LA County School Stability Transportation for Foster Youth Long-Term Plan

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How are transportation costs split between Districts and DCFS?
   - The cost-sharing is outlined in the MOU as follows, for transportation during Stop-Gap Transportation, the Best Interest Determination and Long-Term Transportation:
     - DCFS will cover the cost of any caregiver reimbursements or public transportation cards/tokens they provide to their youth.
     - School Districts will cover the cost of utilizing/rerouting school bus routes and any public transportation cards they provide to their students.
     - DCFS and School Districts will share the costs of the private vendor contracted by the County (which is currently HopSkipDrive) 50/50.
   - As there is one Child Welfare Agency and 80 School Districts in LA County, DCFS has jointly developed this MOU over the past two years through a workgroup consisting of DCFS, school districts, LACOE, OCP, and advocates that can serve both DCFS and the 80 districts.

2. Who makes decision about whether the child remains in their school of origin (SOO)?
   - The Education Rights Holder (ERH) determines whether it is in the child’s best interest to remain in their SOO.
   - The SOO is the default placement. Youth may not be unenrolled from school until and unless the BID occurs and finds it is in the youth’s best interest to change school placements.

3. How will I be notified that a foster youth is/will be placed in out-of-home care or changing placements?
   - The DCFS CSW will utilize the Form 1399 to notify the school following a determination that a youth will be or has been placed into out-of-home care or is moving to a new placement.
   - For questions about notifications or the Form 1399 please reach out to DCFS Education YES box youth.education.support@dcfs.lacounty.gov

4. What are school District Foster Youth Liaison responsibilities?
   - Supporting a youth’s rights with respect to school of origin. This includes the responsibilities listed below as well as contacting the youth’s ERH(s) and caregiver before disenrolling a foster youth student or enrolling a new foster youth student to inform them of the student's right to SOO.
   - As soon as possible, convene a best interest determination meeting. Reach out to the ERH and youth. The CSW may be included in order to get their perspective. NOTE: This meeting can be by phone or in-person. Other parties, such as the DCFS Education Specialist and caregiver, can also provide support to this process.
   - If the District Foster Youth Liaison wishes to recommend that it is in the child’s best interest to move schools, the liaison must provide the ERH with a written explanation. The Foster Youth Liaison serves in an advisory capacity during this meeting.
   - The District Foster Youth District Liaison should work internally to determine whether a bus route would be possible for the stop-gap or long-term transportation method. The District Foster Youth Liaison should also assess to see whether a child is eligible for transportation under another entitlement or through the student’s IEP.

5. What should a District Foster Youth Liaison do if they cannot get a hold of the ERH?
   - If having difficulty contacting the ERH(s), please reach out to the CSW and/or minor’s attorney who can walk this issue on to court and get a co-ERH or new ERH assigned for the youth.
6. **What should a District Foster Youth Liaison do if they cannot get a hold of the Ed Specialist or CSW?**
   - If you are having trouble reaching out to the CSW or Ed Specialist please reach out to the DCFS Education YES box: youth.education.support@dcfs.lacounty.gov.

7. **Who gets to make the decision about the long-term method of transportation?**
   - DCFS CSWs, Ed Specialists and School District Foster Youth Liaisons jointly determine the long-term method of transportation. Caregivers and ERH may provide input but the final decision is made by the District and DCFS.

8. **How will districts know who is being transported to their school of origin via the private vendor?**
   - The private vendor will notify the District Foster Youth Liaisons, CSW, and DCFS Education Specialists whenever a ride has been confirmed.
   - As noted above, school districts and DCFS will jointly decide who gets to make the decision about the long-term method of transportation. As noted in the ESSA Process One-Pager, during stop-gap transportation the youth is immediately transported to their school of origin and continues to be transported until a best-interest determination can be convened. Often, the stop-gap transportation method is the private vendor, unless another option can be made quickly available.
   - By the third Friday of every month, a school district will receive a receipt of the preceding month with the names of youth being transported, number of rides, start/stop date, cancellations, and costs. DCFS will receive a list with a matched amount that they will be responsible for.
   - If a school district wishes to see the names of the youth who were transported during the pilot, please email Barbara Spyrou at bspyrou@ocp.lacounty.gov.

