

# PRACTICE NOTES

For North Carolina's Child Welfare Workers

From the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program

Volume 11, Number 4  
September 2006

*Children's Services Practice Notes* is a publication for child welfare workers produced four times a year by the North Carolina Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the Jordan Institute for Families and the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

*In summarizing recent research, we try to give you new ideas for refining your practice. However, this publication is not intended to replace child welfare training, regular supervision, or peer consultation—only to enhance them.*

### Let us hear from you!

To comment about something that appears in this or any other issue of *Children's Services Practice Notes*, please send your comments to:

John McMahon  
Jordan Institute for Families  
School of Social Work  
UNC-Chapel Hill  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550  
johnmcmahon@mindspring.com

### Newsletter Staff

Lane Cooke, MSW, Advisor  
John McMahon, MA, Writer  
Aileen Hays, MSW, Writer

### Visit Our Website

To read this or past issues of *Practice Notes* online, go to <[www.practicenotes.org](http://www.practicenotes.org)>.

References for the articles in this issue can be found at <[www.practicenotes.org](http://www.practicenotes.org)>

## PROMOTING SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR CHILDREN INVOLVED WITH THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

"Of all the difficulties foster children experience, low academic achievement may have the most serious consequences for their futures." —*Finkelstein et al., 2002*

\*\*\*\*\*

If you're a child welfare worker, you may be surprised by this statement. If you've seen with your own eyes how powerfully some children are affected by abuse and neglect, you may even be tempted to dismiss this statement as exaggeration or just plain wrong.

Before you jump to conclusions, however, consider what we know on the subject. For example, there is a mountain of evidence to support the idea that, as a group, children involved with the child welfare system—especially those in foster care—have a particularly hard time in school. Numerous findings from research also support the idea that academic failure can have severe and far-reaching consequences for any child. For example, school failure has been linked to:

- Poverty in later life
- Early involvement in sexual intercourse and increased risk of STDs
- Higher health care costs, mortality rates, and incidence of suicide
- More frequent admissions to state mental hospitals
- Increased use of social services, including economic assistance

In addition, evidence suggests that school failure hurts society as a whole by contributing to increased crime, reduced political participation, loss of national income and tax revenues, and general waste of human potential (Rosenfeld & Richman, 2004; Richman & Bowen, 1997).

### OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Through law and mechanisms such as the Child and Family Services Reviews, the federal government makes it clear that as part of their efforts to ensure child well-being, child welfare agencies must meet the educational needs of the children they serve.

Unfortunately, this responsibility is sometimes overlooked. When Finkelstein and her colleagues (2002) interviewed key players in the lives of foster children, the child welfare workers they spoke with admitted they focus more on crises than on children's progress in school.

That's not surprising. From its very beginnings, the primary focus of our profession has been on protecting children from abuse and neglect. It is a difficult, demanding task that dominates the culture of child welfare, threatening to overshadow the less familiar job of promoting school success. Other factors, including high caseloads, worker turnover, and mistrust between schools and child welfare agencies can further complicate matters.

To support you as you seek to help children succeed in school, this issue of *Practice Notes* presents information about the school-related needs of children involved with the child welfare system and educational strategies and resources. It also features advice from a school social worker on how to forge and maintain successful partnerships with schools. ♦



**What can I do to help the kids I serve succeed in school?**

Photo: Illustration

## THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF KIDS IN FOSTER CARE

"As a group, foster kids test far behind their peers, are more likely to drop out, repeat grades, be in special-ed classes, and be suspended or expelled." —Paulson, 2005

\*\*\*\*\*

The first thing you should know about the educational needs of children involved with the child welfare system, especially those in foster care, is that they often struggle in school. Common areas of difficulty and concern include the following.

**Poor academic performance.** In general, children and youth in foster care get lower grades and score lower on standardized tests than their peers (Christian, 2004). For example, Blome (1997) found that most youth in foster care receive "C" grades, compared to control groups, which receive a mix of "B" and "C" grades. In another study, youth in foster care who had completed the 10th or 11th grades were reading, on average, at only a seventh grade level (Courtney, et al., 2004).

**Inappropriate special education services and placement.** Children involved with the child welfare system may be at risk either for being *underserved* or *overserved* by special education programs. Some who need special education services are overlooked. Others, because of temporary behavioral problems caused by placement disruptions or entry into care, receive special education services even though they don't really need them (McNaught, 2005; Courtney et al., 2004).

