# EDUCATION IS THE LIFELINE FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

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## Research Highlights on Education and Foster Care

Success in school can be a positive counterweight to the abuse, neglect, separation, and impermanence experienced by the more than 400,000 U.S. children and youth in foster care at the end of FY 2009. Education has the potential to markedly improve their life chances and their ability to contribute to society as productive adults. Although more data are clearly needed, particularly on a national level, the overall picture emerging from the studies to date is not encouraging. The research suggests that far too many of the children and youth in foster care are not succeeding in school and that a concerted effort will be required if significant progress is to be made in their educational outcomes. The federal Child and Family Service Reviews indicate that states are challenged to meet the educational needs of children and youth in foster care.[1, 2] At the same time, however, there are some promising developments that may lead to better educational experiences and outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

## National Foster Care Data

National data on the number of children and youth in foster care and their characteristics provide a context for the research on the educational experiences of children and youth in foster care. Table 1 provides data on the characteristics of children and youth in foster care.

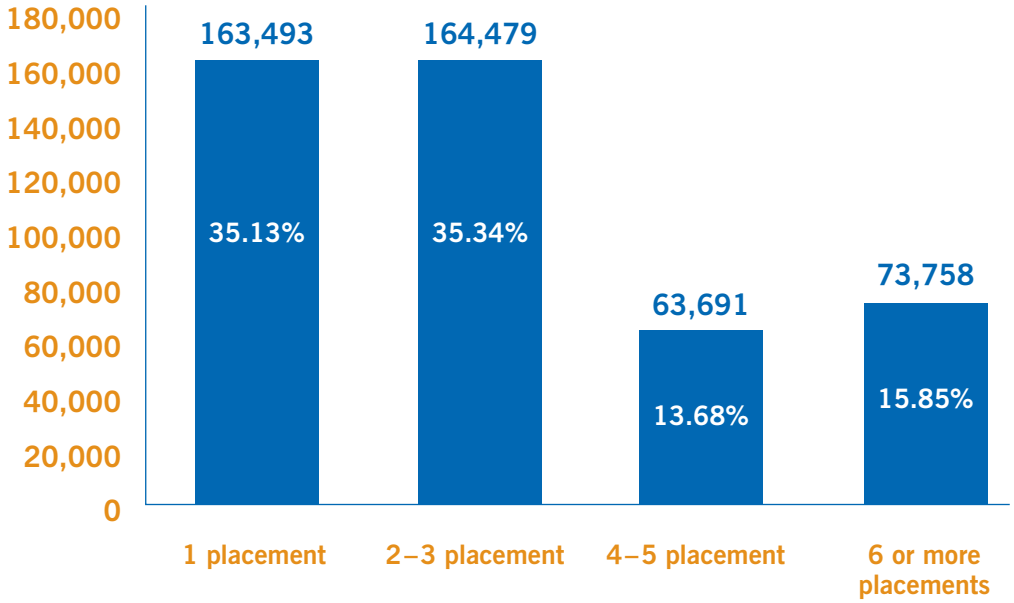
### Table 1.
### Characteristics of Children and Youth in Foster Care

| Number of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2009 | 423,773 | |
|---|---|---|
| **Characteristics of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2009** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| Age | | |
| Young children (age 0–4) | 129,753 | 31 |
| School age children and youth (age 5–17) | 286,895 | 67.7 |
| Young adults (age 18–20) | 18,333 | 5 |
| Race/Ethnicity* | | |
| White | 167,235 | 40 |
| Black | 127,821 | 30 |
| Hispanic (any race) | 8,118 | 20 |
| Other children and youth of color | 41,588 | 10 |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 222,685 | 53 |
| Female | 200,999 | 47 |

* Includes 2 percent whose race/ethnicity was unknown

School age children in foster care in FY 2009 experienced a number of moves while in foster care as shown in Figure 1, a factor that can significantly impacted their school experiences. Federal data indicate that school age children in foster care in FY 2009 experience an average of 3.38 placements.

**Figure 1.**
**School-Age Children and Youth in Foster Care (5–18 Years) in FY 2009: Number of Children by Number of Placements**




*Source*: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY 2009 data (October 1, 2008 through September 30, 2009).

## The Research Findings[i]

### Changing Schools Hinders Academic Achievement

School changes are a significant problem for children and youth in foster care.[3, 4] Numerous studies have found that children in foster care frequently experience school changes.[5, 6, 7] These school changes often occur when children are initially removed from home , or when they move from one foster care placement to another.[10] The rate of school mobility for children in foster care is greater than their non-foster care peers.[11, 12] Children who change schools frequently make less academic progress than their peers, and each time they change schools, they fall farther and farther behind.[14] School mobility has negative effects on academic achievement and is associated with dropping out.[15] Children who experience frequent school changes may also face challenges in developing and sustaining supportive relationships with teachers or with peers.[16]

> **Promising Policy:** The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 requires child welfare agencies to have a plan for "ensuring the educational stability of the child while in foster care," including the child remaining in the school in which the child enrolled at time of placement unless it is not in the best interests of the child.

