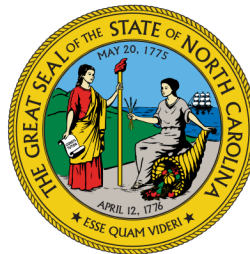


# Collaborating for Change - Supporting Students in Foster Care and *Reclaiming Our Why*



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**  
Division of Social Services  
Child Welfare Services

# Conference Agenda

**Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**

**Local Site Panel**

**Education Training Voucher (ETV)/NC Reach**

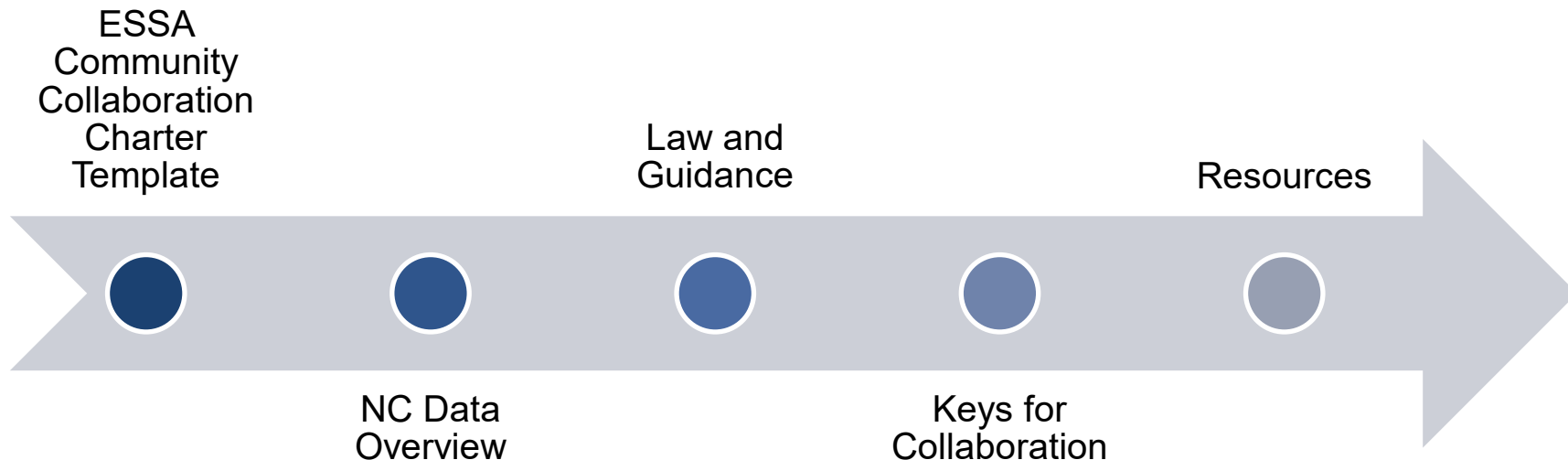
**Lunch and Presentation –High Fidelity Wraparound/NC Youth and Family Voices Amplified**

**Agency Specific Breakout Trainings**

**Lived Expertise Panel**

**Closing Remarks**

# Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)



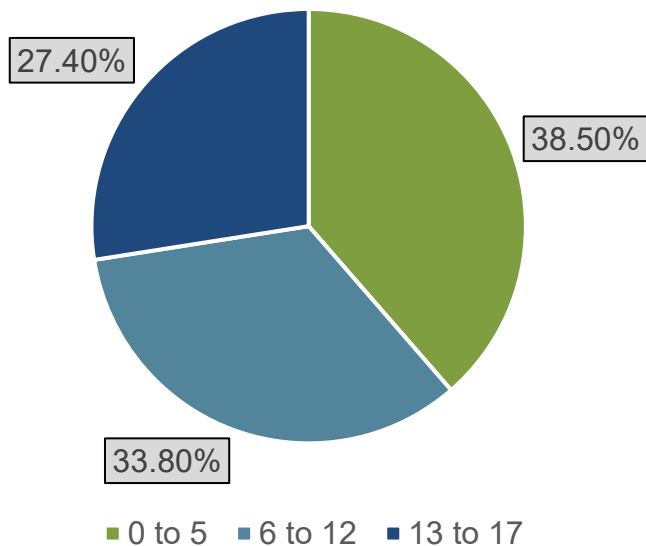
# Definition of Foster Care

"24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians for whom the Title IV-E [child welfare agency] has placement and care responsibility."

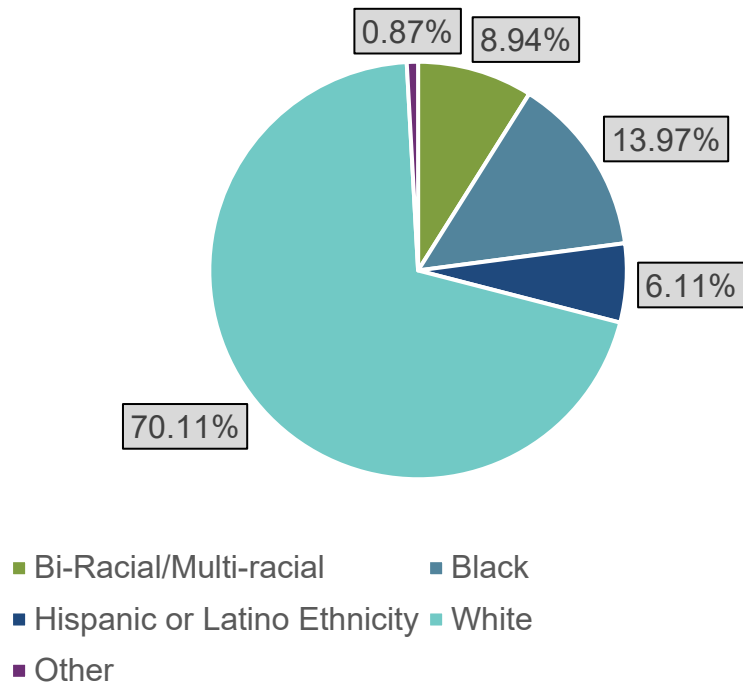
[Fostering Connections Act]

