

school stability  
academic success  
students in care  
education  
achievement

## Educational Advocacy

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Heartland for Children

My name is Lynnette Mitchell and I am a Prevention Specialist at Heartland for Children with a focus on Educational Advocacy. During this presentation I am going to cover some educational topics as it pertains for children within the child welfare system of care, and help provide you the information you need to become an advocate for the child in your home.

## Did You Know...

- 62% of children in foster care are school age
- Up to 75% of children in foster care experience a school change when entering care
- Children in foster care are 2x more likely to be absent from school
- They are 2x more likely to be suspended and 3x more likely to be expelled
- Only 50% complete high school but 84% want to go to college.
- Only 2-9% attain a bachelor's degree
- 16% of children who are not reading proficiently by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade do not graduate from high school
- Average reading level for those who age-out of care: 7<sup>th</sup> grade
- Texas uses 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores to project the number of prison cells needed in 10 years
- 85% of all juvenile offenders have reading problems

\*Center for State Child Welfare- 2011 data



Here are some statistics to read over, but I do want to specifically point out that children in the foster care system are twice as likely to be absent from school than their same-aged peers, twice as likely to be suspended, and three times more likely to be expelled.

Also, Texas will utilize the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores of students to project the number of prison cells they will need in the next 10 years.

## What is ESSA?

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed in December 2015 as a replacement to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which governs the United States public education policy.

### What does it mean for children within the system of care?

- Children **remain in their same school** despite removals or placement changes, unless the child's team determines it is not in their best interest.
- Children receive busing transportation to remain in their same school.
- Children can immediately enroll in school (when a school change is determined to be in their best interest), even if they cannot produce normally required enrolling documents. The enrolling school can contact the last attended school to obtain relevant school records.



ESSA stands for the Every Student Succeeds Act which passed in December of 2015 and replaced the No Child Left Behind Act. For children who have been removed from their parent, this Act keeps them in their same school, even if they now reside outside of that schools zoned area. It also means that if they are attending a public school, the schools transportation department will coordinate a bus route for the student to keep them in their same school they were attending, prior to their new placement.

ESSA also means that students can enroll in school even if they cannot produce normally required documents for enrollment. So, for example, it's July and a child who is 5 was placed in your care and would start Kindergarten in August. They were born out-of-state and the birth certificate was requested, but not received yet. You can provide the school with all of the documentation you have, and the child can be enrolled without the birth certificate. Once the birth certificate is obtained, then you would provide that to the school.


## The ESSA Staffing

- Requested by the Case Manager or Child Protective Investigator if there is a concern for a student remaining in their current school.
- Parties invited include: child, biological parent, current and previous caregiver, case manager and supervisor or child protective investigator and supervisor, therapist, guardian ad litem, school the child currently attends, school the child may potentially attend if they change schools, the local education agency contact, and any other team members involved in the child's case.
- Staffing is held via phone, and lasts approximately 15-20 minutes.
- Best Interest Determination Factors are discussed to help the team determine if it is going to be in the child's best interest to change schools.

If there is a concern for a student remaining at their same school, then an ESSA staffing will be required and the child's team would have to determine that it is in the child's best interest to make a school change before they can be withdrawn from their current school. The case manager or child protective investigator would request an ESSA staffing by filling out a form and sending it to the appropriate contact. The team invited to the staffing consists of the child, parents, current caregiver and previous caregiver, case manager and supervisor or the child protective investigator and supervisor, therapist, guardian ad litem, school the child currently attends, school the child may potentially attend, local education agency contact, and any other team members involved in the child's case. The staffing is held via phone, and lasts approximately 15-20 minutes. There are certain best interest factors that are discussed during the call, along with any other pertinent information, so that the team can make a decision together as to what is going to be in the child's best interest.



## When does ESSA apply?

- If there is going to be consideration for a child to change schools due to a their home placement changing while residing in out of home care, an ESSA staffing **is** required.
    - It doesn't matter if the child is with a relative, non-relative, foster parent, therapeutic home, group home, residential facility, etc.
    - It doesn't matter where their new placement is located in proximity to their current school.
    - The student cannot be withdrawn from their current school until the ESSA staffing has occurred, and it has been determined to be in their best interest to make that school change.
  - A staffing is not required if the child is remaining in their same school. A staffing is also not necessary for school changes when a child is with a biological parent, or making a natural transition into Kindergarten, from Elementary to Middle School, or from Middle to High School.
  - ESSA applies to students throughout their time of being removed from a parent, even if they change homes during the summer.
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Anytime a child's placement changes while they have an open case and are not with a parent, they remain in their current school unless an ESSA staffing is held and has determined it's in their best interest to change. It doesn't matter if the child is placed with a relative, non-relative, foster parent, therapeutic home, group home, residential facility, or other arrangement. It also doesn't matter where the child resides in proximity to their current school, before a school change can occur the ESSA staffing would have to determine that it's in the child's best interest to make that change.

The only time an ESSA staffing would not be required when a child changes placements, is if the plan is for the child to remain in their current school, and transportation has been arranged. An ESSA staffing is also not necessary if a child is with a biological parent, or if they are making a natural transition into Kindergarten, or is changing from elementary to middle or middle to high school.