> **Promising Data:** In a national study of 1,087 foster care alumni, youth who had even one fewer placement change per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before leaving foster care.[17]

### Students Must be Enrolled in School Quickly and Consistently

Delays in school enrollment can occur when a child's initial entry into foster care or a subsequent placement change involves changing schools.[18, 19] These delays are often caused by failure to transfer records in a timely manner.[20,21] Delays in school enrollment can negatively impact attendance and have a number of other adverse consequences such as having to repeat courses previously taken, failure to address special education needs, and enrollment in inappropriate classes.[22]

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[i] This review of the research findings is intentionally very inclusive. Studies were not required to meet any criteria for methodological rigor, and as a result, some studies have significant methodological limitations, including small sample sizes and low response rates, that could affect the generalizability of the findings. Some of these limitations are noted in the end notes and the results of those studies should be interpreted with caution.

**Promising Policy:** The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 requires in cases when remaining in the same school is not in the best interest of the child that "the State agency and local educational agencies . . . provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school, with all of the educational records of the child provided to the school." States are now beginning to implement practices to meet this new federal mandate.

**Promising Data:** Though limited in scope, the National Foster Care Reviewers Coalition's study of the educational outcomes for children in foster care in 7 states (conducted in 2009) found that the majority of the school age children (95%) in foster care who were the subjects of their reviews were enrolled in school.[23] The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) estimates that between 2005 and 2009 that 95.2% of all children ages 5–9, 98.2% of all children ages 10–14, and 95.8% of all children ages 15 to 17 are enrolled in school.[24]

## Regular School Attendance Matters

Studies show that children who enter foster care have often missed a substantial number of school days[25] and that once in foster care, children and youth often have higher school absence rates than their non-foster care peers.[26] The extent to which children experience absences from school appears to be influenced by the child's age and their pre-foster care experiences and their experiences while in care,[27] particularly when children are placed in congregate care.[28] One study found that school attendance problems increase as children in foster care enter adolescence.[29]

**Promising Program:** Two Minnesota studies show some hopeful results regarding school attendance. One private treatment foster care agency in Minnesota succeeded in achieving at least a 90 percent attendance rate for over half of the school age children it served during both the 2005–2006 and 2006 academic years.[30] In another Minnesota study (with a relatively low response rate), researchers found that caregivers reported that children who achieved permanency through adoption or legal guardianship were more likely to be attending school regularly than children who had not attained any form of permanency.[31]

## Children Must Have Support to Prevent Serious Behavior Problems at School

A growing body of research documents the behavioral problems that children and youth in foster care experience, issues that impact their prospects for academic success—in the form of disciplinary infractions and other offenses.[32, 33, 34] Children and youth in foster care experience school suspensions and expulsions at higher rates than non-foster care peers.[35, 36, 37] Some educational experts believe that failure to address the needs of children in foster care leads to behavioral problems at school.[38]

**Promising Program:** In a study with a relatively low response rate, caregivers with children in the Minnesota Permanency Demonstration Project reported that children who had attained permanency through adoption or legal guardianship were less likely to have been suspended from school than children who has not attained any form of permanency.[39]

## Multiple Moves Often Mean Lower Test Scores

Low Test Scores Studies indicate that children in foster care tend to score lower than their peers on standardized tests[40, 41, 42, 43] and some of these differences predate their entry into foster care.[44] Research consistently shows that children who are highly mobile, including both children in foster care and children experiencing homelessness, perform more poorly than stably housed children on standardized tests.[45, 46]

**Promising Program:** Some California counties, including Santa Clara and Fresno, are increasingly linking youth in foster care to college preparation programs such as AVID (Advancement Via Individualized Determination), which targets students in the academic middle who are likely to be the first member of their family to attend college,[47] Research has found that students who participate in AVID and AVID-like programs out-perform their peers on standardized tests, attendance and credit accumulation. In addition, their grade point averages remained high despite enrollment in more rigorous courses.[48]

## Holding Students Back Can Lead to Dropping Out of School

Studies consistently show that children in foster care tend to experience high levels of grade retention[49, 50] and are more likely to be retained than are their non-foster care peers.[51, 52, 53, 54, 55] Research documents that because of grade retention, children in foster care are more likely to be old for grade than are children who have not been involved with the child welfare system.[56, 57] These results on retention and being old for grade are important because both are strong predictors of dropping out of school.[58]

## Children's Special Education Needs Must be Met with Quality Services

Research indicates that children in foster care experience rates of emotional and behavioral problems impacting their education that are higher than their peers who have not been involved in the child welfare system.[59] Studies consistently document that significant percentages of children in foster care have special education needs and/or are receiving special education services,[60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65] with several studies showing that children and youth in foster care are between 2.5 and 3.5 more likely to be receiving special education services than their non foster care peers.[66, 67, 68] Research also suggests that children in foster care who are in special education tend to change schools more frequently, be placed in more restrictive educational settings, and have poorer quality education plans than their non-foster care peers in special education.[69] Studies conducted with California caregivers and school liaisons indicate that children in foster care need more intensive educational and support services to succeed in school.[70, 71]

> **Promising Program:** Hawaii, like several other states, has implemented a statewide education surrogate program for children in foster care. The surrogate parent is an individual who acts in place of the legal parent to make decisions about the student's education when no parent can be located or identified and makes decisions in all matters relating to the identification, evaluation and educational placement of the student and the provision of education services.[72]

