

TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY

STEP 6

Children in the Child Welfare System

- **Introduction**
- **AB 490: A Legislative Model for Addressing Educational Equity** *(a promising practice)*
- **Broward County Model: A Promising Model for Interagency Agreements** *(a promising practice)*
- **Creating Trauma-Sensitive School Cultures** *(an emerging practice)*
- **Endless Dreams: Building Educational Support for Youth in Foster Care** *(an emerging practice)*
- **Fresno County Model: A Promising Model for Interagency Collaboration** *(a promising practice)*
- **It's My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training** *(an emerging practice)*
- **Legislative Approaches for Promoting Educational Success of Children in Foster Care** *(an emerging practice)*
- **Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT)** *(a promising practice)*
- **Mythbusting: Breaking Down Confidentiality and Decision-Making Barriers** *(an emerging practice)*

TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY

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Step 6. Children in the Child Welfare System

Introduction*

Children in foster care need help from schools to ensure they are successful in their education pursuits. Approximately 500,000 children are in foster care in the United States on any given day. Entry into foster care involves a court determination that abuse or neglect of the child by the child's caretaker (typically a parent) has occurred and there is a current inability to continue to provide for the child's needs and keep the child safe in the home. The result is the child is uprooted from his or her home, family, and often siblings, and placed in a new home, sometimes with relatives but often with strangers. This major home life disruption is often coupled with the need to move to a new school. Many of these children are overwhelmed by trauma that affects learning, including, attention, concentration, mood, interpersonal trust, and communication. When schools are equipped with the right information and resources, much can be done to help these students who require additional supports to ensure their educational needs are being met.

In addition to school changes, often due to the history of abuse or neglect in the home, children in foster care might not have been receiving appropriate education services before their entry into foster care. These students might continue to experience disruptions in their education placement and difficulty learning in the midst of the emotional and physical upheaval. Schools can be powerful allies with the child welfare system in working with the children and families to minimize the disruptions and address the well-being of children in foster care (including educational needs). In fact, their educational success requires the involvement of the schools where they are placed.

Often schools lack information and resources to address the needs of children in foster care. This step outlines some basic principles and provides some tools that will help teachers, administrators and other school staff address the needs of this important population of students.

* A *Reference List* for each of the nine Steps, including this Step, can be found in Appendix E.

Guidelines for Promoting the Educational Success of Children in Foster Care

To meet the education needs of students in the child welfare system, and create classroom and school sensitivity, educators can:

1. Learn more about of the child welfare system in their community and what life is like for children living in foster care.

Most school staff have not had training or experience with the CHILD WELFARE or foster care system in their community or had any personal experience with children in foster care. Training for school teachers and other school professionals typically does not include coursework or seminars related to the unique circumstances and needs of children who have been victims of abuse and neglect and placed in out-of-home care. Schools can address this information gap through training on this population of students. See the **Endless Dreams Curriculum** for more information.

2. Learn more about the impact of trauma on children and how to create supports in the school environment for children who have experienced trauma.

Trauma experiences affect the ability to focus and learn in school. Children in foster care are part of a larger group of students who have experienced trauma in their home lives. There are ways schools can work with children impacted by trauma to increase their ability to experience education success. See **Creating a Trauma Sensitive School Culture** for more information.

3. Work with children, families, and the child welfare system to promote academic and school stability by keeping children in their school of origin whenever possible. When school changes are necessary, provide seamless transitions to new schools, including enrollment, record transfers, and credit issues.

With so much upheaval in their lives, children in the child welfare system can benefit immensely from remaining in their same classroom and school, even when they move to a new home or a new part of town. Schools can develop procedures and protocols to address how “remaining in school of origin” determinations would be made, including addressing critical issues such as the providing transportation to the school. For example, the McKinney Vento Act provides similar accommodations for children who are homeless and sometimes includes children in foster care. For more information, see www.nlchp.org/education.

Providing this kind of important support for children in foster care requires strong collaboration and communication between local child welfare and education agencies.

Examples of ways these accommodations have been achieved are provided in **The Fresno Model** and **The Broward County Model**, using interagency agreements, and in **Legislative Approaches**. Best practices for handling confidentiality and privacy issues are provided in **Mythbusting**.

There are times when keeping children in foster care in their home school is not feasible. In these instances, schools should work with child welfare agencies to ensure smooth transitions into the new school. Too often, children in foster care remain at home waiting for school enrollment requirements to be met before they can begin at a new school. Children are missing critical learning time due to administrative requirements that can be streamlined to ensure children in foster care do not unnecessarily miss class time. In addition to enrollment, schools can also address the transfer of education records from old to new school. These records include vital information about how to meet the education needs of the student. Delay in receiving this information could result in a child's needs not being met appropriately. There are many other issues that accompany school transitions, including credit calculations and partial credit acceptance so students do not lose credit and course time due to moves beyond their control, and social adjustments and support needs as children adjust to new peers, teachers and school. Tools three, four, and five in this *Step* also address these issues.

4. Dedicate specific staff resources for children in foster care in your school to focus on removing the barriers that stand in the way of meeting the education needs of children in foster care.

Educators have likely experienced frustration when attempting to contact a child welfare agency about a student in their school and confusion about the structure and organization of the unfamiliar agency. A similar frustration is felt by child welfare system professionals when they need to contact a school or find out who in a particular school will have the answers they need related to a student in foster care. When schools designate specific staff to be the point person for children involved in the foster care system (sometimes called liaisons or designees), schools improve cross-system communications, as well as internal school policies and practices with the development of specific expertise by identified staff members.

This liaison role may be carried out by various staff within the school, and selection of that person or persons can be a school-by-school decision. For example, in one school, the guidance counselor could be the right choice; in another the school social worker might serve in this role. Classroom teachers, school nurses, or a school administrator are other options. The key is that this professional would have special training/information (see Guideline number one, above) to address the typical barriers that children in the child welfare system face during their education pursuits. When child welfare agencies follow this same process (e.g., have designated staff resources within their agency with specific education expertise), collaboration between the

agencies becomes more feasible (see Guideline number five, below). This education expertise is emerging in child welfare agencies around the country (For more information, see

<http://www.abanet.org/child/rcjji/education/caseyeducationproject.pdf>.)

Schools can play an important and supportive role in the development of education expertise in other agencies and entities (i.e. education liaison in the child welfare agency or the juvenile court). For more information about designated staff resources with foster care expertise within the school system, see Tools three and four that describe interagency agreements, **Legislative Models** and **AB 490**.

5. Develop strong communication mechanisms with the child welfare systems that allow for a forum to identify needs and implement systemic improvements to address education issues for children in foster care.

One way to meet the education needs of children in foster care is for each teacher or staff that works with a child in the foster care system to strive to overcome the specific barriers for that child. While an individualized approach is critical to the success of each unique student, those that work with children in foster care may start to see trends, or common obstacles, that need to be addressed for this population of students.

An efficient way to address these common obstacles is through policies and procedures to guide education system staff working with children in foster care. Most of these procedures cannot be developed by the school system alone. It is only through collaboration with the child welfare agency that the best, most efficient policies can be created. These kind of systemic efforts can be daunting and time consuming, but in the long run, the efforts spent working on systemic solutions become invaluable to teachers, caseworkers, and other professionals working with children in foster care. See the **Fresno Model** and the **Broward County Model** for examples of jurisdictions that have created interagency agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) to guide the collaboration between schools and child welfare.

6. Work with child welfare agencies to ensure that birth parents, when appropriate, are involved in education decisions. When a birth parent is not appropriate, educators should seek clarity on who is the legal decision maker and others who may be serving as an advocate for a child and should be included in education decisions.

While educators work closely with all parents to develop strong relationships, identifying the parent and developing that relationship becomes more complicated when a child is in foster care. Although a child has entered foster care, often the birth parent is still making education decisions for the child. Sometimes, courts have intervened and limited the rights of parents to make education decisions. In these situations, schools

could be left to determine with whom they should develop a strong relationship in order to support the foster child.

Also, for children in foster care, there are many other professionals involved, all of whom might have information to share with the school or a role to play as an advocate (not necessarily as the education decision maker) for the child. These various players include a foster parent or other caretaker, a social worker, an attorney (sometimes know as a guardian ad litem) or other volunteer advocate for the child, or therapist, group home staff or counselor. The relevant players may be different depending on each child's individual circumstances. Schools need tools and resources to help them understand how the child welfare system works (see Guideline 1) and communicate with the child welfare agency (see Guideline 6) in order to ensure all the right people are at the table when education decision are made.

For information about education decision makers, surrogate parents, and other persons who might play a role, see **Mythbusting**.

7. Recognizing the high number of children in foster care who are at risk of not completing school; provide specific supports to ensure successful completion with an appropriate high school diploma; and work to ensure students in foster care are participating in programs (and the schools they attend have access to these programs) that expose and encourage post-secondary education opportunities.

Studies have shown that despite a strong desire of children in foster care to obtain a higher education, very few enter, and fewer complete, post secondary education. Reasons for this disparity are numerous, and include such issues as lack of mentors and advocates that encourage and support the completion of high school and the pursuit of additional education; limited exposure to the many education and career opportunities that exist; and ending of the child welfare system support between ages 18 and 21, which is the critical time for decisions about future education and careers. Schools can help by making efforts to target youth in foster care for extra supports and programs to complete high school and pursue other education goals. These efforts would improve overall graduation rates for schools and directly impact on the future success for these youth. See **It's My Life** for resources for schools and suggestions for supporting students in foster care with standardized tests, application and enrollment in postsecondary education, applying for financial aid, and completing postsecondary goals.

Educators are critically important to helping children in foster care achieve education success and prepare for independent lives as adults. By using effective resources and tools such as the ones highlighted in this section, educators can take pride in the role they play in the education success of children in the foster care system.

TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY

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Step 6. Children in the Child Welfare System

AB 490: A Legislative Model for Addressing Educational Equity for Foster Children (a promising practice)

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Assembly Bill 490 (AB 490) in California is a comprehensive education statute designed to address the unique educational needs of foster youth enrolled in California schools. Effective January 1, 2004, the purpose of the statute is to ensure foster youth have access to:

- meaningful opportunities to meet state academic standards;
- stable school placements;
- placement in the least restrictive educational programs; and
- academic resources, services, and extracurricular and enrichment activities available to all students.

Another underlying goal of AB 490 is to ensure that all educational and school placement decisions for foster youth are based on the best interests of the child. For the text for AB 490, see http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/03-04/bill/asm/ab_0451-0500/ab_490_bill_20031012_chaptered.pdf.

Key components of AB 490:

- **Promotes educational stability**. Requires agencies to promote educational stability by taking into consideration a placement's proximity to a foster youth's school attendance area (Welf. & Inst. Code §16501.1(c)(1)-(2)).¹
- **Right to remain in school of origin**. Allows foster youth to remain in their school of origin for the duration of the school year when their placement changes and to remain enrolled in and attend the school of origin pending resolution of any school placement dispute (Educ. Code §48853.5(d)(1) & (5)).

¹ All statutory references are to the California Code.

- **Right to immediate enrollment**. Allows a foster child to be immediately enrolled in a new school even if all typically required school records or related items are not available at the time of enrollment (Educ. Code §48853.5(d)(4)(B)).
- **Right to least restrictive program**. Requires a comprehensive public school be considered the first school placement option for foster youth. Alternative educational settings are specifically frowned upon and are considered the educational placement of last resort for foster youth (Educ. Code §§48850(a), 48853(b)).
- **Joint responsibility**. Makes the local education Agency (LEA) *and* the placing agency jointly responsible for the proper and timely transfer of foster care students between schools (Educ. Code §49069.5(b)).

IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

AB 490's strength is its attention to detail with respect to all aspects of enrollment, placement, and transfer procedures that might impact whether a school placement decision for a foster youth is, in fact, based on the best interests of a child. In order to facilitate educational stability, AB 490 requires all school districts to have a Foster Care Educational Liaison position and it specifies detailed responsibilities for the Liaison as well as all other agencies charged with carrying out the educational placement and transfer of foster youth.

Recognizing that the transfer of student records is a critical factor in the swift placement of foster youth in educational settings, specific timelines and responsibilities for such transfers are mandated. Specific exceptions to mainstream school placements are spelled out and narrowly defined. Provisions to facilitate access to educational records of foster youth are included and the exchange of information between agencies is explicitly encouraged. Finally, other detailed provisions are designed to ensure foster youth do not incur further academic deficits or are not academically penalized because their mobility too often disrupts their educational experience.

- **Education Liaisons**. Every LEA is required to designate a staff person as a foster care education liaison who is responsible for ensuring and facilitating proper school placement, enrollment, and checkout from school of foster youth. The liaison also assists foster youth when transferring from one school to another by ensuring the proper transfer of credits, records, and grades (Educ. Code § 48853.5(b)(1)-(2)).
- **Transfers: Notice**. Every OLC placing agency is required to notify the LEA of the student's expected last day of attendance; request calculation of the student's seat time, credits, and grades in preparation for transfer of records; and request that the student be transferred out as soon as it becomes aware of the need to transfer a student (Educ. Code § 49069.5(c) & (e)).