# NC Foster Care Profile

## Age Group



## Race/Ethnicity

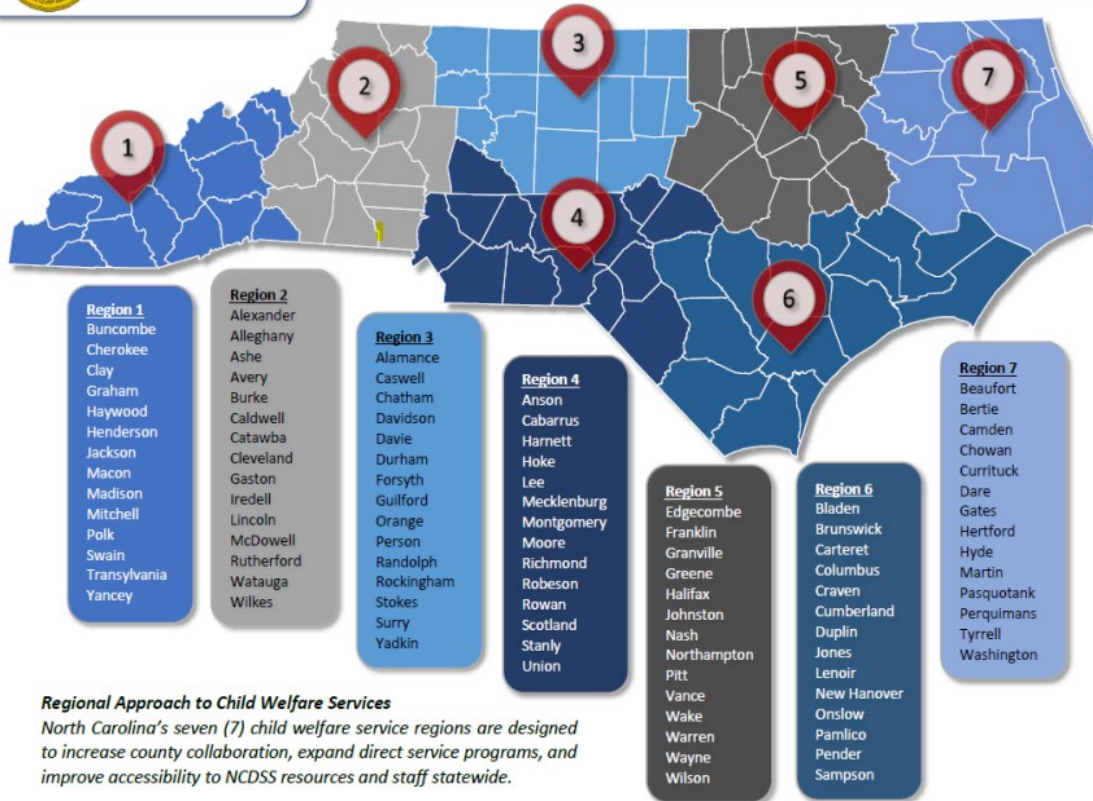


Source: NC DHHS CWIS/CPPS Systems – August 2025



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**  
Division of Social Services

## North Carolina Child Welfare Services Regional Map



### Regional Approach to Child Welfare Services

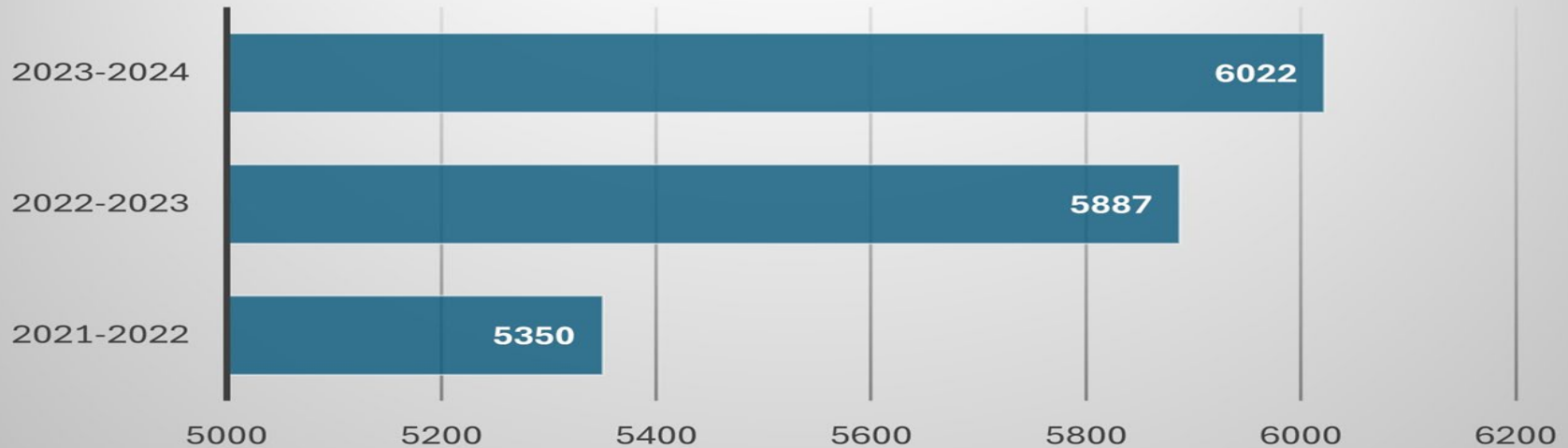
North Carolina's seven (7) child welfare service regions are designed to increase county collaboration, expand direct service programs, and improve accessibility to NCDSS resources and staff statewide.