ESSA applies to students throughout their time of being removed from a parent. Therefore, if they are removed or change homes during the summer, they remain in their current school once school resumes in August unless an ESSA staffing was held and determined that it was in their best interest to change.

## Why does school stability matter?

- School is often the single safe space and consistency a child has when being abused/neglected.
- Children have already formed relationships and established role models.
- Children lose four to six months of academics with every school change.
- Children with multiple school changes have significantly lower test scores.
- Children who change schools are far more likely to repeat a grade than stable students.



School stability is so important for students, especially when they have experienced trauma and loss. Oftentimes, school is the single safe space a student has when being abused or neglected. School provides consistency for students, knowing what to expect, with safe trusted adults, and regular meals. Students have developed relationships with staff and peers at school. Statistically speaking, students will lose 4-6 months of academic time with every school change. This puts children behind resulting in lower test scores and the possibility of failing a grade or requiring Summer school and tutoring.

Think back to the beginning slide with the statistics. It's reported that 50% of children in the foster care system complete high school, but 84% want to go to college, and only 2-9% obtain a Bachelor's Degree. When we consider that students who change schools lose 4-6 months of academics, score lower on tests, and are more likely to repeat a grade – a lack of stability may keep them further away from their goals of graduating high school and going to college.

## What does it mean for me?

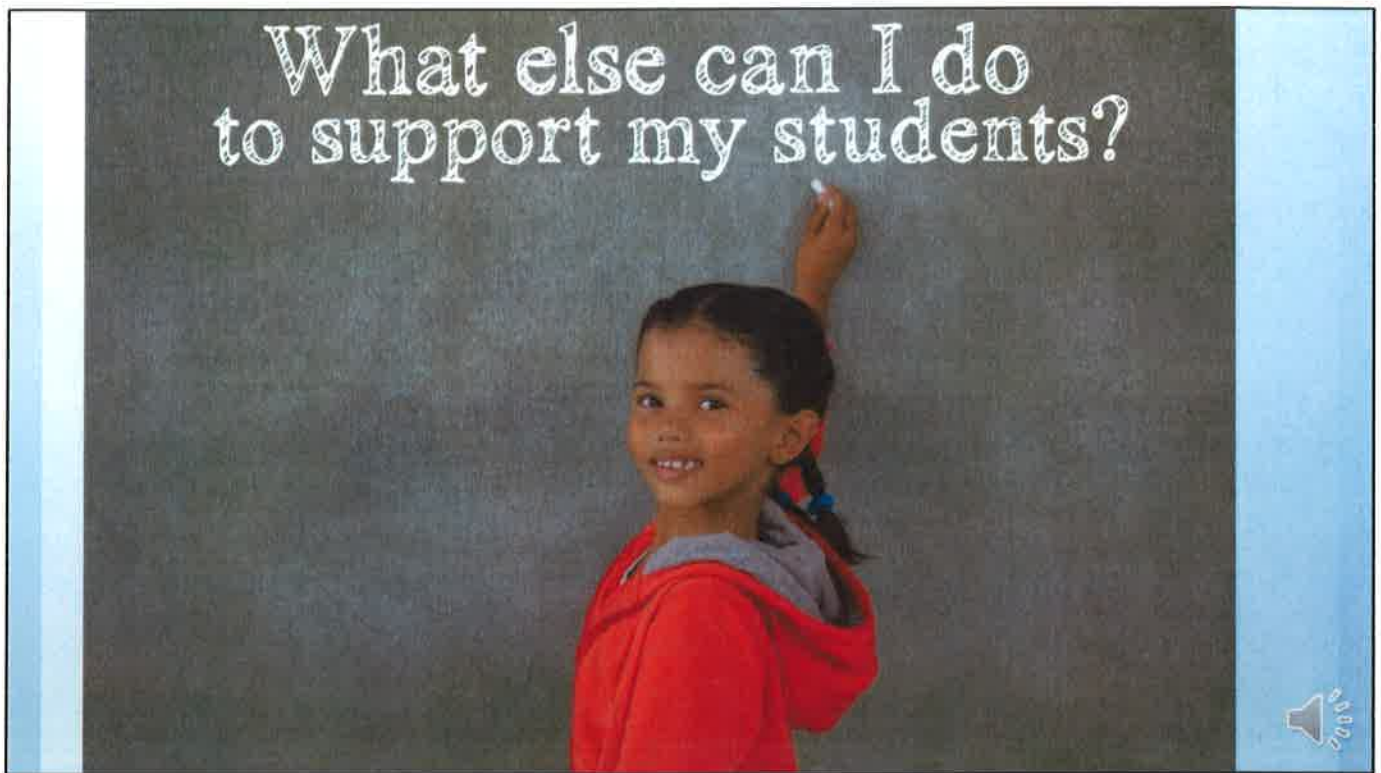
- **Assistance with transporting** a child to/from their school of origin until a transportation plan is established; or until it is considered in the child's best interest to change schools. A child will still need transportation if they change schools until busing or another plan can be established.
- **Participation** in a brief phone staffing if there is consideration about changing a child's school. This phone staffing will discuss best interest determinations to determine if it is in a child's best interest to change schools.
- **Brainstorming** transportation options to maintain a child in their school, if busing is not appropriate, such as: mileage reimbursement, friends/family/neighbors, before/afterschool care programs, and relationships at the child's school.



