

IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE: PERSPECTIVES FROM JUDGES AND PROGRAM SPECIALISTS

Permanency Planning For Children Department



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

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Marguerite Casey Foundation



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

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IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE: PERSPECTIVES FROM JUDGES AND PROGRAM SPECIALISTS

Introduction

This *Technical Assistance Bulletin* is the result of a collaborative project between the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Permanency Planning for Children Department (PPCD) and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) with support from the Casey Family Programs. The overall purpose of the project is to increase the capacity of judges, child-welfare staff, and educators to better assist youth in foster care in meeting their educational goals. The project studies the educational experiences and placement stability of foster-care youth, and how these factors influence successful transition out of care and into adulthood. This *Bulletin* presents information gathered from judges and other program specialists about current practices aimed at addressing the educational needs of youth in care and points to areas needing improvement. This part of the project's focus is identifying realistic systems changes which potentially can improve the educational outcomes for foster youth, a group which has historically experienced poor educational outcomes.

Every year in the United States, approximately 20,000 youths exit foster care and enter the adult world. Studies have shown that education is a significant factor in determining the success of this transition.¹ Statistically more likely to have lower levels of educational attainment and fewer resources, many foster youth flounder when faced with adult roles and responsibilities. Three in ten of our nation's homeless adults are former foster children.² One in three former foster children needs public assistance after the age of 18.³

In education foster youth statistically lag behind their non-foster peers. Numerous state studies (e.g. *Washington State, 2001*⁴) have shown that significant differences by grade level exist between foster-care and non-foster youth. And as if educational impediments were not enough, a recent study by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education entitled, "Losing Ground,"⁵ reports that low-income students – of which former foster youth are over-represented – have increasing economic barriers to attending college.

In this era of educational reform and a growing reliance on performance-based testing, the educational gap between high and low achievers is steadily widening. Nearly every state has adopted academic standards in some subjects, and 44 states have standards in the four core areas of Math, English, Social Studies, and Science. This has intensified the pressure on students already struggling or at-risk

¹ Cook, R.J. (1992). *Are we helping foster care youth prepare for the future?* Children and Youth Services Review, 16, 213-229.

² *Resources On: Foster Care and Homeless Youth.* (2001). Casey Family Programs.

³ Courtney, M., Grogan-Taylor, A., and Nesmith, A. (1998). *Foster Youths' Transitions to Adulthood: Outcomes 12 to 18 Months after Leaving Out-of-Home Care*, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, WA.

⁴ Burley, M. and Halpern, M. (2001). *Educational attainment of foster youth: Achievement and graduation outcomes for children in state care.* Washington State Institute of Public Policy. Olympia, WA.

⁵ National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. (2002). *Losing Ground: A National Status Report of American Higher Education.* San Jose, CA.

of not completing the most basic part of their education – a high-school diploma. Children in foster care frequently do not receive the attention and continuity necessary for academic success. They are at a markedly increased risk for educational failure – especially dropping out – and associated independent-living impacts after leaving foster care⁶.

Goals of the Survey

A major component of the collaborative project between the PPCD and the CWLA involved identifying and describing promising efforts designed to address and support the educational needs of youth in foster care. This *Bulletin* presents the findings of a survey of Child Victims Act Model Court Lead Judges⁷ and related program specialists regarding this important topic. Please see Appendix A for a brief description of the national Child Victims Act Model Court Project.

As a first step in gathering information, research staff of the PPCD conducted telephone interviews with Model Court Lead Judges. As a second step, Lead Judges were asked to identify other court-related personnel whom the PPCD could question to obtain in-depth information about specific areas of programming and services. The primary goal of the interviews was to gain insight into innovative practices and programs in Model Court jurisdictions which address foster care youths' educational needs. Additionally, the interviews explored the Model Court judges' impressions of the overall importance of this topic for the judiciary.

Overview of Survey Method

Judges' Survey

There are 23 Model Courts currently participating in the PPCD's national Child Victims Act Model Court Project. The Model Courts represent a true cross-section of the nation's juvenile and family court system: some are large, some are small, and they are composed of urban, rural, and tribal jurisdictions across the United States, including Hawaii. Together, the Model Court jurisdictions account for approximately one-third of all children in foster care in the United States. Each Model Court has a designated "Lead Judge" who heads up reform efforts in his or her jurisdiction, and who frequently has developed significant expertise in particular types of improvements. The Lead Judge is often the best single point-of-contact for any changes currently underway or planned for the future. In addition to providing valuable information on the points surveyed for this research project, Model Court judges also serve as a first step in gathering information about whether a topic is relevant to the judiciary – whether it is even on judges' "radar screens."

⁶ Cook, R. "A National Evaluation of Title IV-E Foster Care Independent Living Programs for Youth, Phase 2." 1992.

⁷ The Child Victims Act Model Court initiative is funded by the United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

The research staff of the PPCD conducted telephone interviews with 19 of the 23 Model Court Lead Judges.⁸ Each interview was conducted via telephone by trained PPCD research staff members. With additional funding, PPCD would ultimately like to gather information about this topic from a wider, nationally representative sample of judges. Such a sample would provide baseline information from judges potentially less familiar with this issue and other systems' reform efforts.

The telephone interviews were designed to determine:

- To what degree addressing educational needs is seen as an important part of ensuring best outcomes for youth in care;
- To what extent there is an awareness of the services of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program;
- The identification of promising practices and programs; and
- The identification of the appropriate contacts for additional program information.

The judges' telephone interviews contained 15 multi-part questions and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The last question asked the judges to identify additional court-related personnel who could provide expanded information on current educational programming available to the courts (i.e., who would be good sources of detailed information about specific programs, practices, and policies at national, state, and local levels). These program specialists were designated as "key informants" for research staff to follow-up with for more program and policy information.

Program Specialists' Survey

After the judges' interviews, each program specialist or "key informant" was contacted by telephone by a staff member of the PPCD who asked about his or her willingness to participate in the survey. A total of 61 program specialists were recommended by the Lead Judges as key informants. All key informants were invited by the PPCD staff to participate in the study by completing a survey of 13 multi-part questions. Unlike the Lead Judges, the program specialists were mailed a questionnaire to complete on their own time.

Of the 61 program specialists identified by the judges, 26 (43%) did not respond to the invitation to participate in the survey. The 35 who did agree to participate were sent questionnaires. Follow-up calls were made to encourage the return of completed questionnaires. Of the 35 questionnaires mailed out, 19 were completed and returned. The 19 respondents (a 54% response rate) provided information about 32 different programs aimed at addressing the educational needs of youth in foster care.

⁸ Three judges' schedules prevented them from participating in the telephone interviews. One judge declined to participate. The overall response rate for the judges' component of the survey was 83%.

Upon receipt of the completed questionnaire, PPCD research staff designed a code book in order to enter the data into a “Statistical Products and Service Solutions (SPSS)” program. Once the data were entered, the names and identifiable information of the respondents were blackened out to protect anonymity. Only information pertaining to specific programs was associated directly with that program. Program specialists were also asked to forward program materials to the PPCD.

Findings

Findings of Judges’ Survey

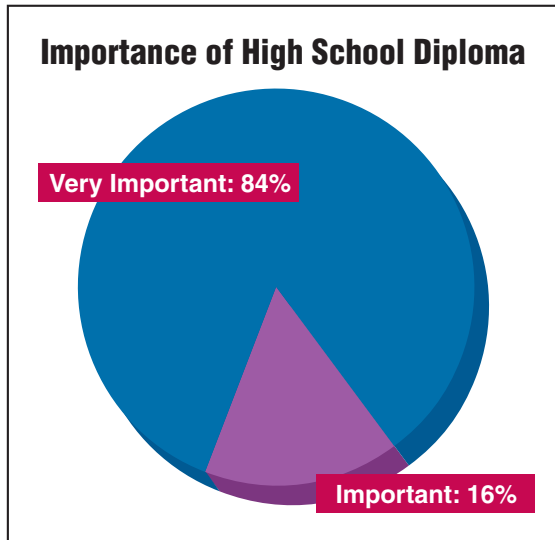
A major goal of the judges’ survey was to gather information on current court practices addressing how foster youth’s educational needs are assessed and met. During the interviews, the following types of information were requested:

- What is the importance of educational achievement for youth in foster care, including post-secondary education?
- Do judges play a role in ensuring that educational needs are met?
- Do child welfare agencies pay enough attention to educational needs and levels of achievement for youth in foster care?
- What types of inquiries about educational needs does the court make, and when?
- Do educational needs become an “issue” only during adolescence?
- How and from whom does the court receive information about a youth’s educational needs?
- What programs and resources are in place within the jurisdiction addressing these needs?
- What is the court’s level of knowledge and familiarity with the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act?

