

# Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care

January 2014

## Why Education Matters to Children in Foster Care

When supported by strong practices and policies, positive school experiences can counteract the negative effects of abuse, neglect, separation, and lack of permanency experienced by the nearly 400,000 U.S. children and youth in foster care. Education provides opportunities for improved well-being in physical, intellectual, and social domains during critical developmental periods and supports economic success in adult life. A concerted effort by child welfare agencies, education agencies, and the courts could lead to significant progress in changing the consistent and disheartening picture about educational outcomes for children in foster care the research portrays. The promising programs and interventions highlighted below represent innovative efforts to address a wide range of factors influencing the disparities in education outcomes. With cross-system collaboration, we are positioned to build on what is being learned, bring about change, and promote success for all children and youth in foster care.

## Fast facts from national and multi-state studies\*

Number of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2012	399,546
Average number of living arrangements during first foster care stay	2.8
Number of foster children of school age	249,107
Likelihood of being absent from school	2x that of other students
Percent of foster youth who change schools when first entering care	56%-75%
Percent of 17-18 year olds in care who have experienced 5+ school changes	34%
Likelihood of 17-18 year old foster youth having an out-of-school suspension	2x that of other students
Likelihood of 17-18 year old foster youth being expelled	3x that of other students
Average reading level of 17-18 year olds in foster care	7th grade
Likelihood of foster youth receiving special education	2.5 - 3.5x that of others
Percent of foster youth who complete high school by 18	50%
Percent of 17-18 year old foster youth who want to go to college	84%
Percent of foster youth who graduated from high school who attend college	20%
Percent of former foster youth who attain a bachelor's degree	2 - 9%

\* All *Fast Facts* are referenced elsewhere in this document. These facts were compiled based on findings from multiple studies where a consistent picture is emerging that points to widespread deficits on a number of markers of educational progress or success. Data points represented here are either from national studies or multiple studies conducted in different states (in which case a range is provided for the data point).

## National Foster Care Data

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

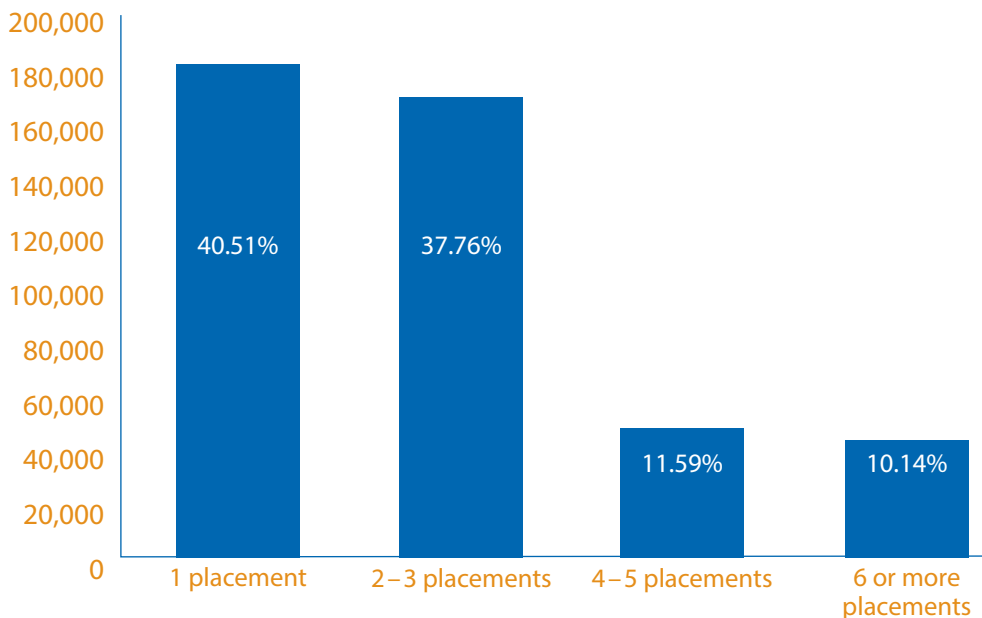
**Table 1.**  
**Characteristics of Children and Youth in Foster Care**

Number of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2012		399,546	
Characteristics of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2012		Number	Percentage
<b>Age</b>			
Young children (age 0–4)		132,845	33
School age children and youth (age 5–17)		249,107	62
Young adults (age 18–20)		17,302	4
<b>Race/Ethnicity*</b>			
White		166,195	42
Black		101,938	26
Hispanic (any race)		84,523	21
Other children and youth of color		34,371	9
<b>Gender</b>			
Male		209,131	52
Female		190,355	48

\* Includes 3 percent whose race/ethnicity was unknown

School age children in foster care commonly experience a number of moves while in out-of-home care as shown in Figure 1. These changes can significantly impact their school experiences. Data from Chapin Hall’s Center for State Child Welfare Data shows that among school-aged youth who entered care between 2005-2009, each experienced an average of 2.8 living arrangements by the end of 2011, including their initial out-of-home placement when removed from home.

**Figure 1.**  
**School-Age Children and Youth in Foster Care (5–17 Years) Who Entered Care Between 2005-2009:  
Number of Children by Number of Living Arrangements**



*Source:* The Center for State Child Welfare’s 2011 data. The Center draws data from 29 states and two counties. Each youth who first entered care between 2005-2009 is represented in this data. The number of living arrangements was counted from entry date through the end of 2011.

## The Research Findings

### Lay the Foundation for a Strong Start for Young Children in Care

Research has consistently found a high need for early intervention and early childhood education services among young children in foster care as a result of their developmental, emotional and behavioral problems.<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup> Data suggest that effective interventions exist to improve the performance of children in foster care when entering kindergarten. Yet, several studies indicate that many young children do not receive the early intervention or early childhood education services they need to address these problems.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Studies indicate that children in foster care as a group are less likely to be enrolled in Head Start than eligible, low income children.<sup>9</sup>

**Promising Program:** The Education Equals Partnership is working to close the educational achievement gap between children in foster care and their peers in California by focusing on young children who are at early risk for school failure. For example, in Fresno County children under the age of five were not routinely accessing early intervention programs or preschool despite qualifying for services due to their high risk of developmental delays. The Fresno County child welfare agency assigned an education liaison to ensure that toddlers and preschool-age children received the assessments and services that they needed to thrive. These efforts have increased the percentage of children enrolled in preschool from 42% to 59% over the past two years. The Partnership is using data such as these to target their school readiness efforts.<sup>10</sup>

**Promising Program:** A randomized control trial of the Kids in Transition to School (KITS) Program showed that children in foster care participating in this pre-kindergarten program were reported to show considerably less aggressive or oppositional classroom behavior than a comparison group.<sup>11</sup>

**Promising Program:** A study from the University of Delaware evaluating the Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up (ABC) intervention, a 10 session parenting program that targets children's self-regulation, showed that pre-school aged children in foster care who received this intervention exhibited stronger cognitive flexibility and theory of mind skills than a comparison group of children in foster care.<sup>12</sup>

