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**Federal Programs
FY 24 Foster Care Plan
By: Tracy Dearing
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Quitman School District

The purpose of this memorandum is to ask for board approval of Foster Care Plan for the 2023-2024 school year.

Thank you,

**Tracy Dearing
Federal Programs Director**



**FOSTER CARE PLAN
2023-2024**

**EDUCATIONAL STABILITY *for* CHILDREN *in*
FOSTER CARE**

Quitman School District Foster Care Plan

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the procedures used in the Quitman School District to enroll and withdraw children that have been placed under the care of the Mississippi Child Protection Service.

Goal

Quitman School District in collaboration with Child Protection Services ensures that children placed in foster care have stability with regards to their education.

The educational stability includes assurances that (1) a child in foster care will remain in the child's school of origin, unless a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest in that school and (2) if a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest to remain in the school of origin, the child will be immediately enrolled in the school of residence, even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment.

Definitions

District Point of Contact (DPC) – the person designated by the Quitman School District Superintendent to represent the District with regards to foster children being enrolled or withdrawn from the district. The District Point of Contact will communicate directly with the Case Worker or Supervisor of Child Protective Services.

School Point of Contact (SPC) – the person designated by the building level Principal to represent the school with regards to foster children being enrolled or withdrawn from the school. The School Point of Contact will communicate directly with the District Point of Contact. The School Point of Contact will ensure that any and all student records are obtained when a foster child enrolls in the local school and that any and all student records are provided to the Child Protective Service Case Worker when a foster child withdraws from the local school.

Regional Director of Child Protective Services (CPS) – the person from Child Protective Services that will communicate directly with the District Point of Contact and with the Child Protective Service Case Worker in charge of the case for a particular foster child.

Case Worker – the person from Child Protective Services that has been assigned the case of a child in foster care.

Foster Child – a child to whom the custody has been appointed to Child Protective Services by a sitting judicial authority.

Foster Parent – the parent(s) to whom a foster child is currently residing.

LEA Point of Contact and Responsibilities

The superintendent will assign at least one person to serve as a Foster Care Child Liaison, or Point of Contact (POC). The name of this person will be turned in annual to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) by September 30th of each year. If additional staff members are needed to meet the requirements, the district will make assignments as deemed necessary. The Point of Contact will work in the best interest of the child to ensure that all educational requirements are being met. The POC that is assigned to the position will have access available training and materials to keep them informed of any changes in the Foster Care Regulations. The POC will work closely with state and tribal child welfare agencies to:

- Coordinating with the corresponding child welfare agency,
- Leading the development of a process for making the best interest determination,
- Documenting the best interest determination,
- Facilitating the transfer of records and immediate enrollment,
- Facilitating data sharing with the child welfare agencies, consistent with FERPA and other privacy protocols,
- Developing and coordinating local transportation procedures,
- Managing best interest determinations and transportation cost disputes,
- Ensuring that children in foster care are enrolled in and regularly attending school, and
- Providing professional development and training to school staff on the Title I provision and educational needs of children in foster care.

Decision-Making Process

The CPS Case Manager will phone the LEA POC to notify the school of a possible change of placement for the foster child. The POC will complete the Foster Care Placement Form and return it to CPS. The CPS case worker will forward the completed Foster Care Placement Form to the Educational Liaison for CPS. The Educational Liaison will make a decision based on the information received and will notify CPS of the decision of school placement. CPS will notify the POC and the Best Interest Determination (BID) will be completed by the POC and CPS. If a change of placement is necessary, enrollment in the new school must take place immediately. All educational records must be provided to the receiving school. In emergency circumstances CPS has the authority to make an immediate decision regarding the school placement. Afterwards, CPS will consult with the LEA and revisit the best interest determination of the child. The determining factors that may be evaluated include:

- Proximity of the resource family home to the child's present school;
- Safety considerations;
- Age and grade level of the child as it relates to the other best interests' factors;
- Needs of the child, including social adjustment and well-being;
- Child's performance, continuity of education and engagement in the school the child presently attends;
- Child's special educational programming if the child is classified;
- Point of time in the year;
- Child's permanency goal and likelihood of reunification;
- Anticipated duration of the placement;
- Preferences of the child;
- Preferences of the child's parent(s) or educational decision maker(s)
- The child's attachment to the school, including meaningful relationships with staff and peers;
- Placement of the child's sibling(s);
- Influence of the school climate on the child, including safety;
- Availability and quality of the services in the school to meet the child's educational and socioemotional needs;
- History of school transfers and how they have impacted the child;
- How the length of the commute would impact the child, based on the child's developmental stage;

- Whether the child is a student with a disability under the IDEA who is receiving special education and related services or a student with a disability under Section 504 who is receiving special education or related aids and services and, if so the availability of those required services in a school other than the school of origin; and
- Whether the child is an EL and is receiving language services, and if so, the availability of those required services in a school other than the school of origin.

*Transportation costs will not be considered when determining a child's best interests.

In the event of a disagreement regarding school placement for a child in foster care, the child welfare agency should be considered the final decision maker in making the best interest determination. The child welfare agency is uniquely positioned to assess vital non-educational factors such as safety, sibling placements, the child's permanency goal, and other components of the case plan. The child welfare agency also has the authority, capacity, and responsibility to collaborate with and gain information from multiple parties including parents, children, schools and the court in making these decisions.