So what does ESSA and school stability mean for you as a caregiver? It means that you and the case manager or child protective investigator will work together to create a plan for how to transport a child to and from their current school until a long-term transportation plan is established, such as busing, or until an ESSA staffing is held.

It means that you will be asked to participate in an ESSA staffing if there is going to be consideration for a child changing schools. If you are the child's new caregiver, or if a child is leaving your home, we will ask that you participate in the staffing so that you can be part of this important decision making team and help determine what will be in the child's best interest.

It also means that we will need your help in brainstorming ideas to maintain a child in their school of origin if the bus route is not appropriate. This could be stepping up to provide transportation with mileage reimbursement, looking to supportive friends and family who could assist, helping to identify before and after school care programs, or being aware of relationships at the child's school that may be able to help.



Beyond maintaining school stability, let's talk about what else you can do as a caregiver to support the educational needs of the students in your home.



## Parent Portal

Hardee – [www.focus.hardee.k12.fl.us](http://www.focus.hardee.k12.fl.us)



Highlands –  
[www.skywardstudent.highlands.k12.fl.us](http://www.skywardstudent.highlands.k12.fl.us)



Polk – [www.focusk12.polk-fl.net](http://www.focusk12.polk-fl.net)



Hardee, Highlands, and Polk County all have a parent portal program that can be located at the appropriate links found on this slide. Parent Portal allows you to access your students educational record to see how they are performing academically, if there have been any behavioral incidents, and to keep track of their daily attendance. Parent Portal is updated daily so that you can see in real-time how your student is doing. It's important to check in Parent Portal regularly so that you can help your student when concerns arise, instead of waiting until their report card comes out when it is too late for that grading period to bring up a grade. I encourage you to share the information from parent portal with the case manager, and they can make a referral for tutoring if needed. You can also work with the school to see if they could put together make-up work or a recovery packet to help a student improve their grade if necessary.

## Ensure that the school has all necessary documentation

- Caregiver information, address, and emergency contacts
- Case Manager information
- Guardian Ad Litem information
- Court Documentation including:
  - Shelter Order
  - No Contact Order or information on approved parental contact
  - Termination of Parental Rights Order
  - Other pertinent court documentation
- Trauma History and any previous psychological evaluations that may be important for the school in working with the student.

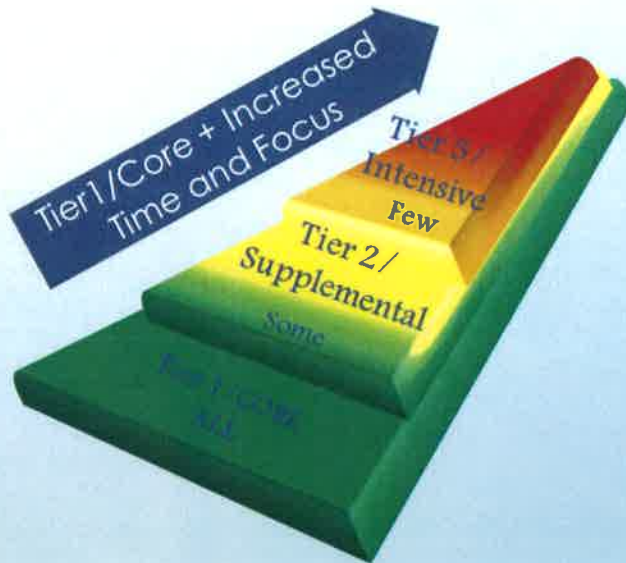
**Notify the school within 72 hours of a change.**



A very important step as a caregiver is ensuring that the child's school has all necessary documentation. This includes your information, address, and emergency contacts. The school needs to know who to call in case of an emergency, so it is vital that your information be on file. The school will also need contact information for the child's case manager, guardian ad litem, and other involved parties such as a therapist or mentor. The school should have any appropriate court documentation such as the shelter order which states that the child has been removed from their family, the no contact order if one is in place, or documentation that reflects what kind of contact the biological parent can make with the child. If a termination of parental rights order is in place, the school should be provided a copy as well as any other pertinent court documentation. It's important to ensure that the school is notified within 72 hours of any changes related to that student.

Also, schools should be informed of any trauma history or evaluations completed on the student. We have an inter-agency agreement with the Hardee, Highlands, and Polk County school boards that allow us to openly share what is normally confidential information for the benefit of the student. This means that we can make the school aware of what has happened to a student so that they can make appropriate provisions to provide the necessary support to that student and help them achieve success. This allows the school to respond to situations with compassion and understanding, instead of viewing the student as having inappropriate behavior. For example, you are caring for a student who was sexually abused and is triggered by being touched. You can inform the school that the student is an abuse survivor, and cannot be touched unexpectedly. The school wouldn't need to know any of the specific explicit and personal details regarding the abuse, but should be provided with information about what triggers the student and how to help them.

