UPDATE: Educational Stability and Improved Outcomes for Foster Children

2013

Authorizing Legislation: **RCW 28A.300.8001**

Secondary Education and Student Support
Dan Newell, Assistant Superintendent

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Executive Summary

As of September 2013, nearly 8,000 students in Washington State were in foster care. More than 5,000 were school age and represented some of the most vulnerable students in the state. They may come to the foster care system because of abuse, neglect, imminent danger, a death of a parent or the inability of a parent to care for them. Often, the reason(s) the students enter the foster care system lead to emotional struggles that affect their ability to learn. They are more likely to change schools, which interrupts their education, and they are more likely to need special education services.

All too often these factors impact the educational success of those students. On state tests, students in foster care score much lower than the average for all students. As a single example, foster care students scored on average 30 percentage points lower than all students in seventh grade reading. What's more disheartening, the graduation rate for students in foster care is significantly below the rate for non-foster care students. In 2009, the on-time graduation rate for non-foster youth was 78 percent, compared to 47 percent for foster youth.

Despite the challenges, many organizations are deeply involved in the home lives and educational lives of those students, including:

- The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)
- Department of Social and Health Services, Children's Administration (DSHS-CA)
- The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC)
- Education institutions
- Private advocacy groups
Background

Submitted in response to Revised Code of Washington 28A.300.8001, this report describes how agencies work together to provide the best education, as well as the best lives, for foster-care children. In particular, the law requires OSPI to annually report on the at least the following:

1. A description of the process used to determine students’ best interest in continued enrollment at the school the student was in at the time of initial placement or change of placement;

2. The number of days, following initial placement or change of placement, to resume school at the school the student was in at the time of initial placement or change of placement or complete new school enrollment and attend at a new school;

3. The number of days from request to delivery of school records from the sending school to the receiving school; and

4. Documentation of a plan and use of federal Title IV-E dollars to support transportation for educational continuity as envisioned in the Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, P.L. 110-351.

Update Status

1. **A description of the process used to determine students’ best interest in continued enrollment at the school the student was in at the time of initial placement or change of placement:**

   - The Department of Social and Health Services, Children’s Administration (DSHS-CA), continues to apply best practices in determination of a student’s continued enrollment at the time of initial placement. If a placement change is identified as necessary, a shared planning meeting is the process used to determine this change. DSHS-CA is guided in this process by requirements under state (RCW 74.13.550) and federal (P.L. 110-351) laws when determining the best interests of the child in all areas of case planning including educational stability.

2. **The number of days, following initial placement or change of placement, to resume school at the school the student was in at the time of initial placement or change of placement or complete new school enrollment and attend at a new school:**

   Two data sources were used in this analysis:

   - Administrative data from DSHS-CA with de-identified demographic information for youth in foster care; and
   
   - Attendance records for the 2011–2012 school year from OSPI.
School enrollment outcomes for youth in foster care in the 2011–2012 school year were examined based on the following categories:

- Count of youth with placement move events within the school year and school enrollment changes due to placement moves.
- Count of youth with removals within the school year and school enrollment changes due to removal from home.

The total count of youth in foster care with a placement or placement move within the 2011-12 school year was 5,114. Of these, 66 percent (3,415) did not change schools. For those who did enroll or re-enroll in school during the school year, the following chart breaks out the length of time it took them to re-enroll.

A focus on the timeliness of enrollment appears to have improved overall school enrollment and the time it takes foster children to become enrolled in school. In addition, legislation passed in 2013 (House Bill 1566) provides guidance to school districts in terms of enrollment for foster care youth. Further improvements are expected in the timeliness of enrollment.

### Table 1: Enrollment Timeliness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of time to enrollment for children/youth with a change in placement during the school year</th>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>&lt; 5 days</th>
<th>5-14 days</th>
<th>&gt; 14 days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For Youth With Change in Placement</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010–11</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Youth With Initial Out of Home Removal</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010–11</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** An enrollment delay following placement does not mean that a gap in actual attendance occurred.

(3) The number of days from request to delivery of school records from the sending school to the receiving school:

- Data-share agreements are finalized between agencies. Data flowing from DSHS-CA to OSPI has been processed to connect the most recent list of our children in care to the most recent education data submitted by school districts. Students who are in foster care have been flagged in our state system and both individual education data and reports with foster care/education information are now available to every school and school district in our state.

- Work continues on developing a more robust common protocol surrounding communications and determining what other information may be needed including the best ways to share said information.
(4) **Documentation of a plan and use of federal Title IV-E dollars to support transportation for educational continuity as envisioned in the Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, P.L. 110-351:**

The Federal Fostering Connections Act provides a means for child welfare agencies to be reimbursed for transportation costs when a student is IV-E eligible; it does not provide any additional funding or a dedicated transportation funding stream.

DSHS-CA reimburses mileage to caregivers when the mileage meets the individual needs of children to remain in their school of origin as identified in case planning (ISSP, service plan or case notes) for the child.

In order to be eligible to claim transportation as a reimbursable expense under IV-E, the child must be IV-E eligible, and the need for transportation services must be clearly identified in the child’s case plan. Children’s Administration has continued to distribute this message to field workers and regional education staff.

In the event a child is not IV-E eligible, DSHS-CA has a policy and procedure in place which allows case workers to request transportation funding to support and maintain a child’s school enrollment. Funding may be available through other federal sources or through state funds.

**Conclusion and Next Steps**

We thank the state Legislature for its continued help in improving the lives of students in foster care. What had been missing for those involved in this endeavor were two “lynchpin” solutions to barriers. We believe those solutions have been found.

The sharing of information and cross-agency collaboration that has taken place during the past two years is significantly breaking down those barriers. Our work has resulted in more K−12 public educators becoming involved in guiding education decisions for foster care students, as well as more comfortable and comprehensive involvement in our schools by DSHS-CA field staff.

Second, increased collaboration has improved the working relationships between agencies. That has resulted, for the first time, in schools and districts having the permission and ability to know which of their students are currently in foster care. In turn, that allows for directed student accommodations, focused student/staff training, and concentrated wrap-around services. All of these positive actions are reflected in the most recent reports from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, which show improvements in education outcomes and more students being on track to graduate, especially for those who have remained in care for all four years of high school.

Cross-collaboration continues at the state level in finishing and adding new goals/actions to the plan put in place several years ago.

To see more information on Washington State’s cross-agency coordination plan to improve educational success for foster children and youth, please go to the [*Foster Care Youth website*](#).
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