

## CHAPTER

# 5



### **DISTRICT FOSTER CARE LIAISONS: RESPONSIBILITIES & EXPECTATIONS**

- LIAISON INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW
- WHERE TO GET STARTED?
- 12 KEY ACTIVITIES FOR DISTRICT FOSTER CARE LIAISONS

# CHAPTER 5

## District Foster Care Liaisons: Responsibilities and Expectations

Each school district and open-enrollment charter school is statutorily required to appoint *at least one* employee to act as a liaison to facilitate the *enrollment* and *transfer of records* of students in the legal custody of DFPS when enrolling in or changing schools. The information in this section provides suggestions on 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.

### LIAISON INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW:



**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.<sup>39</sup>

### 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 district 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 new district efforts;
- Work with mobile student 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;
- Are principals and campus leaders; and/or
- Are counselors or counselor administrators.

These liaisons will build capacity and infrastructure within their district to support students in foster care. Ideally, they will also coordinate with individual campuses, community services agencies, caregivers, local colleges, and advocates involved with the child welfare system.

The term “**liaison**” or “**district liaison**” refers to the school district foster care liaison unless otherwise indicated.

To see the list of district liaisons who are registered with TEA, visit: [www.tea.state.tx.usFosterCareStudentSuccess/liaisons/](http://www.tea.state.tx.usFosterCareStudentSuccess/liaisons/)

## WHERE TO GET STARTED?

### 1. Notify TEA of district liaison:

- All districts and open-enrollment charters must register their liaison(s) with TEA.<sup>40</sup> Please send an email with the name, position, and contact information of the designated liaison(s) to: [fostercareliaison@tea.state.tx.us](mailto:fostercareliaison@tea.state.tx.us)
- Please complete the *Foster Care Liaison Introductory Survey* at: [www.surveymonkey.com/s/Fostercareliaisons](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Fostercareliaisons)
- To make sure the district has access to the most current information in Texas, join the Foster Care Education Listserv at: [ritter.tea.state.tx.us/list/](http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/list/) and select *Foster Care Education*.

### 2. Notify campus and district leaders of liaison appointment:

Distributing an informational letter to leaders within the district and at individual campuses is an important first step to ensuring that people are aware of the liaison position and appointment within the district. To increase awareness and promote effective practices within the district, include information about the responsibilities of the liaison, the importance of school stability, and the statutory provisions that support students in foster care. In August 2012, TEA disseminated a *To The Administrator Addressed (TAA) letter* informing districts of the need for a liaison and the importance of school stability for students in foster care.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, a *TAA letter for Foster Care Awareness Month* promoting understanding of foster care and education was distributed in May 2013. These letters may be attached to district and campus communications to increase awareness and strengthen support.

### 3. Visit the TEA *Foster Care & Student Success* website and listen to webinar trainings:

TEA will provide training and continued guidance for district foster care liaisons.<sup>42</sup> To view archived trainings, visit: [www.tea.state.tx.us/FosterCareStudentSuccess/liasons/](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/FosterCareStudentSuccess/liasons/)

### 4. Develop and coordinate individual “campus champions” for students in foster care:

Best practices suggest identifying individual campus champions to share the work of the district liaison and to ensure students are served appropriately and effectively at each campus within the district. Having a point person at each campus may help to facilitate effective enrollment and withdrawal, to ease student transitions, to coordinate across departments, and to organize individualized and enhanced campus level support. The district liaison can coordinate with designated campus champions to provide trainings and streamline communication processes to ensure campuses work in a uniform and coordinated manner. Overall, the district liaison can play an important role in coordinating and working with campus champions to establish district practices that fulfill responsibilities for students in foster care.

## 12 KEY ACTIVITIES FOR DISTRICT FOSTER CARE LIAISONS

### 1. Streamline enrollment processes for students in foster care:

The district liaison can provide expertise to the school district and its campuses about enrollment for students in foster care. Specifically, the liaison should be aware of the special challenges of and legal requirements for students in foster care. They can assist campuses in establishing mechanisms to identify students and implement strategies for tracking student progress. Liaisons can also develop processes that streamline enrollment with school registrars and front office staff and provide overall ease of enrollment in a new school. For example, it is important to ensure that school records from the previous school are received, students are placed in the appropriate grade level classes and receive books, and special education services are secured, if appropriate. As the point person for enrollment, the liaison can serve as the district’s designated contact person to address school-related questions and concerns regarding foster students (*see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 for more information on enrollment*).

### 2. Implement student data tracking and monitoring mechanisms:

TEA is developing a PEIMS indicator code for students in foster care based on legislation passed by the 83<sup>rd</sup> Texas Legislature.<sup>43</sup> This information will support districts with identifying students, and with providing assistance to students in foster care. It will provide TEA with information to track, monitor and report aggregate student data and educational outcomes at the state level. TEA will provide districts and charters with guidance on tracking students in PEIMS after the new indicator code is developed.

Connected to the PEIMS Indicator code that is required to upload foster care student data to TEA, is the important role for districts to provide statutorily required academic supports for students who are identified and coded as in foster care. In order to implement statutory requirements to provide students with assistance in school, districts should implement local data tracking mechanisms. Local systems should have the capacity to identify student needs, plan interventions, and monitor student progress regarding academic services that are provided. In addition, the PEIMS code should help schools to support students during critical transitions, and also to support school stability (see page 84 for information on transitions).

### **3. Ensure that students in foster care receive school nutrition and meal programs without further application:**

A student in foster care is categorically eligible for U.S.D.A. child nutrition programs without further application.<sup>44</sup> This includes the National School Lunch Program/School Breakfast Program (NSLP/SBP), Special Milk Program (SMP), Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Establish a coordinated process within one's district to ensure students are able to receive meals immediately. A student's DFPS *Placement Authorization Form 2085* addresses meal eligibility and is the only proof the school district needs to confirm eligibility (see page 74). This is an important training element for district food coordinators and campus champions. Foster care liaisons can ensure that students are enrolled in all food and nutrition programs offered by the district.

