

# Child Welfare—Education System Collaborations to Increase Educational Stability

The Children’s Bureau funded these 10 projects to build capacity among State, local, or Tribal child welfare agencies and education systems. The goal was to improve educational stability and permanency options for children ages 10 to 17 years who are in the custody of child welfare agencies. The synthesis is comprised of information that the grantees included in their final project and/or evaluation reports.<sup>1</sup>

## Funding Opportunity Announcement

In 2011, the Children’s Bureau published a funding opportunity announcement (FOA) for Child Welfare - Education System Collaborations to Increase Educational Stability. The 17-month infrastructure-building grants were to support collaborative initiatives among State, local, or Tribal child welfare agencies and education systems to improve educational stability and permanency outcomes for youth ages 10 to 17 years in foster care.

The FOA provided research findings that indicate older youth in foster care are less likely to finish high school, more likely to have poorer academic outcomes, and, on average, experience more school placements than their peers who are not in foster care. (Smithgall, Gladden, Duck-Hye, & Goerge, 2005; Stone, Andrade, & Austin, 2007; Burley & Halpern, 2001). Additionally, older youth in foster care are more likely to be in alternative school environments than their peers due to placement in residential settings or mental health facilities, loss of credits due to placement changes, or inability to enroll in school in a timely manner.

<sup>1</sup> Links to these reports are included within this document and are available in the [Children’s Bureau’s Discretionary Grant Library](#)

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According to the FOA, these projects would:

- Foster strategic coordination and institutionalized communication among public child welfare, education, community organizations, targeted youth in care, and their families
- Support the development of policies, procedures, and/or practices to increase the identification, enrollment, and attendance of targeted youth in care into comprehensive, high-quality education services
- Promote the awareness and utilization of multidisciplinary interventions and quality practice that increase protective factors and decrease risk factors to improve outcomes for youth in care
- Promote the development of policy and procedures across child welfare, education, and other supporting systems (courts, juvenile justice, and health) aimed at increasing protective factors and mitigating the effects of childhood trauma that impact permanency and educational outcomes
- Collectively disseminate findings and support knowledge transfer from these projects to the field

### FOA Information

FOA Title: Child Welfare—Education System Collaborations to Increase Educational Stability  
 FOA Number: HHS-2011-ACF-ACYF-CO-0183  
 CFDA Number: 93.652  
 Approved Project Period: 10/1/2011 through 2/28/2013

### Award Information

Funding Instrument Type: Grant  
 Estimated Total Funding: \$2,000,000  
 Expected Number of Awards: 8  
 Ceiling on Amount of Award: \$250,000 per budget period  
 Floor on Amount of Award: \$0 per budget period  
 Average Projected Award Amount: \$250,000 per budget period  
 Length of Project Periods: 17-month project and budget period  
 Match: None

### Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for grant awards included:

- State governments
- County governments
- City or township governments
- Independent school districts
- Public and State-controlled institutions of higher education
- Native American Tribal governments (Federally recognized)
- Native American Tribal organizations (other than Federally recognized Tribal governments)
- Nonprofits having a 501(c)(3) status with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), other than institutions of higher education
- Nonprofits without 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than institutions of early learning and education

### Grantees

Note: For ease of reading, projects will be identified by the State postal abbreviation for the State in which they are located. For example, the Solano County Office of Education project will be referred to as CA. Links to final reports and site visit reports (where available) are provided.

#### State: California (CA)

#### Project Title: Project Help, Opportunity, Preparation for Education (HOPE)

Lead Agency: Solano County Office of Education  
 Collaborating Partners: Child Welfare Services (CWS) division of the Solano County Health and Social Services Department  
 Award Number: 90CO1067  
 Contact: Lisette Estrella-Henderson, Associate Superintendent, Student Programs and Educational Services, Solano County Office of Education,  
[LEHenderson@Solanocoe.net](mailto:LEHenderson@Solanocoe.net)

Target Population: Children ages 10 to 17 years who are under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court as a dependent or ward, including children placed by other counties into Solano County who are also under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court

Key Grant Activities:

- Established two Solano County Office of Education (SCOE) staff as student support specialists and colocated the specialists in the Child Welfare Services (CWS) office.
- Developed data-sharing protocols between CWS and SCOE that allowed the school to receive an electronic notification within 24 hours of a placement change. In addition, real-time data from the school system were integrated into the California Child Welfare Services/ Case Management System, which allowed CWS caseworkers to obtain education information on youth in foster care.
- Established a transportation protocol to allow youth in foster care to remain in their school if their placement changes and if remaining in the same school is in their best interest.
- Collaborated with Solano Community College Foster Youth Success Initiative and the SCOE Foster Youth Services program that also prepares youth to transition into postsecondary education by offering continuous support throughout their senior years in high school and conducting a summer bridge program to prepare these youth for college entrance in the fall.
- Hired a consultant to review new and amended State legislation and policies regarding the education of youth in foster care. The consultant then amended the interagency agreement to reflect these changes and identify any actions required by each agency due to the legislation.

[CA Virtual Site Visit Report](#)  
[CA Final Project Report](#)

**State: Connecticut (CT)**

**Project Title: Waterbury Educational Stability**

**Initiative: A Collaborative Response to Trauma**

Lead Agency: Connecticut Department of Children and Families

Collaborating Partners: Waterbury Public Schools

Award Number: 90CO1071

Contact: Ann-Marie DeGraffenreidt, Director of Program Development, [Ann-Marie.DeGraffenreidt@ct.gov](mailto:Ann-Marie.DeGraffenreidt@ct.gov)

Target Population: Children in foster care in Waterbury who attend Waterbury Public Schools

Key Grant Activities:

- Provided training on trauma-informed child welfare practice and child traumatic stress to educators, child welfare professionals, parent liaisons, foster parents, and school resource officers.

[CT Site Visit Report](#)

[CT Final Project Report](#)

**State: Florida (FL)**

**Project Title: Developing Resources and Educational Advocacy for Motivated Students (DREAMS)**

Lead Agency: Kids Central, Inc.

Collaborating Partners: Florida Department of Public Health, Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), Marion and Citrus County Public Schools, Children's Medical Services, Fifth Judicial Circuit Courts

Award Number: 90CO1068

Contact: Debra Wise, Deputy Chief of Prevention Services, Kids Central, [Debra.wise@kidscentralinc.org](mailto:Debra.wise@kidscentralinc.org)

Target Population: Children in foster care ages 10 to 13 years in Marion and Citrus Counties

Key Grant Activities:

- Created policies, procedures, and protocols to promote cross system collaboration, address barriers to information sharing, and ensure that appropriate services are provided to students in foster care.
- Implemented an automated, web-based data extraction and reporting system to facilitate information sharing.

- Colocated educational liaisons in the targeted school districts.
- Designated a staff member from each school to serve as the primary contact and advocate for students in foster care.
- Provided comprehensive training and education to stakeholders on roles and responsibilities in meeting youth's educational needs, Federal and State education statutes, as well as related policies and procedures and the K-12 Education Report Card.

### FL Final Project Report

#### State: Iowa (IA)

##### Project Title: Collaboration of Agencies for Permanency and Stability (CAPS)

Lead Agency: Siouxland Human Investment Partnership (SHIP)

Collaborating Partners: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Siouxland, Iowa Department of Education (DE), Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS), Iowa Third and Fourth Judicial District Juvenile Court Services (JCS), Council Bluffs Community School District (CBCSD), Sioux City Community School District (SCCSD), Green Hills Area Education Agency, Northwest Area Education Agency, Iowa Third and Fourth Judicial District Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association, Achieving Maximum Potential  
Award Number: 90CO1070

Contact: James France, Director, SHIP

Target Population: High school-aged youth in group foster care in CBCSD and SCCSD

#### Key Grant Activities:

- Implemented new policies and practices for youth as they transition to and from schools while in group foster care.
- Provided access to DHS and JCS caseworkers to the Iowa Transcript Center that DE uses to transfer students' school records and transcripts.
- Provided education advocacy training to child welfare, education, and legal practitioners, as well as to foster parents and legal guardians.

### IA Final Project Report

#### State: Kansas (KS)

##### Project Title: Kansas Partnership for Educating Kids in Care (KPEKC)

Lead Agency: University of Kansas (KU)

Collaborating Partners: Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) and the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE)

Award Number: 90CO1068

Contact: Teri Garstka, Institute for Educational Research and Public Service (Institute), and Alice Lieberman, University of Kansas School of Social Welfare

Target Population: Youth in foster care ages 10 to 17 years

#### Key Grant Activities:

- Developed data-sharing agreements at the local and State levels.
- Reviewed Federal, State, and agency policies and updated current policy to correspond with those policies.
- Developed educational materials for educators, child welfare stakeholders, and policymakers to facilitate an understanding of roles, responsibilities, and issues facing youth in foster care.
- Developed and provided online training, *Using Data to Improve Educational Outcomes*.
- Developed a [KPECK website](#) that contains information about the project.

### KS Final Project Report

#### State: North Carolina (NC)

##### Project Title: Fostering Youth Educational Success (Fostering YES)

Lead Agency: Center for Family and Community

Engagement (Center), North Carolina State University

Collaborating Partners: Cumberland County Social Services, Schools, Court, and Mental Health

Award Number: 90CO1075

Contact: Joan Pennell, Professor and Director of the Center for Family and Community Engagement, North Carolina State University, [jpennell@ncsu.edu](mailto:jpennell@ncsu.edu)

Target Population: Youth ages 10 to 17 years in out-of-home placements and in the custody of social services. Over time, the focus was extended to encompass older youth who voluntarily continued in care.

## Key Grant Activities:

- Established the Youth Advisory Council and Project Advisory Council to inform the interventions of the project.
- Conducted youth focus groups to inquire about the facilitators and barriers to their educational success. The results from these focus groups provided a solid foundation from which to develop survey questions for youth to complete anonymously.
- Determined youth's experience with school and placement moves through data analysis, which, in turn, allowed the project to determine the transportation costs related to the youth's movement away from their school of origin.
- Developed automated forms to track the youth's placements, removals, and child and family team meetings.
- Developed and tested curricula on promoting the educational success of foster youth and using child and family teams to support youth in transition, and effectively used co-training with youth partner.

[NC Children's Bureau Express article](#)  
[NC Final Project Report](#)

**State: Ohio (OH)****Project Title: Kids in School Rule! (KISR!)**

Lead Agency: Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati (LAS)

Collaborating Partners: Cincinnati Public Schools, the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services (JFS), Hamilton County Juvenile Court

Award Number: 90CO1077

Contact: Elaine E. Fink, Managing Attorney, Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, [efink@lascinti.org](mailto:efink@lascinti.org)

Target Population: All youth in JFS custody who attend Cincinnati Public Schools

## Key Grant Activities:

- Established specialized staff at Cincinnati Public Schools and JFS whose job responsibilities involved improving educational outcomes for KISR! students.

- Developed a JFS Operational Manual for education specialists and a KISR! Desk Guide detailing roles and resources.
- Developed a Cincinnati Public Schools KISR! Liaison Handbook detailing procedures and protocols for the project and the roles and responsibilities of various partners.
- Implemented a district-wide "No-Barrier" enrollment protocol created by Cincinnati Public Schools to ensure that KISR! students were immediately enrolled into schools.
- Developed the Education Court Report to provide substantive updates on the education progress of each KISR! youth, and developed the Educational Judicial Bench Card to enable the court to effectively address educational progress at each review hearing.
- Established a trauma-informed consultation program to improve school staffs' understanding of the challenges facing youth in foster care and offer strategies and suggestions for responding to behavioral challenges with KISR! students.
- Improved systems coordination through bimonthly Leadership Team meetings held with Cincinnati Public Schools, JFS, Juvenile Court, and LAS.
- Developed a data infrastructure that allowed the KISR! program to measure and monitor educational outcomes and stability in school placement on an ongoing basis.

[OH Site Visit Report](#)

[OH Final Project Report](#)

**State: Pennsylvania (PA)****Project Title: Improving Educational Well-Being Outcomes of Children**

Lead Agency: Allegheny County, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS)

Collaborating Partners: Pittsburgh Public School (PPS) District, and the Allegheny County Family Court

Award Number: 90CO1076

Contact: Erin Dalton, Deputy Director, Allegheny County DHS, [Erin.Dalton@AlleghenyCounty.US](mailto:Erin.Dalton@AlleghenyCounty.US)

Target Population: Youth ages 10 to 17 years in the child welfare system

## Key Grant Activities:

- Automated the Pennsylvania State Education Screen by populating some of the fields from the integrated data acquired through a data-sharing agreement.
- Developed a consent form for use across all DHS program areas that would allow for more collaboration among agencies serving school-age children.
- Built the technical infrastructure to display child-level education data received from PPS in the KIDS<sup>2</sup> case management system.
- Implemented the Best Interest Placement Tool to ensure that when a child needs to be placed in out-of-home care, DHS is identifying placements that are in the best interest of that child and family.
- Partnered with the Education Law Center to provide training for child welfare staff on education issues, including training on the State Education Screen.

[PA Virtual Site Visit Report](#)

[PA Final Project Report](#)

[PA Final Project Report Attachments](#)

**State: Texas (TX)****Project Title: Texas Trio Project — Strengthening Court, Child Welfare, and Education**

Lead Agency: Texas Education Agency (TEA)

Collaborating Partners: Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and the Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families (Children’s Commission). Concurrently, a local collaborative project with the Houston Independent School District (HISD), DFPS, and Child Protective Services (CPS) Region 6 occurred and included both local and State-level team members across systems.

