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Nancy T. Buckner
Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

Date: July 27, 2020
From: Jan Casteel, Director
Children and Family Services
To: County Directors
Subject: Educational Services for Children in Out of Home Care related to COVID 19

We remain in unprecedented times as we approach the new school year. Alabama schools are set to re-open over the next few weeks with plans varying by local system. Educational services may be provided in person on site, through remote virtual technology or through a hybrid of both traditional and remote learning. As a result of the differing plans across jurisdictions, it will be vital that each child in out of home care who is eligible for public education services be considered individually.

Attached is an educational choice form that must be completed for each child in the Department's custody who is eligible for public education. County staff will need to discuss the local options available with the child's parents (if not in the Department's permanent custody), foster parents or related caregiver and Guardian ad Litem. Once there is an agreement regarding how to best meet the child's current educational needs, the form must be signed by all involved. If there is an agreement, then a full ISP is not necessary. If an agreement cannot be reached, the county will need to immediately convene a full ISP team for further discussion.

If a child is in a medically fragile placement or has some other significant medical issue to include but not limited to conditions such as asthma, diabetes and autoimmune disorders, a written statement from the child's physician approving in person educational instruction is required if that is the educational option chosen.

Developmentally appropriate children ages ten and above should be asked for input as well.

Once completed this form needs to be scanned into the file cabinet and stored in the child's educational folder in the FACTS electronic file cabinet and store the paper copy in the county case file.

There are several areas to consider when beginning this process. In addition to the medical considerations already outlined, there should be consideration regarding how this decision may

impact a child's mental health/emotional well-being, socialization opportunities, and ability to progress academically. Consideration must also be given to any other services provided to children eligible for special education programs such as speech therapy, occupational therapy and physical therapy. If those services are needed and provided as a part of the child's education, decisions must be made regarding how those services can continue if the child is not returning to the traditional classroom at this time for medical or other reasons.

This process may need to be completed multiple times as individual school systems make adjustments to available options throughout the school year. If you need further assistance you may contact the Office of Foster Care or for children aged 14 and above, the Independent Living Program here at SDHR. Both divisions can be reached through our main number, 334-242-9500.

Cc:
Commissioner
Deputy Commissioners
District Administrative Specialists
Children and Family Services Management