

Educational Stability for Youth in Foster Care

Jackie Jacobson

*Non-Traditional Educational Programs Manager |
Federal Programs and Oversight*



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Agenda

- What is foster care?
- Why this matters
- Collaboration with DCS
- Roles of the Point of Contact
- Identifying children in foster care
- Best Interest Determination
- Enrollment
- Transportation
- Agreements with DCS



What is Foster Care?

Who is a Child in Foster Care?

- The Title I foster care provisions apply to all children in foster care enrolled in public schools. Students in preschool must be included as well if the LEA offers a preschool program.
- “Foster care” is defined as 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the Department of Children’s Services (DCS) has placement and care responsibility.
- This includes placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, childcare institutions, and pre-adoptive homes.



Children in Foster Care

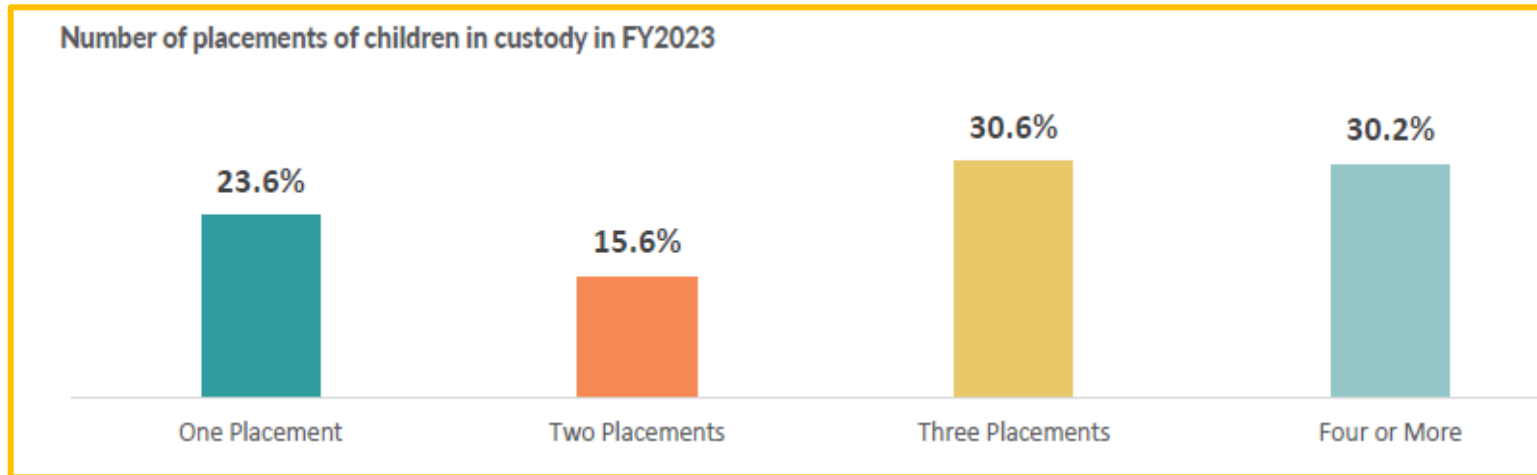
- From April 2023 to March 2024, Tennessee had 5,026 children enter foster care, a rate of 3.20 per 1,000.
- In FY23, there were approximately 166,249 hotline or abuse referrals. Of those, 54% were screened out.
- In 2023, 5,197 entered foster care. This was the lowest number since at least 2017. Of those children, 24% were re-entering care.



Source: The State of the Child in Tennessee 2023, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth

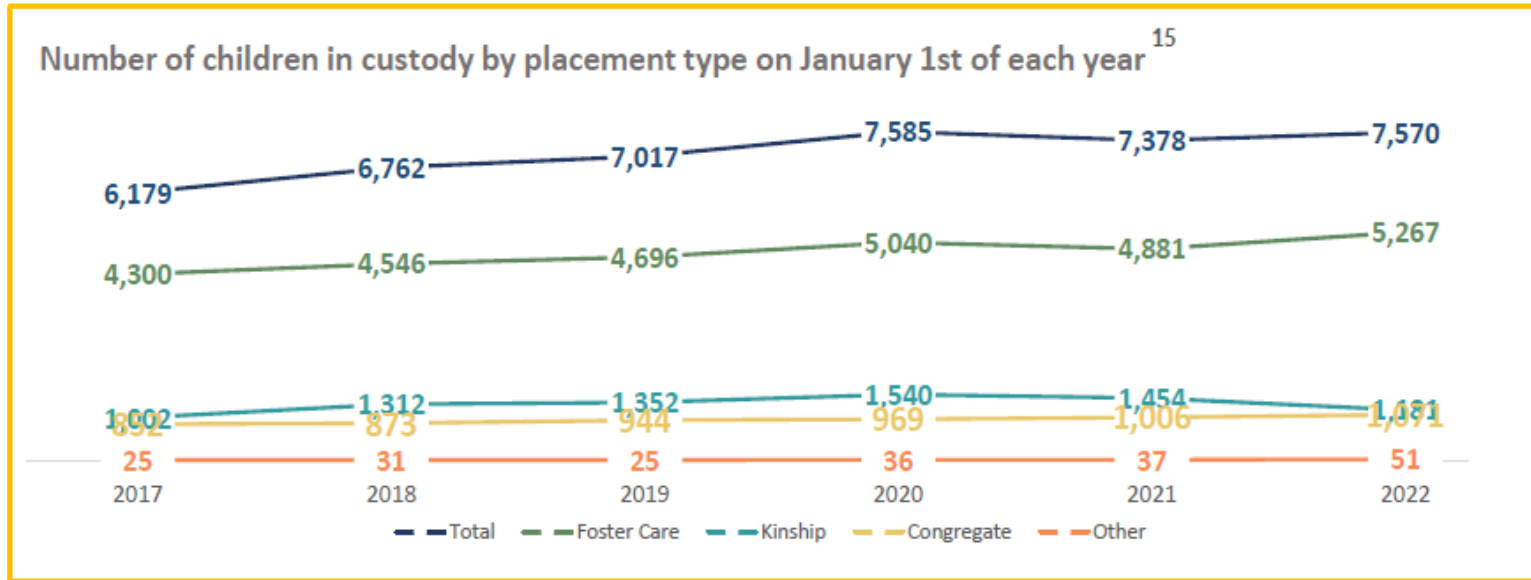
Children in Foster Care: Placement

- In FY23, 60% of children had been in 3 or more placements while in care.



Source: *The State of the Child in Tennessee 2023*, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth

Children in Foster Care: Placement



- On June 30, 2023, there were 3,521 youth in licensed residential care or foster care programs.
- In FY23, there were 7,862 children reported to be served by non-secure private or public agencies licensed or approved to provide residential child care and/or foster care.



Source: *The State of the Child in Tennessee 2023*, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth

Children in Foster Care: First-Time Placement

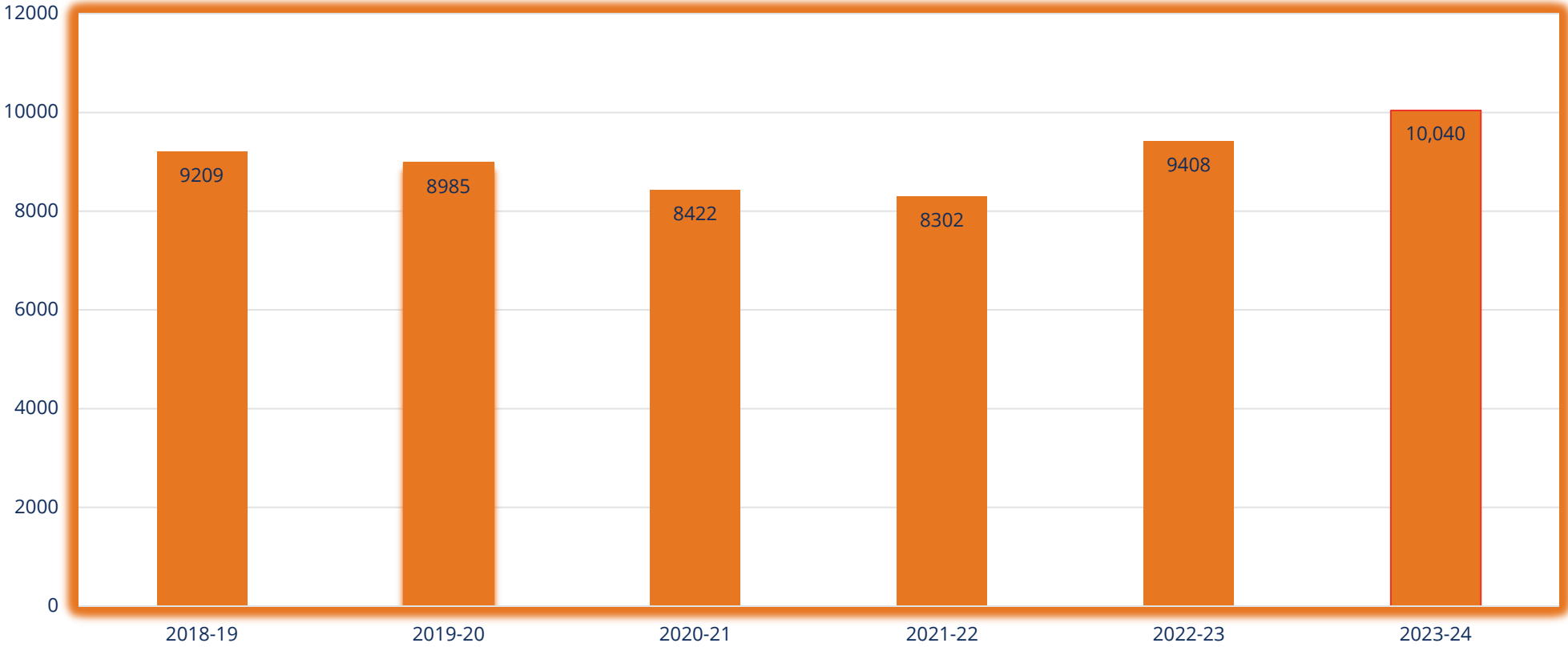
- Of first-time foster children entering the system in 2022, 38% had been in three or more placements by Dec. 31, 2023.
- Among children entering in 2023, 31% had been in three placements by Dec. 31.
- Since 2016, roughly a third of first-time Tennessee foster youth have experienced three or more placements while in care.