Award Number: 90CO1072

Contact: Julie Wayman, Director of Prevention Initiatives, TEA, [Julie.Wayman@tea.state.tx.us](mailto:Julie.Wayman@tea.state.tx.us)

Target Population: Youth ages 10 to 17 years in foster care

<sup>2</sup> KIDS is the Pennsylvania statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS).

## Key Grant Activities:

- Developed the Foster Care & Student Success Resource Guide to support increased awareness and replicable practices statewide.
- Revised the DFPS Residential Contract to require caregivers to notify the school of a child’s placement change.
- Updated CPS policy to require caseworkers to notify the school of a child’s withdrawal if the child requires a placement change from a kinship caregiver.
- Developed resources for judges related to education outcomes of youth in foster care.
- Promoted and increased awareness about the need for each school district in Texas to have a foster care liaison.
- Analyzed DFPS/TEA’s current data-sharing processes.
- Developed and implemented an MOU between DFPS and HISD to allow the exchange of data and information between the two agencies.

[TX Final Project Report](#)

[TX Final Evaluation Report](#)

**State: Utah (UT)****Project Title: CASA Volunteers as Education Advocates, System Liaisons, Facilitators, and Role Models**

Lead Agency: Utah Department of Human Services (DHS)

Collaborating Partners: Utah State Office of Education (USOE), University of Utah, School of Social Work’s Criminal Justice Center, the Guardian ad litem Office, and courts

Award Number: 90CO1074

Contact: Laurieann Thorpe, State Education Specialist

Target Population: Children ages 10 to 17 years residing in foster care in Utah

## Key Grant Activities:

- Developed the CASA Education Questionnaire.
- Incorporated a recruitment and marketing component to increase the number of CASAs and to educate the general public about the issues faced by children in foster care.
- Provided training to CASA volunteers on the education component of youth in foster care.

- Sponsored the Endless Dreams conference in January 2013 to initiate additional discussion about the educational needs of children in foster care and to provide training to those who support these children.
- Developed training for educators about the connections between foster care and the education system.

[UT Site Visit Report](#)

[UT Final Project Report](#)

## Key Program Interventions/Activities

Grantees focused on organizational-level activities intended to coordinate systems and encourage knowledge transfer across the systems. This was appropriate, given that the primary intention of the FOA was to facilitate building an infrastructure to support collaborative initiatives between child welfare and education systems. Organizational-level activities included, but were limited to, the following:

- **Service integration procedures.** All of the projects within this cluster devoted time and effort to the review and/or revision of agencies' policies and procedures. The development of new policies, procedures, and practices promoted collaboration across child welfare, education, and other supporting systems (courts and juvenile justice) and were aimed at improving permanency and educational outcomes, and increasing communication and information exchange between child welfare staff and education staff.
  - CA – Established a transportation protocol to allow youth in foster care to remain in their school if their placement changed and if remaining in the same school was in their best interest. The protocol indicates that the school system will provide transportation for the youth.
  - CT – (1) Developed tools to facilitate DCF's access to the educational history of children in DCF's custody. (2) Revised the form used to notify school districts when a child's placement changed and changed the method used to send the form to school districts.
  - FL – Developed a DREAMS procedural manual that was disseminated to student services directors, guardian ad litem programs, and child welfare staff. The manual established policy, procedures, and protocols with school districts to ensure biological parent, foster parent, and youth involvement in meetings concerning the youth's academic progress and success.
  - IA – Designed an electronic transfer document form for information contained in student's academic record, including high school credits, academic placement history, and current academic support staff, to include school counselor and case worker. In addition, policies and protocols were developed for using the form.
  - KS – (1) Reviewed Federal, State, and agency policies and updated current policy to correspond with those policies. (2) Developed educational materials for educators, child welfare stakeholders, and policymakers to facilitate an understanding of roles, responsibilities, and issues facing youth in foster care.
  - NC – (1) Developed automated forms to more effectively track youth's placement and school moves. (2) The infrastructure developed by the project allowed Cumberland County Social Services to move away from a paper-based system and establish a comprehensive electronic record system for children in foster care. The electronic record system consolidated different forms, which made record searches and updates easier.
  - OH – (1) Established an enrollment protocol for children in foster care. The protocol indicates that children in foster care are to be enrolled in school immediately, even if they do not have all of the required documentation. KISR! students are not to miss educational instruction because of barriers to enrollment. In addition, all enrollment fees are waived for KISR! students, including summer school enrollment fees. Prior to the establishment of this enrollment protocol, LAS would often receive calls about issues enrolling children in schools; however, during the 2012–2013 school year, there

were no enrollment issues with KISR! students. (The enrollment protocol is included in the OH Final Project Report). (2) Developed a policy by which Cincinnati Public Schools allowed KISR! students to remain in their neighborhood schools, even if their foster placement disrupted, and they were moved to a foster placement out of their school catchment area. The schools and JFS work together to resolve transportation issues. (3) JFS revised its placement process to give explicit consideration to keeping a child in the same school when selecting a placement, unless contraindicated by the child's best interests. The placement process now requires that the child's assigned caseworker notify JFS education specialists within 24 hours of the placement of any children within the Cincinnati Public School district. (4) JFS instituted a new protocol for KISR! students that prevents removal from school during academic instruction time for child welfare case plan services. This ensured that KISR! students did not miss school for medical appointments, therapy appointments, and visits with parents. (5) Implemented new protocols to decrease the length of time needed to update child welfare data and the corresponding entry of changes in school-related information. The new protocols required caseworkers to update school-related information on a weekly basis for all children in JFS custody.

- PA – (1) Designed and implemented the ability to store signed education consents in KIDS and populate school district data when the signed consent form is stored in KIDS. (2) DHS built technical capacity and legal authority to share educational records across all DHS agencies for students who were adjudicated dependent and for students for whom DHS received an educational consent signed by the parent or guardian. This allowed for more collaboration among agencies within DHS that serve school-age children and their families (a copy of this consent is included in the [PA Final Project Report Attachments](#)). (3) Developed and implemented the Best Interest Placement Tool.

This decision-making tool provides caseworkers access to information to identify the best placement in an attempt to maintain a child within his or her current school catchment area, closer to the child's family and community of origin (if preferred), and close to the child's current medical and mental health providers.

- TX – (1) Revised the DFPS Residential Contract to require caregivers to notify the school of a child's withdrawal due to a placement change and to ensure that all school records are collected at the time the child is discharged from the placement. (2) Updated CPS policy to include the requirement for caseworkers to notify the school of a child's withdrawal if the child requires a placement change from a kinship caregiver.
- UT – Developed the CASA Education Questionnaire to assist the CASAs in collecting education information. This form is based on a judicial [checklist](#) developed by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the form was designed to correspond to existing data fields in SAFE, Utah's SACWIS. (Detailed information about the questionnaire is included in the [UT Site Visit Report](#)).
- **Training.** All projects offered child welfare, education, and other related stakeholders training to help understand the importance of assessing and supporting students educationally during their time in foster care. Some projects offered training about trauma to assist educators and other related stakeholders in understanding the affects childhood maltreatment and removal from the home may have on a child. Through the training, staff gained knowledge and, in some projects, also developed and strengthened collaborative relationships with partnering agency staff.
- CT – (1) Provided training on trauma-informed child welfare practice and child traumatic stress to school administrators, schools nurses, school resource officers, parent liaisons, pupil services staff, foster parents, and child welfare professionals. The DCF Training Academy conducted the training using

- a slightly modified [Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit](#), which was developed by the [National Child Trauma Stress Network](#). The purpose of the training was to improve participants' understanding of how disruptive placing a child in foster care is for a child's education; to increase participants' understanding of the nature of the behavioral problems that might occur and provide them with intervention strategies; and to increase understanding of the importance of educational stability in the life of a child, especially a child in foster care. Throughout the training, the importance of assessing and supporting students educationally as their placements changed was emphasized. (2) Dee Bell, an expert on balanced and restorative justice (BARJ), trained a team of Waterbury Public Schools personnel and DCF social workers on how to implement BARJ in schools. This training was provided because it is essential that students who are the subject of the grant remain connected and part of the school community, even when they violate school rules. The purpose of the training was to provide the district with strategies that allow the district to hold a student accountable while allowing a student to remain a part of the school community.
- FL – Provided training to judges, magistrates, guardians ad litem, Children's Legal Services staff, foster and adoptive parents, biological parents, kinship caregivers, child welfare personnel, Children's Medical Services staff, and school system personnel on roles and responsibilities in meeting youth's educational needs; on Federal and State education statutes, as well as related policies and procedures; and the K-12 Education Report Card that must be completed for all school-age children in the custody of the State. (A copy of the K-12 Education Report Card, including instructions for completion, is included in the *K-12 Report Card Interventions* manual in the [FL Final Project Report](#).)
  - IA – (1) Provided education advocacy training to child welfare personnel, educators, legal practitioners, foster parents, and other caregivers. The training increased awareness of education-related issues and increased the ability of foster parents and other caregivers to navigate educational systems and become education advocates for their youth. (2) Provided training on the new electronic data-sharing tools.
  - KS – Developed and provided online training, *Using Data to Improve Educational Outcomes*, and classroom training, using an Action Planning Guide developed for this project, for child welfare staff, school district administrators, teachers, counselors, social workers, and school clerks. The training was developed to assist educators and child welfare professionals at the local level to better understand and use shared data.
  - NC – Enhanced existing training and developed new training for youth in foster care, community partners, social services and education staff, and foster and kinship care providers. Training topics focused on promoting educational success and how to guide and support youth in transition effectively, including youth participation in Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings and resources available to youth. Training titles included *CFT, What's in It for Me?*, *Keeping It Real: Child and Family Teams With Youth in Transition*, and *Believe & Achieve: Bridging the Gap!* The training was delivered by trainers experienced with delivering child welfare services, who partnered with a youth partner trainer who had experienced out-of-home care. According to project staff, the co-training approach assisted training participants in understanding the impact of trauma, encouraged a focus on factors promoting youth success, and modeled youth-agency partnership. (Additional information about the trainings and the training curricula is available in the [NC Final Project Report](#).)
  - OH – (1) Provided training for all KISR! partner agency staff and community partners, including attorneys, foster parents, and mental health providers, on the KISR! project, educational law and educational advocacy, and educational legal issues for children in foster care. (2) Contracted with a local behavioral health provider, Beech Acres Parenting Center, to provide trauma-informed consultations to schools to build the capacity of

teachers, school administrators, and other school personnel to understand how trauma may affect students in school; the best practices for working with children who have experienced trauma; and how to create a trauma-sensitive environment that supports learning. These consultations were intended to enhance the capacity of school personnel to maintain educational stability for KISR! students. (The Beech Acres informational brochure on trauma-informed services is included in the [OH Final Project Report](#))

- PA – Partnered with the Education Law Center to provide training for child welfare staff on the KIDS education screen and education records; school enrollment/school stability and attendance; the right school setting (includes school discipline); special education issues and accommodations for children in school; and education transition planning and postsecondary planning.
- TX – (1) Provided training to judges, court personnel, CASA volunteers, attorneys, child welfare staff and advocates, educators and other school personnel, secondary education professionals, data coordinators, Communities in Schools staff, Title III, and migrant staff on ensuring the educational needs of youth in foster care are met. (2) Developed training and guidance for foster care liaisons, including *School District Foster Care Liaison 101* (Guidance for Texas School District Foster Care Liaisons) and *School District Foster Care Liaison 201* (Understanding Child Protective Services and Court).
- Utah – (1) Provided training to CASA volunteers to teach them their roles and responsibilities for successfully advocating for the educational needs of children involved in the child welfare system. (2) Provided training to educators, child welfare personnel, and officers of the court to increase their understanding of educational issues facing children involved in the child welfare system and awareness of CASA volunteers' roles in advocating for educational issues for these children. (3) Developed training for educators about the connections between foster care and the education system.
- (4) Sponsored the Endless Dreams conference in January 2013 to initiate additional discussion about the education needs of children in foster care and provide training to those who support these children.
- **Advisory Committees and/or Leadership Teams.** These oversight bodies brought together representatives from child welfare, education, juvenile/family court, and other community stakeholders and were responsible for planning the project, providing leadership, and monitoring project implementation.
  - CA – Utilized the existing Foster Youth Education Project committee as the advisory team for Project Hope. Members included mid-level managers and line staff from participating agencies, including education, Special Education Local Plan Area, child welfare, juvenile probation, juvenile court, youth's attorneys, Foster Parents Association, foster care providers/agencies, Foster Kinship Care Education program, Solano Community College, county attorneys, and the Youth Action Team.
  - CT – Established the grant team members, which included the DCF area office director, the chief academic officer for Waterbury Public Schools, the out-of-district special education supervisor, the social work supervisor for foster parent support unit, the education consultant and specialist for the DCF region, a representative from the Connecticut State Department of Education, two liaisons, and the program manager. The team met monthly, with frequent email communication between meetings.
  - IA – Established the project oversight committee that included representatives from DE, DHS, and JCS.
  - KS – Organized the KPEKC taskforce, which included DCF, KSDE, KU, State-level stakeholders, including CASA, Juvenile Justice Authority, Office of Judicial Administration, foster and adoptive parent associations, as well as youth and representatives from the local pilot (USD 501 and TFI, Inc.).

