

## Alabama Education Stability for Foster Students

Madison City Schools

Madison County Schools

Huntsville City Schools

### Local Education Agency (LEA) Collaborative Foster Care Plan

#### LEA Students in Foster Care Overview

**Number of Students in Foster Care SY 2021-2022 (Currently Enrolled):**

Madison City Schools - 27

Huntsville City Schools - 53

Madison County Schools - 30

**Number of Students in Foster Care SY 2022-2023 (Currently Enrolled):**

Madison City Schools - 21

Huntsville City Schools -

Madison County Schools - 79

**List Agencies in Collaboration:**

Madison City Board of Education  
211 Celtic Drive, Madison, AL 35758

Huntsville City Board of Education  
200 White Street, Huntsville, AL 35801

Madison County Board of Education  
1275 Jordan Road, Huntsville, AL 35811  
Madison County Department of Human Resources  
2206 Oakwood Ave NW, Huntsville, AL 35810

**Policy Review and Revision** (Describe how each agency in collaboration reviewed policies and the revisions made to policies as a result of reviews)

Madison City Schools: [Policy Manual, Section VI. Students, Policy 6.1.2 – Admission to Schools](#)

Huntsville City Schools: Policy Manual, Section VI. Students, Policy 6.1.2g - Admission to Schools

Madison County Schools: Policy Manual, Section VII Instructional Program, Policy 7.12 - Homeless, Migratory, Immigrant, Foster Care and ELL Enrollment/Education

Meetings between LEAs and DHR are held annually to make joint informed decisions about children in foster care and to remove barriers that may hinder the implementation of the Title I foster care provisions. During these meetings policies are reviewed and revised to comply with the state and/or federal guidelines. It is our goal to ensure that the appropriate interventions and strategies are in place to support foster care students to succeed in school.

**Describe Collaboration and Coordination with Agencies** (Include a list of team members, positions, signatures, and agencies):

Huntsville City, Madison County, and Madison City LEAs and the Department of Human Resources will conduct ongoing meetings and conversations to make informed decisions regarding children in foster care. All efforts are made to remove barriers that may hinder the implementation of the Title I foster care provisions.

Foster Care Collaborative Team Members

**Madison City Schools:**

Natalia Dooley, Federal Programs Coordinator Natalia Dooley  
Briana Hawkins, Social Worker Briana Hawkins  
Heather Hicks, Social Worker Heather Hicks BSW  
DeAnna Haataja, Social Worker DeAnna Haataja  
Susan Zinkil, Coordinator of Special Education Susan Zinkil  
Travis Schrimsher, Transportation Specialist Travis Schrimsher  
Dorinda White, Director of Student Services Dorinda White

**Huntsville City Schools:**

Nicole Harden, Special Populations Liaison Nicole Harden  
Scott Gillies, Transportation Coordinator Scott Gillies  
Jasmine Green, Student Welfare and Social Services Coordinator Jasmine Green  
Deborah Baeder, ESOL Coordinator Deborah Baeder  
Towana Smith, Federal Programs Coordinator Towana Smith  
Elizabeth Long, Director of Special Education Elizabeth Long

**Madison County Schools:**

Jennifer Whitt, Supervisor of Student Services Jennifer Whitt  
Kerrie Bass, Federal Programs Supervisor Kerrie Bass  
Kevin Creekmore, Transportation Supervisor Kevin Creekmore  
Rachel Ballard, Director of Equity and Innovation Rachel Ballard  
Pamela Carter, District Social Worker Pamela Carter

**Madison County Department of Human Resources**

Rachel Heard, Child Welfare Assistant Director Rachel P Heard  
Paul Arnold, Program Specialist Paul Arnold

**LEA(s) Point(s) of Contact:**

Madison City Schools: Natalia Dooley, Federal Programs Coordinator, (256)464-8370, ext. 10355, (256) 755-7323 (cell), [nadooley@madisoncity.k12.al.us](mailto:nadooley@madisoncity.k12.al.us); Briana Hawkins, Social Worker, (256) 541-7069 (cell), [bbhawkins@madisoncity.k12.al.us](mailto:bbhawkins@madisoncity.k12.al.us), Heather Hicks, Social Worker, (256)783-2807 (cell), [hhicks@madisoncity.k12.al.us](mailto:hhicks@madisoncity.k12.al.us)

Huntsville City Schools: Nicole Harden, Special Populations Liaison, (256)428-6884 (office), (256)529-8905 (cell), [Nicole.Harden@hsv-k12.org](mailto:Nicole.Harden@hsv-k12.org)

Madison County Schools: Jennifer Whitt, Supervisor of Student Services, (256) 852-2557, ext 61715 (office), (256)658-4330 (cell), [jdwhitt@mcस्क12.org](mailto:jdwhitt@mcस्क12.org)

