



Educational Permanence for Youth In Foster Care

Presented by Michigan Department
of Human Services

Students in Foster Care

- More than 15,000 Michigan children are in foster care because their birth families cannot provide a safe and secure home.
- Of these 15,000 children in foster care, the majority of them are school-age.

- For children in the foster care system, educational success is a potential positive counterweight to abuse, neglect, separation, and impermanence.
- Positive school experiences can enhance well-being, help students make more successful transitions to adulthood, and increase their chances for personal fulfillment and economic self-sufficiency, as well as their ability to contribute to society.

- Unfortunately, the educational outcomes for many children in foster care are dismal. As current research reveals, a large proportion of young people in foster care are in educational crises.
- Research makes it clear that serious issues must be addressed to ensure the educational success of children and youth in foster care.

School Mobility

- Foster youth have an average of one to two home placement changes per year while in out-of-home care.
- This leads to a high rate of school mobility, with foster youth attending an average of 6 different schools.

Research on School Mobility

- In the 2003 Casey National Alumni Study, youth who experienced one fewer placement change per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before leaving care.
- A 1999 study found that California high school students who changed schools even once were *less than half as likely to graduate* as those who did not change schools, even when controlling for other variables that affect high school completion.

Research on School Mobility

- It takes children an average of 4-6 months to recover academically after changing schools.
- Mobile students score 20 points lower on standardized tests than non-mobile students.
- Mobile students are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities and more likely to act out or get into trouble.
- Average test scores for non-mobile students were significantly lower in high schools with high student mobility rates.
- Students who changed high schools even once were less than half as likely as stable students to graduate, even controlling for other factors.

Project Forum at NASDSE, March 2007
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2006

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Academic Outcomes

- A 2001 Washington State study found that children and youth in foster care attending public schools scored 16 to 20 percentile points below youth who were not in foster care in statewide standardized tests at grades three, six, and nine.
- Youth in foster care in the Midwest Study, interviewed primarily after completing 10th or 11th grade, on average read at only a seventh grade level. Approximately 44% read at high school level or higher.
- Few excelled in academic subjects, especially relative to a comparable national sample. Less than one in five received an "A" in English, math, history, or science.
- In the Midwest Study, 37% of youth in foster care (compared with 22% of a comparable national sample) reported repeating a grade.

Behavior Issues

- Children in foster care are significantly more likely than children in the general population to have a special education classification of an emotional or behavioral disturbance.
- Several studies have found that children and youth in foster care are significantly more likely to have school behavior problems and that they have higher rates of suspensions and expulsions from school.

High School Completion

- In the Washington State study, 59% of youth in foster care enrolled in 11th grade completed high school by the end of 12th grade.
- In the Midwest Study, approximately 58% of youth in foster care had a high school degree at age 19, compared to 87% of their same-age peers in a comparable national sample.

College Preparation

- The majority (80%) of those youth in out-of-home care interviewed in the Midwest Study at age 17–18 hoped and expected to graduate from college eventually.
- A national study done in 1997 indicates that only 15% of youth in foster care are likely to be enrolled in college preparatory classes versus 32% of students not in foster care, even when they have similar test scores and grades.

Postsecondary Entrance/Completion Rates

- Data suggests that few former foster youth who enroll in higher education institutions complete a degree.
- The Northwest Alumni Study found that of the alumni of foster care who were interviewed:
 - 43% completed some education beyond high school.
 - 21% completed any degree/certificate beyond high school.
 - 16% completed a vocational degree (22% among those age 25 or older).
 - 1.8% completed a bachelor's degree: (3% among those age 25 or older) compared to the general population rate of 24%.

All data is from "Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care" December 2008
http://www.americanbar.org/contrib/dan/rabami/grades/child/education/National_Ed_of_cfhout_2008_authcheckdam.pdf

What can we do?

- **ADVOCATE!**
 - Caseworkers, education planners, caregivers, GALs, CASAs, and other individuals involved in a case can advocate for a child/youth to maintain education continuity in order to improve outcomes
 - Youth can also be taught to appropriately advocate for themselves.

Educational Success = Well-Being

- Improves Current Well-Being
 - Placement stability
 - Social/emotional stability
 - Increases access to services
 - More likely to attain permanency
- Expands Future Well-Being
 - Less likely to be incarcerated, unemployed, abuse drugs, etc.
 - Increased income potential
 - Increased stability later in life

Legal Basis- Federal and state law give children and youth in out-of-home care certain rights to remain stable in one school despite changes in their living arrangement.

- Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.
- McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001.
- **Michigan law now allows a foster child's worker to select the child's school.** The selected school must enroll the child, regardless of the child's district of residence and without permission from the district of residence (2009 PA 186-187).

Fostering Connections Act Educational Provisions

- Child welfare agencies must include within the case plan assurances of the educational stability of the child while in foster care.
- DHS must ensure that child welfare agencies:
 - Consider appropriateness of school and proximity to school of origin when making foster care placements.
 - Work with schools to ensure child remains in the school in which the child is enrolled at time of placement.

Best interest factors foster care workers need to consider regarding school placement include:

- The parent's or guardian's and child's school of preference.
- Educational input from school personnel and educational liaison.