- NC – Established a Project Advisory Council that was supported by the Center and was composed of representatives from Cumberland County Department of Social Services, Cumberland County Schools, Cumberland County Juvenile Court, Cumberland County Department of Health, and a liaison from the Youth Advisory Council. In addition, the project established a Youth Advisory Council that was coordinated by a foster care alumna and youth from the independent living program. Project staff reported that having a youth council and a strong liaison between the two councils made youth feel as though they had a voice and it was being heard by decision-makers.
- OH – Developed the KISR! leadership team that included high-level management staff from each partner agency, Cincinnati Public Schools, JFS, and Hamilton County Juvenile Court, as well as the JFS education specialists.
- TX – Established a State-level leadership composed of representatives from TEA, DFPS, and the Children’s Commission.
- **Data sharing.** Projects planned, developed, and/or enhanced data-sharing capabilities between child welfare, education, and, in some cases, the courts, to assist in ensuring the education accomplishments and challenges of children/youth in foster care were recognized and addressed by all entities.
  - CA – Expanded and improved data sharing between SCOE and CWS. Prior to the grant, there was generally a delay in notifying the school of placement changes. As a result of the grant, the school system now receives an electronic notification within 24 hours of a placement change. In addition, Foster Focus was implemented, which allowed real-time data from the school system to be integrated into the California Child Welfare Services/Case Management System. Foster Focus allows CWS caseworkers to obtain information on youth in foster care that includes, but is not limited to, attendance, grades, behavioral issues, and credits toward graduation.
  - FL – Developed an electronic data exchange between social services and the school system. In order to access the school records, Kids Central provided the school system with a list of students under the DREAMS project, along with a copy of a court order authorizing Kids Central to have access to the youth’s educational records or a release of information signed by the parents authorizing the release of educational records.
  - IA – Developed a collaboration between DE, DHS, and JCS that provided DHS and JCS caseworkers access to the Iowa Transcript Center (ITC)—a website that schools in Iowa use to transfer student records and official transcripts. By providing caseworkers access to ITC, they were able to initiate the request for a student’s school records, current course enrollment, and recommended course of study to be sent from one educational facility to another. In addition, the caseworkers, through ITC, could request and receive copies of the school records. This increased communication among caseworkers, local education systems, and group care facilities, and improved educational transitions and reduced student credit loss. Cross-system access to academic records for youth currently in the child welfare system was accomplished via the project’s signed data-sharing agreements.
  - KS – Developed data-sharing agreements at the local and State level. The local data-sharing pilot between a school district and child welfare case management provider shared student data across systems and identified critical issues to inform additional data sharing at the State level. At the end of the grant period, the grantee’s data team was working on developing a mechanism to flag youth in foster care in the State KSDE data system, which would be a positive step toward regular data sharing and coordination.
  - OH – (1) Expanded the range of education data points that are contained in Cincinnati Public School’s Learning Partner Dashboard (LPD) for KISR! students so it could track desired indicators and become the means to share specific data about

all KISR! students with JFS. JFS enters agreed-upon child welfare data into LPD on an ongoing basis for each KISR! student. The child welfare data points include legal status, permanency plan, and placement type, which are taken from the Ohio SACWIS. The education data points are populated for KISR! students on a daily basis. LPD can be accessed by JFS education specialists, who can review certain education data points for KISR! students, including, but not limited to, grade point average, attendance, discipline referrals, if a student is failing a class, and if the student has an individualized education program (IEP). In addition, the dashboard identifies if a student has any educational risk indicators, which are determined by the number of absences, tardy arrivals, discipline referrals, and/or class failings by the student. The dashboard provides data on individual students and can provide aggregate data on all KISR! students. LPD allows for meaningful integration of child welfare and education data, and it is designed to provide information about individual students as well as about KISR! students in the aggregate. KISR! partners expect to utilize LPD to generate reports that will inform and guide the project going forward.

(2) Cincinnati Public Schools provided access to PowerSchool to the JFS education specialists to allow them to closely monitor the KISR! students' performance and attendance. PowerSchool is a web-based student information system that allows parents to view real-time attendance and grade information for their children. PowerSchool provides more detailed information about student performance than LPD.

- PA – (1) Integrated the school systems' data into the DHS data warehouse,<sup>3</sup> and the data included, but were not limited to, the following:
  - Personal identifiers (name, date of birth, Social Security number)
  - School directory data (school building, grade level)

<sup>3</sup> The DHS data warehouse contains data on human services recipients, including those receiving services for child welfare, mental health, homelessness, and juvenile justice.

- Demographic data (gender, race, age, free lunch indicator)
- Performance data (grade point averages, Pennsylvania System of State Assessment Scores)
- Attendance data (days of suspension, excused and unexcused absences, tardy arrivals)

The school system data were made accessible and integrated into the DHS data warehouse when the child is adjudicated dependent, which is known through information from the Common Pleas Court Management System or if the caseworker uploads a signed parental consent into KIDS (a copy of this consent is included in the [PA Final Project Report Attachments](#)). The inclusion of school system data in the DHS data warehouse is allowed via an MOU. The MOU authorized the use of the data for conducting an "action research" project, which is a problem-solving process in which DHS and the school district work toward improving the way they address certain issues involving students served by both systems. To do this, DHS used data to prepare analytical, aggregate reports related to students who received services through DHS. These reports identified characteristics and indicators related to academic successes and challenges. DHS and the school districts examined the data in order to develop effective strategies for improving the way they address the needs of students and their families. (The MOU is included in the [PA Final Project Report Attachments](#)) (2) The Pennsylvania State Education Screen, a part of KIDS, was modified to include a section with detailed educational records about each child. Some data may be entered manually, but other data are populated automatically when the child attends school in a district with a data-sharing agreement with DHS.

- TX – Developed and implemented an MOU between the DFPS and HISD to allow the exchange of data and information between the two groups. Because HISD includes the State's largest number of students in foster care, the information collected and the challenges with data exchange help to inform the project's understanding of data and information exchange at the local level.

- **Court processes.** Several of the projects established, in collaboration with the courts, processes, procedures, and/or forms to assist the courts with monitoring the school performance of youth in foster care. The establishment of these procedures helped to ensure the courts thoroughly reviewed and addressed the educational needs of the youth.
  - OH – Developed the Education Court Report and Judicial Bench Card for Education Success. JFS education specialists submit an Education Court Report to the juvenile court before every KISR! student custody review hearing. The court report includes information about the child’s educational history, special education needs, attendance, discipline issues, and other issues relevant to the child’s education. The assigned magistrate reviews the Education Court Report before the hearing and during the hearing references the Judicial Bench Card for Education Success, which is a guide for the magistrates to use to direct discussions on education issues. The Judicial Bench Card has been so successful in gathering education information about KISR! Students, that some magistrates are beginning to use it for children not involved in the KISR! program. (The Education Court Report and the Judicial Bench Card for Education Success are included in the [OH Final Project Report](#))
  - FL – Provided the judges and magistrates in Citrus and Marion Counties with an education checklist for use during judicial reviews. The checklist provided guidance on what the court should ask regarding a youth’s education. In addition, the courts began to request to review the K-12 Education Report Card during judicial reviews and, as a result, Children’s Legal Services started attaching the K-12 Education Report Card to each Judicial Review Report filed with the courts.
  - PA – Added education information/data from the PA education screen and a one-page summary of the child’s education records for the current school year to the Court Addendum that is submitted to the court before each judicial hearing. (2) The school outreach coordinator for the Focus on Attendance Program meets with the magisterial district judge on a regular basis to determine the best course of action for families whose children have poor school attendance.
  - TX – Developed resources for judges related to education outcomes of youth in foster care, including a website and a judicial checklist, that include questions the judges should ask during hearings. In addition, the Texas Child Protection Law Bench Book was revised to include recent legislative changes to education rules and to add a chapter on education. The revised Bench Book and the judicial checklist were provided to courts across the State.
  - UT – Developed a form for the CASAs to use to gather education information about the children in their cases prior to each judicial review hearing. The forms are provided to the guardians ad litem, attorneys, caseworkers, and the court. During hearings, judges refer to the form, and they have indicated that the form assists the court in making decisions about the child.
- **Designated staff to work with youth in foster care.** The majority of the grants developed roles and responsibilities for designated staff to ensure that the educational needs of youth in foster care were met and that information for and about the youth was readily available to child welfare and education staff.
  - CA – Established two SCOE staff members with backgrounds in education and child welfare as student support specialists. The specialists were colocated in the CWS office. The student support specialists’ responsibilities include, but are not limited to, assisting CWS permanency caseworkers in ensuring that the educational needs of youth in foster care are met, helping caseworkers obtain school records and understand the education system, accessing academic performance status and school discipline records, supporting the caseworkers in preparing for IEP meetings for youth on their caseload, attending IEP meetings, and meeting with the youth.
  - CT – Hired two retired special education supervisors to act as liaisons to the students served by the project. The liaisons reviewed educational progress

- of the students, facilitated their registration in school, and shared information about the child’s educational progress with the foster parents and DCF social workers. The liaisons also identified students at risk of failing, seniors with insufficient credits to graduate, and students in need of referrals for special education and related services.
- FL – Assigned educational facilitators to all students in foster care ages 10 to 13 years in Marion and Citrus Counties. The facilitators made monthly contact with school designees, participated in critical school meetings involving the students (e.g., IEP meetings), advocated for the students, and worked with case workers to ensure that the student’s educational needs were addressed. In addition, the caregivers and/or parents were contacted on a monthly basis by the educational facilitators to discuss the student’s progress.
  - OH – (1) Designated two JFS case managers as education specialists. Their role is to assist in maintaining educational stability and success for KISR! students by assisting with school enrollment, ensuring children are enrolled in the appropriate programs, providing and receiving information from school liaisons, preparing educational court reports, reviewing information from the Learning Partner Dashboard and PowerSchool, discussing education issues with the child’s case manager, and assisting in maintaining children in the same school should a placement move occur or the child return home. The education specialists are the point of contact for all issues involving KISR! students. They have regular meetings with the Assistant School Superintendent in order to resolve issues involving KISR! students expeditiously, and they have access to certain data reports from the juvenile court’s information system to ensure all eligible children are involved in KISR! (The guidelines and responsibilities of the JFS education specialists are outlined in the JFS operational manual, which is included in the [OH Final Project Report](#)) (2) Established a KISR! liaison within each Cincinnati Public School to support KISR! students by working collaboratively with the education specialist and the assigned teachers to discuss the successes and address the challenges and education needs of KISR! students, including problems with attendance. The liaisons are required to have regular contact with KISR! students. (The guidelines and responsibilities of the KISR! liaisons are outlined in the KISR! Liaison Handbook included in the [OH Final Project Report](#))
  - TX – Promoted and increased awareness about the need for each school district in Texas to have a foster care liaison. In addition, the project developed a database and method to track liaison appointments. As a result, more than 435 school district foster care liaisons were identified during the grant period. (The key responsibilities for school district foster care liaisons are included in the [Texas Foster Care & Student Success Resource Guide](#).)
  - **Project outreach materials.** Several projects developed outreach materials to assist parents, foster parents, and caregivers with meeting the educational needs of youth in their care, as well as providing information to educators, child welfare professionals, court personnel, and youth in foster care.
    - FL – Created a pamphlet for parents and caregivers titled *Helping Children Succeed In School*. The pamphlet provided contact information for the Kids Central Education Program, information on school portals for each school district, and exceptional student education information. (The pamphlet is included in the [FL Final Project Report](#))
    - IA – Developed resource materials about the importance of ensuring educational records, educational plans, and education credits transfer between schools.
    - KS – Developed a [KPECK website](#) that contains information about the project, as well as resources for educators, child welfare professionals, foster parents, and youth in foster care.
    - TX – Developed and disseminated the [Texas Foster Care & Student Success Resource Guide](#). The guide contains information for addressing foster care and education in Texas and replicating collaborative cross-system practices throughout the State.

- UT – Customized a video by the National CASA Association for audiences in Utah that promotes volunteering as a CASA. The 3-minute video is available on YouTube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j77tCpk7cCo&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j77tCpk7cCo&feature=youtube_gdata_player). In addition, the project developed a 30-second version of the video to be seen in 178 movie theaters before each movie. The project also used billboards and newspaper advertisements to recruit additional CASA volunteers.
- **Interagency agreement/Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).** Grantees established formal agreements between partner agencies to define the expectations of each agency for the grant period. The following are examples highlighted in grantees' final reports.
  - CA – Amended an existing interagency agreement to reflect State legislation and policies regarding the education of youth in foster care and identify any actions required by each agency due to the legislation. As a result of this process, the project determined that the agreement would need to be a living document in order to accommodate new and changing legislation and policy. (The interagency agreement is attached to the [CA Virtual Site Visit Report](#).)
  - CT – Developed an MOU that clarified the roles and responsibilities for the partner agencies, as well as established the expenditure of grant funds and the reporting of those expenditures. (A copy of the MOU is attached to the [CT Site Visit Report](#).)
  - KS – Established an MOU between the convener (KU) and the partner agencies (DCF and KSDE) to formalize the commitment to collaborate. In addition, an MOU was established at the local level to share data for the local pilot.
  - FL – Developed an interagency agreement to clarify roles, responsibilities, and procedures regarding youth's status in school.
  - OH – Established an MOU between the partner agencies that clearly outlined the roles and responsibilities of each of the partner agencies for the grant period. The MOU was signed by the leader of each partner agency. (The MOU is included in the [OH Final Project Report](#))
- **Data analysis to inform grant interventions.** A few projects conducted analyses of student data to provide additional insight into the needs of students in order to plan appropriate, meaningful grant interventions.
  - NC – Linked de-identified social services and schools administrative data for youth in care 3 months prior to the start of the project to determine the youth in foster care's experience with school and placement moves. These data were analyzed to determine the reasons for placement and school changes, and, using mapping technology, the transportation costs related to youths' movement away from their original schools. In addition, to expedite tracking of foster youths' placements and removals, and their child and family team meetings, Cumberland Social Services developed automated forms over the project period. Data from the first rollout of these forms were sent to the Center, and preliminary analyses were made of the predictors of school and placement moves. The main challenges in analyzing these data were the high levels of missing data and difficulties in matching data sets.
  - KS – Completed a one-time data-sharing process at the local student level that informed the development of training modules on using data to improve educational outcomes.
  - TX – Analyzed DFPS/TEA's current data-sharing processes. Through efforts aimed at overcoming the barriers to child-specific data sharing between TEA, HISD, and DFPS, a descriptive baseline for children in foster care related to their education status was gathered statewide and at the HISD level. The descriptive baseline and following analysis allowed for project staff to understand the educational achievement of children in foster care at the implementation stage of the grant process and informed specific grant interventions.

