

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

744 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

1430 N Street, Sacramento, California 95814

May 25, 2005

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE I-10-05

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS  
ALL COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS  
ALL EDUCATIONAL LIAISONS FOR FOSTER YOUTH  
ALL FOSTER YOUTH SERVICES PROGRAM COORDINATORS

SUBJECT: THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN RECEIVING IN-HOME  
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES AND CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

The purpose of this All County Information Notice (ACIN) is to promote the development and implementation of strategies, policies and protocols to improve educational services to children in the child welfare system with identified needs.

The Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) requires that the State comply with the Federal Well Being Outcomes for children. Federal Well Being Outcome 2, Item 21 states that: "Children receive appropriate services to meet their education needs." The key issue identified in the final report for California's review was that "in some cases although the education needs were assessed, services were not provided to meet the identified needs." This was noted in particular for children and youth receiving in-home services. For each area in which California was found to be in non-conformity, the development of an action step to address the area was required. The action steps for these areas are contained in California's Program Improvement Plan (PIP), which was negotiated with the federal government and approved in June 2003. Consistent with California's PIP, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is issuing this letter.

Extensive research indicates that children placed in foster care have not fared well traditionally in the educational setting. These children frequently exhibit behaviors identified with poor educational outcomes including higher rates of grade retention, lower scores on standardized tests, and higher absenteeism, tardiness, truancy and dropout rates. This directly impacts their skills as independent adults; a higher than average percentage of these children enter the welfare, social service and criminal justice systems as single parents, homeless and unemployed. It is evident from the research that school success is critical to a high quality life in both childhood and adulthood. Concrete planning and intervention are needed on an individual and system-wide basis to ensure that children, either placed in foster care, or living with parents under the supervision of child welfare services, will receive the services

necessary to be as successful in school as their peers and in turn help them to be successful, independent adults.

The remainder of this ACIN will address suggested strategies and list resources to consider in improving educational outcomes for foster children as well as children receiving in-home services from child welfare. The suggested strategies were developed as a result of a review of resources, many of which are included on the enclosed list. They are intended to assist child welfare services and educational staff in working together at both the State and local levels to begin/continue a dialog that will identify and remove barriers and to establish policies and procedures that will facilitate communication between the two systems in order to better meet the needs of children.

### Suggested Strategies

1. Establish regular meetings between key staff in the social work, mental health, juvenile justice and education systems to share information and do case conferencing.
2. Provide a presentation to educators on the child welfare system, including children who are receiving in-home services and those who are placed in out-of-home care, to increase awareness of the specific impacts of child welfare involvement on educational performance.
3. Organize workshops and provide follow up consultation to educators on school-based interventions for child welfare-involved students with disruptive behaviors.
4. Assist in providing critical information and avoid duplication of services by encouraging county social services staff to document (via the Health and Education Passport on CWS/CMS) educational and health information for children placed in out-of-home care.
5. Provide educational advocacy training for social workers, probation officers and mental health workers to assist them in being effective advocates for children and youth in the school setting.
6. Advocate at the State and local levels for the appropriate removal of barriers to confidentiality, and thus allow caseworkers and educational staff access to needed information in children's records through both systems.
7. Establish policies or protocols between schools and the child welfare system to facilitate the sharing of information and insure increased communication.
8. Invite teachers and/or counselors who play an important role in the life of a child or youth to participate in Team Decision Making conferences, a group process which encourages the child/youth and family to take a proactive and lead role in developing their case plan.

9. Encourage the development of mentoring programs by community-based organizations for at risk children and youth.
10. Refer foster youth with persistent attendance or behavior problems to a school attendance review board (SARB).
11. Consider conducting a formal or informal research study countywide or in a selected geographical location within the county to identify current weaknesses in the educational system for abused and neglected children within the county, to build accountability for the children's education, and to support strategic planning about the most appropriate, tactical investments to positively influence the educational outcomes for foster care children and children receiving in-home child welfare services.

If you have questions related to this notice, please contact Teresa Contreras, Bureau Chief, Child Welfare Policy and Program Development Bureau, California Department of Social Services at (916) 651-6160.

If you have questions related to the educational needs of children in foster care, please contact David Kopperud, Education Program Consultant, California Department of Education at (916) 327-5930.

Sincerely,

*Original Signed by Susan Nisenbaum*

SUSAN NISENBAUM, Chief  
Child Protection and Family Support  
California Department of Social Services

*Original Signed by Sue Stickel*

SUE STICKEL, Deputy Superintendent  
Branch Curriculum and Instruction Branch  
California Department of Education

Enclosure

## Resources

### **The Vera Institute of Justice ( [www.vera.org](http://www.vera.org) )**

#### Study – What keeps children in Foster Care from succeeding in school? Views of Early Adolescents and the Adults in their Lives (July 2002)

As a group, children in foster care struggle academically. Foster children face unique roadblocks, among them concerns about their biological parents and siblings that distract from school, and court appearances and doctors appointments that cause frequent absences. Behavioral issues take attention off academics, and many foster children avoid friendships, fearing that their foster status will be discovered. Foster parents, caseworkers, and school staff may each lack a full picture of the children's needs. In this study, researchers interviewed 25 foster children and 54 of the adults in their lives to better understand how being in foster care affects a child's education, and how adults can help them succeed in school.

