



New PIMS Reporting Requirement for Students in Foster Care Effective 2025-2026 School Year

Dear School Administrator, Foster Care Point of Contact, and PIMS Administrator,

For nearly a decade, Pennsylvania's Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have worked to ensure educational stability for students in foster care under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Identifying students in foster care is essential to providing the protections and supports guaranteed by law, including those outlined in ESSA and Act 1 of 2022 – Assisting Students Experiencing Education Instability.

Beginning with the 2025–2026 school year, a new reporting field has been added to the PIMS Student Template: **Field No. 209 – FOSTER STUDENT**. This is a required element and must be completed for **all** students in foster care. Each student will have one LEA record per school year in the Student Template.

The following includes important guidance for LEAs to successfully complete the new PIMS reporting requirement.

What is the new PIMS requirement for students in foster care?

LEAs will report students who are in foster care placement and enrolled in their public LEAs in **Field No. 209 – Foster Student**. This includes students in grades K-12. LEAs with public pre-school programs will identify the number of pre-K children in foster care enrolled in their pre-K program.

What is the definition of students in foster care who must be reported as a FOSTER STUDENT in Field no. 209?

“Foster care” means 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents and for whom the agency under title IV-E of the Social Security Act (also known as County Children and Youth Agency or Department of Human Services) has placement and care responsibility. Children in foster care are placed in varied placement settings.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Placements in foster family homes,
- Foster homes of relatives (**formal kinship care where kin receive a stipend**),

- Group homes,
- Emergency shelters,
- Residential facilities,
- Childcare institutions;
- Trial reunifications/trial home visits; and
- Pre-adoptive homes.

Importantly, this includes **resident foster children (P.S. § 13-1302), non-resident foster children (P.S. § 13-1305), and children living in institutions who are in foster care placement (P.S. § 13-1306)**. Children designated as Wards of the State may also fall within foster care placement.

However, this definition does **not** include children under permanent legal custodianship (PLC). While these students may be coded as P.S. § 13-1305 within Child Accounting because the permanent caregiver continues to receive a stipend, under federal law they are **not** considered to be in foster care.

Students in foster care may change schools within the same academic year. How should they be reported?

A student should be reported if they are in foster care at any point, and for any length of time, while enrolled in the LEA during the current school year. It is possible that the same student will be reported by more than one LEA in a given school year.

In Field No.209 of the Student Template – Foster Student should be a **Y** if a student is foster at any point during the current school year.

How do schools know when children are in foster care?

County Children and Youth Agencies (CCYA) are required to inform LEAs when a child enters or changes foster care placement. This should occur even if a child's foster care placement is within the same school entity and school stability is not at risk. CCYAs may provide this information in the form of a letter, electronic notification, or the [school placement notification form](#), which was developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and updated in 2024.

While LEAs should receive entry or change notifications on a rolling basis throughout the calendar year and use this information to inform this reporting element, it is recommended that LEAs develop a routine with CCYAs serving their school communities to provide an updated list at agreed upon intervals (e.g., prior to new school year, mid-year, end of school year).

It is also essential that school staff collaborate and work with each other to maintain accurate identification of students throughout the year. This should include regular

coordination between the school identified foster care point of contact, school enrollment staff, and PIMS administrators.

A directory of LEA foster care points of contact is available [here](#).

I have had difficulties receiving notifications of entries or changes in foster care placement from the CCYA. What should I do?

Please report challenges to your regional foster care office contacts found [here](#), or to the State Education Agency (SEA) Foster Care Point of Contact, Matthew Butensky, at mbutensky@csc.csiu.org.

A directory of Education Liaisons located at County Children and Youth Agencies is available [here](#).

What tool or platform should my LEA use to meet the new PIMS requirement?

Many LEAs already use student information systems with features to flag or mark students in foster care. LEAs may continue using these systems or other local processes that meet their needs.

LEAs may also consider using the [ESSA Foster Care Student Tracking Information Tool](#) from pafostercare.org or the [PDE-4507](#) form to support local identification and recordkeeping.

It is essential that information about a student's foster care status be shared **only** with individuals in the LEA who have a legitimate role in supporting that student's education and well-being.

What is the purpose of the new reporting element in PIMS and how will this information be used?

Since 2016, ESSA has required SEAs to report student achievement and high school graduation rates for students in foster care. More recently, SEAs are now required to report the number of students who are in foster care and enrolled in LEAs. Identifying students in foster care is essential to ensure they receive educational protections and supports guaranteed by law.

Collecting data also helps us track academic progress, address barriers to stability, and provide targeted resources. Accurate information also allows educators and agencies to coordinate services effectively. Ultimately, this leads to better outcomes and helps us close opportunity gaps for a highly mobile and vulnerable student population.

Where can I find more technical information about the new PIMS requirement for students in foster care?

The PIMS Manuals for 2025-2026 have been updated to reflect the new requirement for students in foster care. Links to the updated manuals are found here:

[2025-2026 PIMS Manual Vol 1v1 \(PDF\)](#)

[2025-2026 PIMS Manual Vol 2v1 \(PDF\)](#)

Field No. 209 in the Student Template (FOSTER STUDENT) can be found on page 177 of PIMS Manual Vol 1v1. PIMS Manual Vol 2v1 provides helpful information related to applicable status and codes.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting students in foster care and ensuring compliance with these important reporting requirements.

For more information please contact:

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Visit [PA Foster Care](#) for more information about education stability for children and youth in foster care in Pennsylvania.