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Toolkit for Relocating to WA or Moving School Districts After a Disaster

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Office of Education Ombuds

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Intake <https://services.oeo.wa.gov/oeo> | Website: oeo.wa.gov

Hello,

If you've experienced a disaster, even if the disaster was months ago, the Office of Education Ombuds staff is here to support you and your family. We understand there are many unknowns. We hope this guide can help to ease some of the anxieties and help you feel more safe, settled, and on a path to recovery.

If you are a professional working with families who are relocating because of a disaster, we are here to support you too. Please feel free to reach out to our staff with questions.

This toolkit is intended to help make enrolling into Washington Schools a little easier after a disaster. The guide is designed so you can pick and choose the sections you need when you need them. You do not have to read the whole toolkit at once. You can always return to the toolkit at different stages of your enrollment process.

If you have any questions or trouble with the process, please reach out to the Office of Education Ombuds. Please mention you are seeking help after a disaster. If you need an interpreter or disability-related accommodations, please let us know.

Sincerely,
OEO Team

OEO Contact Information:

Email: oeoinfo@gov.wa.gov | Main Line 1-866-297-2597 | Intake <https://services.oeo.wa.gov/oeo> |

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Enrollment information

Basic information about enrolling into a K-12 school in Washington:

Identify your local district and neighborhood school:

- [What School District Are You In? District Boundary Map | GreatSchools](#)
- [OSPI Map](#) -- Use Chrome, Firefox, or Edge browsers
- [State-Tribal Education Compact Schools \(STECs\) | OSPI](#)

Enrollment in Washington is done by residency. Where you live or plan to live is where your student should be enroll into school. Each school district handles enrollment of their own students. Online virtual schools are an exception, see the section on online schools to learn more.

Enrollment age:

Children can start kindergarten at age five and continue in school until they graduate or turn 21

- Kindergarten enrollment: School districts sets their own birthdate cut-offs for Kindergarten enrollment. You will need to check with the school district you are enrolling into.

Paperwork or Information Generally Required:

- **Verify your address**
 - If you have housing secured, provide the enrollment office with the paperwork to confirm the address. Examples: electric bill with your name on it, rental agreement with the address and your name, etc.
 - If you do not have stable housing, for example, mention this to the enrollment staff. You can still enroll as a family experiencing homelessness. Ask to speak with the school district's McKinney Vento Liaison.
 - Examples of unstable housing include: living with family or friends, in a hotel/motel, vehicle, campground, or other situations that aren't meant to be long-term. Mention the circumstances to the enrollment staff so they can help with exploring additional supports for which a student may be determined eligible.
- **Confirm your child's age**, especially for kindergarten
 - If you do not have a birth certificate or a passport for your child, alternative documents must be accepted. Acceptable alternatives may include: adoption records, certified statement from a physician, or immunization record with a birthdate, family religious records (e.g. bibles, family trees, etc.) with names and birthdates may be accepted by some districts.
 - After a disaster, government offices where the disaster was declared may waive fees for records. Ask if this is possible and what documentation is needed to access fee waivers.
 - If you are enrolling a child into second grade or higher you may not need to verify age. Check with your school district about age verification.
- **Immunization records**
 - Contact the health department (often state or county) where you most recently lived to request a copy, OR
 - Contact your child's doctor's office to request a copy. *Note, doctor's offices or clinics may provide a list of immunizations received. The school or child care may require you to transfer the information (i.e. rewrite it onto the form) to their official "[Certificate of Immunization Status \(CIS\)](#)" form to be valid due to licensing standards (i.e. they won't accept other printouts).

- Washington State Department of Health [information on accessing immunization records](#)
- [School and Child Care Immunization | Washington State Department of Health](#)
- If you would like to request a personal/religious exemption from immunization, fill out this form: [Certificate of Exemption Personal/Religious \(wa.gov\)](#).
- The school nurse may be able to help obtaining immunization records – ask for help if needed.

Who can enroll a student?

In Washington State, people who can enroll a child in school include:

- **Parents or Legal Guardians**
- A person acting as a parent in the absence of a parent or guardian. This might include:
 - A relative providing **Kinship Care**,
 - A **Foster Parent**, or
 - A Caregiver acting in the role of parent.
- **A Youth on Their Own.** A young person who is not living with a parent, and does not have a fixed, regular or adequate place to live, can get help enrolling on their own as an **Unaccompanied Homeless Youth**. Ask to talk to a McKinney Vento Liaison if you feel this applies to you or a student you are supporting after a disaster.

According to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the federal law on education records, a parent “includes a natural parent, a guardian, or an individual acting as a parent in the absence of a parent or a guardian.” More information about FERPA is available on the U.S. Department of Education’s website

at: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>.

Information to Share with Your New School

Reach out to the administrators (e.g. principal, assistant or vice principal, house administrator, office staff, etc.) at your new school. Call the school and explain your circumstances for enrolling into a new school. The school staff will want to know what has happened to support your student.

Here is some suggested information you may want to share with staff at your student’s new school:

- The circumstances that brought you to the school – even high-level information can be helpful (examples: moved because of a hurricane, wildfire, flood, storm, earthquake, war, fleeing violence, domestic violence, etc.)

- Any accommodations needed – language, disability, technology barriers (e.g. no computer or phone, no- or limited-internet, limited cellphone minutes, outdated devices, etc.), etc.
- Which accommodations have been successful?
- Was the student receiving services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and/or accommodations through a Section 504 plan?
- Social-emotional needs or behavior changes in your student?
- What does your student enjoy now or in the past?