#### Kit – Foster Children and Education: How can you create a positive education for the foster child? (July 2004)

When it comes to succeeding in school, foster children face unique challenges and obstacles that have them lagging behind their peers. This kit, designed primarily for use by caseworkers and educators, lays out those challenges and offers some simple, inexpensive lessons and tools that can enhance the educational experience of children in foster care. The lessons – including how to facilitate school registration and how to increase adult attendance at parent/teacher conferences – can be adapted for use in any community. They are drawn from the experience of Safe and Smart, a joint project of the Vera Institute and the New York City Administration for Children's Services that placed caseworkers in schools in support foster children.

#### Loss Screening Interview (tool) – Childhood Loss and Behavioral Difficulties at School Project (June 2004)

Grief in children and adolescents sometimes manifests itself in anger, depression, or aggression. Unfortunately, many people in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and school disciplinary and truancy systems have not been trained to recognize loss and its symptoms or how to respond constructively when a grieving young person acts out. Grieving children may even be treated more punitively than other children who have disciplinary problems because they may behave belligerently or refuse to engage with adults trying to help them, which are normal psychological reactions to loss.

The *Loss Screening Interview* was developed by the Vera Institute with city and state agencies to assess whether students' behavior and attendance difficulties may be

grief-related. The Institute piloted the new screening tool at a Bronx middle school during the 2003-2004 school year and found students generally receptive and interested in learning about grief-related symptoms. In addition, the school staff responsible for responding to disciplinary and truancy problems received training to promote their recognition and understanding of the impact of childhood loss. The *Loss Screening Interview* is available for use on the Vera Institute website.

**The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) [www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)**

The McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act: Accessing Educational Supports for Youth in Out-of-Home Care

A strong educational foundation is essential for success. This is particularly true for children and youth in our foster care system. For a number of reasons, children placed in foster care often slip behind their peers in school. By minimizing enrollment delays and providing additional supports to children and youth in care, we can begin to close this gap. Child welfare agencies may be able to bring these resources to children and youth in care through the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act.

The CWLA urges child welfare agencies to partner with their local departments of education to determine which children in care are eligible for federal education assistance through the McKinney-Vento Act. Through the Act, communities ensure that children are entitled to continued enrollment in their home school or immediate enrollment in a new school. The Act provides a stream of federal funding for an array of supports including but not limited to tutoring, transportation, and cash assistance to ensure the participation of homeless children and youth in elementary and secondary school. The act guarantees access to school and a meaningful opportunity for educational success.

Although the act was developed for children who are homeless, many of the protections may be applied to children in a variety of out-of-home settings. This is because the act includes in the definition of homeless children a clause that includes children who “are awaiting foster care placement.” In partnership with local departments of education and homeless advocates, communities nationwide have applied McKinney-Vento eligibility to young people who have run away from a foster home, group home, or other placement, and children in a number of temporary living arrangements, including shelters; emergency, interim, and short-term foster homes; interim group homes and residential placements; and evaluation centers or placements for the sole purpose of evaluation.

The U.S. Department of Education has urged local school officials to “consult with their district liaisons for homeless children and youth as well as their local public social service agency providers” to determine whether “youth awaiting foster care placement” in their school districts are considered homeless and therefore eligible for the rights and resources available under the law. Each school district has a McKinney-Vento

liaison, and it is important that child welfare workers get to know their liaison. In the event a school district for some reason is not enrolling a child in transition, the

McKinney-Vento education liaison will help child welfare workers in working with the school district and in offering resources afforded by the act.

### Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Care: A National Symposium (2002)

The CWLA and the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges convened a symposium to initiate dialogue between the child welfare, judicial, and educational fields on how to support positive educational outcomes for youth in care. The proceedings are documented in this article. The results from a survey of experts in the three fields are discussed, along with the recommendations for the creation of a national agenda. Promising programs and practices that improve youths' educational outcomes are also presented.

### **The Future of Children (<http://www.futureofchildren.org>)**

The Future of Children is a publication of The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and The Brookings Institution. The Future of Children seeks to promote effective policies and programs for children by providing policymakers, service providers, and the media with timely, objective information based on the best available research.