- **Transfer: Records**. An LEA is required to deliver a foster youth's education information and records to the next educational placement within two business days of receiving a transfer request from a county placing agency (Educ. Code §49069.5(e); Educ. Code § 48853.5(d)(4)(C)).
- **Waiver of Enrollment Procedures**. Enrollment cannot be delayed even if the foster care student has outstanding fees, fines, textbooks, or other items due at the school last attended or is unable to produce records or clothing normally required for enrollment, such as: previous academic records, medical records, immunization records, proof of residency, other documentation, or school uniforms (Educ. Code § 48853.5(d)(4)(B)).
- **Priority Placement - Mainstream Public School**. It establishes a specific standard for the placement of foster youth in a mainstream public school by requiring that, in all instances, educational and school placement decisions be based on the best interests of the child (Educ. Code § 48850(a)). It narrowly defines exceptions for placement in an alternative setting:
 - when an individualized education program (IEP) requires placement in a non-public school or in another local educational agency;
 - when the person holding educational rights determines it is in the best interest of the student to be placed in another educational program; or
 - when a foster youth asserts the right to remain in his or her school of origin for the remainder of a school year (Educ. Code § 48853(a)(1)-(3)).
- **Facilitates Access to Student Records**. Authorizes the release of educational records to any county placing agency, without parental consent or court order, for the purpose of compiling the child's health and education summary, fulfilling educational case management responsibilities required by a juvenile court or by law, or to assist with the school transfer or enrollment of a foster student (Educ. Code § 49076(a)(11)).
- **Cooperative Agreements**. School districts, county offices of education, and county placing agencies are encouraged to develop cooperative agreements to facilitate confidential access to and exchange of pupil information by electronic mail, facsimile, electronic format, or other secure means (Educ. Code § 49076(a)(11)).
- **Protection of Grades and Credits**. LEAs are required to calculate and to accept credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed by a student while attending a public school, juvenile court school, or nonpublic, nonsectarian school (Educ. Code § 48645.5).
- **No Penalties for Absences**. Ensures foster youth will not be academically penalized for absences due to change in placement, attendance at a court hearing or other court-related activity (Educ. Code § 49069.5(g) & (h)).

PROGRAM EVALUATION

There has been no formal evaluation of the impact of AB 490 on the educational status of California's foster care students. However, prior to the statute's enactment, there were several reports which identified the educational barriers faced by foster youth and which served as the foundation for the statute's provisions.

- *Education of Foster Group Home Children, Whose Responsibility Is It? – Study of the Educational Placement of Children Residing in Group Homes Final Report* (January 2001) American Institute for Research; SRA Associates, University of California at Berkeley Child Welfare Research Center; Lodestar Research, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/documents/lcistudies.pdf>
- *Education for Foster Children: Removing Barriers to Academic Success* (April 2001) Bay Area Social Services Consortium, Center for Social Services Research School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/bassc/pdfs/EDUfc.pdf>
- *Policies, Procedures, and Practices Affecting the Education of Children Residing in Group Homes* (March 2003) The American Institutes for Research, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fr/se/documents/grouphomes.pdf>
- The summary report is entitled *Educating California's Foster Youth, The Policies, Procedures, and Practices Affecting the Education of Children Residing in Group Homes*, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fr/se/documents/fosteryth.pdf>

AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

Although no specific data or studies are available at this time regarding the effectiveness of AB 490, the most recent report issued by the California Department of Education concerning the state's Foster Youth Services (FYS) program sheds some light on the statute's impact. Part II of the report discusses common challenges in implementing effective FYS programs, which implicate numerous AB 490 provisions, including those concerning partial credit calculations, transportation, transfer of records, collaboration between partner agencies, notification of placement changes, and immediate enrollment.

See: Foster Youth Services Program (Education Code sections 42920-42925) Counseling, Student Support, and Service Learning Office, California Department of Education (February 15, 2006), <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/documents/fylegreport2005.pdf>.

RESOURCES

- Ensuring Educational Rights and Stability for Foster Youth: Assembly Bill 490—Training and Implementation Materials <http://www.abanet.org/child/rcjji/education/ab490.html> Includes AB490 summary and overview; the roles and responsibilities of Juvenile Court Judges, Attorneys, Social Workers, Probation, Caregivers, Schools; an

"Implementation Plan for AB 490—A School Blueprint," and an AB 490-related electronic presentation.

- Frequently Asked Questions & Answers About AB 490 (California Foster Youth Education Task Force) <http://ylc.org/AB490QuestionsAnswers.pdf>.
- Foster Youth Education Fact Sheets (California Foster Youth Education Task Force) <http://ylc.org/californiafactsheets082205.pdf>.
- California Department of Education Foster Youth Services <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/>
Includes general information regarding Foster Youth Services, including contact lists for all Foster Youth Services Program Coordinators and AB 490 Educational Liaisons and links to foster care/education-related publications.

BACKGROUND READING

- Courtner, M .E., Roderick, M., Smithgall, C., Gladden, R.M., & Nagaoka, J. (December 2004). *The Educational Status of Foster Children*. Chapin Hall Center for Children. http://www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1377&L2=61&L3=130
- Lichtenberg, L., Lee, A., Helgren, P. & Bradley, S. (Oct. 2004). *Helping foster children achieve educational stability and success: a field guide for information sharing*. Casey Family Programs. http://www.wa-schoolcounselor.org/documents/Field_Guide_DRAFT_rev%5b1%5d..pdf
- National Adoption Information Clearinghouse. (March 2006). *Educational Stability for Children and Youth in Foster Care, 2001-present*. National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information. http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/teleconferences/educational_stability.pdf
- Shea, N., Weinberg, L. & Zetlin, A. (May 2006). *Helping Your Child Succeed in School: An Education Handbook for Parents and Caregivers of Children and Youth in the Foster care System*. Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc. http://www.acoe.k12.ca.us/acoe_docs_spas/Parent_Ed_Handbook_May_2006.pdf

TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY

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Step 6. Children in the Child Welfare System

Broward County Model

(a promising model for interagency collaboration)

BRIEF OVERVIEW

The ***Broward County Model (Fostering Student Success)*** is an interagency plan to ensure that children in foster care are properly educated in safe, caring environments.

Fostering Student Success is an eight-year collaboration, documented in a formal interagency agreement (the "Agreement") to improve and support the academic progress of children in the child welfare system in Broward County, Florida. The Agreement provides procedures that create an awareness of these students' unique educational needs and supportive educational interventions to improve the educational outcomes for these students. Formal partnerships began with the School Board of Broward County and the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). ChildNet and Workforce One joined the collaboration in recent years.

Broward County schools have students who have been removed by the Dependency Court from the homes of their parents or primary caregivers and live in licensed foster homes or facilities. All of these children and youth have experienced abuse, neglect, or abandonment from their primary caretakers and, for the most part, suffer from emotional scars that are likely to affect their academic success. The students often "fall between the cracks" as they move from their family's home to multiple foster homes and, consequently, from school to school. A research project conducted by the School Board of Broward County documented that children in the child welfare system were educationally disadvantaged when compared to their same-aged peers. The general goal of this model is to implement planned interventions to remove as much of the educational disadvantage for these children as possible.

The Collaboration's Guiding Principals

- Education, stability within the educational setting, educational progress, including progress toward post-secondary education, and employability skills are important to all children, especially the children served by the child welfare system.
- Schools must fulfill constitutional and statutory obligations to educate children of compulsory school age and ensure that each child makes adequate yearly progress.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, local education agencies (LEAs) have obligations for education and related services for children with disabilities.

- LEAs and the child welfare system share responsibility for the early identification and intervention services needed by children who are confirmed to have been the victim of maltreatment as defined in Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) and IDEA Part C.
- The parties to the Agreement share responsibility for the elimination of barriers to school enrollment for children awaiting foster care placement.
- The children known to the Department could have, or be "at risk" of developing, academic and/or behavioral problems due to the disruption in their lives and, therefore, they may require special education services and interventions.
- School stability and attendance are strongly linked to academic achievement and both entities will encourage within their respective systems prompt enrollment, continuation of children in the school of origin whenever safe and feasible, and regular attendance.
- Students need to be in school and in the right school or program to be successful.
- Collaboration can ensure educational access and related care, including post-secondary education pursuits, and promote job training and employability skills essential to fostering the success of these students.
- Collaboration can avoid duplication of services or programs, and combine resources to maximize availability and delivery of services and programs.
- Communication between and among all interested parties best serve the children, families, and communities in which they reside.

IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

Agreement to Collaborate

Key to the model is the agreement to make all reasonable efforts to collaborate and cooperate regarding the education and related services for children in the child welfare system. Without such “buy in” on all levels, the agreement becomes a paper on the shelf. In order to support collaboration and remove any unintended barriers, the parties convene the stakeholders on a quarterly basis, at a minimum, in order to:

- a) Review each agency’s rules, regulations, policies and practices as they impact the education, special education, and related services of children in care.
- b) Make recommendations to the School Board, the District Administrator of DCF, and the Board of the ChildNet regarding procedures, processes, guidelines, and policies as they impact the children.
- c) Define and establish communication protocols, identify responsible staff, and facilitate prompt and substantive information sharing and communication between the parties.
- d) Provide technical assistance and support among the parties for the implementation of the Agreement.
- e) Review and report to the proper authorities any laws, administrative codes, policies, or plans that need to be amended in order to fully implement this Agreement and its intended purposes.
- f) Report to the group about the progress made in implementation of the agreement.

Liaisons

The parties each agreed to appoint a staff liaison responsible for implementation of this Agreement. The liaisons coordinate in promoting and maintaining procedures among the School Board, DCF District Office and ChildNet and Workforce One. They align their work to foster student success.

- a) **Court Liaison.** The School Board of Broward County provides staff to the court for shelter and dependency hearings and some staff who are also responsible for communication with the school-based personnel to share the change in custody or placement as reported at the hearings and work cooperatively with the DCF and ChildNet staff in protecting the children, obtaining educational programs and interventions, and coordinating transportation, training, and implementation efforts.
- b) **Education Liaison.** The Child Welfare agency provides a staff member as primary contact with the school system administration and as a specialist in education to support caseworkers. This individual also works cooperatively with the school staff in training.

- c) **School-Based Liaisons.** The school board has agreed to identify a staff person at each school to serve as a “Foster Care Designee,” and to establish roles and responsibilities of the designees. The Foster Care Designee is an informed contact person for the child, the caregiver, and the caseworker. Further, the designee reviews the educational records of the child and initiates any appropriate interventions as may enable the child to make educational progress.

Hearings

Within 24 hours of a child’s initial removal from home, a shelter hearing will be held and the judge will determine whether the child shall be maintained in state care, placed with an approved relative or other caregiver, or returned home. The Dependency Court Liaison attends the daily shelter hearings and reports the findings to the Foster Care Designee via e-mail. This facilitates appropriate school-based measures being taken to support the child, address specific safety concerns, and enforce court-orders regarding contact with the child by parents or other individuals.

School Registration Form for Children in Foster Care

A School Registration Information for Foster Care Children form is completed by ChildNet and provided to the Foster Care Designee at the respective school for every child in state care attending a Broward public or charter school. This form, created collaboratively by ChildNet and the school system, includes at a minimum: the student’s name; the student identification number; the name, address, and phone number of the caseworker and supervisor; and the phone number, name, address, and an emergency number for the foster care parent or agency. The form also includes: protective custody status; any special needs; educational, medical, social, emotional, or behavioral issues; whether there is a court order that precludes the natural parent, family, or guardian(s) from being in contact with the child; and any other court orders that might have an impact on the educational environment.

The form is received by the school immediately after the child has been placed in the custody of DCF/ChildNet or, in the case of a new registration, at the time of registration. The form, along with court orders and any other information related to a child’s foster care status, is kept in a confidential folder with the Foster Care Designee. When significant changes take place, an updated form is provided within 72 hours.

Registration Documentation

Children in foster care may be enrolled by either their caseworker or their foster parent. Foster care students are required to have the same forms of documentation for registration as other Broward County Students. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act, 42 USC §11431 *et seq.*, temporarily waives the enrollment requirements of proof of immunizations and other registration documentation for students who are considered “homeless” by state definition. Children residing in a temporary shelter arrangement while awaiting a permanent family or foster home placement are included

in this definition. No foster care student is denied prompt registration or school attendance.

For children who reside in a setting under the supervision of the courts, the caregiver assumes the parental role of registering the student in school. This caregiver provides a copy of the court order or other official documentation indicating the student has been officially and legally placed in the caregiver's physical custody. These children are not classified as being in foster care in Broward County.

The registration process is conducted privately in order to protect the student's rights to privacy and confidentiality.

Free and Reduced Meals

All children known to the DCF have an application completed for eligibility determination for free or reduced meals to ensure immediate processing and authorization for meal services. A foster care child, living in any licensed foster home or facility is considered a household of one. The amount that the caregiver receives for the child's personal use, not the foster parent's income, is considered when determining eligibility.

