



TO: The Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Education  
FROM: Linda A. Hall, Executive Director  
DATE: January 11, 2018  
RE: **WAFCA Support for Assembly Bill 780**

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The Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies (WAFCA) supports Assembly Bill 780 which proposes some simple modifications to state law to clarify and improve communications between the child welfare system and schools.

WAFCA is a statewide association that represents over fifty child and family serving agencies and leaders in the field and advocates for the more than 250,000 individuals and families that they serve each year. Our members' services include family, group and individual counseling; chemical dependency treatment; crisis intervention; outpatient mental health therapy; and foster care programs, among others.

In 2010, WAFCA was pleased to partner with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families to update the "Educational Services for Children in Foster Care" guidance – a resource to facilitate cooperation between the child welfare and school systems. Over the past several years there has been additional significant work at the state and federal level to improve educational outcomes for youth in foster care by supporting efforts to maintain school stability and quality exchange of information between the school and child welfare systems.

WAFCA has also appreciated the opportunity to work closely with the Speaker's Foster Care Task Force in the development of their package of proposals to improve Wisconsin's systems of care for vulnerable children and families.

One of the key elements that the 2010 guidance seeks to promote is the establishment of dedicated liaison responsibilities within schools and county child welfare agencies to increase the level of competency across systems to better serve children in foster care by maintaining active channels of communication while also protecting confidentiality.

Assembly Bill 780 proposes a few simple changes to further the goal of quality communication between schools and the foster care system and to recognize the critical role that school plays in the stability and well-being of children in care. The bill proposes three changes:

- Adding the child's school to the list of entities or persons that receive notice of a permanency plan review or hearing, which will afford the school the opportunity to submit relevant information to the courts regarding the child's progress;

- Requiring that licensing agencies inform school districts when a new foster home or group home is licensed in their school district; and
- Requiring that a child welfare agency making an out-of-home care placement notify the school district and school where the child will attend after the placement is made.

In practice, agencies are currently making notifications to the appropriate school when a child is placed in out-of-home care, however, the current statutes require notification to the clerk of the school district, which does not align with best practice and has also caused confusion, because it is often unclear who functions as the clerk of a school district. Requiring direct communication with the school where the child will actually be attending will conform the statute to practice and reduce confusion.

With regard to school notification of upcoming hearings on a child's permanency plan, WAFCFA has also partnered with the court system in recent years to promote tools to assist judges in assessing the educational stability for children and youth in the system. Adding schools to the official list of interested parties would codify recognition of the significant role that schools play in the success of our vulnerable children in care.

Thank you for your support for AB 780.