**Promising Program:** In Illinois, all children between the ages of three and five receive a school readiness screening as part of the Integrated Assessment performed within 30 days of entering substitute care. Additionally, Early Childhood Procedures now require all children in care between the ages of three and five to be enrolled in an early childhood preschool program.<sup>13</sup>

### Ensure School Stability

School changes are a significant problem for children and youth in foster care.<sup>14,15</sup> Numerous studies have found that children in foster care frequently experience school changes.<sup>16,17,18,19,20,21</sup> These school changes often occur when children are initially removed from home, or when they move from one foster care living arrangement to another.<sup>22,23</sup> The rate of school mobility for children in foster care is greater than for their non-foster care peers.<sup>24,25,26</sup> Children who change schools frequently make less academic progress than their peers, and each time they change schools, they fall farther and farther behind.<sup>27</sup> School mobility has negative effects on academic achievement and is associated with dropping out.<sup>28</sup> Children in foster care tend to score lower than their peers on standardized tests<sup>29,30,31,32,33,34</sup> and some of these differences predate their entry into foster care.<sup>35</sup> Research consistently shows that children who are highly mobile, including both children in foster care and children experiencing homelessness, perform significantly worse on standardized tests than stably housed children.<sup>36,37</sup>

Children who experience frequent school changes may also face challenges in developing and sustaining supportive relationships with teachers or with peers.<sup>38</sup> Supportive relationships and a positive educational experience can be powerful contributors to the development of resilience and are vital components for healthy development and overall well-being.<sup>39</sup> In a national study of 1,087 foster care alumni, youth who had even one fewer change in living arrangement per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before leaving foster care.<sup>40</sup>

**Promising Policy:** The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 requires child welfare agencies to have a plan for “ensuring the educational stability of the child while in foster care,” including the child remaining in the school in which the child is enrolled at time of placement unless it is not in the best interests of the child.<sup>41</sup>

**Promising Practices:** Many states have enacted legislation and developed policies to support maintaining school stability. Child welfare agencies have begun to use GIS mapping or other tools to locate living arrangements that allow a child to remain at the same school. Increasingly, child welfare agencies are collaborating with schools and others to make best interest decisions about school placement. Various tools and checklists have been created to assist with these important decisions. Child welfare agencies have also developed reimbursement mechanisms to provide transportation for children to remain in the same school.<sup>42</sup>

### Enroll Students in School Quickly and Consistently

Delays in school enrollment can occur when a child's initial entry into foster care, or a subsequent change in living arrangement while in foster care, involves changing schools.<sup>43,44</sup> These delays are often caused by failure to transfer records in a timely manner.<sup>45,46</sup> Delays in school enrollment can negatively impact attendance and have a number of other adverse consequences such as students having to repeat courses previously taken, schools failing to address the special education needs of students, and students being enrolled in inappropriate classes.<sup>47</sup>

States have been using various strategies to ensure prompt enrollment when school changes are necessary. Some states have passed legislation or issued joint policies to streamline the process, including allowing for immediate enrollment without typically required documents, and creating timelines for prompt enrollment and records transfers. Many jurisdictions are using enrollment forms designed to facilitate communication between child welfare agencies and schools. For example, some child welfare agencies and schools have designated specific staff to serve as liaisons for children in care and assist with a smooth transition to a new school.

**Promising Policy:** In cases when remaining in the same school is not in the best interests of the child, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 requires that “the State agency and local educational agencies . . . provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school, with all of the educational records of the child provided to the school.”<sup>48</sup> States are now beginning to implement practices to meet this new federal mandate. The work of quickly enrolling foster children in school and ensuring better academic support has also been advanced by a recent amendment to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This amendment, called the Uninterrupted Scholars Act (USA), was signed into law in January of 2013, and makes it easier for child welfare professionals to access the educational records of the foster youth in their care.<sup>49</sup>

### Promote Regular School Attendance

Studies show that children who enter foster care have often missed a substantial number of school days<sup>50,51</sup> and that once in foster care, children and youth often have higher school absence rates than their non-foster care peers.<sup>52,53</sup> The extent to which children experience absences from school appears to be influenced by the child's age, their pre-foster care experiences, and their experiences while in care,<sup>54,55</sup> particularly when children are placed in congregate care.<sup>56</sup> One study found that school attendance problems increase as children in foster care enter adolescence.<sup>75</sup>

**Promising Program:** Allegheny County in Pennsylvania has established a data sharing program between the school system and the Department of Human Services that enables case workers and other child welfare staff to easily access the educational records of foster youth. This collaboration has led to the inclusion of an ‘education page’ in the electronic child welfare case record for each child involved in the child welfare system. One example of the benefit of access to shared data from the school district is case workers can be automatically alerted when a child has had three unexcused absences from school.<sup>58</sup>

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

A growing body of research documents the behavioral problems that children and youth in foster care experience – issues that impact their prospects for academic success – in the form of disciplinary infractions and other offenses.<sup>59,60,61</sup> Children and youth in foster care experience school suspensions and expulsions at higher rates than non-foster care peers.<sup>62,63,64</sup> Some educational experts believe that failure to address the needs of children in foster care leads to behavioral problems at school.<sup>65</sup>

In addressing behavioral problems with students in foster care, schools need to understand the impact of trauma on the lives of many children and youth in care. Research suggests that between half and two-thirds of all children are exposed to one or more adverse childhood experiences that can be trauma-inducing. Not surprisingly, children

in foster care experience trauma on a disproportionate basis.<sup>66, 67</sup> From medical centers to courts to child welfare systems, several evidence-supported and evidence-based approaches to address trauma have been developed and have proven to be effective. These approaches include trauma-informed systems (approaches that shape organizations to be more trauma-sensitive) and trauma-specific treatment interventions (implemented at the individual-level to address trauma and its symptoms).

**Promising Practice:** In 2005, the Massachusetts Advocates for Children, Harvard Law School, and the Task Force on Children Affected by Domestic Violence launched Helping Traumatized Children Learn, a policy agenda for the state. Schools are encouraged to adopt a “Flexible Framework” for trauma-sensitive practices and supports at the school-wide level. More specifically, schools are asked to incorporate an understanding of trauma into strategic planning, academic programming, staff training and reviewing and implementing school discipline policies to ensure they reflect an understanding of the role of trauma in student behaviors.<sup>68</sup> Ensuring that schools are trauma-sensitive is a collaborative process that involves participation on behalf of parents, teachers, administrators, and staff. Furthermore, to close the gap between government policy and what works in schools, these same stakeholders must advocate all levels of government to include holistic school-wide trauma-sensitivity when developing policy.<sup>69</sup>

### Meet Children’s Special Education Needs with Quality Services

Research indicates that children in foster care experience rates of emotional and behavioral problems impacting their education that are higher than their peers who have not been involved in the child welfare system.<sup>70</sup> Studies consistently document that significant percentages of children in foster care have special education needs and/or are receiving special education services,<sup>71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76</sup> with several studies showing that children and youth in foster care are between 2.5 and 3.5 times more likely to be receiving special education services than their non foster care peers.<sup>77, 78, 79</sup> Research also suggests that children in foster care who are in special education tend to change schools more frequently, be placed in more restrictive educational settings, and have poorer quality education plans than their non-foster care peers in special education.<sup>80</sup> Studies conducted with California caregivers and school liaisons indicate that children in foster care need more intensive educational and support services to succeed in school.<sup>81, 82</sup> While screening foster youth for special education needs has been shown to increase the chance that youth receive needed services, one study showed that 84% of foster youth whose screenings indicated potential special education needs did not receive related services within 9-12 months.<sup>83</sup>

