



Child Welfare/Education Collaborations (Highlights)

The Fostering Connections Act builds on prior law by adding a new requirement that case plans ensure the educational stability of the child in foster care and by also requiring Title IV-E state plans show that each child receiving a Title IV-E foster care, adoption or guardianship payment is a full-time school student, or is incapable of attending school due to a documented medical condition.

What follows are some state examples of education and child welfare collaborations that support the Fostering Connections Act. Some of the information was relayed directly to NRCPCF in response to a survey of State Foster Care Managers and outreach by NRCPCF. Other information was retrieved from the "Fostering Connections Implementation State Survey" available on the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators website.

Delaware

Delaware's Division of Family Services currently has a successful collaboration with the Delaware Department of Education. A subcommittee was established to achieve three different outcomes. Those outcomes include:

1. The development of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families and the Department of Education;
2. To develop a training curriculum for DSCYF and DOE staff to improve system collaboration between child welfare and education as it relates to children in foster care;
3. To study the educational success of children in foster care through the collection and analysis of data and make recommendations for system improvement and performance measures.

The Memorandum of Understanding was completed in December 2008. The focus of the MOU is to improve communication between the Departments and to ensure that youth involved with the child welfare agency are receiving the most supportive services possible so that they can achieve academic success. All staff from the Department of Education and the Division of Family Services were trained on the MOU. See:

<http://www.doe.k12.de.us/DDOEDSCYFMOU.pdf>

In addition to the training staff receive on the MOU, there is an ongoing training plan for staff from both Departments that covers a variety of topics. I have attached the trainings that have occurred to date.

At the beginning of each school year, DFS sends DOE a comprehensive list of all school-aged children in foster care. DOE then sorts the list by schools and sends the sorted list to the corresponding school. Each month thereafter, DFS sends DOE a list of youth that have exited and entered foster care the prior month so that the database is always current. Each school is then aware of the youth in their building that are in foster care. By having that information, each school is able to provide additional supportive services to the youth and their family (foster families included). In addition to that information, DSCYF and DOE will use aggregate data to review the following measures:

- Graduation rates for youth in foster care versus non-foster care youth
- Attendance rates for youth in foster care versus non-foster care youth
- Special education enrollment for youth in foster care versus non-foster care youth
- State test scores for youth in foster care versus non-foster care youth

If discrepancies are identified, the subcommittee will identify ways to improve outcomes for youth in foster care.

Finally, DSCYF provides school-based early intervention services. The K-5 Early Intervention Program is a voluntary program staffed and managed by the Office of Early Intervention in partnership with DSCYF and participating local school districts. The program employs Family Crisis Therapists statewide to work with children and families identified as “at-risk”. Family Crisis Therapists assigned to designated elementary schools provide a range of interventions designed to remove barriers to academic and social success. The program focuses on providing a “System of Care” by enhancing collaboration among state agencies and communities to meet the needs of children and their families. The K-5 program expanded from serving nine schools in 1996-1997 to its current fifty-one (51) elementary schools in thirteen school districts and three charter schools statewide.ⁱ

Nebraska

Educational stability policy and procedures are in place to provide for educational placement and services that best meet the needs of the child. When a child enters out-of-home placement, DHHS notifies all relevant persons and takes action to coordinate with education agencies to enable the child to remain in the school where s/he was enrolled at the time of placement, unless remaining in that school is not in the child’s best interest. In cases where the child must be enrolled in a new school, immediate enrollment and assurance that the child's educational records follow the child is the responsibility of the DCFS.

In addition to regulations and policies related to educational stability, Nebraska has made and is making other efforts to meet this need for children in care. In 2008, Nebraska Statute was amended to include the following language, which coincides with Fostering Connections:

NE Rev. Statute 43-1313: Except as otherwise provided in the Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Act, immediately following removal of a child from his or her home pursuant to section 43-284, the person or court in charge of the child shall: (4) Require that the child attend the same school as prior to the foster care placement unless the person or court

in charge determines that attending such school would not be in the best interests of the child.

In the Fall of 2009, Supreme Court Justice, Michael Heavican and Commissioner of Education, Dr. Roger Breed, attended a meeting intended to increase collaboration and ultimately improve education for children in the child welfare system. Unfortunately DHHS officials were not able to attend the meeting at the last minute, but have since met with the Chief Justice and Commissioner to discuss and support the work from the conference and strategies for continued collaboration. The resulting action plan includes 5 initiatives, including establishment of a web-based Tool-kit with resource materials to assist systems involved in education of students in out of home placement, e.g., schools, courts, county attorneys, guardians ad litem, probation, DHHS, treatment providers, and foster parents.