- **College preparation assistance.** Youth involved in some projects received services and/or referrals to services to assist them as they transitioned to secondary education. The following are examples highlighted in grantees' final reports.
  - CA – Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) was created by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office to address issues current and former foster youth may experience in the higher education system. Although the program is not funded through the community college system, Solano Community College (SCC) funded a full-time staff member to help current and former foster youth successfully navigate the community college system, to teach them basic life skills, and to provide them with resources and connections to assist them in reaching their educational goals. SCC FYSI, in collaboration with Project HOPE and the SCOE Foster Youth Services program, also prepares youth to transition into postsecondary education by offering continuous support throughout their senior years in high school and conducting a summer bridge program to prepare these youth for college entrance in the fall. The student support specialists refer youth to the transitional program as part of their education plans.
  - OH – Although not exclusive to KISR! students, at least 40 KISR! students participated in the Higher Education Mentoring Initiative (HEMI). HEMI is a partnership between a Hamilton County Commissioner, Hamilton County JFS, the University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College, and Great Oaks vocational program. HEMI helps prepare children for postsecondary education. The initiative recruits, trains, and supports mentors to establish a long-term (4 years), positive relationship with youth in foster care. The mentors meet with the youth at least once a week beginning their junior year in high school and assist them with applying for postsecondary education opportunities. HEMI recently announced its 2013 scholarship winners for students pursuing higher education, and 8 of the 12 awards were to current or former KISR! participants.
- In addition, HEMI has started providing housing vouchers to students participating in the project.

  - **Interviews and focus groups to inform grant interventions.** Some projects conducted focus groups and developed surveys to learn more about the educational barriers and successes of youth in foster care in order to establish infrastructure to improve educational stability for these youth. The following examples were highlighted in grantees' final reports
    - NC – Conducted focus groups of youth in foster care to determine their views on what promotes or interferes with educational success. The focus group participants identified issues that they faced at school and in their placements as well as the supports they needed. Information from the focus groups was used to develop a survey, which was completed anonymously by youth currently or formerly in foster care. The survey had three goals: to discover what kinds of resources youth in foster care, ages 12 years and older, needed to support their educational and well-being goals; to examine what kinds of planning services and assistance individuals had received or would like to receive to help them plan for adulthood; and finally, to guide practitioner training of social workers and to improve their understanding of the supports and resources youth in foster care need to plan for their futures. Respondents to the survey identified perceived and needed resources to achieve positive educational outcomes. Notably, most youth who attended child and family team meetings felt that their social worker paid some to a lot of attention to their school progress, and they indicated that that their social worker is their primary adult support.
    - KS – Administered a stakeholder survey and conducted focus groups to identify statewide information needs and gaps. The statewide stakeholder survey was administered online to more than 9,000 partners across the State, with a total of 1,603 educators, child welfare professionals, and parents responding. In addition, a local needs assessment was administered via an electronic survey to all educators and child welfare

professionals in the district. The surveys identified that individuals working with children need more specific information about the individual needs of those they are working with; they need more timely access to educational records; and more information regarding best practices in meeting the educational needs of youth in foster care. In addition, many educational staff indicated they need more data-related training.

- **Other relevant interventions.** Grantees also provided the following interventions that were not included under other topic areas:
  - FL – Created the *K-12 Report Card Interventions* manual. DCF requires that caseworkers complete the K-12 Education Report Card for children ages 5 to 17 years in foster care. The Education Report Card has nine items/indicators about the child’s educational status and is to be completed on a regular basis and entered in the SACWIS system at least every 30 days. Circuit 5, the grant catchment area, requires that the Education Report Card be completed for all children ages 5 through 17 under the court’s supervision. The grantee developed the *K-12 Report Card Interventions* manual for the counties served by the project to go with the nine educational domains. The interventions are divided into three categories, pro-active, active, and reactive. Pro-active interventions are items to understand and implement, which will often limit, minimize, or prevent an unwanted occurrence. Active interventions are ongoing and particular to individual needs within that domain. Reactive interventions are most likely considered when the domain data indicate a problem of major consequence if not quickly remedied. The *K-12 Report Card Interventions* manual is included in the [FL Project Final Report](#).
  - OH – Provided, via the Legal Aid Society, advocacy or legal representation to KISR! students who were experiencing issues related to enrollment, school discipline, or special education.
  - PA – Developed and implemented the Focus on Attendance Pilot program, a model truancy

- prevention program that began in two Pittsburgh Public School K-8 buildings. Based on data analysis of truancy and on the premise that early prevention and assistance to both students and their families reduces truancy, a school-based outreach specialist was hired to work on the pilot program in two K-8 schools. The primary responsibility of the outreach specialist was to assess child and family needs and to educate, refer to available community resources, and coordinate new and existing human services. Through a referral process from the schools, the outreach specialist identified high-risk children and assessed their needs, as well as the needs of their families. In certain high-need situations, the outreach specialist referred the child and family to in-home and truancy-related services. In addition, the outreach specialist created collaborative groups of service workers who met and communicated about the best interests and needs of the child and family they were serving. The outreach specialist established a relationship with the magisterial district judge serving the two schools and attended every hearing of students who were referred to her. Because of the relationships the specialist established, the judge ensured that the students were working with the program and bypassed punitive measures if they were not needed in favor of constructive work by the family and child to improve attendance, with the assistance of the specialist. A tool to help track actions and outcomes for this program went live in the child welfare case management system in January 2013. This tool allowed the school outreach specialist to systematically track the needs of the children referred, the actions taken, and the referrals to paid and unpaid services. At the time of the final report, more than 150 students were served in the two schools, and 42 percent of them saw improvement in their attendance.
- TX – (1) Established a Foster Care Education listserv to communicate information about foster care and education to the education community in Texas. (2) Implemented a local-level pilot project in HISD with Region 6 DFPS. Group members for

the pilot, including members of the State and local team, met monthly at HISD. The pilot provided Trio the opportunity to understand the challenges, cross-system training needs, and opportunities for improved coordination and collaboration to enhance foster care and education success at the local level. The pilot project provided baseline information regarding student data that were previously unknown and began the process of developing and identifying reasonable student identification and information-sharing processes and enrollment practices.

## Overarching Themes

### Common Challenges

Grantees identified multiple challenges in their efforts to achieve collaboration between child welfare and education systems:

- **Information and data sharing.** Challenges in sharing information about children served by both systems were attributed to the interpretation of laws preventing child welfare agencies and educational entities from sharing information without the informed consent of the parent. In addition, some projects had difficulty in establishing data-sharing agreements. Projects worked to overcome these issues through relationship building, training, establishing information-sharing protocols and MOUs, obtaining parental consent through release forms, and court orders allowing child welfare agencies to have education information about children in their custody. In addition, the passage of the Uninterrupted Scholars Act of 2012 helped alleviate barriers to sharing educational records with child welfare agencies.
- **Maintaining advisory and leadership committee members.** Most projects established leadership committees. One of the challenges to maintaining the committees was maintaining consistent participation from personnel, particularly leadership, and from collaborative partners. Issues that hindered the participation of some key personnel included the inability to commit to meetings and activities due to their already demanding schedules. In addition, some projects experienced staff/advisory members leaving their respective agencies during the grant period.
- **17-month grant period.** Some grantees reported that planning and implementing the project within the 17-month grant period was challenging.
- **Tasks delayed by external processes.** Tasks of some projects were delayed due to delays in obtaining governing bodies' approval; agency leadership not signing information-sharing agreements in a timely manner; and case referrals to the project not occurring as expeditiously as initially believed.

### Successful Strategies

The following strategies were identified by projects as influential in enhancing the collaborative process:

- **Communication and interaction across programs/agencies.** Although the systems working together on these projects may have had frequent interactions prior to the grant projects, the interactions were not always positive. Strong partnerships of the agencies and the individuals were formed through the grant process. The partners met and/or communicated on a regular basis to discuss the progress in meeting the objectives of the grant projects and to modify the project if needed. In addition, the agencies met to discuss policies and procedures, which was beneficial in addressing the barriers to service provision. Partners took the time to learn about and understand the roles and responsibilities of each program/agency involved.
- **Supportive leadership.** Having people on the leadership/advisory team who could make decisions on behalf of their agency/organization or had access to the decision-makers was key to the success of the projects. Leaders who understood the need for specialized, directed educational services and educational stability for youth in foster care also contributed to the success of the projects. In addition, the cross-discipline leadership team allowed members to learn from one another's expertise.
- **Ongoing education/training.** The projects provided numerous trainings and technical assistance options for educators, child welfare staff, and court personnel on the importance of meeting the educational needs

and maintaining school and placement stability for youth in foster care. In addition, some projects provided training to educators on trauma and how trauma may manifest itself in a classroom setting. In addition, trainings were provided on information sharing and the use of data in making educational decisions for youth in foster care.

- **Data and information sharing.** Although seen as a challenge, when systems did exchange data and information and created a data-sharing infrastructure, communication improved across the systems and, in turn, anecdotal information indicated that educational stability improved for youth in foster care because the information about students was readily available to those working closely with them.
- **Designated staff to work with youth in foster care.** The majority of the grants developed roles and responsibilities for, and provided training to, designated staff to ensure that the educational needs of youth in foster care were met. In addition, these staff members also ensured that information for and about the youth was readily available to child welfare and education staff.

## Common Lessons Learned

The projects developed infrastructure and implemented interagency practices to improve educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care. Their project implementation and evaluation experiences highlighted some lessons learned, including the following:

- **Leadership commitment.** The leadership of each agency/system involved being supportive of the project and understanding the importance of educational stability and improving education outcomes for youth in foster care was key to the success of the projects.
- **Collaboration, communication, and relationship building.** By establishing a collaborative of key stakeholders from the education, child welfare, and other closely related systems, it is necessary to implement consistent communication practices to keep them engaged. The leadership team, as well as frontline staff, having regular contact via meetings or

trainings is vital to the establishment and maintenance of relationships. Cross-agency partnerships cannot be maintained unless people are able to see each other on a regular basis.

- **Create project guidelines, policies, and procedures.** The creation of project guidelines, policies, and procedures is crucial to any project. The assistance of the partners and key stakeholders is necessary in the development of the guidelines and it ensures that everyone is doing the same thing and is on the same page. Once the guidelines, policies, and procedures are developed and approved, it is necessary to train staff, supervisors, and other individuals they will affect.

## Evaluation

The FOA required each grantee to engage in an evaluation. The goal was to track relevant outputs and outcomes that reflect the results of the project activities. Where data were available and appropriate, grantees were encouraged to measure outcomes of pre- and post-grant activities. Each project worked with an evaluator to construct a logic model, develop a design for the evaluation, and collect and analyze data. The evaluation summaries in the Appendix describe each project's data collection tools and methods, evaluation challenges, and selected process and outcome findings as described in project reports.

## Evaluation Challenges

The Child Welfare - Education System Collaboration projects experienced some evaluation challenges. Several projects reported the intent to collect certain types of data, including baseline data and child-specific data; however, while conducting the evaluation, it was determined that some of these data were not available. In addition, certain aspects of the evaluation process could not be performed because there was difficulty in obtaining information from stakeholders and collaborative partners. In some cases, this resulted in the lack of a meaningful sample size. A few projects noted that the 17-month grant period inhibited the grants from assessing the outcomes of the projects adequately and thoroughly.

## Evaluation Findings

Programs reported some promising findings and interventions related to and designed for enhanced Child Welfare - Education coordination and collaboration. It is difficult, however, to summarize results across the projects due to the differences in the activities of the projects, the differences in the evaluation processes, and the varying levels of participation among key agencies. In addition, because of some evaluation challenges and resultant limitations, caution must be used in drawing inferences or making generalizations from these findings.

Overall, the project evaluations appear to suggest improvements in communication and collaboration among child welfare, education, and system partners involved in the grant project. Some evaluations identified that at the end of projects, child welfare and school system personnel had more knowledge and understanding about cross-system policies, operations, and challenges. In addition, evaluations also showed improvement in the coordination of services to improve stability in education and educational outcomes for children/youth in foster care. In many projects, policies and procedures were developed and implemented to allow for more open communication and data/information exchange between the two systems, as well as policies and procedures aimed at maintaining children/youth in their schools of origin. A few projects identified early results that indicated a reduction in school changes that appeared to be directly related to new policies and procedures established by the projects.