Enrollment of Students

Social workers or other legal guardians will be allowed to immediately enroll children in Quitman School District. We understand that all necessary paperwork (birth certificates, shot records, academic records, special education records, etc.) may not be immediately available and want to provide a smooth transition for the student into our district. We will contact the home school district for the records and make adaptations as needed. After enrollment, the following guardianship or legal custody documents shall be provided for verification by the foster family or Child Protection Services (CPS):

- Power of attorney
- Affidavit
- Court Order

Withdrawal of a Student by CPS

CPS has the right to withdraw students assigned to them by a judicial authority. The SPC, in this case, is responsible for providing as many educational records as possible to make any transition from the school of origin to the new school a smooth transition. Records not on file in the school office shall be forwarded to the new school within 48 hours following a request by the school or CPS.

The SPC shall contact the DPC if he/she thinks it would be in the best interest of the child being withdrawn to remain in the school of origin. The DPC will immediately contact the Regional Director of Child Protective Services to relay the concerns of the SPC as well as possibly scheduling a time to discuss the child's educational placement.

Free/Reduced Lunch Application

Foster Care Parents, Child Protective Services, or District Point of Contact should complete a Free/Reduced Lunch Form for the Quitman School District. The form along with verification of foster care shall be submitted to the School Point of Contact who in turn will forward the documents to the District Point of Contact. The District Point of Contact will forward the documents to the Food Service Director or Food Service Secretary.

IDEA Students

The IDEA, Part B directs school districts must make a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) available to all eligible children with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). FAPE under IDEA includes the provision of special education and related services at no cost to the parents in accordance with a properly developed Individualized Education Program (IEP). Each child's placement decision must be made by a group of knowledgeable persons. The Quitman School District will operate in accordance with all state and federal laws regarding special education students. Special education services will be provided to foster care students as they are to all students following the guidelines below.

- Educational placement will be determined annually and will be based on the child's IEP in accordance with the child's individual needs

- The child will be placed in the least restrictive environment and unless they require some other arrangement they will attend the school that he/she would attend if not disabled.
- Timely and expedited evaluations and eligibility determinations for highly mobile children with disabilities will be made when possible.
- Children in foster care will have access to related aids and services that are designed to meet their educational needs.
- Children will have access to comparable services including summer and extended school year services if applicable.
- Children in foster care will not be discriminated against and are considered a protected group.

EL Students

The Quitman School District will ensure that EL students in foster care will participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs by doing the following:

- Identifying and assessing all potential EL students in a timely, valid and reliable manner;
- Provide EL students with a language assistance program that is educationally sound and proven successful;
- Sufficiently staff and support the language assistance programs for EL students;
- Ensure that EL students have equal opportunities to meaningfully participate in all curricular and extra-curricular activities;
- Avoid unnecessary segregation of EL students;
- Ensure that EL students with disabilities are evaluated in a timely and appropriate manner for special education and disability-related services and that their language needs are considered in these evaluations and delivery of services;
- Meet the needs of EL students who opt out of language assistance programs;
- Monitor and evaluate EL students in language assistance programs following federal guidelines;
- Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of school districts language assistance program and progress of each student;
- Ensure meaningful communication with the parents of the students.

Transportation

The Quitman School District will collaborate with CPS to develop and implement clear written procedures governing how transportation is provided to maintain children in foster care in their schools of origin. The Quitman School District will also work with the CPS to reach an agreement in regards to covering the transportation costs. The agreement will cover how the transportation will be provided, arranged, and funded for the duration of the child's time in foster care. Each agreement can/will vary greatly because the needs of each child should be considered in making the decision on transportation.

The regular transportation policies approved by the Quitman School District will be followed in transporting foster care students. Drivers will be appropriately licensed, certified, and with the required DMV and background checks. Various public school vehicles may be used to transport students depending on the circumstances. Students that must be transported out of state will be school board approved as required by Mississippi law.

Student Records

The Quitman School District will share education records with the CPS that are allowed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This allows educational agencies to disclose without parental consent educational records, including IDEA, of students in foster care to State and Tribal agencies.

Appendix

Children in Foster Care Enrollment Records Checklist

The following records are required for enrollment of a child in foster care.

Supporting Documentation:

- Report Cards and Progress Reports
- Discipline Records
- Student Achievement
- Teacher Evaluations
- Attendance Records
- Written input from absent participants
- IEP and/or 504 Plan
- Transcript showing current credits, if high school student
- Withdrawal From Previous School
- Copy of Birth Certificate
- Copy of Immunization Form
- Achievement Data (test scores)
- Health reports/records
- BID
- Others: _____

Records Checklist for Case Worker Withdrawing a Child

Supporting Documentation:

- Report Cards and/or Progress Reports
- Current Grades
- Discipline Records
- List of student activities, if junior high or high school student
- Attendance Records
- IEP and/or 504 Plan
- Transcript showing current credits, if high school student
- Withdrawal Form
- Copy of Birth Certificate
- Copy of Immunization Form
- Achievement Data (test scores)
- Health reports/records
- BID
- Other: _____