

FosterMA Connect



Fall Update from Commissioner Spears

Posted by Karin Bettencourt in FosterMA Connect on Oct 5, 2020 12:34:15 PM

Dear DCF Foster Parents,

I hope this email finds you all doing well. As we settle into a new school year, unlike any we've known, I want to start by thanking you for continuing to hang with us. The Commonwealth is deeply indebted to its foster parents and kinship foster parents for continuing to do whatever it takes to assure kids they have the support of a family during these uncertain times.

I am so appreciative of all that you are doing as you balance new circumstances every day. We know that each day brings new questions and we will continue working with Massachusetts Alliance for Families (MAFF) to be sure we are able to hear and respond to your concerns.

As you already know, school districts began the year with varying learning models based on community public health data. While some school districts are fully remote, many school districts are offering in-person education in combination with online learning and allowing parents/caregivers to choose this "hybrid option" or all online learning.

Due to the challenges of remote learning for some children, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has asked schools to offer in-person classes for children in special education, children who are homeless, and foster children. Yet, DCF also recognizes in-person learning may not be the right fit for some children and their foster families.

You may have already experienced that learning models can change at any time depending on public health conditions, or, children may need a different learning environment. Attached, you will find questions to help you talk to your Social Workers about any school issues facing the child in your care (you do not need to fill

out the questionnaire). We encourage each Foster Parent to work closely with the child's social worker and with schools to ensure that the plan for children in your care best meets their needs, whether that is in-person or remote learning.

The second attachment is a spreadsheet of current fall reopening plans. Because each school district can make independent decisions based on circumstances in the community, this list is subject to change. When necessary, you should reach out directly to DCF education specialists or the Foster Parent Point of Contact for the child's school district. Their emails and phone numbers are listed on the second and third tabs of the spreadsheet.

Before we know it, school vacation will be upon us and some of you may be planning to take some well-deserved time to relax and recharge. At this time, the travel order Governor Baker issued in July remains in effect to keep Massachusetts' COVID-19 transmission levels as low as possible.

Thank you for your understanding and for reconfiguring your summer plans to adhere to the travel order. As you schedule future overnight out-of-state trips, please notify your Social Workers as soon as possible so they can work with you to assure safe travels for all.

All travel requests are reviewed by the clinical team and your Family Resource team. The third attachment is a questionnaire to guide your communication with the Department (you do not need to fill it out) that includes specific information about the travel order. As the travel order is subject to change and may impact your plans, you can check mass.gov/travelorder for the latest updates.

Please feel free to contact your Family Resource Workers or Area Offices with any questions you might have about any topic. Our staff is so grateful for your dedication to our children and is always here to support you.

It looks like perfect weekend weather for apple-picking, pumpkin-carving, and fall foliage. I hope you can all get out and enjoy it!

With appreciation,

Linda Spears, DCF Commissioner

Department of Children and Families

School Attendance Questionnaire for Children in Foster Care during COVID-19 Issued: October 2, 2020

If you are Educational Decision Maker (EDM) for a child in your home, it is anticipated that you and the child's Social Worker/Supervisor will discuss and evaluate the school options for that child and decide which is best to meet the child's needs. While Foster Parents are the EDM in most cases, the EDM may also be the child's biological parent, a special education surrogate parent, or an Educational GAL appointed by the court. In the event that you are not the EDM for a child in your home, the child's Social Worker/Supervisor will facilitate a discussion with you, your Family Resource Worker, and the EDM to consider options and determine which is best for the child.

Below are some of the questions that should be considered in making the decision about what type of learning is best for a child.

Who is the child's Education Decision Maker?

What is the child's school district plan regarding reopening?

Who is the key school contact for the child?

Is there a choice regarding in-school or at-home learning?

Have the parent(s)/guardian(s) expressed any concern or opinion about school reopening plans?

Does the child or anyone they come in regular contact with fall into a category which places them at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19?

Does the child receive special education services?

- If so, what is the school district's plan for providing the child required education services? If remote learning is preferred, can the child's needs be met via this option?
- If the child receives specific services such as physical therapy or counseling at school, how will that service be provided? Will the child be able to engage and benefit in this format?

Does the child have any medical, developmental or mental health conditions that would make it difficult for them to properly wear a cloth face covering (aka mask) for long periods of time?

Will the child be able to maintain social distancing during the school day?

How will the child be transported to school?

What are identified challenges for supporting the child's learning this year? (for example, internet access, technology concerns, transportation, etc.)

- Can the school district, DCF, or other resources help with any of these concerns?

If you have not done so, please contact your Family Resource Worker to discuss these considerations regarding the educational programming for the children in your care as well as any impact that program options may have on your family. The Family Resource Worker will coordinate with you and the child's Social Worker to identify the most appropriate plan for the children in your home and steps to be taken to inform the school and the children's parents/guardians.