## MTSS: Multi-tiered System of Supports



Goal: At least 80% of all students will show proficiency through CORE (Tier 1)

Three tiers describe the level and intensity of the instruction/interventions provided across the continuum.

They are layers of support for core instruction.

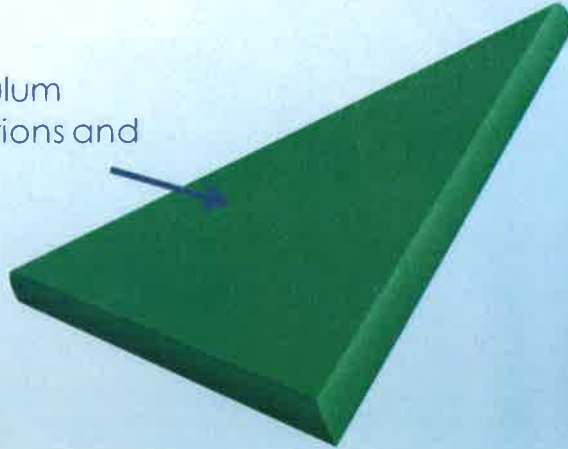


Schools operate using MTSS, which is the Multi-Tiered System of Supports. MTSS is a framework used to help schools identify students who are struggling and provide interventions. The tiers of supports are like layers being that they build upon each other, and the level of support increases in intensity with each tier. The goal is for 80% of all students to be fully supported just through Tier 1, the core tier.

# TIERS OF SUPPORT – TIER 1

**Tier 1:** Core, Universal Instruction & Supports  
General academic and behavior instruction and support provided to **ALL STUDENTS** in all settings.

Core Subject Area Curriculum  
Positive Behavior Interventions and  
Supports (PBIS)  
Agenda's



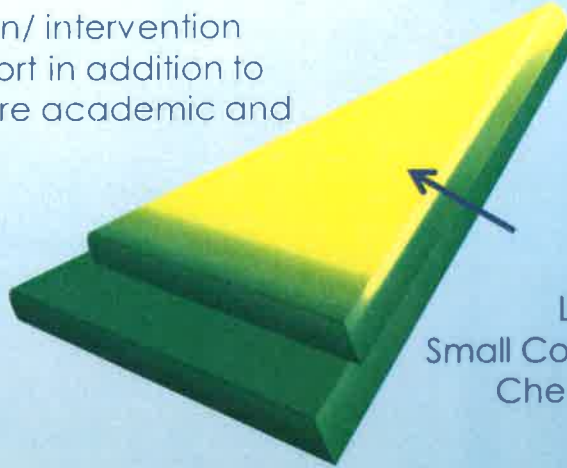
Tier 1 of the MTSS process provides core, universal instruction and supports to all students in all settings with general academic and behavior instruction. An example of a Tier 1 support would be a student agenda that a teacher writes in daily to communicate with the parent. Another example of Tier 1 support would be the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (also known as PBIS) that is a school-wide system where students are taught how they are expected to behave, and these expectations are described in a positive way.



## TIERS OF SUPPORT – TIER 2

**Tier 2:** Targeted, Supplemental Interventions & Supports.  
For SOME students.

More targeted instruction/ intervention and supplemental support in addition to and aligned with the core academic and behavior curriculum.



Leveled Readers  
Small Counseling Groups  
Check In-Check Out  
Intensive Class



Tier 2 of the MTSS process provides targeted, supplemental interventions and supports for some students, in addition to what they receive in Tier 1. An example of a Tier 2 intervention is small group interventions where students may be able to have more supportive instruction in areas where they are struggling, but it is scheduled at a time that they do not miss any core instruction that would make it more difficult to catch up. Another example of a Tier 2 intervention would be a check-in/check-out system with a supportive adult at the school who builds rapport with the student, provides encouragement, and sometimes has a point or goal sheet to help motivate the student.

## TIERS OF SUPPORT – TIER 3

Functional Behavior  
Assessment and/or Positive  
Behavior Intervention Plan



**Tier 3:** Intensive,  
Individualized Interventions  
& Supports for **FEW** students

The most intense (additional time, narrowed focus, reduced group size) direct instruction/intervention based on individual student need provided in addition to and aligned with Tier 1 & 2 academic and behavior instruction and supports.



Tier 3 of the MTSS process provides intensive, individualized interventions and supports for a few students, in addition to what they receive in Tier 1 and Tier 2. An example of a Tier 3 intervention would be a Positive Behavior Intervention Plan (also known as a PBIP or a BIP) that establishes strategies to help reduce or prevent the likelihood of challenging behaviors from occurring on a student's behalf. This is written in a positive format, to encourage the student to exhibit positive behaviors, not to discipline them for negative behaviors. Typically, an evaluation called a Functional Behavior Assessment (or FBA) will be completed first to determine the cause of the behavior so that a Positive Behavior Intervention Plan can be written that aligns with the Functional Behavior Assessment.