## Support is Needed to Ensure Students Graduate

Researchers have found that youth in foster care graduate at relatively low rates[73, 74] and are less likely to complete high school than their non-foster care peers.[75, 76, 77, 78] When foster youth do complete high school, they often graduate later than expected.[79] Research also suggests that young people in foster care are less likely to graduate from high school if they experience repeated changes in their foster care placements.[80, 81] Youth in foster care are more likely to complete high school with a GED than with a high school diploma. Youth of color in foster care, in particular, are less likely to have a high school diploma and more likely to have a GED than youth in foster care who are non-Hispanic white.[83, 84, 85] These findings are of concern because despite the fact that having a GED can improve the life changes of individuals who do not graduate from high school, a GED is not equivalent to a regular high school diploma when it comes to labor market outcomes and post-secondary educational attainment. Compared to high school graduates, individuals who have a GED earn less, on average, and are less likely to graduate from college.[86]

> **Promising Data:** The 2008–09 graduation rate for students who were in foster care at least 90 days during their high school years in Washington State was 29 percentage points below the rate for all Washington State students and 19 percentage points below the rate for low income students. However, the "on-time" high school graduation rate for these students rose from 32% in 2006–07 to 44% in 2008–09.[87] In another Washington State study, researchers found that the odds of graduating from high school were 2.8 times higher for youth in foster care who participated in a mentoring program than for non-mentored peers with similar characteristics even after controlling for other factors.[88]

## Financial Aid, Scholarships and Housing Support Lead to College Success

Although studies indicate that youth in foster care have college aspirations,[89, 90] numerous studies have found lower college enrollment rates[91, 92] and lower college completion rates[93, 94, 95, 96] among young people who have been in foster care than among other young adults. Research suggests that enrollment in college is more likely when young people are allowed to remain in care until age 21[97] or are receive mentoring services.[98] Research indicates that graduation from college is more likely when young people have had fewer foster care placement moves.[99] A few studies have examined the relationship between postsecondary educational attainment and race/ethnicity among young people who had been in foster care and the findings have been mixed.[100, 101, 102, 103] Studies have found that financial difficulties, needing to work and concerns about housing are among the barriers that prevent former foster youth from pursuing postsecondary education.[104] Overcoming these barriers is important because increasing postsecondary educational

attainment among youth in foster care would increase their average work-life earnings. With a four year degree, youth in foster care could expect to earn approximately $481,000 more, on average, over the course of their work-life than if they had only a high school diploma. Even if they did not graduate with a degree, completing any college would increase their work-life earnings, on average, by $129,000.[105]

**Promising Programs:** College enrollment during the first year after expected high school graduation among youth in foster care in Washington State rose from 16% in the high school years of 2005–06 to 20% in 2008–09. The researcher credits this improvement to a number of programs implemented or expanded in Washington State over the past decade that provide educational support to foster youth . These programs offer services such as educational advocacy and financial assistance such as scholarships designed to keep foster youth enrolled in school, increase the high school graduation rates, and improve college enrollment rates (Burley, 2009).

**Promising Program:** Campus support programs, which provide college students who aged out of foster care with an array of financial, academic, social/emotional and logistical (e.g., housing) supports to help them stay in school and graduate, have the potential to increase postsecondary educational attainment among youth formerly in foster care.[106] Although additional research is needed to evaluate their impact on education outcomes, the number of such programs has grown rapidly in recent years, especially in California where more than 2,500 alumni from foster care are enrolled in 79 colleges that offer campus support programs for foster youth.

## A Strong Start is Especially Important for Young Children in Foster Care

Research has consistently found a high need for early intervention and early childhood education services among young children in foster care as a result of their developmental, emotional and behavioral problems.[107, 108, 109] Yet, several studies indicate that many young children do not receive the early intervention or early childhood education services they need to address these problems.[110, 111, 112] Studies indicate that children in foster care are less likely to be enrolled in Head Start than eligible, low income children as a group.[113]

**Promising Development:** The Ready to Succeed Initiative is working to close the educational achievement gap between children in foster care and their peers in California by focusing on young children who are at early risk for school failure. For example, the Initiative found that in Fresno County children under the age of five were not routinely accessing early intervention programs or preschool despite qualifying for services due to their high risk of developmental delays. The Fresno County child welfare agency assigned an education liaison to ensure that toddlers and preschool-age children received the assessments and services that they needed to thrive. These efforts have increased the percentage of children enrolled in preschool from 42% to 59% over the past two years. The Initiative is using data such as these to target their school readiness efforts.

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# ENDNOTES

[1] In 18 of the 35 states that participated in the first round of Child and Family Service Reviews during FY 2002 through FY 2004, the educational needs of foster children were not being met, in part, because services to address their education-related problems were not consistently provided (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2008).

[2] Across the 32 states whose Child and Family Service Reviews were completed in FY 2007 and 2008, the standard for "children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs" (i.e., Child Well-Being Indicator #2) was achieved, on average, 87% of the time, which is less than the 95% needed for substantial conformity (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010b).

## School Mobility

[3] Four focus groups conducted in California with representatives from child welfare, education and other agencies as well as foster youth and caregivers identified placement instability resulting in frequent school changes as a major problem (Zeitlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006).

[4] A focus group consisting of schools liaisons from one California school district identified the lack of stability in the lives of foster children, including school stability, as the most serious problem facing students in foster care (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2010).

[5] More than one-third of the 17 and 18 year old foster youth in the Midwest Study had experienced five or more school changes related to their being in foster care (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004).