The results of pre- and post-tests/surveys indicated that most training attendees increased their level of knowledge about the training topics, including knowledge about the unique needs of children/youth in foster care, meeting youth's educational needs, education advocacy, and promoting educational success. Most training participants reported that they were satisfied with the training they received through the projects.

## APPENDIX: Evaluation Summaries

The evaluation summaries below provide a brief overview of each project's evaluation process and findings, as described in project reports.

### Project: CA

Evaluator: Tad Kitada

The evaluation process was conducted as a feedback process rather than an end of the project report.

- Process evaluation included the direct observation of FYEP meetings, school district liaison meetings, district administration meetings, and trainings. The observation focused on the nature of responses to the information presented, requests for feedback and input, and the type of information shared, including announcements and communication across agencies. In addition, satisfaction surveys of trainings were reviewed.
- Outcome evaluation included the review and ongoing revision of the interagency agreement, as well as the responses to trainings related to the agreement. Additionally, the implementation of Foster Focus, educational data software related to youth in foster care, was deemed to have been completed and an achieved outcome. A success noted by the evaluator was the establishment of forms and protocols for the implementation of key pieces of legislation used by the partner agencies.
- Findings of the evaluation indicated improvements in how information was exchanged between the SCOE and the CWS, including how promptly changes in placements were reported. In addition, the evaluation found that the training provided by the project bolstered the knowledge of staff from SCOE, CWS, and other community partners. Prior to trainings for educators on foster care education laws, attendees received a Likert survey to measure their knowledge on foster care education-related laws. The survey results indicated that not all attendees knew the law as it related to the educational rights of youth in foster care. The post-training surveys indicated that 100 percent of the attendees had an increase in knowledge about

foster care education laws. The evaluator reviewed and monitored the colocation of the student support specialists and reviewed their access log, which tracks questions asked by CWS caseworkers, as well as indicates the supports provided by the specialist. According to information provided by project staff, some CWS caseworkers reported that they would not have known education-related information if it were not for the colocated staff. Others reported they do not always have the capacity to make calls seeking education-related information; therefore, the colocation of the student support specialists improved the SCOE's ability to meet the educational needs of youth in foster care.

**Project: CT**

Evaluator: Brian K. Perkins, Ph.D.

This evaluation employed a participatory action-research model utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods. The evaluation consisted of two sets of surveys and one set of focus group meetings. The initial survey distribution and focus group meetings occurred between January 2013 and April 2013. A draft report was developed and, based on the fact that the liaisons only began working in May 2013, it was determined that a second survey would be issued. The second survey was issued in February 2014.

The project outcome evaluation focused on four groups—children in the cohort, foster parents, DCF employees, and WPS employees. The evaluation found that there was minimal to no improvements in perceptions of the communication processes between DCF and WPS. The evaluation noted that teachers did not know who to contact at DCF. This was confirmed by the survey responses from DCF staff because they indicated that they did not communicate with teachers directly. It is believed that though teachers may not know who to contact at DCF, they did know who to speak with in their school when a student displayed emotional difficulty or challenging behavior.

The response to the training provided by the grant was good from all participants. School personnel and

DCF social workers received trauma training. Some of the training included participants from both agencies because it was the belief of the grant team that collaborative training enriches the discussion during the training and enhances post-training collaboration between the participants. Additional support was provided through the grant liaisons who reviewed every child's record, facilitated every child's enrollment, and ensured that the children's needs were addressed appropriately.

The grant team, including the liaisons, ensured that all children in the cohort were enrolled in summer enrichment programs sponsored by the Waterbury Public Schools during the summer of 2013. Concentrated outreach to the social workers and foster parents occurred to make families aware of the programs and to ensure that funding was available to pay for the programs, if necessary. All students in need of summer school were identified prior to the end of the school year. These students were enrolled in summer school. The final evaluation revealed that the academic performance of children improved after placement in the program.

The grant liaisons proved an invaluable resource by facilitating communication between DCF, WPS, and foster parents. They brought information concerning the children in the cohort to the monthly meetings, where they discussed the children. They, the education consultant, and the FASU social work supervisor worked together to ensure that everyone was alerted when a child entered care.

**Project: FL**

Evaluator: Jean K. Elder and Associates, Inc.

The evaluation consisted of an outcome process evaluation. The primary data collection activities included:

- Stakeholder online survey assessing knowledge about DREAMS components, "buy-in" to the DREAMS initiative, perception of the extent of DREAMS implementation and barriers to implementation, and perception of coalition functioning.

- Informal check-in interviews with Kids Central’s DREAMS leadership, including the DREAMS project manager and educational facilitators regarding adherence to the project components, approach, and timeline, as well as notes regarding barriers to implementation
- Supplemental documentation from the Kids Central’s DREAMS project director, including stakeholder meeting minutes and dissemination materials.

Secondary data sources that were part of Kids Central’s ongoing quality management and training processes included:

- Pre-/post-training assessments for the *Endless Dreams* and *PRIDE* trainings.
- Florida K-12 Report Card data.

The following research questions guided the outcome evaluation:

- To what extent was DREAMS successful in achieving system, staff, and caregiver intermediate outcomes identified in the program logic model (i.e., establish and implement policies to promote positive educational outcomes; increase staff and caregiver knowledge regarding strategies to promote positive educational outcomes; and improve service provision and case planning for target youth)?
- To what extent was DREAMS successful in achieving youth outcomes identified in the program logic model (i.e., improved outcomes related to number of school placements, timeliness of school records transfer, increased attendance, and improved grades)?

The outcome evaluation found the following:

- Examination of newly established or revised school and child welfare policies pertaining to a child’s educational experience, including procedures for placement, transfer, transportation, and parent involvement, confirmed that policy-related system outcomes had been accomplished.
- Comparison of the results from the initial and the second administration of the DREAMS stakeholder

survey found that scores on items pertaining to staff knowledge regarding the nature of the collaboration (e.g., familiarity with goals of DREAMS, their role in the initiative) increased over the duration of the grant, although the gains were not statistically significant. In addition, survey items that assessed stakeholder’s perception of the value of the initiative were generally quite high at baseline and evaluators saw slight gains in four out of eight of these items, including the importance of a set of clear cross-system policies, cross-system data sharing, timely educational record transfer, and having a designated point person.

- Improvements in service provision and case planning were determined when the preliminary K-12 Report Card data were reviewed. Data indicated that 100 percent of the applicable cases had an IEP in place if needed, and the youth were in the appropriate educational setting or were in the process of being assessed for exceptional student education classes. In addition, 57 percent of the applicable cases had parents who had regular communication with teachers and at least occasional participation in school events during the evaluation period.

The following research questions guided the process evaluation:

- Did the grantee adhere to the proposed project timeline?
- Did the grantee develop an effective collaborative/coalition focused on supporting the academic success of target youth?
- To what extent were the enhancements described under program activities and outputs in the project logic model put into place?
- What factors facilitated or posed significant barriers to implementation?

The process evaluation determined the following:

- Interagency agreements regarding the data exchange system were a problem in Marion County. Electronic data exchange was accomplished in Citrus County, and manual data exchange occurred in Marion County.

The implementation of the Florida K-12 Report Card data increased the pressure for collaboration and communication (necessary to complete the monthly updates and remain in compliance with Florida mandates), which highlighted the usefulness and importance of the school designees and educational facilitators. Quarterly KCI/DCF School District committee meetings were held.

- A school designee was established within each school and all had been in contact with an educational facilitator.
- The Florida K-12 Report Card indicated increased monthly conversations between caseworkers and parents about education progress and needs.
- The training totals for *Endless Dreams* and *PRIDE* are reflected in the table below:

Reporting Period	Endless Dreams Training #	Endless Dreams Training Type	PRIDE Training #	PRIDE Training Type
Feb 12-Oct 12	32	Family Case Managers	29	Foster Parents
Feb 12-Oct 12	9	Children’s Legal Service/GAL	N A	N A
Feb 12-Oct 12	3	Judges	N A	N A
Nov 12-Mar 13	56	Guidance Counselors	5	Adoptive Parents
Nov 12-Mar 13	N A	N A	20	Foster Parents
Apr 13	N A	N A	6	Adoptive Parents
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>100</b>	N A	<b>60</b>	N A

**Project: IA**

Evaluator: Not specified

Goals of this project were collaborative communication, data sharing, common policies/protocols, shared materials among the child welfare, legal, and educational systems, education advocates for involved youth, and institutionalization of all these processes across systems. The evaluation had a process and outcome component.

- Goal 1 was to coordinate and institutionalize communication among child welfare, legal, and educational systems to maximize educational stability for youth in the child welfare system.
  - Evaluation findings: A workgroup of key stakeholders from each system was convened to collaborate in resolving the educational stability problem. In addition, they designed an electronic transfer document form for information on each student’s academic record, including high school credits, academic placement history, and current academic support staff, to include school counselor and case worker. The workgroup developed policies and protocols for using the form and provided trainings on how to use the form.
- Goal 2 was to develop data-sharing capacity using integrated recordkeeping and data exchanges across systems that support the educational stability of youth in foster care.
  - Evaluation finding: The project used DE’s software instead of developing new software and implemented the ability to share data electronically by the end of the fifth quarter.
- Goal 3 was to develop educational policies, protocols, and data-sharing agreements within counties in the project service area to minimize disruption caused by school transfers, that is, to increase educational stability.
  - Evaluation finding: Child welfare, juvenile court services, and education officials signed the data-sharing agreement that CAPS developed. Parties agreed to send and receive information via the DE’s ITC.

- Goal 4 was to establish policies and protocols that support recruitment and training of qualified volunteers to serve as educational advocates for youth in foster care.
  - Evaluation finding: CAPS developed training about the issues and the need for education advocacy and presented the training to DHS caseworkers, juvenile court officers and judges, district court judges, and foster parents. Evaluations from the trainings demonstrated that the trainings were well received by participants.
- Goal 5 was to provide resource materials and regular updates regarding collaborative efforts to the child welfare, education, and legal communities.
  - Evaluation findings: Resource materials about the importance of ensuring educational records and educational plans move swiftly among schools, and ensuring that full educational credits will transfer, were developed. Resource materials about the project were developed and posted to the project's website, as well as on project partners' social media sites, and distributed through quarterly email updates and press releases; presentations and materials to the child welfare, education, and legal communities were provided; and articles about the project for publications in the three communities were provided. In addition, Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association (IFAPA) produced and delivered 5,000 copies of its curriculum on education advocacy and AMP produced and delivered 5,000 brochures on the education advocacy services throughout Pottawattamie and Woodbury Counties.

### Project: KS

Evaluator: Dr. Karin Chang-Rios, Assistant Director for the Institute for Educational Research and Public Service, School of Education, University of Kansas

The project's evaluation incorporated a utilization-focused approach to assess the progress toward intended goals and objectives. Utilization-focused evaluation is a participatory approach that emphasizes stakeholder involvement from project start to finish. The evaluator

worked with participants to refine evaluation questions, select appropriate data collection methods, and involved program participants in interpreting the findings of the evaluation. The approach emphasized timely and frequent use of data to facilitate mid-course project corrections and encourage project improvement.

- Research Questions
  - Is KPEKC implementing its activities as intended?
  - Is KPEKC making progress toward its outcomes?
  - Are the KPEKC cross-system trainings effective?

Multiple methods were used to strengthen the integrity of the findings. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods gave stakeholders vital information about both the context and impact of the project, encouraging informed decision-making about project implementation and translation. Two instruments were developed to measure stakeholder and training recipients' knowledge and experiences. The stakeholder survey measured stakeholder collaboration, knowledge of cross-system policies and practices, access to cross-system data, and identified barriers. The cross-system training survey assessed knowledge of how to use data to inform practice and use of cross-system data.

### Process Evaluation

- Activity 1: Cross-system collaborative working group with State-level DCF and KSDE
  - Context: DCF and KSDE were lead partners with KU acting as convener and facilitator. The workgroup (KPEKC Taskforce) also included State-level stakeholders such as CASA, Juvenile Justice Authority (JJA), Office of Judicial Administration, foster and adoptive parent associations, youth, and representatives from the local pilot (USD 501 and TFI, Inc.).
- Activity 2: Policy review and alignment
  - Context: To identify barriers to youth in care graduating on time, a multiphase assessment process was completed. The assessment included: individual interviews of foster parents, focus groups of youth in foster care, an electronic survey sent to more than 9,000 email addresses, and State and Federal policy review.

- Activity 3: Information dissemination and communication protocol to courts and legislative stakeholders
  - Context: The project developed a [KPECK website](#) to house materials, data, and products of the KPECK.
- Activity 4: Evaluation
  - Context: The evaluation process incorporated a multimethod approach to assess progress toward outcomes. The key areas evaluated were collaboration, data sharing, cross-system policy understanding, and cross-system data use training.
- Activity 5: Cross-system collaborative working group with DCF regional staff, TFI, Inc., and USD 501
  - Context: The local pilot group was instrumental in informing the work of the project. The work group completed a one-time data-sharing process at the student level and provided input on data use training modules.
- Activity 6: Cross-system training on data systems and data-driven practice
  - Context: The project launched Using Data to Improve Educational Outcomes, an online training curriculum, as part of the local pilot. This training and the training on using an Action Planning Guide were presented to child welfare and school district administrators, teachers, counselors, social workers, school clerks, and child welfare case managers.
- Conclusion: The project was successful in recruiting staff from State and local child welfare and educational agencies to participate regularly in planning activities. Over the course of 23 months,<sup>5</sup> the Taskforce significantly increased its collaboration in two areas, member characteristics and communication. Funding was consistently identified as an area for growth for the collaborative and did not show improvement during the project.
- Measured Outcome 2: Improved understanding of cross-system policies
  - Evaluation method(s): The training survey was given to local pilot study participants. The survey was embedded in the online training module and delivered at the beginning and end of Training Module 2, which covered cross-system policies and procedures. This survey looked at knowledge of cross-system policies by exploring participant knowledge of cross-system indicators, goals, and data-sharing opportunities. Sixteen participants completed the survey.
  - Conclusion: At pretest, participants demonstrated a general understanding of the goals and data-sharing opportunities available in their district; however, half of the participants could not successfully identify the educational indicators for tracking youth in care. At post-test, knowledge of cross-system indicators improved. Approximately 3 out of 4 participants could identify the indicators successfully at post-test. Although data were not collected at the State level, these findings suggest that the local training was successful in increasing knowledge of policies and could be used in other districts to increase awareness and knowledge of cross-system policies.