Please see Appendix B for the Model Court Lead Judges’ complete telephone interview instrument.

Importance Ascribed to Educational Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care

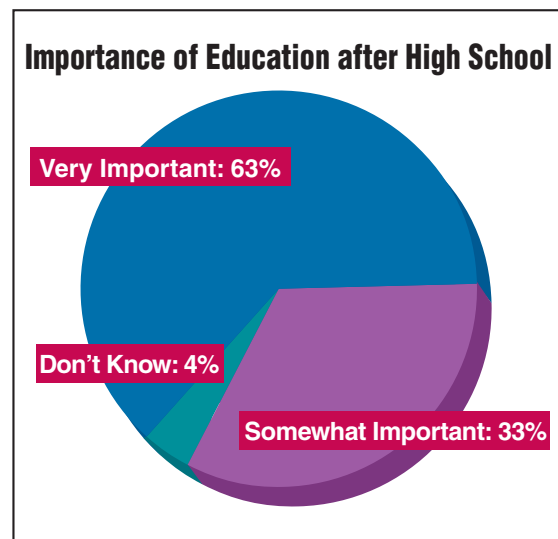
Judges were asked their opinion regarding the importance of completing a basic education (i.e. a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma) for youth in foster care. Most of the judges (16 of 19 or 84%) believed that the completion of a high-school diploma was “very important” for youth who are under the jurisdiction of the court.



“A high-school diploma is a necessary tool for children to survive and be successful in today’s society.”

Figure 1

Over half of the judges (12 of 19 or 63%) went on to say that they felt a focus on *post-secondary education* was also “very important” for youth in foster care. They believed that striving beyond high school to attend college, or some other post-high-school specialized education program, should be part of educational preparation/education initiatives for all youth in care.



“The same opportunities should be offered to children in foster care that are offered to children outside of foster care.”

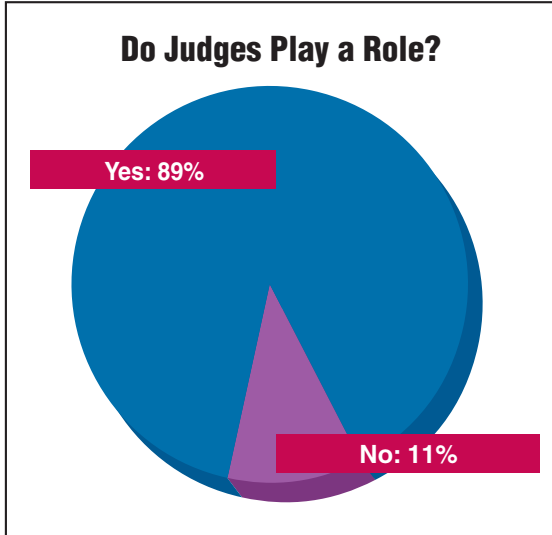
Figure 2

The majority of judges interviewed (17 out of 19 or 89%) believed that judges play a distinct role in ensuring that the educational needs of youth in care are met.

“It’s part of protecting best interests.”

“...judges must take advantage of [their] jurisdiction...to ensure that agencies are responding to all needs, including education.”

“Education will help the child’s self-esteem, help break the cycle, and will eventually aid in the reduction of caseloads.”



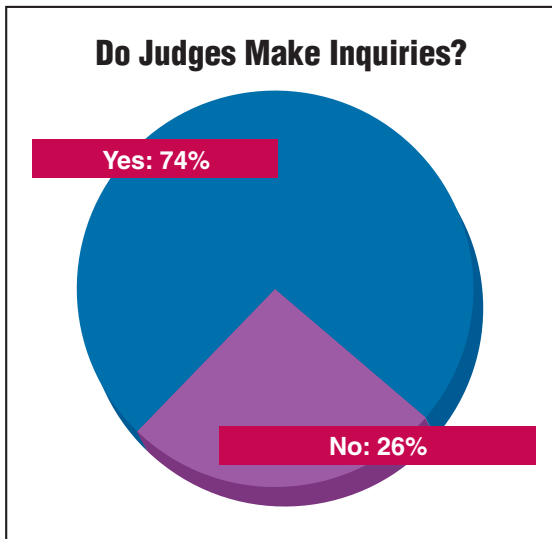
“The same amount of attention needs to be paid to educational needs as to any other service provided by the court.”

Figure 3

Bench Practice

Seventy-four percent of the judges (14 out of 19) reported that they made a specific inquiry *pre-disposition* regarding the educational needs of youth in foster care. The inquiry was made independent of whether or not there was a specifically identified educational issue or problem. These pre-disposition inquiries from the bench were described as “routine” questions regarding education. Judges reported that their inquiries focused on:

- School attendance
- Location of school relative to placement
- Whether educational needs had been or needed to be assessed
- Whether any identified special needs were being met



“It’s our responsibility to inquire and make certain that educational needs, as other needs, are being met.”

Figure 4

Half of the judges (10 of 19 or 53%) reported that they made routine specific inquiries about the educational needs of youth in foster care *post-disposition*. The nature of this inquiry was described as questioning educational placement stability, special needs, and assessments. The remaining half of the judges reported that these inquiries were more likely to be made only if specific problems had been identified and raised during the course of the hearing.

Judicial Impressions Regarding Practice

Just over half of the judges (12 of 19 or 63%) reported that in their opinion child-welfare agencies do not pay enough attention to the educational needs of youth in care. The judges noted that “with limited resources available, the agency’s focus is on basic survival, safety, and health,” and that, as a result, “education often takes a back seat.”

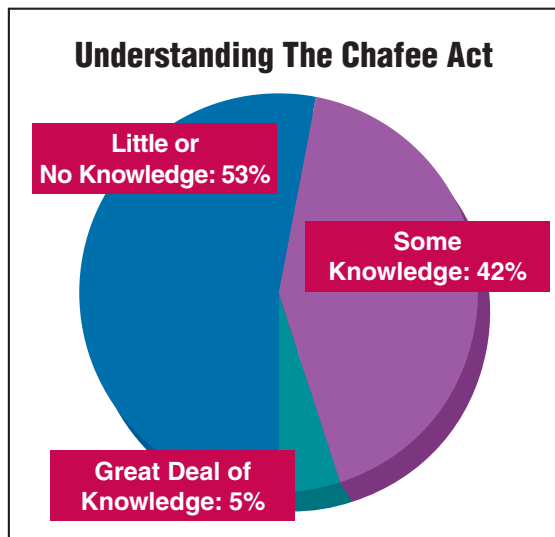
“When the system is overwhelmed and without resources... education often becomes an afterthought.”

One third of the judges interviewed (6 of 19 or 32%) reported that they frequently are not provided with enough information to properly assess whether the educational needs of youth in foster care are being met. Under current practices, these judges noted that “reports are infrequent and typically submitted only if there are serious problems,” and that “information received is very general” and reports are “typically superficial.”

Sixty-eight percent of the judges (13 of 19) believed that the frequency with which the court is provided information about a youth’s educational status was not dependent on the age of the child. Most agreed that such information is provided to the court regardless of the age of the child and is based on the specific needs and problems of the child. Nevertheless, eight of the 19 judges (42%) had experienced cases in which the information was dependent on the age of the child. Comments included, “Information regarding educational assessment is more frequently provided with younger children,” and “Information about job-related education is typically received only when the youth are about to transition out of the system.”

Judges’ Understanding of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act

Two years after the passage of the Chafee Act, the majority of the judges (10 of 19 or 53%) surveyed rate themselves as having little to no knowledge of the Chafee Independence Program Services. Of the remaining nine judges, eight reported having “some” knowledge, and only one judge reported having “a great deal of knowledge.”



“Any information about how other jurisdictions are using it and interpreting it would be appreciated.”

Figure 5

Promising Practices Identified by the Judges

The telephone surveys identified a number of developing practices which are enabling the courts to better meet the educational needs of foster youth:

- Educational/school board liaisons in court (47%)
- Emancipation or independent living programs (32%)
- Educational advocacy/rights programs (32%)
- Truancy diversion programs (26%)
- Programs focused on the developmental needs of children (e.g. early intervention) (21%)
- Educational assessment centers (11%)
- Mentoring programs (11%)
- Tutoring programs (11%)
- Projects focused specifically on the needs of girls (11%)
- Benchmark permanency hearings (5%)

Challenges to Reform Efforts

The survey revealed a number of areas which impede the Model Courts' ability to meet the educational needs of foster youth. In order of frequency of mention, these challenges were:

- Lack of communication between systems regarding the importance of the issue (54%)
- Confidentiality and sharing of information across systems (46%)
- Working with multiple school districts (23%)
- Lack of resources for programming and for program staff (15%)

The judges identified some strategies to address these challenges to reform, including:

- Having educational representatives participate in court improvement efforts and including them in court-improvement committee membership
- Holding regular meetings with decision-makers on the Board of Education
- Working with each system to develop formal protocols regarding confidentiality and the sharing of information about educational needs

“Bring them to the table...let them know their ideas are respected.”