[6] Two thirds of the Casey National Alumni Study participants (ages 20 to 51) had attended three or more different elementary schools and one third reported having attended at least five. Nearly two-thirds of the Northwest Alumni Study participants (ages 20 to 33) had experienced seven or more school changes during their elementary and secondary school years (Pecora, et al., 2006).

[7] Foster youth who entered an educationally oriented residential facility between October 2001 and June 2005 and had been in foster care for an average of nearly seven years reported a mean of 6 school changes (after accounting for normative changes) while they were in care (Sullivan et al., 2010).

[8] A study of foster children in 7 states found that more than half changed schools upon entering foster care (data were not available for 15%) but more than two thirds remained in the same school during the six-month study period (data were not available for 4%) (National Foster Care Review Coalition, 2009 [data on school changes after foster care entry were only available for 28% of children]).

[9] In a New York City study, three quarters of the 8 to 21 year old foster youth who were interviewed in 2000 had not remained in their school of origin upon entering foster care and almost two thirds had transferred to a new school in the middle of the school year (Advocates for Children of New York, 2000).

[10] New York City children who entered foster care between 1995 and 1999 were more than twice as likely to have changed schools during the year after placement as compared to the year before (Conger & Rebeck, 2001).

[11] During the 2001 through 2003 school years, elementary school-aged foster children in the Chicago Public Schools were more than twice as likely to change schools as students who had no history of child welfare services involvement. School mobility was especially high among children who entered foster care during the school year, with over two-thirds experiencing a school change. Among those children who entered foster care in 2008 without first receiving in-home services, over one-half of the 6- to 10-year olds and almost two-thirds of the 11- to 17-year-olds had changed schools at least once within the past two years (excluding normative transitions from elementary to high school) (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

[12] In a study conducted in San Mateo County, CA, between the 2003-04 and 2007-08 academic years, 17% of the dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who remained in their home or were returned to home while in the court's custody) left school midyear compared to only 2% of non-dependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

[13] In 20 of the 35 states that participated in the first round of Child and Family Service Reviews during FY 2002 through FY 2004, the educational needs of foster children were not being met because "many children in foster care experienced multiple school changes as a result of placement changes" (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).

[14] In one study, it was found that with each school change, a child falls further behind. This outcome was found even after family socioeconomic status and other demographic factors associated with both academic achievement and school mobility were taken into account (Kerbow, 1996).

[15] A recent meta-analysis of the relationship between school mobility and school performance found negative effects on both reading and math achievement as well as positive effects on dropping out (Reynolds, Chen, & Herbers, 2009).

[16] South et al., 2007.

## School Enrollment

[17] Pecora et al., 2006; this analysis was limited to foster youth who were least 17 years and 3 months old when they left care.

[18] One-fifth of the 11 to 17 year olds of the Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services were either not enrolled in school or had been absent for so long that they were effectively not enrolled. Many of these youth had become disengaged from school and remained disengaged after entering foster care (Smithgall, et al., 2010).

[19] Approximately half of the caregivers of school-aged foster children in nine San Francisco Bay Area counties who were interviewed in 2000 had had to enroll their foster child in school, and 12% of those caregivers had experienced enrollment delays of at least two weeks (Choice, et al., 2001 [response rate; 28%]).

[20] Forty-two percent of the 8 to 21 year New York City foster youth who were interviewed in 2000 had experienced a delay in school enrollment while in foster care, and nearly half of those who experienced a delay attributed it to lost or misplaced school or immunization records (Advocates for Children in New York, 2000).

[21] More than three quarters of the California group home operators who were surveyed in 2000 reported that educational records for foster children in group homes are either "frequently" or "almost always" incomplete, 60% reported that the transfer of educational records is "frequently" or "almost always" delayed when youth change schools or group home placements, three quarters reported that youth recently placed in group homes experience long delays when attempting to enroll in public school, and more than two thirds reported that educational placement decisions were "frequently" or "almost always" compromised by incomplete school records (Parrish, et al. 2001 [response rate: 48%]).

[22] Failure to immediately enroll foster children in their new school when they change schools during the school year was a major problem identified by the four focus groups conducted in California with representatives from child welfare, education and other agencies as well as foster youth and caregivers (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006).

## School Attendance

[23] National Foster Care Review Coalition, 2009.

[24] US Census Bureau, 2010.

[25] A Chapin Hall study of children in Illinois who enter foster care without first receiving in-home services found that about one-third (30.2%) of the 6- to 10-year old children entering foster care missed more than 10 days of school during the past semester or grading period. Some had missed as many as 40 days. Family problems were the principal reasons that children of this age group missed school. Poor school attendance was more prevalent than for younger children. Over half of the children ages 11 to 17 who were enrolled in school at the time they entered foster care had experienced excessive absences (10 days or more) during the previous semester or grading period. The principal reasons for school absences were family problems, running away and hospitalizations (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

[26] A study in San Mateo County, California found that the average absence rate for children and youth in foster care was 12% compared to only 6% for non-dependent youth. The percentage leaving school mid-year was 17% for children and youth in foster care compared to only 2% for non-dependent youth (Castrechini, 2009).