## What Can I Do if I have a Concern?

- Communicate with classroom teacher, case manager, therapist, Guardian ad Litem (if applicable), or parent.
- Request a Problem Solving Team Meeting with the School Counselor.
- If student already has 504/IEP/Positive Behavior Intervention Plan, ask School Counselor for a review meeting with the team.



As a caregiver, if you have concerns for a student in your home, talk to the team such as the child's classroom teacher, the case manager, therapist, their Guardian Ad Litem, or parent.

If you feel the need there is a need to further evaluate what struggles the student is having, or the concerns go beyond a simple conversation, you can request a Problem Solving Team Meeting through the school counselor. I'll discuss the specifics of this meeting on the next slide.

If the student already has a 504 Plan, an Individualized Education Program (commonly known as an IEP), or a Positive Behavior Intervention Plan, you can ask the school counselor for a meeting to review the plan to determine if the plan should be modified or if additional accommodations or supports should be added.

## 4-Step Problem Solving Process

### 1. DEFINE THE PROBLEM

**What is the problem?**

*Is this a school, classroom, small group or individual problem?*

### 4. EVALUATE

**Is it working?**

*Response to Intervention (RtI)*

*What is the trend?*

*Will we meet the goal?*

*If not enough progress, what can we do?*



### 2. PROBLEM ANALYSIS

**Why is it occurring?**

*What are the skills?*

*What are the conditions for success?*

**Plan Development**

*What will we do?*

*How will we reinforce?*

*How will we monitor?*

### 3. IMPLEMENT PLAN

**What are we going to do about it?**

*How long, how many sessions?*

*How much additional time is student receiving?*

*Who will implement, who/how will monitoring be done?*



When you request a Problem Solving Team Meeting, it's a time for the child's school, parent, caregiver, and child welfare team to come together to define what problem or areas of concern the team has for the student. The problem is then identified, and it is defined as to where these concerns occur and the frequency. From there, the problem is analyzed to look at causes for why it is occurring, and a plan is developed to determine how to help the student become more successful. After the meeting, the plan is implemented with specific details that will define the way that it will be carried out to address the areas of concern. Lastly, the plan will need to be evaluated to determine if it is working. Prior to ending a problem-solving team meeting, you can ask that a specific follow-up date be scheduled so that it is clear when the plan is going to be evaluated for its effectiveness.

For example, you are caring for a student who is struggling in reading and is not making progress. You request a problem solving team meeting, and make the case manager, parent, guardian ad litem, and other involved parties aware of the date and time the school is holding the meeting. At the meeting, you explain that you're concerned about how the student is struggling in reading, and the problem is both at home and at school. During the meeting, it is discussed that while he is only in first grade, he has already changed schools multiple times, and has not been able to get the level of support needed. The school reports that they have recently started providing small group instruction for the student in reading, but finds additional ways that they can further support him through intervention. The case manager reports that she can make a referral for tutoring to be provided to also help him catch up with his reading. You ask the school to provide work or resources available that can help you assist him at home as well, so that everyone can be on the same page. Before leaving the meeting, everyone agrees to a follow-up meeting in 6 weeks to discuss his progress. From there, the plan is implemented with everyone doing their part, and in the timeframe determined, the team has a follow-up meeting and learns that the interventions are working and his reading ability has improved.



## What Can I Expect from the Problem Solving Team Meeting (PSTM)?

- Documentation of the methods that have been used to facilitate learning and adaption to the general education classroom
- Response to the interventions, the answer to the question: Is this working?
- A written plan to address identified problems
- Next meeting date to review progress
- Consideration on whether the child may qualify and have a need for an IEP/504 Plan, and if so, a plan to take necessary next steps.



From a Problem Solving Team Meeting, you can expect to learn about methods that have already been utilized to help your student be successful. You can understand how the student is responding to the interventions that have already been put into place to determine if it is working. You can expect a written plan to be developed to address the problems identified during the meeting, along with a follow-up meeting to review progress.

Sometimes during a Problem Solving Team Meeting, the team considers whether a student may qualify for an IEP or a 504 Plan based on a diagnosis or suspected disability. If there is a concern, then the school may complete specific evaluations or give you a form to be completed by the child's physician or psychiatrist that identifies the child's diagnosis.

## Who can sign what?

- When considering if a child has a disability or qualifies for the gifted program, this requires consent for evaluations, re-evaluations and placement into the ESE or Gifted program. Consent must be provided by the biological parent, if parental rights are intact. Even if a parent is incarcerated, they can still sign.
- If parental rights are terminated, and the child has been in a stable placement with their current caregiver, then sometimes the caregiver can sign those documents such as if the caregiver is a relative, non-relative, or foster parent with less than 5 children in the home.
- However, foster parents with over 5 children in their home, therapeutic foster homes, group homes, and residential treatment facility staff cannot sign consent. Case Managers can also not sign for consent. During those circumstances, a surrogate parent would need to be appointed.
- It takes approximately 30 days for a surrogate parent to be appointed, preferably the GAL who is familiar with the child and meets the specific criteria. A court order can also designate someone as the educational decision maker if parental rights are intact and the parent is unable or unwilling to sign.