Additional Resources

[DCF List of School District Fall Learning Plans](#)

[DESE COVID-19 Guidance Documents](#) (Including Comprehensive Special Education Guidance for the 2020-21 School Year)

[Special Education Surrogate Parent Program](#)

Department of Children and Families

Travel Questionnaire for Children in Foster Care during COVID-19 Effective: October 2, 2020

What is the nature and purpose of the out-of-state travel (vacation, special event, other)?

What are your travel dates?

What state/location are you traveling to?

- Are there any current restrictions (e.g. state or country prohibitions/ travel warnings) at your travel destination?
- Is your travel destination currently experiencing a surge of COVID-19 cases?
- Are there specific testing or quarantine requirements at your travel destination?
- If quarantine is required at your destination, will you be able to adhere to quarantine restrictions?

Where will you be staying? (e.g. hotel, vacation home, campground)

- Does this location have any restrictions or guidance that you will need to adhere to?
- Are you staying or traveling with other people (e.g., extended family or family friends)? You will need to provide the Department with the following COVID-19 screening information for each of the other people:
 - Has anyone you are travelling with or at the destination home experienced COVID-19 symptoms: sore throat, body aches, coughing, shortness of breath or a fever of 100.4 °F or higher within the last 14 days?
 - Within the last 14 days, has anyone in the destination home been in close contact (closer than 6 feet for at least 15 minutes without use of a mask) with someone confirmed to have COVID-19?

How will the family be traveling? (Driving, flying, other?)

- If traveling by plane, does the airline have any restrictions? If so, is everyone traveling able to adhere to them?
- If traveling by car, do you have safety precautions and face masks for any stops along the way? (Including gas, stops for food, etc.)
- Are you able to bring sanitizing products (i.e. hand sanitizer, Lysol wipes, etc.) with you to utilize?

What is the plan to minimize risk of exposure in your planned activities during your travel? (ability to social distance, PPE access and use, avoidance of gatherings, etc.)

- Do you plan to attend any large gatherings, participating in or attending any activities that would involve larger crowds or groups (e.g., theme parks, movie theaters, birthday parties, BBQs, wedding, funeral, etc.)?
- Will you be able to adhere to social distancing and other CDC recommendations during travel activities?

Beginning August 1, 2020, the Governor's COVID-19 order on out-of-state travel requires anyone arriving from another state, including Massachusetts residents who have left the state for anything more than transitory travel, to fill out a travel form [Massachusetts Travel Form] and self-quarantine for 14 days unless you:

1. Are coming from a [lower-risk state](#)
2. Can produce, on request, proof of negative test result for COVID-19 from a test administered on a sample taken no longer than 72 hours before your arrival in Massachusetts, or
3. [Meet the exemption criteria](#)

Are you willing and able to self-quarantine for 14 days upon return to Massachusetts per the Governor's advisory?

- If not, what are the issues or barriers (i.e. work, childcare, scheduling family time between the children and their birth family/siblings, etc.)?

Have you been facilitating in-person or virtual family time?

- Will you be able to facilitate family time for the foster children and their birth family before, during and after your travels?

Education Program Decision Making Matrix for DCF-Involved Children at Home and in Foster Care

Issued: October 2, 2020

	CHILDAT HOME	DCF/CFC Foster Care	CONGREGATE CARE
Collaborative discussion of considerations should include, but is not limited to, the following parties:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social Worker ▪ Parent/Guardian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster Parent ▪ Education Decision Maker (EDM) ▪ Family Resource Worker ▪ Social Worker ▪ Parent/Guardian ▪ Education Coordinator ▪ Educator familiar with the student's needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provider ▪ EDM ▪ Parent/Guardian ▪ Social Worker ▪ Network Specialist ▪ Education Coordinator ▪ Educator familiar with the student's needs
Authority who determines plan for educational program:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent/Guardian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EDM ▪ DCF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EDM ▪ DCF
The following should be informed about the recommended plan for educational program:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Personnel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Personnel ▪ Parent/Guardian ▪ Child's Attorney 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Personnel
Responsibility for notifying the school of the identified plan for educational program:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent/Guardian ▪ Social worker will make collateral contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EDM and/or Social worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provider
When there is disagreement or a need to reconsider a plan, a meeting will be convened and may include, but is not limited to the following participants:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent/Guardian ▪ School Personnel ▪ Formal Supports: Support and Stabilization Service Provider and/or Therapist(s) ▪ Natural Supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent/Guardian ▪ Foster Parent(s) ▪ EDM ▪ School Personnel ▪ Formal Supports: Support and Stabilization Service Provider and/or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent/Guardian ▪ Program Representative ▪ EDM ▪ School Personnel ▪ Social Worker/Supervisor ▪ Education

Education Program Decision Making Matrix for DCF-Involved Children at Home and in Foster Care

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	and/or Extended Family Social Worker	Therapist(s) Social Worker/Supervisor Education Coordinator Educator familiar with the student's needs	Coordinator Network Specialist Educator familiar with the student's needs