“All of us in child welfare, including judges, need to realize that if education is important and valued for our children at home, it is more important for our children in care...if we expect them to be productive members of society, we need to partner together and share responsibility for giving them the right tools to be able to do so.”

Additional Findings

At a recent judicial workgroup of Model Court Lead Judges and court officers conducted after this survey,⁹ several ideas were generated on how the courts could be more effective in addressing educational outcomes. From the beginning of placement to the very end of a case, judges can take responsibility for a child's educational needs by ordering a complete educational assessment for every child who enters out-of-home care. Judges can play a role in attempting to maintain the child in the same school, if possible. Also, judges can play an important role in presenting a post-secondary degree as the optimal educational goal, rather than accepting a high school-level education as the first goal.

The judicial workgroup suggested the following collaborative structures to support court efforts to address the educational needs of youth in care:

- A Model Court advisory committee to study this issue;
- Memoranda of agreement and understanding among schools, social service agencies, and the courts to share information;
- Training for court officers on education; and
- Educational advocates to ensure the educational needs of children and youth are met.

The workgroup suggested that more information was needed about the state and federal laws on the educational rights of children, possibly in the form of “bench books” for judges. It would also be helpful for judges to have enforcement tools to ensure that school districts are meeting children’s educational needs. The judges agreed that there is currently a lack of cross-training for all court participants on this issue. Additionally, confidentiality barriers among agencies, schools, and courts create and perpetuate a lack of understanding.

Participants in the judicial workgroup suggested several collaborative strategies to successfully improve the educational outcomes for youth in care:

- Participate in reciprocal training with child welfare agencies and school districts;
- Convene joint committees;
- Include foster parents in collaborative efforts; and
- Give children a voice in the process (e.g., youth advisory committees).

Judges can also reach out to educational leaders by:

- Bringing school representatives into the process; and
- Meeting with administrators in the schools.

Finally, the judiciary can use the litigation of lawsuits and class-action suits to hold providers and agencies accountable for meeting the educational needs of children and youth in care.

⁹ This workgroup was convened as part of the Child Welfare League of America/National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges *Symposium on Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Care*, Washington, D.C., February 8, 2002. This *Symposium* was funded by the Marguerite Casey Foundation.

Findings of Program Specialists' Survey

A major goal of the program specialists or key informant questionnaire involved identifying and describing promising efforts designed to address the educational needs of youth in foster care. The following types of information were requested:

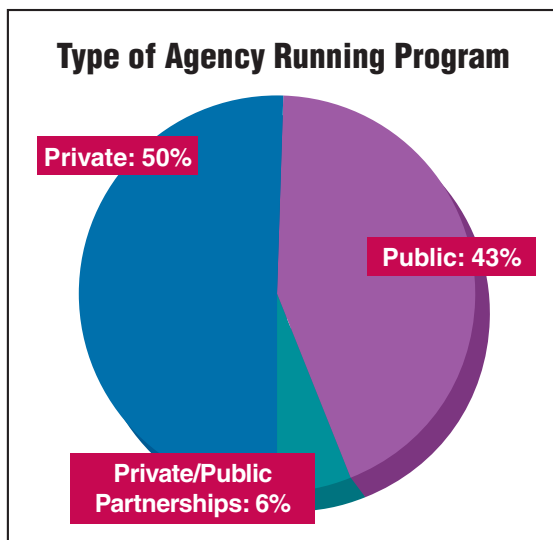
- Under whose auspices does the program exist?
- What type of agency is running the program?
- What services are provided by the agency?
- Does the program have an educational specialist on staff?
- Demographic information on youth served by these programs?
- How are youth referred to these programs?
- What are reasons for the referral?
- What are the various sources of funding for the programs?
- Does the program have an evaluative component?
- Are there any components or special features that are particularly important to the overall success of the program?
- What are some of the barriers and challenges to educational needs?
- What policy changes are needed on the local, state, and national levels to positively address the educational needs of youth in care?
- Are there people or organizations on the state or national scene who can provide information or insight about the educational needs of youth in care?
- Are there any further comments about the educational needs of youth in care generally?

It is important to note that although a total of 32 programs were included in the program specialists' responses, not all program specialists responded to each question, and some questions allowed for more than one response. For each of the following questions, therefore, the "total response" number varies. The total for each question is cited so that the percentages can be understood. Please see Appendix C for the program specialists' complete questionnaire instrument.

Under Whose Auspices?

Program specialists were asked to identify who had primary oversight for their specific program(s). Responses to this question were received for 31 programs. Twenty-six percent (8 of 31) of the programs were identified as falling under the auspices of the educational system. Sixteen percent (5 of 31) were identified as under the auspices of non-profit organizations. Thirteen percent (4 of 31) were identified as solely under the auspices of the court system. Ten percent – the smallest percent – were identified as under the auspices of the child welfare system (3 of 31). Five of the programs (16%) were identified as being under the auspices of a system other than the educational system, child welfare system, or court system. These systems included independent living programs, the community, and the Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents. Two programs (6%) were overseen by a collaborative involving the child welfare system, the educational system, the court system, and other systems.

Type of Agency Running the Program



Of the 32 programs reported, half (16 of 32 or 50%) were run by a private agency. Fourteen programs (43%) were run by a public agency, and two (6%) were run by partnerships between public and private agencies.

Figure 6

Services Provided by the Agency

Program specialists were asked to report what types of services their agencies provided. Answers were given for 30 programs. The majority of the programs (10 of 30 or 33%) provide educational services. Nine programs (30%) provide foster care services. Five programs (17%) provide school related services. Four programs (13%) provide advocacy services. Four programs (13%) provide social support services. And, two programs (7%) provide legal services.

Educational Specialist

Of the 31 programs responding, 30 (97%) had an educational specialist on staff. Only one agency did not have an educational specialist on staff.

Youth Served by the Programs

Program specialists were asked to report the age group(s) of the youth being served by their program(s). The 27 who responded reported that over half of their programs served children from pre-school through high school (16 of 27 or 59%). Four programs (15%) served youth in middle school and high school. Two programs (7%) served children from kindergarten through high school. One program (4%) served youth in middle school only, and two programs (7%) served youth in high school only. One program (4%) extended its services to include college.

Information for 26 programs was provided regarding the type of child care children were placed in during their involvement in the education program. While eight of the programs (31%) identified only served youth in out-of-home care, more than half (18 of 26 or 69%) did not restrict services to youth in out-of-home care.

Of the 26 programs for which information was provided, a majority (21 of 26 or 81%) served both Medicaid eligible and non-Medicaid eligible youth. Fewer of the programs only served Medicaid eligible youth (5 of 26 or 19%).

Twenty-seven programs provided information about the geographic area they serve. Eighteen of the programs (67%) serve urban areas; thirteen of the programs (48%) serve suburban areas; six of the programs (22%) serve rural areas; and five of the programs (19%) serve state-wide areas. Seven of the programs (26%) serve both urban and suburban areas. Six of the programs (22%) serve urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Types of Referrals

Program specialists provided information from 26 programs regarding the types of referrals used to enter youth into educational programs. The majority of referrals are made through the court system (20 of 26 or 77%). Youth are referred to many programs by foster parents (15 of 26 or 58%); school personnel (13 of 26 or 50%); or themselves (7 of 26 or 27%). Six programs (23%) accept a combination of self referrals, school referrals, foster parent referrals, and court referrals.

Reasons for Referrals

Program specialists provided information about the reasons referrals were made into educational programs. Of the 26 programs reporting this information, most cited educational difficulties (17 of 26 or 65%) as the reason for the referral. The next most frequent reason was being at-risk for educational difficulties (14 of 26 or 54%). Seven of the programs (27%) reported that referrals were based on a child’s placement in a residential or group home. Six of the referrals were because of youth excelling in academics or needing advanced-placement coursework (23%).

Sources of Funding

Program specialists provided information regarding funding for 26 educational programs. Fourteen programs (14 of 26 or 54%) receive state funding. Eleven programs (11 of 26 or 42%) receive local funding. Ten programs (10 of 26 or 38%) receive corporate funding, and nine (9 of 26 or 35%) receive federal funding. Eight programs (8 of 26 or 31%) are funded by private donors. Four programs (4 of 26 or 15%) receive funding from all three levels of government. Only one program was funded completely by private sources.

Evaluative Component/Special Features for Overall Success of the Program

Most programs have a component to evaluate their effectiveness (18 of 25 or 72%). Only seven of the programs did not (28%). However, when asked if their evaluations had been completed, the respondents reported that less than half of their programs (6 of 17 or 35%) had completed evaluations.