DHHS participates on the Nebraska Department of Education, Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), established by the NE Department of Education per the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). SEAC is an advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to Special Education and related services for children with disabilities. The responsibilities of the Special Education Advisory Council include becoming knowledgeable about research-based educational practices and reviewing Nebraska Department of Education-Office of Special Education activities designed to improve outcomes for children with disabilities. Members also seek information from the perspective of their constituency group. Based on these factors, SEAC serves in an advisory capacity the NDE Office of Special Education and to the Nebraska State Board of Education. The responsibility of the Council members is to advise, i.e. inform, counsel, recommend, suggest or guide, the Department of Education, not to advocate for an individual position. Recommendations are made by SEAC for the consideration and possible action by the NDE Office of Special Education and/or the State Board. The State Board approves membership on SEAC annually and receives advice and comments from SEAC as necessary throughout the year on special education issues. The Council consists of a balance of parents, educators, administrators, and representatives from various state agencies who serve differently-abled children birth through 21.

DHHS also participates on a SEAC Committee on Education of Students in Out of Home Placements. This group's primary mission is to provide guidance to the policymakers and stakeholders of Nebraska in the development and implementation of educational opportunities for children and youth in out of home placements. The OHP Committee's membership covers a broad-based spectrum of representation from a variety of schools, child welfare and advocacy organization, and the juvenile and criminal justice systems. This Committee currently has several work groups focusing on Statewide Academic Assessments and Curriculum; Transitions; School Residency and Responsibility; Systems Communication, Collaboration and Coordination; and Data Collection and /Evaluation.ⁱⁱ

Retrieved from: <http://www.napcwa.org/Legislative/docs/NebraskaSummary.pdf>.

New York

New York currently complies with the mandatory provisions of the Fostering Connections Act and successfully collaborates with several systems throughout the state to improve policies and practices for youth in care. To expand this effort, New York has a Council on Children and Families throughout each jurisdiction, where state administrators negotiate solutions for interagency collaborations. Commissioners of the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the State Education Department (SED), the Office of Mental Health (OMH), the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), the Department of Health (DOH), and the Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives (DPCA) assemble to discuss statewide cross-systems collaborations to better serve children and families. OCFS provides counties with oversight and coordination to effectively comply with all mandatory requirements of P.L. 110-351. New York issued emergency regulations on December 31, 2008 to require counties to comply with the new federal requirements. New York amended their state regulations to clarify the educational stability provision, requiring counties to have foster children remain in their school of origin where possible and coordinate with the child's local school district to obtain records. Additionally, children must attend school full-time unless they have a medical condition.ⁱⁱⁱ

Retrieved from: <http://www.napcwa.org/Legislative/docs/NY.pdf>.

This information is about the Scholars Program, based in New York City. The Scholars Program is a collaboration between "A List," an educational services company, and Graham Windham, a not for profit child welfare agency:

In the fall of 2007, [A List] partnered with Graham Windham to launch a six-year Scholars Program, the objective of which is to enable foster youth to succeed in high school and in college.

Our students, all of whom are high school juniors, will set individualized academic goals with the assistance of a staff member and attend weekly tutoring sessions to monitor progress toward their objectives. Tutors will also provide extra help with schoolwork. In addition to their guided study sessions, Scholars will take a year-long SAT preparation course to thoroughly prepare them for the spring exams.

As the students enter their senior year, they will transition into the college application phase, during which they will engage in group and individual counseling to select schools and complete their applications. Once applications have been submitted, Scholars' coursework will include many of the independent study and research skills critical to success at the college level. A-List tutors will continue to provide tutoring and mentorship for the students throughout their college careers.

Beyond academic guidance, the Scholars Program seeks to provide a community of stability and positive influence by cultivating a network of consistent support through like-minded peers and dedicated staff. Scholars will participate in cultural activities during monthly enrichment sessions allow them the opportunity to bond in a setting

outside the classroom. Constant communication between Graham Windham and A-List staff will ensure that all involved parties are prepared to meet each student's needs.

In the spring of 2014, we anticipate the college graduations of nine intelligent, highly motivated, well-rounded young people who are inspired to reach their full potential and confident in their ability to do so. Retrieved from:

<http://www.alisteducation.com/info/graham-windham-program>.