**Promising Program:** A randomized trial of sixty-nine 16.5-17.5 year olds receiving both special education and foster care services found that 72% of youth involved in the *TAKE CHARGE* program had graduated high school or obtained a GED a year after the program compared to only 50% of the control group. The *TAKE CHARGE* intervention involves weekly coaching in self-determination and goal setting skills as well as quarterly mentoring by former foster youth.<sup>84</sup>

**Promising Programs:** A number of states, including Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maine, Missouri, and Vermont have developed statewide surrogate parent programs to ensure that children in foster care and other students are assigned surrogate parents on a prompt basis. These programs train and maintain a pool of surrogate parents statewide to represent children with disabilities in the special education process. Such statewide programs are particularly critical for children living in group homes and other residential settings who will not have a foster parent to represent them in the special education process.

### Support Students to Succeed and Graduate

Researchers have found that youth in foster care graduate at relatively low rates<sup>85, 86</sup> and are less likely to complete high school than their non-foster care peers.<sup>87, 88, 89, 90, 91</sup> This is troubling considering that high school graduates earn an average of \$8,500 more per year.<sup>92</sup> When foster youth do complete high school, they often graduate later than expected.<sup>93</sup> Studies consistently show that children in foster care tend to experience high levels of grade retention<sup>94, 95</sup> and are more likely to be retained than are their non-foster care peers.<sup>96, 97, 98, 99, 100</sup> Research shows that because of grade retention, children in foster care are more likely to be old for their grade and be undercredited compared to their peers who have not been involved with the child welfare system.<sup>101, 102</sup> These results on retention and being old for grade are important because both are strong predictors of dropping out of school.<sup>103</sup> Research also suggests that young people in foster care are less likely to graduate from high school if they experience repeated changes in their foster



care living arrangements.<sup>104, 105</sup> Youth in foster care are more likely to complete high school with a GED than with a high school diploma.<sup>106</sup> Youth of color in foster care, in particular, are less likely to have a high school diploma and more likely to have a GED than youth in foster care who are non-Hispanic white.<sup>107, 108, 109</sup> These findings are of concern because despite the fact that having a GED can improve the life chances of individuals who do not graduate from high school, a GED is not equivalent to a regular high school diploma when it comes to labor market outcomes and post-secondary educational attainment. Compared to high school graduates, individuals who have a GED earn less, on average, and are less likely to graduate from college.<sup>110</sup>

**Promising Policy:** Maine has enacted legislation to ensure that the goal of graduation does not remain beyond reach for children in foster care. This legislation assigns an educational liaison to each youth experiencing educational disruption and requires schools to develop an individualized graduation plan based on input from the student's prior school that identifies all credits and coursework to be completed. Schools must adopt a credit recognition policy that may include considering testing or written work to demonstrate competency and ensures that partial credits count towards graduation. The legislation also permits students to obtain a course waiver if a student has previously completed a course which is similar or demonstrates knowledge of the subject matter. The legislation furthermore provides access to credit recovery and remedial programs as well as access to a state-issued diploma for students who meet state graduation standards but are unable to obtain a school-district-issued high school diploma.<sup>111</sup>

**Promising Program:** The *Graduation Success* program provided by *Treehouse* in Washington state works with youth in care in middle and high school to create individualized plans for each youth in care to work towards academic success. *Graduation Success* monitors students' academics, behavior, and attendance while connecting students with academic resources such as tutoring, college counseling, and career preparation. *Graduation Success* also works with students facing obstacles common amongst youth in care such as transitioning between schools, retrieving course credit, and addressing special education needs. Of the 39 high school seniors involved in *Graduation Success* in the 2012-2013 school year, 24 graduated and eight others have an active plan for completing high school.<sup>112</sup>

## Support Transitions to College

Although studies indicate that youth in foster care have college aspirations,<sup>113, 114</sup> numerous studies have found lower college enrollment rates<sup>115, 116</sup> and lower college completion rates<sup>117, 118, 119, 120</sup> among young people who have been in foster care than among other young adults. While one study suggests that former foster youth who do enroll in college are confident about their academic abilities and optimistic about their chance of success in college, the same study indicates that former foster youth lag behind their college peers in academic performance.<sup>121</sup> Research suggests that enrollment in college is more likely when young people are allowed to remain in care until age 21<sup>122</sup> or receive mentoring services.<sup>123</sup> Research indicates that graduation from college is more likely when young people have had fewer foster care living arrangement moves.<sup>124</sup> A few studies have examined the relationship between postsecondary educational attainment and race/ethnicity among young people who had been in foster care and the findings have been mixed.<sup>125, 126, 127, 128</sup> Studies have found that financial difficulties, needing to work, and concerns about housing are among the barriers that prevent former foster youth from pursuing postsecondary education.<sup>129, 130</sup> Overcoming these barriers is important because increasing postsecondary educational attainment among youth in foster care would increase their average work-life earnings. With a four year degree, youth in foster care could expect to earn approximately \$481,000 more, on average, over the course of their work-life than if they had only a high school diploma. Even if they did not graduate with a degree, completing any college would increase their work-life earnings, on average, by \$129,000.<sup>131</sup>

**Promising Programs:** College enrollment during the first year after expected high school graduation among youth in foster care in Washington State rose from 16% in the high school years of 2005–06 to 20% in 2008–09. The researcher credits this improvement to a number of programs implemented or expanded in Washington State over the past decade that provide educational support to foster youth. These programs offer services such as educational advocacy and financial assistance such as scholarships designed to keep foster youth enrolled in school, increase the high school graduation rate, and improve college enrollment rates.<sup>132</sup>

**Promising Programs:** Campus support programs, which provide college students who aged out of foster care with an array of financial, academic, social/emotional, and logistical (e.g., housing) supports to help them stay in school and graduate, have the potential to increase postsecondary educational attainment among youth formerly in foster care.<sup>133</sup> Although additional research is needed to evaluate their impact on education outcomes, the number of such programs has grown rapidly in recent years, especially in California and Michigan.