\*\*Anyone participating in a school meeting, such as an IEP meeting, can sign as a participant.



When considering if a child has a disability or qualifies for the gifted program, this requires consent for evaluations, re-evaluations, and placement into the ESE or gifted program. Consent must be provided by the biological parent if parental rights are intact. So, even if a parent is incarcerated, the case manager can get the paperwork to them in the jail so they still can sign consent.

If parental rights have been terminated, and the child has been in a stable placement with their current caregiver, then sometimes the caregiver can sign those consent documents such as if the caregiver is a relative, non-relative, or foster parent with less than 5 children in the home.

However, foster parents with over 5 children in their home, therapeutic foster homes, group homes, and residential treatment facility staff cannot sign consent. Case Managers can also not sign consent. During those circumstances, a surrogate parent would need to be appointed.

If a surrogate parent is needed, this process typically takes 30 days. We prefer if the child's Guardian Ad Litem can be appointed as their surrogate parent (if they meet specific criteria) as they would be familiar with the child. Otherwise, the person appointed would also need time to get to know the child and review their records. In certain circumstances, a court order can appoint an educational decision maker for a child, such as if parental rights are still intact but the parent is unable or unwilling to sign.

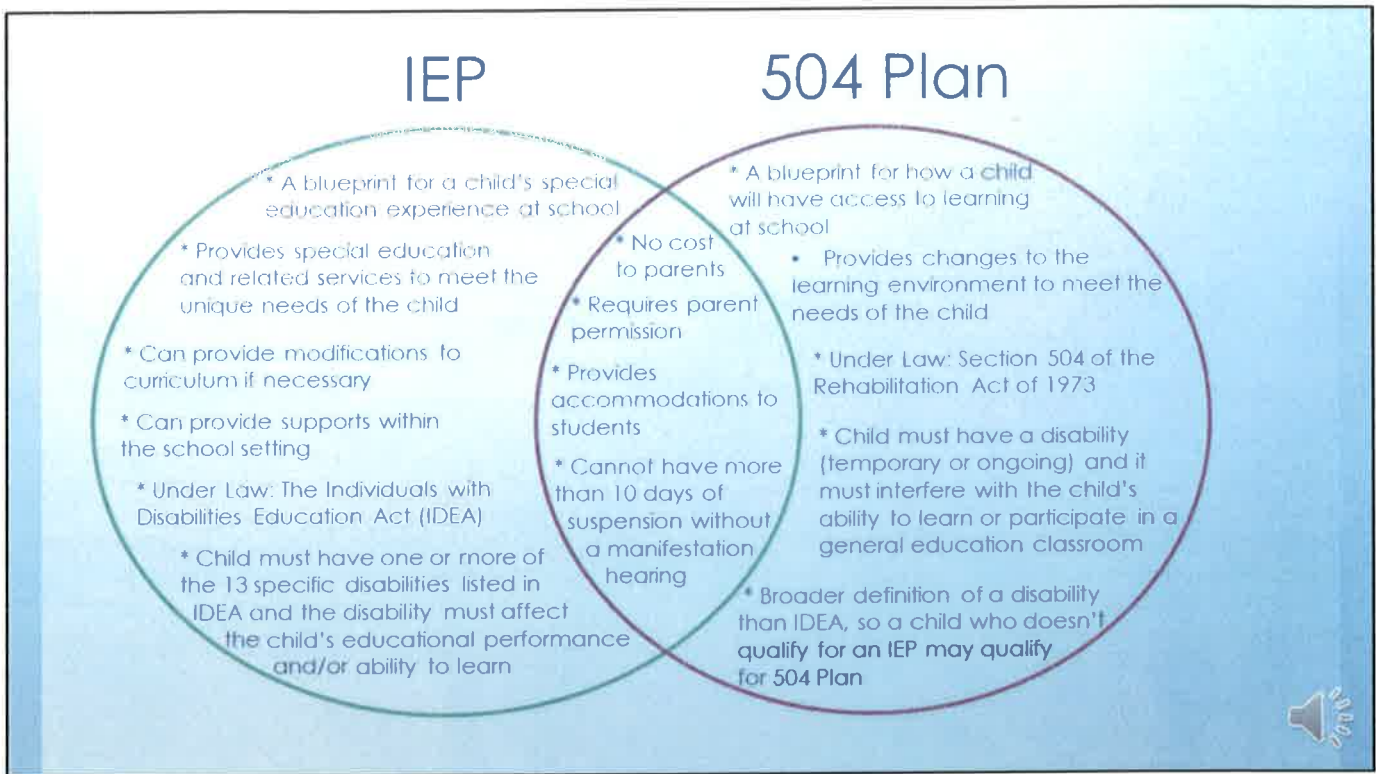
Also, I do want to note that anyone participating in a school meeting, such as an IEP meeting, can sign as a participant, they just cannot sign the specific consent documents for evaluations or for placement into that program.