Source: The State of the Child in Tennessee 2023, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth

Foster Children in Tennessee Schools

Students in Foster Care Coded as FOSO1



Why This Matters

Children in Foster Care

- Children in foster care:
 - are a vulnerable population;
 - typically make more unscheduled school changes than their peers in a given school year; and
 - compared to their peers, experience:
 - **lower** high school graduation rates,
 - **lower** scores on academic assessments, and
 - **higher** rates of grade retention, chronic absenteeism, suspensions, and expulsions.



Mobility and Graduation

“In a national study of 1,087 foster care alumni, youth who had one fewer placement change per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before leaving care.”

Legal Center for Foster Care and Education

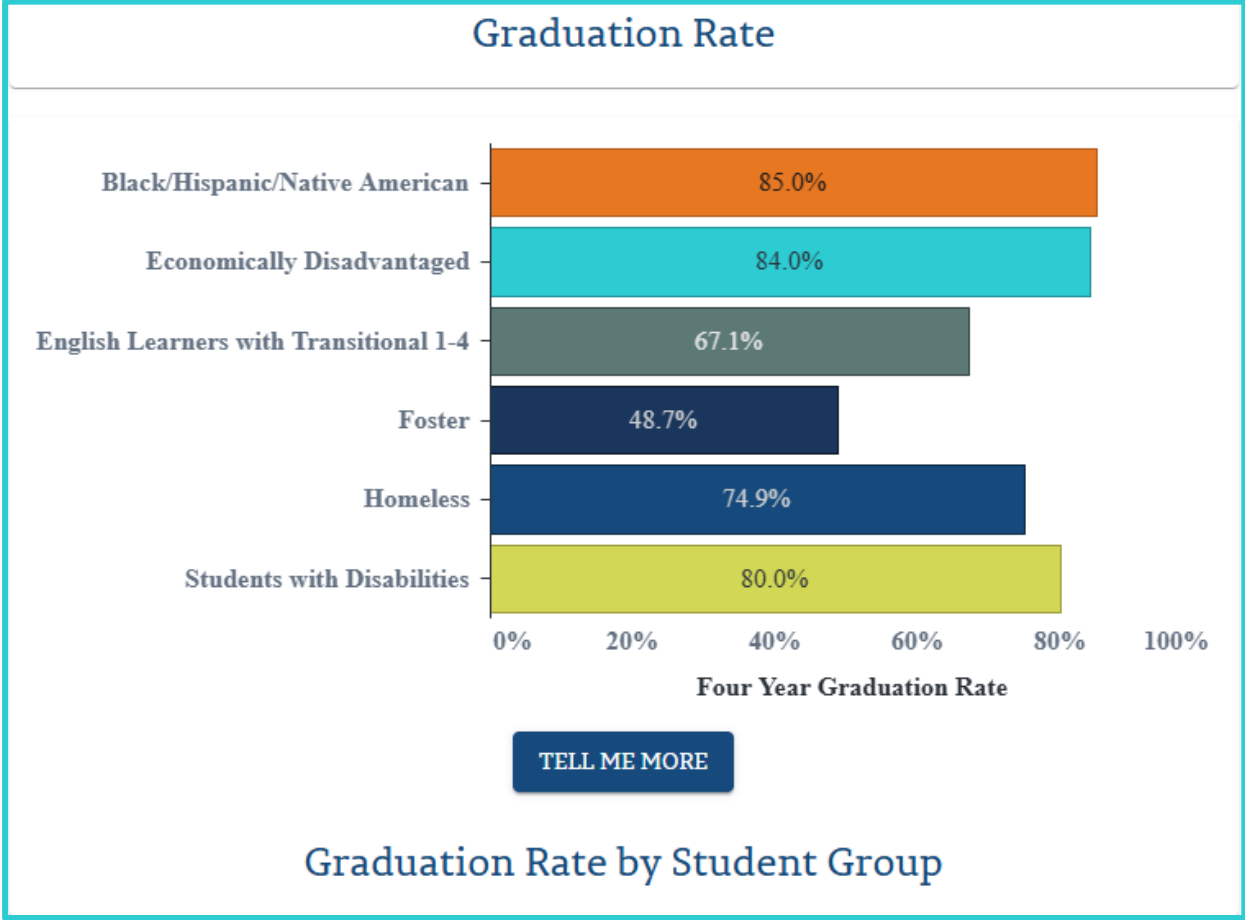


Children in Foster Care: Educational Risk

- Performance on state achievement tests indicate that the largest deficits in reading and math achievement are evident in the months immediately preceding removal from the home (Berger, Cancian, Noyes & Rios-Salas, 2015)
- Children in foster care experience:
 - Impaired cognitive ability and academic achievement
 - Memory difficulties
 - Poor social skills
 - Diminished language development
 - Increased likelihood for mental health diagnoses



Children in Foster Care: Tennessee Graduation Rate



Collaboration is Key

Lots of Moving Parts

- Everyone plays an important role.
- Typically, multiple agencies are involved with youth in foster care.
- Misalignment can topple the entire structure.



Crossover Youth

- Youth involved in both the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system
- Dually-involved, dually-adjudicated, dual system youth require a specialized focus.
- Higher risks for mental health and educational challenges
- Higher risk of recidivism, poor placement stability, and poor permanency outcomes



Collaborative Legislation

Fostering Connections (2008)	Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)
Coordination with LEAs	Collaboration with child welfare agencies
Presumption to remain in school of origin	Presumption to remain in school of origin
Best interest determination	Best interest determination
Immediate and appropriate enrollment	Immediate enrollment, even without documentation
Permissible use of federal Title IV funds to support transportation	Transportation must be arranged, provided and funded
