



Back to School 2015

IN THIS ISSUE: LEGISLATIVE UPDATES AND BACK TO SCHOOL BEST PRACTICES

Countdown to School

Get Ready

Gather the documents you will need to enroll your child in school.

Talk with your caseworker about what school the children in your home should attend.

Call the school registrar at the assigned school and ask:

- When is school enrollment?
- What documents do I need?
- Contact information for the director of Special Education to begin services if needed.

For the initial enrollment in a new school district, you will need:

- ✓ Withdrawal form from the last school the child attended
- ✓ (DFPS) Form 2085 – Placement Authorization Verification of Foster Caregiver

- ✓ (DFPS) Form 2085 E - Education Decision-Maker
- ✓ Doctor's orders on any medications taken at school
- ✓ Birth certificate
- ✓ Immunization record
- ✓ Documents for special education and Section 504 services
- ✓ School transcripts
- ✓ Court orders establishing DFPS custody, by request

Get Set

Complete the paperwork - Form 2085 establishes your role as caregiver and the child's eligibility for the free National School Lunch Program.

Form 2085E names the person, usually the caregiver, responsible for making education-related decisions.

Visit the school. Take a tour to help the child find the cafeteria, the bathroom, classrooms, and the bus pick up and drop off area

Meet the teacher. Take the opportunity to meet the teacher, school staff, and classmates.

Establish communications and access school portals. You can check your child's daily class progress, grades and upcoming events.

GO!!!!

"Opt out" of the school using corporal punishment on your child in writing.

Get back into the school routine. That means eight to 10 hours of uninterrupted sleep a night for youth and children. Start setting bedtime hour two weeks before school begins.

Practice the route to school or what bus to take. Review the school rules with your child.

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education programs provide short-term and long-term opportunities for young children to develop math and language abilities, learn appropriate social interactions, reduce placement in special education settings, and achieve better education outcomes throughout their school years.



Head Start Programs

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally-funded early childhood education programs available in many communities for children under the age of 5. The two types of eligibility are income-based and categorical. Children in foster care are categorically eligible for Head Start (ages 3-5) and Early Head Start (ages 0-3), but any child may be put on a waiting list because of enrollment capacity.

Pre-kindergarten and early childhood education programs at the local public school or through Head Start may not be available in the local community or appropriate for each child.

For a Head Start or Early Head Start program near you, see <http://www.txhsa.org/>

Pre-kindergarten Programs for Children ages 3, 4, and 5

Children ages 3, 4, and 5 who are in or were ever in the conservatorship of DFPS as a result of an adversary hearing are eligible for the free pre-kindergarten programs offered through many Texas public schools. Texas Education Code §29.153

In general, children must be 4-years-old on or before September 1 to be eligible to enroll for a 4-year-old pre-kindergarten program at a local public school. Caregivers must secure a Letter of Verification from the DFPS regional education specialist for school enrollment. Contact the local school district for enrollment policies.

Information on pre-kindergarten programs offered at local public schools and Head Start programs may be obtained from the CPS regional child care coordinator. Questions on child care options should be directed to the CPS caseworker.

Some schools may offer high quality pre-K programs, a new opportunity created in the 2015 legislative session.



Things you can do to improve your child's reading

1. Talk with your child. When you talk to your child, you're helping him or her to learn words.
2. Read to your children. Let your child pick a book before nap or bedtime.



3. Ask an older child to read to a younger child. Older children will be proud of their reading skills and younger children will want to read like the older child.
4. Practice word games in the car, when you shop for groceries, or reading a menu.
5. Let your child see you read. This is the best way for them to see reading is important!

Go to www.rif.org for more information on reading

EDUCATION DECISION-MAKER

Role and Responsibilities

What is an Education Decision-Maker?

The Education Decision-Maker is the person who is responsible for making the day-to-day education-related decisions for a child or youth in DFPS conservatorship.

Who can be designated as an Education Decision-Maker?

The caseworker considers who can best represent the child in making day-to-day education-related decisions. The Education Decision-Maker will most likely be the caregiver for the child or youth.

Who needs an Education Decision-Maker?

All children and youth in DFPS conservatorship, including Kinship, who attend Texas public or private schools K-12, children who are in pre-K programs at local public schools, charter schools, Pre-kindergarten Programs for Children with Disabilities (PPCD), or children who participate in a nontraditional program such as homeschooling or online programs.

Who makes special education decisions for a child or youth receiving special education services?

A surrogate parent* is appointed by the school or the court to make special education decisions for the child or youth. Training must be completed within 90 days of appointment.

* Surrogate parent may not be an employee of a child welfare agency, Texas Education Agency, the school, or residential facility.