Region	# of Children in Care
1	937
2	1954
3	2450
4	1904
5	1393
6	1769
7	286

Source: CWIS/CPPS Systems – Sept. 2025

# NC LEAs Identified from 2021-2024

## Three-Year Comparison NC Foster Care Students



# Educational Outcomes in NC 2024-2025

## Cohort Graduation Rates

Percentage of  
9th-graders  
graduating in

Focus on these students

In foster care

During this time period

Last 3

**Last 5**

Last 10

Using this rate 

**4-year**

5-year

2025 RATE

**60.4%**

graduated in 4 years

VS. PRIOR YEAR

**5.0 points**

from 2024

LONGER-TERM TREND

**3.3 points**

2021-2025



# Education ↔ Permanency: A Reciprocal Relationship

Children and youth who remain in care longer, and who are less likely to be reunified or adopted, are more likely to struggle in school and have special education needs.

Children who have achieved permanency are:

- more likely to have attended school regularly
- more likely to talk to their caregivers about schoolwork
- less likely to have changed schools during the prior two years
- less likely to have been suspended from school

# Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

- Signed into federal law on 12/10/2015, reauthorized and amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)
- Includes foster care provisions that complement requirements of the Fostering Connections Act (2008) to address the educational needs of students in foster care
- **Updated Joint Federal Guidance:** [Non-Regulatory Joint Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability and Success for Students in Foster Care \(November 2024\)](#)





# Key Components of ESSA

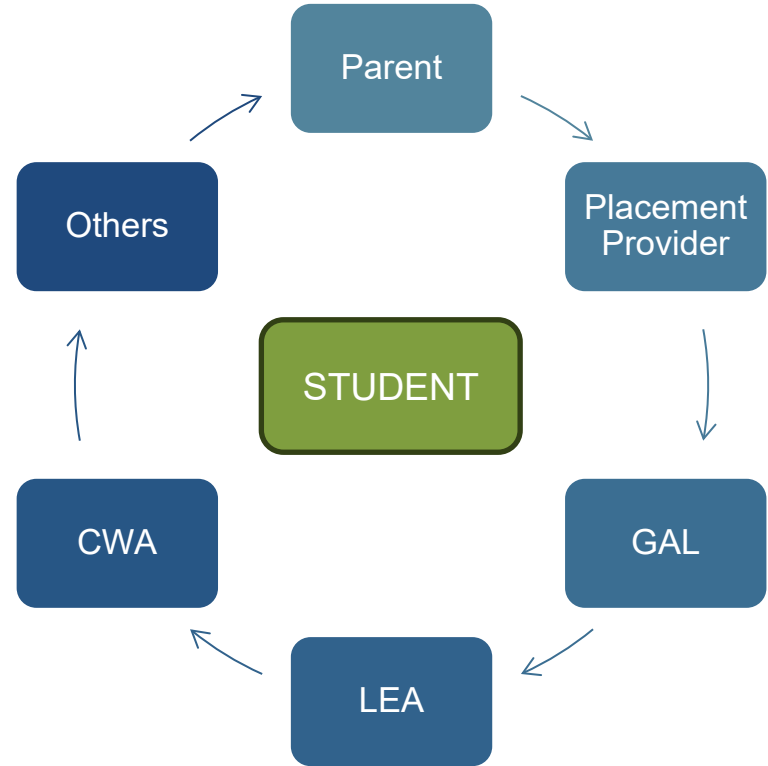
Increase	Increase educational stability
Remove	Remove enrollment barriers
Ensure	Ensure high-quality educational opportunities
Close	Close achievement gaps
Improve	Improve educational outcomes for children

# Key Stakeholders

CWA = Child Welfare Agency  
LEA = Local Education Agency  
GAL = Guardian ad Litem

Others may include:

- Mental health providers
- Courts
- Department of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention



# Key Terms

State Education  
Agency (SEA)

Local Education  
Agency (LEA)

School of  
Origin

Child Welfare  
Agency (CWA)

Child and  
Family Team  
(CFT)

Best Interest  
Determination  
(BID)

Immediate  
Enrollment

Memorandum  
of  
Understanding  
(MOU)

Additional  
Costs



## Local Education Agency (LEA) Roles

- Every LEA in NC has a point of contact (POC).
- Typically, they are the first point of contact when CWA's notify LEAs about a child's custody or placement change.
- Help ensure educational continuity and stability for youth in foster care.
- Play a key role in BID meetings, enrollment and records transfer, transportation coordination, and training of district staff.

