

Family to Family Educational Technical Assistance Project
Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc.
Los Angeles, CA 90010
www.mhas-la.org

Incorporating Education into the Family to Family Initiative

Andrea G. Zetlin
California State University, Los Angeles

Lois A. Weinberg
California State University, Los Angeles

Nancy M. Shea
Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc.

September 2008

The work on this Booklet was supported by a generous grant from the Stuart Foundation to Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc.

There is a growing body of research that documents how vulnerable and academically at risk foster children are and that a high percentage of this population experience poor educational outcomes. Foster youth are more likely than other children to have academic and behavioral trouble in school, including higher rates of disciplinary referrals, grade retention and placement in special education classes, and lower performance in the classroom and on standardized achievement tests in reading and mathematics (Courtney et al., 2007; Smithgall Gladden, Howard, Goerge, & Courtney, 2004; Zima et al., 2000). Contributing to the wide range of school problems of this population of children are the high levels of residential mobility and school transfers that children in foster care experience (Eckenrode, Rowe, Laird, & Brathwaite, 1995). Highly mobile foster children often miss large portions of the school year, lose academic credit due to moves made mid-semester, and have incomplete education records due to missing transcripts, assessments and attendance data (Parrish, et al., 2001; Zetlin, Weinberg & Luderer, 2004). To address these dismal education outcomes for foster youth the Annie E. Casey Foundation Family to Family Initiative now includes as one of its areas of system reform addressing the educational needs of children in foster care.

Family to Family is a family-centered, neighborhood-based system of foster care that promotes permanence for all children. There are four core strategies upon which Family to Family relies for reforming child welfare systems. These are (1) Building Community Partnerships which focuses on building relationships in communities and neighborhoods that can support families involved in the child welfare system, (2) Team Decision Making which involves a process for making all placement decisions for foster children, (3) Resource Family Recruitment, Development and Support, which involves

finding foster and kinship families that can support children and families in their own neighborhoods, and (4) Self-Evaluation, which looks at collecting and using hard data to evaluate outcomes and determine where changes need to be made.

The information in this Booklet was developed as part of the Family to Family Education Technical Assistance Project, a 3-year project that focused on 7 California counties. Funded by the Stuart Foundation, its goal was to develop strategies for incorporating education into four Family to Family core strategies.

Building Community Partnerships

Core Elements of Building Community Partnerships

The focus of the Building Community Partnerships core strategy is twofold: (1) building relationships with a wide range of community organizations and leaders in neighborhoods in which child protection referral rates are high, and (2) collaborating to create an environment that supports families involved with the child welfare system. The development of these relationships with neighborhood and community organizations has several benefits:

- enhancing the child welfare system's ability to recruit, train, retain, and support neighborhood-based foster care.
- assuring that interventions respect the cultural and racial backgrounds of the children and families and are readily accessible to them.
- increasing the types and numbers of available formal and informal services.
- helping build a network of enduring supports for families within their communities.
- helping the community see the complexity of a child welfare agency's role.

Why Partner with Education

It is clear that child welfare cannot address the education issues that foster youth face alone; it needs to work closely not only with the education system but with the community at large. The basic assumption is that the responsibility for changing the unacceptably low educational performance of foster children and youth is a shared responsibility. It lies with a host of public and private agencies, organizations, communities, family members and the youth themselves, who must all work together

strategically in new ways and with great energy to accelerate, expand, and unify efforts to achieve better results. No single group, sector, or organization can accomplish these goals alone. Only by joining forces can real change be accomplished.

Legislative and judicial activities can serve as an impetus for child welfare and education to work together to develop collaborative structures and formal procedures for addressing the education functioning of foster youth.

In California state legislation provides a framework for facilitating collaboration between child welfare and education. This is a comprehensive set of laws (referred to as AB 490) that mandates that educators, school personnel, social workers, probation officers, caregivers, advocates, and juvenile court officers work together to serve the educational needs of children in foster care (AB 490). In addition to this state legislation the Judicial Council of California has adopted new Rules of Court that require the juvenile court, child welfare, educators, advocates, and caregivers to work together to address on an ongoing basis the educational needs of all children in the foster care system (Rules of Court, 2008). Other states may also have laws and policies that provide rights and protections to children in foster care to assist with school stability and continuity.

Getting Started

The first step for child welfare is to identify those school districts where foster youth live and attend school. A district that has a significant number of foster youth enrolled will be much more willing to partner with child welfare than one where only a few are enrolled. Identifying these districts can be a challenge because often very little education information is collected by child welfare.

One child welfare agency was certain that they had complete education information on the children in their system until they did a computer run and discovered that they had 16 year olds attending elementary schools. The education information had never been updated. With this information the agency immediately adopted a policy to update all education information and to keep it current.

The next step is to identify those movers and shakers within education who are strongly committed to making the necessary changes needed to improve the educational outcomes of children in foster care.

In California the Foster Youth Services Program (FYS) which operates in 57 of the state's 58 County Offices of Education provides education-related services to foster children and can provide a bridge between child welfare and education. In addition each school district is required by law to appoint a foster youth liaison.

Are there Superintendents of local school districts or school board members who may have a special interest in foster youth? There may also be a principal or other school administrator at a local school who can be engaged as partners.

In one large urban school district a school board member was instrumental in developing a detailed policy, which outlined the district's responsibility for foster youth. The California School Boards Association has adopted a draft policy which can be downloaded at www.csba.org.

Convene an Education Workgroup

An education workgroup will bring together the major stakeholders responsible for the educational performance of foster youth and provide the arena for identifying issues and fashioning solutions to address these issues. It can take different forms including:

- Creating a new interagency workgroup
- Creating an education subcommittee of an on-going advisory committee
- Folding education into a pre-existing interagency group

It can be formal in nature with a memorandum of understanding that delineates the functioning of the workgroup, or it can be more informal where the arrangements are *ad hoc* and agreements are verbal. It is important to remember, however, that no single model of collaboration is likely to meet the needs of every community and that the context, organizational structures, and leadership currently available must be considered. To be successful the workgroup must involve more than meeting and talking. It needs to create potent working relationships and not simply establish positive personal connections.

Who Should Participate in the Workgroup?