**Promising Programs:** Some California counties, including Santa Clara and Fresno, are increasingly linking youth in foster care to college preparation programs such as AVID (Advancement Via Individualized Determination), which targets students in the academic middle who are likely to be the first member of their family to attend college.<sup>134</sup> Research has found that students who participate in AVID and AVID-like programs out-perform their peers on standardized tests, attendance, and credit accumulation. In addition, their grade point averages remained high despite enrollment in more rigorous courses.<sup>135</sup>

## Support Caregivers

From increasing learning to reducing problem behaviors at school, research shows that effective parenting techniques used by caregivers lead to improved academic outcomes for children and youth. Offering training to foster parents in effective tutoring and behavior improvement methods is an important next step in improving the quality of education for foster youth.<sup>136</sup>

**Promising Program:** A Belgium study of 49 children in foster care suggests that supportive parenting was associated with less problem behavior over a two year period, while increases in negative parenting strategies led to increased problem behavior over the same period.<sup>137</sup>

**Promising Program:** A study of youth in foster care in Ontario showed that training foster parents in tutoring methods led to significant gains in reading and math skills among 6-13 year olds. These positive effects were seen despite the fact that in only approximately half of all cases did the research team consider the foster parents' tutoring to strictly adhere to the intervention guidelines.<sup>138</sup>

## Conclusion

There is overwhelming evidence that children and youth in care are a vulnerable population in our public education system. The achievement gap between youth in care and the general population is staggering, with youth in care trailing their peers in standardized test performance, high school graduation rates, and likelihood of attaining post-secondary education. There is also a large evidence base to explain many of the factors that lead to this unacceptable disparity. What the field lacks are enough viable interventions and the capacity to evaluate new and promising solutions. While this document is not comprehensive in its scope, it highlights a number of promising interventions and programs from around the country that are improving educational outcomes for youth in foster care.

We are accustomed to thinking about the educational achievement of vulnerable children as an issue of the individual child. It is also a school-level and system-level issue, raising important questions around how to foster collaboration between the education and child welfare systems and design interventions to enhance the education of the most vulnerable children. To ensure that all youth in care are afforded opportunities to learn and develop the skills necessary to be successful in life, the field must continue to invest in developing the tools, materials, ideas, practices, and policies that support the work of the caseworkers, teachers, judges, lawyers, parents, and foster parents working to improve the educational experiences of these children. We must also invest in research so that we are building a body of evidence of the effectiveness of these approaches and holding ourselves accountable for improving the trajectories of children in foster care. The resources expended to improve educational outcomes for these children is a worthwhile investment in the improved life outcomes of foster youth that in turn strengthens our communities, economy, and society.

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## ENDNOTES

### Early Childhood Education

- <sup>1</sup> Data from the National Study of Child and Adolescent Well Being (NSCAW) was used to determine the extent of developmental problems for 268 children who were 1 to 5 years old and had been in foster care for approximately one year at the time the sample was drawn. Researchers found that 57% had a developmental problem in at least one of three domains: 47% had cognitive delays, 49% had language delays, and 52% had behavioral problems. Forty-two percent of the caregivers of these children reported that their child had been assessed for learning problems, special needs, or developmental disabilities, and 23% had been told that they had a learning problem, special need, or developmental disability. However, only half of the children identified as having learning problem, special need, or developmental disability had an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Thirty five percent of these children had been referred by their caseworker for an assessment to identify learning problems or developmental disabilities, 7% had been referred for special education services and 20% had been referred for services to address an emotional, behavioral or attention problem. At the same time, 39% of their caseworkers indicated that the child needed an assessment to identify learning problems or developmental disabilities, 22% indicated that the child needed services for an emotional, behavioral or attention problem and 14% indicated that the child needed special education services. In addition to the children for whom a referral had been made, another 2% to 3% were already receiving special education services or other services to address a developmental problem (Ward, et al., 2009).
- <sup>2</sup> One study that analyzed data for foster children ages two to 24 months old found that nearly six in ten were at high risk for neurological or cognitive developmental impairments (Vandivere, et al., 2003).
- <sup>3</sup> In a study of Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services, researchers found that over one third of the 3 to 5 year olds showed evidence of a possible developmental delay in at least one of the following domains: visual-motor adaptive, language and cognition, fine or gross motor, personal-social, or problem solving. Fourteen percent of the 3- to 5-year olds were identified as having behavior problems ranging from lack of focus to aggressiveness (Smithgall, et al., 2010).
- <sup>4</sup> An Oregon Social Learning Center study found that foster children entering kindergarten showed large pre-reading skills deficits, with average scores in the 30th to 40th percentile (Pears, Heywood, Kim, Fisher, 2011).
- <sup>5</sup> A study using data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being divided a sample of infants who entered foster care into three groups based on their living arrangement 66 months after the initial baseline survey of children in the study. The three groups were children who remained in foster care, children who were reunited with their birth parents, and children who were adopted. The group of children still in foster care at age 5-6 showed worse developmental outcomes than the other two groups for measures of social skills, math, and reading (Lloyd & Barth, 2011).
- <sup>6</sup> A study that analyzed data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well Being for 641 children who were less than six years old and in foster care when the first wave of data was collected found that had nearly half had scores on measures of cognitive, behavioral, and social skills that would make them eligible for early intervention services. However, their caregivers reported that just over one third of these children had received any type of service to address their developmental and behavior problems during the past year. Children at risk for delays in 2 or more domains were more likely to have received services than children at risk in 0 or 1, and children ages 3 to 5 were more than twice as likely to have received services as children ages 0 to 2 (Stahmer et al., 2005).
- <sup>7</sup> In a study of Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services, researchers found that while over one third of the 3 to 5 year olds showed evidence of a possible developmental delay in at least one domain, only 14% were receiving early intervention services when they entered foster care (Smithgall, et al., 2010).
- <sup>8</sup> The National Center for Education Statistics (2005) determined that 19 percent of children birth through age 5 not yet in kindergarten who were in families with a household income of \$25,000 or less participated on a weekly basis in Head Start or Early Head Start.
- <sup>9</sup> The National Study of Child and Adolescent Well Being indicates that only 6 percent of children in foster care under age 6 are enrolled in Head Start (Vandivere, 2003). Between 1991 and 2005, the percentage of all children ages three to four participating in a Head Start program remained fairly constant, ranging between 9 and 11 percent, and was at 9 percent in 2005 (Child Trends, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Shea, Weinberg, Zetlin, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Pears, Kim, Fisher, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis-Morrarty, Dozier, Bernard, Terracciano, Moore, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Procedures 314, Educational Services, February 27, 2007 – P.T. 2007.03, retrieved on Nov. 12, 2013 from [www.state.il.us/dcf/docs/ocfp/procedures\\_314.pdf](http://www.state.il.us/dcf/docs/ocfp/procedures_314.pdf).

### School Mobility

<sup>14</sup> Four focus groups conducted in California with representatives from child welfare, education and other agencies as well as foster youth and caregivers identified living arrangement instability resulting in frequent school changes as a major problem (Zeitlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> A focus group consisting of schools liaisons from one California school district identified the lack of stability in the lives of foster children, including school stability, as the most serious problem facing students in foster care (Zeitlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> More than one-third of the 17 and 18 year old foster youth in the Midwest Study had experienced five or more school changes related to their being in foster care (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Two thirds of the Casey National Alumni Study participants (ages 20 to 51) had attended three or more different elementary schools and one third reported having attended at least five. Nearly two-thirds of the Northwest Alumni Study participants (ages 20 to 33) had experienced seven or more school changes during their elementary and secondary school years (Pecora, et al., 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Foster youth who entered an educationally oriented residential facility between October 2001 and June 2005 and had been in foster care for an average of nearly seven years reported a mean of 6 school changes (after accounting for normative changes) while they were in care (Sullivan et al., 2010).

