; if a student cannot remain in their school of origin, ensure that the student's records are transferred immediately.
- ✓ Develop and maintain systems and processes to properly identify and code students in foster care in PEIMS.
- ✓ Annually review and update transportation agreements in collaboration with DFPS, as required by ESSA.
- ✓ Utilize LEA foster care data to inform decision-making.



Support the LEA with implementing school transition requirements for students in foster care, as defined by 19 TAC § 89.⁴³ (See *Appendix G*, page 165.)

- ✓ Support the awarding of credit.
- ✓ Assist with placement in educational programs and courses.
- ✓ Promote access to educational and extra-curricular programs.
- ✓ Promote post-secondary information.
- ✓ Coordinate to ensure special education provisions are implemented (when necessary).
- ✓ Collaborate with the student's education decision-maker (when necessary).



Streamline enrollment processes and eliminate enrollment barriers for students in foster care. (See *Transition Assistance for Students who are Homeless or in Substitute Care*, page 119.)

- ✓ Serve as the LEA expert concerning the enrollment of students in foster care.
- ✓ Ensure there are systems and processes in place for appropriately identifying students in foster care at enrollment.
- ✓ Train registrars and front office staff on appropriate paperwork and communication processes with the liaison.
- ✓ Ensure that school records from the previous school are promptly received.
 - » Texas Records Exchange (TREx), the Personal Identification Database (PID), or the Person Enrollment Tracking (PET) application can be used to expedite coordination and communication between the sending and receiving schools.

- » Utilize the PID to locate information from the student's previous school if the information is not provided at enrollment.
- ✓ Develop a system for providing welcome packets containing information on school opportunities, supports, and resources available.
- ✓ Introduce new students to campus systems and processes, provide campus tours, and link with student ambassador programs (always maintain confidentiality and privacy).
- ✓ Ensure students are placed in the appropriate grade level classes and receive books.
- ✓ Coordinate with appropriate staff to ensure that transfer requirements are met for students who are eligible for special education services.
- ✓ Ensure an enrollment conference occurs within the first two weeks of school.
- ✓ Stay knowledgeable and informed of state and federal mandates to support students in foster care.

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Accurately identify students for PEIMS and data use.

- ✓ Ensure proper identification of students in foster care for PEIMS purposes. Refer to guidance in TEA PEIMS Data Standards, C196 Code Table. For a list of acceptable and unacceptable paperwork for PEIMS coding, visit: [Foster Care PEIMS Guidance](#).
- ✓ Ensure registrars and campus staff are trained on appropriate paperwork and processes.
- ✓ Annually review LEA enrollment paperwork and online enrollment processes to ensure student information is requested appropriately.
- ✓ Establish systems to utilize data and monitor and track student progress, including attendance, course completion, enrollment, and withdrawals.

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Ensure that students in foster care automatically receive school nutrition and meal program services.

A student in foster care is categorically eligible for USDA child nutrition programs without further application.⁴⁴ This includes the National School Lunch Program/School Breakfast Program, Special Milk Program for Children, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Summer Food Service Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. A student's DFPS Placement Authorization Form 2085 addresses meal eligibility and is the only proof the LEA needs to confirm eligibility (*See Appendix E, page 163.*)

- ✓ Incorporate nutrition eligibility for students in foster care as a training element for LEA food coordinators and foster care campus champions.
- ✓ Establish a coordinated process to ensure students can receive meals immediately.
- ✓ Serve as a designee to sign for nutrition benefits for students in foster care.

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Encourage involvement in extracurricular activities.

- ✓ Share information with students and caregivers about extracurricular activities, make connections with key staff, and help students connect with peers.
- ✓ Support transportation planning for extra-curricular activities, if necessary. The LEA may have bus passes, carpools, and other creative methods to assist student participation in extracurricular activities. Consider waiving associated fees using indirect state compensatory education funds, federal funds, and local funding sources. (*See Transition Assistance for Students who are Homeless or in Substitute Care, page 122.*)

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Know which supports are available within the LEA and community.

- ✓ Connect students and caregivers to available LEA resources, such as tutoring and counseling services.
- ✓ Connect students and caregivers to free resources and community opportunities, such as backpack drives, sporting and holiday events, job fairs, college tours, and other resources.

8

Help coordinate withdrawal and records transfer.

- ✓ Seamless and timely records transfer and withdrawal are central duties of the foster care liaison.
- ✓ Develop and implement processes to ensure that students' credits are accurately calculated, and that school records and credits are transferred through the electronic Texas Student Records Exchange (TREx) system within 10 days of a student's withdrawal.
- ✓ Coordinate with campus champions, counselors, registrars, teachers, and, if applicable, special education teams and campus health services (e.g. nurse) to verify that a student's education records are complete, especially when a student moves in the middle of a grading period.
- ✓ Provide information for students acquiring partial credits.⁴⁵ Communicate with the student's caregiver, caseworker, and/or DFPS Educational Specialist regarding records and any additional information needed to support a successful withdrawal and transfer.