**The Education Decision-Maker is generally responsible for:**

- ✓ Enrolling the child in school and providing necessary documents such as immunization records and school transcripts
- ✓ Signing the "opt out" of corporal punishment slip at school
- ✓ Conferring with the child or youth on course selection
- ✓ Approving the child's participation in routine and non-routine school activities, such as field trips and after-school tutoring
- ✓ Giving permission to enroll the child in special programs such as Bilingual Education and Gifted and Talented
- ✓ Receiving and signing report cards, permission slips, approving day-to-day activities
- ✓ Accessing school records, attending parent-teacher conferences, Parent's Night
- ✓ Informing the caseworker of child's disciplinary actions by the school that may result in a disciplinary hearing, manifestation determination review, truancy, suspension, expulsion, or removal to a DAEP or JJAEP program.

In addition, the Education Decision-Maker:

- * Reviews the child's Education Portfolio
- * Signs the Student Code of Conduct and assists the youth with understanding the Code of Conduct
- * Provides updates, notes, forms, and records to the caseworker
- * Notifies the caseworker of significant education-related activities

If the caregiver is named as Education Decision-Maker Form 2085E, the caregiver must provide this form to the school within five days of being named as education decision-maker. The caseworker must ensure the school and the caregiver have copies of the current Education Decision-Maker Form.



The shift in student assessment

**TAKS
to
STAAR**



12th grade students were the last to take the TAKS test in the 2013-14 school year.



Out of the 180 annual instructional days, students typically spend two to five days taking state-required tests, depending on their grade.

15 > 5

In 2013, the Texas Legislature decreased the number of state-required tests for high school students from 15 to five.

2014 was the first year students were only be required to take five tests

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What is STAAR?

The State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) replaced the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test beginning in the 2014-2015 school year for all school districts. Students in DFPS conservatorship must complete STAAR assessments.

How is STAAR different from TAKS?

- STAAR is longer, more difficult, and cognitively complex
- STAAR has time limits – English I and II must be completed in five hours; all other tests must be completed in four hours
- STAAR has more open-ended questions in science and mathematics to encourage more independent answers
- STAAR requires high school students to complete End of Course (EOC) assessments whenever they take the corresponding course
- STAAR requires two writing tasks instead of one
- STAAR better measures student progress in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

STAAR Calendar

Subject Area	Grade Administered In
Reading	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Math	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Writing	4, 7
Science	5, 8
Social Studies	8

The Texas Education Agency [website](#) provides previous versions of the test and sample questions.

Legislative Changes Affecting Education

Home Schooling:

Before the 84th Legislative Session, caregivers who wished to home school a child in DFPS conservatorship needed a waiver to do so; however, beginning September 1, 2015, the department must allow a caregiver to provide the child with an education in a home environment unless:

- The right to homeschool has been specifically limited by a court order;
- The court determines that, based upon evidence presented by the department (using criteria from the CPS handbook), that education in a home setting is not in the child's best interest; or
- The department determines that federal law requires another school setting.

If a caregiver wishes to educate a child in a home setting, the caseworker should notify the supervisor and the education specialist immediately to determine if education in a home setting is in the child's best interest and if federal requirements will be met.

Education Stability:

- Students in substitute care are now allowed to remain in their school despite living outside of the attendance district even if there is a change in placement after enrollment.
- Students in substitute care are allowed to have absences excused due to services required through the child's service plan. The school should be notified of the absence and provided with documentation explaining the absence was related to a service plan activity. Until an excused absence form is developed caseworkers should send letters to the school on DFPS letterhead. Although changes were made to legal truancy procedures to make more services available to youth with truancy issues before a referral to court is made, caregivers can still be liable for fines in some cases if they don't work to address a child's truancy issues. Contact the child's caseworker if absences become excessive.
- Students who meet the federal definition of "homeless" now qualify for services similar to the transition assistance students in substitute care receive, such as:
 - Records transfer within 10 days when a child changes schools; and
 - Collaborative practices that help students complete courses and graduate.

Questions about eligibility or services should be directed to the regional education specialist.

Education Decision Maker:

Previously, DFPS staff had to file FORM 2085-E Notice of Education Decision-Maker within five days of the adversary hearing to the court, school and all parties entitled to notice of a permanency hearing. The law no longer requires a worker to file the FORM 2085-E with all the parties in a child's case after the adversary hearing. The worker only needs to provide the form to the court and the child's school within the five-day timeframe after the adversary hearing. If the Education Decision-Maker (or surrogate parent, if applicable) changes, then the caseworker now only needs to inform the court in the next permanency progress report. The caseworker must still continue to notify the school of any changes within five days of the change.

Graduation:

Students who pass their classes but are unable to pass end of course tests may now request an administrative review to determine if they may proceed with graduation. The education decision maker and/or the caseworker should contact the school counselor to request a review, if necessary.

Post-Secondary:

Institutions of higher learning are now required to have a foster care liaison available to assist youth formerly in foster care with accessing resources and assistance on campus.