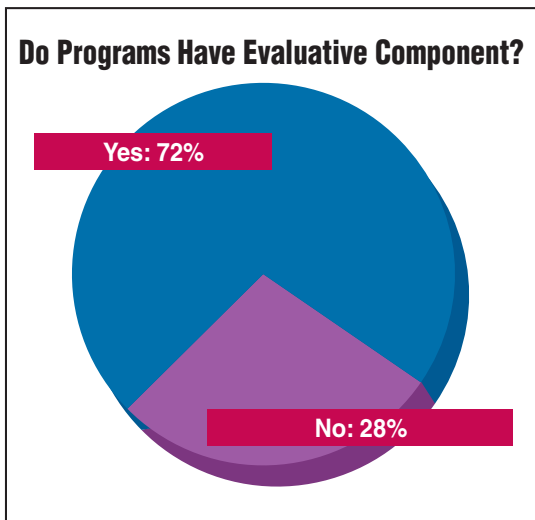


Figure 7

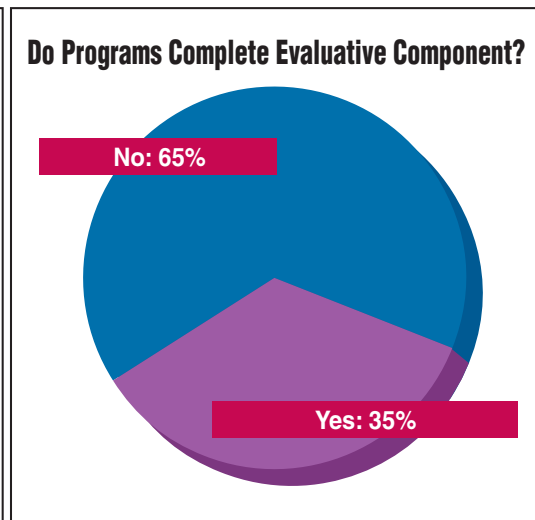


Figure 8

Two-thirds of the program specialists agreed that there were certain components or features of the programs that are particularly important to the overall success of the program itself. These components, in order of frequency of mention, are:

- System collaboration (n=23);
- Advocacy (n=21);
- Youth involvement (n=18);
- Caregiver involvement (n=15);
- Adequate funding (n=15);
- Court involvement (n=13);
- Mentoring (n=11); and
- Tutoring (n=10).

Most respondents agreed that their programs were the result of collaborative efforts with other systems and institutions (70%). Only two of the respondents felt that their programs were not the result of collaborative efforts. Programs that were the result of collaboration involved the child welfare system, the education system, and the court system. The vast majority (95%) of the programs resulted from collaboration with the child welfare system. Almost as many programs (86%) collaborated with the educational system. More than half collaborate with the court system (67%), and more than half (57%) collaborate with other systems, including mental health agencies, probation departments, and community agencies.

Barriers and Challenges to Educational Resources

Program specialists were asked to indicate if they had encountered any barriers or challenges in their efforts to address the factors that affect the educational success of youth in foster care. The majority (14 of 17 or 82%) indicated that they had. Eighty-eight percent (15 of 17) of the informants reported that a lack of system cooperation was a major barrier. More than half of the responses (10 of 17 or 59%) cited a lack of funding or financial resources. The lack of ability to track children as they move through the child welfare system was also identified as a barrier by 53% of the respondents (9 of 17). Other challenges mentioned included lack of agreements or Memoranda of Understanding for information-sharing across systems (8 of 17 or 47%) and confidentiality issues (8 of 17 or 47%). Comments included:

“County Social Services sometimes abdicates its responsibility in enrolling kids once they are placed in a new home.”

“[There is] a lack of information sharing during times of transition between foster homes or between group care facilities and community programs (home and education) supports.”

Other barriers included:

- A shortage of surrogate parents and a lack of understanding of roles among the systems;
- Family Court termination of jurisdiction of minors at age 18;
- Inadequate notification to school personnel regarding juvenile status and placement moves;
- Lack of knowledge, awareness of issues, and training;
- Lack of agreement (at times) from educational systems that problems with compliance even exist;
- Lack of alternative school programs, tutoring, mentoring, and mental health services; and
- Lost educational records.

Program specialists identified ways that barriers affecting the educational success of youth in care have been addressed, noting that courts have been persistent in their efforts to improve educational outcomes for youth in care. Collaboration among systems was also identified as an especially effective tool. For example, in one jurisdiction the court and department of child and family services administrators are meeting collaboratively with school district representatives to reach a consensus on protocols and issues-at-hand for youth in care.

Numerous policies and procedures have also been implemented in different jurisdictions to overcome barriers.

“A CASA volunteer assists the caretaker in enrolling a child in school or brings the fact that the child has not been enrolled in school to the attention of the court.”

“Attorneys work to build education teams comprised of representatives of all agencies and systems involved with the child(ren) and family (e.g. child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice). The team brings knowledge and resources to the education planning meeting – resources and information the school may not have.”

“A service for foster youth in group homes was established that facilitates school enrollment for youth in group homes.”

“The State Department of Human Services can continue foster board allowance for any eligible foster child who has reached the age of majority if he or she is attending an institution of higher learning.”

Other procedural changes to overcome barriers included:

- Educational staff employed to monitor and assist educational advisors and liaisons employed to ensure school staff positively work on educational plans and needed educational services for youth in care;
- Programs developed to support children who are experiencing difficulties in school;
- Requests submitted for funding services for minors from legislators, foundations, and grant makers;
- Court-appointed educational advocacy developed for dependents and wards of the juvenile court; and
- A variety of forums organized within counties for agencies to meet, discuss, and problem-solve educational issues pertaining to youth in care.

Program specialists noted that in spite of recent progress, there remain a plethora of ongoing issues needing resolution. All respondents stressed that funding and financial assistance would help address and overcome some of these barriers by assisting courts in implementing collaborative policies and services to help youth in foster care fulfill their educational potential.

Suggestions for Change at the Local Level

Program specialists were asked to give their opinions regarding changes at the local level which would positively address the educational needs of youth in care. Awareness of the needs of these children was identified as of “fundamental importance.” Another locally needed change included more funding for indigent communities where dependent children lack quality schools and programs.

The responses regarding change on the local level are grouped into three broad categories: policy, collaboration, and increasing resources.

Policy at the local level

The majority of respondents (12 of 15 or 80%) stated that changes in policy at the local level need to occur in order to address the educational needs of youth in care. Specifically, all educational information should be computerized and legislation should be implemented requiring the child services agencies to keep a database. This database should be accessible to all agencies involved in delivery of services. There should be a systematic evaluation process for detecting learning disabilities and developmental problems in a timely way. And, through a collaborative case-planning process, communities need to create systems for the matching of services to needs and prompt delivery of such services.

“School enrollment policies relating to juvenile-court youth need to be established. Juvenile-court youth need to have some sort of educational priority – more focus, attention, services, support.”

“The current paper system is archaic and ineffective...school transcripts should be regularly requested to avoid the delay in re-enrolling children once they are moved.”

“Policies [are needed] which encourage local school districts to welcome and provide support systems for state wards and work collaboratively with the state child welfare agencies serving the youth.”

“Hold principals accountable for the achievement of these students. Policies are needed to encourage school-based behavioral health services. Policies are also needed to support tutoring and specialized services, like reading.”

Respondents noted that many of their local schools have excellent written policies that indicate they intend to serve the needs of all children. However, many schools are not implementing their policies with regard to wards and dependents of the court or special education students. Program specialists worried that youth in care are often turned away because of a lack of appropriate school records. Receiving schools need to improve their handling of these cases and increase their efforts to obtain students' records. Preventing frequent school transfers would go a long way toward remedying this problem. Development of collaboration among key stakeholders is needed to focus on information sharing, registration, attendance, transfers, special education, and residential placement. Additionally, local school districts need to coordinate more effectively with child welfare to identify children with disabilities.

Program specialists reiterated that it is imperative that collaboration between educational providers and community members be increased to ensure that children and families receive the educational support services they need without duplication. Such services include after-school programs, tutoring, mentoring, mental health programs, and recreational programs. Local policies should ensure that the most vulnerable students receive an education appropriate to their academic, social, emotional, and developmental needs.

“Children and their education should not be penalized because of the indiscretions of their parents.”

Collaboration at the local level

Forty percent of the program specialists (6 of 15) felt that collaborative efforts need to be made at the local level in order to positively address the needs of youth in care. They suggested several approaches for developing and implementing collaboration:

“Collaboration with service providers needs to occur to provide a comprehensive network of care. Systematic evaluations of youth in care for learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effect, and substance abuse [are needed].”

