School of Origin Transportation for Youth in Foster Care

Strategies and Tips



California Foster Youth Education Task Force

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Supporting Education Success

Youth in foster care face significant barriers to educational success due (in part) to frequent disruptions in their home and school placements. To address these disruptions in education, both Federal Law (Every Student Succeeds Act) and California Law (California Education Code Section 48853.5(d)(1)) provide youth in foster care with the right to remain in their school of origin (unless their education rights holder determines it is not in the youth's best interest) when a child welfare or probation agency moves them to a new placement. The law also includes the right to transportation to the school of origin.

While the provision of transportation to school of origin has always involved the use of creative strategies and partnerships, districts throughout the state have identified recent increases in utilization of school of origin rights, and challenges in identifying transportation options due to Covid restrictions, which has led many counties and school districts to struggle to meet the demand. To ensure that transportation is provided promptly when it is determined that a student in foster care will remain in their school of origin, this document shares transportation strategies that may be considered in achieving transportation to a student's school of origin.

Both child welfare and school districts share portions of the responsibility for arranging, providing, and funding this transportation. For more detail on the different and collective responsibilities, please see this policy brief. The most common forms of transportation include: caregiver provides transportation, school district provides transportation, and/or child welfare pays for and/or partners with school district to share cost of private transportation. However, when these options are not available, or optimal, here are some additional ideas that can be explored:

Who Can Provide Transportation (unless otherwise barred by the court from doing so):

- Caregivers or others given permission by caregivers under the "Reasonable and Prudent Parent" standard[i] can receive reimbursement for providing transportation.[ii] These individuals might include:
    - Resource parents
    - Biological parents[iii]
    - Education Rights Holders
    - Other trusted adults (e.g., adult sibling, neighbor, non-relative extended family member, etc.)
    - Youth themselves
    - Private car service drivers (e.g., taxi service, specialized car service designed to serve youth)
    - Congregate care staff (e.g., Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP) staff)[iv]
    - Private car service drivers funded by someone other than the caregiver (e.g., taxi service, specialized car service designed to serve youth)
    - School district personnel (e.g., bus drivers, transportation provided for homeless/magnet/special education/preschool students, other staff members who may live near the student's home, staff from home school district, etc.)

- Public transportation providers (e.g., public buses, railways, etc.)

Where They Can Provide Transportation:

- Directly to/from school of origin
- To/from school district site or otherwise designated pick-up/drop-off area for the student to change transportation vehicle (potentially in coordination with pick-up/drop-off from neighboring district vehicle)
- To/from public or school district bus/train stop
- To/from home of another youth receiving transportation services
- To/from after school enrichment programs and team sports with the approval of the Education Rights Holder in consultation with the caregiver

In Addition:

- For youth on track to begin Independent Living Preparation (14 and older), to or from any event consistent with their career interests or to help them pursue work opportunities, obtain their California ID or Driver's License, or their interest in pursuing higher education - such as attending tours of college campuses
- To and from activities that are consistent with and necessary for fulfillment of any enumerated right set forth in the Foster Youth Bill of Rights including in particular:
    - to and from worship services of the youth's choosing, and
    - to and from social events of the youth's choosing with approval of either the caregiver and/or Education Rights Holder applying the prudent parent standard

Other Creative Solutions to Explore:

- Transportation provided by a biological parent or sibling (if unsupervised visits are not barred by the court) to facilitate more opportunities for visitation
- A district employee who lives near the student's home provides the transportation, and perhaps use this as a mentoring opportunity with proper training[v]
- Coordination with a neighboring district to split transportation responsibilities (e.g., student transported by district of residence from home to district border, student transported by district of origin from district border to school of origin)
- Evaluating whether a student receiving special education services has transportation included in their IEP as a necessary "related service" based on their special education needs. If so, this service can be used to transport the student to their school of origin.[vi]
- Using a database that utilizes Geo Mapping so districts can be aware of and share existing routes
- Explore a child's eligibility for transportation through outside sources such as Medicaid for children who are medically fragile, or Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) eligible children
- Contract with organizations to transport the youth
    - Examples that are utilized by different counties throughout the state:
        - Trust-Ed: https://youtu.be/OkHctUTMUkg
        - Kiddie Commute: https://www.kiddiecommutes.com/
        - SOL: https://soltransportation.com/index.html
        - ALC: https://www.alcschools.com/
        - ZUM: https://www.ridezum.com/
        - Hop Skip Drive: https://www.hopskipdrive.com/
- Ask the parents or student for ideas

- Meet with your homeless liaison to creatively problem solve strategies, challenges, cases and costs. Determine if there are ways to share costs and/or routes between these programs and funding streams
- Consider if a carpool can be used to transport more than one youth with a similar commute
- Provide resource parents with a list of options that they can access for transportation support, including contact information and cost/potential for reimbursement
- Recruit additional volunteer drivers. In some areas child welfare and volunteers are reaching out to resource parents who are waiting for youth to be placed in their home, or who no longer have youth in their care and may be willing to provide this service

AB 2083 Interagency Leadership Team Collaboration

Section 16521.6(F) of Assembly Bill No. 2083 states that "alignment and coordination of transportation and other foster youth services" shall be met "to ensure that coordinated, timely, and trauma-informed services are provided to children and youth in foster care who have experienced severe trauma."