### Project Outcome Evaluation

- Measured Outcome 1: Improved cross-system collaboration and communication
  - Evaluation method(s): The evaluation team used two methods to assess changes in collaboration and communication: attendance logs were analyzed to assess participation in KPECK activities by multiple agencies and the Wilder Survey of Interagency Collaboration was used to assess collaborative functioning.<sup>4</sup>
- Measured Outcome 3: Knowledge of cross-system information needs and gaps
  - Evaluation Method(s): The project administered a stakeholder survey and conducted focus groups during the spring of 2012 to identify statewide information needs and gaps. The statewide

<sup>4</sup> The Wilder Survey of Interagency Collaboration consists of 25 items that measure collaboration across five domains.

<sup>5</sup> KS received a no-cost extension that allowed the project to continue beyond the 17-month grant period.

- stakeholder survey was administered online to 9,031 partners across the State, with 1,603 educators, child welfare professionals, and parents responding. The local needs assessment was administered via an electronic survey to all educators and child welfare professionals in the district, and 211 participants completed this survey.
- Conclusion: Many educational staff indicated they need more data-related training. It was evident from the information gathered that tracking the educational outcomes of children in foster care is something that needs to be further emphasized. Certain indicators (e.g., attendance) appeared to be used much more often, while other important indicators, such as opportunities for post-secondary education, appeared to be under-emphasized. Areas of need that were commonly identified included specific information about the needs of individual children, more timely access to educational records, and information regarding best practices in meeting the educational needs of youth in foster care.
  - Measured Outcome 4: Coordination and access to data systems at the local level
    - Evaluation Method(s): The project developed a follow-up training survey to measure participants' use of the cross-system data systems and barriers to implementation. Participants were asked to assess the coordination and ease of use of the coordinated data. Sixteen teachers and administrators in the pilot community completed the survey.
    - Conclusion: The results suggested that there is continued work to be done at the local level to improve access and coordination of data. Although the training provided lessons on utilizing the data, issues related to technology and timeliness of the data were not addressed by the training.
  - Measured Outcome 5: Dissemination of project information
    - Evaluation Method(s): Reviewed project records including briefs, website, and public releases
    - Conclusion: Although the number of presentations was not significantly large, the target population included key stakeholders who had influence in the child welfare and education communities across the State. The project was strategic in sharing information with State and regional decision-makers who in turn shared the information with their local constituents.
  - Measured Outcome 6: Development of data-sharing protocols, MOUs, and successful data linkages
    - Conclusion: Although the project did not create a formalized system for tracking changes in data-sharing protocols and policies, it did keep records of the developments over the course of the grant period. At both the local and State level, taskforce members were able to develop data-sharing agreements successfully with the child welfare and educational agencies and link data on a one-time basis.
  - Measured Outcome 7: Increased knowledge of using data to drive decision-making
    - Evaluation Method(s): The project developed a training survey to measure changes in knowledge of local training participants. The survey was embedded in the online training modules and was administered before and after each module.
    - Conclusion: The training survey results showed that participants in the local pilot training program increased their knowledge related to using data to drive decision-making. Participants in the training program had a better understanding of selecting appropriate indicators for measuring the success of children in foster care, the current policies of DE regarding children in foster care, and what constitutes evidence-based practice; however, interpreting identifying trends in real data was one area that needed additional attention in future trainings.
  - Measured Outcome 8: Increased use and “valuing” of cross-system data systems to inform practice at the local level

- Evaluation Method(s): The project developed a follow-up training survey to measure participants' use of the cross-system data systems to inform practice. The online survey was delivered to training participants 2 months following the training.
  - Conclusion: Two months after completing the online trainings, both educational staff and school administrators were using data to track educational outcomes for children in foster care. Educational staff reported that they used the data more frequently than school administrators. The most commonly used indicators were attendance and progress toward graduation. Both educational staff and school administrators used these indicators to alter their interventions with children in foster care. These results showed that the data accessed by school administrators and staff members influenced their decisions regarding the educational interventions of students in foster care.
  - Measured Outcome 8: Increased stability of youth in care, as measured by number of changes in foster care placement
    - Evaluation Method(s): Reviewed foster care placement records from DCF and monthly data for the period of July 2012 through September 2013 to capture placement statistics before and during the project period.
    - Conclusion: It was not anticipated that changes in permanency and stability would occur during the grant period as these types of changes often take years to occur; however, preliminary evidence suggested that the local pilot community is already showing improvements in stability rates. Immediately following the local training, the number of children with two or more placements dropped significantly for children who have been in the child welfare system for less than 12 months. A more rigorous evaluation study is required to assess whether this decline is significant for this population.
- The project's logic model guided the outcome evaluation. The logic model included the intended proximal outcomes and distal impact. Because of the short-term nature of this project, the evaluation only measured progress on the proximal outcomes.
- Proximal Outcome 1: Development of foster youth leadership within a system of care to support educational stability and permanency
    - The Youth Advisory Council was formed as a separate body from the Project Advisory Council. This structure, along with having a foster care alumna as the Youth Leadership Coordinator, supported lively participation by the youth in care. To assess the development of youth leadership through the Youth Advisory Council, three areas were taken into account:
      - Consistency of youth participation. The Youth Advisory Council succeeded in engaging the youth at each meeting, but the number of participants varied and fell below the goal of five members. To maintain youth participation, the involvement of the youth leadership coordinator was crucial.
      - Involvement in project planning. The topics discussed by the Youth Advisory Council fit with the different phases of the project and pointed to the significant contributions that the youth made to designing and carrying out the project.
      - Contributions to policy development. A member of the Youth Advisory Council shared the group's experiences and ideas with the Project Advisory Council.
  - Proximal Outcome 2: Increased foster youth involvement in educational and placement planning
    - To assess foster youth's involvement in educational and placement planning, two main sources of data were used:
      - Focus groups and surveys.
        - » Focus groups with youth in foster care. In the spring of 2012, three focus groups were held with 15 youth in foster care. In the focus groups, foster youth identified facilitators

**Project: NC**

Evaluator: Joan Pennell, Professor and Director of Center for Family & Community Engagement, North Carolina State University

of educational success and recommended ways to enhance supports for their education. Particularly prominent areas identified by the youth were confidentiality, communication, timely responses from social workers, and educational and extracurricular supports for youth in care.

- » Surveys with youth in foster care. During the fall of 2012, members of the research team conducted surveys with 40 youth in foster care. In the surveys, the youth identified perceived and needed resources to achieve positive educational outcomes. Notably, most youth who attended CFT meetings felt that their social worker paid some to a lot of attention to their school progress.
- DSS Administrative Data Base. Cumberland DSS developed an electronic system for documenting CFT meetings. CFT meetings are considered a vehicle for involving youth in foster care in educational and placement planning. This system makes it possible for the agency to monitor and assess foster youth involvement in the meetings on an ongoing basis, and DSS can determine if youth involvement in their educational and placement planning is increasing.
- Proximal Outcome 3: Increased foster youth educational and placement stability
  - In assessing foster youth’s educational and placement stability, the project first used June 2011 administrative records from Cumberland County schools and DSS for youth in care. Then, in February 2013, the University received data from DSS’s newly created automated systems for CFT meetings and for placements and removals. The short-term nature of the project and the low rate of matching between the 2011 and 2013 data prohibited assessing change over time in terms of educational and placement stability; however, the data sets offered insight into factors affecting youth’s placement and school stability. A cost-effectiveness analysis on school transportation was conducted with the 2011 matched school and DSS data. This
- analysis integrated cost-effectiveness analysis and geographical information system mapping. Analyses of the 2013 CFT and placement/removal data sets identified predictors of school and placement changes.
- Proximal Outcome 4: Increased coordination of services/resources at level of agency, local system of care, and community
  - Change in the local coordination of services and resources was measured using the Levels of Collaboration Survey.<sup>6</sup> The survey was completed by senior representatives at each of the four key agencies in Cumberland County: court, mental health, schools, and social services. In order to measure change, the survey was completed at two points in time, early in the project, February 2012, and after the conclusion of the project, March 2013. On the survey, each of the four respondents selected the level of collaboration for their agency with each of the other three agencies at the two times. The respondents remained the same at three of the four agencies. In the fourth agency, the two respondents gave exactly the same ratings in the pre- and post-period. There were no missing responses. For the most part, the agencies’ assessments of the level of collaboration remained constant or varied by only one point from the pre- to post- surveys.
- Proximal Outcome 5: Enhanced knowledge of foster youth, university students, and agency staff about facilitators of and barriers to educational stability of foster youth
  - Two curricula that were developed under a separate contract were delivered in Cumberland County, and they supported the involvement of youth in foster care in planning their futures, including their education. The three curricula specifically developed for this project were all intended to increase knowledge about the facilitators and barriers to the educational stability of youth in care. The five curricula were designed for different groups—youth

<sup>6</sup> This instrument was developed for schools and their partners in the Safe Schools, Healthy Students initiative. The survey examines levels of collaboration: no interaction at all (lowest level), networking, cooperation, coordination, coalition, and collaboration (highest level).

in foster care, caregivers, university students, and agency staff. There was a good cross-section of workshop participants to test the curricula, and the participant feedback indicated that each curriculum succeeded in enhancing knowledge about the education of foster youth. A training evaluation feedback instrument for adult attendees was developed for the three new curricula and inquired about the participants' increased sense of self-efficacy in supporting the academic achievement of foster youth and their satisfaction with the training. The average responses were between strongly agree and agree, indicating overall satisfaction with the curricula and an increased sense of self-efficacy.

### **Project: OH**

Evaluator: Kathleen McNaught, Center for Children and the Law, ABA, and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

The KISR! project evaluation included both a process evaluation and a project outcome evaluation.

The process evaluation identified the following successes of KISR!:

- Developed a solid program infrastructure built on open communication and meaningful collaboration to support students' educational achievements.
- Expanded the KISR! program to all schools in the Cincinnati school district.
- Increased the number of youth involved in the program.
- Increased the understanding among system partners of the relevance of education stability and success.
- Enhanced the focus on individual problem solving on behalf of KISR! youth through the services and interventions of the program.
- Embedded structural changes and tools into the KISR! program, such as creation of handbooks and manuals that clarify roles and responsibilities and help to institutionalize the collaboration.
- Encouraged substantive in-court discussion of each youth's education progress.

- Enhanced the court's data system to allow for increased data collection.
- Modified the LPD to include educational outcome measures.
- Built an infrastructure for data sharing and program evaluation that allows the KISR! program to measure and monitor educational outcomes and stability in school placement on an ongoing basis.

The project outcome evaluation identified short-term and long-term outcomes.