## Most Common Plans Available to Support Students

- **Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS):** Tiered level of support within the school that identifies struggling students and emphasizes prevention.
- **Positive Behavior Intervention Plan (PBIP):** Formal plan to work collaboratively to determine the best way to help a student behaviorally. This serves to teach and reinforce positive behaviors.
- **Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA):** Process that identifies a specific target behavior, the purpose of the behavior, and what factors maintain the behavior that is interfering with the student's educational progress. When this is complete, it helps drive the PBIP.
- **504 Plan:** Document with a written plan that offers all children equal access to an education. The student must have a disability that significantly impacts a major life function.
- **IEP (Individualized Education Program):** A written legal document that describes special education and related services specifically designed to ensure that students with a disability receive an appropriate education. The student must have a disability that meets criteria under IDEA that significantly impacts educational performance, and requires specialized services. The IEP is converted to a service plan if the student is attending a private school.
- **EP (Education Plan) for Gifted Students:** Document that establishes goals and determines necessary services for the child to make progress and achieve the set goals. The student must be evaluated by a school psychologist to qualify.

This slide details out some of the common plans available for a student. We already discussed MTSS, the Multi-Tiered System of Supports available to all students. PBIP, or Positive Behavior Intervention Plan is the plan developed for students that serves to teach and reinforce positive behaviors. FBA, or Functional Behavior Assessment is an evaluation that identifies a specific target behavior, the purpose of the behavior, and what factors maintain the behavior that is interfering with the student's educational progress. The FBA helps drive the PBIP. A 504 Plan is a document with a written plan to offer all children equal access to an education, and to qualify a student must have a disability that significantly impacts a major life function. An IEP, or Individualized Education Program is a written legal document that describes special education and related services specifically designed to ensure that students with a disability receive an appropriate education. The next slide will detail out the differences between a 504 plan and an IEP. If a child is attending a private school, their IEP would be converted to a service plan. This means that the accommodations and services would then be modified to align with what the private school is able to provide. Lastly, an EP is an Education Plan for Gifted students that establishes goals and determines necessary services for the student to make progress and achieve those set goals. A student does have to qualify for Gifted to have an Education Plan, which requires an evaluation by a school psychologist. A child can have an Education Plan for Gifted that addresses academics, and still need an IEP for a disability that addresses behavior.





This graph is to help explain the differences and similarities between an IEP (which is an Individualized Education Program) and a 504 Plan.

A 504 Plan is a blueprint for how a child will have access to learning at school, and provides changes to the learning environment to meet the needs of the student. To qualify, a student must have a temporary or ongoing disability that interferes with their ability to learn or participate in a general education classroom. A 504 Plan has a broader definition of a disability compared to IDEA, so a child who doesn't qualify for an IEP may qualify for a 504 Plan. For example, a student who breaks their arm has a temporary disability and could be eligible for a 504 Plan with accommodations for writing so that they can perform to the best of their ability comparable to the same level as their non-disabled peers. Similarly, a student with diabetes may have a 504 Plan with accommodations to allow immediate access to water and the bathroom, as well as having a snack and meal schedule and trained staff at the school. These are just very basic examples.

An IEP is a blueprint for a child's special education experience at school. It provides special education and related services to meet the unique needs of the child. The curriculum can be modified if needed to support the level of learning that the student is functioning at, instead of the grade level. Through an IEP, a student can receive supports within the school setting, such as being in a smaller setting for a period of time or for the whole day, receiving therapeutic supports such as counseling, physical, occupational, or speech therapy; or having a student specific paraprofessional with them to assist. These supports and services can be in a special education classroom setting, or in an inclusive setting where a student is with their non-disabled peers. To qualify, a student must have one or more of the specific disabilities listed in IDEA (which is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and the disability must affect their educational performance and/or their ability to learn.

Both the IEP and 504 Plan are available at no cost to parents and require parent permission. You cannot have an IEP and a 504 Plan, only one or the other. They both provide accommodations to students, so, a student who has ADHD may need frequent breaks and extended time for tests and assignments due to their trouble focusing. The frequent break and extended time would be considered an accommodation. The other piece that both an IEP and 504 Plan have in common is that a student cannot be suspended for more than a total of 10 days in a school year without a manifestation hearing. This means that the school would hold a hearing to determine if the student's behavior is a manifestation of their disability, or not, before they can suspend a student beyond 10 days, expel them, or send them to an alternative school. Caregivers, and any other team members are able to be present at these meetings to help the team determine the outcome. A child with a disability, generally speaking, should not need to be repeatedly picked up early from school unless it is coded as a suspension, as that would be time out of the classroom that they are losing instruction. If those suspensions add up, then the manifestation hearing would determine what the appropriate next steps would be regarding discipline for their behavior. If the team determines that the behaviors are a manifestation of the student's disability, then they should not continue to be suspended. Or, if the team determines that the student's behavior was a direct result of the school district's failure to implement the student's IEP or 504 Plan. I would advise that you read through the District Code of Conduct as well as the Procedural Safeguards for Students with Disabilities for a deeper understanding of the discipline policy.