	State and local points of contact



Essa Requirement

- Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must provide assurances that children in foster care enroll or remain in the school of origin unless there is a determination that it is not in their best interest to attend the school of origin.



School Stability in Fostering Connections

- Must include an Education Stability Plan as part of each child's case plan, including assurances that:
 - Each placement takes into account the **appropriateness of the current education setting** and the **proximity to the school** in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement;
 - Child welfare agency has **coordinated with appropriate local education agencies...to ensure** that the child **remains enrolled in the school** in which the child was enrolled at the time of placement;
 - **If not in the best interest to remain**, child welfare agency must ensure **immediate and appropriate enrollment** in a new school and ensure **all education records** of the child are provided to the school.



The Department of Children's Services

Department of Children's Services

Terms and Acronyms

- **CFTM** – Child and Family Team Meeting
- **FSW** – Family Service Worker is the DCS case manager
- **TFACTS** – Record keeping system for DCS
- **Educational Specialist** – Liaison between DCS and the school system, primary point of contact for LEA foster care POC



Department of Children's Services

- Who are the youth served by DCS?
- If a child is temporarily placed away from home, are they in state custody?
- How long are children in state custody or foster care?
- How frequently do children change placements?
- What is a trial home visit, and how does it impact ESSA requirements?
- Who has the authority to make educational decisions?
- Who has the authority to make day-to-day decisions (attending field trips, dances, extracurricular activities)?



Role of the Point of Contact

Point of Contact Responsibilities

- All points of contact (POCs) must have the capacity and resources to guide the implementation of the ESSA provisions.
 - Each LEA must have a POC designated to coordinate services for all students in foster care.
 - Federal and state requirement (PC951)
 - Minimum responsibilities include coordinating with regional DCS offices to develop a process for implementation of ESSA provisions.



