

Scott County Public Schools

Foster Care Policies and Procedures

For children and youth in foster care, a change in home placement frequently results in a change in school placement. Each time students enter new schools they must adjust to different curricula, different expectations, new friends and new teachers. The impact of every school change can be significant. These changes may create negative impacts on the student, to include: making less academic progress, falling behind their peers, struggling to make friends, building relationships with their teachers, etc. Scott County Public Schools in a joint effort with the Scott County Department of Social Services strives to work together toward the best interest of the student. It is recognized that keeping children in the same school: provides for continuity in education, maintains relationships at school, provides stability during a traumatic time for children, and supports academic success by ensuring school stability.

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) requires that school divisions and child welfare agencies collaborate to develop and implement clear written procedures governing how transportation will be provided, arranged, and funded to maintain children in foster care in their school of origin during the time students are in foster care when it is in their best interest.

A “Best Interest Determination” is made by a committee for each child when placed into foster care by representatives of Scott County Public Schools, the Local Department of Social Service’s service worker (LDSS), the child, the child’s parents [unless there has been a loss of parental rights in which case the foster parent(s) or guardian(s) will serve], the child’s guardian ad litem, and any other significant person(s) or member of the IEP or 504 Team. The Best Interest Determination Committee looks at report cards, progress reports, attendance, achievement data, disciplinary records, and health records. The committee takes into consideration: the child’s previous placements (emotionally, socially, academically, and physically), the child’s permanency goal and plan, safety considerations, student preferences and interests, whether the child has a current IEP or 504 Plan.

Because Scott County is a rural county and covers 500 square miles, it is not always possible to work out transportation issues. Also, as a rural community children taken from home and placed in foster care often end up with a relative. Depending on where that person lives in the county, the family may request that the student transfer to another school that would be more convenient for them. These issues are taken into consideration before determination of the final school placement for each child is made taking into consideration first and foremost transportation to the child’s school of origin.

If there are additional costs incurred in providing transportation to maintain children in foster care in their schools of origin, Scott County Public Schools will provide transportation to the school of origin if:

- The Scott County Department of Social Services agrees to reimburse Scott County Public schools for the cost of such transportation;
- Scott County Public Schools agrees to pay for the cost of transportation; or
- Scott County Public Schools and The Scott County Department of Social Services agree to share the cost of such transportation.

The development of the local transportation plan includes the following participants: The Title I Director, the Local Foster Care Liaison, The McKinney-Ventro Liaison, the Transportation Director and a Representative from the Department of Social Services.

Scott County Public Schools Transportation Plan for Students Placed in Foster Care

Sequence:

1. When a student is placed in foster care or changes residence while in foster care, the LDSS worker must notify the principal and the McKinney-Ventro Liaison from Scott County Public Schools. If the new residence is not in the same school zone, the foster care liaison must be notified and invited to participate in the Best Interest Determination (BID).
2. Upon receipt of the invitation to participate in the BID, the foster care liaison notifies the school of origin transportation designee.
 - a. The foster care liaison should provide the student's name, current school, new residence address, and whether the student has an IEP with specialized transportation.
 - b. The school of origin transportation designee identifies potential ways that the child could be transported (see list of options below) if the BID results in a decision to maintain the current school enrolment. This information is given to the foster care liaison to include in the BID.
3. The LDSS worker, foster care liaison, and other essential members of BID share their information. The joint decision is made by the LDSS worker and the foster care liaison.
4. If the BID decision is that the student will remain in the current school, the foster care liaison notifies the school of origin transportation designee, who then assists the LDSS worker in arranging transportation to and from school.

Options:

Multiple factors will be considered and addressed in the BID when determining transportation options for foster care students, including: safety for the student and other students being transported; student age; length of commute; and distance. Information from the school of origin transportation designee about these factors will be provided so that the BID will be comprehensive and will include consideration of cost-effective measures.

The following options will be considered to provide school of origin transportation:

1. An existing bus route can be used.
2. An existing bus route can be modified slightly to accommodate the new address.
3. Specialized transportation offered to other students can be accessed, such as special education;
4. Existing specialized transportation can be modified slightly to accommodate the new address.
5. Scott County Public Schools would also look at the feasibility of using a county car.
6. The LDSS worker also should explore options outside of those provided by the school division, such as reimbursing the foster parents for transportation costs, or including transport in contracts with licensed child placing agencies or group homes.

Funding:

If the student has an IEP that includes provisions for specialized transportation, transportation must be provided by the school division responsible for the student's Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Based on Virginia's special education regulations, any alternative special education placement, whether public or private, assumes specialized transportation is part of the IEP and must be provided for the student to receive FAPE.

If Scott County Public Schools can offer an existing means of transportation at no additional cost, the LDSS will not be charged.

If Scott County Public Schools can provide transportation but will need to modify a route or create a new option, the school of origin transportation designee will calculate the cost that will be charged to the LDSS. This calculation is not required until the BID has been completed and the decision to maintain the current school enrollment is made. The LDSS should explore whether the student is eligible for IV-E or CSA funds to be used to cover the cost. The school division's Title I, Part A funds may be used to assist with excess transportation costs if funds exist after covering mandated responsibilities (such as transportation for students experiencing homelessness).

Once a final determination of school placement is made and transportation issues are worked out, the following must be kept on file:

- **Best Interest determination**
- **"Yellow Ticket" – Immediate Enrollment of Child in Foster Care Form**
- **Transportation Certification**