# LEA POC Responsibilities

## North Carolina Foster Care Education Program



**Overview:** Each local education agency (LEA) is required to designate at least one employee as the Foster Care Point of Contact (POC) to ensure school stability and immediate enrollment for students in foster care. The POC coordinates with the local child welfare agency to address enrollment, transportation, best interest determinations (BIDs), interagency collaboration, and other supports that remove barriers to academic success.

### Key Responsibilities for LEA Foster Care Points of Contact (POCs)

Immediate Enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serve as the LEA expert, ensuring students are immediately enrolled, attending classes, and participating in school activities.</li> <li>Develop and document the process for BID meetings.</li> <li>Participate in all BID meetings, to the extent possible.</li> <li>Facilitate prompt transfer of records when students change school placements.</li> <li>Resolve disputes related to BID processes and school of origin transportation.</li> <li>Establish a coordinated process with nutrition services to ensure students can access meals immediately.</li> <li>Train <u>all</u> school staff on how to support the complex needs of students.</li> </ul>
School Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with DSS to ensure school of origin transportation is provided.</li> <li>Support awarding or recovery of course credit when applicable.</li> <li>Promote academic and extracurricular programs.</li> <li>Share post-secondary opportunities, including dual enrollment, fee waivers, and funding for graduation-related expenses.</li> <li>Collaborate with the student's education decision-maker as needed.</li> <li>Partner with DSS and community organizations to increase awareness of students' academic and non-academic needs.</li> </ul>
Collaboration: Departments Of Social Services (DSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide DSS with the LEA POC's contact information; share LEA policies and procedures pertaining to students.</li> <li>Establish and maintain protocols with DSS to ensure ongoing communication regarding students' academic progression.</li> <li>Ensure LEA staff participation in all BID meetings.</li> <li>Coordinate with DSS and LEA transportation staff to secure school of origin transportation.</li> <li>Develop and annually review Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and transportation agreements.</li> <li>Maintain a data tracking system for identifications, service provisions, and interagency data sharing (in compliance with FERPA).</li> <li>Participate in cross-systems meetings and trainings to strengthen partnerships.</li> </ul>
Knowledge & Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay informed of all federal and state mandates affecting students in foster care.</li> <li>Regularly review LEA policies to ensure compliance with Title I and ESSA provisions.</li> <li>Maintain documentation of processes, training, and interagency agreements.</li> </ul>

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## **Child Welfare Agency (CWA) Roles**

- Although law does not require local CWA to designate POCs, this is highly encouraged.
- Working with LEAs to ensure that students in foster care are immediately enrolled in school and, where needed, to coordinate transportation services.
- Managing BIDs and transportation cost agreements between the LEA and the child welfare agency.

**School  
of Origin  
(SOO)**

School where the  
child is enrolled  
prior to going into  
foster care

School where the  
child is enrolled  
prior to a foster  
care placement  
change



## School of Origin (SOO)

- Student must remain in SOO (unless it is not in his/her best interest) for the duration of time in foster care.
- These provisions apply to feeder school patterns (i.e. when moving from elementary to middle school).
- A student who has never been enrolled in a public school, and therefore has no “SOO,” should be immediately enrolled in a new school even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment.
- Although ESSA does not apply when a student exits foster care, education agencies are encouraged to allow students to remain enrolled at their SOO through the end of the school year and provide transportation.



## Best Interest Determination (BID)

- DSS and LEA coordinate to determine whether the student remains in the SOO or enrolls in a different school.
- This process is triggered when a student enters foster care or experiences a placement change.
- BID meetings must occur within 5 school days of the initial and subsequent placements (Federal guidance recommends within 3 days).
- The student must remain at SOO until the BID process is complete.
- If a student is being placed in a childcare institution, the LEA and CWA should conduct a BID beforehand to determine whether attending the local public school is in the student's best interest.
- *Transportation costs cannot be a factor when determining best interest.*