- Consider collaborating through the AB 2083 county Interagency Leadership Teams (ILT) to meet school of origin needs of youth in foster care. Refer to your county's AB 2083 Memorandum of Understanding.

Choosing the Method of Transportation

The method of transportation must be "developmentally appropriate" for the youth.[vii] Caregivers, education rights holders, social workers, and attorneys for youth, and especially the youth themselves should be consulted when considering different options to ensure that the option chosen is safe and appropriate, given that youth's unique needs.

Funding Strategies

The following funding options may be considered if additional costs to transport a student in foster care to the school of origin are determined:

- Cost sharing between the district and child welfare through use of a specific transportation strategy in which each party is responsible for a segment of the transportation (this may be done

Melody's Story: Graduating High School

Melody was an 18-year-old who had not had much stability at school. Beginning with her freshman year, she had attended four high schools and found it very hard to trust others or make connections due to a lack of stability.

Through the Foster Youth School Stability Transportation Pilot in Los Angeles County, Melody was able to attend her school of origin through private vendor rides when she changed placements. Melody says that staying in her school of origin allowed her to make more friends, "be the old her," and made her excited to attend school. She also liked her experience with the private vendor and found the drivers very friendly.

Because of her previous school instability, Melody had to work twice as hard her senior year to make up previous class credits. Through the private vendor, Melody was able to get rides to school as early as 7:00 a.m. or stay as late as 4:30 p.m. to take credit recovery classes, which allowed her to graduate on time.

When Melody graduated, she was the recipient of multiple accolades, including the Principal Award, Honors, and Citizenship Award. Melody said being able to attend her school of origin gave her a little bit of hope and made her life easier. In July 2019, Melody finished her first year of college.

through an existing memorandum of understanding, or as part of a unique arrangement made for a specific student)[viii]
    - Discussion can occur with the AB 2083 ILT
- If applicable, support caregiver to access reimbursement/Title IV-E funds to cover the cost of the portion of the transportation that they are providing[ix]
- Cost sharing between the school district of origin and the school district where the student is living
- Use of the district's Title I funds
- If a youth requires transportation as a related service on their IEP, the district may be able to use Medicaid reimbursements to help cover the transportation cost[x] However, the education rights holder would need to consent to the district billing Medicaid for this service[xi]
- Use of any available grant funds such as AB 130 Direct Services Funds[xii]

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[i] "Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard" means careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the child's health, safety, and best interests. (Welfare & Institution Code, Sections 362.04 and 362.05.)

[ii] The California Department of Social Services issued guidance, in All County Information Notice I-86-20, to clarify that other trusted adults in a foster youth's life may provide transportation to the youth's school of origin and are also eligible for transportation reimbursement. (United States Code, Title 20, Section 6312(c)(5); United States Code, Title 42, Section 675(4)(A).)

[iii] Note that biological parents must not be prohibited by the court from having unsupervised visits with the youth if they provide this transportation without supervision.

[iv] STRTPs must provide core educational services such as transportation to school of origin, unless other arrangements are specified. (STRTP Interim Licensing Standards, Version 3 (Released 1/11/19), Section 87074(c).)

[v] Pomona Unified School District is piloting a similar program.

[vi] California Education Code Sections 41850(b)(5) and 56040.

[vii] Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Youth in Foster Care, U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Guidance on the Foster Care Provisions in Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, June 23, 2016; available at https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/09/Non-Regulatory-Guidance_06-23-2016.pdf.

[viii] California Education Code, Section 48853.5(f)(10); United States Code, Title 20, Section 6312(c)(5); United States Code, Title 42, Section 675(4)(A).

[ix] United States Code, Title 20, Section 6312(c)(5); United States Code, Title 42, Section 675(4)(A). The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) explains how to calculate the reimbursement in All County Letter No. 11-51. In addition, CDSS recently issued guidance, in All County Information Notice I-86-20, to clarify that other trusted adults in a foster youth's life may provide transportation to the youth's school of origin and are also eligible for reimbursement.

[x] California Education Code, Sections 41850(b)(5) and 56040.

[xi] The school district billing Medicaid for services may impact the youth's ability to access Medicaid-funded services outside of school. Ensure that Education Rights Holders and others working with the youth are fully informed about the potential impact of allowing this billing before asking for their consent.

[xii] Section 141 of Assembly Bill 130 (Chapter 44, Statutes of 2021) allocates $30 million to county offices of education to provide direct services to youth in foster care which can include transportation. Please visit the FYSCP Hub Webpage for more information: https://fyscptap.scoe.net/resources/additional-direct-service-funds-ab-130.