“Development of collaboration among courts, child welfare, and local school districts to focus on educational issues [is needed]. Local policies need to be developed to consider the unique needs of children in foster care concerning information sharing. Some examples of information that needs to be shared include the following: registration information, attendance, transfer history, special education needs, and residential placements.”

Local districts need to establish more effective communication and collaboration practices with child welfare agencies. Program specialists reported that all too often districts are unaware of child welfare involvement, a child’s abuse-and-neglect history, or how a child’s learning and behavior are impacted by his history. Respondents noted that local districts may move to discipline, suspend, or even expel a student because of the behavioral problems stemming from the student’s background without considering or determining if the child has disabilities related to a history of abuse or neglect.

Increasing resources at the local level

Almost half of the program specialists (6 of 15 or 40%) felt that resources at the local level need to be increased in order to positively address the educational needs of youth in care.

“Establish a youth intake center to access and identify the educational, social, psychological, and economic needs of young people. Resources within the community are needed to adequately address these needs.”

“Need more vocational opportunities for youth.”

Suggestions for Change at the State Level

Program specialists were asked to give their opinions regarding changes at the state level which would positively address the educational needs of youth in care.

Policy at the state level

Just over half of the respondents (8 of 15 or 53%) agreed that states need to adjust their policies at this level of government, noting that changes at the local level will not be sufficient to ensure the educational needs of youth in care are being met. State legislators need to increase funding for departments such as the Department of Child and Family Services and the Department of Education so that they can provide better and more consistent services to youth in care. Other comments included:

“Eliminate funding based on district of residence. Fund education based on a district-of-service concept.”

“Part of social service agency requirements and standards of practice need to ensure that a child’s educational needs are being met. State licensing requirements and audits should be in place to ensure that no child misses more than one day of school due to a change in placement.”

“The State Departments of Education need to track the educational outcomes of their children in foster care, acknowledge and provide additional resources, and train local districts to meet the special needs of this population. There are an estimated 40-50% (of children in care) who have disabilities, even multiple disabilities.”

Collaboration at the state level

Few program specialists (3 of 15 or 20%) mentioned the need for change in the collaborative efforts at the state level. Among the few responses were the following comments:

“Encourage collaboration among existing service providers; re-examine adoption procedures for dependent children.”

“Develop collaboration between the State Department of Education and the State Child Welfare agency to facilitate local cooperation.”

Increasing resources at the state level

Two-thirds of the program specialists (10 of 15 or 67%) agreed that resources at the state level must be increased in order to meet the educational needs of youth in care. Respondents suggested that legislation needs to be implemented ensuring that children's educational needs are being adequately met. Respondents also felt that state legislators need to increase program funding for youth in care (e.g. after-school programs, extracurricular activities, mental health services, long-term care, and educational services). Separate educational funding is needed for dependent children that supports education as a priority across all grades.

The respondents reported that states need to establish and fund a tracking system so that the educational outcomes of children in care can be more closely monitored. A tracking system would enable states and communities to better allocate resources to meet the special and evolving needs of foster care youth. Indeed, as PPCD staff proceeded with the research and surveys for this *Bulletin* it became apparent that there are enormous gaps in databases for this population. Without tracking systems, educational outcomes for foster care youth cannot be determined at local, state, or national levels.

“Provide separate tracking for the education of youth in foster care, and develop an agency to track, coordinate, and manage this specific program...”

“Resources from incarceration and institutionalization could be redirected to promote policies that integrate and strengthen families...and (provide) educational services for youth.”

“We need a computerized system for children's records. Currently, their records can take several months to arrive at a new school, and often get lost.”

Suggestions for Change at the Federal Level

Program specialists were asked to give their opinion regarding changes needed at the federal level which would positively address the educational needs of youth in care. The majority of respondents felt that changes needed to be formulated and implemented at this level in order to be effective.

Policy at the federal level

Nearly two-thirds of the program specialists (9 of 15 or 60%) agreed that changes in policy are necessary at the federal level. It is important to note that one third of the respondents (5 of 15 or 33%) recognized that the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) need implementation and that some amendments to this Act would be helpful. Other federal policies which the program specialists felt needed amendment included the Individual Education Plan, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Adoptions Promotions Act of 1997. Change at the federal level was mentioned in the areas of:

- Support for states in their efforts to secure appropriate educational services for youth in care;
- Laws mandating the provision of educational needs as a part of permanency planning;
- Revision of confidentiality laws relating to accessing educational records; and
- Re-examination of the Adoptions Promotions Act.

“A federal campaign to increase awareness of the needs of foster care youth – particularly for the schools to go the extra mile rather than letting them slip through the cracks.”

“ASFA or other federal funding for states should be made conditional on (having) a statewide/countywide educational database. Also, federal audits should include investigation into educational services being provided by state welfare agencies.”

“Congress needs to amend IDEA to require stronger procedural protections for children in substitute care. Requirements need to be established that include training and remuneration for education surrogates.”

“Create strong federal policy supporting states in their efforts to secure appropriate educational services for youth in the child welfare system.”

Collaboration at the federal level

Few of the program specialists (3 of 15 or 20%) mentioned the need for collaborative efforts at the federal level for addressing the educational needs of youth in care.

Increasing resources at the federal level

Two-thirds of the program specialists (10 of 15 or 67%) felt that there needs to be an increase of resources at the federal level to effect change. Increased funding is needed across the board for additional support services such as truancy initiatives, alternative school drop-out programs, job training, early childhood programs, substance abuse programs, teen pregnancy prevention, and special education programs.

It should be recognized that many foster children require special education services and interventions that are expensive. Many times, foster children do not receive these services because time and resources are spent on other issues. Respondents suggested that federal funding of IDEA needs to be increased, and there needs to be a renewed commitment that meeting the educational needs of foster youth is a priority.

“Increase the funding sources for additional support services for children in care of the state: fund busing to keep children in school...(provide) vocational technical programs.”

Access to Information on the State and National Scene

Several individuals and agencies were identified by the program specialists as good contacts for information and insight about the educational needs of youth in care. Individuals included attorneys, judges, and persons directly associated with agencies. Agencies included, but were not limited to:

- UNICEF-UNESCO;
- National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI);
- Schwab Foundation;
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Casey Family Programs; and
- Local Departments of Children and Family Services.

Additional Comments

Program specialists were asked to provide additional general comments about the educational needs of youth in care.

“It is crucial that dependent children receive a good education because it will help them later in life. Many foster children become homeless after emancipation from the system because they lack skills and support. Many dependent children are not receiving an appropriate education. Furthermore, their educational needs are going unmet and are often ignored by educational systems and dependency courts.”

There is an overwhelming need for programs and services that strengthen families and build assets in the children and the family. This includes services for youth who reach emancipation. In addition, more staff are needed to help ensure academic success for foster youth. As one respondent articulated,

“Social workers are just too busy.”

Collaboration between the school system and the agencies that serve children and families is crucial to ensure positive educational outcomes for youth in care. While the educational needs of dependent children are costly, it is critical that such programs receive funding because of their fundamental importance for the future success of dependent children.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

Judges, education specialists, social workers, and foster parents are increasingly concerned that the educational outcomes for the foster children they serve have frequently been less than optimal. *This Technical Assistance Bulletin* by the PPCD reviews current court practices on this topic, and identifies and describes promising efforts designed to address and support the educational needs of youth in care. By interviewing and canvassing judicial and program personnel, this *Bulletin* provides a point-in-time assessment of how well some foster-care and child welfare systems are providing for the educational needs of their wards.

Within the Child Victims Act Model Court Project, the majority of Lead Judges are aware and sensitive to youth's educational needs. Many of the judges (12 of 19 or 63%) reported that they felt a focus on post-secondary education was "very important" for youth in foster care. They believed that striving beyond high school to attend college, or some other post-high-school specialized education program, should be part of the educational plan for all youth in care.

The majority of Lead Judges interviewed (17 out of 19 or 89%) believed that judges play a distinct role in ensuring that the educational needs of youth in care are met. Judges are in the unique position to oversee the numerous agencies to ensure that they provide for the diverse, and frequently challenging, educational needs involved in the delivery of services to foster children. The judges believed that educational needs were just as important as other needs in the "big picture."

Seventy-four percent of the judges (14 out of 19) reported that they made a specific inquiry pre-disposition regarding the educational needs of youth in foster care. Half (53%) reported that they made similar inquiries post-disposition. Their questions focused on attendance, educational placement stability, and special needs. Most of their inquiries were made without respect to whether there was a specifically identified "educational" issue or problem. It was part of their routine handling of dependency cases.