[27] One study found a small positive relationship between school transfers and attendance rates for children entering foster care. In this study, the attendance rates of many of the children improved after entry to care. The greatest gains were seen in children who were younger, who remained in care for at least an entire semester after placement, children with stable placements, children placed with foster families or kinship families, and those who entered care as a result of abuse or neglect. Declines or small gains in attendance were seen with children with short stay and those who stayed longer. Higher attendance rates increased math and reading schools, and school transfers had no effect on reading scores and depressed math scores slightly (Conger & Rebeck, 2001).

[28] One study found that children and youth in congregate care entered care with a far lower attendance rate prior to placement than children in kinship homes prior to placement (69 percent compared to 80 percent) and that attendance rate for children in congregate care decreased by almost 5 percentage points by the semester after foster care placement (Conger & Rebeck, 2001).

[29] A recent study of children placed in treatment foster care (designed for children in foster care with intensive mental, emotional, behavioral, or medical needs) found that these children had attendance rates of at least 90% over the course of two years but the proportion of children

with school attendance below 90% for two consecutive years climbed significantly at around age 13. Children in independent living programs had lower attendance ratios than children in other types of services (Larson, 2010).

[30] Larson, 2010.

[31] Siegel, 2009. The survey response rate was only 35 percent.

## School Behavior Problems

[32] In a study of Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services found that nearly half of the 6 to 10 year olds demonstrated behaviors that were deemed problematic by the school and that two-thirds of the 11 to 17 year olds exhibited problem behaviors, received disciplinary action, or both (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

[33] During the 2003-2004 academic year, foster children and youth in the Chicago Public Schools were more than twice as likely as students who had no history of child welfare services involvement to have experienced at least one disciplinary code infraction as students who had no history of child welfare services involvement. Moreover, just over half of the foster youth ages 11 and older and 70% of the foster children ages 6 to 10 who experienced a disciplinary code infraction were involved in at least one violent offense (e.g., fighting, bullying, or battery (Smithgall, et al., 2005).

[34] According to their self-reports, nearly three quarters of the 15- to 19-year old foster youth in a suburban Missouri county who had been referred for independent living preparation had been suspended, 16% had been expelled, 29% had been involved in a physical fight with other students and 28% had been involved in a verbal fight with a teacher since they entered 7th grade (McMillen et al., 2003).

[35] The 17- and 18-year old Midwest Study participants were more than twice as likely to report having be given an out-of-school suspension and over three times more likely to report having been expelled than a nationally representative sample of 17 and 18 year olds (Courtney, et al., 2004).

[36] A study in San Mateo County found that close to one-third of youth in foster care for more than 2 years (31.8%) had experienced a suspension and 4.1% of these youth had been expelled. Children in foster care for shorter (less than 6 months) and longer (more than 2 years) periods of time were more likely to be suspended or expelled (Castrechini, 2009).

[37] Twelve percent of a random sample of Los Angeles County foster children ages 6 to 12 had been suspended and 3% had been expelled. Just over one third of the foster children were rated by their teachers as having classroom behavior problems in the clinical range, only 16% of the foster children who rated by their teachers as having behavior problems were also rated as having behavior problems by their foster parent (Zima, et al., 2000).

[38] One focus group consisting of educational advocates and another consisting of school liaisons, all from California, suggested that failure to adequately address the needs of foster children led to emotional and behavior problems with which schools do not know how cope (Zeitlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2010).

[39] Seigel, 2009. The response rate was only 35 percent.

## Academic Achievement Gap

[40] Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who had remained in their homes or been returned to homes while in the court's custody) in the San Mateo County study were more than twice as likely NOT to be proficient in the English language and more than twice as likely NOT to be proficient in math as their non-dependent peers. The dependent youth also earned, on average, 14 fewer credits per year (Castrechini, 2009).

[41] Compared to Chicago Public Schools students who had no history or child welfare services involvement, foster children in grades 3 through 8 were, on average, more than one year behind in reading in 2003, although controlling for demographic and school characteristics reduced the gap to just over half a year. The foster children were also more likely to score in the bottom quartile on the reading portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), but 44% had also scored in the bottom quartile prior to their placement (Smithgall, et al., 2004).

[42] In 2000, Washington State foster children and youth in grades 3, 6 and 9 scored 16 to 20 percentile points below their 3rd, 6th and 9th grade peers who were not in foster care on state achievement tests for reading and math (Burley & Halpern, 2001).

[43] On average, the 17 and 18 year old Midwest Study participants were reading at a seventh grade level (Courtney, et al., 2004).

[44] A Chapin Hall study of children in Illinois who enter foster care without first receiving in-home services found that among children ages 6 to 10 with at least one school change in the past 2 years, 36% were behind or underperforming compared to 56% of those with no school change. Of children ages 11 to 17, 56% were behind or underperforming as compared to 61% of children withno school changess. The researchers concluded that in many cases, children who were

doing well before transferring continue to do well after transferring and those who were struggling continue to struggle (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

[45] Studies have found that highly mobile children score lower than stably housed children on standardized tests in reading, spelling, and math (Obradovic, et al., 2009; Rafferty, et al., 2004; Rubin, et al., 1996).

[46] A review of studies on school mobility and education success found that moves occurring in elementary school and high school were associated with more detrimental effects on reading and math achievement than moves in middle school (Reynolds, Chen & Herbers, 2009).

[47] Sommer, Wu, & Mauldon, 2009.

[48] Watt, Yanez, & Cossio, 2002.