- Short-Term Outcomes
  - School data on KISR! students more promptly entered into SACWIS. JFS developed a policy to ensure that caseworkers updated school information in SACWIS on a weekly basis. Prioritizing the inputting of school information, together with subsequent professional development for caseworkers on the importance of compliance with this expectation, has improved the practice. The information that was previously haphazard and irregular in terms of accuracy is now routinely updated and confirmed. JFS education specialists received weekly agency reports that tracked the information, and they shared this information with the education liaisons.
  - Length of time decreased between a new placement and enrollment in school. The partners addressed this challenge through improved communication and coordination between JFS and Cincinnati Public Schools during the 2011/2012 school year. The changes resulted in generally decreasing the time between a new placement for a child and enrollment in school. However, a survey conducted by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges in March 2012 found that the time between the placement and school enrollment, on average, remained too long—more than 2 days. In the summer of 2012, the school system worked with KISR! partners and developed a barrier-free, immediate school enrollment protocol. The JFS education specialists were advised to contact the school assistant superintendent in the event of any

- delays so that the issue could be promptly resolved. By February 2013, JFS education specialists reported that barriers and delays were no longer an issue with enrolling a child in foster care into school. Thus, the enrollment protocol and strengthened communication between JFS and the school system improved systemic capacity to eliminate barriers to school enrollment for children and youth in foster care.
- Lowered number of school changes during one school year. At the time of the grant application, children in JPS custody averaged one to two placement changes per year. These placement changes often resulted in school changes, as well. Data revealed that despite three placement changes in one school year, the KISR! student was able to be maintained in his same school throughout changes.
  - Increase number of students served by crisis intervention services. During the grant period, Beech Acres provided 30 trauma-informed consultations about individual KISR! participants, and 14 Cincinnati Public Schools received trauma-informed consultations or trainings. Data collected at the end of the consultation sessions and trainings showed that 90 percent of the teachers/counselors reported having learned at least one thing about trauma and how it affects children in the classroom.
  - Increased knowledge of education law and the child welfare system. During the grant period, 45 trainings were provided for more than 1,200 participants on topics related to education law and the child welfare system. Participants included child welfare staff, school district administrators, teachers, school social workers, school psychologists, magistrates, foster parents, foster care network providers, mental health agencies servicing youth in foster care, CASAs, and guardians ad litem. In post-tests given at many of the presentations, the majority of participants reported an increase in their understanding of education law as a result of the training.
  - Increased school engagement for KISR! students. The Cincinnati Public Schools liaisons and JFS education specialists' handbooks provide guidelines and expectations for the level and frequency of contacts between liaisons/specialists and KISR! students. The rationale was that contact with the students will bolster school engagement and success for students. Through the use of the LPD, the project is measuring school engagement and success. In addition to other KISR!-specific data, LPD incorporates a matrix for KISR! students developed for the teachers to use to monitor and assess student risk levels for academic problems. This risk system, or class profile, codes students into categories of high, moderate, or low risk based on a variety of factors, including grades, attendance, and discipline referrals. Decreasing the number of students in high and moderate risk categories is a means to measure an increase in school engagement. In December 2012, the project ran a report through LPD that sorted all KISR! students by risk level. At that time, there were only five KISR! students identified at high risk for academic problems. The JFS education specialists and school system liaisons were already aware of education challenges faced by those students and were actively working to support them and improve their educational outcomes.
  - Improved achievement in school for KISR! students as a result of increased school attendance. A number of activities and interventions were put into place to increase school attendance. Through LPD, the project began collecting, reporting, and analyzing school attendance issues for all KISR! participants.
  - Long-Term Outcomes
    - KISR! students are stable in school. The LPD became the combined infrastructure for KISR! data collection. One distinct data element in this database is the number of school changes for each KISR! participant. The project generated the first set LPD reports in December 2012. One of the reports showed that the majority of KISR! students had maintained school stability during the school year

and had been enrolled in only one school. Of KISR! students participating in the program in December 2012, only 4 had been enrolled in 3 schools during program participation, and another 26 had been enrolled in 2 schools. These numbers showed a high level of school stability from January 2012 to December 2012, the KISR! program averaged between 170 and 190 participants.

- KISR! students achieve academic success. KISR! helped to create numerous individual stories of academic success for its participants. To document these exciting breakthroughs, KISR! collects testimonials to capture powerful moments and milestones. (These testimonials are available in the [OH Final Project Report](#).)
- The systemic changes driven and promoted by the KISR! project, including training about the effects of trauma, are exemplified by evidence of changes in culture and decision-making by the partner agencies—specifically a willingness for dialogue and a desire to build capacity and understanding. The depth and effectiveness of the KISR! collaboration are expressed through an ever-increasing grasp of the challenges faced by youth in foster care by school administrators. (See the [OH Final Project Report](#) for more information about this goal.)
- KISR! students graduate from high school. The project wanted to ensure that KISR! students graduated from high school and were prepared to move on to higher education, employment, or training opportunities. During the 2011-12 school year, the KISR! project included 12 seniors in high school, and all 12 seniors graduated. In the 2012-13 school year, the KISR! project had 13 seniors. At the time of the grant’s final report, each senior was on track to receive their high school diploma.

### **Project: PA**

Evaluation: Kevin H. Kim, Allegheny DHS

The evaluation consisted of both a process evaluation and an outcome evaluation.

The process evaluation determined the following:

- Developed and implemented the Best Interest Placement Tool during the grant period as a way to improve permanency outcomes and school stability for children in foster care.
- Improved the electronic access to education information by modifying the education tab in KIDS to include a section with detailed educational records. This improved the ability of direct service workers and the courts to access education records in a consistent and timely manner.
- Built the technical capacity and legal authority to share educational records for students who were adjudicated dependent and for students for whom DHS received a signed DHS educational consent form. This ability decreases the timeliness of information and reduces paperwork for caseworkers, thereby increasing their ability to focus on educational outcomes as a metric for the well-being of children. The DHS-wide Consent to Share Educational Records is included in the [PA Final Project Report Attachments](#)
- Redesigned the way school district data are loaded and stored in the DHS Data Warehouse. The new design is more standardized so there is minimal development required as data from new school districts are added. This process greatly improved the technical infrastructure within the case management system.
- Added education data to the court addendum for all children in foster care.
- Established the Focus on Attendance Pilot Program, a truancy program, in two Pittsburgh Public Schools.

The outcome evaluation identified the following:

- Outcome 1: Increased and more efficient access to educational information

- Electronic access to education records—direct service workers have the ability to get a signed consent from a parent or guardian, upload the consent, and access education records electronically (updated weekly). Trainings are planned for each regional office to ensure that caseworkers know how to use the consents and why educational records can be useful. Once this occurs, there is a plan to track the number of consents that have been loaded to the system. DHS staff will track this by caseworker and office to better target training in the future.
- PA Education screen—a survey was administered to caseworkers regarding the education screens, and 122 people started the survey, although not all caseworkers completed every question. Of the respondents, 46 percent reported that they had completed between 1 and 5 education screens, while 37 percent of caseworkers said they completed more than 10 education screens to date. The area of the education screen that caseworkers found most difficult to complete was the section regarding education records. The performance indicators selected for the Children’s Bureau’s Performance Measurement Online Tool were focused on the education/training aspect of the Pennsylvania Education Screen implementation. According to the evaluation, there was a significant training effort to introduce the education assessment to caseworkers, as well as talk to them about the importance of education and child well-being. To assess the success of the education/training, DHS selected the following short-term performance indicators:
  - Number and percent of individuals who completed training
  - Number and percent of trainees who report increased knowledge and skills

The project selected the intermediate outcome of, number, and percent of trainees who utilize the information from this training. The findings of the evaluation show that approximately 77 percent of the 562 individuals who signed up to receive training successfully received the training, while 60 percent of trainees who completed the survey after training reported increased knowledge, skills, and/or awareness. To assess the utilization of information from training, the evaluator calculated the percent of caseworkers who successfully completed an education screen at 59 percent. Based on these findings, the evaluator noted that there is opportunity for improvement on the knowledge, skills, and training of child welfare staff on education issues.
- Outcome 2: Better service alignment and emphasis on educational outcomes
  - Ongoing Education Training for Child Welfare Staff—as of February 2013, DHS had offered more than 76 hours of training, through 27 sessions covering 10 topics. The trainings offered included face-to-face trainings and webinar series, including 7 webinars, with more than 150 human service professionals attending, each on a different topic related to 1 or more of the 9 sections of the education screen. Technical assistance was available to caseworkers from the initial launch of the education screen and continuing through the implementation stages. In addition, a series of webinars was offered through a collaborative effort with ELC to address the need to effectively identify and meet the education needs of children and youth in foster care.
- Outcome 3: Increased School Stability and Educational Outcomes for Children in Care
  - The Best Interest Placement Tool – This tool went into effect at the beginning of April 2013, therefore, according to the project’s final report, there are limited data available for a full evaluation. At the time of the final report, data were being collected on all children being placed, on foster homes and how they ranked by child, and the homes that were chosen as placements for children. The evaluation of the tool will also include how often children are being placed in top ranked homes. In addition,

when children are not placed in top ranked homes, information will be collected on why the top ranked homes were not used. After 6 months of tool utility, information on the needs of children being placed will be shared with providers as a way for them to better target foster family recruitment. Information available at the time of the final report showed that foster family preferences indicated that many were willing to take children who exhibited verbal or physical aggression, while fewer were interested in serving children with special medical needs, children who exhibited disruptive or destructive behavior, or children with a history of running away from placements. The final report states that analysis and evaluation of the functionality of the tool, and how well it matches children to foster homes, will be conducted at regular intervals.

#### Additional outcome measures:

- Outcome 1: Improved child welfare, education, and well-being outcomes for court-active children ages 10 to 17 years in the Pittsburgh Public School District
  - Focus on Attendance Pilot Program—at the time of the final report, evaluation of the process and educational and human service outcomes of the Focus on Attendance pilot program was ongoing. Key metrics were measured at 6-month intervals, including information regarding time to referral, the demographics of those referred, what services were provided, and other human service agency involvement of those referred to the program. The program findings available at the time of the final report supported the national research that early identification of problems and early intervention yield the most positive results. However, due to limited resources and staff time, the primary referrals made to this program were during the second semester of the school year. There was inconsistent information provided about the students, their needs, and their family contacts. This inhibited the ability of the worker to connect with the family and required more investigation by the worker into the issues that led to the child missing school. The evaluation of the needs of families

by the school outreach coordinator revealed that families fall into one of four categories:

- Families that need help writing excuse notes and understanding that attendance is important
- Families that need to access community services, i.e., food bank, housing
- Families that need more intensive human services
- Families that are already involved with human services, need coordination of services, and need their direct service workers to focus on attendance

Of the 128 unique clients referred to the program through March 2013, 26 (20 percent) were referred for more intensive services, including intensive truancy and prevention services. The evaluation also examined the human service involvement of students in the two pilot schools, as well as those involved in the Focus on Attendance program. The evaluation showed that there are higher than district-wide rates of human service involvement at the two pilot schools. In addition, students involved in human services at these schools have higher rates of chronic absenteeism—more than 10 percent of all school days. Of the students referred to the Focus on Attendance program, 40 percent were active in a DHS service, compared to 30 percent of the students at these two schools.

- Outcome 2: Improved attendance for students in Pittsburgh Public Schools
  - Focus on Attendance Pilot Project—attendance has improved for about 40 percent of the students served in this program. These students had better attendance rates post-program involvement than pre-program involvement. These outcomes support the findings of the school outreach coordinator that early intervention yields better results.

#### Impact evaluation findings:

- Improved communication, collaboration, and relationships between court, child welfare, and education systems.

- A short answer survey was administered to key stakeholders regarding the degree to which partnerships and programming improved communication and relationships between stakeholders within the courts, child welfare, and the city public school district. Overall, key stakeholders felt that the grant met the goal of improving communication and relationships between stakeholders at Allegheny County courts, DHS, and Pittsburgh Public Schools. Though the foundation of these partnerships is data sharing, additional benefits have accrued to all stakeholders involved, including higher quality and more timely information and improved relationships and communication between key entities.
- Additional evaluation activities and results:
  - New MOU Signed with Pittsburgh Public Schools—the new MOU creates a legal framework to share DHS data with PPS.
  - Expanding School District Partnerships—during the project period, DHS signed a data-sharing MOU with five additional school districts, Woodland Hills School District, Elizabeth Forward School District, Gateway School District, Penn Hills School District, and Sto-Rox School District.

### **Project: TX**

Evaluator: The Child and Family Research Institute, University of Texas at Austin

The evaluation addressed the following questions for both the statewide and local collaboration levels:

- How has collaboration and cross-problem solving increased? What barriers were experienced?
- What organizational level improvements have been made to increase school stability for youth in foster care?
- How has the State/local collaboration increased its capacity to improve educational outcomes for youth in foster care?

The evaluation gathered data at the statewide and local levels to further enhance the understanding of

the education challenges and successes of children in foster care. Data were collected using quantitative and qualitative methods with several stakeholder groups. At the State level, a survey was administered to foster care liaisons employed in school districts across the State, and focus groups were conducted with statewide DFPS educational and disability specialists in order to understand the current capacity of addressing children and youth's educational needs within the schools.

At the local level, data were collected from the Houston collaborators, DFPS caseworkers, and HISD personnel. Key members of the local collaboration were interviewed, including the members of the Houston DFPS and HISD team and staff from the participating pilot schools. Next, a survey was administered to a larger group of HISD administrators, support staff, and counselors to assess their knowledge of issues related to foster care and education. Lastly, a survey was sent to all regional DFPS caseworkers to understand their experience working with the schools from a child welfare perspective.

The evaluation also included content analyses of meeting notes and agency MOUs to increase the understanding of the processes of the collaboration and the policy and procedures of the pilot project. The evaluation encompassed a number of pre- and post-tests to assess the gains in knowledge provided by the trainings and any potential gaps. In addition, a descriptive baseline for foster children's education status was gathered statewide and at the HISD level. The descriptive baseline and subsequent analysis allowed for further understanding of the current state of educational achievements for children/youth in foster care.

### Findings

Source of information: State and local collaborator surveys

- Collaboration—a modified version of the Wilder Collaboration survey was used to measure collaboration.