Point of Contact Responsibilities

- Maintain agreement(s) between the LEA and DCS
- Identify students in foster care
- Coordinate and document BID meetings
- Coordinate and document transportation
- Remove barriers to ensure immediate enrollment
- Train all applicable staff



Identifying Students in Foster Care

Two Primary Methods of Identification

- Education Passport (updated July 2024)
- School Nutrition List



Education Passport and BID Notification

- The Education Passport is one method of notification of entry into foster care or change of foster care placement.
- Caseworkers should present the documentation at the time of enrollment or at the time of withdrawal. Both the school of origin and the school of zone should receive notification.
- The updated Education Passport can be found in **ePlan > TDOE Resources > Non-Traditional Educational Programs > Title I, Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care > Department of Children's Services Resources.**



Identification and BID Notification

- The notification of foster care status should also include information regarding the need for a best interest determination (BID) meeting.
- This notification allows for real time communication between DCS and the LEA to ensure that BID meetings happen in a timely manner.
- DCS education specialists are regional and have specific LEA assignments, but caseworkers may be employed by DCS or a contracted agency such as Youth Villages.



Dual Eligibility

- Students with foster care status due to a DCS placement who **also** qualify as homeless per the McKinney-Vento definition are dual eligible for foster care and homeless status and services.
- Students with foster care status due to a DCS placement who **also** qualify as runaway are dual eligible for foster care and runaway status and services.



Best Interest Determination (BID)

Best Interest Determination Meetings

- Youth in foster care are enrolled or remain in their school of origin, unless a determination is made that it is not in their best interest.
- The presumption is made that a student is best served in the school of origin.
- The best interest determination is based on factors including the consideration of:
 - the appropriateness of the current educational setting, and
 - the proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement.



Best Interest Determination Meetings

- Must be held when a student **enters** foster care or **changes** foster care placement, and the school of zone has changed.
- The child's caseworker is responsible for notifying the LEA when a BID meeting is needed via the education passport.
- All BID meetings must include the DCS personnel and the LEA foster care POC (or their surrogate).
- Meetings can occur in person, virtually, via teleconference, or in some cases email exchanges may be appropriate.