Placement Changes and Educational Stability

The school setting is often the most stabilizing environment for foster care youth as they travel from community to community. It becomes an important focal point of their existence, in which relationships with school staff and peers can be established and maintained. School success for the foster care child takes on major significance since the ability to break the cycle of trauma and poverty is often based on being educationally prepared for employment and the future. In most instances, students placed in a licensed shelter or foster home will move away from their home school, either temporarily or permanently. To support their educational stabilization, children residing in licensed settings may continue to attend their school of record or a previous school of attendance. Most students remain in their current school, unless it is determined that a change in schools should be made due to issues of safety or other circumstances. This decision is made collaboratively by ChildNet, school personnel, and the new caregiver/provider.

It is common for children in foster care to experience disruptions in their foster placement causing them to be moved from one home or facility to another. The ensuring disruption of academic progress can further set a child back emotionally and educationally. ChildNet has committed to place students in foster homes/settings with, or closest to, their home school whenever possible to facilitate stabilization of school placements.

When making decisions about an appropriate school placement, the following factors are considered:

- the student's academic, social, and emotional needs;
- safety or other risk factors;
- schedule/credit concerns for high school students (i.e. block vs. regular schedule);
- therapeutic services/relationships, such as those provided in EH/SED programs;
- the previous mobility of the student as well as potential plans for reunification;
- travel distance and length of bus ride, given the child's age/developmental level;
- ability for continued participation in before- and after-school activities and clubs; and
- input from the student, if age appropriate.

Movement between schools should preferably take place at logical breaks in the school calendar such as at the end of a marking period, semester, or school year.

School Transition

If it is determined that a change in school would be in the student's best interest, the parties agree to a protocol to expedite registration and, importantly, a transfer of records and information. The transition protocol includes: contact initiated by the current school's Foster Care Designee with the new school Foster Care Designee to discuss pertinent issues and paperwork regarding the child; transmittal of the confidential folder to the new school's Foster Care Designee; and expedited registration of the youth at the new school in the correct educational program.

Special Transportation

If the determination is made to maintain the student at his/her current school, the parties use a protocol for arranging any necessary transportation. Transportation requests may take up to 10 school days to be processed from the time of notification to the Dependency Court Liaison. The caseworker is responsible for ensuring temporary transportation for the child until the school district has determined the appropriate transportation option.

Whenever feasible, transportation should use bus stops that already exist or the addition of new stops on an existing route such as those for magnet programs, cluster programs, near-by schools, etc. The second transportation option would be to pay the foster care parent at the district reimbursement rate to transport the student (two round trips per day). This option must be pre-approved by the school district. When neither of these is feasible, the LEA commits to providing transportation in order to stabilize the student's education placement.

School-based Individual Planning

The school-based interventions begin with each principal identifying a Foster Care Designee as the single point of contact. The Foster Care Designee has primary responsibility for: coordinating and monitoring the support and educational interventions for the foster care student; and communicating with the caseworker, foster parent, and when appropriate, the biological parent. The Foster Care Designee meets with their foster care students a minimum of once a semester to monitor their needs and services and identify additional interventions or modifications needed. The Foster Care Designee is provided with a checklist to facilitate proper planning and interventions for the student.

Whenever a student is suspected of having a disability, appropriate procedures for are followed to determine eligibility. Referrals are handled on a priority basis as these students tend to be highly mobile.

Parental Rights/Educational Decision Making

Unless prohibited by court order, parents are encouraged to continue to make educational decisions for the child. Under Florida law, foster care parents have the same rights as other parents. Parental involvement is acknowledged as a contributor to academic success. Parents are encouraged to participate in conferences with the student's teachers and receive information and provide input about grading, attendance, behavior, student records, Section 504 rights, and other matters essential to the child's educational progress.

Special Education Decision Making/Surrogate Parents

The interagency agreement protocols facilitate the prompt determination of an educational decision-maker and the appointment of a trained surrogate parent when appropriate. The parties agree that special training is needed for surrogates and foster parents, not only on the special education process, but also on the impact of trauma from the abuse, neglect, abandonment, and removal from the home, as those events may affect the child's ability to learn.

When a student living in a foster home has or is perceived to have a disability, the school district must determine the person(s) who hold(s) the child's due process rights. Failure to determine this in a timely manner could result in the court appointing an educational decision-maker. The student's parents are encouraged to be actively involved and maintain their due process rights unless they are prohibited from participation by the court or their whereabouts are not known. In most situations, the foster parent may serve as the decision-making parent if there are no more than four total children in the home. Under Florida law, if there are more than four children in the home, the foster parent should remain actively involved, but a surrogate parent, as defined in IDEA, must be appointed.

Students residing in any type of group care setting, regardless of the number of children (i.e., shelter facilities, group homes, or residential treatment centers) require a surrogate parent if they meet any of the criteria listed below:

- parent's rights have been terminated by court order;
- parent's rights are still intact but the court has issued an order limiting their right to be the educational decision-maker;
- parents' whereabouts are unknown; or
- other situations as determined on a case-by-case basis regarding who is entitled by law to have a surrogate appointed but does not meet the criteria listed above.

The agreement has resulted in establishment of a solid group of trained surrogate parents and other persons who support good Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for this group of students.

Information Sharing

The interagency agreement allows ChildNet and the school district staff to share information about foster care students.

Comprehensive Behavioral Health Assessments

A comprehensive behavioral health assessment is provided through the state for all children removed from their homes due to child abuse, neglect, or abandonment. The purpose of this assessment is to provide assistance and recommendations to the courts and the case management agency to determine the specific needs of the child. One requirement of the assessment is that the evaluator must observe the child in a variety of settings, including school. Evaluators from these agencies are permitted to observe a student without further consent of the parent/guardian. The evaluator produces proper agency identification and a copy of the court order indicating that the child is in the legal custody of the child welfare agency before being granted access. Every effort is made not to disrupt the student's instruction. An interview with the student while at school is generally not needed unless the evaluator has exhausted all other opportunities to meet with the child.

Facilitating School Attendance and Addressing Truancy

To identify students in state custody who are not attending school, the LEA electronically forwards the attendance of foster care students to ChildNet on a regular basis. The case workers are required to monitor and address any school attendance problems, as they might be a sign of a service need and because they interfere with student progress. To promote attendance, efforts are made to schedule child welfare-related events outside of the school day,

Behavioral/Discipline Issues

Foster care youth are expected to follow the same student code of conduct guidelines as all other students. When a disciplinary issue arises, the parties have agreed to explore options relating to school-based infractions. Alternatives to external suspension

are required whenever possible for foster care students. Efforts are made to communicate with the foster parent/group home director and caseworker to determine interventions to support the youth's progress using resources as appropriate from each child-serving system.

Case Planning

The parties have developed protocols regarding case planning for a child known to the department, both at the time of plan development and plan review. Within the plan development or review process, the schools may provide information regarding the child and suggest services or tasks for the child or the family. The case plan may address the education of the child and include any tasks or strategies necessary to enable the child to maximize the attainment of educational goals. The case plan might include recommendations for parental involvement in the child's education.

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

If a child has an IEP or one is developed while the child is in foster care, the Foster Care Designees ensure that the appropriate individuals are involved in the development of the IEP and that the decision makers for the child have proper legal authority to act.

Independent Living Skills

The parties cooperate in developing programs to assist youth in achieving independence, both for students with and without disabilities. Collaboration in this area is designed to enhance but not supplant the schools' responsibilities under IDEA to ensure that community agencies are contacted and participate in the development of transition plans for students with disabilities. This collaboration works to ensure educational progress and to assist students in acquiring essential independent living skills, including readiness for pursuit of higher education goals and/or employment.

Pursuit of Post Secondary Education

The parties recognize the importance of encouraging post-secondary education pursuits for foster children and agree to work collaboratively to encourage continued education for these youth. The LEAs agree to train guidance counselors on the availability of fee waivers and scholarship opportunities designed to assist these children in continuing their education. The school system advises the ChildNet Independent Living staff of all resources for transition and transition planning available through its offices and suggests guidelines for transition plans to meet the special needs of students known to the Department.

Training and Staff Development

The parties agree to provide training and staff development related to the implementation of the agreement and to institutionalize the policies and processes needed to implement it. The schools must provide training for its staff to identify and serve the educational needs of the children known to the Department. This training includes a general understanding of the implementation of this Agreement and the

impacts of the trauma of abuse, neglect, abandonment, and removal from home on children known to the Department.

This training incorporates an education component into new or existing staff development for school personnel and caseworkers regarding methods for enrolling students, stabilizing school placements, access to educational services, referral for special education services when appropriate, IDEA and state implementing statutes for securing special education and related services including transition planning, the importance of education in child development, progress towards independence, and the impacts of trauma on children generally.

Training also is provided for foster parents on the rights of children in foster care to an education, the role of education in their development and adjustment, the proper ways to access education and related services for them, and the importance of and strategies for parental involvement in education for their success. DCF is mandated, either directly or through the Community-Based Care (CBC), to provide training to caseworkers, guardians ad litem, attorneys ad litem, judges, and others involved in the child welfare system regarding the services and information available through the schools.

AVAILABLE EVIDENCE AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

Findings in this report mirror the needs reported in the literature nationwide. Other key identified benefits of the agreement included: (a) Broward was ahead of other school districts in Florida, and most other areas of the nation, in the sharing of information and service provision to foster care students; (b) increased attempts by child welfare agencies to focus on stabilization of foster care and school placements; (c) the majority of foster care students attended school on the first day of the 2003-04 academic year; and (d) privatization presents the opportunity to enhance foster care students' educational status. Emerging findings indicate that the presence of the agreement continues to generate benefits for some of the most fragile students.

- Evaluation Report, 2003-2004: *Interagency Agreement Between The School Board Of Broward County, Florida, The Florida Department Of Children And Families, District 10, and Childnet, Inc.*, http://www.Broward.K12.Fl.U.S/Research_Evaluation/Evaluations/Dcffinal5-5-04.Pdf
- School Board of Broward County, Florida. (January 2003) *Foster Care Research Brief: An Examination of Students Participating in the Foster Care Program. Report from the Office of the Superintendent.*, http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/research_evaluation/Briefs/brief51-75/Fostercarebrief67.pdf.

RESOURCES AND BACKGROUND READING

Copies of the following documents are available online at:

<http://www.abanet.org/child/rcjji/education/#flo>

- Fostering Student Success. Child Welfare Agency Procedural Manual 2005-2006. Broward County, Florida (July 2005)
- Interagency Agreement between the School Board of Broward Count, Florida, the Broward County Department of Children and Family Services, ChildNet, Inc., and WorkForce One (April 18, 2006).
- School Registration Information for Foster Care Children form. Broward County, Florida.

TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY

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Step 6. Children in the Child Welfare System

Creating Trauma Sensitive School Cultures (emerging practices)

The three programs listed below are designed to improve the caring climate of schools and to reduce the impact of trauma and other barriers to learning.

There has been a push in recent years to examine how trauma impacts children by undermining their ability to learn, have healthy relationships, and function in school and the community. Trauma can occur from such things as: experiencing violence, neglect, witnessing traumatic events, or lack of a nurturing environment. All children in foster care experience some form of trauma from being removed from their natural home environment, regardless of the circumstances leading up to their removal from the home. Living within the foster care system can be confusing, scary, and disheartening for children. This can invariably lead to difficulties in school from academics to social interactions with teachers and peers.

Each of these three programs designed to create caring schools that are more sensitive to children who have experienced trauma has a foundation in research. Components of each have been proven to be effective. One is a policy agenda with a flexible framework schools can use to create school-wide trauma-sensitive environments; the second tool is an approach based on a three-tiered prevention model, targeted and intensive intervention model connecting schools, families, and mental health services; and the third is a model to create change within the culture of an entire organization. Full implementation of some of these tools requires new staff, monetary resources, and the support of an entire school community. However, some components of these tools provide information and ideas that can be implemented by individual educators.

Each of these tools can be considered a very strong emerging practice. Since the tools are in the first years of implementation, there is limited evidence available about implementation results. Regardless, all of the tools are in the process of being implemented and evaluated, and initial results are positive.

(1) HELPING TRAUMATIZED CHILDREN LEARN

http://www.massadvocates.org/uploads/95/135/Help_Tram_Child-Med.pdf

Massachusetts Advocates for Children (www.massadvocates.org)

Brief Overview

Helping Traumatized Children Learn is a report and policy agenda created by the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, a partnership between Massachusetts Advocates for Children and [Harvard Law School's Hale and Dorr Legal Services Center](#). The report discusses how trauma impacts a child's academic performance, behavior, and relationships and provides policy recommendations for legislators and community members.

The report provides a "Flexible Framework" that schools can use to weave trauma-sensitive approaches throughout the school day while allowing the school to implement specific and creative programming within its individual resource strengths and constraints.

The six key components of the Flexible Framework are:

1. **Schoolwide Infrastructure and Culture.** With "buy in" from staff, principals, and other administrators, the report provides a structure for supporting staff to address the needs of traumatized children through strategic planning; assessment of staff training and support needs; a structure for confidential conferencing of individual cases; reviewing of policies with an understanding of trauma; a community liaison team; an ongoing method for identifying and addressing barriers to success; and an evaluation process.
2. **Staff Training.** Provides insights on staff training that enable staff to partner with parents, and develop teaching strategies for students who have been traumatized.
3. **Linking with Mental Health Professionals is Critical.** Building clinical support for school staff and accessibility to mental health resources for families
4. **Academic Instruction for Traumatized Children.** This consists of basic teaching approaches, language-based teaching approaches, and appropriate evaluations for students affected by trauma.
5. **Nonacademic Strategies.** These assist in building relationships and providing extracurricular activities for children affected by trauma.
6. **School Policies, Procedures, and Protocols.** Develop policies around discipline, communication with parents, the handling of restraining orders, filing of abuse complaints and building safety plans for children.

