



Best Practices For Enrolling a Child in School

1. Write to CWS (or whichever Resettlement Agency your match family came through) to make sure that a CWS Case Worker is not already working on enrolling the children in school (see CWS Contact Sheet). If they are, ask them how you can assist. **Even if CWS is enrolling the children in school, or they are already in school, RAA requests that your team still do steps 5-10 to help the children acclimate well.** If CWS is not working on schooling and your team is willing to do it, proceed with #2. If your team is not willing to do it, and CWS is not helping, please let RAA staff know.
2. Ask the family if they are interested in having their children enrolled in a nearby public school or if a religious school is important to them (like a Muslim day school). You don't want to do all the work to enroll them in a public school only to find out later that they'd prefer to first look into private or religious schooling options. Tell them that, unlike a public school, a private/religious school will cost \$ (unless they are awarded a scholarship), may not provide free transportation, may not provide ESL education, and may not have space. Look online for the type of school they desire and tell them the pros and cons. If you can't find the type of school they desire, suggest to them that they ask people they know and leadership at their local place of worship (mosque, church, etc.) about schooling options asap.
3. Contact the nearby type(s) of schools they desire and ask if they have ESL programming, if the family's address is correct for the school (within the public school zone or nearby to the private school), and if you can come to the office to get the necessary paperwork for enrolling the children. *RAA does not recommend proceeding with a school that does not have an ESL program, but the ultimate decision about where to enroll the children in school should be made by the parent (even if they choose a school that you do not think is the best option).*
4. Fill out the enrollment paperwork for each school/child. Keep in mind that you will likely need one or two proofs of residence (lease, utility bill, etc.), proof of age for the children (i.e. birth certificate), immunization records, etc. Refer to the registration guide for [Miami-Dade](#) or [Broward](#) public schools.
5. Fill out the RAA School Liaison Letter with the parent (found in this section of the CST Toolkit) and take it to the school with you *and the parent*. This will likely allow you to act on behalf of the child's best interest with the parent's permission.

While you may serve as a liaison between the school and the parent (and this will likely be welcomed by the parent and incredibly helpful for the family), *RAA strongly recommends that every single decision for the child, or information from the school, be stated to the parent for their approval/knowledge, even if the parent tells you, the volunteer, that you can make those decisions alone.* This is not only out of respect for the parent(s), *but because the parent(s) needs to learn how the school system works so that they can advocate for/get involved on behalf of their child in the future, when you will not be around.*

6. When at the office *with the parent*, ask the school to set up a future meeting with you, the parent, the school counselor, and/or any other administrator willing to attend. Tell them that this is a refugee child and you want to make sure the child gets the best start possible in the school, including helping the parent understand how the system works.
7. Assuming they agree to a meeting with you and the parent(s), take an interpreter or use Tarmily for the entire meeting so that the parent is never left out. RAA suggests the following discussion topics:
 - That you are working with a refugee organization on behalf of the family
 - Where the child is from and when they arrived in the U.S. (no potentially traumatic details necessary, but do frequently ask the parent if they'd like to add to anything you're saying or ask a question throughout this discussion)
 - That the child has undergone stress that may affect their ability to integrate and learn (try to avoid the word trauma so that the parent will not find offense) and that due to this:
 - That you would be grateful if the school could take special care with the child (attentive counselor, teachers, opting out of active shooter or other drills that can retraumatize the student, etc.)
 - What language(s) the child speaks, including if they speak any English
 - How the ESL program will help the child
 - How you and the parent can stay involved with the child's education (*the parent should hear from the administrator that being involved in their child's education, through checking grades to attending events to meeting with teachers, is normal and encouraged in U.S. culture*)
 - If the child was approved for free or reduced lunch
 - If needed, where the child can get donated uniforms (many school offices have them)
 - If you can contact each of the child's teachers via email to introduce yourself and the situation (*a short email to individual teachers goes a long way*)
 - If there any free tutoring or after school programs available to the child
 - How to login to the school portal (*create an account for the family and teach them to use it*)
 - How bussing will work if the family lives far enough away to use the bus (they may refer you to the bussing office)
 - What the child should expect when they arrive on the first day of school,

- and if there is any extra care the school can provide on that day
- Ask the parent again directly what questions they might have at this time
 - Obtain contact information of the administrators who you met with
 - **If they do not agree to do this meeting with you**, first try to get these answers in person with the parent in the office (go at a non-busy time to the office, not when it's the beginning or end of the school day), or, if that can't happen, call the school (at a non-busy time)
8. Physically walk the child and a parent to the child's bus stop ahead of time to acclimate them to it. Note: Often children will not be eligible for a free school bus *if they live less than two miles from the school*. If this is the case for your family, and the family does not want to walk, discuss other options (Uber, paid bussing, rides).
 9. On the first day of school, ideally take the child to school with a parent so that you can give encouragement and direction to the child, and be there for the parent (who may feel very worried or upset, especially if the meeting with administration was unable to happen or unsuccessful).
 10. Keep in touch with the school, and keep the parent informed!

Thank you for all that you do!