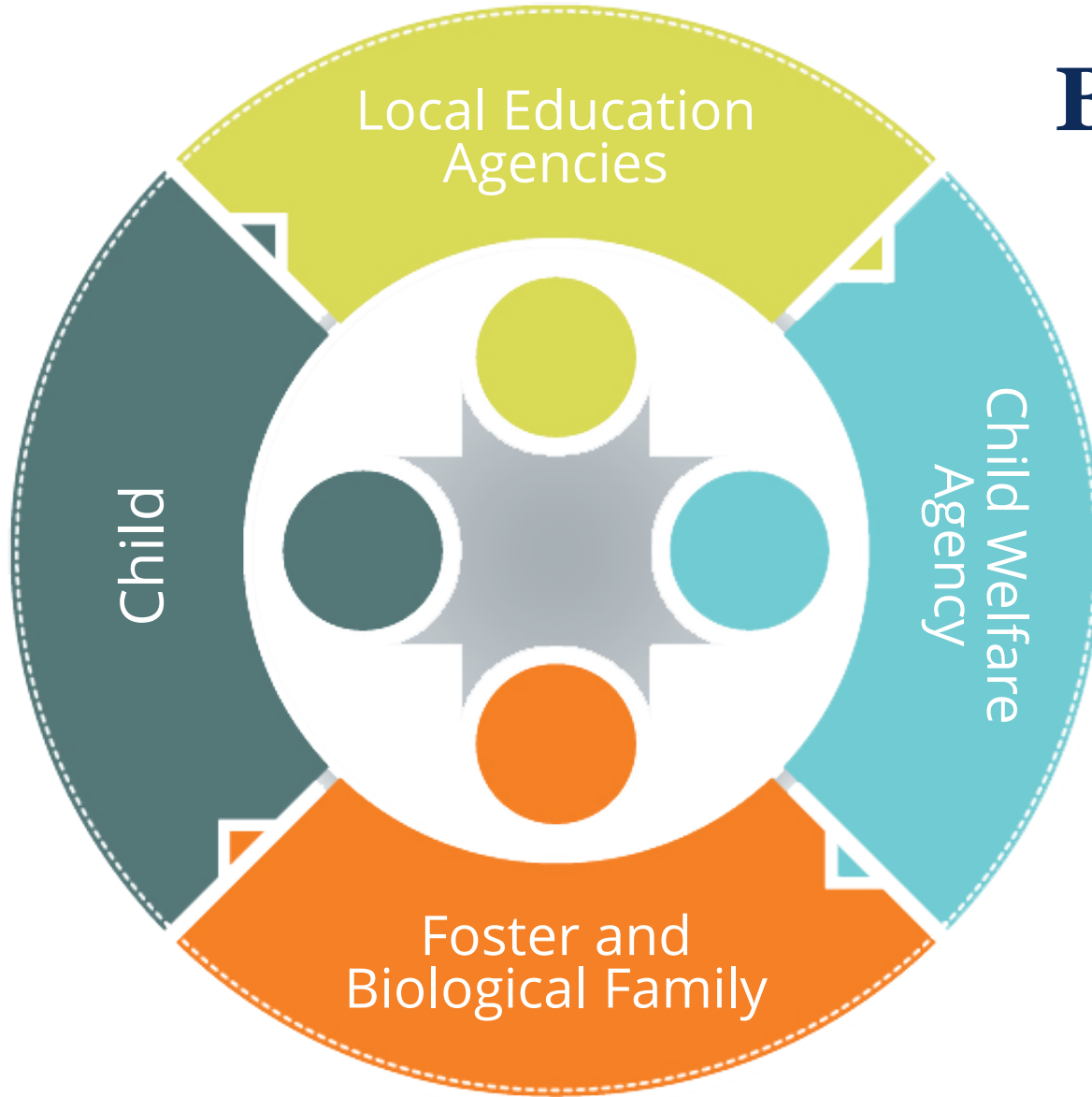


Best Interest Determination Meetings

- Best interest determination meetings (BIDs) are the heart of the school stability process.
- Conducting a quality and thoughtful BID can avoid future disputes that may arise.
- Requires all systems and individuals involved to focus on a specific child and think outside of their own individual interests and perspectives.



BID Meetings



- Gather meaningful input from:
 - School counselors, teachers, and coaches
 - Child’s parent(s), child, child advocate, guardian ad litem, foster parent(s), and mental health providers

Best Interest Determination Meetings

- Factors to consider in determining best interest:
 - Appropriateness of current educational setting
 - Proximity of placement
 - Preferences of the child
 - Preferences of the parent or education decision maker
 - Child's attachment to the school
 - Placement of siblings
 - Availability and quality of services to meet the child's educational and socioemotional needs
 - History of school transfers
 - Length of commute and the impact based on developmental stage
 - Special education or EL services



Best Interest Determination Meetings

- The LEA must document all BID meetings
- A copy of the documentation should be kept on file by:
 - LEA foster care POC
 - School point of contact
 - DCS regional educational specialist
 - DCS Caseworker



- All documents can be found in TDOE Resources in ePlan.

 U.S. Department of Education/Health and Human Services Guidance/Webinars

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Enrollment

Immediate Enrollment

- Barriers to enrollment must be eliminated.
- LEAs must ensure that a child in foster care is immediately enrolled in his or her new school even if the student does not have required documentation.
- The enrolling school must immediately contact the child's school of origin to obtain all relevant records.
- The school of origin must immediately transfer the records.



Let's Talk about Withdrawal

- It is crucial that a BID meeting occur **prior to** withdrawal.
- What happens when a student is withdrawn without notice?



Transportation

Transportation: ESSA Requirements

- LEAs must provide assurances that they will collaborate with DCS to develop and implement clear, written procedures for how transportation will be provided, arranged, and funded for the duration of the child's time in foster care.
- Children in foster care needing transportation to their school of origin must promptly receive that transportation in a cost-effective manner and in accordance with Section 475(4)(A) of the Social Security Act.
 - Note: Even if an LEA does not transport other students, it must ensure that transportation is provided to children in foster care.



Transportation: ESSA Requirements

- If there are additional costs incurred in providing transportation to the school of origin, the LEA will provide such transportation if:
 - the local child welfare agency agrees to reimburse the LEA for the cost of such transportation;
 - the LEA agrees to pay for the cost; or
 - the LEA and local child welfare agency agree to share the cost (ESEA § 1112(c)(5)(B)).



Transportation: DCS

- The child welfare agency must ensure that the educational stability plan of each child in foster care includes an assurance that the child welfare agency has coordinated with the appropriate LEA(s) to ensure the child can remain in the school of origin, or if remaining in that school is not in the child's best interest, an assurance that the child will be enrolled immediately in a new school.



Transportation

- Transportation is an allowable use of federal funds, both under the Title IV-E of the Social Security Act and Title I of the ESEA.
- Transportation procedures should include a dispute resolution process if agreement cannot be reached.
- A child must remain in his or her school of origin while any disputes regarding transportation costs are being resolved and transportation must be provided during this time.