Massachusetts has passed a law (MGLc 69 Sec 1N(b) establishing safe and supportive learning environments (also known as "Trauma Sensitive Schools") grant program. Its goal is "to address within the regular education school program the ...needs of children whose behavior interferes with learning, particularly those who are suffering from the

traumatic effects of exposure to violence." Many school districts are using the *Flexible Framework* as the centerpiece for grant requests and grant implementation.

Implementation Essentials

The essential element of the *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* report is enlisting support of key leaders in the school and use the resources of a trauma expert. Schools and educators are encouraged to brainstorm specific programming for each category based on availability of resources in a particular school or classroom.

Program Evaluation and Available Evidence

This program is yet to be formally evaluated but some results may be available by late 2007. The *Framework* is based on available research cited in the report. Massachusetts Advocates for Children recently began collecting evaluation data (summer 2006). The Massachusetts Department of Education provides oversight to the school districts receiving this grant and is in the process of beginning a comprehensive evaluation of the grant recipients in the 2006-07 school year.

References and Background Reading

- *Helping Traumatized Children Learn: A Report and Policy Agenda*, Massachusetts Advocates for Children (2005),
http://www.massadvocates.org/uploads/95/135/Help_Tram_Child-Med.pdf
- The Massachusetts Department of Education Trauma-Sensitive School initiative,
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/tss/>
- *Troubled in School*. (10-24-05) Boston Globe editorial.
<http://www.massadvocates.org/uploads/77/144/GlobeEditorial.pdf>

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(2) TURNAROUND FOR CHILDREN: A School and Community Systems Approach

www.turnaroundforchildren.org

Brief Overview

The *Turnaround Approach* is an integrated program in a school to train school employees to create an environment that fosters growth and learning. There are four key components:

1. **Education Coach.** An education coach is assigned to each school to assist the faculty and staff in responding to student difficulties and provide support to the administration and professional development to the staff. The education coach facilitates the three teams: Core Team; Instructional Support Team and; Student Intervention Team.

2. **Student Support Social Worker.** Each school must have a licensed certified social worker on campus who works with the entire staff to ensure timely interventions are made on behalf of students.
3. **Family/Community Engagement Coordinator.** The coordinator works with the education coach, social worker, and school staff to engage families in the school. This person also provides training and information about community resources to families and collaborates with other community programs.
4. **Mental Health Service Model.** Mental Health services are provided to the school either through a school-based program, a mobile professional team, or a Triage and Consultation Unit that offers emergency mental health services. This model provides case management, school interventions, and medical assistance when needed.

Implementation Essentials

The three-tiered prevention-intervention model noted in the Introduction (to this Tool) to support the conditions for learning and behavior is the essential foundation of the *Turnaround for Children* program.

The program uses a team problem solving approach that examines:

- school-wide strategies and policies and procedures that support the conditions for learning using an administrator-led, stakeholder-rich *Core Team*;
- training and supports for enhancing staff skills in identifying, addressing, and monitoring academic and behavioral needs and progress for students found at-risk through the *Instructional Support Team* and;
- access and integration of intensive school and agency interventions for students and families with serious social-emotional and mental health needs are managed by the school and agency staff *Student Intervention Team*.

The three teams have interlocking membership (i.e. social worker, administrator, school psychologist, or counselor) and communicate regularly to ensure the alignment of interventions so that progress can be sustained and services efficiently utilized. Data are monitored by all teams to ensure that the program's elements are producing positive results.

This program requires each school to hire additional staff (student support social worker or similar school mental health staff) and partner with existing mental health services providers in the community as well as the education coach and family/community engagement coordinator described above. It also requires needs-driven training and support for existing school staff. Additional implementation information is available from <http://www.turnaroundforchildren.org>.

Program Evaluation and Available Evidence

The *Turnaround Approach* is being fully implemented in over 15 middle and elementary schools with high poverty populations in New York City. Results have been reported in two pilot schools—PS 132 and 115 in Manhattan's Washington Heights neighborhood. These schools have implemented key components of the program, including: an

education coach, structured teams, staff training, and school-wide prevention programs as well as a partnership with Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital and community programs. Reports show increased mainstreaming and reduced discipline referrals. Preliminary results (2005) for PS 132 include: test scores that show academic improvements; a decrease in inappropriate special education referrals from 4% to 2.4%; and greater movement of students from full-time special education classrooms to more inclusive part-time special education services (19.3% of special education populations partially mainstreamed as compared to 11.4% in New York City public schools). There also has been increased attendance, reduction in student conflict/disruptive behavior, and enhanced language skills. *Turnaround* has partnered with the American Institutes for Research (www.air.org) as the primary evaluator for the program and is in the process of collecting data from 12 sites that should be available in 2007.

Additional information about evidentiary support for the program is available on the *Turnaround* website, which will be updated as more evidence becomes available.

http://www.turnaroundforchildren.org/what_research_txt.htm

References

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<http://www.haworthpress.com/store/ArticleAbstract.asp?sid=FJ4KFE30VBR98GEU9WC6E45H57RV6MB1&ID=21342>

(3) SANCTUARY MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE FOR CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT

<http://www.sanctuaryweb.com/main/sanctuary%20articles.htm>

Brief Overview

This model is described as "a trauma-informed whole system approach designed to facilitate the development of structures, processes, and behaviors on the part of staff, children, and the community-as-a-whole that can counteract the biological, affective, cognitive, social, and existential wounds suffered by children in care." The model focuses on putting "democracy in action" by requiring continual reflection and feedback from all levels of an organization.

This model is designed to help an organization develop a culture that incorporates these seven characteristics:

- non-violence;
- emotional intelligence;
- inquiry and social learning;
- shared governance;
- open communication;
- social responsibility; and
- growth and change.

The model uses a concept called S.E.L.F. It is a therapeutic model for use with clients as well as staff in dealing with issues that come up within the community. S.E.L.F. stands for:

- **S**afety
- **E**motional Management
- **L**oss
- **F**uture

Other key components of this model include community meetings, safety plans, curriculum development, psycho-education, staff training, client participation, and evaluation.

Implementation Essentials

This model focuses on an entire shift in organization thinking. A *core team* is initially required that includes a representative from every level of the organization. This team is ultimately responsible for developing and implementing a curriculum that includes the entire organization. The core team works with the entire community to develop organizational values and beliefs which ultimately lead to the creation of a Constitution for the community.

To use the *Sanctuary* name, a certified training program must be completed as well as an agreement to on-going review for the certification process.

Program Evaluation

Rated as an "acceptable/emerging" practice by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse, <http://www.cachildwelfareclearinghouse.org/program/16>

Available Evidence

The evaluative research concerning the Sanctuary Model has been focused on residential treatment facilities. There is a paper, *Preliminary Results of a Study Examining the Implementation and Effects of a Trauma Recovery Framework for Youths in Residential Treatment* that provides evaluative data. The Sanctuary Leadership

Development Institute at Andrus Children's Center in Yonkers, NY has training and information concerning the Sanctuary Model.

Resources and Background Reading

- Bloom, S.L., *Creating Sanctuary: Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies*. 1997, New York: Routledge.
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GENERAL BACKGROUND READING

Childhood Trauma

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network, www.nctsnet.org
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TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY

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Step 6. Children in the Child Welfare System

Endless Dreams Building Educational Support for Youth in Foster Care (an emerging practice)

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Increasing school staff and other service providers' awareness of the positive impact they can have on children and youth in foster care is a critical first step in improving educational outcomes for these children and youth. The educational needs of youth in foster care—half a million at any given time—remain largely unrecognized. Yet the foster care experience has an enormous impact on educational outcomes at every level. Casey Family Programs developed the *Endless Dreams* video and training curriculum to assist in this effort. These practice-oriented tools are designed to support education advocates, specialists, liaisons, CASA volunteers, child welfare professionals, and their agencies to work together to assist youth in care with their educational needs.

In 2000, while working with a high school in Seattle to provide tutoring to youth in out-of-home care, staff realized they needed to do a better job educating the educators about the unique educational needs of youth in out-of-home care. Consequently, the *Endless Dreams* video was developed as a tool to do just that. With the release of the video, educators became more interested in the needs of youth in foster care and about the foster care system in general. In January 2005, after being piloted in Texas, the *Endless Dreams* curriculum was developed and published.

The *Endless Dreams video* showcases the great potential of schools to support and enrich the lives of youth in care. The video features a young woman in care and describes how life in foster care affects her educational successes and challenges. Social workers, teachers, education specialists, and foster parents share their recommendations for how to support the educational needs of youth in out-of-home care. After watching the video, participants are asked about their thoughts and perceptions regarding it.

Points made in the video include:

- the impact of a chaotic early childhood and how this creates a barrier to educational success for children who are in out-of-home care;
- the guilt that children and youth feel about being removed from their home and how this influences their behavior in school and reinforces their misperception that removal from their home was their fault;
- the detrimental effects that numerous school moves can have on a child's academic achievement;
- the emotional manifestations of living in out-of-home care, including issues with sleep, worries and concerns about birth parents or elderly grandparents who may be raising them, and stress of having to do school projects that focus on such topics as family trees or autobiographies; and
- the importance of having at least one connected adult in the educational life of a child or youth in-out-of-home care and how this person can be the change agent in a child's outlook and engagement in their education.

The ***Endless Dreams*** training curriculum is a comprehensive, peer-reviewed curriculum, composed of ten one-hour sessions. Each session includes a facilitator's guide which provides training outcomes; materials needed; details on the facilitator's role before, during, and after the presentation; a step-by-step agenda for the session (including a script or outline for the facilitator); and overheads and handouts.

The curriculum illustrates how child welfare practice and regulatory environment affect the educational needs of youth in out-of-home care. It provides solid, practical advice for educators on implementing policies and procedures to improve outcomes. Optimally, each school that completes the training takes steps to address the particular needs of youth in out-of-home care in its annual school building plan.

The ten modules of the *Endless Dreams* Training curriculum are:

- Session 1: Introduction to the Educational Needs of Youth in Foster Care and Out-of-Home Care;
- Session 2: Understanding the Foster Care System – Part I;
- Session 3: Understanding the Foster Care System – Part II;
- Session 4: Understanding the Impacts on Youth who are Part of the "System;"
- Session 5: Roles and Responsibilities: Working with Youth in Foster Care;
- Session 6: Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care and Out-of-Home Care;
- Session 7: Indicators of Systems Change;
- Session 8: Educational Support for Youth in Transition;
- Session 9: Class-wide Strategies for Increasing Knowledge Around the Issue of Out-of-Home Care Students for All Participants; and
- Session 10: Beyond the School Day: Building a Supportive Community.

IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

Certification to deliver the *Endless Dreams* training curriculum requires a six-hour “train the trainer” learning session. Upon successful completion of the learning session, trainees are certified by Casey Family Programs to train others in the *Endless Dreams* curriculum. Newly certified trainers receive a complimentary copy of the *Endless Dreams* video and training curriculum. Copies of the *Endless Dreams* video are available for free by contacting the Casey Family Programs website: www.casey.org.

Those eligible to participate in than-the-trainer learning session are individuals who are familiar (either professionally or personally) with the foster care system. Additionally, they should have access to schools and other programs that they can bring the training to. To inquire about the train-the-trainer learning sessions, contact to contactus@casey.org.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

As of August 2006, over 150 participants have been certified as *Endless Dreams* trainers. Evaluations from the trainer-the-trainers learning sessions have indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the training. Over 1,500 evaluations of *Endless Dreams* sessions, conducted by certified trainers reveal that audience members (largely consisting of educators, foster parents, CASA volunteers, and child welfare workers) felt they knew more about the educational needs of youth in out-of-home care and they would be more likely to advocate on behalf of that population’s educational needs as a result of their participation in training.

AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

The *Endless Dreams* video and curriculum were developed to fill a void—the fact that educators know little about the unique educational needs of youth in out-of-home care. For youth in foster care, educational success is potentially a positive counterweight to abuse, neglect, separation, and impermanence. Positive school experiences enhance students’ well-being, help them make more successful transitions to adulthood, and increase their chances for personal fulfillment and economic self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, the educational outcomes for youth in foster care are dismal. A number of recent studies revealed that only about 56% of foster youth graduate from high school while in care as older adolescents (Pecora, et al., 2005). Studies show that only about 13% of former foster youth go on to college compared to about 60% of all high school seniors (*Connected By 25: A Plan for Investing in Successful Futures for Foster Youth*, 2003) and only 3% will eventually graduate from college (Pecora, et al., 2005) as compared to about 27% of the general adult population (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2004).