## Retention/Old for Grade

[49] Nearly 45% of the 8 to 21 year children and youth in foster care in New York City public schools who were interviewed in 2000 reported being retained at least once (Advocates for Children, 2000).

[50] More than one third of the Casey National Alumni Study participants reported that they had repeated a grade (Pecora, et al., 2006)

[51] Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who had remained in their homes or been returned to homes while in the court's custody) in the San Mateo County study were twice as likely to be retained as non-dependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

[52] Between 2000 and 2003, elementary school-aged foster children in the Chicago Public Schools were retained at nearly twice the rate as students with no history of child welfare services involvement (Smithgall, et al, 2004). 2004).

[53] In 2000, children in foster care in Washington State were, on average, about twice as their 3rd, 6th and 9th grade peers who were not in foster care to have been in the same grade for more than one year (Burley & Halpern, 2001).

[54] Thirteen percent of a random sample of Los Angeles County foster children ages 6 to 12 who were in care between July 1996 and March 1998 had repeated at least one grade (Zima, et al., 2000).

[55] The 17 and 18 year old Midwest Study participants were 1.7 times more likely to report that they had repeated a grade than a nationally representative sample of 17 and 18 year olds (Courtney, et al., 2004).

[56] In 2003, foster children in the Chicago Public Schools were nearly twice as likely to be old for grade as third through eighth graders with no history of children welfare services involvement even after controlling for demographic and school characteristics (Smithgall, et al., 2004).

[57] Almost half of the foster youth who entered an educationally oriented residential facility between October 2001 and June 2005 were, based on their age, behind their expected grade in school and nearly one third reported having repeated a class due to failing grades (Sullivan et al., 2010).

[58] Alexander, Entwhistle & Kabbani, 2001; Jimerson, 2001.

## Special Education

[59] A study of special education students in one large city and 32 county school districts were over three times more likely to be diagnosed with an emotional disturbance if they had a history of foster care placement than children who were poor but had no child welfare services involvement (Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2009).

[60] Just over half of the 11 to 14 year old foster youth and 45% of the 15 to 18 year old foster youth in Lucas County (Toledo), Ohio were identified as having special education needs. Just under one fifth of the 5 to 10 year olds were identified as having special education needs but data were missing for nearly one third (Theiss, 2010).

[61] Though limited in scope, a study of foster children in 7 states found that two-thirds of the children with special education needs (data were not available for 10%) were receiving special education services (National Foster Care Review Coalition, 2010).

[62] Nearly half of California children in foster care who were placed in group homes or licensed children's institutions (LCI) in 1999 had a special education classification, with emotional disturbance and learning disabilities being the most common. Moreover, these special education students were over 10 times more likely to be enrolled in non-public schools special education foster children who were not in group homes or LCI's. Some of this difference can be explained by the fact that more than half of the latter were diagnosed with a learning disability and fewer than one in ten were diagnosed with an emotional disturbance (Parrish, et al., 2001).

[63] Nearly half of the 17 and 18 year old Midwest Study participants reported that they had ever been placed in a special education class (Courtney, et al., 2004). Thirty-eight percent of the Casey National Alumni Study participants reported that they had been enrolled in a special education class (Pecora, et al., 2006).

[64] A study of the educational experiences of foster youth who were, on average, 17.5 years old and had been in

foster care for an average of 8 years as of December 1998 found that one third had been placed in special education classes (Shinn, 2003; the response rate was only 38%).

[65] More than one third of the Bay Area caregivers of school-aged foster children in who were interviewed in 2000 reported that their foster child was receiving special education services. However, over two thirds identified their foster child as having some type of special need, with behavioral and emotional problems, learning disabilities, and medical or health problems being the most common (Choice, et al., 2001; the response rate for the telephone survey was only 28%).

[66] Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who had remained in their homes or been returned to homes while in the court's custody) in the San Mateo County study were 2.5 times more likely to be receiving special education services as non-dependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

[67] In 2000, Washington State foster children in grades 3, 6 and 9 were two and a half to three times more likely to be enrolled in special education programs than the average 3rd, 6th and 9th grader (Burley & Halpern, 2001).

[68] In 2003, foster children in the Chicago Public Schools were three and a half times more likely to have a special education classification than students in grades one through eight who had no history of child welfare services involvement even after controlling for demographic and school characteristics. Moreover, foster children who had a special education classification were much more likely than students with a special education classification but no history of child welfare services involvement to be classified as having an emotional or behavioral disorder (Smithgall, et al., 2004).

[69] Children in foster care and in special education in a large urban Oregon school district changed schools more frequently and were in more restrictive settings than special education students who were not in foster care. Moreover, the Individualized Education Plans of the foster youth were of poorer quality and less likely to include goals related to postsecondary education or to the development of independent living skills than those of special education students not in foster care. The foster youth were also less likely than other special education students to have an advocate present during their transition planning meetings (Geenen & Powers, 2006).

[70] Two focus groups consisting of California foster parents and relative caregivers identified the failure of schools to acknowledge their children's needs for services to address learning or behavior problems and to provide their children with more intensive supports as ongoing problems (Zetlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2010).

[71] California school liaisons who participated in the focus group suggested that some of the problems that resulted in foster children being referred for special education services may be due to the emotional trauma or frequent school changes they have experienced rather than to learning disabilities (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2010).

[72] Hawaii Department of Education, 2007.