- Collaboration at the State level—the pre-test survey revealed only two strengths of the collaboration, and both were actually factors external to the collaboration: a favorable climate for collaboration and the unique purpose that the collaboration has for the community. In the post-test, the climate for collaboration was ranked as a borderline issue. Two borderline issues in the pre-test, adaptability of the collaboration to change and members having a stake in the collaboration, were ranked as strengths in the post-test, suggesting that perhaps these issues improved through the course of the project; however, the overall sense of the State collaboration indicates significant issues both at the pre- and post-tests. In particular, mutual trust and understanding of collaboration members, flexibility of members, and lack of clarity of roles continued to be unresolved issues at the end of the collaboration.
- Collaboration at the local level—the members of the Houston collaboration reported many factors that appear to have remained strengths throughout the collaboration. Among these strengths were mutual respect among members, members having a stake in the process, flexibility of members, clear roles, adaptability, open communication, concrete goals, and a shared vision. Issues that were noted as borderline issues for the collaboration included the lack of history of collaboration among child welfare and schools in the community, the lack of a favorable climate for the collaboration at the end of the project, and the lack of legitimacy of the project. At the end of the project, the pace of the project was noted as a borderline issue, perhaps suggesting that the Houston collaborators recognized the project should be longer. Another potential area of concern relates to the sufficient resources to support the collaboration, which was a borderline issue at the beginning of the collaboration and noted as a serious issue at the end of the collaboration.
- Opinions regarding the state of education of children in foster care—participants at the State and local level were asked to rate how well the State and their community were meeting the educational needs of foster youth on a four-point Likert scale, with four indicating that the action taken to meet the educational needs of youth in foster care frequently happens and one indicating that an action never happens.
  - In general, State-level participants responded on the pre-test survey that the actions rarely happen. On the post-test, State-level participants responded that actions happened sometimes. The responses from local-level (Houston) participants varied more than those of the State-level participants. At the local level, participants reported that youth were frequently invested in their education, and also reported that actions happened sometimes to meet the needs of foster youth.
- Knowledge of issues related to foster care and education—participants at the State and local level were asked to rate their knowledge of issues related to foster care and education on a four-point Likert scale, with one indicating they have no knowledge of the issue and four indicating they have strong knowledge of the issue.
  - Overall, participants at the State level indicated they felt somewhat confident about all issues. Houston participants indicated they were somewhat confident or strongly confident about issues. Although there were some increases or changes in confidence from pre- to post-test, these changes are not necessarily indicative of the impact of the project due to the limitations previously discussed.
- Training needs—participants in Houston were asked about their interest in various training topics and their preferred means of receiving training.
  - In general, respondents were very interested in most topics suggested by the survey, but were extremely interested in trainings regarding laws related to the education of youth in foster care. In terms of type of trainings, respondents indicated that they were most likely to complete trainings that were in-person, conferences with no registration fees, and/or trainings that offered continuing education credits.

- Source of information: statewide data foster care liaison survey
  - Ninety-three foster care liaisons completed an online survey gathering information about their background and positions within their school district, their knowledge of the foster care system, and their experience working with foster youth. The survey revealed the following:
    - Participants, overall, had little experience interacting with the child welfare system.
    - Participants, in general, felt either somewhat or very confident about their knowledge of issues, particularly their knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act. Overall, they were less confident about how the McKinney-Vento Act applies to foster youth.
    - Participants reported that they somewhat understand and strongly understand why children are removed from their homes, signs of sexual abuse, behavioral problems that stem from trauma, and differences between poverty and neglect. In contrast, they indicated that they had no knowledge or minimal knowledge about foster care issues such as what happens to children in foster care or why foster care placements are chosen.
    - Participants indicated that they wanted to be the foster care liaison for their district even though the majority of them did not necessarily choose the position. Participants were also not fully confident in their understanding or ability to fulfill the role of the foster care liaison.
    - Participants expressed that they were very interested in all the training topics suggested in the survey.
- Source of information: focus groups with DFPS regional education and disability specialists
  - Four focus groups were conducted with a total of 22 DFPS regional education and disability specialists who are the primary resource for schools that need assistance working with youth in foster care. Each of the focus groups was asked to respond to the following questions:
    - What is your involvement in working with foster youth?
    - How would you characterize the education of foster youth in your region?
    - What do you know about the new foster care school district liaisons?
    - The Trio Project is currently putting together a resource guide for school district personnel. What key components do you think should be addressed in the resource guide?
    - What do you want the school districts to better understand?
- Summary of responses from the focus groups:
  - Communication: Participants discussed their desire to have more consistent and intuitive communication among departments, school districts, and policymakers to better serve children/youth in foster care. While each school district is required to provide mandated services, many are only able to provide services based on their district's budgetary capabilities and their investment in children/youth in foster care. As a result, communication issues arise between schools and DFPS. Often children/youth in foster care are inadvertently penalized due to multiple moves and incomplete record transfers. Participants described instances in which student files are incomplete or, with each transfer, begin to have inaccurate or inconsistent information added to the files. Additionally, with the pervasiveness of incomplete information in student files, assessments, Admission, Review, and Dismissal meetings, prescriptions and diagnoses, and tests are not completed or updated in an accurate or timely manner. Participants also described the lack of communication between the schools and the circle of support on events such as awards, graduation ceremonies, and school picture day, resulting in an urgent need for collaboration with outside agencies. The lack of involvement of foster parents was another issue that creates a barrier for children/youth in foster care to achieve

success, such as paying for summer school or providing the supports to make it possible. Examples included times in which foster parents lacked interest, as well as instances in which foster parents did receive pertinent information or know the channels in which to receive it. Ultimately, all instances of breakdowns in communication were no fault of the child and yet they were the ones consistently penalized. Participants also described a lack of understanding within the community and the diverse roles of the circle of support teams. Participants also described instances in which there is an increase in communication, which resulted in an improvement in services, but it was then disrupted by another move—capturing children in a loop of ineffectiveness and inefficiency. One of the predominant problems that participants described was the lack of efficient or timely records transfers, which resulted in a great deal of preventable problems. Records transfers resulted in incomplete student files, creating an inaccurate grade level placement, inappropriate diagnoses or medications, untimely testing schedules, or repeated services—all delaying the development of the child/youth in foster care.

- Training and education: Participants discussed their desire to have trainings or have other members of the foster care community participate in training and education. With the use of training and education, the specialists believed that it would assist in supporting communication and create more supportive environments for students. An increase in information was requested to assist in properly handling and redirecting behaviors, fostering empathy toward children/youth in foster care, and “educating the educators” on issues of confidentiality and legality. The outcomes of misinformed reactions to children/youth in foster care are extremely damaging and were reported as often resulting in criminalizing their behaviors. The insufficient access to information was reported as directly causing inappropriate responses to behaviors, resulting in suspensions, arrests, or inappropriate medications. In addition to creating criminal ramifications, the participants reported that

children/youth in foster care are affected by school district staffs’ lack of education on the boundaries and safety of youth. They reported that teachers discuss confidential details of children/youth in foster care in public areas or discuss youth’s child welfare status in offices in which staff and students can hear. This lack of education also affects the reporting of child abuse and neglect. Specialists reported the need for a comprehensive training, such as “Foster Care 101,” intended to help educators understand what the children are going through and how the system works. Additionally, participants wanted a resource guide that would include acronyms and a glossary of terms, the laws of custody, stakeholders, and who makes decisions.

- Positive practices: Several accounts of positive practices emerged from the focus groups. In some areas, mobile charter schools were starting to develop in order to provide outreach for students who were not succeeding in mainstream schools. To address long-term plans for children/youth in foster care, some schools took youth to job sites or created them in-house. In addition, along with jobs planning, participants reported that schools were focusing on GED programs for youth in foster care.
- Schools’ resistance: Schools’ resistance to supporting children/youth in foster care was a topic that dominated all four focus groups, irrespective of region. Some of the barriers were avoiding enrolling foster youth to avoid the potential for poor scores or attendance on the school’s record. Ensuring that children/youth in foster care were receiving appropriate services is critical to success. Schools, however, were reportedly denying them access to the services they needed. Tutoring services were limited or prohibitive due to cost. Focus group participants reported that the breakdown in engagement in school often led to an increase in dropout rates and inappropriate placements in special education, when really the student needed comprehensive education to make up for gaps in learning. On the contrary, schools were also criticized for placing children in special education classes based solely on their status as children/youth in foster care.

Additional information that informed the evaluation process was gleaned from support groups and surveys administered to the local project participants, including interviews with Houston collaborators, surveys of educators from the Houston Independent School District, and Houston DFPS caseworkers. In addition, evaluators conducted an analysis of HISD foster care and education baseline data. This information is available in the [TX Final Evaluation Report](#).

#### Overall findings:

- Increased collaboration and cross-problem solving
  - One of the most significant successes of the Trio Project was bringing together members of DFPS, TEA, HISD, and the Children’s Commission for the purpose of addressing issues related to foster care and education. While it is clear that barriers to collaboration and cross-problem solving still exist, the effect of bringing representatives of education and child welfare together to discuss solutions has the potential to affect long-term change. The evaluation indicates that concerns remained throughout the project related to interagency trust, mutual understanding, and clarity of roles and responsibility at the State level. Problems with inadequate resources, role clarity, and staff turnover were cited as unresolved concerns at the local level. Members of the collaboration acknowledged these issues and provided attention to communicating and resolving the problems. The short time frame available to develop relationships, clarify expectations, and address the barriers to the collaboration played a role in impeding problem solving. In addition, members cited limitations from being a part of large, bureaucratic institutions with varied rules and perspectives and felt it contributed to slowing down potential change.
- Organizational level improvements
  - The evaluation of the Trio Project indicated steps were made to influence organizational change at the State and local levels. One of the most noteworthy contributions to organizational change occurred through the many opportunities for training and education for stakeholders at both the State and

local levels. Training for child welfare, education, and court professionals regarding supporting foster youth in schools increased understanding of the issues and the likelihood that change could occur. Furthermore, the creation of the [Texas Foster Care & Student Success Resource Guide](#) provided an extensive and accessible source of information beyond the time of the Trio Project. The Resource Guide demonstrated significant cross-agency collaboration and sharing of knowledge between TEA and DFPS with valuable information to support foster youth in schools. One specific organizational-level goal of the Trio Project was to affect change in the data-sharing procedures between DFPS and TEA. Although a significant change was not realized, several important developments and conversations occurred regarding the policies and procedures of sharing child-level data to track the educational outcomes of youth in foster care. From these conversations, recommendations for data sharing were created and the plans for improvements continue. It is clear that more efforts are needed at both the State and local level to address issues in the education of youth in foster care; however, there was evidence of an increase in awareness and recognition of the needs of youth in foster care and of schools.

- Increased its capacity to improve educational outcomes for youth
  - On the State level, some progress was made relating to increasing capacity to assist youth in foster care. In particular, the Resource Guide developed through the cooperation of the agencies will be available to school districts.

#### **Project: UT**

Evaluator: The Social Research Institute (SRI) of the University of Utah College of Social Work

According to the project final report, SRI only conducted a process evaluation due to the short-time of the grant.

Project Objectives (followed by the applicable data to be collected and the data, when available):

- Performance indicators
  - Number of CASA volunteers recruited—519 CASA volunteers were active at the close of the project. Of these volunteers, 201 were recruited since the project started on February 1, 2012. Based on information from the responses to the CASA Volunteer Survey (CSV), CASA volunteers were mostly younger, ages 20 to 29 years, or older, ages 60 years or older. In addition, the people who became CASA volunteers typically had never volunteered with youth involved in the child welfare system, or youth in general, and most volunteers had not been employed working with youth involved in the child welfare, legal, or mental health systems.
  - Number of CASAs trained—only CASA volunteers completing the training were considered new volunteers; therefore, the numbers for this performance measure are the same as the number of recruits listed above.
  - Number of education, child welfare, and juvenile court personnel trained on the role of CASA volunteers—no information provided.
  - Number of foster youth served by CASA volunteers—provision of advocacy services and facilitation of education services to 1,000 children in foster care at any point in time, and 1,700 children in foster care during the 17-month project period.
  - Characteristics of CASA matches, including length and frequency of CASA involvement —this information was not collected at the case level by the CASA coordinator.
  - Barriers—the major difficulty to having detailed information on both CASA volunteers and the children they served was the confidentiality of the data. This restricted analyses to aggregate data that were collected by the CASA office and survey data from CASA volunteers.
- Effectiveness of the training education model
  - Observed trainings and completed online training—two types of training was provided during the grant period.
    - Training targeted toward CASA volunteers was designed to teach the roles and responsibilities for successfully advocating for the educational needs of children involved in the child welfare system. Observations of trainings showed the educational advocacy training was imbedded in the general 32-hour CASA training. The volunteers spent approximately 1-1.5 hours in person learning how to fill out the education form used for assessing a youth’s needs. Additional training was an Internet-based course previously developed by another State. Trainings were conducted in each region across the State. The first aspect of the training that was evaluated concerned volunteers’ perceptions of whether the training increased their confidence to work on educational aspects of a child’s case. Most volunteers who responded to the CVS felt they learned quite a bit about educational issues facing youth involved with the child welfare system during the training (91 percent strongly agreed or somewhat agreed).
    - Training for other professionals in the educational, child welfare, and legal systems was designed to increase their understanding of educational issues facing children involved in the child welfare system and awareness of CASA volunteers’ roles in advocating for educational issues for these children.
  - Number of CASAs trained—information not in final report.
  - Additional observations during scheduled trainings—not available.
  - CSV—was administered via the Internet with an email solicitation sent by the CASA coordinator at the end of the project. One hundred and sixty one volunteers responded, which was just under one-third (31 percent) of the total CASA volunteers at the time of the administration. The survey consisted of 54 questions focusing on training experiences, collaboration with professionals in the educational, child welfare, and legal systems, and educational advocacy activities CASA volunteers had carried out while being a volunteer. The CVS asked each

participant to respond indepth regarding his or her activities with a current youth involved in the child welfare system. This was asked to assess how the training may have affected the CASA volunteers' activities with a youth. The survey results indicated that CASA volunteers were clear about what academic information they could share with other professionals, and 81 percent of the CASA volunteers reported that the training provided them with a baseline of information from which to ask effective questions about educational performance and planning.

- Assess impact on collaborations—information about findings was not included in the project final report
  - Endless Dreams conference survey
  - Meeting minutes
  - Observations from meetings and conference
- Assess type of educational advocacy provided by CASA volunteers to foster care youth— information about findings was not included in the project final report
  - CSV



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