It is noteworthy that half the judges reported that in their opinion child welfare agencies in their jurisdictions do not pay enough attention to educational needs. Their jurisdictions, the Child Victims Act Model Courts, are perhaps more experienced than any in the United States in the collaboration and integration of services for youth in care. It raises the question of how much attention child welfare agencies are able to devote to educational needs in other jurisdictions without the

opportunity to participate in such systems reform projects.

Telephone surveys with the judges identified a number of developing practices which are enabling the courts to better meet the educational needs of foster youth:

- Educational/school board liaisons in court or communication with the court (47%);
- Educational advocacy/rights programs (32%);
- Truancy diversion programs (26%);
- Programs focused on the developmental needs of children (e.g. early intervention) (21%);
- Educational assessment centers (11%);
- Mentoring programs (11%);
- Benchmark permanency hearings (11%);
- Projects focused specifically on the needs of girls (11%);
- Tutoring programs (11%); and
- Emancipation or independent living programs (11%).

Challenges to Reform Efforts

This study revealed the following areas which impede the Model Courts' ability to meet the educational needs of foster youth:

- Lack of communication between systems regarding the importance of the issue (54%);
- Confidentiality and sharing of information across systems (46%);
- Working with multiple school districts (23%); and
- Lack of resources for programming and for program staff (15%).

The judges identified some strategies to address these challenges to reform:

- Having educational representatives participate in court improvement efforts and including them in court improvement committee membership;
- Holding regular meetings with decision-makers on the Board of Education; and
- Working with each system to develop formal protocols regarding

confidentiality and the sharing of information about educational needs.

The judges all felt that continued court improvement efforts were necessary in court improvements to meet the educational needs of foster youth. The system has a long way to go. Some of the more interesting suggestions included the development of “bench books” on state and federal laws, cross-trainings for all court participants, and overcoming obstacles created by current confidentiality barriers.

Program specialists and other court-related personnel were able to provide information from the other side of “the bench.” Many of their comments centered on the need for increased funding and the lack of systems cooperation which interfered with the delivery of services. In describing the programs they were involved in administering, they were able to furnish interesting insights into how child welfare agencies are handling educational needs.

Two-thirds of the program specialists agreed there were certain components or features of their programs that are particularly important to the overall success of the program itself. They identified these components as:

- System collaboration (n=23);
- Advocacy (n=21);
- Youth involvement (n=18);
- Caregiver involvement (n=15);
- Adequate funding (n=15);
- Court involvement (n=13);
- Mentoring (n=11); and
- Tutoring (n=10).

It is interesting to compare these responses with the answers judges provided (please see the previous page) regarding the “developing practices” in their jurisdictions which they identified as positive. Systems collaboration, mentoring, tutoring, and the availability of focused programs are areas which both the judges and program specialists consider important in meeting the educational needs of youth in care.

Program specialists also provided feedback on the barriers they encounter in meeting foster youth’s educational needs. A significant finding was that eighty-eight percent (15 of 17) of the program specialists reported that a lack of system cooperation was a major barrier. More than half of the responses (10 of 17 or 59%) mentioned a lack of funding or financial resources as a major barrier. The lack of ability to track children as they move through the child welfare system was also identified as a barrier by 53% of the specialists (9 of 17). Other challenges mentioned included lack of agreements or Memoranda of Understanding (8 of 17

or 47%) and confidentiality issues (8 of 17 or 47%).

The program specialists mentioned some procedural changes to overcome barriers:

- Educational staff monitor and assist educational advisors and liaisons to ensure school staff positively work on educational plans and needed educational services for youth in care;
- Programs specifically to support children who are experiencing difficulties in school;
- Requests for funding services for minors from legislators, foundations, and grant makers;
- Court-appointed educational advocacy for dependents and wards of the juvenile court; and
- Organizing a variety of forums within counties for agencies to meet, discuss, and problem-solve educational issues pertaining to youth in care.

More than half of the program specialists (8 of 15 or 53) agreed that states need to adjust their policies at the state level of government, noting that changes at the local level would not be sufficient to ensure that the educational needs of youth in care are being met.

Another critical issue the specialists identified was that states need to establish and fund a tracking system enabling the educational outcomes of children in care to be more closely monitored. Such a system would allow states and communities to better allocate resources to meet the special and evolving needs of foster care youth. The need for a tracking system appeared repeatedly among the program specialists' responses. Several specialists felt the issue was so important that federal funding should be conditional on its establishment.

Two-thirds of the program specialists agreed that changes in policy (60%) and funding and resources (67%) are necessary at the federal level in order to be effective. It is important to note that one third of the program specialists (5 of 15 or 33%) felt that attention needs to be paid specifically to implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and that some amendments to this Act would be helpful.

Overall, the judges and program specialists reported that there needs to be a renewed national commitment to meeting the educational needs of foster youth. Funding, resources, and systems collaboration will be necessary to implement court changes in how dependent youth are educated. The educational needs of youth in foster care must come to be understood as a priority impacting future independent living. As one judge stated:

“...if we expect them to be productive members of society, we need to partner together and share responsibility for giving them the right tools to be able to do so.”

APPENDIX A: CHILD VICTIMS ACT MODEL COURT PROJECT

The National Model Court Project

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), Permanency Planning for Children Department's (PPCD) Child Victims Act Model Courts Project (VAMC), is a national initiative funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), U.S. Department of Justice. The "Model Courts" project involves a total of 23 model courts, representing urban, rural, and tribal jurisdictions. All of these jurisdictions are engaged in systems change efforts and are working collaboratively with social service agencies and other systems professionals to achieve improvement goals. The VAMC project seeks to improve court processing of child abuse and neglect cases by producing replicable innovations in "Model Courts." Working closely with the PPCD and with each other, and drawing on the best practice principles of the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES*¹ and *ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY GUIDELINES*,² the Model Courts are continually assessing their child abuse and neglect case processing, focusing on barriers to timely permanency, developing and instituting plans for court improvement, and working collaboratively to effect systems change. Each of the Model Courts is committed to taking a "hard look" at how its court process is working in everyday practice; how well the court is meeting federal and statutory requirements; how well social service agencies are meeting clients' needs; and how well the child protection system as a whole is meeting the needs of the children and families it serves.

It is important to underscore the meaning of the term "model" within the Child Victims Act Model Courts Project. The use of the term "model" is not meant to infer that the Model Courts have achieved ideal practice or created perfect systems. Rather, the Model Courts serve as *models for facilitating systems change*. Each court engages in self-assessment and chooses jurisdiction-specific goals to improve its practice in child abuse and neglect cases. Each is using unique, individualized methods of collaboration with related child welfare agencies and community groups. Each Model Court is an invaluable source of information about how to begin, engage, and institutionalize needed systems change.

Judicial leadership is a critical component of the success of Model Court reform efforts. Each Model Court has a designated "Lead Judge" who makes a personal commitment to lend his or her energy, vision, and office to the task of improving court practice. It is that personal commitment that serves as a catalyst for mobilizing others to change. Model Court Lead Judges make the commitment to work collaboratively, think imaginatively, and accept the risk, responsibility and accountability for facilitating systems change.³

¹ *RESOURCE GUIDELINES: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse & Neglect Cases*. 1995. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

² *ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY GUIDELINES: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*. 2000. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

³ For more information about the Model Courts themselves, please see: Child Victims Act Model Court Project - Status Report 2001. *Technical Assistance Bulletin*, Vol. VI, No. 1. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

**APPENDIX B: MODEL COURT LEAD JUDGES'
TELEPHONE INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT**

**Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Care: A National Collaboration
MODEL COURT LEAD JUDGE INTERVIEW**

Model Court Jurisdiction: _____ Interview Date: _____

Interviewee Name: _____

Interviewer: _____ Start Time: _____ am/pm (circle)
End Time: _____ am/pm (circle)

Instructions to Interviewers:

- Begin with brief statement regarding purpose of interview.

Thanks again for agreeing to participate in this interview. As you recall, the NCJFCJ and the CWLA, with funding from Casey Family Programs, are working on a collaborative project to improve the educational outcomes and transitional successes of young people in foster care. A major component of this project involves identifying and describing promising efforts designed to address the educational needs of youth in care.

As a first step in gathering such information, we are conducting interviews of all of our Model Court Lead Judges. The purpose of these interviews is to gain insight into innovative practices and programs that might exist in each Model Court jurisdiction, as well as record your impressions of the overall importance of this topic. We are also interested in any suggestions you might have for additional people to contact for more information about programs and practices in your jurisdiction and nationwide.

I will be reading you questions from a standardized interview instrument and writing down your answers as we talk. Please forgive me if there is some delay while I record your responses.

Your name will not be identified with any of the answers you provide – except for program specific information, we will be reporting information in a summary format. Do you have any questions before I begin?

3A. Why do you say that?