Research over the past three decades shows that, compared to the general school population, the half-million children in foster care in the United States have lower grade point averages, change schools more frequently, earn fewer credits toward graduation, have lower scores on state testing and are more likely to be exempted from state testing; and, are more likely to be in special education programs with disproportionate representation in special education classes that are segregated. Recent research conducted by Chapin Hall found that children's' experiences prior to placement in foster care contribute substantially to their educational delays (Smithgall, et al., 2004). However, placement in foster care seldom serves as an alleviating factor in academic failure and often contributes to it by frequent home placement moves, resulting in many school placement changes.

Recommendations for improving educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care fall into four key categories: school placement and transfer issues, collaboration and training, supports and services, and preparation for adulthood (Casey Family Programs, 2004). These categories are not mutually exclusive and will have the greatest impact when the issue of educational success for youth in care is addressed in a multi-faceted, multi-systemic manner. *Endless Dreams* includes those components that research suggests must be addressed for youth in foster care to have successful school and post-school outcomes.

- **School Placement and Transfer Issues**

The longer youth are in foster care, the greater the number of home placements they experience (Yu, Day & Williams, 2002a). A change in home placements often is accompanied by a change in schools. By the sixth grade, students who had changed schools four or more times had lost approximately one year of educational growth (Kerbow, 1996). School placement stability is paramount to educational success for all students, but particularly for those who are most vulnerable to other disruptions in their lives. Of course, no one advocates that youth remain in schools that are unsafe, or that provide an inferior education. However, education and child welfare systems must work to eliminate enrollment barriers and other delays that create unnecessary disruptions to a youth's schooling.

- **Collaboration and Training**

There is a critical need for increased collaboration and cross-training among the three major systems involved with these young people – child welfare, education, and judiciary – at the local, state and national levels (Yu, et al., 2002a). A fourth group that needs to be trained and collaboratively involved are caregivers. Effective collaboration means working together to maintain school placement stability, sharing a youth's pertinent information and records, and ensuring a youth's timely enrollment in school. Interagency protocols, preferably supported by appropriate level regulation, are essential to creating a comprehensive, effective collaborative system.

- **Supports and Services**

When health and safety concerns are present in foster care, education takes a back seat. To make up for this deficit, youth often need considerable supplemental education services. Supplemental services include: mental health services, counseling and advisory support, tutoring, mentoring, career assessment and counseling, and access to remedial and enrichment offerings, including extracurricular activities. Toddlers and preschoolers should attend research-based early educational intervention programs as soon as they enter the child welfare system. Youth identified as needing special education services are a particularly vulnerable subgroup of youth in out-of-home care. It is estimated that between 30 and 50 percent of students in foster care may qualify for special education services because of a disability (Geenen & Powers, 2003).

- **Postsecondary Preparation Issues**

Postsecondary education or training is important for a successful adulthood is clear. In addition to personal benefits, there are clear economic advantages – annual median earnings of college graduates exceed high school graduates by over \$10,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). However, youth in foster care are considerably less likely to adequately prepare for college enrollment while in high school. While over 70% of youth in foster care desire to go to college, only 15% of youth in foster care are likely to be enrolled in college preparatory classes during high school compared to 32% of all students. Preparing for postsecondary education or training must begin in middle school and be the focus of high school. Actively supporting youth to progress through the critical steps in preparing for and succeeding at the postsecondary level must involve foster parents, caseworkers, teachers, counselors, mentors and advocates. See *It's My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training Guide* for more information on this recommendation.

RESOURCES

- For additional information on the *Endless Dreams* Train-of-the-Trainers learning session, contact Casey Family Programs at contactus@casey.org or visit www.casey.org/ToolsAndResources
- For a free copy of the *Endless Dreams* video, contact Casey Family Programs at contactus@casey.org with your request for a free DVD or VHS copy. Be sure to include a mailing address with your request.
- *A Road Map for Learning: A Framework for Education Practice from Casey Family Programs* (Casey Family Programs, 2004), <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/ARoadmapforLearning.htm>
- *In School, The Right School, Finish School: A Guide to Improving Educational Opportunities for Court-Involved Youth* (National Children's Law Network 2005) <http://www.illinoisprobono.org/UPLOADS/004400In%20School,%20The%20Right%20School,%20Finish%20School%20->

[%20A%20Guide%20to%20Improving%20Educational%20Opportunities%20for%20Court-Involved%20Youth.pdf](#)

- *It's My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training* (Casey Family Programs 2006), www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/IMLPostsecondaryEd.htm

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TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY

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Step 6. Children in the Child Welfare System

Fresno County Model (a promising model for interagency collaboration)

BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Fresno County Model is an interagency collaborative, data-driven, team model that is designed to serve children in foster care by reducing barriers to learning and to improve academic outcomes. Developing and formalizing collaborative working relationships between school and child welfare personnel and other community agencies to address foster care student educational gaps and poor school performance is a model well founded in theory and has begun to show measured success in California's Fresno County.

Since March 2003, a group of child welfare, education, mental health, probation, children's advocates and other interested stakeholders of the Fresno County community has met regularly to discuss ways to improve educational outcomes for youth involved with the county's child welfare system.² The goals of the "Fresno Model" collaborative effort are to: identify and address the needs of foster youth with a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 2.0 and below; provide stability for these children in their educational experiences; increase the number of foster youth graduating from high school; establish partnerships between local school districts and the child welfare agency; and improve access to college for foster youth in Fresno County.

A Strategic Plan was developed and a mission statement adopted: "*To improve or establish processes that reduce or eliminate the barriers to school success faced by Fresno County children and families when the children are in out-of-home placement in Fresno County.*"

²This group was convened at the request of the Youth Law Center and agreed to serve as the first site for community-based work in *Expanding Opportunities for At Risk Youth*, a project funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation to address educational opportunities for foster care youth. The group is also focusing on education issues impacting youth in Fresno's juvenile justice system.

Goals and objective measures of outcomes have been identified and preliminary successful results are being reported.

Guiding Principles

- 1) Children in state care should have the same educational opportunities and supports afforded their peers.
- 2) Every child should have identified educational goals and individuals in his or her life who can help the child meet those goals.
- 3) Changes in living arrangements and educational placements should be kept at a minimum and children should be allowed to remain in their home school whenever possible.
- 4) Decisions concerning placement must take into consideration the educational needs of the child and should be made in consultation with individuals involved with the child's education.
- 5) Decisions concerning educational issues should take into consideration the child's living situation (placement) and should be made in consultation with individuals involved with the child.
- 6) Records transfer and school enrollment policies and procedures should be streamlined to allow the prompt, appropriate school placement of every student.
- 7) Care providers and professionals should help ensure the child has an appropriate school placement and support the child's educational activities.
- 8) Data analysis should be used to evaluate interventions and to inform policies and practices.

Key components of the "Fresno Model" collaborative effort

- **Interagency Committee on Education.** An interagency committee meets regularly to discuss ways to improve educational outcomes for foster youth and to oversee the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The committee consists of representatives from: Fresno County's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Fresno Unified School District (FUSD), the Fresno County Office of Education (FCOE), the Youth Law Center (YLC), and other interested individuals from mental health, probation, other school districts, local advocacy organizations, and other education professionals.
- **Information Sharing.** A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was entered into between DCFS and FUSD for the purpose of sharing relevant data and information (see <http://ylc.org/fresnoagreement.pdf>). Later, a standing order was issued by the local court authorizing data sharing (see <http://ylc.org/fresnostandingorder.pdf>).
- **Decision making.** The committee agreed a multidisciplinary team approach, which is familial and culturally relevant, should address the needs of the child and the child's parents in the following areas: social/emotional, health, mental health, placement, and education.

IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

Core component strategies of the Fresno Model are:

- *Improve decision making to increase information sharing and collaboration and improve school success.*
 - 1) Using an interagency student focused team decision-making process, plans were developed to make each child's educational goals and needs a part of key child welfare decisions at critical points, including entry into care and changes in placement.
 - 2) Develop ways to include child welfare participation in key educational decisions.
 - 3) Include family systems in all decision making.
 - 4) Ensure each local education agency (LEA) has appointed a Foster Care Educational Liaison (AB 490, Calif. EDUC. CODE §48853.5(b)-(e), <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=wic&group=15001-16000&file=16000-16014>).
 - 5) Identify and appoint an Educational Liaison for DCFS and Probation (see <http://www.ylc.org/ImprovingEducationalOpportunitiesforYouthintheCWandJJSys tems.pdf>). Foster Care Educational Liaisons have been appointed in five Fresno school districts. DCFS also appointed an Educational Liaison. The Educational Liaisons from DCFS, FUSD and FCOE have developed a close working relationship to resolve potential problems in individual cases in a mutual effort between students, care providers, school districts, child welfare, probation, and other agencies.
- *Use data to inform decisions.*
 - 1) Use an MOU between FUSD and DCFS to obtain data to analyze education progress and problems for youth in placement.
 - a. DCFS is required to maintain data concerning placement and services in California's Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS). CWS/CMS data provides information, such as number of placement moves, which is useful in tracking progress. By using address information, the CWS/CMS data allow for mapping, such as identifying the school districts in which children are placed and the distance children are placed from home.
 - b. FUSD maintains data on school mobility, discipline, enrollment, attendance, credits, reading and math scores, GPA, and special education placement. The FUSD data system allows sorting by gender, grade level, and race/ethnicity. Detailed information allows for targeted inquiries.
 - 2) Initially follow and analyze a discrete number of students rather than all ages and grades.
 - a. Initial focus on students in foster care in grades 7 through 9.
 - 3) Pay particular attention to children with emotional, behavioral, or physical limitations that affect their ability to succeed in regular school settings.

- 4) Implement information-sharing strategies in other school districts.
- *Improve Record Keeping and Information Sharing.*
 - 1) Increase the completion of educational passports (*see* Calif. Welf. & Inst. Code § 16010.)
 - 2) Increase the use of Foster Youth Services Placement form (*see* <http://www.fosteryouthservices.fcoe.net/pdf/NOP%20NOD%20Procedures%20Final.pdf>).
 - 3) Implement information sharing strategies piloted by the FUSD in other school districts in the county.
 - *Develop a plan to provide training.*
 - 1) Child welfare and probation staff: about the education system and their responsibilities with respect to education for children under their supervision;
 - 2) education staff: about the child welfare and probation systems;
 - 3) care givers: about the importance of education and their role in supporting a child's school success;
 - 4) youth: about educational opportunities and their rights; and
 - 5) everyone: about available services and resources.

Youth Law Center (YLC) has assisted local partners in providing training on AB 490 and other education requirements, on education issues for juvenile court officers, and to placement workers and foster youth members of the local California Youth Connection chapter and Independent Living Program staff. YLC staff also provides on-going technical assistance on a wide array of educational legal issues to DCFS, FCOE and FUSD Educational Liaisons.
 - *Develop a monitoring system.* A monitoring system is needed to oversee the process and coordination of services; specifically, to identify problem areas, evaluate what is going well and what is not, and make recommended changes.
 - *Evaluation.*

The results of these coordinated interventions are being measured by their effects on the academic and behavioral goals established by the teams.

Beginning in September 2004, DCFS, in partnership with the FUSD, FCOE, and YLC, implemented a pilot study focused on 21 foster youth in relative care who were enrolled in a regular program in 7th - 9th grade within FUSD and who had an average GPA of 2.0 or below. Its purpose is to demonstrate that academic improvement will occur as a result of increased support, resources, and targeted case management that an "educational team" provides. Evaluation steps include:

- Educational Staffing Assessment (ESA) Data: FUSD and DCFS personnel complete the ESA Form that includes pertinent information about each student. Quarterly statistics received from FUSD are analyzed by the DCFS

- Educational Liaison. As of August 2006, DCFS staff is in the process of drafting a report to summarize their findings (*see Available Evidence, below*).
- MSW Interns: All students in the pilot were matched with an MSW Intern from California State University, Fresno. The interns meet with each student once a month to discuss academic and other concerns. Issues are also discussed with care providers and others. The interns also offer case management services.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

To verify that children in placement have educational problems beyond those experienced by their peers, DCFS selected 50 children each from family foster care, group care, and kinship care who were enrolled in FUSD, regardless of their grade level or age. FUSD then ran data on these students to identify school mobility, days enrolled and days attended, days suspended and days expelled, GPA, and reading and math scores. A significant percentage of these students were at risk for academic failure. Most children had a "solid D" GPA; the median GPA was 1.79 for children in group homes, 1.89 for children in relative placements, and 2.0 for children in foster homes. Data for children in out-of-home care were compared to children living at home who qualify for the school lunch program.

A comparison of reading, math, and language scores showed that children in out-of-home care fall in the bottom third of the overall FUSD student body. Average GPA was 1.74, and these scores decline considerably for youth as they move from middle school to high school. Children in out-of-home care attended school slightly less often than the comparison group, with variations according to the type of placement. The number of times a student changed schools was higher among children in out-of-home care. Students in out-of-home care attempted an average of 31 credits in a school year but completed only an average of 22. Suspensions were greater among students in out-of-home care, but expulsions were not significantly higher. Baseline data was developed that includes: absences; average GPA; credits attempted and earned; days enrolled and attended; school, address moves; suspensions; and California Standards Test (CTS) averages in math and English language arts. These data are gathered and grouped by student foster-care placement.

AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

The Middle School Pilot study of 21 students in placement included the following information: absences; GPA; number of credits; promotion and retention; special education; suspensions; behavior; difficulties experienced; and successes or improvements. Initial data from the pilot study reveals that 71% of the youth improved their GPA. Thirty-three percent of the students are averaging a GPA of 2.0 or above. Twenty of the students were promoted and 71% had attendance of 90% or above during the school year.

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- Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services, <http://www.fresnohumanservices.org/ChildrenandFamilyServices/default.htm>
- *Project Access*, Fresno Unified School District, <http://www.fresno.k12.ca.us/divdept/stafed/projectaccess/>

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TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY

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Step 6. Children in the Child Welfare System

It's My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training (A Guide Series for Transition Services) (an emerging practice)

BRIEF OVERVIEW

The importance of postsecondary education or training to a successful adulthood is clear. In addition to personal benefits such as improved self-worth and confidence, there are economic advantages. An August 2006 Department of Labor report, *America's Dynamic Workforce*, <http://www.dol.gov/asp/media/reports/workforce2006/>, highlights the current make-up and trends in the labor force. It provides key evidence of the importance of post-secondary education in decreasing the unemployment rate and increasing wages for employees. In 2005, individuals with a college degree working full-time earned a median of \$430 more a week (\$22,360 a year) than those with a H.S. diploma and no college experience. An even greater disparity exists -- \$640 a week -- between those with a college degree and those without a H.S. diploma. Individuals with at least some college or an Associates' degree earned a median of \$87 more a week (\$4,454 a year) than those with only a H.S. diploma, and a median of \$261 a week (\$13, 572 a year) than individuals without a H.S. diploma.

Youth who enroll in higher education typically follow a series of steps: they develop aspirations for more education, engage in academic preparation, research and assess postsecondary options, take entrance exams, apply for admission and financial aid, and enroll. Students who start preparing for postsecondary education late in their high school careers, as is the case with many youth in foster care, are at a disadvantage but should not be discouraged from pursuing postsecondary education. In fact, the average age of college students continues to increase, and strategies and resources are also available for these students.

In 2001 Casey Family Programs—working with young people in foster care, alumni of care, families, and other stakeholders—published *It's My Life*, a framework to develop services for young people preparing to make the transition from foster care to successful adulthood. Based on the belief that the domains of our lives are interconnected, this framework promotes a holistic approach to transition services. The

It's My Life series of guides build on that framework, offering specific strategies, tactics, and resources for youth and the adults who guide and support them. ***It's My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training*** (2006) is a valuable resource for educators, counselors, and child welfare professionals who work with youth of transition age. It follows ***It's My Life: Housing***, published in 2005 and ***It's My Life: Employment***, published in 2004. Published volumes are available online (see *Resources* below).

It's My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training is a 176-page guide recommending practical strategies and resources for working with young people to help them prepare for postsecondary education/training and to promote successful completion. The guide provides:

- a wealth of links to online resources on preparation, study skills, financial aid, and student housing;
- a comprehensive guide to standardized tests;
- a step-by-step plan for applying for financial aid;
- resources for students with special needs;
- checklists for students in each secondary grade level; and
- retention strategies focusing on underrepresented students.

Based on research, the guide offers eight recommendations for helping young people begin and succeed in postsecondary programs. Numerous strategies and resources are provided for each of the eight recommendations:

- Foster high postsecondary aspirations.
- Encourage long-term educational and career planning.
- Stress rigorous academic preparation.
- Support students in taking standardized tests.
- Support students in choosing, applying for, and enrolling in postsecondary education.
- Help students obtain adequate financial aid.
- Engage young adults who have missed out on postsecondary preparation.
- Help students adjust to and complete their college program.

Data show that students who begin planning for postsecondary education as early as 8th grade are much more likely to enroll in higher education. To prepare adequately, students must follow certain prescribed time sequences and deadlines. For example, they must complete the first year of algebra in time to take three more years of high school math; ACT and SAT tests must be taken on given dates; and college and career and technical program applications all have deadlines for submission. Even if it is not possible to start this process in middle school, it is important to focus on the same elements: academic preparation; test preparedness; information about postsecondary options; and guidance and coaching towards enrollment. With this in mind, the guide provides a general timeline and yearly checklists, beginning in 7th grade, for preparing students for postsecondary education. Each activity in the checklists is keyed by page

number to the strategies in the guide giving the information needed to accomplish the activities. The checklists include specific activities for students with disabilities.

IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

It's My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training can be downloaded for free from the Casey Family Programs website:

www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/IMLPostsecondaryEd.htm.

Many resources in this Guide can be found on the Internet. However, the Guide stresses the importance of ensuring that young people are Internet savvy before suggesting that they use such sites. They need to be aware that suggestions to visit sites for free information are not endorsements for products and services sold there and to use caution in divulging personal information and adequate safeguards when making personal contacts through the Internet. The Guide cautions about the importance of keeping an eye out for scholarship and financial aid scams, noting that companies that guarantee free money for tuition or require payment for scholarships are probably not credible (see "Be aware of scholarship scams!" on page 113). The Guide lists some resources for teaching young people about Internet safety and security including:

- Safe Teens, www.safeteens.com
- Get Net Wise, www.getnetwise.com
- Internet Safety 101, www.about.com [Click *Parenting & Family*, then click *Family Internet*. Under *Essentials*, click *Online Safety Tips*.]

For those primarily interested in helping young people find funding sources for college or vocational training, a 30-page *It's My Life: Financial Aid Excerpt* can be downloaded from the Casey site, <http://www.casey.org/NR/rdonlyres/92960D67-DDA4-4E50-9E4F-D52315D55D45/848/IMLFinancialAid.pdf>. This excerpt includes a financial aid checklist of activities to complete every year, starting in 9th grade. It also provides information about the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Chafee IL Program) and the Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program—two important federal resources for supporting the education needs of youth in foster care and youth formerly in foster care.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

An evaluation of the *Postsecondary Education and Training* guide has not been conducted to date.

AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

The eight recommendations in this Guide are based on research on access to postsecondary education for under-represented youth in general and on research and practice with youth in foster care.

Youth in foster care face many educational challenges during their K–12 schooling. Their placements change, and home support for education may be unavailable. They move from school to school, their attendance at school may be inconsistent, and they often experience interference from emotional and mental health issues. These difficulties are reflected in the lower grades and standardized test scores that they, on average, earn. Numerous studies show higher dropout rates as well, with a recent study finding that only 56.3 percent of students in foster care in the study earned a high school diploma (Pecora, Kessler, Williams, et al, 2005).

These outcomes, and the academic challenges that underlie them, call for focused, long-term educational support beginning in middle school.

Statistics on postsecondary educational outcomes for youth formerly in foster care are also cause for concern. In general, only about 55 percent of all students entering college receive a degree, but these figures are even lower for students of color, first-generation college students, and students without parental support (Venezia et al, 2003). By way of contrast, in a recent study of youth who had been in public and private care in Washington and Oregon, by the age of 25 only 1.8 percent had completed a bachelor's degree (Pecora et al, 2005). These young adults are coping with the combined stresses of living on their own and adjusting to higher education without the support systems of home and family. Many are coping with financial worries, childcare needs, mental health issues, and even such specific concerns as where they are going to stay during school vacations. On top of these concerns, many students from foster care enter college with barely adequate academic or study skills and with a negative sense of their own abilities—the sense that “college is not for foster kids.

RESOURCES

- *Gaining early awareness and readiness for undergraduate programs (GEAR UP)* [Discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.]
<http://www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html>
- *It's My Life: Employment* (Casey Family Programs 2004),
<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/ItsMyLifeEmployment.htm>
- *It's My Life: Financial Aid Excerpt* (Postsecondary Education and Training),
<http://www.casey.org/NR/rdonlyres/92960D67-DDA4-4E50-9E4F-D52315D55D45/848/IMLFinancialAid.pdf>
- *It's My Life: Housing* (Casey Family Programs 2005),
<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/ItsMyLifeHousing.htm>

- *It's My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training* (Casey Family Programs 2006), www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/IMLPostsecondaryEd.htm
- *Transition to Higher Education Initiative* (focusing on connecting out-of-school youth ages 16-24 to higher education) <http://nyec.modernsignal.net/page.cfm?pageID=142>
- *TRIO Programs* [Educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.] <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>

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TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY

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Step 6. Children in the Child Welfare System

Legislative Approaches for Promoting Educational Success of Foster Children (emerging practices)

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Recognizing that foster care placement often results in educational disruption many states have adopted legislation that provides protections and agency mandates to ensure effective educational opportunities for these children. Numerous studies have confirmed that children in foster care experience higher rates of grade retention, lower scores on standardized tests, and higher drop-out rates than children in general³. California's "AB 490" (described elsewhere in this *Step*) is one successful state effort to address these issues. This Tool assesses several states' laws against key elements in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (<http://www.naehcy.org/mvact.doc>) lists the following elements as critical to improving educational access and school stability for homeless children and youth population, including, but not limited to, the following:

- the right to remain in the school of origin;
- transportation provisions to the school of origin;
- immediate enrollment when a change in placement precipitates a school transfer;
- expedited record transfer between the sending and receiving school; and
- the designation of a foster care liaison.

³ Cheryl Smithgall, et al. *Educational Experiences of Children in Out-Of-Home Care*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, 2004.

See also, Foster, Michael E. and Elizabeth J. Gifford. "The Transition to Adulthood for Youth Leaving Public Systems," *On the Frontier of Adulthood*, eds. Richard A. Settersten, Jr., Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., and Ruben G. Rumbaut. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

This federal law requires states to ensure that each homeless child or child of a homeless individual has access to the same free public education as other children and youths. It also intends to allow homeless children or a child of a homeless individual to have an equal opportunity to meet the same state student academic standards to which all students are held.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

This Tool takes reviews several states' laws to assess whether they address the five key McKinney-Vento elements. There are no specific data or studies available documenting the impact of the following statutory schemes.

Arizona (enacted 2001)

Amending Title 15: Education, Chapter 8: School Attendance

(<http://www.azleg.state.az.us/ArizonaRevisedStatutes.asp?Title=15>)

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** The statute does not mention the right to remain in school of origin. However, a recent publication entitled *What Arizona Schools Need to Know about Children in Care* references the McKinney-Vento Act stating that eligible children in foster care have a right to remain in their school of origin.
- **Transportation.** As determined in McKinney-Vento, local education agencies must provide children experiencing homelessness with transportation to and from their school of origin.
- **Immediate Enrollment.** Schools should make every effort to immediately enroll foster children, even if the foster child is unable to produce records, including immunization, normally required for school attendance.
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** School records for foster children must be requested from the previous school within five school days of enrollment. The previous school must forward the records of foster children within 10 school days of the request.
- **Foster Care Liaison.** All school districts must designate a staff person as the homeless youth education liaison. This liaison also has specific duties that must be completed for every incoming foster child in the district.

Arkansas (enacted 2005)

Arkansas Code Title 9, Chapter 27, Subchapter 1,

(<http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/ftproot/bills/2005/public/HB1710.pdf>) amended to include *An Act to Ensure the Continuity of Educational Services to Foster Children*

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** Foster children should remain in their school of current enrollment unless the court finds it is not in the child's best interest or it conflicts with other provisions of current laws excluding residency requirements.

- **Transportation.** School districts, to the extent reasonable and practical, are encouraged to work out a plan for transportation to enable foster children to remain in their current school.
- **Immediate Enrollment.** The new school must immediately enroll the foster child even if the foster child is unable to provide required records including, but not limited to, academic records, medical records, or proof of residency.
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** The previous school shall provide all relevant school records to the new school within 10 days of receipt of request.
- **Foster Care Liaison.** Every school district shall identify a foster care liaison who shall: ensure and facilitate the timely enrollment of foster children; ensure the transfer of credits, grades, and other relevant records; and expedite the transfer of records when a foster child changes school placement.

Delaware (enacted 2005)

Title 14, §202(c) amended: *An Act to Amend Title 14 of the Delaware Code Relating to Public School Attendance of Foster Children.*

(<http://www.legis.state.de.us/LIS/LIS143.NSF/vwLegislation/HB+279?Opendocument>)

This law provides that all foster children “shall attend school in accordance with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act” and explicitly defines the McKinney Vento words “awaiting foster care placement” to include all children in foster care.

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** Mc-Kinney-Vento gives the child to right to remain in his school of origin.
- **Transportation.** McKinney Vento requires the state and its local educational agency to provide transportation to and from the school of origin.
- **Immediate Enrollment.** McKinney-Vento requires a school to immediately enroll a foster child, even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, including but not limited to, academic records, medical records, or proof of residency.
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** There is no provision for expedited record transfer. The new school must call the previous school and request the records; the previous school must comply with the request.
- **Foster Care Liaison.** There is no provision for a foster care liaison.