<sup>19</sup> A study of foster children in 7 states found that more than half changed schools upon entering foster care (data were not available for 15%) but more than two thirds remained in the same school during the six-month study period (data were not available for 4%) (National Foster Care Review Coalition, 2009 [data on school changes after foster care entry were only available for 28% of children]).

<sup>20</sup> In a New York City study, three quarters of the 8 to 21 year old foster youth who were interviewed in 2000 had not remained in their school of origin upon entering

foster care and almost two thirds had transferred to a new school in the middle of the school year (Advocates for Children of New York, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> PolicyLab's Children's Stability and Well-being (CSAW) study found that study participants in Philadelphia, on average, attended 2.7 different schools within the two year study period (Zorc, O'Reilly, Matone, Long, Watts, Rubin, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> A study by the Center for Social Services Research and the Institute for Evidence-Based Change showed that three-quarters of California foster youth changed schools the year that they entered foster care compared to only 21% of the comparison group (Frerer, Sosenko, Pellegrin, Manchik, Horowitz, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> New York City children who entered foster care between 1995 and 1999 were more than twice as likely to have changed schools during the year after entering foster care as compared to the year before (Conger & Rebeck, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> During the 2001 through 2003 school years, elementary school-aged foster children in the Chicago Public Schools were more than twice as likely to change schools as students who had no history of child welfare services involvement. School mobility was especially high among children who entered foster care during the school year, with over two-thirds experiencing a school change. Among those children who entered foster care in 2008 without first receiving in-home services, over one-half of the 6- to 10-year olds and almost two-thirds of the 11- to 17-year-olds had changed schools at least once within the past two years (excluding normative transitions from elementary to high school) (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> In a study conducted in San Mateo County, CA, between the 2003-04 and 2007-08 academic years, 17% of the dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who remained in their home or were returned to home while in the court's custody) left school midyear compared to only 2% of non-dependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> In a WestEd study of California foster youth, two-thirds of foster youth stayed in the same school over the course of a school year compared to 90% of non-foster youth from low socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, approximately 10% of foster youth went to three or more schools over the course of the school year as opposed to only 1% of non-foster youth from low socio-economic backgrounds (Barrat & Berliner, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> In one study, it was found that with each school change, a child falls further behind. This outcome was found even



after family socioeconomic status and other demographic factors associated with both academic achievement and school mobility were taken into account (Kerbow, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> A meta-analysis of the relationship between school mobility and school performance found negative effects on both reading and math achievement as well as positive effects on dropping out (Reynolds, Chen, & Herbers, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who had remained in their homes or been returned to homes while in the court's custody) in the San Mateo County study were more than twice as likely not to be proficient in the English language and more than twice as likely not to be proficient in math as their non-dependent peers. The dependent youth also earned, on average, 14 fewer credits per year (Castrechini, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Compared to Chicago Public Schools students who had no history or child welfare services involvement, foster children in grades 3 through 8 were, on average, more than one year behind in reading in 2003, although controlling for demographic and school characteristics reduced the gap to just over half a year. The foster children were also more likely to score in the bottom quartile on the reading portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), but 44% had also scored in the bottom quartile prior to their placement in foster care (Smithgall, et al., 2004).

<sup>31</sup> In 2000, Washington State foster children and youth in grades 3, 6 and 9 scored 16 to 20 percentile points below their 3rd, 6th and 9th grade peers who were not in foster care on state achievement tests for reading and math (Burley & Halpern, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> On average, the 17 and 18 year old Midwest Study participants were reading at a seventh grade level (Courtney, et al., 2004).

<sup>33</sup> A study by the Center for Social Services Research and the Institute for Evidence-Based Change showed that over a three-year period, California foster youth performed worse than a comparison group on standardized tests in math and English, and saw fewer gains over this period (Frerer, Sosenko, Pellegrin, Manchik, Horowitz, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> A California study conducted by WestEd showed that the standardized testing achievement gap between foster youth and the general population is similar to that seen with English language learners and students with disabilities. Furthermore, the test scores for foster youth were consistently worse than those of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Barrat & Berliner, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> A Chapin Hall study of children in Illinois who enter

foster care without first receiving in-home services found that among children ages 6 to 10 with at least one school change in the past 2 years, 36% were behind or underperforming compared to 56% of those with no school change. Of children ages 11 to 17, 56% were behind or underperforming as compared to 61% of children with no school changes. The researchers concluded that in many cases, children who were doing well before transferring continue to do well after transferring and those who were struggling continue to struggle (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Studies have found that highly mobile children score lower than stably housed children on standardized tests in reading, spelling, and math (Obradovic, et al., 2009; Rafferty, et al., 2004; Rubin, et al., 1996).

<sup>37</sup> A review of studies on school mobility and education success found that moves occurring in elementary school and high school were associated with more detrimental effects on reading and math achievement than moves in middle school (Reynolds, Chen & Herbers, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> South et al., 2007.

<sup>39</sup> *Promoting Development of Resilience Among Young People in Foster Care*, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Pecora et al., 2006; this analysis was limited to foster youth who were at least 17 years and 3 months old when they left care.

<sup>41</sup> H.R. 6893 (110th): *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*.

<sup>42</sup> To learn more details about states using these various strategies, see Legal Center for Foster Care and Education (2011). *Fostering Connections Implementation Toolkit*. [www.fostercareandeducation.org/portals/0/dmx/2013/02/file\\_20130221\\_140202\\_KrW\\_0.pdf](http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/portals/0/dmx/2013/02/file_20130221_140202_KrW_0.pdf)

## School Enrollment

<sup>43</sup> One-fifth of the 11 to 17 year olds of the Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services were either not enrolled in school or had been absent for so long that they were effectively not enrolled. Many of these youth had become disengaged from school and remained disengaged after entering foster care (Smithgall, et al., 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Approximately half of the caregivers of school-aged foster children in nine San Francisco Bay Area counties who were interviewed in 2000 had to enroll their foster child in school, and 12% of those caregivers had

experienced enrollment delays of at least two weeks (Choice, et al., 2001 [response rate; 28%]).

<sup>45</sup>Forty-two percent of the 8 to 21 year New York City foster youth who were interviewed in 2000 had experienced a delay in school enrollment while in foster care, and nearly half of those who experienced a delay attributed it to lost or misplaced school or immunization records (Advocates for Children in New York, 2000).

<sup>46</sup>More than three quarters of the California group home operators who were surveyed in 2000 reported that educational records for foster children in group homes are either “frequently” or “almost always” incomplete, 60% reported that the transfer of educational records is “frequently” or “almost always” delayed when youth change schools or group home placements, three quarters reported that youth recently placed in group homes experience long delays when attempting to enroll in public school, and more than two thirds reported that educational placement decisions were “frequently” or “almost always” compromised by incomplete school records (Parrish, et al. 2001 [response rate: 48%]).

<sup>47</sup>Failure to immediately enroll foster children in their new school when they change schools during the school year was a major problem identified by the four focus groups conducted in California with representatives from child welfare, education and other agencies as well as foster youth and caregivers (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006).