Graham Windham is also a member of the NYC Education Stability Collective and the ACS [Administration for Children's Services] Data Sharing Pilot called Project School Success. Both are partnerships between ACS, NYC Department of Education, and child welfare organizations. We are also an active member of OCFS' Education Committee which was formed in the Fall of 2006.^{iv}

Texas

DFPS was found to be in substantial conformity on the education outcome in the federal on-site Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) in March 2008. Strong cross system collaborations between DFPS and school districts help improve the educational outcomes of children in care. This collaboration assists the state in operating the educational coordination and planning activities under P.L. 110-351. For example, DFPS has educational specialists in each region and in the state office to assist child protective services staff in addressing the educational needs of children in foster care and in developing and arranging working relationships with local school districts, and regional education centers. The school districts and regional education centers use the DFPS education specialists as subject matter experts in resolving educational issues related to CPS children. These working relationships also help facilitate the transfer of children's school records. Additionally, each school age child in foster care has an educational portfolio that follows the child as he/she changes placements, returns home to his/her parents, or transitions into an adoptive home. Current state statute also requires children to be immediately enrolled in school if their placement changes, and allows this transition to occur no later than three days prior to enrollment. Policy was recently updated to give more emphasis to having caseworkers consider whether a child can continue to attend the child's current school at removal or when a subsequent placement is needed.^v

Retrieved from: <http://www.napcwa.org/Legislative/docs/Texas.pdf>.

Virginia

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) has worked steadily with the Virginia Department of Education (DOE) pursuant to the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*. A workgroup was formed in that regard. Just over a year ago advocates, educators, social workers, foster parents, and stakeholders interested in the educational needs and outcomes of youth in foster care and older adopted youth convened around a primary objective of the Act--promoting educational stability. First the group decided that it might be helpful to consider the immediate challenges regarding the implementation of the Act in Virginia, as well as effective tools and strategies to swiftly address those challenges. We then decided to establish a multi-jurisdictional workgroup that might serve as a vehicle to

consider programs, positions, policies, and promising practices pursuant to the educational needs of foster care youth and older adopted youth. Experts whose input would facilitate and support enhanced educational outcomes for youth were identified. Steadfast vision, unwavering commitment, and focused collaboration and creativity resulted in the development of tools to facilitate the primary objective. The tools include (a) The Virginia Department of Education and the Virginia Department of Social Services Joint Guidance on Best Interest Determination for School Placement, (b) the Best Interest Determination for School Placement Form, and (c) the Immediate Enrollment of Child in Foster Care Form. Informational webinars are planned for December 2010 and January 2011 to introduce the tools to our colleagues around the state--social workers, school personnel, advocates, parents, and private agencies. The webinar is sponsored by VDSS in collaboration with DOE.^{vi} NRCPFC is working with Virginia to make the webinars available to all State Foster Care Managers as a peer-to-peer learning opportunity.

Wisconsin

DSP Info Memo 2010-11: This memo provides information on activities to improve educational outcomes for children/youth in out-of-home care.

<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/memos/infomemos/DSP/2010/2010-11.pdf>

In response to recent federal changes in affecting both education and child welfare, our state departments of public instruction and child welfare created a joint publication for use by school professionals, child welfare professionals, and foster parents.

Educational Services for Children Placed in Foster Care

This publication was produced through a collaborative effort of the Wisconsin Departments of Children and Families (DCF) and Public Instruction (DPI), and the Wisconsin Association of Family and Children's Agencies (WAFCA). Its purpose is to help facilitate cooperation between the child welfare public school systems by:

- Summarizing the legal responsibilities of each system to serve children living in foster care, and
- Sharing practices and resources that can help to improve how these two systems serve youth living in foster care.

<http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/pdf/sswedfostercare.pdf>

In addition, we present the information together for professionals across the state at conferences.^{vii}

ⁱ Email correspondence December 1, 2010.

ⁱⁱ Information retrieved November 30, 2010 from the "Fostering Connections Implementation State Survey" available on the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators: <http://www.napcwa.org/Legislative/fostering.asp>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Information retrieved November 30, 2010 from the "Fostering Connections Implementation State Survey" available on the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators: <http://www.napcwa.org/Legislative/fostering.asp>.

^{iv} Email correspondence December 1, 2010.

^v *Information retrieved November 30, 2010 from the “Fostering Connections Implementation State Survey” available on the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators: <http://www.napcwa.org/Legislative/fostering.asp>.*

^{vi} Email correspondence December 1, 2010.

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