

Screening for Educational Neglect (children age 6 to 6th grade) & Additional Considerations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

For children age 6 to 6th grade there has not been a change in FSD policy or Vermont statute regarding educational neglect since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We are grappling with how to flexibly interpret and apply our policies during this pandemic – which is the purpose of this supplemental guidance. In summary:

- If a child age 6 to 6th grade is meeting the minimum standard to be in attendance with their school, but not receiving adequate support at home to complete all assignments, we are not accepting for educational neglect.
- If a child has been absent for twenty (20) days or more NOT due to medical/mental health issues **AND the school has made diligent efforts to help the family**, we would generally accept the report for educational neglect.
- With that said, if absences are due to a lack of or insufficient technology, lack of an adequate space at home for the child to learn, problems with childcare, caretaker work schedules, COVID fears, or other barriers exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to assess if the school has offered sufficient assistance to the family prior to accepting a report of educational neglect.

Additional considerations have been added when screening reports for educational neglect:

1. Holding or offering an ACT 264/CSP meeting or internal team meeting
2. Diligent efforts to engage the family, including several attempts at communication
3. Diligent efforts to address technology barriers or other challenges related to the pandemic

SCREENING INTAKES

Education Neglect:

A child age six to 6th grade did not meet minimal expectation for attendance for twenty (20) or more school days not due to medical/mental health issues. Poor grades or performance is not considered educational neglect or a child protection matter.

Prior to Accepting for Educational Neglect:

- The school is required to hold or offer an ACT 264/CSP meeting. If the family declines or does not respond, the school must hold an internal team meeting (or some other internal method of coordinating and planning how to best assist this family); **AND**
- The school must make diligent efforts to engage the family to address the challenges and notify the family that a DCF report will be made.

Diligent Efforts:

→ To engage the family:

- Several attempts at communication with the family must be made on different platforms if they are unreachable or unresponsive. Options include phone calls, text

messages, letters, emails, and any other forms of social media or messaging known to be used by the family.

- At least one of the attempts of contacting the family must include notification that the school is obligated to report to DCF for educational neglect.
- If the school has a resource officer or other staff who could go to the home, we will ask the school to use these resources. This is something we will ask, but it is not required for report acceptance.

→ **To address lack of technology:** The school must have offered internet and a computer/tablet. If the family lives in an area without cell or internet service, the school should offer printed packets to be picked up/mailed or offer in-person school-based education.

→ **To address other challenges due to the pandemic:** If the family is engaged in remote learning, the school should offer or revisit in-person school-based learning. If children are not attending in-person, the school should attempt discussions about COVID-19 fears and offer remote learning via technology or packets.

QUESTIONS for the REPORT

- Is the child/youth registered for school?
- What type of school is the student participating in? In-person? Virtual/Remote? Hybrid Model?
- How does the school measure absences? Does the school's method of measuring absences differ for virtual learning? The school must describe minimum expectation during the COVID-19 pandemic for attendance and how child is not meeting the minimum attendance requirements.
- What is the number of total absences?
- What is the family's explanation for the absences?
- How many of these absences were due to a medical or mental health issue?
 - Has the school verified this with the medical or mental health provider?
- If attending school remotely/virtually, does the family has sufficient technology or connectivity AND/OR an adequate physical setting for remote learning?
 - If no, what has the school offered to assist?
- If the student has missed in-person school, does the caller know if it is due to concerns about COVID-19 exposure or illness?
 - If yes, what has the school offered to assist?
- Are there other barriers to school attendance not already mentioned?
- What steps have been taken by the school thus far to address the challenges?
- (If not already answered) What communication or attempts at communication with the parents have occurred?
 - Phone calls (how many?)
 - Text messages (how many?)
 - Emails (how many?)
 - Other messaging or social media communication (how many?)
 - Letter?
- In the communication attempts, were parents informed that school would be making a DCF report?

- Has an ACT 264/ CSP meeting been offered?
 - If yes, what was the outcome?
 - If no, ask the school to offer this.
 - If caretakers declined or did not respond to meeting, has school held some type of team meeting? If yes, what was the outcome? If no, ask the school to have an internal meeting for coordinating and planning how to best assist this family.
 - Is there a staff person or resource officer who could go or has gone to the home? Has the person who drops off school lunches seen the child(ren)? (If gone to home, what was the outcome?)
- How have the parent responded to any of the school's outreach? Ask probing follow-up questions.

For questions, please contact Dianne Jabar at dianne.jabar@vermont.gov or (802) 871-6474.