There is a whole range of community resources besides representatives from child welfare and education who could be part of an education workgroup. Even in selecting participants from child welfare and education, it is important to have a variety of perspectives represented, e.g., a social worker as well as a child welfare manager and a school psychologist as well as a foster youth coordinator. Other representatives to include are:

- County Agencies, e.g., Departments of Health, Mental Health, Public Social Services, Probation, Recreation & Parks, Library
- Courts, e.g., bench officers, attorneys for parents, children and child welfare, and Court Appointed Special Advocates
- Child care and Preschool Programs
- Post Secondary Education Institutions, e.g., community colleges, state universities, vocational colleges
- Service Agencies, e.g., PTA/PTSA, United Way volunteer agencies
- Service Clubs and Philanthropic Organizations, e.g., Lions Club, Rotary Club, foundations
- Youth Agencies and Groups, e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, 4-H
- Family members, caregivers and youth

Too often collaboratives and workgroups consist mainly of professionals with little representation from family members, caregivers and youth. And yet it is at the level of the family that the local school has its primary relationship in the community. Consequently, it is critical that family, caregiver and youth be as an active and equal partner.

Initially the workgroup participants need to agree on certain basic tenets. An example is the following list of Seven Basic Agreements adopted by the Los Angeles County Education Coordinating Council.

- Everyone must understand the central importance of education for the current well-being and future prospects of children and youth, expressing that value clearly and consistently in every aspect of their work.

- Everyone needs to adopt and maintain high expectations for foster children and youth.
- A strong investment in prevention, assuring that children are enrolled in high-quality early care and education programs, is fundamental.
- Everyone must pay attention to and address early on any factor affecting educational success, including the social, developmental, health, mental health, and learning challenges of youth
- School stability must be strongly considered when making residential and educational placement decisions, except when a school does not adequately meet the needs of the child or youth.
- Parents and caregivers should be involved in all aspects of their children's education.
- A shared understanding of educational responsibility must be achieved among all partners and groups who help to care for these youth, so that roles and responsibilities can be clarified and each group held accountable (Education Coordinating Council, 2006).

What Should the Workgroup Do?

The first task of the workgroup is to identify those specific educational issues that are preventing foster youth from achieving in schools. Important information can be obtained by conducting focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders and informants who are not participating in the workgroup.

Examples of Educational Issues to Be Addressed by a Workgroup

1. No process for systematically sharing key educational information among county agencies, schools, and caregivers.
2. Frequent changes in school and residence
3. Not enrolling in or attending school immediately upon a change of residence
4. Lost, missing, incomplete, or unavailable school records
5. No school information at the Team Decisionmaking Meetings (TDMs) (for more information on TDMs, see next section)
6. Failure to provide caregivers with the training and support needed to be an effective advocate for the foster youth's education
7. No policy requiring enrollment in high quality early care and education programs
8. Little communication between child welfare and education
9. Accurate assessment data at entry into the foster care system unavailable
10. Failure to monitor homework and educational progress
11. No intensive educational programs to remediate deficits in reading, math, and written language

Once the education issues are identified, the next step is to prioritize these issues as to which ones the group will address initially and then to develop a work plan.

Examples of Education Workgroup Activities

1. Pilot a data-sharing system with those school districts where the most foster children are enrolled.
2. Design a form that child welfare can use to notify a school district that a foster child is enrolling or disenrolling in the school.
3. Develop a policy that ensures that education information is available at TDMs (see next section).
4. Draft a Memorandum of Understanding that delineates the responsibilities for each of the participants in the education workgroup in assuring that foster youth receive an appropriate education in a timely manner.
5. Organize an Education Summit for a wide range of stakeholders, which will focus on the education needs of foster youth.
6. Create an education liaison position within child welfare who could facilitate communication between child welfare and education and provide support and resources to child welfare staff as well as families and youth.
7. Develop and conduct cross-trainings on education and the foster care system for caregivers, child welfare staff and school personnel.

In addition to specific projects that the education workgroup can undertake, the following are specific outcomes that child welfare can measure.

- Education workgroup meetings are held regularly where education issues of foster children and youth are identified and addressed.

- Heads of agencies and local education agencies meet regularly to address education issues of foster children and youth.
- Boards of Education adopt policies regarding best practices for meeting the education needs of foster youth.
- Child welfare representative attends established education meetings.
- A list of key school contacts is regularly updated and made available to social workers.
- A point person is designated in child welfare and the school district who will troubleshoot problems and coordinate activities.
- Educational resources within the county are mapped.

For a partnership to be successful it is important that it be seen as the expected way of doing business and not as a peripheral set of activities. All participants must share a vision and be prepared to work together.

Team Decisionmaking

Core Elements of Team Decisionmaking

Team Decisionmaking provides the opportunity to involve birth families and caseworkers as well as foster parents and community members in placement decisions which will ensure a network of support for the children and the adults who care for them. When difficult placement decisions must be made, team decisionmaking assures access to experienced and knowledgeable child welfare workers in discussion with the family, private service providers, and community representatives to develop a plan to keep at risk children safe. Interventions designed with the cooperation and input of families in terms that the family understands are more effective when offered to the family. By connecting families to natural supports within their own neighborhoods, team decisionmaking often contributes to the development of long term community safety nets for families at risk. The process also nurtures growing partnerships between public child protection systems and the neighborhood-based entities that such systems have often overlooked in the past.

The goal of Team Decisionmaking (TMD) is to make the best possible placement related decision with a high level of participant involvement and agreement (consensus).

A quality TDM decision is one that provides

- Safety and protection
- Placement in the least restrictive/intrusive setting possible
- Permanency and a life-long connection to a caring adult
- Placement stability... moves hurt children

What is a Team Decisionmaking Meeting?

Family to Family team decisionmaking serves as a forum where family members, their extended family or other support persons, foster parents (if the child is in placement), service providers, other community representatives, the caseworker of record, the supervisor and, often, resource staff from the child welfare agency come together to consider placement options. The meeting is a sharing of all information about the family which relates to the protection of the children and functioning of the family. The goal is to reach consensus on a decision regarding placement and to make a plan which protects the children and preserves or reunifies the family. Placement priorities include:

- With relatives or in a family setting with siblings
- In their own community
- Near their own school

An important voice at the TDM table is the youth. Failure to involve the youth in the decisions made about where they live increases the likelihood that the placement will be disrupted. Youth who are not “engaged” in the TDM process will have an increased likelihood of agreeing to a decision that they cannot or will not later support.