<sup>48</sup>H.R. 6893 (110th): *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*.

<sup>49</sup>S. 3472 (112th): *Uninterrupted Scholars Act (USA)*. (2012).

### School Attendance

<sup>50</sup>A Chapin Hall study of children in Illinois who enter foster care without first receiving in-home services found that about one-third (30.2%) of the 6- to 10-year old children entering foster care missed more than 10 days of school during the past semester or grading period. Some had missed as many as 40 days. Family problems were the principal reasons that children of this age group missed school. Poor school attendance was more prevalent than for younger children. Over half of the children ages 11 to 17 who were enrolled in school at the time they entered foster care had experienced excessive absences (10 days or more) during the previous semester or grading period. The principal reasons for school absences were family problems, running away and hospitalizations (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

<sup>51</sup>The CSAW study in Philadelphia showed that students had an average 31% daily absence rate in the two months leading up to placement in foster care (Zorc, O’Reilly,

Matone, Long, Watts, Rubin, 2013).

<sup>52</sup>A study in San Mateo County, California found that the average absence rate for children and youth in foster care was 12% compared to only 6% for non-dependent youth. The percentage leaving school mid-year was 17% for children and youth in foster care compared to only 2% for non-dependent youth (Castrechini, 2009).

<sup>53</sup>Children participating in the CSAW study were absent for twice as many days during the school year as the overall student body (Zorc, O’Reilly, Matone, Long, Watts, Rubin, 2013).

<sup>54</sup>One study found a small positive relationship between school transfers and attendance rates for children entering foster care. In this study, the attendance rates of many of the children improved after entry to care. The greatest gains were seen in children who were younger, who remained in care for at least an entire semester after placement, children with stable placements, children placed with foster families or kinship families, and those who entered care as a result of abuse or neglect. Declines or small gains in attendance were seen with children with short stay and those who stayed longer. Higher attendance rates increased math and reading scores, and school transfers had no effect on reading scores and depressed math scores slightly (Conger & Rebeck, 2001).

<sup>55</sup>Among participants in the CSAW study, children who found permanent placement within 45 days of entering foster care were absent less than other foster children. Children with unstable placements after nine months in care were absent 38% more than children who found permanent placement within 45 days (Zorc, O’Reilly, Matone, Long, Watts, Rubin, 2013).

<sup>56</sup>One study found that children and youth in congregate care entered care with a far lower attendance rate prior to placement in foster care than children in kinship homes prior to placement (69 percent compared to 80 percent) and that attendance rate for children in congregate care decreased by almost 5 percentage points by the semester after foster care placement (Conger & Rebeck, 2001).

<sup>57</sup>A recent study of children placed in treatment foster care (designed for children in foster care with intensive mental, emotional, behavioral, or medical needs) found that these children had attendance rates of at least 90% over the course of two years but the proportion of children with school attendance below 90% for two consecutive years climbed significantly at around age 13. Children in independent living programs had lower attendance ratios than children in other types of services (Larson, 2010).

<sup>58</sup>Skakalski, Murphy, Whitehill (2013).

## School Behavior Problems

<sup>59</sup>In a study of Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services found that nearly half of the 6 to 10 year olds demonstrated behaviors that were deemed problematic by the school and that two-thirds of the 11 to 17 year olds exhibited problem behaviors, received disciplinary action, or both (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

<sup>60</sup>During the 2003-2004 academic year, foster children and youth in the Chicago Public Schools were more than twice as likely as students who had no history of child welfare services involvement to have experienced at least one disciplinary code infraction as students who had no history of child welfare services involvement. Moreover, just over half of the foster youth ages 11 and older and 70% of the foster children ages 6 to 10 who experienced a disciplinary code infraction were involved in at least one violent offense (e.g., fighting, bullying, or battery (Smithgall, et al., 2005).

<sup>61</sup>According to their self-reports, nearly three quarters of the 15- to 19-year old foster youth in a suburban Missouri county who had been referred for independent living preparation had been suspended, 16% had been expelled, 29% had been involved in a physical fight with other students and 28% had been involved in a verbal fight with a teacher since they entered 7th grade (McMillen et al., 2003).

<sup>62</sup>The 17- and 18-year old Midwest Study participants were more than twice as likely to report having been given an out-of-school suspension and over three times more likely to report having been expelled than a nationally representative sample of 17 and 18 year olds (Courtney, et al., 2004).

<sup>63</sup>A study in San Mateo County found that close to one-third of youth in foster care for more than 2 years (31.8%) had experienced a suspension and 4.1% of these youth had been expelled. Children in foster care for shorter (less than 6 months) and longer (more than 2 years) periods of time were more likely to be suspended or expelled (Castrechini, 2009).

<sup>64</sup>Twelve percent of a random sample of Los Angeles County foster children ages 6 to 12 had been suspended and 3% had been expelled. Just over one third of the foster children were rated by their teachers as having classroom behavior problems in the clinical range, only 16% of the foster children who rated by their teachers as having behavior problems were also rated as having behavior problems by their foster parent (Zima, et al., 2000).

<sup>65</sup>One focus group consisting of educational advocates and another consisting of school liaisons, all from California, suggested that failure to adequately address the needs of

foster children led to emotional and behavior problems with which schools do not know how cope (Zeitlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2010).

<sup>66</sup>Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, Koss, & Marks (1998).

<sup>67</sup>Copeland, Keeler, Angold, & Costello (2007).

<sup>68</sup>Cole, O'Brien, Gadd, Ristuccia, Wallace, & Gregory (2005).

<sup>69</sup>Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia (2013).

## Special Education

<sup>70</sup>A study of special education students in one large city and 32 county school districts were over three times more likely to be diagnosed with an emotional disturbance if they had a history of foster care placement than children who were poor but had no child welfare services involvement (Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2009).

<sup>71</sup>Just over half of the 11 to 14 year old foster youth and 45% of the 15 to 18 year old foster youth in Lucas County (Toledo), Ohio were identified as having special education needs. Just under one fifth of the 5 to 10 year olds were identified as having special education needs but data were missing for nearly one third (Theiss, 2010).

<sup>72</sup>Though limited in scope, a study of foster children in 7 states found that two-thirds of the children with special education needs (data were not available for 10%) were receiving special education services (National Foster Care Review Coalition, 2010).

<sup>73</sup>Nearly half of California children in foster care who were placed in group homes or licensed children's institutions (LCI) in 1999 had a special education classification, with emotional disturbance and learning disabilities being the most common. Moreover, these special education students were over 10 times more likely to be enrolled in non-public schools special education foster children who were not in group homes or LCIs. Some of this difference can be explained by the fact that more than half of the latter were diagnosed with a learning disability and fewer than one in ten were diagnosed with an emotional disturbance (Parrish, et al., 2001).

<sup>74</sup>Nearly half of the 17 and 18 year old Midwest Study participants reported that they had ever been placed in a special education class (Courtney, et al., 2004). Thirty-eight percent of the Casey National Alumni Study participants reported that they had been enrolled in a special education class (Pecora, et al., 2006).

