

RESOURCE SIX

STUDENT SUPPORT GROUPS FOR STUDENTS IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

The *Out-of-Home care Education Commitment¹ (Partnering Agreement)* requires that schools establish a Student Support Group (SSG) for any student residing in out-of-home care.

Commonly asked questions

1. What is the purpose of a Student Support Group?

The SSG brings together the people responsible for the wellbeing and education of the student in out-of-home care.

(The Student Support Group) ensures that those with the knowledge and responsibility for the child or young person work together to support engagement, attendance and achievement, and establish shared educational and social goals. This group also monitors and evaluates the child or young person's progress².

2. How frequently should an SSG be held?

The initial SSG should be held within the first week of the student being enrolled at the school and following this, meetings should occur at least twice per year, but more frequently if required.

3. Who should attend SSGs?

The following is a list of relevant people that may attend SSGs:

- The case manager from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and/or a Community Service Organisation (CSO) or an Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation (ACCO)
- A teacher, year level coordinator, the Learning Mentor and Principal or Vice Principal
- Student wellbeing staff member and/or student support services officer
- The child or young person (where age-appropriate)
- The carer or child or young person's parent
- Other relevant support services

¹Out Of Home Care Education Commitment: A Partnering Agreement between the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Catholic Education Commission of Victorian and Independent Schools Victoria (2011).

² Ibid, page 16.

4. What should happen during meetings?

Attendees should provide information about the student that will support him/her in their education. Attendees identify the child or young persons' strengths and needs and utilise the SSG to develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The group devises strategies to to optimise student wellbeing and achievement and to address potential barriers and challenges to engagement.

Further, it is important that the Learning Mentor is able to advocate for the student, and/or that the student is included and involved in the discussions, likely to have ideas about what might work better for them.

5. What are some best practice tips in running a SSG meeting?

- The Principal or other nominee from the school should assume the role of meeting Chair. The Chair should:
 - Prepare the agendas and facilitate meetings
 - Ensure that the meeting follows the agenda within the allocated time
 - Take minutes and document/disseminate key actions amongst participants in a timely manner
- Members should respect each other's views, knowledge and expertise, and collaborate as a team to meet the best of the student
- Carers are likely to have the greatest understanding of the child and young person, and it is integral that their meaningful participation is supported. Members should consider the language and terminology used during meetings to ensure that all members, in particular carers and students, are informed, comfortable and have the capacity to equally participate.
- Regular meetings should be scheduled in advance to ensure the availability of all members
- Additional meetings should be held on as-needed basis, if requested by group members to discuss particular matters in a more timely fashion
- Meetings should provide opportunities for reflection and creative problem-solving

"SSGs are important to me because we are all on the same page about what the kids need both academically and socially. It helps me understand what the school is doing and what I can do at home to help!"

Anglicare Victoria, foster carer