## High School Completion

[73] Just over one third of Washington State foster youth who exited care at age 18 or older between January and June 2000 had a high school diploma or GED (Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, 2001).).

[74] A study of the educational experiences of Illinois foster youth who were, on average, 17.5 years old and had been in foster care for an average of 8 years found that one fifth had dropped out of school (Shinn, 2003; the survey response rate, however, was only 38%

[75] Based on a review of studies conducted between 1995 and 2005, Wolanin (2005) estimated that about half of foster youth complete high school by age 18 compared to 70% of youth in the general population and that GED completion rates for youth in foster care ranged between 5% and 29%.

[76] Washington State 11th graders who had a history of foster care placement and enrolled in 12th grade the following year were one third less likely to complete high school at the end of that 12th grade year than their peers who had no foster care history (Burley & Halpern, 2001).

[77] Fourteen year old Chicago Public Schools students who were in foster care in September 1998 were half as likely to have graduated from high school five years later as their peers who had no history of child welfare services involvement. In addition, the likelihood of dropping out was nearly twice as high for the youth in foster care, even after controlling for demographic characteristics, school characteristics and academic performance in elementary school (Smithgall, et al., 2004).

[78] By age 21, 77% of the Midwest Study participants had a high school diploma or GED compared to 89% of 21 year olds in a nationally representative sample (Courtney, et al., 2007).

[79] Twelve percent of Washington State students who had been in foster care at any time after their 16th birthday and were expected to graduate at the end of the 2004-05 to 2006-07 school years graduated from high school one year later than expected (Burley, 2009).

[80] The odds of completing high school were 1.8 times higher for foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study if they had experienced one fewer placement change per year and 3.1 times higher if they had experienced two fewer placement changes per year (Pecora et al., 2006; this analysis was limited to foster youth who were least 17 years and 3 months old when they left care).

[81] Researchers reported that the odds of graduating from high school among foster care alumni in the Northwest Study were 4.6 times higher if they had experienced a low rate of placement change (i.e., less than .5 per year) and 2.7 times higher if they had experienced a moderate rate of placement change (i.e., .50 to .99 per year) than if they had experienced a high rate of placement change (i.e., at least 1 per year). In addition, their odds of graduating from high school were twice as high if they had experienced 6 or fewer school changes than if they had experienced 10 or more (Pecora et al., 2009).

[82] The rate of high school completion for foster care alumni in both the Northwest Alumni Study and the Casey National Alumni Study was comparable to the 2008 high school completion rate of 85% among 18 to 24 year olds in the general population. However, 29% of the Northwest Alumni Study participants and 19% of the Casey National Alumni Study completed high school with a GED rather than a high school diploma compared to 6% of 18 to 24 year olds in the general population (Pecora, et al, 2005; Pecora, et al., 2006).

[83] American Indian/Alaskan Native foster care alumni were about as likely to complete high school as non-Hispanic White alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study but were significantly less likely to have a high school diploma and significantly more likely to have a GED (O'Brien, et al., 2010).

[84] Although the African American foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study were about as likely to have completed high school as their non-Hispanic White counterparts, they were significantly less likely to have completed high school with a regular diploma (Harris, et al., 2009).

[85] Likewise, African American foster care alumni in the Northwest Study were significantly more likely to have completed high school than their non-Hispanic White counterparts, but significantly less likely to have a high school diploma (Dworsky, et al., 2010).

[86] Boesel, Alsalam, & Smith, 1998; Heckman, Humphries, Mader, 2010; Bozick & DeLuca, 2005: Grubb, 1999; Smith, 2003.

[87] Burley, 2010.

[88] Burley, 2009.

## Post Secondary Education

[89] Eighty four percent of the 17 and 18 year old Midwest Study participants aspired to complete some college and 71 percent aspired to graduate (Courtney, et al., 2004).

[90] Seventy percent of the 15 to 19 year old foster youth in Missouri who had been referred for independent living preparation aspired to attend college (McMillan et al., 2003).

[91] Based on a review of studies from 1995 through 2000, Wolanin (2005) estimated that approximately 20% of foster youth who graduate from high school attend college compared to 60% of high school graduates in the general population.

[92] Only 11% of the youth in foster care in Washington State who were in the high school classes of 2006 and 2007 were enrolled in college during both the first and second year after expected high school graduation. By comparison, 42% of Washington State high school students in the class of 2006 enrolled in college during the first year after they were expected to graduate from high school and 35% were enrolled in college during both the first and second year after graduating from high school (Burley, 2009).

[93] Forty three percent of foster care alumni in the Northwest Alumni Study had completed any postsecondary education and almost half of the foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study participants had completed at least some college. However, only 2% of the former and 9% of the latter had at least a bachelor's degree (Pecora, et al., 2006; Pecora, et al., 2005).

[94] Just under one third of the 23 and 24 year old Midwest Study participants had completed at least one year of college but only 6% had a college degree. By comparison, 61% of the 23 and 24 year olds in the nationally representative Add Health Study sample had completed at least one year of college and nearly one quarter had a college degree (Courtney et al., 2010).

[95] Foster care alumni who entered postsecondary education in 1995 and were first-time undergraduates, were as likely to attend four-year institutions as other first time undergraduates and more likely to be enrolled fulltime. However, they were half as likely to have earned a degree or certificate during the six-year study period as their non-foster peers (Davis, 2006).