## Best Interest Determination (BID)

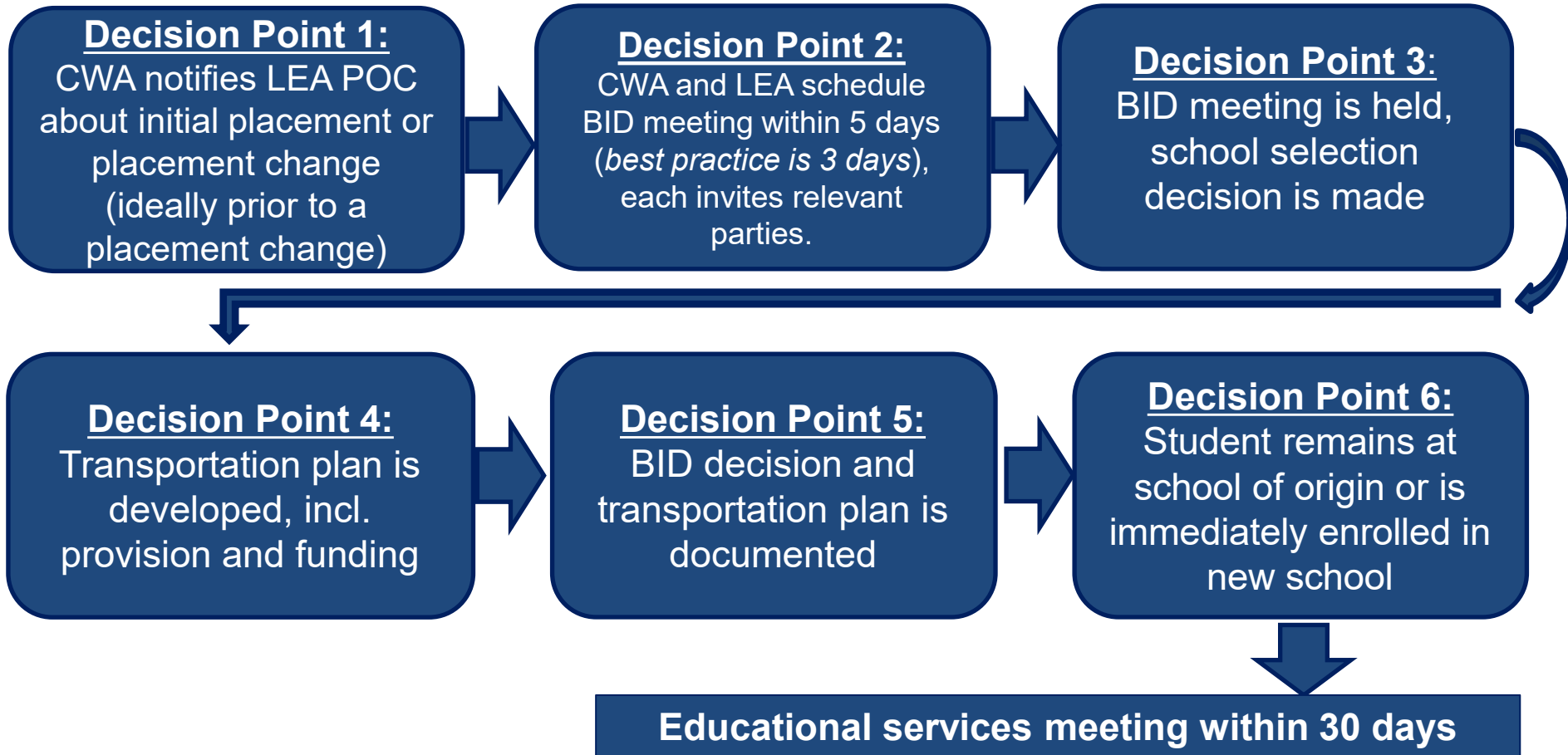
### BID factors MUST include:

- Appropriateness of the current educational setting
- Proximity to the school in which the student is enrolled at the time of placement

### BID factors SHOULD include:

- Student preference
- Parent(s) preference
- Placement of student's siblings
- Student's involvement with extracurricular activities
- Student's attachment to the SOO
- Availability/quality of services in the school to meet educational and socioemotional needs
- History of school transfers and impact on student
- Information about the immediate and long-term education plan
- Considerations of the student's child welfare permanency goal
- Influence of the school climate on the student, including safety
- Whether the student has a disability under IDEA/504 who is receiving special education and related aids or services
- Whether the student is an English learner and is receiving language services and if so, the availability of those required services in a school other than SOO

## BID Process Flowchart





## Immediate Enrollment

- Students in foster care should be enrolled in school as soon as possible to avoid educational disruption. "Immediately" means as soon as practicable – **ideally within 3 business days.**
- Federal guidance states enrollment **cannot be denied or delayed due to missing documentation.** Schools must enroll the student and contact the SOO for records, which should be provided within 3 business days.
- Enrollment goes beyond registration; under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), it means "**attending classes and participating fully in school activities**".



## Transportation

- LEAs must develop and implement clear written procedures for how transportation will be provided, arranged, and funded for the duration of time in foster care.
- Procedures must ensure that students will promptly receive transportation in a cost-effective manner.
- This includes transportation for needed academic supports, such as afterschool tutoring, summer learning and enrichment programs.
- Students in foster care may be placed across LEA and/or county lines, requiring coordination among multiple LEAs and CWAs to provide SOO transportation.
- CWA(s) are encouraged to continue to work with the appropriate LEA(s) in exploring the full range of options for providing and funding transportation to maintain a student in their SOO.





## Transportation

- Are LEAs required to provide transportation for students in foster care to their SOO, even if they don't transport other students? **YES.**
- Are charter school LEAs required to provide SOO transportation for students in foster care? **YES.**
- Funds reserved for students experiencing homelessness may **NOT** be used for students in foster care.



## Transportation Additional Costs

- If there are additional costs incurred in providing transportation to SOO, LEAs will provide transportation if:
  - a) The local CWA agrees to reimburse the LEA;
  - a) The LEA agrees to pay the cost; or
  - b) The LEA and local CWA agree to share the cost
- Additional costs should reflect the difference between what an LEA would spend to transport a student to their assigned school and the cost of transporting a student to their SOO.