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Coordinate with child welfare partners.

- ✓ Provide information to the student's caseworker to support Education Best Interest Decision- Making, when requested.
- ✓ Support school stability by providing school of origin transportation in collaboration with DFPS Regional Education Specialist.

A map of the DFPS regions is found on page 28. See Chapter 3 for more information on building cross-system partnerships.

- ✓ Troubleshoot problems that arise.
- ✓ Provide information and insight on the school system and processes to child welfare partners.
- ✓ Conduct cross-system trainings.
- ✓ Communicate with DFPS Education Specialists, Youth Specialists, and Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Specialists to support students in foster care.
- ✓ Participate in local and regional foster care consortia to promote collaboration and strengthen cross-system partnerships.



TIP: The [DFPS Regional Youth Specialist](#) is youth formerly in foster care who works for DFPS and is available to provide understanding and strengthen awareness about the experience of students in foster care.

It is important to involve people who experienced foster care in trainings and to establish effective supports and practices.

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Provide foster care related information and training to the LEA.

Liaisons can provide trainings and resources about foster care to their district and local campuses and can coordinate with child welfare and community partners to increase cross-system awareness. Trainings may include:

- ✓ Child Welfare System 101
- ✓ Confidentiality/Sensitivity
- ✓ Enrollment/Withdrawal
- ✓ Foster Care Education Laws
- ✓ Every Student Succeeds Act
- ✓ Mandatory Child Abuse Reporting
- ✓ Credit Retrieval and Recovery
- ✓ The Impact of Trauma on Learning and Mobility
- ✓ Transition Supports and Post-Secondary Opportunities

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Coordinate with the academic counselor to ensure students are on track to graduate.

- ✓ Review students' class schedules and course credits to make sure that students are on track for graduation.
- ✓ Ensure that all students in foster care graduate with endorsements, if applicable, and have post-secondary plans identified in their personal graduation plans, to the extent required by TEC § 28.02121.
- ✓ Review alternative options for acquiring and restoring course credit (e.g. summer school, credit recovery etc.).
- ✓ Utilize local, state, or federal funding options to waive costs that may impede access to cap and gowns, graduation pictures, and ceremonies.

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Encourage successful transition into adulthood and post-secondary opportunities.

- ✓ Ensure that all students in foster care in grades 11 or 12 are given information about tuition and fee waiver and dual credit opportunities.⁴⁶ Enrollment in *any* college coursework triggers this lifetime benefit. See [Foster Care Resources at College for All Texans](#) for more information.
- ✓ Help high school students access the Free Lifetime College Tuition and Fee waiver (available to qualifying Texas students currently or formerly in foster care) by facilitating enrollment in dual-credit or any college course at a public two-year college during high school.
- ✓ Promote successful transitions and college access by connecting students with local colleges and existing campus-based student support programs, including [Higher Education Foster Care Liaisons](#).⁴⁷ Promote successful transitions into adulthood by linking with DFPS programs and services that support youth in preparing for adulthood, including [Preparation for Adult Living \(PAL\)](#) and [Supervised Independent Living \(SIL\) programs](#).
- ✓ Inform students seeking post-secondary education opportunities of the bacterial meningitis vaccine requirement for college enrollment in Texas.⁴⁸

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Become a foster care expert and promote practices that align with Texas law.

More information about foster care and education can be found on TEA's [Foster Care & Student Success webpage](#).

- ✓ Be familiar with the foster care system and the impact the foster care experience has on a student's education.
- ✓ Actively participate in professional learning and collaborative meetings, such as foster care consortia, to coordinate across systems, troubleshoot barriers, and remain up-to-date on policy and practice guidance.
- ✓ Be knowledgeable of the laws and policies that support students in foster care. Promote awareness and implementation of policies and practices that align with state and federal law across the LEA.



RESOURCES: Training for Foster Care Liaisons

Texas Children's Commission, [Reports and Resources](#) - A collection of education resources and collaborative reports are located under the Foster Care and Education tab.

Texas Children's Commission Foster Care & Education Confidentiality Workgroup, [Information Sharing Between Child Welfare and Schools: Maintaining Privacy and Promoting Educational Success](#)

[Legal Center for Foster Care and Education](#) - A central clearinghouse of information on foster care and education training and technical assistance across the country.

[Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)

[Sesame Street in Communities, Foster Care](#)

[TEA, College, Career, and Military Prep](#)

American Bar Association, Center on Children and the Law, Juvenile Law Center, Education Law Center; [ESSA Implementation Toolkit](#) - Addresses the transportation requirements of local education agencies under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The report also explains the duties and responsibilities of local education agencies and provides a step-by-step plan to implement ESSA's transportation requirements.