Considering Education at the Team Decisionmaking Meeting

Research has confirmed that the population of students in foster care is extremely vulnerable to school failure and early leaving. Placement and school instability is the major barrier linked to the wide range of school problems that these youngsters experience. Highly mobile foster children fall behind academically because they miss important concepts taught and are unfamiliar with the new curriculum, teachers, and

other students. School personnel find it difficult to track down prior school records. The delay in receiving proper school documentation results in students not receiving credits for classes they have taken, repetition of classes because there is no record of requirements having been met, failure to identify a student's eligibility for special education, and inappropriate placements and services. We know that "moves hurt children" but the depth of the problem regarding school instability is only now being documented:

- in a three-state study, over a third of young adults in out-of-home care reported having had five or more school changes (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004).
- of the 31 group home children studied, 3 had waited more than 20 days before entering school and 10 attended no school at all during the full 10-week study period (Caywood, 2000)
- a loss of 4 to 6 months of learning occurs with each placement change (Wolanin, 2005).
- the number of changes in foster homes was associated with having at least one severe academic delay (Smithgall, Gladden, Howard, Goerge, & Courtney, 2004; Zima, Bussing, Freeman, Yang, Belin, & Forness, 2000).
- higher rates of depression, poor social skills, lower adaptive functioning, and more externalizing behaviors were found among children who had been in numerous placements (Harden, 2004; Fansel, Finch, & Grundy, 1990)

In 2003, California passed Assembly Bill 490 (AB 490), landmark legislation to address the barriers to equal educational opportunities for California’s foster children and youth. The legislative intent of AB 490 was that “...educators, care providers, advocates, and the juvenile courts shall work together to maintain stable school placements and to ensure that each pupil is placed in the least restrictive educational programs, and has access to the academic resources, services, and extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to all other pupils...” A provision of AB 490 addresses school stability by providing foster youth with the right to remain in their school of origin for the remainder of the school year when a child welfare or probation agency moves them to a new placement (AB 490).

How Should Education Be Discussed at the Team Decisionmaking Meeting?

Each participant, child welfare staff as well as family, caregivers, and community representatives, has a role to play in informing the process to develop the best plan for the child and family. Participants can provide education details about the child’s schooling history and needs to assist the team’s consensus-based decision about placement.

Parent(s)	Shares information about the child and family including how the child is doing in school; gives his/her perspective on the current situation
Caregiver	Provides current information about the child including the child’s educational needs
Community Representative	Provides resources and supports others do not know about including educational services and interventions

Social Worker	Thoroughly presents the risk elements and safety concerns in this situation; included is a statement of the family' strengths and resources as well as its' current needs
Supervisor	Supports and models "straight talk;" brings clinical knowledge, engagement skills, and system smarts' to the table
Facilitator	Guides the meeting and ensures that the team discusses fully and openly both the risk to the child and the family strengths. He/She makes certain that education is a topic of focus

Who Should Represent Education at the Team Decisionmaking Meeting?

A school representative chosen by the family and/or youth should be included as a participant. The child and family should be queried to determine to which staff member at the school the student has a strong connection. A teacher or instructional aide who knows the student well can provide detailed information about how the youth performs in school and what academic or behavioral difficulties the youth experiences. A school coach, secretary, or nurse may have a special relationship with the student and can provide unique information that others may not be aware of. The TDM protocol should include an entry to identify a school representative to be invited to the TDM.

In California the Foster Youth Services or AB 490 liaison may be another important education figure to include in the TDM. These liaisons have access to school records and reports that may provide critical information when considering a change in

placement that might affect the child or youth's education placement. They also are knowledgeable about the local schools and special programs and services available in a school district or county. For example, a youth has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and receives special education services; if the child's school changes because of a placement decision, it is important to know whether the new school has the needed services documented in the IEP?

The child welfare agency may have a designated worker with specialized knowledge of educational matters. This worker can help interpret information presented about the youth's school history or needs. This worker's presence can assure that the child's education placement will be discussed when making decisions about placement or placement changes.

A TDM was held for a youth whose foster care placement was in jeopardy of failing. A major complaint of the foster parent was the youth's school record of tardiness and truancy. The school counselor attended the TDM and during the meeting, the youth revealed that she hated her 1st period class. The school counselor determined that the class was an elective and suggested a change in schedule. The youth agreed to the new schedule which included a later start time and a first class that featured a teacher and subject that the youth liked. The foster parent was willing to see if the schedule change eliminated the youth's attendance problems and the placement was maintained.

Bringing Educational Data to the TDM

One way to assure that the child's educational needs are represented at the TDM, is to solicit educational data from the school district in which the youth is currently enrolled. A school information form can be faxed to a contact at the school district and returned completed in time for the TDM meeting. This requires some coordination and collaboration between the TDM facilitator and the school district. Information can be requested such as grade level, attendance record, recent achievement test scores, grade point average (GPA), number of credits toward high school graduation, California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) scores, and whether the youth has an IEP or 504 plan which may be essential to decisions that affect the child's education placement.

Orange County in California has developed a procedure whereby the social worker faxes the School Information Form to the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) Foster Youth Services (FYS) office. The FYS office then contacts the appropriate District education liaison who then completes the form and faxes it to the OCDE office where it is faxed to the TDM clerk (see attachments 1 & 2).

Another way to assure that education is discussed at the TDM, is to ask education questions at the meeting. Depending on whether the TDM is being held to consider an initial placement, a placement change or preservation, or reunification, there are critical questions that should be asked by either the TDM facilitator or Education designated child welfare worker.

Initial Placement

- Are unaddressed educational needs of the child contributing to the abuse or neglect?
- Could a different educational placement or additional educational supports for the child strengthen the family?
- If out-of-home placement is to occur, does the child have educational needs, including special education needs, which might affect the placement decision?
- Does the placement decision comply with the requirements of state laws, regulations and policies?

Placement Change or Preservation

- When should the replacement occur to avoid a disruption in the child's schooling?
- If the need for replacement is related to the child's behavior problems, is the educational setting negatively affecting the child's behavior?
- Could a different educational setting help improve the child's behavior?
- What educational needs, including special education needs, does the child have that might affect a placement decision?
- Does the replacement decision comply with the requirements of state laws, regulations and policies?

Reunification

- How will the child's education be affected by changing the home placement even if the child's school does not change?
- Will reunification be jeopardized if educational supports, including special education supports, are not in place?

- When should the reunification occur to avoid disruption of the child's schooling?
- Does the reunification decision comply with the requirements of state laws, regulations and policies?