## Dispute Resolution

### For ALL disputes regarding the BID school placement decision:

- County CWAs make the final decision.
- If a child, parent, guardian, or custodian disagrees with the BID, an informal review by the CWA director may be requested in writing within three days of the BID. If requested, the CWA director, in collaboration with the CWA POC, shall review the BID and affirm or reverse the decision.
- The LEA must ensure that the child remains enrolled in the school of origin while any BID disputes are resolved; the CWA ensures transportation is provided until the BID dispute is resolved.



## Dispute Resolution

**For ALL NC agency disputes regarding how to fund additional transportation costs:**

- While a dispute is being resolved, the LEA must ensure that a child receives transportation to the school of origin, including funding that transportation.
- If the LEA and CWA are unable to reach agreement on funding within 30 days from the day the notification or enrollment form was received by the school, the disagreement should be referred to the state level POCs for the Division of Social Services and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).
- If the state level POCs are unable to reach agreement on transportation funding within another 30 days, the LEA and the CWA must split the cost.

# Sample Transportation Agreement

## Local Transportation Plan for Students in Foster Care

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
Local Education Agency (LEA) Department of Social Services (DSS)

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires LEAs and child welfare agencies (i.e., Departments of Social Services) to collaborate to ensure the educational stability of foster care children and youth. To address transportation for students in foster care cost-effectively, the local LEA and DSS agency must establish formal written protocols and procedures to ensure that foster care students remain in their school of origin whenever it is determined to be in their best interest. To do so, DSS must regularly inform LEAs of all foster care youth enrolled in an LEA.

The local transportation plan must be collaboratively designed between the LEA and DSS to appropriately reflect the unique local context. It is recommended that the LEAs and DSS agency consider previous scenarios, as well as low-cost/no-cost options when designing the joint transportation plan to limit the educational disruption for students in foster care.

Note: LEAs should consider developing transportation plans with other LEAs or DSS agencies, both in-state (between different LEAs and DSS agencies) and out-of-state, with which they frequently interact regarding students in foster care.

1. Please indicate the LEA and DSS representative(s) included in the design of this local transportation plan.

Local Education Agency Representative Names	Position Title	Email Address and Phone Number

Department of Social Services Representative Names	Position Title	Email Address and Phone Number

<https://ncfcep.unc.edu/>

# Sample Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING	
Between Local Educational Agency (LEA) _____ and _____	
Department of Social Services Agency (DSS) _____	County _____
<p><i>This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) addresses information sharing, collaboration, and transportation-related provisions in accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act, and the 2008 Fostering Connections Act to ensure the educational stability of children and youth in foster care. Additional policies/protocols may be developed to address the unique needs of the LEA and DSS, as needed.</i></p>	
<p><b>Joint Responsibilities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DSS and LEAs each bring valuable perspectives to the Best Interest Determination (BID) process which focuses on the educational stability and success of students in foster care.</li> <li>The LEA and DSS agree to collaborate to establish or update formal mechanisms to ensure that the LEA is promptly notified when a child enters foster care or changes foster care placements.</li> <li>The LEA and DSS agree to collaborate to jointly design a comprehensive transportation plan to ensure that transportation for children in foster care is provided, arranged, and funded.</li> <li>Both parties agree that under no circumstances shall a transportation dispute between parties delay or interrupt the provision of transportation for a child to the school of origin.</li> <li>Both parties agree to communicate regularly and share leadership responsibilities at the local level to ensure that available resources for transportation are utilized in the most effective manner.</li> <li>Both parties agree that transportation must be provided in a "cost-effective" manner so low-cost/no-cost options should be explored (e.g., pre-existing bus stops or public transportation, foster parents provide transportation, transportation by other programs if the child is eligible).</li> <li>Both parties agree to maintain confidentiality of information regarding children and families being served, in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and all other state and federal laws and regulations.</li> <li>Both parties understand that all federal, state, and local funding sources should be maximized to ensure transportation costs are not unduly burdensome on one agency.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Under this agreement, the LEA will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a Foster Care Point of Contact (POC) to ensure educational stability requirements defined by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).</li> <li>Share the Foster Care POC's contact information with the county Department of Social Services and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.</li> <li>Review policies and practices to identify and remove barriers to immediate enrollment and records transfers.</li> <li>Provide foster care-related information and training to the district and schools, ensuring that relevant instructional and administrative staff understand their responsibilities and the needs of children in foster care.</li> <li>Attend BID meetings to provide relevant educational information for children in foster care.</li> <li>Ensure that transportation is provided to children in foster care, adhering to the collaboratively designed transportation plan, even if the LEA does not transport other students.</li> <li>Acknowledge that Title I is an allowable funding source for additional transportation costs, although funds reserved for comparable services for homeless children and youth may not be used for transportation for children in foster care.</li> <li>Inform the DSS agency whether Title I funds are available to support additional transportation costs for children in foster care to maintain enrollment in their school of origin.</li> <li>Agree, if applicable, to support additional transportation costs for eligible foster care youth</li> </ul>	