Training the LEA Staff

Training the LEA and School Staff

- All personnel who may have contact with foster students must be trained on processes and procedures.
- This may include:
 - School counselors
 - Social workers
 - Receptionists
 - Attendance personnel
 - Registrars
 - Administrators



Agreements with DCS

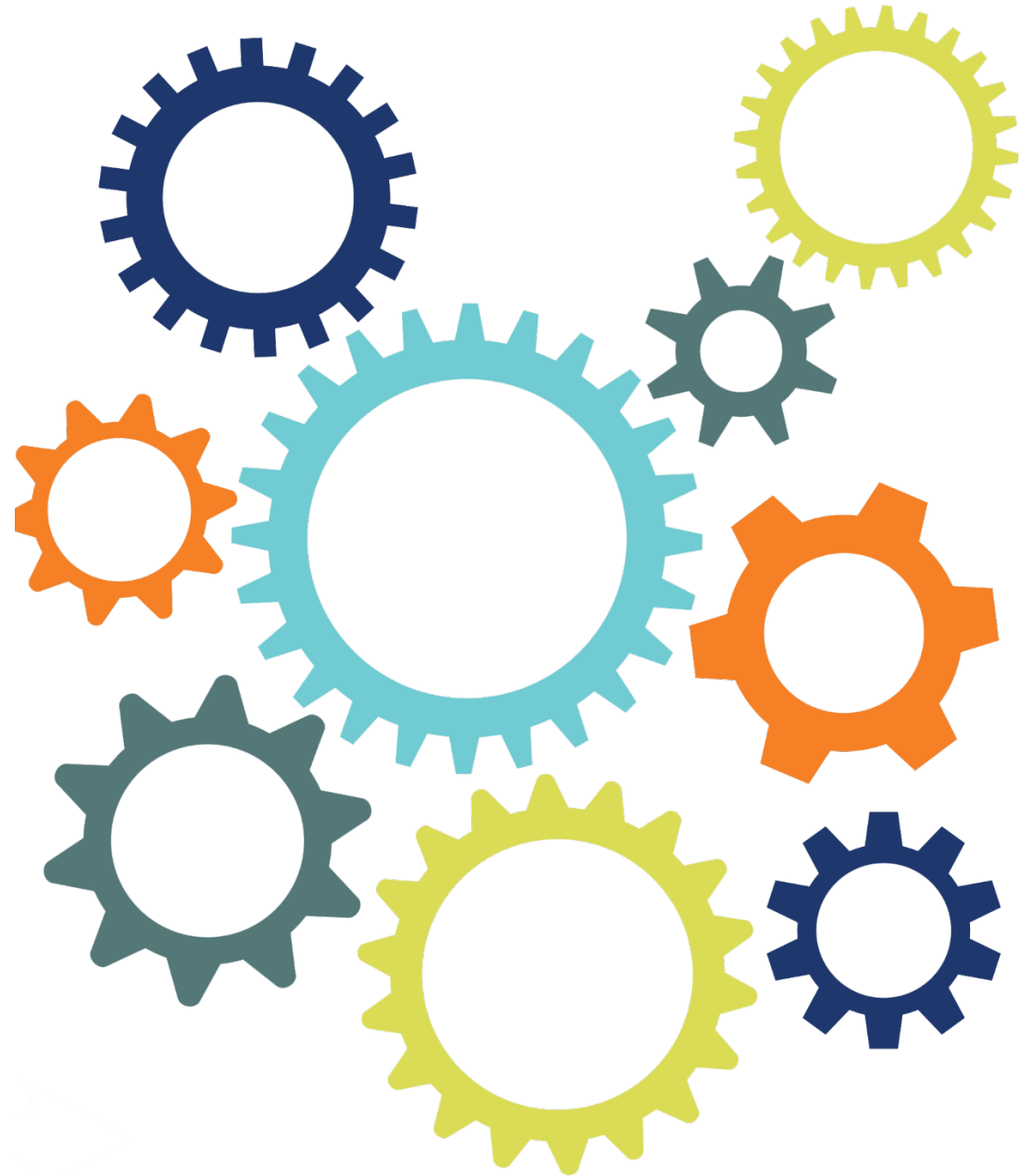
Components of the Agreement

- All LEAs are required to have a signed agreement with DCS regarding educational stability for children in foster care.
- Agreements are uploaded in ePlan as a component of the consolidated funding application (CFA).
- Agreements must contain:
 - Five-day timeline for BID meetings
 - Five-day timeline for transportation
 - Dispute resolution procedures
 - Assurance that the child remains in the school of origin during a dispute
 - Provisions for immediate enrollment