Action Plan Follow-up

Each TDM concludes with action steps being outlined for implementing the decision and to provide the family with immediate engagement to the most critical supports. The education issues and needs discussed at the TDM may require follow-up and the action steps will include identifying who is responsible to do what. For example, if the child or youth has severe academic delays or behavioral problems, the assigned social worker or school or agency education liaison may be asked to request an evaluation for special education services. If the youth is nearing high school graduation but has few high school credits and has not passed the high school exit exam, the assigned social worker or school or agency education liaison may be asked to request a Student Study Team meeting at the school to explore alternate education options or other supplemental services available for high school students.

Other Strategies to Engage School Districts in Team Decisionmaking

Even when TDMs are committed to discussing school placement, the most frequently heard concern is that school staff do not have the time or flexibility of schedule to attend the TDM. The following are strategies that encourage closer ties and greater communication between the schools and the child welfare agency.

- Social workers are being placed on school campuses in which large numbers of children in foster care are attending; they work with the school staff to monitor student progress and serve as a resource to the school and student.

- Social workers are being assigned to specific geographic regions/zip codes, which allows the worker to become a resource to the school sites within the region and facilitates collaboration and communication.
- Child Welfare agencies are establishing an Education Liaison position, a worker who serves as bridge/contact person between the agency and the schools.
- TDMs are being held at the school site, thus making it easier for teachers or other school staff to attend the meetings.
- School staff are being encouraged to attend, at least part of the meeting, to assure that school information is made available for reference/discussion during the TDM or a conference call is being arranged with a representative from the school during the TDM to provide educational input.



SCHOOL INFORMATION FORM for TEAM DECISION-MAKING MEETINGS (TDM's)
 Complete **PRIOR** to the scheduled Team Decision-Making Meeting

SECTION I: completed by OCDE Secretary, then faxed to the AB490 District Liaison.

RE: Student's Name _____ Date of Birth _____

TO: AB490 District Liaison _____ Fax No. _____

Student's Current School _____ School Phone No. _____

FROM: Social Worker _____ Phone No. _____

Holder of Educational Rights _____ Phone No. _____

Section II: completed by school representative/liaison

PLEASE COMPLETE AND FAX TO (714) 560-0585 BY 9:00 A.M. ON _____ (DATE OF TDM)

Form Completed by _____ Title _____ Phone No. _____

1. What grade is the student in? _____

2. Number of days absent this school year? _____ Excused _____ Unexcused _____

3. Has the student had a Student Study Team (SST) meeting? No Yes

4. Does the student have a 504 Plan? No Yes

5. Does the student have an IEP? No Yes ...Eligibility _____ Placement _____

6. Student's most recent achievement test scores? Reading _____ Math _____ Year Test Given _____

7. Does the student have a behavior support plan? No Yes Is one recommended? No Yes

8. Identify a school person the student has a strong connection to: _____

Teacher/Other Comments (concerns, strengths, etc.) _____

Complete if the student is in high school

9. What is the student's grade point average (GPA)? _____

10. How many credits does the student have toward high school graduation? _____

11. Has the student passed the California High School Exit Exam? English _____ Math _____

Orange County TDM
School Liaison Procedure

STEPS:

1. When a placement change or exit from placement TDM is scheduled for a school age child, the SW provides the scheduler with the name of the school that the child attends and the holder of the educational rights
2. Once a day the TDM face sheet that has the identifying information and includes the name of the child's school and educational rights is faxed to the secretary at Orange County Department of Education-Foster Youth Services (OCDE)
3. The OCDE Secretary researches the school records to make a positive identification of the school that the child attends.
4. The OCDE Secretary completes the top half of the attached form and faxes it to the appropriate school liaison who completes the rest of the form and faxes back to the OCDE Secretary.
5. The OCDE Secretary faxes the completed form back to TDM
6. The completed form is give to the TDM Facilitator and a copy given to the assigned SW
7. Most completed forms are sent to TDM after the meeting has been held. When this is the case, a copy is placed in the TDM file and a copy is sent to the assigned SW

Recruitment, Development and Support of Resource Families

Core Elements of Recruitment, Development and Support

The purpose of the Recruitment, Development and Support (RDS) strategy is (1) to create stability for children in foster care by allowing them to remain safely in their home communities when they are removed from their parents' homes and (2) to develop and adequately support a sufficient number of resource families in those communities who can provide nurturing out-of-home placements for the children. The RDS strategy includes:

- recruitment and development of resource families within those communities with high rates of removal of children for abuse or neglect,
- recruitment and development of resource families within the home communities of individual children in foster care, including teens, sibling groups, and those with special needs,
- placement of children by child welfare in resource family homes in the children's home communities; and
- development and support of resource families so that they are able to maintain and nurture the foster children and youth placed in their homes and not require, because of inability to provide adequately for their well being, that child welfare move them to other homes.

Recruitment and Development

Recruitment requires that there be a sufficient number of foster homes in communities with high rates of removals of children for abuse or neglect. Consequently, child welfare must use mapping and other data collection and self-evaluation techniques

to identify those high-removal communities. Once child welfare has identified these communities, agency representatives must engage in strategies to

- recruit a sufficient number of resource families from those communities, and
- ensure that children who are removed from their homes in those communities are then placed with resource families from the same communities, if the children can remain there safely.

Recruitment efforts may focus on local churches, community organizations, and friends and family members of existing resource families. In addition, schools can be a rich source for recruiting resource families because of their role in the community. Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and school booster club members as well as teachers, classroom aides, administrators, office staff, and other school or district employees, such as foster youth liaisons, may be interested in serving as resource families or can help identify those within the community who would be interested. Working with leaders within local school communities who will champion the cause of resource family recruitment can be an effective strategy. In addition, a school employee who is familiar with a specific child who is entering foster care may be willing to serve as a resource family because of the connection to that child.

Child welfare social workers and teachers, counselors, and other school district employees would appear to be natural allies because both agencies focus on the well being of children; however, communication across agencies has not always been easy. Teachers and other school district staff often find it difficult to make contact with child welfare social workers and express dismay when their reports of child abuse or neglect have not resulted in full-blown investigations or in removal of children from their homes.

Social workers and their supervisors, on the other hand, often find it difficult to negotiate the educational system, do not feel welcome on school campuses, and find that the needs of children in foster care are not well understood by school staff or are not adequately supported. Significant bridge building is needed for child welfare and the schools to work together more compatibly so that the school community can be a rich resource for both recruitment and development of resource families.