## Reasons to consider ESE:

- Academic Concerns:
  - Is the student behind?
  - Is the student making little progress despite the interventions?
  - Are there previous referrals?
  - Is there a history of learning difficulties?
- Behavioral Concerns:
  - Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs)
  - Absences/Tardies
  - Signs of depression, withdrawal.
  - Interventions are not helping
- Outside/Medical Information:
  - Hospitalization
  - DSM diagnosis
  - Recommendations from other professionals

## Do they need ESE Services?

- Will they catch up with all 3 tiers of support?
- Is the situation improving?
- Are they significantly different from their peers?
- Do they need additional support?

## ESE Categories:

- Developmentally Delayed (DD)
- Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
- Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD)
- Intellectual Disability (ID)
- Other Health Impaired (OHI)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Speech Impaired (SI)
- Language Impaired (LI)
- Hearing Impaired (HI)
- Hospital/Homebound (H/H)
- Vision Impaired (VI)
- Orthopedically Impaired (OI)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Deaf/Blind
- Multiple Disabilities



Reasons to consider if a student needs ESE services through a 504 Plan or IEP would be looking at how they are doing academically, have they been retained, and is there a history of learning difficulties. Behavioral concerns are an area to consider as well, such as any discipline referrals or signs of withdrawal. Also consider any hospitalizations, diagnosis, or referrals from other professionals. We look at if the student is able to catch up with the MTSS tiers of support we discussed earlier, if there have been any improvements with interventions, and what additional support they need to be successful. Do they just need more time or tutoring, or does the level of support needed go beyond that scope? Also you would want to consider if the student has had multiple absences and tardies, or if they have had multiple school changes.

The ESE categories for an IEP are to the right of this slide. For most of these categories, the school will provide their own evaluations, depending upon what concerns there are for the student. Other categories, such as Other Health Impaired, also referred to as OHI, require a form provided by the school to be completed by the child's physician or psychiatrist detailing the child's diagnosis.

## Available Scholarships

- **McKay Scholarship:** If the child has an IEP/504 Plan, this scholarship allows them to attend a different public school of your choosing (if approved), or a private school. For more information, visit: <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/mckay/mckay-parent-info.stm>
- **Florida Tax Credit Scholarship:** Through Step Up For Students and AAA Scholarships, this scholarship provides funding for low income families and for foster children. Funding can be utilized to attend a private school or for transportation assistance to an out-of-district public school.
- **Gardiner Scholarship:** Through Step Up For Students and AAA Scholarships, this scholarship provides funding for children with certain diagnoses. This funding can be used towards a private school or homeschool option as long as the child is not attending a public school in any capacity, even on a shortened schedule.
- **Hope Scholarship:** Through Step Up For Students, this scholarship provides funding for children who experience bullying at a public school and meet certain criteria. Funding can be utilized to attend a private school or for transportation assistance to an out-of-district public school.
- **Reading Scholarship Account:** Through Step Up For Students, this scholarship provides funding for 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade public students who scored a 1 or 2 on the ELA. The Scholarship is worth \$500 and can be used for reimbursement towards tutoring, instructional materials, or educational programs.

A few scholarships that are available to students are listed here. A student with an IEP or 504 Plan in a public school would qualify for the McKay Scholarship, allowing more school choice options within the public school system, or it would provide funding towards a private school. There are limitations for the McKay scholarship, such as the length of time a student has been in a public school (which is a minimum of the 2 FTE weeks that occur in October and February every year), however, there is special consideration given to students within the child welfare system residing in out-of-home care, meaning that they are not with their biological family or with an adoptive parent after the adoption has been finalized.

The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship is through Step Up For Students and AAA Scholarships, and provides funding to low income families and for foster children. This funding can be utilized to attend a private school, or for transportation assistance to an out-of-district public school. There is no application deadline for students in out-of-home care in the child welfare system, however, funding is limited.

The Gardiner Scholarship is also through Step Up For Students and AAA Scholarships. This scholarship provides funding for children with certain disabilities which can be used towards a private school or homeschool expenses, as long as the child is not attending a public school in any capacity, even on a shortened schedule.

The Hope Scholarship is through Step Up for Students and provides funding for children who have experienced bullying at a public school and meet certain criteria. Funding can be utilized to attend a private school or for transportation assistance to an out-of-district public school.

The Reading Scholarship Account is through Step Up for Students and provides funding for 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade students in public school who score a 1 or 2 on the ELA. The Scholarship is worth \$500 and can be utilized for reimbursement towards tutoring, instructional materials, or educational programs.

Please note that you cannot combine scholarships. For example, your student cannot receive the McKay Scholarship and the Gardiner Scholarship, nor can they use funding from Step Up for Students and AAA Scholarships. If you apply for more than one scholarship and you are awarded all of them, you would have to choose just one scholarship that you are going to utilize.

# Who Can I Contact?

## Heartland for Children

### **Lynette Mitchell, Prevention Specialist – Educational Advocacy**

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Lastly, here is my contact information, as well as the contact information for my Director, Kathie Southern. Please feel free to reach out to either one of use for any educational related questions or concerns you may have. We appreciate all that you do in caring for students and thank you for taking the time to watch this video.