

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
Department of Public Welfare

SPECIAL TRANSMITTAL

SUBJECT: Enrollment of Students

TO: County Children and Youth Social Service Agency Administrators
Private Children and Youth Social Service Agencies

FROM: Wayne Stevenson
Deputy Secretary for Children, Youth and Families

In March of 2002, the Education Law Center released a report, *Lost in the Shuffle Revisited*, which addressed various educational obstacles for children in the foster care system. As a result of the report, representatives from the Departments of Education and Public Welfare met to discuss ways to improve communication between school districts and foster family care agencies in order to expedite the enrollment process for children in substitute care.

Effective with the start of the 2002-2003 school year, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) issued a Basic Education Circular (BEC) to all public school entities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to provide guidance for the enrollment of students. These enrollment procedures specifically address students in substitute care and those in pre-adoptive homes. Children whose parents or guardians do not live in the same school district as the foster family home in which the child resides, are called nonresident students.

Nonresident children placed in foster care are entitled to privileges afforded to resident children of that school district. Children living with pre-adoptive parents are entitled to attend school in the district in which the pre-adoptive parent resides. In addition, nonresident exceptional persons should be afforded the same rights to an appropriate special educational program, as are exceptional persons who are residents of the district. An exceptional person in this situation means a school age child with

disabilities, which may require specialized evaluation and education.

When a school-aged child enters foster care placement, the children and youth agency in conjunction with the private foster family care agency when appropriate, should enroll the child in school as soon as possible. PDE recommends that students be enrolled and in attendance in school within five (5) school/business days. The following need to be provided to the school when a child in foster care placement is enrolled in school:

- (1) Proof of the child's date of birth. Acceptable documentation includes:
 - a birth certificate;
 - baptismal certificate or transcript of the record of baptism which is duly certified and shows the date of birth;
 - notarized statement from the parents indicating the date of birth;
 - duly attested transcript of the birth certificate; or
 - duly certified transcript of birth.
- (2) Immunization record or assurance from the former school district or medical office that the required immunizations have been done (or a required series begun) with a record to be sent.
- (3) A Parent Registration Statement attesting to whether the student has been or is suspended or expelled for offenses involving drugs or alcohol, weapons or violence. (Form to be provided by the enrolling school district.)
- (4) Proof of residency.

A school district's registration form may include:

- the child's name,
- address,
- telephone number,
- name and address of parent(s) or guardian(s) and name and address of resident adult(s) with whom the student is living,
- telephone numbers,
- emergency contact information,
- former school information,
- and other locally required information.

School districts may not require social security numbers, photo identification, reasons for the child's placement, or court orders. For a complete copy of the BEC that addresses this issue, see the PDE website at www.pde.state.pa.us/k12/cwp/view.asp?A=11&Q=84241.

County children and youth social service agencies should attempt to obtain the information necessary to enroll a child as listed above, prior to placement if at all possible. If emergency placement occurs, the county agency and/or private foster family care agency should immediately obtain this information for any school-aged child, in order to facilitate timely school enrollment. In situations where a child is placed in substitute care, and a parent or caregiver will not provide the information needed to enroll a child, the county agency or private foster family care agency should be in communication with the original school district to request that school records immediately be transferred to the new district as well as a copy sent to the county agency. The county agency or the private foster family care agency should also be in communication with the new district to explain the child's current situation. The county agency should send for a copy of the child's birth certificate immediately when there is reason to believe a parent will not or cannot produce the document. If the child is placed through a private foster family care agency, clear roles should be determined with the county agency in regard to obtaining information, documentation and enrolling a child in school.

The State Board of Education is in the process of revising Chapter 11 of the Pennsylvania Code, the regulations that govern pupil attendance, and plans to address issues related to the enrollment of children in substitute care. PDE will provide this information to the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) as soon as the changes are published for OCYF to distribute to the public and private children and youth agencies.

Both the Departments of Education and Public Welfare are committed to ensuring that children are being enrolled in appropriate educational programs to meet their needs in a timely manner. Should problems occur at the local level, please contact OCYF so that we can work with our partners at PDE to resolve the specific local issue and address systemic issues.

CC: Charles Songer
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