**DHR(s) Point(s) of Contact:**

Rachel Heard, Director, (256)427-6388, ext. 6281, [Rachel.Heard@dhr.alabama.gov](mailto:Rachel.Heard@dhr.alabama.gov)

Paul Arnold, Program Specialist, (256) 427-6201, [Paul.Arnold@dhr.alabama.gov](mailto:Paul.Arnold@dhr.alabama.gov)

2 C. F. R. §§ 200.331(d), 200.328(a); 34 C.F.R. §76.770; ESSA SECTION 1111(1)(e) - LEAs must implement the Title I educational stability requirements of children in foster care, including ensuring that:

- A child in foster care remains in his or her school of origin, unless it is determined that remaining in the school of origin is not in that child's best interest;
- If it is not in the child's best interest to stay in his or her school of origin the child is immediately enrolled in the new school even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment; and
- That the new (enrolling) school immediately contacts the school of origin, to obtain relevant academic and other records.

**Describe procedures for implementing the above provisions.**

A student in foster care will enroll or remain in the student's school of origin, unless it is determined that remaining in the school of origin is not in such student's best interest. If it is not in a student's best interest to stay in the school of origin, a student in foster care may be enrolled in any school in the system that serves the attendance area in which the student is living, even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment. [Reference: 20 U.S.C. §§6311(g)(1)(E)]

Madison City, Huntsville City, and Madison County LEAs will engage in a collaborative process with the Madison County Department of Human Resources (DHR) and foster parent(s) to determine the best interest of the student and ensure the student remains in the school of origin, if it meets the best interest of the child. If a foster parent enrolls a student without contacting DHR, LEA foster care liaison will contact DHR foster care liaison to initiate collaboration for the determination of the best interest of the child. If the best interest determination shows that it is not in the child's best interest to remain in the school of origin, the DHR caseworker, previous LEA, and foster parent(s) will collaborate with the new school to enroll the child immediately. The new enrolling school will contact the school of origin to obtain the student's academic records. The previous school will transfer the records within 15 work days to the new enrolling school.

ESSA Section 1111(g)(1)(E)(i) – A description of how the LEA in collaboration with the local child welfare agency will ensure that in determining whether it is in the child's best interest to remain in his or her school or origin, and LEA takes into consideration all factors relating to a child's best interest.

**Description of how the LEA will work with child welfare agencies to develop a clear policy or protocol on how to make best interest determinations including making every effort to gather meaningful input from relevant parties, in addition to required child welfare and school representatives, in deciding what school placement is in a child's best interest.**

**Include a description of protocols in this description.**

Madison City, Huntsville City, and Madison County LEAs will engage in a collaborative process with the Madison County DHR to utilize current guidelines to make the best interest determinations for each student in foster care (see Best Interest Determination, Appendix A). The stakeholders will solicit input from all included parties, in addition to DHR and LEA representatives, to identify the school placement that is in the child's best interest. The following factors will be considered for the best interest determination for each student in foster care:

1. The child's preference
2. The views of the parents or the person with education decision-making rights
3. The child's attachment to school and staff
4. The placement of the child's siblings

5. The availability and quality of services in the current and potential schools to meet the child's education and social/emotional needs
6. School climate/safety
7. The impact of a school transfer, including the commute
8. The child's special needs

The cost of transportation will not be a factor in determining the child's best interest. The team will use the following possible supporting documentation for best interest determination:

1. Report cards
2. Progress reports
3. Test Scores
4. Attendance Data
5. IEP or 504 Plan
6. E-mails from individuals consulted during the best interest determination process
7. Other relevant documents

Madison County DHR caseworker shall document the best interest determination ([Appendix A](#)) in the child's Individualized Service Plan (ISP), including factors considered, participants involved in the collaborative process, the determination for school placement, and the placement made. The best interest determination will be made in a timely manner within the first 3 days of the initial contact to determine the path for the solution that will be in the best interest of the student. Parties involved in the decision making will include, but are not limited to LEA staff, Madison County DHR foster care caseworker, other DHR representatives, foster parents, guardian ad litem (GAL) and other stakeholders as applicable. Documentation of the best interest determination shall be maintained in both the Madison County DHR child case file and the school's student cumulative record. The best interest decision may be revisited, if the student's situation changes to meet the needs of the student. If a change in placement is determined to be in the child's best interest, the school representative shall send this documentation to the new school as a part of the student's cumulative record. If records are requested from a district outside of Madison County, Alabama, the school representative shall contact the appropriate DHR state foster care POC (see [Appendix B](#) for appropriate DHR foster care contact).

ESSA Section 1112(c)(5)(B) Description of transportation protocols and procedures to include how additional costs for transportation will be calculated and funded as well as a policy for LEAs to resolve best interest disputes and interagency disputes related to transportation costs. Description must include how transportation and transportation costs will be monitored. (Include



LEA and welfare responsibilities for providing transportation.)

