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**HOUSE BILL 2684**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2018 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Caldier, Senn, Kagi, Kilduff, Ortiz-Self, Johnson, Muri, and McBride

AN ACT Relating to defining best practices for the process and people involved in best interest determination of students in out-of-home care; amending RCW 74.13.560 and 74.13.631; adding new sections to chapter 28A.225 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28A.320 RCW; repealing RCW 28A.300.800; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.225 RCW to read as follows:

School districts must collaborate with the department of children, youth, and families, as also required under RCW 74.13.560, to develop protocols specifying specific strategies for communication, coordination, and collaboration regarding the status and progress of children in out-of-home care placed in the region, in order to maximize the educational continuity and achievement of these children. For the purposes of this section, "out-of-home care" has the meaning provided in RCW 13.34.030.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.225 RCW to read as follows:

(1) For the purposes of this section, "out-of-home care" has the meaning provided in RCW 13.34.030.

(2) The protocols developed in collaboration between school districts and the department of children, youth, and families for making best interest determinations of students in out-of-home care must meet the requirements of this section.

(3) Best interest determinations should be made as quickly as possible in order to prevent educational discontinuity for the student.

(a) When making best interest determinations, every effort should be made to gather meaningful input from relevant and appropriate persons on their perspectives on which school the student should attend during his or her time in out-of-home care, consistent with the student's case plan.

(b) Relevant and appropriate persons include:

(i) Department of children, youth, and families representatives;

(ii) School of origin representatives, such as a teacher, counselor, coach, or other meaningful person in the student's life;

(iii) Biological parents;

(iv) Foster parents;

(v) Educational liaisons identified under RCW 13.34.045;

(vi) The student's relatives; and

(vii) Depending on his or her age, the student.

(4) In accordance with RCW 74.13.550, whenever practical and in their best interest, students placed into out-of-home care must remain enrolled in the school that they were attending at the time they entered out-of-home care. Student-centered factors must be used to determine what is in a student's best interest.

(a) In order to make a well-informed best interest determination a variety of student-centered factors should be considered, including:

(i) How long is the student's current out-of-home care placement expected to last?

(ii) What is the student's permanency plan and how does it relate to school stability?

(iii) How many schools has the student attended in the current year?

(iv) How many schools has the student attended over the past few years?

(v) Considering the impacts of past transfers, how may transferring to a new school impact the student academically, emotionally, physically, and socially?

(vi) What are the immediate and long-term educational plans of, and for, the student?

(vii) How strong is the student academically?

(viii) If the student has special needs, what impact will transferring to a new school have on the student's progress and services?

(ix) To what extent are the programs and activities at the potential new school comparable to, or more appropriate than, those at the school of origin?

(x) Does one school have programs and activities that address the unique needs or interests of the student that the other school does not have?

(xi) Which school does the student prefer?

(xii) How deep are the child's ties to his or her school of origin?

(xiii) Would the timing of the school transfer coincide with a logical juncture, such as after testing, after an event that is significant to the student, or at the end of the school year?

(xiv) How would changing schools affect the student's ability to earn full academic credit, participate in sports or other extra-curricular activities, proceed to the next grade, or graduate on time?

(xv) How would the commute to the schools under consideration impact the student, in terms of distance, mode of transportation, and travel time?

(xvi) How anxious is the student about having been removed from the home or about any upcoming moves?

(xvii) What school does the student's sibling attend?

(xviii) Are there safety issues to consider?

(b) Transportation costs should not be considered when making best interest determinations.

(5) The student must remain in his or her school of origin while a best interest determination is made and while disputes are resolved, in order to minimize disruption and reduce the number of school transfers.

(a) School districts are encouraged to use any best interest determination guide developed by the office of the superintendent of public instruction during the discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of keeping the student in the school of origin or transferring the student to a new school.

(b) School districts are encouraged to use any dispute resolution process developed by the office of the superintendent of public instruction when there is a disagreement about school placement, the provision of educational services, or a dispute between agencies.

(6) The special education services of a student must not be interrupted by a transfer to a new school.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.320 RCW to read as follows:

(1) For the purposes of this section, "out-of-home care" has the meaning provided in RCW 13.34.030.

(2)(a) A school district must designate a foster care liaison to facilitate district compliance with state and federal laws related to students in out-of-home care and to collaborate with the department of children, youth, and families to address educational barriers for these students.

(b) The role and responsibilities of a foster care liaison may include:

(i) Coordinating with the department of children, youth, and families on the implementation of state and federal laws related to students in out-of-home care;

(ii) Coordinating with foster care education program staff at the office of the superintendent of public instruction;

(iii) Attending training and professional development opportunities to improve school district implementation efforts;

(iv) Serving as the primary contact person for representatives of the department of children, youth, and families;

(v) Leading and documenting the development of a process for making best interest determinations, in accordance with section 2 of this act;

(vi) Facilitating immediate enrollment, in accordance with RCW 28A.225.330;

(vii) Facilitating the transfer of the records, in accordance with RCW 28A.150.510 and 28A.225.330;

(viii) Facilitating data sharing with child welfare agencies, consistent with state and federal privacy laws and rules;

(ix) Developing and coordinating local transportation procedures;

(x) Managing best interest determination and transportation cost disputes, according to the best practices developed by the office of the superintendent of public instruction;

(xi) Ensuring that students in out-of-home care are enrolled in and regularly attending school, consistent with RCW 28A.225.023; and

(xii) Providing professional development and training to school staff on state and federal laws related to students in out-of-home care and their educational needs, as needed.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.13.560 and 2009 c 520 s 88 are each amended to read as follows:

The administrative regions of the department and the supervising agencies shall develop protocols with the respective school districts in their regions, as also required under section 1 of this act, specifying specific strategies for communication, coordination, and collaboration regarding the status and progress of ((~~foster~~)) children in out-of-home care placed in the region, in order to maximize the educational continuity and achievement for ((~~foster~~)) children in out-of-home care. The protocols shall include methods to assure effective sharing of information consistent with RCW 28A.225.330. The protocols for making best interest determinations must meet the requirements of section 2 of this act.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.13.631 and 2013 c 182 s 6 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Consistent with the protocols for making best interest determinations developed under section 2 of this act and RCW 74.13.560, the department shall provide youth residing in out-of-home care the opportunity to remain enrolled in the school he or she was attending prior to out-of-home placement, unless the safety of the youth is jeopardized, or a relative or other suitable person placement approved by the department is secured for the youth, or it is determined not to be in the youth's best interest to remain enrolled in the school he or she was attending prior to out-of-home placement. If the parties in the dependency case disagree regarding which school the youth should be enrolled in, the youth may remain enrolled in the school of origin until the disagreement is resolved in court, unless the department determines that the youth is in immediate danger by remaining enrolled in the school of origin.

(2) Unless otherwise directed by the court, the educational responsibilities of the department for school-aged youth residing in out-of-home care are the following:

(a) To collaboratively discuss and document school placement options and plan necessary school transfers during the family team decision-making meeting;

(b) To notify the receiving school and the school of origin that a youth residing in foster care is transferring schools;

(c) To request and secure missing academic records or medical records required for school enrollment within ten business days;

(d) To document the request and receipt of academic records in the individual service and safety plan;

(e) To pay any unpaid fees or fines due by the youth to the school or school district;

(f) To notify all legal parties when a school disruption occurs; and

(g) To document factors that contributed to any school disruptions.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  RCW 28A.300.800 (Education of school-age children in short-term foster care—Working group—Recommendations to legislature) and 2002 c 326 s 1 are each repealed.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act takes effect September 1, 2018.

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