<sup>75</sup>A study of the educational experiences of foster youth who were, on average, 17.5 years old and had been in

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

<sup>76</sup>More than one third of the Bay Area caregivers of school-aged foster children in who were interviewed in 2000 reported that their foster child was receiving special education services. However, over two thirds identified their foster child as having some type of special need, with behavioral and emotional problems, learning disabilities, and medical or health problems being the most common (Choice, et al., 2001; the response rate for the telephone survey was only 28%).

<sup>77</sup>Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who had remained in their homes or been returned to homes while in the court's custody) in the San Mateo County study were 2.5 times more likely to be receiving special education services as non-dependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

<sup>78</sup>In 2000, Washington State foster children in grades 3, 6 and 9 were two and a half to three times more likely to be enrolled in special education programs than the average 3rd, 6th and 9th grader (Burley & Halpern, 2001).

<sup>79</sup>In 2003, foster children in the Chicago Public Schools were three and a half times more likely to have a special education classification than students in grades one through eight who had no history of child welfare services involvement even after controlling for demographic and school characteristics. Moreover, foster children who had a special education classification were much more likely than students with a special education classification but no history of child welfare services involvement to be classified as having an emotional or behavioral disorder (Smithgall, et al., 2004).

<sup>80</sup>Children in foster care and in special education in a large urban Oregon school district changed schools more frequently and were in more restrictive settings than special education students who were not in foster care. Moreover, the Individualized Education Plans of the foster youth were of poorer quality and less likely to include goals related to postsecondary education or to the development of independent living skills than those of special education students not in foster care. The foster youth were also less likely than other special education students to have an advocate present during their transition planning meetings (Geenen & Powers, 2006).

<sup>81</sup>Two focus groups consisting of California foster parents and relative caregivers identified the failure of schools to acknowledge their children's needs for services to address learning or behavior problems and to provide their children with more intensive supports as ongoing

problems (Zetlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2010).

<sup>82</sup>California school liaisons who participated in the focus group suggested that some of the problems that resulted in foster children being referred for special education services may be due to the emotional trauma or frequent school changes they have experienced rather than to learning disabilities (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2010).

<sup>83</sup>Petrenko, Culhane, Garrido, Taussig, 2011.

<sup>84</sup>Powers, Geenen, Powers, Pommier-Satya, Turner, Dalton, Drummond, Swank, 2012.

### High School Completion

<sup>85</sup>Just over one third of Washington State foster youth who exited care at age 18 or older between January and June 2000 had a high school diploma or GED (Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, 2001).

<sup>86</sup>A study of the educational experiences of Illinois foster youth who were, on average, 17.5 years old and had been in foster care for an average of 8 years found that one fifth had dropped out of school (Shinn, 2003; the survey response rate, however, was only 38%).

<sup>87</sup>Based on a review of studies conducted between 1995 and 2005, Wolanin (2005) estimated that about half of foster youth complete high school by age 18 compared to 70% of youth in the general population and that GED completion rates for youth in foster care ranged between 5% and 29%.

<sup>88</sup>Washington State 11th graders who had a history of foster care placement and enrolled in 12th grade the following year were one third less likely to complete high school at the end of that 12th grade year than their peers who had no foster care history (Burley & Halpern, 2001).

<sup>89</sup>Fourteen year old Chicago Public Schools students who were in foster care in September 1998 were half as likely to have graduated from high school five years later as their peers who had no history of child welfare services involvement. In addition, the likelihood of dropping out was nearly twice as high for the youth in foster care, even after controlling for demographic characteristics, school characteristics and academic performance in elementary school (Smithgall, et al., 2004).

<sup>90</sup>By age 21, 77% of the Midwest Study participants had a high school diploma or GED compared to 89% of 21 year olds in a nationally representative sample (Courtney, et al., 2007).

<sup>91</sup>A California study conducted by WestEd shows that the graduation rate for 12th-grade foster youth was 58% compared to 84% for all 12th-grade students in the state.



The graduation rate for foster youth is the lowest of any at-risk group examined in the study (Barrat & Berliner, 2013).

<sup>92</sup> This report calculated that raising the graduation rate of one year's cohort of youth aging out of foster care to the national average would result in increased earnings and tax revenues totaling over \$2 billion and an estimated impact in excess of \$61,000,000 in the first year alone. (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2013).

<sup>93</sup> Twelve percent of Washington State students who had been in foster care at any time after their 16th birthday and were expected to graduate at the end of the 2004-05 to 2006-07 school years graduated from high school one year later than expected (Burley, 2009).

<sup>94</sup> Nearly 45% of the 8 to 21 year children and youth in foster care in New York City public schools who were interviewed in 2000 reported being retained at least once (Advocates for Children, 2000).

<sup>95</sup> More than one third of the Casey National Alumni Study participants reported that they had repeated a grade (Pecora, et al., 2006).

<sup>96</sup> Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who had remained in their homes or been returned to homes while in the court's custody) in the San Mateo County study were twice as likely to be retained as non-dependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

<sup>97</sup> Between 2000 and 2003, elementary school-aged foster children in the Chicago Public Schools were retained at nearly twice the rate as students with no history of child welfare services involvement (Smithgall, et al, 2004).

<sup>98</sup> In 2000, children in foster care in Washington State were, on average, about twice as likely as their 3rd, 6th, and 9th grade peers who were not in foster care to have been in the same grade for more than one year (Burley & Halpern, 2001).

<sup>99</sup> Thirteen percent of a random sample of Los Angeles County foster children ages 6 to 12 who were in care between July 1996 and March 1998 had repeated at least one grade (Zima, et al., 2000).

<sup>100</sup> The 17 and 18 year old Midwest Study participants were 1.7 times more likely to report that they had repeated a grade than a nationally representative sample of 17 and 18 year olds (Courtney, et al., 2004).

<sup>101</sup> In 2003, foster children in the Chicago Public Schools were nearly twice as likely to be old for grade as third through eighth graders with no history of children welfare services involvement even after controlling for

demographic and school characteristics (Smithgall, et al., 2004).

<sup>102</sup> Almost half of the foster youth who entered an educationally oriented residential facility between October 2001 and June 2005 were, based on their age, behind their expected grade in school and nearly one third reported having repeated a class due to failing grades (Sullivan et al., 2010).

<sup>103</sup> Alexander, Entwistle & Kabbani, 2001; Jimerson, 2001.

<sup>104</sup> The odds of completing high school were 1.8 times higher for foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study if they had experienced one fewer placement change per year and 3.1 times higher if they had experienced two fewer placement changes per year (Pecora et al., 2006; this analysis was limited to foster youth who were at least 17 years and 3 months old when they left care).

<sup>105</sup> Researchers reported that the odds of graduating from high school among foster care alumni in the Northwest Study were 4.6 times higher if they had experienced a low rate of placement change (i.e., less than .5 per year) and 2.7 times higher if they had experienced a moderate rate of placement change (i.e., .50 to .99 per year) than if they had experienced a high rate of placement change (i.e., at least 1 per year). In addition, their odds of graduating from high school were twice as high if they had experienced 6 or fewer school changes than if they had experienced 10 or more (Pecora et al., 2009).