[96] Michigan State undergraduates who had been in foster care were 1.6 times more likely to have dropped out by the end of their first year and almost twice as likely to

have dropped before completing their degree as first generation, low income undergraduates who had not been in foster care (Day, 2010).

[97] Midwest Study participants from Illinois, who were allowed to remain in foster care until age 21, were 1.7 times more likely to have completed at least one year of college by age 23 or 24 than their counterparts from Iowa and Wisconsin, where that option did not exit. However, the Illinois study participants were no more likely to have a college degree (Courtney et al., 2010).

[98] The odds of enrolling in college were 4.6 times higher for Washington State foster youth who participated in a mentoring program than for non-mentored peers with similar characteristics even after controlling for other factors (Burley, 2009).

[99] The odds of graduating from college were 3.7 times higher for foster care alumni in the Northwest Study if they had experienced 6 or fewer school changes than if they had experienced 10 or more (Pecora, et al., 2009).

[100] American Indian/Alaskan Native foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study were about as likely as their non-Hispanic White counterparts to have any postsecondary education, they were significantly less likely to have graduated from college (O'Brien, et al., 2010).

[101] In the Casey National Alumni Study, there were no significant differences in postsecondary educational outcomes between the non-Hispanic White and African American alumni (O'Brien, et al., 2010).

[102] African American foster care alumni in the Northwest Study were as likely to have completed any college as their non-Hispanic white counterparts (Pecora, et al., 2009).

[103] Although African American Midwest Study participants were significantly more likely to have attended college and to have completed at least one year of college by age 21 than their non-Hispanic white counterparts, only the difference in college attendance was statistically significant (Courtney et al., 2010).

[104] A study of former foster youth participating in 8 campus support programs in California and Washington State found that although former foster youth clearly appreciated the concrete services and supports that they received, such as having someone to turn to or someone who believed in them and feeling understood or part of a family, it was the less tangible benefits that they valued most. Moreover, some of the challenges participants reported were not unlike those faced by many young people from low income families when they go away to school but others, particularly their concerns about having a stable place to live, were probably related to their status as former foster youth (Dworsky & Perez, 2010).

[105] Peters et al., 2010.

[106] Dworsky & Perez, 2009.

## Early Childhood Education

[107] Data from the National Study of Child and Adolescent Well Being (NSCAW) was used to determine the extent of developmental problems for 268 children who were 1 to 5 years old and had been in foster care for approximately one year at the time the sample was drawn. Researchers found that 57% had a developmental problem in at least one of three domains: 47% had cognitive delays, 49% had language delays, and 52% had behavioral problems. Forty-two percent of the caregivers of these children reported that their child had been assessed for learning problems, special needs, or developmental disabilities, and 23% had been told that they had a learning problem, special need, or developmental disability. However, only half of the children identified as having learning problem, special need, or developmental disability had an Individualized Family Service Plan (I.F.S.P.) or an Individualized Education Plan (I.E.P.). Thirty five percent of these children had been referred by their caseworker for an assessment to identify learning problems or developmental disabilities, 7% had been referred for special education services and 20% had been referred for services to address an emotional, behavioral or attention problem. At the same time, 39% of their caseworkers indicated that the child needed an assessment to identify learning problems or developmental disabilities, 22% indicated that the child needed services for an emotional, behavioral or attention problem and.14% indicated that the child needed special education services. In addition to the children for whom a referral had been made, another 2% to 3% were already receiving special education services or other services to address a developmental problem (Ward, et al., 2009).

[108] One study that analyzed data for foster children ages two to 24 months old found that nearly six in ten were at high risk for neurological or cognitive developmental impairments (Vandivere, et al., 2003).

[109] In a study of Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services, researchers found that over one third of the 3 to 5 year olds showed evidence of a possible developmental delay in at least one of the following domains: visual-motor adaptive, language and cognition, fine or gross motor, personal-social, or problem solving. Fourteen percent of the 3- to 5-year olds were identified as having behavior problems

ranging from lack of focus to aggressiveness (Smithgall, et al., 2010).

[110] A study that analyzed data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well Being for 641 children who were less than six years old and in foster care when the first wave of data was collected found that had nearly half had scores on measures of cognitive, behavioral, and social skills that would make them eligibility for early intervention services. However, their caregivers reported that just over one third of these children had received any type of service to address their developmental and behavior problems during the past year. Children at risk for delays in 2 or more domains were more likely to have received services than children at risk in 0 or 1, and children ages 3 to 5 were more than twice as likely to have received services as children ages 0 to 2 (Stahmer et al., 2005).

[111] In a study of Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services, researchers found despite the finding over one third of the 3 to 5 year olds showed evidence of a possible developmental delay in at least one domain, only 14% were receiving early intervention services when they entered foster care (Smithgall, et al., 2010).

[112] The National Center for Education Statistics (2005) determined that 19 percent of children birth through age 5 not yet in kindergarten who were in families with a household income of $25,000 or less participated on a weekly basis in Head Start or Early Head Start.

[113] The National Study of Child and Adolescent Well Being indicates that only 6 percent of children in foster care under age 6 are enrolled in Head Start (Vandivere, 2003). Between 1991 and 2005, the percentage of all children ages three to four participating in a Head Start program remained fairly constant, ranging between 9 and 11 percent, and was at 9 percent in 2005 (Child Trends, 2010).

National Working Group on Foster Care and Education

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