<p>utilizing funds made available within Title I.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand that if there are additional costs in providing transportation for children in foster care to remain in his or her school of origin, the LEA will provide such transportation if (1) the county DSS agency agrees to reimburse the LEA for the cost of transportation; (2) the LEA agrees to pay for the additional costs; or (3) the LEA and county DSS agency agree to share the costs.</li> <li>Agree that a child must remain in his/her school of origin while any disputes are being resolved.</li> <li>Agree to provide or arrange for adequate and appropriate transportation to and from the school of origin while any disputes are being resolved.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Under this agreement, DSS will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify all children in foster care enrolled in the LEA and regularly provide that information to the LEA POC.</li> <li>Inform the LEA of children in foster care who may need transportation to maintain enrollment in their school of origin.</li> <li>Immediately inform the school of origin and LEA POC of children in foster care who experience a change of foster care placement.</li> <li>Provide the completed Verification of Custody Letter (DSS 5760) to the LEA POC within <u>one day</u> of foster care placement.</li> <li>Provide the completed Notification of Placement form (DSS 5133) to the school and LEA POC within <u>one day</u> of foster care placement (or foster care placement change). Delivery of the Notification of Placement form may be made by either DSS or the foster care placement provider. The Notification of Placement form will serve to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alert the LEA that the child has entered foster care or had a foster care placement change.</li> <li>Request the child's comprehensive education records pursuant to the Uninterrupted Scholars Act, and</li> <li>Initiate scheduling a BID meeting if it did not occur prior to the foster care placement or placement change.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Schedule the BID meeting <u>within 5 days</u> of a child entering foster care or of the placement change and communicate with the LEA/LEAs regarding the BID meeting and document it on the Best Interest Determination form (DSS 5137).</li> <li>Schedule an Educational Services meeting <u>within 30 days</u> of the child's placement when the child's foster care placement is (a) within the existing transportation system for the current school he/she attends, and (b) there is no intent to change the child's school assignment.</li> <li>If applicable, support transportation costs for eligible foster care youth utilizing funds made available within the county's child welfare budget under Section 475(4)(A) of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act.</li> <li>Inform the LEA/school of origin whether Title IV-E funds are available to support additional transportation costs for children in foster care to maintain enrollment in their school of origin.</li> <li>Assist the LEA/school of origin in exploring the full range of options for providing and funding transportation to maintain a child in his or her school of origin, consistent with the child's educational stability plan.</li> <li>Coordinate with the LEA regarding data sharing for children in foster care, consistent with the Federal Educational Records Privacy Act (FERPA) and the confidentiality of information provisions in the IDEA</li> </ul>
<p><b>Updates and Revisions:</b></p> <p>Best practice recommends that this MOU is reviewed annually. Updates and revisions to this MOU should be made as needed. Any updates or revisions to the MOU must be submitted to L.J. Von Dohlen, Coordinator for the Education of Children and Youth in Foster Care, at <a href="mailto:lisa.vondohlen@dpi.nc.gov">lisa.vondohlen@dpi.nc.gov</a>.</p>
<p>Review date/time: _____</p>

<b>Department of Social Services Representative:</b>	
Name: _____	
Title: _____	
Address: _____	
Phone: _____	
Email: _____	
Signature: _____	
Date: _____	
<b>Local Education Agency Representative:</b>	
Name: _____	
Title: _____	
Address: _____	
Phone: _____	
Email: _____	
Signature: _____	
Date: _____	
<b>Other Representative:</b>	
Name: _____	
Title: _____	
Address: _____	
Phone: _____	
Email: _____	
Signature: _____	
Date: _____	

# DSS Educational Stability Forms

- **DSS-5133: Foster Care Notification of Placement (Change) Form**  
*Within **one school day** of the BID meeting (or one school day of the child's placement if a BID meeting was not held prior to placement) this form must be provided to the child's school*
- **DSS-5137: Best Interest Determination Form**  
*If a BID meeting does not occur prior to initial entry into foster care or change in placement, it must be completed within **5 school days** of a child's entry into foster care or change of placement.*
- **DSS-5137a: Best Interest Determination Override Form**  
*Only to be used when Child Welfare Director approves BID meeting being waived*
- **DSS-5135: Foster Care Immediate Enrollment Form**  
*Outcome of BID meeting to enroll in new school, this form is provided to new school within **one school day**.*
- **DSS-5245: Child Education Status Form**  
*Completed within **7 days** of a child entering care and **updated annually***  
DSS-5245 Instructions

# DSS Verification of Custody Letter

Verification of Custody Letter

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To Whom It May Concern:

The \_\_\_\_\_ (County) Department of Social Services obtained legal custody of the below child on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date).

Child's Name:	DOB:

**N.C.G.S. § 7B-505.1. outlines consent for medical care for a juvenile placed in nonsecure custody of a county department of social services.** Unless the court orders otherwise, when a child is in the custody of the county child welfare agency, a county director or the director's representative under N.C.G.S. § 7B-101(10) is authorized to arrange for, provide, or consent to any of the following without prior parental consent:

- Routine medical and dental care or treatment, including, but not limited to, treatment for common pediatric illnesses and injuries that require prompt intervention
- Emergency medical, surgical, psychiatric, psychological, or mental health care or treatment
- Testing and evaluation in exigent circumstances

The current placement provider for the above-named child is \_\_\_\_\_. They currently reside at \_\_\_\_\_.

The child welfare social worker for this case is \_\_\_\_\_ and may be contacted by phone at (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_.

The child welfare supervisor for this case is \_\_\_\_\_ and may be contacted by phone at (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_.