<sup>106</sup> The rate of high school completion for foster care alumni in both the Northwest Alumni Study and the Casey National Alumni Study was comparable to the 2008 high school completion rate of 85% among 18 to 24 year olds in the general population. However, 29% of the Northwest Alumni Study participants and 19% of the Casey National Alumni Study completed high school with a GED rather than a high school diploma compared to 6% of 18 to 24 year olds in the general population (Pecora, et al, 2005; Pecora, et al., 2006).

<sup>107</sup> American Indian/Alaskan Native foster care alumni were about as likely to complete high school as non-Hispanic White alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study but were significantly less likely to have a high school diploma and significantly more likely to have a GED (O'Brien, et al., 2010).

<sup>108</sup> Although the African American foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study were about as likely to have completed high school as their non-Hispanic White counterparts, they were significantly less likely to have completed high school with a regular diploma (Harris, et



al., 2009).

<sup>109</sup> Likewise, African American foster care alumni in the Northwest Study were significantly more likely to have completed high school than their non-Hispanic White counterparts, but significantly less likely to have a high school diploma (Dworsky, et al., 2010).

<sup>110</sup> Boesel, Alsalam, & Smith, 1998; Heckman, Humphries, Mader, 2010; Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Grubb, 1999; Smith, 2003.

<sup>111</sup> Maine Public Law Chapter 451, H.P. 1296 – L.D. 1860. An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Task Force To Engage Maine’s Youth Regarding Successful School Completion. Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §257, sub-§4.

<sup>112</sup> Treehouse, *Agency-Wide 2012-2013 School Year Report*.

### Post Secondary Education

<sup>113</sup> Eighty four percent of the 17 and 18 year old Midwest Study participants aspired to complete some college and 71 percent aspired to graduate (Courtney, et al., 2004).

<sup>114</sup> Seventy percent of the 15 to 19 year old foster youth in Missouri who had been referred for independent living preparation aspired to attend college (McMillan et al., 2003).

<sup>115</sup> Based on a review of studies from 1995 through 2000, Wolanin (2005) estimated that approximately 20% of foster youth who graduate from high school attend college compared to 60% of high school graduates in the general population.

<sup>116</sup> Only 11% of the youth in foster care in Washington State who were in the high school classes of 2006 and 2007 were enrolled in college during both the first and second year after expected high school graduation. By comparison, 42% of Washington State high school students in the class of 2006 enrolled in college during the first year after they were expected to graduate from high school and 35% were enrolled in college during both the first and second year after graduating from high school (Burley, 2009).

<sup>117</sup> Forty three percent of foster care alumni in the Northwest Alumni Study had completed any postsecondary education and almost half of the foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study participants had completed at least some college. However, only 2% of the former and 9% of the latter had at least a bachelor’s degree (Pecora, et al., 2006; Pecora, et al., 2005).

<sup>118</sup> 47% of participants in the Midwest study had completed at least one year of college at age 26, but only 8% had

obtained a postsecondary degree. By comparison, 46% of 26 year olds in the nationally representative National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health sample had obtained a two or four year degree. (Courtney et al., 2011).

<sup>119</sup> Foster care alumni who entered postsecondary education in 1995 and were first-time undergraduates, were as likely to attend four-year institutions as other first time undergraduates and more likely to be enrolled fulltime. However, they were half as likely to have earned a degree or certificate during the six-year study period as their non-foster peers (Davis, 2006).

<sup>120</sup> One study using administrative data from Michigan State University showed that former foster youth were more likely to drop out of college compared to a comparison group of youth who were never in foster care but were from low-income backgrounds and were first generation college students. The study showed that 34% of former foster youth dropped out before earning a degree compared to 18% for the comparison group (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, Damashek, 2011).

<sup>121</sup> In this exploratory cross-sectional survey, 81 former foster youths’ readiness for college were measured as well as their first semester academic performance (Unrau, Font, Rawls, 2011).

<sup>122</sup> Midwest Study participants from Illinois, who were allowed to remain in foster care until age 21, were 1.7 times more likely to have completed at least one year of college by age 23 or 24 than their counterparts from Iowa and Wisconsin, where that option did not exist. However, the Illinois study participants were no more likely to have a college degree (Courtney et al., 2010).

<sup>123</sup> The odds of enrolling in college were 4.6 times higher for Washington State foster youth who participated in a mentoring program than for non-mentored peers with similar characteristics even after controlling for other factors (Burley, 2009).

<sup>124</sup> The odds of graduating from college were 3.7 times higher for foster care alumni in the Northwest Study if they had experienced 6 or fewer school changes than if they had experienced 10 or more (Pecora, et al., 2009).

<sup>125</sup> American Indian/Alaskan Native foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study were about as likely as their non-Hispanic White counterparts to have any postsecondary education, they were significantly less likely to have graduated from college (O’Brien, et al., 2010).

<sup>126</sup> In the Casey National Alumni Study, there were no significant differences in postsecondary educational outcomes between the non-Hispanic White and African American alumni (O’Brien, et al., 2010).

- <sup>127</sup> African American foster care alumni in the Northwest Study were as likely to have completed any college as their non-Hispanic white counterparts (Pecora, et al., 2009).
- <sup>128</sup> Although African American Midwest Study participants were significantly more likely to have attended college and to have completed at least one year of college by age 21 than their non-Hispanic white counterparts, only the difference in college attendance was statistically significant (Courtney et al., 2010).
- <sup>129</sup> A study of former foster youth participating in 8 campus support programs in California and Washington State found that although former foster youth clearly appreciated the concrete services and supports that they received, such as having someone to turn to or someone who believed in them and feeling understood or part of a family, it was the less tangible benefits that they valued most. Moreover, some of the challenges participants reported were not unlike those faced by many young people from low income families when they go away to school but others, particularly their concerns about having a stable place to live, were probably related to their status as former foster youth (Dworsky & Perez, 2010).
- <sup>130</sup> A study examining the testimony of forty-three high school and college age foster youth in front of panels of policymakers in Michigan identified a lack of supportive

relationships with caring adults as the most frequently cited impediment to graduating from high school or applying to/attending college (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, Fogarty, 2012).

<sup>131</sup> Peters et al., 2010.

<sup>132</sup> Burley, 2009

<sup>133</sup> Dworsky & Perez, 2009.

<sup>134</sup> Sommer, Wu, & Mauldon, 2009.

<sup>135</sup> Watt, Yanez, & Cossio, 2002.

### Caregiver Support

<sup>136</sup> A Canadian research team determined that differences in out-of-home placements in Ontario (including the level of academic support provided in the placement) accounted for 15% of the variation among the school performance of foster children. The researchers suggest that promoting effective tutoring practices amongst caregivers could be a promising intervention based on the results of this study (Cheung, Lwin, Jenkins, 2012).

<sup>137</sup> Vanderfaellie, Van Holen, Vanschoonlandt, Robberechts, Stroobants, 2012.

<sup>138</sup> Flynn, Marquis, Paquet, Peeke, 2011.

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