



**National Resource Center for
Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning**
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

INFORMATION PACKET
Educational Needs of Youth
in Foster Care

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SUMMARY

According to research and studies done across the country, the educational needs of youth in foster care are not being met. Children and youth in foster care are at greater risk for failing grades, increased absenteeism, retention in grades, school dropout, behavioral problems, and involvement in special education (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2003). Since approximately 20,000 youths age 18-21 age out of the foster care system annually, many without an adequate high school education, this problem continues to be detrimental to this population even after leaving foster care, contributing to poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and other associated problems (Elze, Auslander, Stiffman, & McMillen, 2005).

There are many factors that contribute to this crisis. When children and youth are placed in out-of-home care or change placements, they often change schools as well. As such, they experience educational impermanence. In addition to the trauma of abuse or neglect and changes in their caregivers and living situation, these young people often cannot be enrolled in new schools right away because of problems transferring records, registering, or waiting for classes that are already filled. Students often must repeat classes if they left their old school before completing a class, or the new school does not accept credit. Teachers and administrators are less able to work effectively with students when they are unfamiliar with their academic strengths and weaknesses, and often students are misplaced in special education classes as a result, or not placed in those programs when needed (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006).

Important recommendations include: better communication between schools, child welfare workers, and caregivers; and web-based updated records that follow students when they move. More organized attention and accurate and updated record-keeping by all parties with regards to the student's educational experiences and needs, including follow-up, would help to alleviate some of these problems (Zetlin, et al., 2003).

FACTS AND STATISTICS

- 513,000 children were in foster care on September 30, 2005 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [US DHHS], 2006).
- There are more 15-17-year olds in foster care than any other age (US DHHS, 2006).
- The average time in care is 32 months (Casey Family Programs [CFP], n.d.).
- Each year, about 20,000 young people “age out” of the foster care system (CFP, n.d.).
- 15-year-old students in foster care are only about half as likely as other students to have graduated from high school five years later, with significantly higher percentages of youth in care having dropped out (55%) or become incarcerated, according to a 2004 study of Chicago public school youth (CFP, 2007)
- In a 3-state Midwest study in 2004, youth in foster care on average read at only a seventh grade level after completing tenth or eleventh grade (CFP, 2007).
- The same study reported 1/3 of young adults in foster care had 5 or more school changes (CFP, 2007).
- In a nationwide study of 1,087 youth who had been in foster care, those who had 1 fewer placement change per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school (CFP, 2007).
- In a 2000 study of 70 children in New York foster care, over 75% did not remain in their school once placed in foster care, and almost 65% were transferred in the middle of the school year (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education [NWGFCE], 2007).
- In addition, 42% of the children did not begin school immediately upon entering foster care, half of which were due to lost or misplaced school records (NWGFCE, 2007).

POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/mv_full_text.pdf

This Act is the principle federal statute that addresses school stability for homeless youth. Although it focuses specifically on the needs of homeless children, some youth in foster care, such as those awaiting placements, do benefit from it. The act ensures transportation to schools for homeless children regardless of district and registration even if necessary documents are missing. (CFP, 2007).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020108.html>

This Act is intended to ensure that attention is paid to every student's academic progress or limitation. Standardized testing, increased pressure on states and schools to use proven, research-based educational methods and success measurement systems, and greater choice of schools are ensured. Although this act does not directly address the specific needs of youth in care, it does identify several categories of at-risk youth, many of which include children in foster care.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/pi9802.htm

This 1997 Act focuses on children's need for permanent, safe living situations, an important goal for people in foster care. It is relevant to education because it would decrease the many problems students encounter when they must change schools or miss time in school due to multiple changes in foster placements (Elze, et. al., 2005).

AB490: Ensuring Educational Rights and Stability for Foster Youth

<http://www.abanet.org/child/rcj/education/ab490.html>

California is currently the only state with legislation specific to the educational needs of youth in foster care, such as school stability and proper record maintenance and transfer.

PROMISING PRACTICES AND MODEL PROGRAMS

Advocates for Children of New York: Foster Care Youth Project

The Foster Care Educational Advocacy Project assures young people transitioning out of foster care access to education services and advocacy (<http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/>).

Annie E. Casey Foundation: Closing the Achievement Gap

Closing the Achievement Gap is a series of stories, results, and lessons learned from seven years of education investing by the Annie E. Casey Foundation

(<http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/PublicationsSeries/ClosingAchievementGap.aspx>).

Advocating for the Educational Needs of Children in Out-of-Home Care: Training Curriculum for Child Welfare

A curriculum training Colorado child welfare workers in educational policies, processes, assessments and plans relevant to the educational needs of children in care

(http://tatis.muskie.usm.maine.edu/pubs/pubdetailWtemp.asp?PUB_ID=B060061).

Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Programs

CASA programs train workers to incorporate the educational needs of children via workshops and manuals, and to include educational concerns in court reports (Elze et al., 2005).

Improving Educational Continuity and School Stability for Children in Out of Home Care: A Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC)

In this 18-month national study, ten selected jurisdictions were selected to initiate strategies and test procedures that will improve the education of youth in care and, through ongoing monitoring, develop proven programs that can be modeled nationally.

(<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Projects/BSC/Education/>)

Broward County Interagency Agreement

Broward County, Florida has a successful track record of ensuring effective communication between education and child welfare systems

(http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/research_evaluation/Evaluations/DCFFinal5-5-04.pdf).

WEB SITES AND RESOURCES

http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/education-and-foster-care.html

The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning's comprehensive website contains resources, reports, guides, webcasts, and state-specific information on foster care and education.

<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/FOFCEducation.htm>

Focus on Foster Care: Building Educational Support for Youth in Care describes tools and resources used by Casey Family Programs to improve educational success of youth in care.

<http://www.childcareresearch.org/discover/index.jsp>

The Child Care and Early Education Research Connections website offers a comprehensive collection of resources related to child care and early education.

<http://www.cwla.org/>

The Child Welfare League of America offers everything from a history of child welfare to news and programs. Includes a section on educational supports for youth in out-of-home care.

<http://www.hhs.gov/children/index.shtml> and <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/>

The US Department of Health and Human Services website and its Administration for Children & Families website contain information on childcare issues and educational resources.

<http://www.abanet.org/child/education/>

The Legal Center for Foster Care & Education addresses legal issues surrounding the educational needs of youth in foster care.

<http://www.ncjfcj.org/content/view/572/432/>

Asking the Right Questions: A Judicial Checklist to Ensure That the Educational Needs of Children and Youth in Foster Care are Being Addressed.

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