### **4. Help coordinate withdrawal, records transfer, and credit recovery:**

The liaison can work with school staff to 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. Liaisons may coordinate with teachers to see that the students' education records are complete, especially when students move in the middle of a grading period. Liaisons should also provide information for students in acquiring credits for partial work completed<sup>45</sup> and when necessary link students to credit recovery opportunities and compensatory education services.

### **5. Become a foster care expert and promote practices that align with Texas law:**

It is important that district liaisons become familiar with the foster care system and the impact that the foster care experience has on a student's education. It is also important that liaisons are familiar with the laws and policies that support students in foster care and that they promote awareness, policies, and practices that align with state and federal law throughout their districts.



A comprehensive paper, "Education Issues for Students in Foster Care," written by Joy Baskin, Director of Legal Services at the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) in February 2013, provides beneficial guidance on the federal and state laws that frame foster care education in Texas: [http://www.yourhonor.com/myprofile/assets/Education\\_Issues\\_for\\_Students\\_in\\_Foster\\_Care.pdf](http://www.yourhonor.com/myprofile/assets/Education_Issues_for_Students_in_Foster_Care.pdf)

More information about foster care and education law may be found at: *TEA's Laws & Guidance for Students in Substitute Care*, [www.tea.state.tx.us/FosterCareStudentSuccess/laws/](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/FosterCareStudentSuccess/laws/); and

The Children's Commission, *Transforming Education Outcomes For Children and Youth in Foster Care Law*, [education.texaschildrenscommission.gov/resources/law.aspx](http://education.texaschildrenscommission.gov/resources/law.aspx).

### **6. Coordinate with child welfare partners:**

The liaison can coordinate with child welfare partners to identify barriers and improve cross-system practices. This includes, but is not limited to, trouble-shooting problems that arise, being a point person in the district, providing information and insight into the school system and processes, conducting cross-system trainings, and facilitating enrollment, records transfers, and improved transitions for students in care. DFPS Education Specialists, Youth Specialists, and Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Specialists are important regional partners who may provide valuable insights that strengthen district efforts.



**TIP: The DFPS Regional Youth Specialist is a former foster youth (foster care alumni) that works for DFPS and is available to provide understanding and strengthen awareness about the experience of students in foster care.**

It's important to involve people who experienced foster care in trainings and to establish effective supports and practices. To identify the DFPS Youth Specialists who work within one's region, visit: [www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/contacts/youth\\_specialists.asp](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/contacts/youth_specialists.asp).

## 7. Provide foster care-related information and training to the district:

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
- McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act
- Mandatory Child Abuse Reporting
- Credit Retrieval and Recovery
- Culture of Foster Care
- The Impact of Trauma on Learning
- Transition Supports and Post-Secondary Opportunities

A map of the DFPS regions is found on page 23. Also, see Chapter 3 for more information on building cross-system partnerships.

## 8. Work with DFPS to help students maintain their school placement, when appropriate:

Liaisons should be familiar with the federal, state and local laws and policies associated with attendance and enrollment. For example, students are entitled to complete the highest grade level offered at the school in which the student was enrolled at the time of placement in foster care without payment of tuition.<sup>46</sup> When specialized programs or courses are offered in one school or school district and not in another, consider special accommodations — such as providing transportation — may be beneficial for promoting credit completion, stability, academic achievement, and student success. Liaisons can bring together campuses, districts, and caregivers regarding transportation and may participate, if requested by CPS, in school-related best interest decision making. Liaisons can also ensure that local district policies align with state and federal laws.

## 9. Review student schedules to ensure they are on track to graduate:

The liaison can review students' class schedules and course credits to make sure that students are on track for graduation and to make sure that students receive supports that align with their future goals. Students in foster care are disproportionately placed on minimum high school graduation programs and sometimes placed in classes they have already taken.

## 10. Encourage successful transition into adulthood and post-secondary opportunities:

Liaisons can 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. Schools should ensure that all students in foster care in grades 11 or 12 are given information about the tuition and fee waiver and dual credit opportunities.<sup>47</sup> Enrollment in *any* college

coursework triggers this lifetime benefit. Liaisons can also promote successful transitions and college access by connecting students with local colleges and existing campus-based student support programs. Additionally, liaisons can promote successful transitions into adulthood by linking with DFPS programs and services that support youth in preparing for adulthood. Lastly, encouraging students seeking post-secondary education opportunities to get a Bacterial Meningitis vaccine — which is necessary for college enrollment in Texas<sup>48</sup> while they have access to medical coverage, can also support students in college preparedness and successful transition into post-secondary education (*see Chapter 13 for more information*).

### **11. Encourage involvement in extracurricular activities:**

It is helpful when liaisons are familiar with the extracurricular activities that are available within the district and communicate those to students in foster care and their caregivers. School staff can make the students and caregivers aware of the activities and provide transportation options. The district may have bus passes, carpools, and other creative methods to assist student participation in extracurricular activities (*see page 87–88 for more information on extracurricular involvement*).

### **12. Know which supports are available within the district and community for students in care:**

Liaisons should be familiar with student support resources. Within the school and district, these may include federal School Nutrition Programs, tutoring, and counseling services. It is also helpful when liaisons are informed of free resources and opportunities for students in foster care available in the community at large, such as backpack drives, sporting event tickets, holiday gifts, and other resources. Awareness of available resources and opportunities and communication of them to caregivers and students is an additional way to show meaningful support to students in foster care.