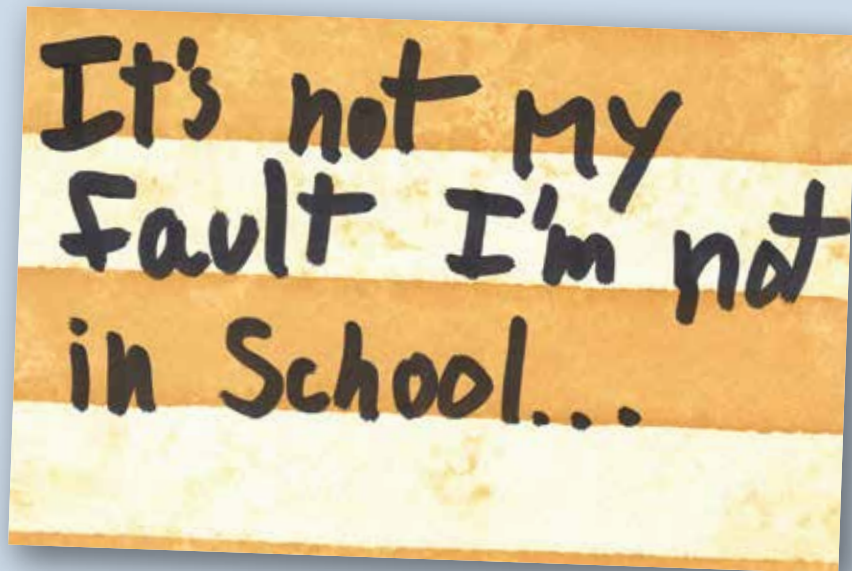


CHAPTER

7



ENROLLMENT 101

- SCHOOL ENROLLMENT FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE – WHY PROMPT ENROLLMENT IS IMPORTANT
- WHAT IS THE TIMEFRAME FOR ENROLLMENT AT A NEW SCHOOL?
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CHAPTER 7

Enrollment 101

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE – WHY PROMPT ENROLLMENT IS IMPORTANT:

Delays and challenges with enrollment significantly impact the educational experience and outcomes of students in foster care. Despite the laws and practices established in the education and child welfare systems to prevent them, enrollment delays are common. Challenges to enrollment exist including:

- Partial and missing records;
- Lack of knowledge of the enrollment process and mandatory provisions for students in care;
- Lack of clarity about who may enroll a student in care;
- Unclear directions as to who is responsible for transfer of records; and
- Misinformation about foster care generally.

This section provides practical information on enrollment of students in foster care to help educators, caseworkers, caregivers, and others work together to see that students enroll and enter school in a timely and efficient manner.



TIP: Maintain confidentiality and sensitivity in the front office when enrolling a student.

It can be challenging to keep students' foster status confidential when enrollment is taking place in school offices. It is helpful when school staff remain aware of who is within hearing distance and work with caregivers and students to enroll students in a way that is both sensitive and respectful (i.e. without highlighting their foster care status). Some former foster youth report that school enrollment can sometimes be very humiliating and lead to negative labeling and stigmatization by school staff and peers when starting in a new school (*see Chapter 6 for more information on identifying students and maintaining confidentiality*).

WHAT IS THE TIMEFRAME FOR ENROLLMENT AT A NEW SCHOOL?

DO NOT DELAY—IMMEDIATELY ENROLL students in foster care!!!

Under Texas law, students in foster care are entitled to immediate enrollment when arriving at a new school or district — regardless of whether they have the necessary documentation and paperwork.⁵² CPS caseworkers are required to enroll a child in school within **three (3)** school days of the child either: a) being placed in CPS custody; or b) moving to a new school or placement.⁵³ The caseworker then has up to **30 days** to provide all necessary enrollment paperwork to the new school.⁵⁴ Follow up to ensure a student:

- Has his or her records requested and received;
- Is placed in the appropriate grade level and classes;
- Receives his or her books; and
- Receives special education services, if appropriate.



TIP: District liaisons play an important role in ensuring successful enrollment and transfers for students in foster care.

School district foster care liaisons may act as the point persons for local campus staff, caregivers, and caseworkers to troubleshoot and resolve enrollment challenges (*see Chapter 5 for more information on district liaison responsibilities*).



WHAT RECORDS ARE NEEDED TO ENROLL A STUDENT IN SCHOOL?

Information for enrollment

1. Identity of parent or legal guardian/legal authority;⁵⁵
2. Proof of residence;⁵⁶
3. Proof of the child's identity (child's birth certificate or another acceptable document);⁵⁷
4. Immunization records;⁵⁸
5. School records from last school attended;⁵⁹ and
6. For children under age 11, records from ALL the student's previously attended schools.⁶⁰

INFORMATION NECESSARY FOR ENROLLMENT DESCRIBED:

1. Identity of parent or legal guardian/legal authority:

Who may enroll a student living in foster care in school?

If a child is in a foster care placement, DFPS has legal authority to enroll the child in school. DFPS may delegate that authority to another person, usually the person who will be responsible for day-to-day care of the child, such as the:

- Foster parent or designated caregiver;
- CPS caseworker or other staff;
- CASA or student's guardian ad litem;
- Residential facility staff;
- Child Placing Agency staff, including case manager, or
- Biological parent, in some cases.

When a student is in foster care, the person enrolling the student may provide one of these documents to show they have legal authority to do so (*see page 50*):

- **DFPS Placement Authorization Form 2085, which is given to caregivers by DFPS and indicates who has the authority to make education decisions for the child**

OR

- **A Court Order naming DFPS as Temporary Managing Conservator (TMC) or Permanent Managing Conservator (PMC) of the child.**



LAW: If a parent or other person with legal responsibility for a child under a court order enrolls the child in a public school, the parent or other person attempting to enroll the child, or the school district in which the child most recently attended school, shall furnish to the school district:

- Child’s birth certificate or other proof of identity;
- Records from the school most recently attended; and
- Immunization records.⁶¹

2. Proof of residence:

A parent or caregiver must provide appropriate documentation of residency in the school district.



