

Match Charter Public School Students in Foster Care Policy

Match Charter Public School (“Match”) recognizes its obligation to ensure that students who are in foster care have access to the same free and appropriate public education provided to other students. Match shall remove barriers to enrollment and provide students in foster care with access to education and other services necessary for these students to meet the same performance standards as other students. Students shall not be segregated into a separate school or program based on their status as being in foster care, nor shall such students be stigmatized in any way.

Definition of Foster Care

A student is considered a student in foster care if the student is awaiting placement or has been placed by the Department of Children and Families (“DCF”) into 24-hour out-of-home care, away from the student’s parents or guardians. These placements include, among others:

- foster family homes;
- foster homes of relatives;
- emergency shelters (including STARR programs and Transitional Care units);
- residential facilities;
- child care institutions;
- group homes; and
- pre-adoptive homes.

Best Interest Determination

A student in foster care may attend either the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled at the time of placement in foster care or the school a student is attending at the time of any subsequent change in a foster care placement (“School of Origin”) or the school in the attendance area where the student’s foster care home, provider or facility is physically located (“School of Residence”). Generally, a student in foster care will remain in the School of Origin unless a determination is made that such placement is not in the child’s best interest. In making the best interest determination in accordance with the law and all applicable guidance, all parties who are best situated to understand the student’s unique circumstances (such as the student, family, the foster family, the School of Origin, the School of Residence, etc.) shall have a meaningful opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. The decision-making process will be individualized to the specific child and will take a variety of factors into account.

In the event no consensus is reached, the final decision regarding school placement will be made by DCF, and the student will continue to attend the School of Origin while the best interest determination is being made. Match may seek review of DCF’s decision by utilizing a Foster Care School Selection Dispute Resolution Process established by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“DESE”) and DCF. Decisions made through this process are not subject to review.

If the student is placed in the School of Origin, the student will remain in that placement for the duration of the student's time in foster care or until the student completes all the grades in that school, whichever takes place first.

Enrollment Procedure

Enrollment

If a student in foster care is accepted at Match, Match will immediately enroll the student even if school records, immunization records, individualized education plans or other required documentation is not available. Match's Foster Care Point of Contact ("POC") will initiate the school-to-school transfer of records with the School of Origin and will ensure that the student is attending school while the records are being transferred. Match will facilitate the transfer of any such records that it has in its possession when a student in foster care is enrolled at another school in accordance with all applicable laws and procedures.

Transportation

Match will ensure that safe, timely and orderly transportation is promptly provided to students in foster care who remain enrolled at Match. Match will enter into an agreement with DCF regarding procedures for how such transportation will be funded.

Foster Care Points of Contact

Match's POC shall be the Director of Network Operations or designee. The POC shall be responsible for:

- The educational stability of students in foster care;
- Participating in the process for making best interest determinations in collaboration with DCF representatives, and documenting those determinations;
- Ensuring school enrollment and attendance of students in foster care and timely transfer of records, as needed;
- Developing and implementing procedures for providing and coordinating cost-effective transportation, as needed;
- Facilitating professional development for district staff as needed to promote educational stability for students in foster care;
- Identifying and supporting students in foster care through coordination between Match and DCF;
- Ensuring that accepted students in foster care are enrolled in and regularly attending school; and
- Ensuring that students in foster care have full and equal opportunity to succeed in school and to meet the same challenging state academic standards as other students, and to receive educational services for which they are eligible.

Resources:

ED and HHS Foster Care Non Regulatory Guidance June 22, 2016:
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf>

DESE and DCF Educational Stability for Students in Foster Care Guidance.

Updated: July 2023