The use of the schools to recruit and develop resource families may provide the context to foster more collaborative working relations between schools and child welfare. A large part of the problem has been that the agencies have not understood each other's cultures or, sometimes, even their missions. Interagency work groups can help identify the common needs of each agency and serve as a vehicle to solve mutual concerns, including identifying winning strategies for recruiting and developing resource families. An interagency workgroup might have as one of its goals, for example, to recruit two resource families at each local school in a particular community. Parent volunteers can work with child welfare and school staff to publicize the campaign to seek resource families from that school and also provide ongoing information and answer questions about the role, responsibilities, and support of resource families. Holding Team Decisionmaking Meetings (TDMs) and other child welfare family decision-making meetings at a child's school is not only a good way to include the child's teacher, counselor, and other school staff in those meetings but, it also can draw attention to the needs of children in foster care.

Case Example

San Diego's Neighborhood for Kids program, with its vision of ensuring that children who are removed from unsafe or abusive families are surrounded by familiar people and places that encourage them to thrive, have realigned the child welfare staff into a cluster model to match school boundaries. The Neighborhoods for Kids program has invested heavily in marketing and has become adept at family finding techniques within the boundaries of each school. The goal is to get at least two resource families per school in the community. They also have "way station" families within the school community so that short-term foster placements do not require that the children have to change schools. The child welfare staff and the school staff work closely together and participate in a multi-agency workgroup. TDM meetings take place at the schools and include child welfare and school staff. They discuss a child's school progress, placement stability, and mental health needs, among other issues. The Neighborhood for Kids model of clustering child welfare workers within school boundaries has decreased travel time of the workers significantly. It also has significantly raised high school graduation rates of foster youth from 50% in 2003 – 2004 to 84% in 2006 – 2007.

Development and Support of Resource Families in the Area of Education

The Role and Importance of Resource Families

Resource families need to understand how important they are to a child's developmental growth and educational success. They must provide educational experiences from the earliest age for young children in foster care, which includes talking to, playing with, and reading to the child, among many other activities as well as ensure that the effects of abuse or neglect are mitigated or ameliorated.

Essential Experiences to Ensure Normal Development and School Readiness

- Encourage exploration
- Mentor in basic skills
- Celebrate developmental advances
- Rehearse and extend new skills
- Protect from inappropriate disapproval, teasing, and punishment
- Communicate richly and responsively
- Guide and limit inappropriate behavior

Ramey & Ramey, 2004.

In addition, it is essential that resource families maintain high expectations for ongoing educational progress (on grades in school work and classes; in types of classes taken; on overall grade point average) and on educational outcomes (high school graduation; enrollment in college).

Resource families play an important role in a child's educational success by:

- providing educational experiences from the earliest age
- maintaining high expectations for the child
- taking an interest in the child's education
- supporting the child's involvement in extra-curricular activities
- ensuring that the child receives college counseling

Resource families must monitor the educational progress of foster children in their care and keep close watch for early signs of school withdrawal, since the process of school disengagement starts early and may lead to a student ultimately dropping out.

Indicators of School Withdrawal that May Lead to Dropping Out of School

- Poor attendance
- Unsuccessful school experiences
- Academic or behavioral difficulties
- Feelings of alienation and poor sense of belonging
- General dislike of school

Research-based Interventions

Research-based interventions listed below are programs and strategies that have been shown by quantitative studies to improve educational outcomes either for children considered to be at risk for poor school or post-school outcomes or specifically to improve school functioning for children in foster care.

Early Intervention. Child welfare social workers and resource families must understand that the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] (2004) specifically requires that all children under age three who have substantiated cases of abuse or neglect be referred for screening to determine whether a full evaluation for early intervention services is warranted and, if warranted, that a referral for an evaluation be made. Both child welfare social workers and caregivers of young children in foster care must receive training on the provisions of IDEA regarding screening for early intervention services as well as on the criteria regarding characteristics for eligibility for a full evaluation and for services.

Eligibility Criteria for Early Intervention Services

Under IDEA, young children, between the ages of birth and three, are eligible for early intervention services when they have:

- diagnosed conditions resulting in developmental delays (e.g., cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome),
- documented delays (e.g. cognitive development, social/emotional development, communication, or
- in some state, conditions that are at high risk for substantial developmental delay (e.g. parental substance abuse; thirty-two week gestation) are entitled to receive publicly funded early intervention services.

IDEA (2004)

Research has shown that early intervention services can ameliorate disabilities for those infants or young children who are at risk for developmental disabilities or reduce their disabling effects. These services may include special instruction for the children (e.g., infant stimulation or preschool programs), family training, psychological counseling, respite services for caregivers, and transportation designed to meet the developmental needs of the child or family. Those entitled to receive services include the child, the parents, including biological and adoptive parents, a relative with whom the child lives, a legal guardian, and, in some states, a foster parent and other caregivers in order to enhance the development of the child.

Preschool and Early Education Programs. Children without a strong pre-kindergarten educational foundation are likely to start kindergarten approximately two or

more years behind their same age peers (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Delays are more pronounced when compared to children from learning-enriched environments.

Immediate and Long-range Effects of Preschool Attendance

- Positive effects on cognitive achievement
- Better performance on vocabulary, reading, and math than those who do not attend
- Less grade retention throughout school
- Fewer years in special education
- Fewer juvenile arrests
- Higher graduation rates
- Fewer cases of child abuse when these children become adults and have children
- More likely to be employed and have a higher income as adults

Consequently, child welfare agencies and resource families must understand how important it is that young children in foster care attend preschool. These preschool programs should ensure a high-quality learning and language environment. Starting such programs early is taking a preventive approach to addressing school readiness needs of a group of children who are at high risk of school failure. Child welfare must ensure that Head Start and Early Head Start programs give priority to children in foster care and that resource families know how to enroll children in their care in these programs. Child welfare must also establish relationships with other public and private preschools so that all young children in foster care have such programs available.

Therapeutic Preschools. Studies from specially designed preschool programs for young foster children and their families have shown that disturbed and abused children can make marked improvement in development and behavior in a secure, structured therapeutic environment (Gootman, 1996). Child welfare must support resource families by informing them of the availability of therapeutic preschool programs in their communities (e.g., Early Childhood Mental Health Dyadic Therapy Program; Kempe Early Education Project Serving Abused Families [Keepsafe]) for those young children in foster care who need such programs.