4. In your jurisdiction, does the court make any inquires regarding the education of a youth in care pre-disposition?

Yes No **[SKIP to 5]**

4A. If yes, what are the different educational issues that are addressed during the inquiry?

4Ai. At any time pre-disposition, do you inquire about a youth's:

4a. **School performance** (e.g., grades, academic performance, etc.)

Yes No

4ai. Are any inquires made regarding a youth's **Educational needs** (e.g. special needs, tutoring, advanced courses, etc.)

Yes No

4aai. Do you inquire about **Educational placement** at any time pre-disposition? (e.g., disruptions in schools, school districts, etc.)

Yes No

5. Are inquiries regarding a youth's education made at any time post-disposition?

Yes No **[SKIP to 6]**

5A. How often are these inquires made?

does not make such inquiries [SKIP to 6]

at every hearing

at every 6 month review

only at specific hearings : _____

only if information is not otherwise provided to court

only if child is present in court

other(s): _____

5Ai. At any time post-disposition, do you inquire about a youth's:

5a. **School performance** (e.g., grades, academic performance, etc.)

Yes No

5ai. Are any inquires made regarding a youth's **Educational needs** (e.g. special needs, tutoring, advanced courses, etc.)

Yes No

5aai. Do you inquire about **Educational placement** at any time post-disposition? (e.g., disruptions in schools, school districts, etc.)

Yes No

6. There is some concern nationally that the educational needs of children in foster care do not become a significant issue until children reach adolescence (youth, teenage). Do you feel that this is a problem?

Yes No

6A. Why do you say that? <<**Interviewer Probe:** Do you feel that the frequency in which a court inquires about a child's educational status differs depending on the age of the child?>>

6B. What is your experience with this issue in your jurisdiction?

7. Does the **court receive information or reports** about the educational status of youth in care?

Almost always Most of the time Infrequently Almost never
[If Almost Never, SKIP TO 8]

7A. **[IF YES]** How often is information **provided to the court** about the educational status of youth in care:

at every hearing
 at every 6 month review
 only at specific hearings : _____

only if ordered by the court
 other(s): _____

7Ai. What types of information are provided in the report?

7Aii. Who **provides** the information?

7Aiii. Is this information **provided** as part of a written report?

7a. How useful is this report? <<**Interviewer Probe:**
 What is your opinion of its quality, depth and breadth
 of areas covered?>>

7Aiv. Does this report address:

School performance (e.g., grades, academic standing, etc.)
 Yes No

Educational needs (e.g. tutoring, advanced courses, etc.)
 Yes No

Educational placement (e.g., disruptions in schools, school districts, etc.)
 Yes No

7B. Does the **frequency** with which the court is **provided** information about a youth's educational status differ depending on the age of the child?
 Yes No

7Bi. Why do you say that? <<**Interviewer Probe:** *Are there any other factors which influence the frequency with which the court is provided such information?*>>

7C. Does the **type of information** you are **provided** about the educational status of youth in care differ depending on the age of the child?
 Yes No

7Ci. Why do you say that? <<**Interviewer Probe:** *Are there any other factors which influence the type of information the court is provided?>>*

8. Do you, as a judge, feel that you are **provided with enough information** to properly assess whether the educational needs of a specific youth in foster care are being met?

Yes No

8A. Why do you say that? <<**Interviewer Probe:** *[If No] What information do you need and from whom?>>*

9. Does your court have **formal written procedures and policies** with respect to the educational status of youth in care?

Yes No **[If No SKIP TO 9B]**

9A. **[If Yes]** May we obtain a copy? Or, would you please describe them for me?

9Ai. Are these policies court-wide? <<**Interviewer Probe:** *are they consistently applied?>>*

9Aii. Were any of these policies developed collaboratively with your child welfare agency? Educational system or school district?

9B. Does your court have **informal policies** with respect to the educational status of youth in foster care?
 Yes No **[If No SKIP TO 10]**

9Bi. [If Yes] would you please describe these them for me?

9Bii. Are these policies court-wide? <<**Interviewer Probe:** are they consistently applied?>>

9Biii. Were any of these policies developed collaboratively with your child welfare agency? Educational system or school district?

10. Has your child welfare agency developed any programs specifically targeting the educational needs of adolescents in foster care?
 Yes No **[SKIP TO 11]** Don't know **[SKIP TO 11]**

10A. **[If Yes]** Would you briefly describe those programs for me?

10Ai. How has this program (or programs) impacted judicial workload?

11Bi. How did you overcome those challenges?

11C. How exactly is the **educational community** involved in your court reform efforts?

11Ci. Has your educational community provided resources to the court? <<**Interviewer Probe:** School liaison to the court? Direct Access to school records?>>
 Yes No [**SKIP to 12**] Don't Know [**SKIP to 12**]

11Cii. **[If Yes]** What resources has your educational community provided to the court?

11Ciii. **[If Yes]** How is this funded?

11Civ. How do these resources fit into the context of the court setting? <<**Interviewer Probe:** how do they assist the court?>>

11D. **[If No]** Why not?

12. Has the court developed resources *in addition to those used by* the educational community to address the educational needs of youth in care?
 Yes No **[SKIP to 13]** Don't Know **[SKIP to 13]**

12A. **[If Yes]** What other resources have been developed?

12Ai. **[If Yes]** How is this funded?

12Aii. How do these resources fit into the context of the court setting?
<<**Interviewer Probe:** how do they assist the court?>>

13. We are interested in learning more about judges' understanding of the **Chafee Foster Care Independence Act**. On a scale from "1," no knowledge, to "5," a great deal of knowledge, how would you rate **your knowledge** of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act?

no knowledge 1 2 3 4 5 great deal of knowledge

13A. What additional information, if any, about the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act do you feel you need?

14. Who else would you recommend that we follow-up with to learn more about policies or programs in ***your jurisdiction*** designed to address the educational needs of youth in care?

14A. Are there people or organizations you would recommend we contact on the ***state or national scene*** who can provide information or insight about the educational needs of youth in care?

<<Interviewer: Well, those are all the questions I have for you.>>

15. Do you have anything else you would like to add about any aspect of this interview, this project, or the educational needs of youth in care generally?

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR TIME! WE WILL BE FOLLOWING-UP WITH THOSE INDIVIDUALS YOU SUGGESTED WE CONTACT.

<<**Interviewer:** Remind judge to forward any materials they offered to send via mail to: PPCD, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, P.O. Box 8970, Reno, NV 89507; via fax to: (775) 327-2393. Attn: Melissa Litchfield, Research Specialist>>

APPENDIX C: PROGRAM SPECIALISTS' QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUMENT

Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Care: A National Collaboration

Key Informant Name: _____

Agency Name and Unit: _____

Title: _____

Thank you for agreeing to take the time to complete this questionnaire. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the Child Welfare League of America, with funding from Casey Family Programs, are working on a collaborative project aimed to improve the educational outcomes and transitional successes of young people in foster care. A major component of this project involves identifying and describing promising efforts designed to address the educational needs of youth in care.

Your name was referred to us as an additional source of information about innovative practices and programs that might exist in your jurisdiction. We are also interested in any suggestions you might have for additional people to contact for more information about programs and practices in your state and nationwide. Your name will not be associated with any of the answers you provide. Except for program specific information, we will be reporting any information in a summary format only. We have asked you to record your name on this questionnaire only so that we may follow-up with you should we have additional questions.

If you need any additional space to provide your answers to any of the questions below, please feel free to attach extra pages to this questionnaire.

1. Please briefly describe current programs and initiatives in your *jurisdiction* related to improving educational outcomes for adolescents in foster care. *Please feel free to attach descriptive program materials as needed.*

Appendix C

2. Thinking about the characteristics of these programs, please answer the following questions:

2A. Under whose auspices is this program?

Program A: (please specify program name):

- Child Welfare System
- Educational System
- Court System
- Other (Please specify _____)

Program B: (please specify program name):

- Child Welfare System
- Educational System
- Court System
- Other (Please specify _____)

Program C: (please specify program name):

- Child Welfare System
- Educational System
- Court System
- Other (Please specify _____)

Program D: (please specify program name):

- Child Welfare System
- Educational System
- Court System
- Other (Please specify _____)

2B. What type of agency runs this program?

Program A: Public Private

Program B: Public Private

Program C: Public Private

Program D: Public Private

2C. What types of services are provided by this agency? (Please check all that apply).

Program A:

- Group Home Foster Care
 Residential Other _____

Program B:

- Group Home Foster Care
 Residential Other _____

Program C:

- Group Home Foster Care
 Residential Other _____

Program D:

- Group Home Foster Care
 Residential Other _____

2D. Is there an educational specialist on the staff of the agency?

Program A: Yes No Don't Know

Program B: Yes No Don't Know

Program C: Yes No Don't Know

Program D: Yes No Don't Know

2E. What is the average caseload size for the agency working directly with the youth on educational services?

