As Local Education Agencies (LEAs) look to respond to individual student needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to consider the unique and individualized needs of students in foster care. Maintaining positive connections, ensuring educational continuity, expediting enrollment, withdrawals, and streamlining transitions in the event of a school move are paramount during this time.

NEW 4/2/2020

1. **How can LEA Foster Care Liaisons work with Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Education Specialists to support students in foster care during COVID-19?**

   LEA Foster Care Liaisons and DFPS Education Specialists are encouraged to collaborate to ensure optimum support for students in foster care during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are several actions that can be taken:
   - Develop a shared strategy for addressing the needs of students in foster care and supporting caregivers locally.
   - Provide information to the DFPS Education Specialist about your district's enrollment and withdrawal processes, available and educational continuity plans. This information will be shared with caregivers, caseworkers, and other relevant parties involved in the child's case.
   - Include the DFPS Education Specialist in virtual meetings and planning to support students (e.g. ARDs, grade placement committee, etc.)
   - Assist in helping child welfare parties get in contact with school personnel (e.g. special services, special education, etc.), while school buildings are closed and staff are working remotely.
   - Contact the DFPS Education Specialist when you are not able to get in touch with a student or family. They will help you locate a student who may have moved.
   - Coordinate collaborative training opportunities virtually.

NEW 4/2/2020

2. **Who should check in with students in foster care during the pandemic?**

   Ideally, it is best for a school staff member that a student has a relationship with to follow-up and touch base (e.g. teacher, counselor, liaison, etc.). Maintaining positive relationships and connections with caring adults is especially important for students in foster care. Weekly check-ins to touch base with students on their progress and well-being is recommended.

NEW 4/2/2020

3. **What strategies can LEAs implement to support caregivers and foster parents during the COVID-19 pandemic?**
   - Follow-up with caregivers to touch base, check in, and regularly communicate support.
   - Communicate the LEA's plan for instruction for the student (including low-tech and high-tech options).
   - Check in with the caregiver to ensure that they have the proper equipment and know-how to access online learning platforms.
   - Inquire to see if the caregiver needs assistance accessing available tools and resources.

- Provide caregivers information to support social and emotional well-being, trauma-informed approaches, mindfulness, and related strategies to reduce anxiety and promote positive learning environments.
- Re-iterate opportunities for the caregiver to connect with teachers and school staff virtually (phone, text, online, etc.).
  - Host virtual support opportunities for caregivers to ask questions, receive coaching, and connect with LEA staff and one-another while students are at home.

4. **Are there any special actions that should be made for students in DFPS custody in Residential Treatment Centers (RTC's)?**
   Yes.
   - LEA Foster Care Liaisons or other support staff should follow-up with the RTC to make sure students are receiving education and have access to appropriate materials and services.
   - Include caseworkers and DFPS Education Specialists, when possible, on communications with the facility, so they can support educational continuity and assistance for the student.
   - Ensure RTC's have resources to support social emotional learning, trauma-informed approaches, mindfulness, and related strategies to assist students with reducing anxiety and challenging behaviors, that may be are amplified at this time.

5. **How can Foster Care Liaisons support <u>enrollment</u> and <u>withdrawal</u> for students in Foster Care, during COVID-19 pandemic?**
   Provide direction on how to enroll and withdraw students while schools are closed, including;
   - Share information on who to call.
   - Assist with records transfers between the sending and receiving schools.
   - Support communication between the caseworker, school, and others involved in the child's case.
   - Prominently place the LEA's enrollment and withdrawal processes and expectations during COVID-19 on the LEA's website.
   - Develop a checklist with enrollment and withdrawal information that can be shared.

6. **Are there any special considerations for maintaining a student in their school of origin (or current school placement) during COVID-19?**
   Yes. As a reminder, pursuant to the Texas Education Code § 25.001 (g) and (g-1) children in foster care may remain enrolled in their school of origin (or current school placement) when placed in a residence outside of their school district, until the highest grade offered by that school, regardless of whether they remain in foster care. Maintaining the child in their school of origin (or current school placement) is encouraged, whenever possible. This remains during COVID-19. When students are participating in school virtually, the distance between the school and the residence of the student becomes less of a consideration in determining which school is in the student's best interest. Similarly, in the event that a student needs to change schools during COVID-19, ensure that the receiving school has a streamlined and clear process for enrollment and can provide educational continuity, prior to withdrawing the student. It is critical that students remain enrolled in school and have minimal disruptions, during this time.

7. **May LEA's deny enrollment while schools are transitioning to virtual instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

No. Pursuant to § 25.001 schools are required to fulfill all statutory responsibilities concerning enrollment. Even while school buildings are closed, LEAs must have a process in place for enrolling students virtually. Your LEA's process for enrollment and withdrawal should be prominently placed on your school's website in an easy to find manner for families, students, and community members.

8. **Who in my LEA can help support students in foster care during COVID-19?**

Foster Care liaisons are available within each LEA to support school transitions for students in foster care and serve as the ESSA Foster Care Point of Contact (for child welfare organizations). Foster Care Liaison contact information is provided in AskTed. LEAs please ensure that your Foster Care Liaison is up to-date in AskTed. For more information visit the TEA Foster Care Liaison Webpage.

9. **How can LEA Foster Care Liaisons or other LEA staff, such as school counselors, support students in foster care during COVID-19?**
LEA Foster Care Liaisons and other support staff should:

- Check in remotely on a regular basis to ensure educational support and continuity
- Ensure students in foster care have equitable access to adequate learning resources that best fit their environment
- Determine whether foster students have the appropriate resources (low tech or high tech) to meet their needs
- Provide tips, resources, and strategies for caregivers on promoting positive at-home learning environments
- Provide resources that link students with social and emotional supports
- Ensure there is a process in place for enrolling and withdrawing students while schools are closed

10. **If an LEA wants to reach out and follow up with a student in foster care, where can they locate the contact information for the student?**

In addition to the LEA's data management system, information for the student's caregiver is found on the Department of Family and Protective Services Placement (DFPS) Authorization 2085 form. The school may also follow up with the student's Education Decision-Maker. This information is found on the DFPS Education Decision-Maker 2085-E form. Both documents should be located in the student's file.

11. **Who can the LEA contact from the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) if they have education related questions or concerns pertaining to students in foster care?**

DFPS has designated Education Specialists in each of the 11 DFPS Regions. For contact information and to look up by county, visit the DFPS Education Specialist Webpage.

12. **Is there guidance available for students in foster care who are included in other Special Populations, such as students receiving Special Education services?**

Yes. TEA created a COVID-19 Special Populations Resources Webpage for up-to-date guidance and information for Special Populations.

13. **Are there any resources available to help caregivers and parents talk to their children about COVID-19?**

Yes. The National Association of School Psychologists COVID-19 Webpage contains valuable information to share with caregivers and parents.

14. **Students in foster care are categorically eligible for the free school meals program. How can students receive meal benefits during this time?**

    Meal finder information can be found at TXSchools.gov. Listed below are additional resources to assist with locating food pantries and food banks in your area.
    - FOODPANTRIES.ORG
    - Aunt Bertha | The Social Care Network

15. **Are there resources available for families that do not have access to internet?**
    Yes. TEA compiled a list of cable providers who offer free broadband and internet services while schools are closed due to COVID-19. The list can be accessed through the following link: Guidance to Districts on Providing Internet to Students

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Please submit any questions, concerns, and/or feedback to:

disasterinfo@tea.texas.gov

Feedback will assist TEA with technical assistance and planning.