Elementary School. Just as enrollment in preschool programs is of utmost importance for children in foster care, likewise, enrollment in kindergarten programs is crucial. Essential academic readiness and other academic and social skills are part of the core kindergarten curriculum. As early as kindergarten and first grade, schools can determine whether children are gaining the essential skills to ultimately become proficient readers. Children in foster care should be in elementary school classes that teach research-based methods of reading and have teachers who are adequately trained in these methods. Reading programs should provide regular assessment of students' reading skills and teachers should receive ongoing training and help by reading coaches.

Resource parents must be encouraged to ask questions about the research supporting the curriculum and instructional methods being used in their children's elementary school classes. If foster children are struggling with early reading skills (e.g, rhyming, sounds of letters, blending sounds) resource families must inquire about what extra, intensive services the school has available for the child, and if adequate services are not available, appropriate tutoring and out-of-school services should be sought.

Tutoring. Resource families should receive support on identifying community tutoring programs that are available and those that have been shown to provide positive results for children in foster care. Many schools offer before or after school tutoring programs. One out-of-school tutoring program, Tutor Connection in San Diego that was specifically designed for children and youth in foster care, showed significant increases in reading, math, and spelling of those who received the tutoring.

Tutor Connection

- For foster youth ages 5 – 21
- Tutoring provided on specific academic subjects and study and organizational skills
- Tutoring provided for at least 20 – 25 hours per semester
- Tutors are pre-teacher education students in a college education class
- Foster youth showed statistically significantly increases in reading, math, and spelling
- Tutors showed statistically significant increases in knowledge of child welfare

Out-of-School Services. Under the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), children in schools that fail to reach adequate yearly progress (AYP) in increasing student achievement for three years are entitled to receive supplemental educational services. These supplemental educational services must be provided outside of the school day and must be high quality, research-based, and aligned with state academic content standards. Research studies (Lauer et al., 2006) have shown positive effects of out-of-school programs on reading and math achievement for at-risk students.

Out-of-School Programs

- To be effective, programs can be after school, on weekends, during school vacations
- Programs needs not focus solely on academics to be effective
- Programs must provide a minimum of 45 hours to be effective
- For reading, one-to-one instruction had the strongest positive effect
- For math, small group instruction had the strongest positive effect

Lauer et al., 2006

Resource families need training in identifying whether the schools that their foster children attend have failed to achieve AYP and, therefore, are required to provide supplemental educational services. If supplemental educational services are required, then caregivers may need support in identifying which services are available for their children. Even if children are not attending schools that have failed to achieve AYP, it still might be advisable to ensure that they attend high quality out-of school programs to improve their academic performance. Child welfare can help identify quality out-of-school programs.

Programs to Support At-risk Junior High and High School Students. Particular challenges exist in helping at-risk students graduate from high school and enroll in college. Several programs have focused on this issue with success. Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) programs are typically found in middle and high schools and are aimed at academic middle students (i.e., “C” students) and students who do not have a family history of attendance at four-year colleges or universities. Students in these programs take a rigorous academic curriculum and receive academic and social

support from an elective class. They also receive tutoring from college students to help them perform well in their academic classes. Other services, such as college advisement, are also provided.

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

- AVID programs are in 2,300 schools in 40 states
- Approximately 75% of students in AVID programs were accepted to 4-year colleges
- In California, Orange, Santa Clara, and Fresno Counties have targeted foster youth for enrollment in AVID programs.

The Higher Education Act, which was reauthorized in August 2008, includes amendments designed to increase foster and homeless students' access to postsecondary education through the federal TRIO programs. Each TRIO program must make available to homeless youth and youth in foster care (including youth who left foster care after age 18) such services as mentoring and tutoring. TRIO programs include: Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP). Talent Search serves young people in grades 6 through 12 and provides counseling and information about college admissions requirements, scholarships, and financial aid programs. Upward Bound helps young people prepare for higher education. Participants receive instruction in academic subjects (i.e., literature, composition, mathematics, and science) on college campuses after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer. GEAR-UP provides programs that offer college awareness and preparation.

TRIO Programs

- Of all the low-income students in the U.S. who graduate from high school and immediately enroll in postsecondary education, nearly one-third have been served by TRIO programs.
- Students in the Upward Bound program are four times more likely to earn an undergraduate degree than those students from similar backgrounds who did not participate in TRIO.

Child welfare should provide information about AVID and Trio programs. For students who do not have access to such programs, child welfare should help resource families put together services (e.g., college tutors, college counseling) that approximate them, as much as possible.

Case Example

As part of the Family to Family California Connected by Twenty-Five Initiative, Orange County's Social Services Agency (SSA) partnered with the local Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) and AVID regional coordinators. The SSA and OCDE representatives agreed to target 6th – 8th grade foster youth in three cities in the county that were residing in long-term foster homes, with relatives, or in select group home placements for placement in a school with an AVID program. They gathered school data on these youths, such as grades, test scores, progress reports, and any disciplinary records and the interagency group discussed each student and, after much discussion and review of records, decided that 15 out of 54 met the AVID eligibility criteria. Individualized letters were sent to the youth, their care providers, and their social workers stating that

the youth was eligible for AVID and was being recommended to apply for the program. Significant outreach occurred to the youth and care provider, including inviting them to a Pizza Party and offering to provide transportation so that they could learn more about AVID and the application process. Former foster youth who had completed the AVID program participated in the Pizza Party and a DVD was shown about the program. For youth who were unable to attend, significant outreach continued. Once youth were accepted into the AVID program, the SSA and OCDE provided them with a binder full of school supplies and ongoing support.

Special Education. Not all children and youth in foster care who are doing poorly in school require special education services. However, if a child has an eligible disability that cannot be adequately supported without special education services, resource families should be encouraged to request assessment for special education. They may need training and ongoing support to advocate effectively for special education eligibility or appropriate services. Special education is governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2004) and requires significant training to fully understand its many provisions. Advocating for appropriate services for an individual child requires not only understanding the IDEA but also being able to identify a child's needs as part of an individualized education program team and the types of programs or interventions that address them. The IDEA requires that school personnel who work with children with disabilities have the skills and knowledge to improve academic achievement, including the use of scientifically based instructional practice, to the maximum extent appropriate. Resource families need to ask about the scientific basis of their child's special education

program and know to whom they can turn when they believe that the special education services are not appropriate to meet the child's needs.