Research data has shown that among substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect, African American and Native American children are represented at twice the rate predicted by their representation among all California children. California county child welfare agencies have been examining this issue for some time. This is not only an issue in child welfare in California, but is also a national issue. In addition, research indicates that disproportionality in school readiness is evident among African American and Hispanic children. The Spring 2005 issue of The Future of Children is entitled "School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps". The two articles summarized below are contained in the Spring issue, and discuss some of the research being done in this area.

### The Contribution of Parenting to Ethnic and Racial Gaps in School Readiness (Spring 2005)

The authors examined various parenting behaviors and their racial and ethnic variations as well as programs that serve poor families (specifically, that serve primarily minority families) and found that home and center-based programs with a parenting component improve parental nurturance and discipline. The article discusses the impact of enhanced parenting skills on improving school readiness, as well as the impact of family literacy programs.

## Can Family Socioeconomic Resources Account for Racial and Ethnic Test Score Gaps? (Spring 2005)

This report considers the impact of socioeconomic resources on test scores among white, black and Hispanic children by measuring the four variables of income, education, family structure and neighborhood conditions. The authors survey policies and programs that address and improve these variables, such as improving poor neighborhoods, strengthening families, etc., to determine their impact on socioeconomic circumstances. The results of this survey are highlighted along with suggested policies on how to most efficiently narrow school readiness gaps.

### **California Department of Education ([www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov)):**

This web site by the State Department of Education includes many resources useful for working with children involved in the child welfare system, including information as to the purpose and use of the school attendance review board (SARB). Education Code Section 48263 states: "If any minor pupil in any district is an habitual truant, or is irregular in attendance at school, or is habitually insubordinate or disorderly during school attendance at school, the pupil may be referred to a school attendance review board". Local SARBs, composed of representatives of school districts, county probation departments, county social services, county superintendents of schools, law enforcement agencies, community-based youth service centers, school guidance personnel, child welfare and attendance personnel, and school or county health care personnel, have the potential to garner the support foster youth need to stay in school and regain access to the standards and learning. The local SARBs can help foster youth by making appropriate changes in their school program, arranging counseling or tutoring services, or by requesting assistance from other agencies or programs.

Also, the SARB is best equipped to handle excessive absences when a child in foster care is not attending school. It is recommended that the local school district be contacted, as the local attendance supervisor may be unaware of the problem. Education Code Section 48240 requires every school district and county office to appoint a supervisor of attendance and such assistant supervisors of attendance as are needed to supervise the attendance of children in the district or county. Information about the SARB process is available on the CDE web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/26985>. In addition, the School Attendance Review Boards Handbook may be accessed at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/sb/documents/sarb02.pdf>.

Under the category of learning supports on the CDE web site, is additional information on improving attendance at school, including the School Attendance Improvement Handbook (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/cw/documents/schattnd.pdf>), which may be downloaded. There is also a section on Foster Youth Services, which provides information on programs to increase interagency support for foster youth. This site includes contact information for the foster youth contacts for county Foster Youth Services Program Coordinators, as well as the Assembly Bill (AB) 490 Educational Liaisons for Foster Youth. The web page listing for the Foster Youth Services Program

Coordinators is <http://www.cde.ca.gov/27357>, and the listing to locate county contacts for AB 490 Educational Liaisons is <http://www.cde.ca.gov/27408> . The web site also contains reports, studies, information on funding and much more.

**California Department of Social Services ([www.childsworld.ca.gov](http://www.childsworld.ca.gov)):**

This web site by the State Department of Social Services includes information on the Child Welfare Improvements that are currently underway. The site contains information on the new outcomes and accountability system, which became effective January 1, 2004. Assembly Bill 636 was signed into law in 2001, and required the establishment of a new outcomes-based review system, the California-Children and Family Services Review (C-CFSR). The new system includes outcomes in the federal Child and Family Services Review, as well as some state-enhanced measures. Using county self-assessments and system improvement plans to monitor and track county child welfare improvement and change, the C-CFSR implements a system-wide, results-based planning instrument necessary for continuous improvement, as well as an outcome and accountability system that will measure change and support that improvement. There is also information on the outcomes being measured, and what they mean in terms of meaningful improvements in the lives of children and families.

The web site also discusses the program and practice improvements currently under way in child welfare such as the development of a statewide safety assessment system, the promotion of permanent connections for youth and improved transitions to adulthood, and the improvements to child abuse hotline response systems with the implementation of a differential response system.

In addition to the CDSS web site, another resource available is a curriculum for educational advocacy. The Northern California Regional Training Academy, under their contract with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), has developed an educational advocacy curriculum geared for social workers and probation officers. The curriculum provides practical knowledge and tools for educational advocacy. Topics include the educational rights of children in California, an overview of special education, how to be a strong educational advocate for children in the child welfare system, and disciplinary issues in regular and special education settings. For further information, please contact Greg Rose, Bureau Chief, Resources Development and Training Support Bureau at (916) 651-6160.