Florida (enacted 2004)

Amending §20.19, F.S., *An Act relating to foster care services and creating §39.0016 entitled Education of abused, neglected and abandoned children,*

(http://election.dos.state.fl.us/laws/04laws/ch_2004-356.pdf)

This legislation requires interagency agreements between school systems and child welfare agencies designed to provide educational access for foster children and facilitate information sharing. The agreements shall include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** The law provides for continuing the enrollment of the foster child in the school of origin, if possible, with the goal of avoiding disruption to education.
- **Transportation.** The law requires determining whether transportation is available when it is needed to avoid a school change and assess the availability of federal, charitable, or grant funding for such transportation.
- **Immediate Enrollment.** No provision for immediate enrollment is included.
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** No provision for expedited record transfer is included but the law does call for the agreements to establish a protocol for information sharing between the school district and the child welfare agency.
- **Foster care liaison.** No provision for a foster care liaison is included.

Maine (enacted 2005) Amended *policies* of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS]

(http://www.maine.gov/education/speced/kmcc/transfer_policy.rtf)

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** When children come into custody, every effort will be made to place them within their own school district. If a placement is not available, every effort will be made to place them near their school district and, under a superintendent's agreement, allow them to continue to attend his school of origin for the remainder of the current school year.
- **Transportation.** School district staff and the child's surrogate parent will work together to arrange transportation for the child to attend his school of origin through the end of the current school year.
- **Immediate Enrollment.** No provision for immediate enrollment. Policies state that "children should not be enrolled in school without at least one day's notice to the school."
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** The DHHS caseworker will "contact the prior school as soon as the caseworker knows that the child will be leaving that school to request that the child's records be immediately sent to the new school that the child will be attending."
- **Foster Care Liaison.** Each school district has a liaison referred to as the KMCC Liaison (Keeping Maine's Children Connected Liaison). The KMCC liaison will either work with the DHHS caseworker directly or identify a person who can work with the caseworker to ensure that the transition for the child to the new school is made as smoothly as possible.

Maryland (enacted 2005)

Amending the following statutes: 2-206, 8-501-506: *Education - Children in State-Supervised Care – Transfer of Educational Records*

(<http://mlis.state.md.us/2005rs/billfile/sb0426.htm>)

“It is the intent of the General Assembly that the State promote the education and well-being of children in state-supervised care by facilitating: (1) the prompt enrollment of children in state-supervised care in an appropriate public school...; and (2) the prompt transfer of the educational records of children in state sponsored care...”

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** No provision for is made to remain in school of origin.
- **Transportation.** No provision for transportation is included.
- **Immediate Enrollment.** Not explicitly mentioned except in purpose clause (see above). It does specify that the child welfare agency shall provide notice to the receiving school regarding the enrollment or imminent enrollment of a child in state-supervised care. Within two days after receiving said notice, the receiving school must request in writing the records from the sending school.
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** After receiving notice of the imminent enrollment from the receiving school, the sending school shall immediately inform the receiving school orally of the grade level in which the child was enrolled and the status of the child under the Federal Rehabilitation Act or under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Within 3 school days of receipt of notice from the receiving school, the sending school shall send by mail or transmit electronically the academic and immunization records of the child, if applicable, the Individualized Education Program or Section 504 Plan, and the most recent assessment of the child.
- **Foster Care Liaison.** No provision for foster care liaison is included.

New Hampshire (enacted 1998/2001)

Amending Chapter 193:28 Right of Attendance

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/XV/193/193-27.htm>

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/XV/193/193-28.htm>

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/XV/193/193-29.htm>

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/XV/193/193-30.htm>

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** “Whenever any child is placed is placed by the department of health and human services, that child shall be entitled to attend the school district that the child attended prior to placement, if continuing in the same school district is in the best interests of the child as determined by the court [and] if the home is within a reasonable distance of the school attended.”
- **Transportation.** A child can remain in school of origin as outlined above if suitable transportation can be arranged without imposing additional transportation costs on a school district or the department of health and human services.
- **Immediate Enrollment.** No provision for immediate enrollment is included.
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** No provision for expedited record transfer is included.
- **Foster Care Liaison.** No provision for foster care liaison is included.

Oregon (enacted 2005)

ORS 326.575, 339.133 and 419B.192 amended: *An Act relating to education of children living in substitute care programs.*

(<http://www.leg.state.or.us/05reg/measpdf/hb3000.dir/hb3075.en.pdf>)

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** The child may remain in the school of origin if the juvenile court determines that it is in the child's best interest.
- **Transportation.** The public agency that has placed the child shall be responsible for providing the child with transportation; however, this obligation is limited to the availability of designated funds.
- **Immediate Enrollment.** No provision for immediate enrollment.
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** When children in foster care change schools, the new school has five days to request records and the previous district has five days to send records. This modifies a previous law that allowed the sending and receiving school 10 days each.
- **Foster Care Liaison.** No provision for foster care liaison.

Pennsylvania (proposed 2004)

Amending Chapter 11 relating to pupil attendance, (<http://www.elc-pa.org/pubs/downloads/english/dis-statebd-ofedu-proposedrulemaking-pupilattendance-chapt-11.pdf#search=%2222%20PA%20Code%20Ch.11%22>)

The intent is to "establish consistent student enrollment procedures across the Commonwealth" and "to limit delays in student enrollment" for those in foster care and others who relocate frequently throughout the school year.

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** No provision for right to remain in school of origin.
- **Transportation.** No provision for transportation.
- **Immediate Enrollment.** A school district shall normally enroll a child the next business day, but no later than five business days from application. The school district has no obligation to enroll a child until the person having control or charge of the student applying has supplied proof of the child's age, residency, and immunizations as required by law.
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** School districts receiving requests for educational records shall forward the records within five business days of receipt of the request.
- **Foster Care Liaison.** No provision for foster care liaison.

Texas (enacted 2003)

Subchapter B, Chapter 264, Family Code, is amended by adding Section 264.113

(<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/cgi-bin/tlo/textframe.cmd?LEG=78&SESS=R&CHAMBER=H&BILLTYPE=B&BILLSUFFIX=01050&VERSION=5&TYPE=B>)

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** “If the department takes possession of a child under Chapter 262 during the school year, the department shall ensure the child returns to school not later than the third school day after the date an order is rendered....”;
- **Transportation.** No provision for transportation.
- **Immediate Enrollment.** A school district shall accept a child for enrollment in a public school without documentation normally required if the child is in the custody of the department.
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** No provision for expedited record transfer.
- **Foster Care Liaison.** No provision for foster care liaison.

Virginia (enacted 2005)

An Act to amend and reenact §§22.1-289 and 63.2-900 of the Code of Virginia and to add a section 22.1-3.4 relating to school enrollment of children placed in foster care.
<http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?051+ful+SB1006ER>

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** Sending and receiving schools may agree to allow the child to continue to attend the school in which he was enrolled prior to placement, upon the agreement of the social services agency that such attendance is in the best interests of the child.
- **Transportation.** No provision for transportation.
- **Immediate Enrollment.** The child shall be immediately enrolled even if unable to produce the required documents. The person enrolling the child shall provide a written statement setting forth the child’s age and, to the best of his knowledge, that the child is in good health and in compliance with other state requirements for enrollment. The placing social services agency shall obtain and produce or otherwise ensure compliance with standard requirements for enrollment within 30 days of the child’s enrollment.
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** Upon receiving notice of a foster care placement of a student across jurisdictional lines, the sending school and the receiving school shall expedite the transfer of the student’s scholastic record.
- **Foster Care Liaison.** No provision for a foster care liaison.

Washington (enacted 2002/2003)

Adding new sections to chapter 74.13 RCW: *An Act relating to coordinated service and education planning for children in out-of-home care*
<http://www.leg.wa.gov/pub/billinfo/2003-04/Pdf/Bills/House%20Bills/1058-S.pdf>

- **Right to Remain in School of Origin.** It is the policy of the state of Washington that, whenever practical and in the best interest of the child, children placed into foster care shall remain enrolled in the schools they were attending at the time they entered foster care.
- **Transportation.** No provision for transportation.

- **Immediate Enrollment.** No provision for immediate enrollment.
- **Expedited Record Transfer.** No provision for expedited record transfer.
- **Foster Care Liaison.** No provision for foster care liaison.

AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

There is considerable evidence that addressing all five of these elements is critical for improving the educational success of children in foster care.

The **Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study** collected data from case records and interviews with alumni of foster care programs in Washington and Oregon to explore the link between foster care services and later mental health status, educational achievement, employment, and financial stability. The findings revealed that more than half of the alumni had mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, and social phobia. Although most of the former foster youth completed their high school education, fewer than 2% held a bachelor's degree. Approximately one-fourth of the study participants reported being homeless for at least one day and one-third had incomes at or below the poverty level. These rates are higher than the general population. Recommendations for improving outcomes focus on increasing access to mental health assessment and treatment while in care, encouraging post-secondary education, reducing school transfers during foster care, enhancing life skills development, and helping youth to build supportive relationships. A summary of the study is available online: *Improving family foster care: findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study*. Casey Family Programs. (2005).

http://www.casey.org/NR/rdonlyres/4E1E7C77-7624-4260-A253-892C5A6CB9E1/301/nw_alumni_study_sum_apr2005.pdf

The Educational Status of Foster Children, (Courtney, M.E., et al (2004))

http://www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1377&L2=61&L3=130,

is an issue brief based on two recent Chapin Hall studies: one of youth aging out of the child welfare system in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa; and the other of Chicago Public School (CPS) students in out-of home care. It describes findings from the studies on the educational status of children and youth in out-of home care and examines some of the challenges confronting child welfare and educational systems in their attempts to develop strategies to work together more productively to improve educational outcomes for these children.

RESOURCES AND BACKGROUND READING

- Bay Area Social Services Consortium (April 2001). *Education for Foster Children: Removing Barriers to Academic Success*. Center for Social Services Research School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley.
<http://cssr.berkeley.edu/bassc/pdfs/EDUfc.pdf>
- Christian, S. (2006). *Educating Children in Foster Care*. National Conference of

- State Legislatures. <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/cyf/CPleducate.htm>
- Finkelstein, M., Miranda, D., & Wamsley, Mark. (July 2002). *What Keeps Children in Foster Care from Succeeding in School?* Vera Institute of Justice. http://www.vera.org/publication_pdf/169_280.pdf
 - Burrell, S. (2003). *Getting Out of the Red Zone*. Youth Law Center. <http://www.ylc.org/GettingOutofth%20RedZone-October2003.pdf>
 - Shea, N., Weinberg, L. & Zetlin, A. (May 2006). *Helping Your Child Succeed in School: An Education Handbook for Parents and Caregivers of Children and Youth in the Foster care System*. Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc. http://www.acoe.k12.ca.us/acoe_docs_spas/Parent_Ed_Handbook_May_2006.pdf
 - The Child and Family Service Review (CFSR), a federal oversight process in effect since March 2000 (<http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/service/cfsr/overview.cfm>), has designated meeting foster children's educational needs a critical "well-bring" outcome on which state systems will be evaluated. The CFSR serves as means by which to hold states accountable for achieving outcomes in several areas of child welfare, including educational needs. Once states are given their assessments, it is their responsibility to enact any changes necessary in order to comply with the CFSR recommendations to improve child welfare systems statewide.

TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY

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## ***Step 6. Children in the Child Welfare System***

### **Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT) (a promising practice)**

#### **BRIEF OVERVIEW**

Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT) is a research-based intervention program (for all children) designed to prevent the development of aggressive and antisocial behaviors in children within the elementary school setting (particularly first and fifth graders). The program seeks to reach at-risk children as early as possible to prevent antisocial behavior such as conduct problems and alcohol/drug use.

LIFT has components for working with the students as well as helping parents develop positive parenting practices. The overall goal of the program is to decrease antisocial behavior while increasing pro-social behavior.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS**

LIFT is a 10-week intervention consisting of three components:

- a classroom-based social and problem-solving skills training for children;
- a playground-based behavior-modification program; and
- a parent education (group-delivered training described below) and communication program (including a weekly newsletter and classroom phone/answering machines for parents to receive a daily message about class activities and homework, and leave short messages for the teacher).

Targeted skills include opposition, deviance, and social ineptitude.

The **classroom component** consists of 20 one-hour sessions designed to be taught over a 10-week period. Each session is taught using the same format: lecture and role play, structured group skills practice, unstructured free play, and skills review and daily rewards. Older students have an additional study skills component.



The **playground component** incorporates reinforcement of positive problem-solving skills and encourages students to suppress negative behaviors by rewarding students when they exhibit desirable behavior on the playground.

**Parental component.** LIFT works with parents to develop positive parenting practices, which include disciplining and monitoring. It teaches parents how to create a home environment that fosters ongoing practice of good discipline and supervision. The parental component is presented, either after school or in the evenings, through a series of two-hour sessions over a six-week period at the child's school. Parents meet in groups of 10 to 15 families. Each session incorporates a review of the results from home practice exercises, a lecture, discussion and role plays of issues for the current week, and a presentation of home practice exercises for the following week. To encourage attendance, free child care is provided and prize drawings are held. When a parent is unable to attend a meeting, LIFT staff makes contact by either meeting with the parent at home or providing packets containing information from the missed session.

Curricula, instructions to trainers, videotapes, and handouts are available for classroom and parent components.

## PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Blueprints for Violence Prevention (promising practice).  
<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/promising/programs/BPP09.html>
- Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools (promising practice).  
[http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/exemplary01/report\\_pg3.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/exemplary01/report_pg3.html)
- SAMHSA Model Programs (promising practice).  
[http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/template\\_cf.cfm?page=promising&pkProgramID=126](http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/template_cf.cfm?page=promising&pkProgramID=126)
- Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General (Promising Level 2 - risk prevention).  
<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence/chapter5/appendix5b.html#LIFT>
- *See also:* <http://www.personal.psu.edu/dept/prevention/LIFT.htm>

In short-term evaluations, LIFT decreased children's physical aggression on the playground (particularly children rated by their teachers as most aggressive at the start of the study), increased children's social skills, and decreased aversive behavior in mothers rated most aversive at baseline, relative to controls. Three years after participation in the program, 1st-grade participants had fewer increases in attention-deficit disorder-related behaviors (inattentiveness, impulsivity, and hyperactivity) than controls. At follow-up, 5th-grade participants had fewer associations with delinquent peers, were less likely to initiate patterned alcohol use, and were significantly less likely than controls to have been arrested.

## AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

An evaluation of the program's influence on delinquent behavior of the 600 first and fifth graders showed that families who participated in LIFT demonstrated greater improvements in problem-solving and conflict resolution skills than families who did not participate. Additionally, the students who involved in the LIFT program had lower levels of adolescent aggression during peer interaction and were seen as being less aggressive towards peers by teachers. In the three years following participation in the program, LIFT students were less likely to show an increase in severity in teacher-reported problem behaviors.

An experimental study found socially withdrawn youth who participated in LIFT showed lower levels of social avoidance than similar youth who did not participate in the program. A second study also showed that youth who participated in LIFT were more likely to initiate social interactions with peers.

**Program Outcomes:** Immediate post-test results of LIFT indicate significant changes in each targeted area of child and parent behaviors. There was a decrease in physical aggression on the playground for children who were participants in LIFT, with a dramatic decrease for the children who had been deemed most aggressive at pre-test. The mothers who displayed the highest pre-intervention levels of aversive behaviors showed the largest reductions when compared to non-participating mothers. Teachers indicated increases in positive social skills and classroom behaviors for the students who had participated in LIFT. Overall, LIFT participation enabled students and parents to make significant changes in individual behavior and home environment.

## RESOURCES

- **Contact for more information:**

J. Mark Eddy  
Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers  
Oregon Social Learning Center  
160 East 4th Ave., Eugene, OR 97401  
Phone: 541-485-2711  
E-mail: [marke@oslc.org](mailto:marke@oslc.org)  
Web site: <http://www.oslc.org/>

## BACKGROUND READING

- *Disability Awareness: A Guidebook for Families and Educators* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). PACER Center. (2001). Available for purchase for \$15 from PACER.  
<http://www.pacer.org/publications/cmi.htm>

- Eddy, J.M., & Reid, J.B., & Fetrow, R.A. (2000, Fall). An Elementary School-Based Prevention Program Targeting Modifiable Antecedents of Youth Delinquency and Violence: Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT). *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 8(3), 165-176.
- Hair, E.C., Jager, J., & Garrett, S.B. (2001). *Background for Community-level Work on Social Competency in Adolescence: Reviewing the Literature on Contributing Factors*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at <http://www.childtrends.org/files/KSocialES.pdf>
- Hair, E.C., Jager, J. & Garrett, S.B. (2002) *Helping Teens Develop Healthy Social Skills and Relationships: What the Research Shows about Navigating Adolescence*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at <http://www.childtrends.org/Files/K3Brief.pdf>
- Ralph, A., Hogan, S.J., Hill, M., Perkins, E., Ryan, J., & Strong, L. (1998). Improving Adolescent Social Competence in Peer Interactions using Correspondence Training. *Education & Treatment of Children*, 21(2), 171-194. Available at: [http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?nfpb=true&pageLabel=RecordDetails&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=EJ573521&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=eric\\_accno&objectId=0900000b80012239](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?nfpb=true&pageLabel=RecordDetails&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ573521&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_accno&objectId=0900000b80012239)

# ***TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY***

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Step 6. Children in the Child Welfare System

MYTHBUSTING

Breaking Down Confidentiality and Decision-Making Barriers to Meet the Education Needs of Children in Foster Care (emerging practices)

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Debunking the myth that rules, laws, and policies governing confidentiality prevent beneficial collaborative information sharing is the goal of ***Mythbusting: Breaking Down Confidentiality and Decision-Making Barriers to Meet the Education Needs of Children in Foster Care***. While child welfare personnel and educators are anxious to engage in collaborative efforts to bolster educational outcomes for foster youth, misinformation relating to issues of confidentiality and their respective professional roles often hampers these good intentions. This confusion is manifested in a variety of ways. Each group of professionals often hides behind a cloak of confidentiality, claiming not to be able to share information about a particular child in foster care. Teachers become confused about whether an agency social worker, foster parent, or child's attorney has authority to represent the child at educational meetings, or receive his grades, sign releases, etc. School personnel are often reluctant to share information with their peers about a foster child due to a misguided fear that they might be violating the privacy rights of the child or his family. Child welfare professionals also become inhibited in sharing details of a child's past out of fear emanating from an erroneous belief that they may be illegally divulging "confidential" information.

Ironically, at times the reverse scenario occurs. Educators and child welfare professionals indiscriminately exchange too much information about a foster youth, or his traumatic family background, failing to safeguard any privacy rights of the child or his family. Psychological evaluations performed solely for court purposes can find their way into school files.

These scenarios underscore the need for professionals to gain a clearer understanding of the laws and the legal parameters around information sharing. ***Mythbusting: Breaking Down Confidentiality and Decision-Making Barriers to Meet the Education Needs of Children in Foster Care***, written by Kathleen McNaught, an attorney with the American Bar Association, Center on Children and the Law (February 2006), is an excellent tool that can be used to demystify the barriers that interfere with such collaboration. Its purpose is to: outline specific myths under which child welfare, education professionals, foster parents, parents and youth operate; clarify the law in this area and then showcase particular statutes or promising programs which have been developed to address these hurdles.

Mythbusting outlines rights under the five pertinent federal statutes:

- the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA);
- the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA);
- the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (AACWA);
- the McKinney-Vento Act; and
- the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Available on line

(<http://www.abanet.org/child/rcjji/education/caseyeducationproject.pdf>), ***Mythbusting*** is an invaluable tool to decipher the confusing maze of rules that govern appropriate information sharing. It is important to add a cautionary note, however, that its usefulness will be enhanced by reference to supplemental state-specific materials. In many instances, ***Mythbusting*** provides that state roadmap with easy-to-use links to state references.

IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

• State Statutes

While the book outlines rights under the five related federal statutes listed above, it must be read in conjunction with unique statutes and regulations in a particular state. A complete overview of state confidentiality provisions, including a list of states that allow release of information to education professionals, can be found at:

<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/general/legal/statutes/confide.pdf>. See also, Foster Care/Education State Legislation Chart,

http://www.abanet.org/child/rcjji/education/fostercareeducation_legislation_draft1.doc.

Each state has crafted a different response to address poor educational outcomes for foster youth. The most encompassing piece of legislation is California Assembly Bill 490. Examples have been noted previously in other sections of these *Tools*. Also see:

- <http://www.abanet.org/child/rcjji/education/ab490overview.pdf> and Oregon House Bill 3075 (2005), available at <http://www.leg.state.or.us/05reg/measpdf/hb3000.dir/hb3075.en.pdf>. Florida

- enacted House Bill 723 in 2004 (codified in §39.0016 of the Florida Statutes) to require interagency agreements between education, child welfare, and other key stakeholders and promote timely information sharing and appropriate training; available at <http://www.abanet.org/child/documents/hb723er.pdf>.
- Washington State established a law that requires child welfare agencies to access education records when requested: RCW 28A.150.510, available at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.150.510>.

- **State Memoranda of Agreement**

Some states have formalized their collaborative efforts, including roles and responsibilities of each partner, in the form of Memoranda of Understanding or Interagency Agreements. For example:

- San Luis Obispo County (California) Interagency and Community Agreement (2005), relating to foster care in that county. <http://www.abanet.org/child/rclji/education/sloagreement.doc>.
- Interagency Agreement Between The School Board Of Broward County (Florida) and the Department Of Children and Families (2003). http://www.floridaschildrenfirst.org/04_reports/proj/Education/National/F_6_20EXEC_3Aagree.pdf.
- *See also* Evaluation Report for the 2002-2003, Interagency Agreement, <http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/dropoutprevention/DCFInteragencyEval.pdf>.

- **State Guides**

Some states and organizations have produced guides tailored for either school or child welfare audiences to clarify both the confidentiality restrictions and respective duties of each professional.

(1) School personnel

- Lichtenberg, L., Lee, A., Helgren, P., & Bradley, S. (Oct. 2004). *Helping Foster Children Achieve Educational Stability and Success: A Field Guide for Information Sharing*. Washington School Counselor Association. http://www.wa-schoolcounselor.org/documents/Field_Guide_DRAFT_rev%5B1%5D..pdf.
- Vesecky, S., Woodward, S., & Levine, A. (2005). *Foster Care Education Fact Sheets*. California Foster Youth Education Task Force. http://humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy/pdf/California%20FYETF%20fact_sheets-082205.pdf.

(2) Child welfare professionals

- *Fostering student success: child welfare agency caseworker's procedures manual, 2003-2004*. Broward County, Florida. School Board. Florida. Dept. of Children and Families. ChildNet. 2003. Available at: <http://www.abanet.org/child/rcjji/education/#flo>
Kintisch, B. & Stotland, J. (March 2004).
- *Educating Children "At Risk" : A Handbook for Caseworkers, Probation Officers and Family*. Education Law Center (Phil., PA). Available at: <http://www.elc-pa.org/pubs/downloads/english/man-children-in-placement.pdf>
- A good pamphlet for Pennsylvania residents which has synthesized both federal and state law to debunk the myths is appropriately entitled, *Common Myths About the Education of Children in Foster Care*, published by the Education Law Center (Sept. 2005). Available at: <http://www.elc-pa.org/pubs/downloads/english/fsc-foster-care-myths.pdf>.

• State Training Materials

Recognizing that written material alone is insufficient, some jurisdictions have created training materials to ensure laws, books and pamphlets are placed by the stakeholders in an appropriate context.

- See Assembly Bill 490 Training Materials: *Ensuring Educational Rights and Stability for Foster Youth*: Assembly Bill 490. California Youth Connection, et al. <http://www.abanet.org/child/rcjji/education/ab490.html>.
- *Foster Children and Education: How You Can Create a Positive Educational Experience for the Foster Child*. Vera Institute of Justice (July 2004). http://www.vera.org/publication_pdf/241_452.pdf.
- *Make A Difference in a Child's Life: A Manual for Helping Children and Youth Get What They Need in School*. TeamChild and Casey Family Programs (2000). <http://www.teamchild.org/manual/manual.pdf>.
- *Endless Dreams*. A video (2000) and curriculum (2005) to educate teachers about foster care. Casey Family Programs. <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/EndlessDreams.htm>.
- Lichtenberg, L., Lee, A., Helgren, P., & Bradley, S. (Oct. 2004). *Helping Foster Children Achieve Educational Stability and Success: A Field Guide for Information Sharing*. Washington School Counselor Association. http://www.wa-schoolcounselor.org/documents/Field_Guide_DRAFT_rev%5B1%5D_.pdf.

PROGRAM EVALUATION AND AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

There has been no formal review of *Mythbusting* or any formal evaluation of its use by any particular jurisdiction. However, it has been touted as a useful resource by the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues, www.abanet.org/child/rcjji/education/home.html and National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/educaiton-and-foster-care.html. Studies have demonstrated that information sharing and role clarification improve outcomes for foster children. See e.g. 2003-2004 Evaluation Report for the Broward County, Florida, Interagency Agreement listed above, http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/research_evaluation/Evaluations/DCFFinal5-5-04.pdf.

In 2004, JustChildren conducted an assessment of a one-day training program aimed at educating social service professionals regarding the legal rights of children under their care. Based on pre- and post-testing, the results indicate significant increases in participant knowledge; 68% of survey participants believe the program directly contributed to their efforts to improve the educational opportunities of children under their care, and these efforts led to improved academic opportunities for over 528 children and 41% said the program has helped them improve children's placement stability. See http://www.abanet.org/child/rcjji/education/JChildren_Assessment_September_04.doc.

One of the key elements of *Project Achieve: A Model Project Providing Education Advocacy for Children in the Child Welfare System* (March 2005) showed that the trainings and technical assistance of educational and child welfare staff contribute to more positive educational outcomes for foster youth; see <http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/pubs/2005/projectachieve.pdf>.

RESOURCES AND BACKGROUND READING

- Educational Stability for Children and Youth in Foster Care, 2001-Present (compiled in 2006). National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information and National Adoption Information Clearinghouse. http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/teleconferences/educational_stability.pdf.
- Education and Foster Care: Resources. National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/education-and-foster-care.html.
- *Education Issues*. National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues, www.abanet.org/child/rcjji/education/home.html.
- McNaught, K.M. (2004). *Learning curves: education advocacy for children in foster care*. Washington, DC: ABA Center on Children and the Law. Available at: <http://www.abanet.org/abastore/index.cfm?section=main&fm=Product.AddToCart&pid=5490441>.