9. **How will Districts/DCFS keep track of costs during the year?**
   - Rides will be billed through the mechanism described in Question 14 once a district signs on to an MOU.
   - As private transportation referrals are submitted the DCFS Education team will sign off on each referral before it moves forward. Only referrals for SOO transportation are accepted.
   - Both DCFS and school districts can help control costs by moving forward the Best Interest Determination meeting, as often the stop-gap method will be the private vendor which is more expensive, but the long-term may be a less expensive option such as caregiver reimbursement, public transportation, or utilizing/rerouting a school bus.

10. **Is there insurance for school districts if transportation is provided through the private vendor (HopSkipDrive)?**
    - Yes, all school districts who sign on to the MOU are indemnified and covered by the County’s contract with the private vendor, HopSkipDrive and this language is included in the Amended MOU.

11. **How long is transportation provided?**
    - Transportation is provided for the duration of the child’s time in out-of-home care, unless the ERH determines it is no longer in the child’s best interest to remain in the SOO.
    - While the Federal right to transportation ends when the foster care case closes, under California education law, when a youth in grade 1-8 leaves care, they maintain the right to attend school at their school of origin for the remainder of the school year. If the youth is in high school, this right extends until high school graduation. Though the District and DCFS no longer have obligations to provide or fund the transportation, districts and DCFS should work with resource families and ERHs in anticipation of the closing of a youth’s case to support them in coming up with ideas to support the exercise of this right.
12. Is transportation provided to youth in their home of parent?
   o No, currently transportation is only provided to foster youth placed in out-of-home care. Once a foster youth returns to their home of parent, the parent is responsible for transportation to school.

13. Are youth in Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs) provided transportation?
   o Youth in STRTPs also have the right to SOO transportation. STRTPs are solely responsible for providing and funding transportation to SOO for foster youth within their care.
   o If you have any questions or concerns about a youth in an STRTP receiving transportation please reach out to the DCFS Education YES box: youth.education.support@dcfs.lacounty.gov.

14. How will payment work?
   o DCFS and each school district will pay 50% of the shared private vendor costs into a trust managed by the County’s Auditor Controller based on an estimated cost for the next 12 months, which was calculated based on costs and growth rate data from the two-year ESSA School Stability Transportation pilot. DCFS and districts who have already signed on have begun to provide money for the trust.
   o Potential sources for districts to pay for these costs include allocating LCFF or Title I funding.
   o For details on payment, please refer to the MOU, Section 3D.2.
   o When we originally looked at the growth rate over the course of the pilot, the numbers showed us that at the current rate, costs could increase by 600%. However, given that STRTPs will now be responsible for providing/funding transportation and we are no longer ramping up the program like we were in the pilot, we believe an estimated 100% growth rate is a closer approximation of the growth costs for the upcoming year.
   o In order to calculate the estimated costs for the next 12 months, we took a year’s worth of data from the pilot, multiplied it by the estimated 100% growth rate, added a 10% administrative fee for the private contract (which DCFS and school districts will share), and divided by 2 to get the district portion of the estimated costs. Please see Appendix E of the MOU for these numbers.
   o When 60% of the amount in the trust fund is reached, the district will receive an email to notify them and next steps to begin discussing adding funding if needed. When the amount in the trust reaches 5%, the district will receive another notification. When funds reach 2%, rides will stop.
   o If costs are less than what is paid into the trust, the funds can be rolled over into the next year or returned. If costs are more, a bill will be issued for the remaining balance.

15. What is the long-term funding plan?
   o Since this is an unfunded mandate, DCFS, LACOE, and OCP are working together to advocate to the state to provide funding to cover this cost for child welfare and the LEAs. We have already begun outreaching to state-level officials and have gotten a lot of positive reception to getting state funding for ESSA school of origin transportation.

16. Who should I contact with questions?
   o For questions about process, facilitating transportation, or payment/billing please reach out to the DCFS Education YES box youth.education.support@dcfs.lacounty.gov.
   o For questions about the MOU, please reach out to Barbara Spyrou at bspyrou@ocp.lacounty.gov who will connect districts with the ESSA School Stability Outreach Coordinator, Maria Casillas. Maria has been hired by OCP to lead the outreach work to the districts and is working closely with LACOE and DCFS on this work.