Share this information with your student’s teachers too. Don’t assume if you tell one person at the school, the information will be relayed to others. Build relationships with many people at the school so they can support your student as wholly as possible.

What you choose to share is completely up to you. You are in control of the information and only need to share what you are comfortable sharing.

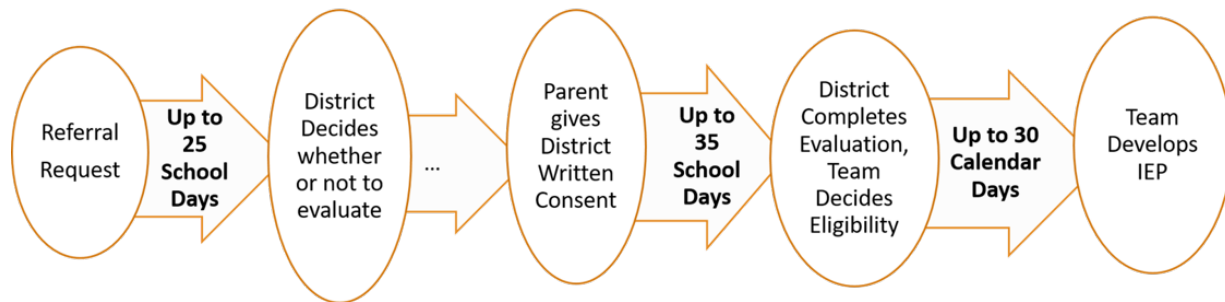
Special Education

When a student with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) enrolls in a new school district, the new school is obligated to provide comparable services and will conduct a new evaluation.

The new school district must begin obtaining student information when a student is enrolled. If you have information to provide to the new school, this may be helpful – examples include previous IEP or Section 504 plans.

If you believe your student may need disability-related services, make an IEP evaluation request in writing, such as email or through fax to the school, keep a copy of the request in your own files. If you encounter resistance, ask questions and share information with the staff that may help them understand your point of view for why an IEP evaluation is needed.

Washington's IEP evaluation process operates on following timeline:



Resource:

[Sharing a New Diagnosis Toolkit](#) – The toolkit includes templates and other helpful tips

[Protecting the Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities in Public Schools](#) – a comprehensive resource with information about IDEA and Section 504 which also includes additional templates for communicating with schools

Credit Transfers and Graduation

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has helpful information about credit transfers, partial credits (when a course wasn't completed), and grade transfers. The [On-Time Grade Level Progression and Graduation for Highly Mobile Students](#) document has more information. Working with your high school counselor can help as well. You can also call the Office of Education Ombuds for support.

Graduation

For middle and high school students, after enrolling into school, it is important to work on reconstructing school records.

- Request your transcripts from your previous school district.
- Make several copies and keep at least two copies for your records.
- Share the records with your new school. Once they accept the records ask to see the new transcript to check it for accuracy.
- If you see a discrepancy, work with the staff right away to correct it. You don't want to wait until right before graduation to learn about problems with the credit transfer.

If you can't request a transcript from your previous school district, work with your school counselor to create a plan to ensure you have enough credits to graduate. You can also ask about alternative pathways to graduation, such as Washington's mastery-based learning.

Information on graduation requirements in Washington:

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

- [Graduation | OSPI](#)
- [Graduation Requirements | OSPI](#)

Washington State Board of Education

- [State Board of Education Graduation Pathways Options](#)
- [State Board of Education High School and Beyond Plan](#)
- [State Board of Education Info for parents and families](#)

Remote/Virtual Learning

If your student is interested in remote/virtual learning, several Washington school districts offer online school.

Resources:

- OSPI List of Online Programs: [Approved Online School Programs | OSPI](#)
- [Washington Virtual Academies: Online Public School \(k12.com\)](#) – Washington Virtual Academies (WAVA), a program of Omak School District, is a full-time online public school for students in grades K–12

Family Supports

As you settle into your new life, please reach out to the staff at your school if there are things you or your student need. Many schools have family support workers, social workers, or other staff members who can share local resources to ensure you and your family have basic needs (e.g. shelter, food, school supplies, etc.) met.

Have a conversation with the teachers and school administrators (i.e. principal, counselor, or assistant principal) to identify safe people and safe spaces your student can turn to if they need support or help. Have a conversation with your child letting them know there are people in the school and places they can seek if they are feeling unwell or unsafe.

Resources to help students adjust after a disaster:

- [How to Help Students After a Disaster - California Teachers Association \(cta.org\)](#)
- [Helping Teens Cope After a Natural Disaster | CDC](#)

- [Returning to School After an Emergency or Disaster | CDC](#)

Resources to help settle into Washington:

- [Parent Trust](#) – Connecting to everything from diapers to mental health support
- [Child Care Resources](#) – Child Care Resources can help you find child care
- [Parent Help 123](#) – Connecting to benefits, including insurance, food assistance, bus passes, etc.

Other Helpful Information

[Office of Education Ombuds](#) – Many additional resources, including translations in over 20 languages

[Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#)

[Washington State Board of Education](#)

Notetaking page – Use this space to record information you may need to refer to often

| | |
|---|--|
| Home address | |
| New school district | |
| School district phone number | |
| School district enrollment email | |
| Name of school enrolling into | |
| School office phone number | |
| School attendance and/or school email | |
| Name of school principal | |
| School principal email and phone number | |
| School start and end times | |
| Bus schedule and bus stops if transportation is provided | |
| Teachers names and contact information | |
| Childcare (before or after school care) contact information | |
| Other information | |