## **Description of Dispute Resolution Policy.**

### **Transportation Protocols and Procedures**

All children in foster care needing transportation to the school of origin will promptly receive transportation in a cost-effective manner and in accordance with the Madison County DHR's authority to use child welfare funding for school of origin transportation. If there are additional costs incurred in providing transportation to maintain children in foster care in their schools of origin, the Madison City, Huntsville City, and Madison County LEAs respectively will collaborate to provide transportation to the school of origin, while Madison County DHR will collaborate with the foster parent(s) and each LEA respectively to provide transportation as necessary.

Wherever possible, and where it is in the student's best interest, respective LEA buses and/or other modes of transportation should be utilized for transportation according to the following procedure:

- LEAs will advise DHR within 5 school days whether it is able to transport the student in question by school bus, and if so, respective LEA will arrange transportation within 5 school days.
- During the interim period of up to 5 school days during which LEA is arranging transportation, DHR will make all reasonable efforts to provide alternative transportation to ensure that the child does not miss school.

If the LEA advises DHR that it cannot transport a student by school bus, DHR will arrange for safe and timely transportation, using one or more of the following options:

- Foster parents reimbursed at the State mileage rate using Title IV E Foster Care Maintenance Payment
- Friends, relatives and neighbors of the child or foster parent reimbursed at the state mileage rate
- Employees of DHR and residential programs
- Public transportation paid at the established rate
- Contracted transportation

### **Dispute Resolution Policy**

It is the responsibility of Madison County DHR and LEA to collaborate in determining the child's best interest for school

enrollment and to resolve any conflict concerning the school enrollment determination. Whenever possible, Madison County DHR and LEA will attempt to informally resolve any enrollment dispute involving a child in foster care. The Madison County DHR and LEA will pursue the formal dispute resolution procedures below when informal resolution is not possible, or when informal resolution would result in disruptions to the child's education. As described above, following the best interest determination process, Madison County DHR has ultimate authority to decide whether to keep a student in out-of-home care in his or her school of origin or transfer him or her to the student's local zoned school. If Madison County DHR caseworker's decision is contrary to the recommendation of LEA, the caseworker will provide LEA with a written explanation of his or her decision. The LEA may then contact Madison County DHR Foster Care POC to state LEA's reasons for disagreement, and if persuaded, the director may override the caseworker's decision and direct enrollment as the school LEA recommends. Or, if necessary, Madison County DHR will convene a Family Team Decision-Making Meeting to discuss and resolve the dispute. While any such dispute is pending, the child shall remain in his or her school of origin with transportation provided as previously arranged.

Level I: LEA-level Dispute Resolution with the Superintendent or Designee

- Written Notice, [Appendix C](#)
- Dispute Form, [Appendix D](#)

Level II: State-level Dispute Resolution

Sally Meek, Foster Care Point of Contact  
Alabama State Department of Education  
Phone: (334) 694-4516  
Email: [sally.meek@alsde.edu](mailto:sally.meek@alsde.edu)

ESSA Section 111(g)(1)(E)(ii)-(iii) **Describe protocol for a child in foster care to be immediately enrolled in a new school.**

Please note the following definitions when enrolling foster care students:

- "Immediate" means no later than one school day after notification of intent to enroll.
- "Enrollment" means the child is attending classes and participating fully in school activities.

The enrollment of children in foster care shall not be denied or delayed due to any of the following barriers that are specifically



prohibited by applicable law, which may include the following:

- Lack of birth certificate
- Lack of school records or transcripts
- Lack of immunization or health records
- Lack of proof of residency
- Lack of transportation
- Guardianship or custody requirements
- Lack of social security card

To begin the enrollment process, the child's DHR caseworker will contact the LEA Point of Contact with intent to enroll or withdraw. The LEA POC will complete the Foster Care Intake Form ([Appendix F](#)). Other adults, as permitted by DHR may be required or permitted to assist with enrollment of the child, but the DHR caseworker will always direct the process and be the primary contact for the LEA staff.

DHR need not produce the child's school record at the time of enrollment in order to enroll the child in school. The school/district the child most recently attended is responsible for transferring the education records of the child directly to the school where a child is seeking enrollment.

Foster care parents, DHR social worker, or other legal guardians will be allowed to immediately enroll children in foster care in the school district without having the necessary paperwork (birth certificates, shot records, academic records, special education records, etc.). This is to help aid the student with a smooth transition into the district. The receiving school district will contact the school district of origin for the records and make adaptations as needed. DHR will collaborate with the involved LEAs to provide the After enrollment, the following guardianship or legal custody documents shall be provided for verification by the foster family or Madison County DHR:

- Power of attorney
- Affidavit
- Court Order
- A letter on the letterhead of the placement agency that has custody of the child explaining that the child is in foster care
- Other documents providing information regarding the student's foster care situation



*Madison City BOE Approval: May 9, 2018*

*Huntsville City BOE Approval:*

*Madison County BOE Approval:*