Program A: average caseload: _____

Program B: average caseload: _____

Program C: average caseload: _____

Program D: average caseload: _____

2F. Within the overall mission of the agency, please rank the following services in order of importance, with “1” being most important.

Program A:

- Safety
- ASFA Requirements
- Permanency
- Health Issues
- Mental Health Issues
- Stability of Placement
- Visitation
- Other _____

Program B:

- Safety
- ASFA Requirements
- Permanency
- Health Issues
- Mental Health Issues
- Stability of Placement
- Visitation
- Other _____

Program C:

- Safety
- ASFA Requirements
- Permanency
- Health Issues
- Mental Health Issues
- Stability of Placement
- Visitation
- Other _____

Program D:

- Safety
- ASFA Requirements
- Permanency
- Health Issues
- Mental Health Issues
- Stability of Placement
- Visitation
- Other _____

3. Thinking about the youth served by each program you have described, please answer the following questions:

3A. What are the ages of the youth served by these programs?

Program A: (please provide ranges)
 ___ year olds through ___ year olds

Program B: (please provide ranges)
 ___ year olds through ___ year olds

Program C: (please provide ranges)
 ___ year olds through ___ year olds

Program D: (please provide ranges)
 ___ year olds through ___ year olds

3B. What is the grade range of the youth served by these programs?

Program A: (please check all that apply)

- Preschool
- Kindergarten
- Early Elementary (1st through 3rd grades)
- Late Elementary
 please specify grades: _____
- Middle or Junior High School
 please specify grades: _____
- High School
 please specify grades: _____

Program B: (please check all that apply)

- Preschool
- Kindergarten
- Early Elementary (1st through 3rd grades)
- Late Elementary
 please specify grades: _____
- Middle or Junior High School
 please specify grades: _____
- High School
 please specify grades: _____

Program C: (please check all that apply)

- Preschool
- Kindergarten
- Early Elementary (1st through 3rd grades)
- Late Elementary
 please specify grades: _____
- Middle or Junior High School
 please specify grades: _____
- High School
 please specify grades: _____

Program D: (please check all that apply)

- Preschool
- Kindergarten
- Early Elementary (1st through 3rd grades)
- Late Elementary
please specify grades: _____
- Middle or Junior High School
please specify grades: _____
- High School
please specify grades: _____

3C. Are these programs only for youth living in out-of-home care?

Program A: Yes No

Program B: Yes No

Program C: Yes No

Program D: Yes No

3D. Are the youth served by this program

Program A:

- Medicaid Eligible
- Non-Medicaid Eligible
- Serve both of above

Program B:

- Medicaid Eligible
- Non-Medicaid Eligible
- Serve both of above

Program C:

- Medicaid Eligible
- Non-Medicaid Eligible
- Serve both of above

Program D:

- Medicaid Eligible
- Non-Medicaid Eligible
- Serve both of above

3E. Please describe the geographical areas served by these programs.

Program A:

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban
- Statewide
- Other _____

Program B:

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban
- Statewide
- Other _____

Program C:

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban
- Statewide
- Other _____

Program D:

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban
- Statewide
- Other _____

4. Thinking about these programs, please answer the following questions about their referral process.

4A. How are youths referred to these programs? (Please check all that apply).

Program A:

- self-referred
- by school personnel
- by foster parent
- by the court system
- Other _____

Program B:

- self-referred
- by school personnel
- by foster parent
- by the court system
- Other _____

Program C:

- self-referred
- by school personnel
- by foster parent
- by the court system
- Other _____

Program D:

- self-referred
- by school personnel
- by foster parent
- by the court system
- Other _____

4B. For what reasons are youths referred to these programs?

Program A: (please check all that apply)

- Identified as at-risk for educational difficulties
- Experiencing educational difficulties
- Excelling in academics/advanced placement
- Based on placement in residential, group home
- Other _____

Program B: (please check all that apply)

- Identified as at-risk for educational difficulties
- Experiencing educational difficulties
- Excelling in academics/advanced placement
- Based on placement in residential, group home
- Other _____

Program C: (please check all that apply)

- Identified as at-risk for educational difficulties
- Experiencing educational difficulties
- Excelling in academics/advanced placement
- Based on placement in residential, group home
- Other _____

Program D: (please check all that apply)

- Identified as at-risk for educational difficulties
- Experiencing educational difficulties
- Excelling in academics/advanced placement
- Based on placement in residential, group home
- Other _____

5. What sources are used for funding these programs?

Program A: (please check all that apply)

- Local government
- State government
- Federal government (specify: _____)
- Private donors (specify: _____)
- Corporate foundation (specify: _____)
- Other (specify: _____)

Program B: (please check all that apply)

- Local government
- State government
- Federal government (specify: _____)
- Private donors (specify: _____)
- Corporate foundation (specify: _____)
- Other (specify: _____)

Program C: (please check all that apply)

- Local government
- State government
- Federal government (specify: _____)
- Private donors (specify: _____)
- Corporate foundation (specify: _____)
- Other (specify: _____)

Program D: (please check all that apply)

- Local government
- State government
- Federal government (specify: _____)
- Private donors (specify: _____)
- Corporate foundation (specify: _____)
- Other (specify: _____)

6. Do these programs have a component to evaluate their effectiveness?

Program A: Yes No (Skip to #7)

Program B: Yes No (Skip to #7)

Program C: Yes No (Skip to #7)

Program D: Yes No (Skip to #7)

6A. If you answered yes to the question above, has the evaluation been completed?

Program A: Yes No

Program B: Yes No

Program C: Yes No

Program D: Yes No

7. In your opinion, are there certain components or features of these programs that are particularly important to the overall success of the program itself?

Program A: Yes No (Skip to #8)

Program B: Yes No (Skip to #8)

Program C: Yes No (Skip to #8)

Program D: Yes No (Skip to #8)

7A. If you answered yes to the question above, what components are particularly important?

Program A: (please check all that apply)

- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Youth Passports
- Youth Involvement
- Caregiver Involvement
- Advocacy
- Court Involvement
- System Collaboration
- Adequate Funding
- Other _____

Program B: (please check all that apply)

- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Youth Passports
- Youth Involvement
- Caregiver Involvement
- Advocacy
- Court Involvement
- System Collaboration
- Adequate Funding
- Other _____

Program C: (please check all that apply)

- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Youth Passports
- Youth Involvement
- Caregiver Involvement
- Advocacy
- Court Involvement
- System Collaboration
- Adequate Funding
- Other _____

Program D: (please check all that apply)

- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Youth Passports
- Youth Involvement
- Caregiver Involvement
- Advocacy
- Court Involvement
- System Collaboration
- Adequate Funding
- Other _____

8. Were these programs the result of collaborative efforts with other systems and institutions?

Program A: Yes No (Skip to #9)

Program B: Yes No (Skip to #9)

Program C: Yes No (Skip to #9)

Program D: Yes No (Skip to #9)

8A. If you answered yes to the question above, which systems and institutions were part of this collaborative effort? Please check all that apply.

Program A:

- Child Welfare System
- Educational System
- Court System
- Other _____

Program B:

- Child Welfare System
- Educational System
- Court System
- Other _____

Program C:

- Child Welfare System
- Educational System
- Court System
- Other _____

Program D:

- Child Welfare System
- Educational System
- Court System
- Other _____

9. Have you encountered any barriers or challenges when addressing factors that effect the educational success of youth in foster care?

Yes No (Skip to #10)

9A. If yes, what types of barriers have you encountered? Please check all that apply.

- Lack of funding/monetary resources
- Lack of agreements or MOUs
- Lack of ability to track youth as they move through the child welfare system
- Lack of system cooperation
- Confidentiality issues
- Other (please specify) _____

9B. How were these barriers overcome? (Please describe)

10. In your opinion, what *policy changes* are needed to positively address the educational needs of youth in care?

At the Local Level: _____

At the State Level: _____

At the Federal Level: _____

11. Are there people or organizations you would recommend we contact on the state or national scene who can provide information or insight about the educational needs of youth in care?

Recommendations for Contact:

12. Would you be willing to share information about your program(s) with others?

Yes No (Skip to #13)

12A. If yes, in what forums would you be willing to share information? Please check all that apply.

- Symposia
- Roundtables
- Conference Presentations
- Written Materials
- Other (please specify) _____

13. Are there any other comments you would like to make about any aspect of this survey or the educational needs of youth in care generally?

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR TIME!

Please fax back your completed questionnaire to Melissa Litchfield at: (775) 327-5306. Or, if you received the questionnaire in the mail, you may return it in the pre-addressed stamped envelope provided. If you have included additional materials and would like to be reimbursed for extra postage, please contact Kari Darden at (775) 784-6968.