Monitoring a Child's Educational Progress

Frequently, no one monitors the educational progress of children and youth in the foster care system. It is essential that resource families are aware that this is their responsibility and that they receive appropriate training and support to do this job well.

Tips on Monitoring Education Progress

- Ensure that the child is enrolled in school immediately
- Provide time and support to complete homework and study for tests
- Help the child learn good study and organizational skills
- Attend Back to School Nights
- Request a conference with the child's teacher
- Review Progress Reports and Report Cards
- Be clear about a youth's school credits and what they need to graduate or for college
- Make sure all credits appear on the child's school transcripts
- Ensure that middle and high school youth are enrolled in appropriate classes

Self-Evaluation

Core Elements of Self-Evaluation

An explicit premise of the Family to Family Initiative is that planning, implementation, and evaluation should be guided by clear and specific goals, and that child welfare needs good performance data to guide the agency toward these goals. Within the child welfare system, state and local databases are developed from two data sources: (1) data collected in routine program operations to track children through their experiences in out-of-home care and (2) new information collected about children in out-of-home care from a variety of agencies that serve families and children (i.e., mental health, education, juvenile justice, etc.). Self-evaluation teams from the county child welfare agency analyze the data on a continuing basis. They assess the agency's progress and link data to program management and policymaking so as to bring the agency closer to its goals.

Need for Educational Data

Given the documented educational vulnerability of foster youth, child welfare needs to be able to access education data to monitor children's progress and identify when services and interventions are necessary to address school problems. There is a need for both (1) aggregate trend data so that policies and practices can be adjusted, and (2) individual, identifiable data that can guide day to day actions and interventions. Attempts to improve the coordination of foster youth's progress through the education system often are hampered by the general lack of education data and, where data exist, barriers to sharing it. Local jurisdictions vary widely with respect to information sharing between the child welfare and education systems and interpretation of laws governing

confidentiality. Yet some type of consistent local education data collection and sharing is needed to identify issues, track trends, and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs that affect the schooling of children and youth in foster care.

Problems Accessing Educational Data

Although both the child welfare and education systems maintain databases, these databases are not linked and information is not shared. Data elements for individuals who exist in both systems cannot be exchanged between the two systems. Moreover, child welfare agencies and the courts often do not inform educational institutions about foster care status, who is the holder of educational rights, and other factors that may influence educational outcomes for these students. The education system, in turn, differs from county to county and from district to district in what data are collected concerning foster youth, the quality of the available data, and to whom information is or may be provided. Often educators at both school and district levels do not know that students are in foster care and if they do know, may still lack essential information that could improve educational delivery to these students.

In California, the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) supports County and State program practice requirements, including data management, outcome measures and reporting solutions, consistent with Federal SACWIS requirements. Within CWS/CMS, limited education information is captured in the Health and Education Passport (HEP). Social workers are required to make entries into the HEP notebook including the name and address of the child's current and previous schools, the type of educational program in which the child is enrolled, whether the child has an IEP, and any other pertinent information. Too often, the only education data found in the HEP

notebook is the name of the child's school and even that may not be current. One California county had its data manager run a list with the names of each child in care and the school in which the child is enrolled. A large number of youth who were in the system for 5 or more years, still had elementary schools identified as their current school. The agency found that, in general, school data were not regularly updated in CWS/CMS.

From the schools' perspective, the general lack of knowledge about students' foster care status, coupled with the often frequent movement of foster youth between schools and districts, means that school personnel are often unaware of the needs of the students in foster care that they encounter, are unable to target assessment, specific interventions, or support, and may have difficulty ensuring that the foster youth receive partial credit for their work when they are moved to another placement.

To complicate matters, federal laws place restrictions on the exchange of individual student information between education and social welfare systems. Federal privacy standards under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA, 1996) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 2000) appear to limit information sharing between agencies. Although these restrictions are being resolved in some counties using court orders, memoranda of understanding, and other agreements, they are still creating barriers to the exchange of information between professionals in other counties and on a statewide basis.

FERPA protects the privacy interests of parents and students regarding the students' education records (20 U.S.C. § 1233g; 34 CFR Part 99). The only individuals with automatic access to education records are the parent and youth over 18. Others involved with the child welfare system (e.g., caseworkers, child attorneys, CASAs, foster parents, etc.) can gain access to education records if: (a) parental consent is obtained; (b) child welfare representative or foster parent/caregiver is considered the parent under law; or (c) a FERPA exception occurs (i.e., Court-order or subpoena grants access; there is an emergency to protect the health and safety of student or other persons)

In California, efforts have been made to improve the exchange and collection of education data relative to foster youth. In 2005-06, over \$7.5 million and in 2006-07, over \$15 million was provided by the legislature to support Foster Youth Services personnel in county offices of education. All but one county has taken advantage of this funding and one of the major uses of funding has been to support better availability of education data of students in foster care. Several counties, notably San Diego and Sacramento Counties, have developed their own unique database that allows secure access to authorized users and provides critical placement, health, and education information to partner agencies about foster youth. The intent of each database is to facilitate timely and appropriate school placement, seamless record and credit transfer, and expedited enrollment.

The county databases vary in such features as how data are entered, the extent of stored information, and what functions the system can perform. Sacramento's database, for

example, stores among other things, transcripts, IEPs, test scores, attendance, and disciplinary information. These data can be accessed by districts, child welfare, and the juvenile court to make possible the tracking of an individual student's progress. The system also immediately notifies school districts of new out-of-home placements and change of placements. A limitation of the system is that much of the data are hand entered as compared to San Diego's database which relies on electronic data matching. San Diego's system, however, is more limited in the kinds of data stored in the database and the functions performed.