The county child welfare after hours number is: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

Child Welfare Social Worker Signature & Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Work Supervisor Signature & Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Court orders may not be shared unless otherwise specified in N.C.G.S. § 7B-2901**

**N.C.G.S. § 7B-2901. Confidentiality of records.**

(a) The clerk shall maintain a complete record of all juvenile cases filed in the clerk's office alleging abuse, neglect, or dependency. The records shall be withheld from public inspection and, except as provided in this subsection, may be examined only by order of the court. The record shall include the summons, petition, custody order, court order, written motions, the electronic or mechanical recording of the hearing, and other papers filed in the proceeding. The recording of the hearing shall be reduced to a written transcript only when notice of appeal has been timely given.

After the time for appeal has expired with no appeal having been filed, the recording of the hearing may be erased or destroyed upon the written order of the court or in accordance with a retention schedule approved by the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources under G.S. 121-5(c).

**The following persons may examine the juvenile's record maintained pursuant to this subsection and obtain copies of written parts of the record without an order of the court:**

- (1) The person named in the petition as the juvenile;
- (2) The guardian ad litem;
- (3) The county department of social services; and
- (4) The juvenile's parent, guardian, or custodian, or the attorney for the juvenile or the juvenile's parent, guardian, or custodian.

DSS-5760 (Rev. 5/2022)  
Child Welfare Services

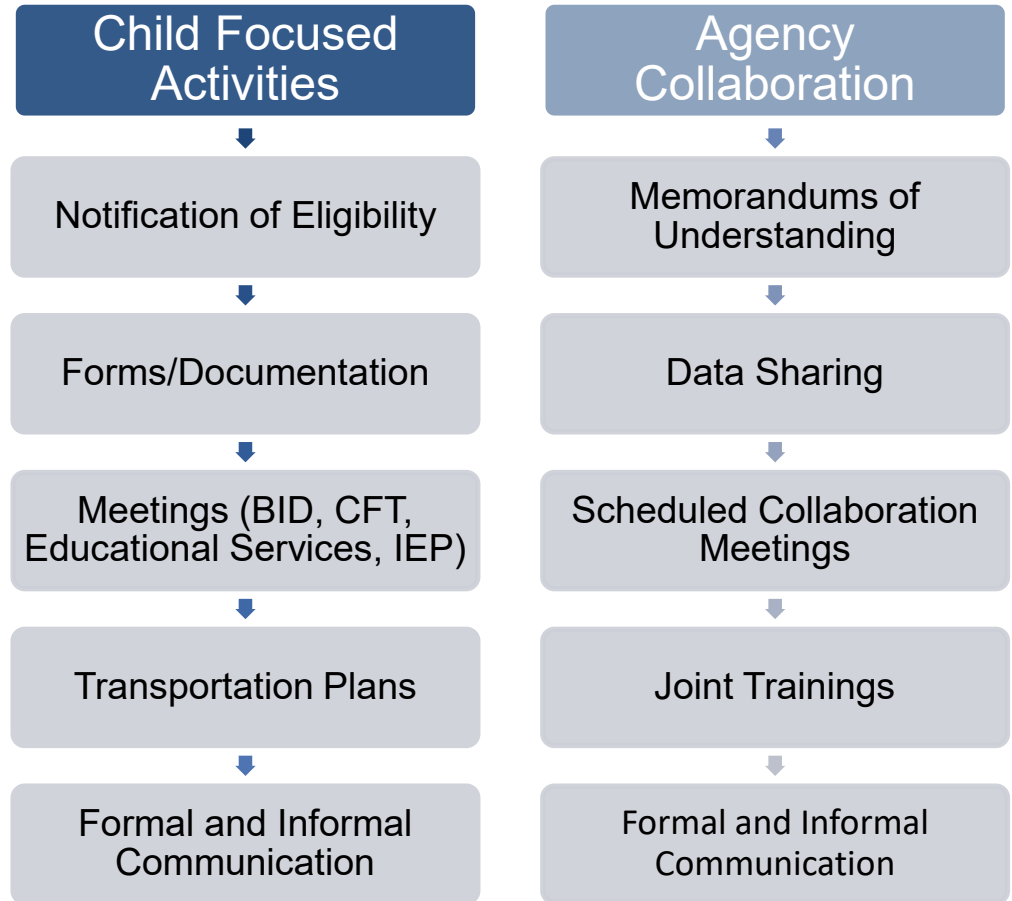


The Verification of Custody Letter must be provided to the juvenile's school within 24 hours of the juvenile entering custody or changing schools. It is the responsibility of the county child welfare agency to ensure that the school maintains a current copy of the Verification of Custody Letter.

*Court orders are not to be shared unless otherwise authorized in a court order.*



# CWA and LEA Collaboration



# NC Foster Care Education Program Website

Resources

Law and Guidance

LEA Foster Care Points of Contact

Sample Forms

DSS Forms



[ncfcep.uncg.edu](https://ncfcep.uncg.edu)

# Resources

- [Comprehensive Summary of the 2024 Joint Federal Guidance](#). Legal Center for Foster Care & Education. (2024, December).
- [Ensuring Educational Stability and Success for Students in Foster Care: Non-Regulatory Guidance](#). Dept. Of Education and Dept. Of Health and Human Services (2024, November).
- [Highlights from the 2024 Joint Federal Guidance](#). Legal Center for Foster Care & Education. (2024, December).
- [Legal Center for Foster Care & Education](#)
- [NC Foster Care Education Program](#)

# Contact Information

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Education Program

NC Department of Public Instruction

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NC Department of Health and  
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910-610-9018