

# Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) & Foster Youth as Students

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*Working Together for Student Success*

# ESSA signed into law December 10, 2015 by President Obama:

- Reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).
- Provides states greater control over accountability & school improvement
- Aims to create transparency regarding achievement gaps of disadvantaged subgroups of students, including foster youth.



# Why Special Protections for Students in Foster Care in ESSA?:

- “Children in foster care are some of the country’s most educationally disadvantaged students. Studies show that students in foster care experience: school suspensions and expulsions at higher rates than their peers not in foster care, lower standardized test scores in reading and math, high levels of grade retention and drop out, and far lower high school and college graduation rates.” (Legal Center for Foster Care Education)



# ESSA Requires State Child Welfare Point of Contact:

- Establishment of Child Welfare State Point of Contact.
- Indiana State Point of Contact for Department of Child Services is Melaina Gant.
  - Contact information:

Mrs. Melaina Gant, M.Ed.  
Director, Education Services - DCS  
317.515.7331 (cell)  
[melaina.gant@dcs.in.gov](mailto:melaina.gant@dcs.in.gov)



# ESSA Requires Separate State Education Agency Point of Contact:

- Cannot be same point of contact as McKinney-Vento Liaison at State Educational Agency.
  - Can be the same person for Foster Care Point of Contact and McKinney-Vento Educational Liaison at Local Educational Agency
- Indiana Department of Education State Education Agency Point of Contact is Jeff Wittman.
  - Contact Information:

Jeff Wittman  
School Social Work & Foster Youth Specialist  
317-234-5704 (Office)  
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# Changes to Definition of Foster Care per ESSA:

- ESSA removes status of “awaiting foster care placement” from Homeless definition.
- New Definition of Foster Care: 24 hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians for whom the child welfare agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes children in foster family homes, shelters, relative foster homes, group homes, and residential facilities – regardless of whether the foster care facility is licensed or whether payments are made by the state.



# ESSA Requires Each Local Educational Agency to Identify a Point of Contact:

- This means all Local Educational Agencies including public school districts and charter schools
- One Point of Contact per Local Educational Agency to simplify contact, to be shared with Child Welfare Point of Contact (Melaina Gant) and State Education Agency Point of Contact (Jeff Wittman)
- These points of contact will collaborate to determine best interest educational placement and transportation plans.



# Best Interest Educational Placement Determination for Foster Youth:

- School of Origin:
  - Assure the foster youth be enrolled or remain in school of origin unless otherwise determined it is not in their best interest.
    - Best interest for educational placement determination initiated by Department of Child Services (DCS) Family Case Manager.
    - Utilizes Point of Contact Checklist for systematic determination (available on IDOE website)
    - Completed Point of Contact Checklist approved by DCS Educational Liaison
    - Approved Point of Contact Checklist sent to school for their input
    - Process should be collaborative



# Transportation Plan for Foster Youth:

- Determined using collaborative interaction between Child Welfare and Local Educational Agency staff.
- Determined using “Written Transportation Plan to Ensure School Stability for Students in Foster Care.” This document can be found on IDOE website under Foster Youth.
- Transportation to be provided as long as the child is in foster care and it is in the child’s best interest to attend that school or until the child exits foster care.
- Transportation of students in foster care to / from their school of origin is an approved expense under Title I funds for schools.



# Immediate Enrollment for Foster Youth

- When a school change is warranted as in the best interest for a foster student, children in foster care can enroll immediately in a new school, regardless of having the normally required enrollment document.
- Enrolling school to immediately contact the school last attended by foster youth to obtain relevant academic and other education / health related documentation.



# Data on Foster Students to be Reported by Schools:

- Schools to identify and report data to IDOE on students in foster care served each year, beginning at end of 2017-18 school year.
- Reporting done one time at end of school year
- DCS and IDOE working together on a data share agreement to share disaggregated data on foster student achievement and graduation rates per ESSA.



# Questions about ESSA & Foster Students???



# Contact Information for Jeff Wittman:

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