Sample Data Elements Included in a Foster Youth Database

<p><u>Agency Section</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement Agency (County and type) • Placement Agency worker • Placement Agency address/county • Placement worker contact info • Placement worker Supervisor • Date case started <p><u>Personal Section</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child's First, middle, last name • Child's Alias Name • Child's birthdate • State Foster Youth ID number • CSIS number • Gender • Date/Place of birth • Social Security number. • Ethnicity • Religion • Child's Primary Language • Child's Secondary Language <p><u>Residence Section</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster Parent name, phone number. • Residence address/telephone number • Type of placement • Date arrived at residence • Date left residence • FFA or Group Home name and contact information <p><u>Education Section</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current School name • School District/County • School contact information • School Type • Foster Youth eligible for Title 1 N or D funds • School start date • Grade level • Grade level performance • Educational Records received at school site Y or N • 504 Plan Y or N • School History (start and end dates of previous schools enrolled in/exit reason) 	<p><u>Education Section (cont)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement test scores (name of test, test date, scores) • Test component name/score • Current credits earned • CAHSEE data • CELDT data <p><u>ILP contact</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ILP enrollment – Y or N • ILP worker name, phone number, email • ILP classes taken <p><u>IEP and Education Rights</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Education -Y or N • Date of most recent IEP • Date of last triennial • Primary disability category • Primary Placement/Service • District/SELPA with IEP • Parents' Education Rights limited Y or N • Holder of Education Rights (name and contact information) • Date assigned Education Rights • If 14 years or older, ITP Y or N <p><u>Vocational/Transitional Section</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment in Employment training program Y or N • Training Program name, start and end date • Enrollment in ILP program Y or N • CDSS services provided Y or N • CDSS name and contact info <p><u>Foster Youth Services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of services (tutoring, records transfer, counseling) <p><u>Health</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health conditions (asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, etc) • Allergies • Immunizations (name, date, exemptions) • Health providers names • Psychotropic medication history
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Using Education Data to Inform Decisions

Aggregate Data

In order to improve school outcomes of children and youth in foster care, there is a need for the collection, availability, and use of high-quality, cross-system data (Berliner, 2007). By tracking trends and patterns, child welfare and the schools can do short and long term planning to meet the identified needs of this group that is at risk for school failure. In Los Angeles County, for example, analysis of suspension data across several large school districts revealed that foster youth were three times more likely to be suspended than other students within those districts. Follow-up investigation found that schools were suspending foster students whose caregivers or social workers could not easily be reached. These data identified the need to develop procedures for schools to follow when representatives of child welfare were inaccessible.

To learn more about the educational achievement of children in foster care, the Los Angeles County Education Coordinating Council worked with the juvenile court judge to issue a court order to permit data matches to be conducted between child welfare and the school districts in which the largest numbers of foster youth were enrolled. Each data match involved identifying the overlap of active caseloads of the district and child welfare agency at a particular point in time. Using each district's school information system, students identified as being in foster care were tagged and their educational performance was compared with that of non-foster youth enrolled in the same district. The data match conducted between child welfare and Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) provided aggregate demographic and academic achievement information of foster youth and identified which elementary, middle, and high schools they attended. The match found that foster youth when compared to the general population performed significantly poorer at all grade levels in math and reading, were almost three times more likely to

be in special education; were suspended at three times the rate of non-foster students; and were less likely to pass or take the high school exit exam. LAUSD also performed a follow-up analysis to create a profile of the 203 foster youth identified as gifted and talented. Based on the LAUSD data match, Healthy City, an online community service and policy research tool for Los Angeles County, then mapped the location of foster youth by city council district, indicating what city resources are available for these youth in each district (Education Coordinating Council, 2006b).

Individual Data

Without information that clearly identifies individual foster youth and which school he or she attends and without the continual monitoring of his or her educational progress, it is less likely that the student will be connected to the services and support needed to succeed. The availability of high quality and reliable information ensures that the child's education history is appropriately understood and documented so that the child can be better represented and served. Moreover, in the event that a child's placement is to change and a school change is likely as well, questions must be asked such as: What school or program should the foster youth attend? What services should the foster youth receive in the new school? What interventions are needed to help the student succeed? The cases presented below illustrate why individual data must be available to the school and child welfare to ensure that each child is appropriately served and that his or her educational needs are addressed to support school success.

Case One

After the school registrar is informed by the caregiver that Joseph, a 9 year old boy, is in foster care, he is enrolled in school and placed in a 4th grade class. His school records have been delayed so the school is unsure if:

- 4th grade is the appropriate grade
- Joseph has the required immunization
- Joseph has an IEP or 504 plan
- Joseph needs any additional services or supports
- Joseph is at risk to harm himself or others

Case Two

It is mid-semester and Maria is being enrolled in the 10th grade classes. Without school records, the school doesn't know:

- Which classes Maria has already completed
- How much credit Maria should receive for classes that she has attended this semester
- Whether Maria is making progress toward completing the required college preparatory classes to attend a state university
- Whether Maria has an IEP or 504 plan
- Whether Maria needs any additional services or supports
- Whether Maria is at risk to harm herself or other

Lessons Learned

Because of the poor achievement outcomes of children in foster care, it is imperative that child welfare agencies and education agencies work together to develop collaborative structures and formal procedures for addressing the educational functioning of foster youth. These collaborative structures and procedures can be infused into the Family to Family Core Strategies, as has been described throughout this Booklet. Where this is done, a reduction of educational barriers occurs largely due to effective collaboration between child welfare and other agencies. The interagency education workgroup is an important vehicle through which much of the interagency collaboration happens. It needs to be remembered, however, that interagency collaboration is relatively easy when the changes necessary to remove barriers do not affect overall agency funding or organizational structures. Some agencies are willing to collaborate more readily when the suggested changes affect other agencies and not their own agency. Nevertheless, personal, respectful relationships between relevant stakeholders are key in the collaborative process because trust is not always easily attained or quickly forthcoming between some agencies. However, existing professional relationships between those in both agencies typically make collaboration easier.

Leadership is essential to bringing about needed changes; however, leadership can operate in different ways and still be effective. “Top-down” leadership within child welfare is one model that provides strong direction in implementing policies and programs that focus on improving education for foster youth. However, leadership sometimes emerges from within the child welfare ranks, typically when a social worker, supervisor, or manager has a particular interest in this area or when there was a strong

educational liaison within the agency. Leadership can also come from outside child welfare, such as from an education agency or a juvenile court judge. Whatever the agency from which leadership arises, these leaders become strongly committed to making changes and pressing forward on a variety of fronts (e.g., training, shared data collection, development of interagency forms, procedures, and policies). What is apparent, however, is that changes in leadership within an agency frequently has substantial consequences when the person who is leading the charge in the area of education leaves or is moved to a new position. Unless the commitments to reducing specific barriers and making changes to improve education outcomes is institutionalized within the agencies, when staff who had assumed responsibility for educational issues leave, progress comes to a halt until a new leader emerges.

Understanding the local context of each county is essential for establishing a workable process for developing cross-agency policies and procedures. At the same time, counties are likely to be more amenable to implementing changes when they know other counties have done it already.

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