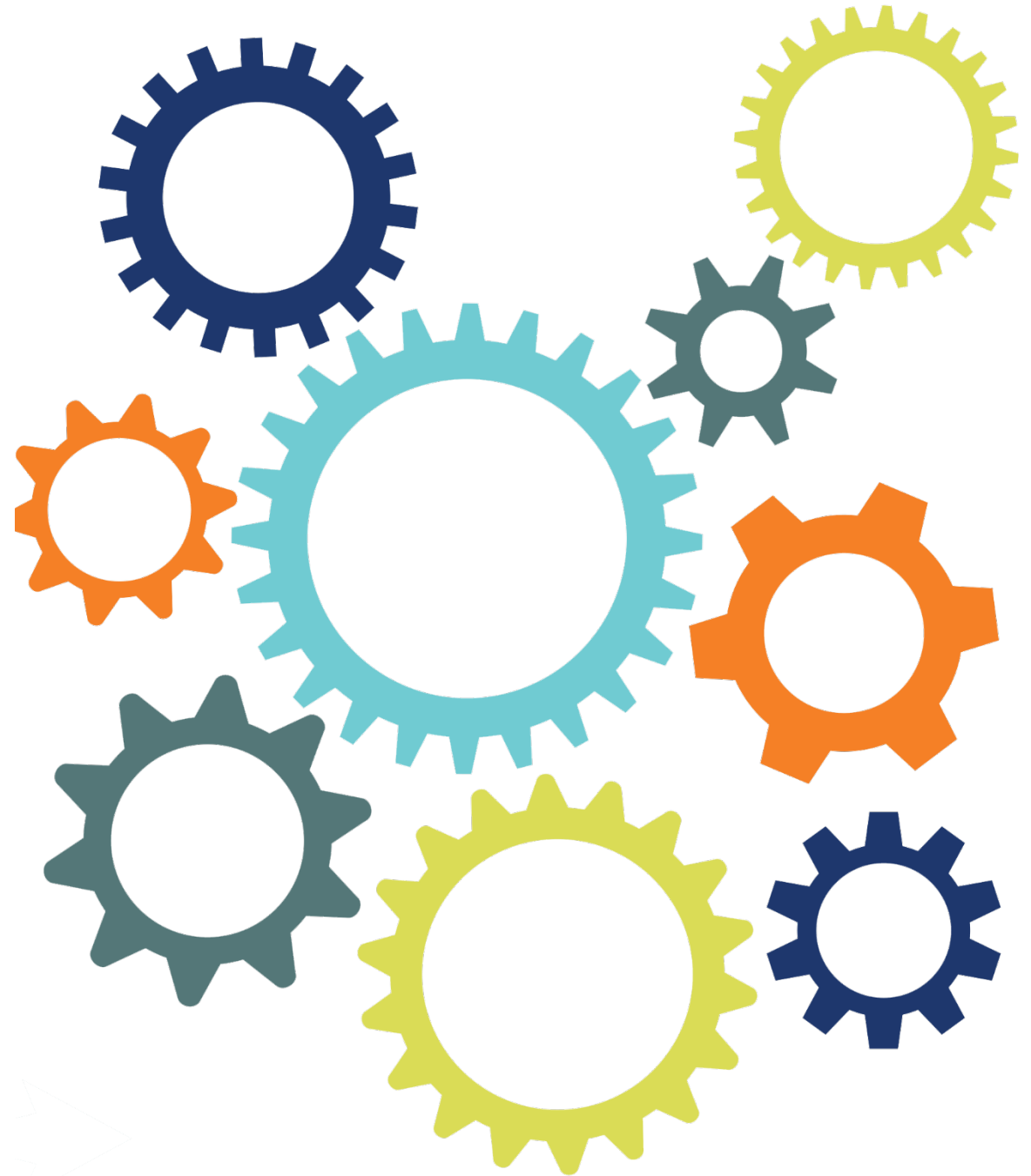
Let's Discuss!

- Zach is a 6th grader who, in October, has been placed with his siblings at a foster home 30 minutes away from his school of origin. His siblings will be attending the school of zone.



Let's Discuss!

- Zach's case plan goal is reunification with his parents, and DCS thinks this will be achieved within six months.





Thank You!

Contact Info or Questions?

Jackie Jacobson | Foster Care Point of Contact

Jackie.Jacobson@tn.gov

(615) 390-4549

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