LAW: A child placed in foster care can attend the public schools in the district in which the foster parents live, free of any charge to the foster parents or the agency.⁶²

Examples of documentation that may be used to establish residency include:

- Utility bill receipts
- Lease information⁶³
- Other documents allowed by one’s local school and district that confirm residence.



TIP: There are *exceptions* that allow students in foster care to remain enrolled in the school they were attending at the time of placement in foster care, even when placed out of the school or district’s attendance zone⁶⁴ (see page 62).

3. Proof of child’s identity:

A **birth certificate** or **other proof** of the child’s identity is necessary.⁶⁵ However, schools should be aware that DFPS may not have access to a student’s original birth certificate.⁶⁶ The process of acquiring an official birth certificate sometimes takes longer than 30 days and presents a challenge to school enrollment. Fortunately, alternative methods to prove identity may be accepted, such as the court order or *Placement Authorization Form 2085*.

According to the *Texas Education Agency Student Attendance Accounting Handbook, Section 3*, other alternative proof of identity includes:⁶⁷

- Driver’s license;
- Passport;
- School ID card, records, or report card;
- Military ID;
- Hospital birth record;
- Adoption records;
- Church baptismal record; or
- Any other legal documents that establish identity.



TIP: The previous school might have a copy of the child's birth certificate in the school file. Contact the previous school to request a copy if the person enrolling the child does not have a birth certificate at the time of enrollment.

4. Immunization records:

Students need their shot records and proof of immunizations to enroll in school.⁶⁸ If a student does not have the appropriate immunization records, the CPS caseworker must:⁶⁹

1. Ensure that the child visits the doctor/health clinic to begin immunizations;
2. Notify the school that immunizations have begun; and
3. Make sure that immunizations are completed and that the immunization records are submitted to the school.



LAW: A person may be provisionally admitted to an elementary or secondary school if the person has begun the required immunizations and if the person continues to receive the necessary immunizations as rapidly as is medically feasible.⁷⁰



TIP: It is important that schools cooperate in transferring a student's immunization records to other schools when requested.⁷¹ Approval from the student's legal guardian is not required before transferring immunization records.⁷²

5. School records from last school attended:

Upon a student's enrollment in a district, the district should make a bona fide effort to secure all records and required documentation pertaining to the student from the previous district and/or the parent or other person with legal control of the student under a court order.⁷³



LAW: All eligible students who desire to enroll in a Texas public school are allowed to enroll, even if the new school has not received the academic records from the previous school. Additionally, credit earned toward state graduation requirements by a student in an accredited school district shall be transferable and must be accepted by any other school district in the state.⁷⁴

Therefore, previous school records are not a requirement for enrollment in a new school for students in foster care. However, having a student's previous records helps tremendously in placing the child in appropriate classes and obtaining the appropriate services in the new school (*see Chapter 8 for more information on promoting effective records transfers*).

6. For students age 11 and under — ALL records from the student's previously attended schools:

If the student is age 11 and under, Texas law requires that the person enrolling the child provide to the new school the name of each previous school attended by the child. The school then must request the school records for the child from each identified school, unless the person enrolling the child has provided these records. If the records are provided to the school by the enrolling person, the school must verify the child's name, address, birth date, grades, and dates attended at the previous schools.⁷⁵

HELPFUL INFORMATION – CPS & ENROLLMENT:

Child welfare partners may provide academic information from the previous school setting:

Foster parents, caseworkers and other advocates may facilitate the enrollment process by providing information from the student's previous school at the time of enrollment, such as school transcripts, report cards, class schedules, ARD committee reports, and other documents. School staff are directed by TEA to use TREx and traditional records transfer processes (*see Appendix H for more information on TREx and what information belongs in the student's record*).

Use the student's DFPS Education Portfolio to find academic information that can help with enrollment:

All students in foster care should have an *Education Portfolio* provided by DFPS in a (currently) green binder; it contains education information and moves with the student from placement to placement. The *Education Portfolio* is not to be given to the school in its entirety, but copies of relevant documents, such as the student's birth certificate or transcripts contained in the binder, may be shared with the new school to assist with immediate enrollment and appropriate class assignment. Caregivers and caseworkers are responsible for updating the binder. School leaders can work with caregivers to provide copies of updated education records and information that should be placed in the Education Portfolio⁷⁶ (*see Appendix I for a list of education documents that are included in the Education Portfolio*).

Familiarity with CPS enrollment expectations is beneficial:

The caseworker must ensure the child is enrolled in school no later than the **third school day** after a court order is issued removing the child from the home and placing him or her in DFPS custody or the third school day following school withdrawal and movement to a new placement. If the child cannot attend school due to a temporary physical or mental condition, the caseworker must give the school **written notice** that the child cannot attend but will return as soon as possible. The caseworker has **30 days** to obtain and provide records to the new school. If the child is transferring from another school district, the caseworker provides the new school with the name and address of the original school to facilitate prompt transfer of school records.⁷⁷

DFPS Regional Education Specialists are available to help with enrollment:

Regional Education Specialists are designated education advocates within each DFPS region and a helpful resource and contact if there are challenges when enrolling a student (*see page 39*).



LAW: If the school does not receive the student's necessary enrollment paperwork from DFPS within 30 days, the school district is obligated to notify law enforcement to determine if the student has been reported missing.⁷⁸