Best interest factors foster care workers need to consider regarding school placement include:

- The child's:
 - Social and emotional state.
 - Academic achievement/strengths/weaknesses.
 - Continuity of relationships.
 - Special education programming.
 - Extra-curricular activity participation.
 - Distance/travel time to and from current school/new placement and the impact on the child.
 - Supportive relationships and/or services.
 - Length of anticipated stay in placement and the permanency plan.

**Best Interest:
School of Origin**

- *Child has established support system in current school.*
- *Child has siblings/strong social relationships in current school.*
- *Child has demonstrated significant educational and/or behavioral progress.*
- *"I'm a Senior!!!!"*

Fostering Connections Act Educational Provisions

- **If remaining in such school is not in the *best interest* of the child, the case plan must include assurances that the child welfare agencies have worked with the schools to:**
 - Provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school; and
 - Provide all of the educational records of the child to the school.

- Case sample where it is in best interest to change schools.

McKinney-Vento Act Rights and Services

The act gives students the right to:

- Remain in their school of origin, if it is in their **best interest**.
- Receive transportation to their school of origin.
- **Immediate** school enrollment (even if they cannot produce the normally required documents, i.e. birth certificates, proof of guardianship, school records, immunization records, etc).
- Supplemental services (such as special education services, tutoring, mentoring, school lunch).

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McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

In Michigan, a foster youth is considered "homeless" until he/she has been in the same placement for 6 continuous months.

- Ensures homeless children transportation to and from school free of charge.
- Family has choice of what school they want to attend regardless of what district they reside in.
- Requires schools to register homeless children even if they lack normally required documents, such as immunization records or proof of residence.

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Important Services through the McKinney Vento Liaisons

- The youth is able to access free lunch and breakfast programs to reduce initial food costs, especially helpful if the youth is placed with relatives that must wait for state food assistance.
- Preschool children can be enrolled if there is space available. Be proactive and seek out programs for youth ages 3-5.
- Tutoring and mentoring can be offered in order to keep the youth on target in classes.
- Clothing and school supplies can be provided to the youth which is helpful if the youth was placed/replaced without all his/her belongings.

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Collaboration Process between schools and Child Placing Agencies

- Every School district has a local homeless education liaison, who must ensure each eligible child receives his/her rights under McKinney-Vento.
- The foster care worker participates in the process by contacting the education liaison, talking with school staff, parents, and caregivers, sharing the appropriate information and providing assistance as needed to ensure the child's educational needs are met.
- The local school district must enroll the child in the school the foster care worker determines is in the child's best interests, either the school of origin or the school of residence.

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Transportation

- Transportation is essential to ensure school stability and promote educational success.
- If it is in the child's best interest to remain in the school of origin, under the McKinney-Vento Act local education agencies are to provide transportation to the eligible children and youth. The local liaison and school district are responsible for arranging the transportation.
- Case workers must provide the information necessary in a timely fashion to schools/homeless education liaison to facilitate transportation.

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Payment for Transportation

- As long as the foster child is eligible for services under the McKinney-Vento Act the school district is required to provide transportation (including transportation costs).
- If the only method of transportation available is for the child to be driven by car and the caregiver agrees to transport, the school district may provide transportation payment to the provider via a gas card or stipend (each school district has their own method). Although mileage may be paid by school district, the case worker is responsible for communicating the transportation plan to the caregiver and providing follow-up to ensure coordination.

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Transportation Costs Fostering Connections Act

- When a youth is no longer eligible for transportation services under the McKinney-Vento Act but still requires transportation to school of origin, DHS will have the full responsibility for transportation payment and coordination.
- The Fostering Connections Act includes payment for reasonable transportation in the foster care maintenance payment (i.e. payment to foster parents).
- Case workers **must provide oversight** to ensure that payments are not being received under both McKinney-Vento and their foster care payment (no 'double-dipping' of federal funds).

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Collaborating with School Staff

- Set up a face-to-face meeting with the school counselor and/or McKinney-Vento school liaison.
- Be prepared with up-to-date documents on the educational rights of foster youth.
- Clearly delegate responsibilities and follow the recommended time-lines.
- Have some prepared suggestions on working together on the goal of education success.
- Make connections within the school district and the community.
- Contact the McKinney-Vento Homeless Coordinator for clarification of issues.

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Best Interest: School of Residence

- Better educational opportunities/services in new school.
- Travel distance from placement to previous school = **HARDSHIP.**
- Child experienced multitude of behavioral and/or academic problems in previous school.

Increasing education outcomes

- In general this population needs lots of encouragement and reminders.
- Be understanding, but keep expectations high.
- Some things to remember:
 - No family support.
 - Homelessness.
 - Young parents.
 - High school drop outs.
 - First in there family to even consider higher education.

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Increasing education outcomes

- No appointments during school hours.
- When change in placement unavoidable, make the move during school breaks, between semesters, etc.
- Encourage extracurricular activities.
- Focus on long-term goals, despite possible short-term crisis.

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Credit Problems

- Be proactive.
- Assist youth with maintaining current records.
- Request a progress report be completed by teachers when move occurs. Grab a transcript if possible!
- Keep a list of classes.
- Use outside supports.
- Online/Correspondence courses
 - Michigan Virtual High School (MVHS).

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