

COVID-19 FAQ: Considerations for Students in Foster Care

As school districts and charter schools look to respond to individual student needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to consider the unique individualized needs of students in foster care. Maintaining positive connections, ensuring educational continuity, expanding enrollment, withdrawals, and streamlining transitions in the event of a school move are essential for students in foster care.

Q 1: Who should check in with students in foster care during the pandemic?

A: Child Welfare Education Liaisons (CWELs) and county Child Welfare Agencies are encouraged to work together to ensure students in foster care and foster caregivers have what they need to engage in remote learning. Ideally, school staff members are connecting with students and have an established relationship (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 are suggested.

Q 2: How can I get in touch with a caseworker or work with County Human Services Agencies to support students in foster care during COVID-19??

A: If the CWEL or school does not have the contact information for a child's caseworker, the CWEL should reach out to the [Educational Point of Contact](#) at the county Child Welfare Agency.

The American Bar Association and Casey Family Programs also recommend the following:

- Create and maintain existing collaborations with child welfare agency partners. Remember, child welfare agencies are similarly in crisis mode attempting to provide for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the child welfare system.
- Provide child welfare partners clear information about what is being offered to children and families. This will allow child welfare to connect students in foster care and families with the support and opportunities the LEA is and will be providing.
- Ensure children and youth in foster care are benefiting from the food and meals offered during school closures, who are categorically eligible for free meals. [Click here](#) to connect to emergency feeding information in Colorado.

Q 3: How can CWELs support foster caregivers who have children and youth in their home that attend multiple school districts?

A: Foster caregivers often have multiple children and youth placed in their homes and they do not always come from the same school districts. Each school district has a unique approach to remote learning during this crisis (e.g. some schools have instruction from 8:00am-12:00pm while others may have online instruction in the afternoon). Please work with foster caregivers and be as flexible as possible with them as they are working to accommodate multiple schedules.

Q 4: How can CWELs and schools support foster caregivers with remote learning resources?

- A. **There are multiple resources to support foster caregivers with remote learning resources.** [Click here](#) to access the Colorado Department of Education's Learning at Home resources. Below are additional considerations for CWELs to support foster caregivers as schools continue providing remote/blended learning options for students.
- Follow-up with students in foster care and 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 student in foster care and/or caregiver needs assistance accessing available tools and resources;
 - Provide students in foster care and 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.

Q 5: How can CWELs support enrollment and withdrawal for students in Foster Care during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- A. CWELs can provide direction on how to enroll and withdraw students during remote learning, including;
- Sharing information on who to call;
 - Assisting with record transfers between the sending and receiving schools;
 - Supporting communication between the caseworker, school, and others involved in the child's case;
 - Outlining enrollment and withdrawal processes during COVID19 on the LEA's website;
 - Posting a checklist with enrollment and withdrawal information that can be shared.

Q 6: Where can I access guidance for supporting students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

A: CDE released FAQs and considerations for serving students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Click here](#) to access these resources.

The U.S. Department of Education also released an FAQ on providing services to children with disabilities during this pandemic. [Click here](#) to access the document. Additionally, the American Bar Association and Casey Family Programs recommend the following:

- Ensure individualized instruction is designed and creative solutions found to address the unique needs of students in special education during school closures;
- Target supports for students in special education and their families to ensure placement stability. Parenting children with disabilities without the benefit of school and school-related services will add significant stressors in the home;
- Work closely with child welfare partners to address all of the complex needs that might arise within the family of the child with special needs to increase supports and ensure a coordinated response.

Q 7: Where can I find guidance related to school nutrition?

A: The School Nutrition Unit at the Colorado Department of Education has a website dedicated to emergency feeding and school meals available in communities across Colorado, including throughout the summer. [Click here](#) to access the website.

Q 8: Can we use Title 1 funds to purchase technology (laptop, iPad, Wi-Fi) for homeless students to access remote learning?

A: Based on the information contained within the CARES Act (relief package), the limit of 15% for technology expenses has been lifted to help districts get tech to kids. Therefore, providing hot spots and other technology which allows students to access remote learning is allowable. CDE recognizes that having equitable access to virtual learning will be critical for students in foster care during times when in-person instruction is not available. School districts will need to follow any internal control policy on checking out equipment and technology. There may be additional requirements that tie to the district's current IT policy regarding use of the internet.

Q 9: Can school districts provide gas reimbursement to families who are driving to a school nearby to access wi-fi for on-line education and free lunch?

A: Yes. Remote learning options often require students in foster care to access WiFi/hotspots as a direct link to education. Therefore, transportation to and from these locations is education-related. Additionally, this would be considered a "comparable service," as the district is providing this to all students.

Q 10: Are there mental health resources available for families?

Yes. Please [click here](#) for a guide to help families cope with COVID-19.

Q 11: How can we support highly mobile students in foster care who are on the run or have lost housing due to COVID-19?

A: Young people who are living independently and have become (or are at risk of becoming) displaced due to COVID-19 closures may access resources through Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs. The following link provides information on contacts for organizations across Colorado: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/grants/colorado-rhy>.

Higher Education and Transition-Aged Youth: The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and Colorado Education and Training Voucher Program provide some direct services to youth. [Click here](#) for more information on Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. [Click here](#) for information on the Education and Training Voucher Program.

Q 12: What about high school seniors who are concerned about graduation?

A: High school graduation is an important milestone in the lives of our Colorado youth. CDE created considerations for 2020 high school graduates and 2020 Graduation FAQs. [Click here](#) to access this resource.

Additional COVID-19 Resources for Children and Youth in Foster Care:

Resources from Colorado State Agency or federal government

- [Colorado Department of Human Services](#)
- [Runaway and Homeless Youth Housing Resources](#)
- [National Children's Bureau: US Department of Health and Human Services](#)

Resources Provided by the American Bar Association Center for Children and the Law

- [National Association for the Counsel for Children: COVID-19 specific Resources for Foster Care](#)
- [American Bar Association Center for Children and the Law: Foster Care and Education](#)
- [Interactive meal-finder app for caregivers to find pick-up locations for free meals](#)
- [National Summer Learning Association COVID Toolkit](#)
- [Resources for parents and caregivers to support young children while self-isolating during COVID](#)
- [Free educational resources for caregivers](#) (includes resources for free or low-cost access to internet and electronics)