At least 30% to 41% of children and youth in care receive special education services (Yu, 2003). Once they enter special education classes, children in foster care seldom return to the regular classroom. One study found that only 2% of children in out-of-home care in special education classes ever return to the regular

classroom, compared to 10% of children not in foster care (Carter, 2002).

**Behavior problems in school** may indicate that a child is disengaged from academics (Alexander et al., 2001). Kids in care have more school behavior problems and are much more likely to be classified as behaviorally disturbed than other children, more so even than other children involved with child protective services (Smithgall et al., 2005).

**High rates of suspensions and expulsions.** Compared to their non-foster care peers, children and youth in foster care are suspended, expelled, and subject to other school disciplinary actions at very high rates. Smithgall and colleagues (2005) found that nearly 70% of children in foster care in Chicago had been suspended; 18% had been expelled.

**Repeating grades.** In her review of the research literature, Yu (2003) found that 26% to 40% of youth in care repeat one or more grades.

One study found that students in foster care who are NOT identified as educationally at risk are actually the most likely to be held back (Rosenfeld & Richman, 2004). This supports the idea that although children with serious problems are likely to get help, children struggling at a marginal level often fail to get the support they need (CASCW, 2000).

**Lower graduation rates.** Most studies have found that children in foster care graduate from high school at a rate at least 10 percentage points below the graduation rate of comparison students (Conger & Rebeck, 2001). In Chicago's public schools, 32% of teens in foster care graduate, compared with 59% for their non-foster peers (Smithgall, et al. 2004).

**Low rates of postsecondary education.** Most youth in foster care have high educational aspirations. When researchers interviewed teens

### WHAT DO KIDS IN FOSTER CARE SAY?

In New York City, 3,026 foster care alumni were interviewed about their experiences in foster care. More than half said that they did not feel prepared to support themselves after leaving care.

An equal number said they were not satisfied with the quality of the education they received while in out-of-home care.

Source: Stukes Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004.



Photo Illustration

in care at age 17 and 18 as they prepared to leave the child welfare system, most said they hoped and expected to graduate from college eventually (Courtney, et al., 2004).

Few do. Although interviews with foster care "alumni" found that four in ten (42.7%) received some education beyond high school, only one in five (21.9%) alumni age 25 and older had completed a vocational degree. Alumni obtained a bachelor's or higher degree at a rate that was dramatically lower than that of the general population: 2.7% for alumni versus 24% for the general population (Pecora et al., 2005).

### CONSEQUENCES

Researchers recently examined outcomes for 659 young adults who had been placed in family foster care as children. They found that 20% were unemployed, 33% lived at or below poverty rate, 33% had no health insurance, and 22% had been homeless for at least one night (Pecora et al., 2005). It seems reasonable to assume that the kind of educational difficulties described above contribute in some way to these negative long-term outcomes. ♦

# HOW WELL DOES NC MEET THE NEEDS OF KIDS IN CARE?

How do we fare when it comes to meeting the educational needs of children in foster care? Before we can answer this question we must consider some key information.

## KEY FACTS ABOUT KIDS IN CARE IN NC

**Most are in school.** According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources (2005), approximately two of every three children in foster care in our state on Sept. 30, 2002 were school-aged. The box below provides more detailed information.

**Most are in care longer than one school year.** On Sept. 30, 2002 the median length of stay in foster care for children in North Carolina was 14 months. Although this average compares favorably with length of stay in out-of-home placement in many other states, most children in foster care in North Carolina are still in care for more than one academic year. This means that even if there are no placement-related school transfers, child welfare workers, foster parents, and others advocating on behalf of the child still need to help the child negotiate the move from one teacher or grade to another.

**Many face multiple placements.** In 2002, 42.3% of children in foster care in our state had 3 or more placements. Many experts believe that multiple placements hurt children’s academic progress in at least two ways: (1) by causing stress and disruption in the child’s home life, and (2) by requiring transfers from one school to another, often in the middle of the school year.

## MEASURES OF OUR PERFORMANCE

**Federal Child and Family Services Review.** In 2001 federal reviewers found our state was “not in substantial conformity” with federal performance standards when it came to meeting the educational needs of foster children. In particular, reviewers were concerned that:

- Foster parents were often more involved and knowledgeable about children’s educational needs than were child welfare workers

- Information sharing with schools was sometimes poor
  - There was inconsistent screening for educational needs and communication with schools for in-home cases
- Federal reviewers were also concerned because only about half of the teenagers eligible for Independent Living services—some of which are educational in nature—were actually offered or received these services.

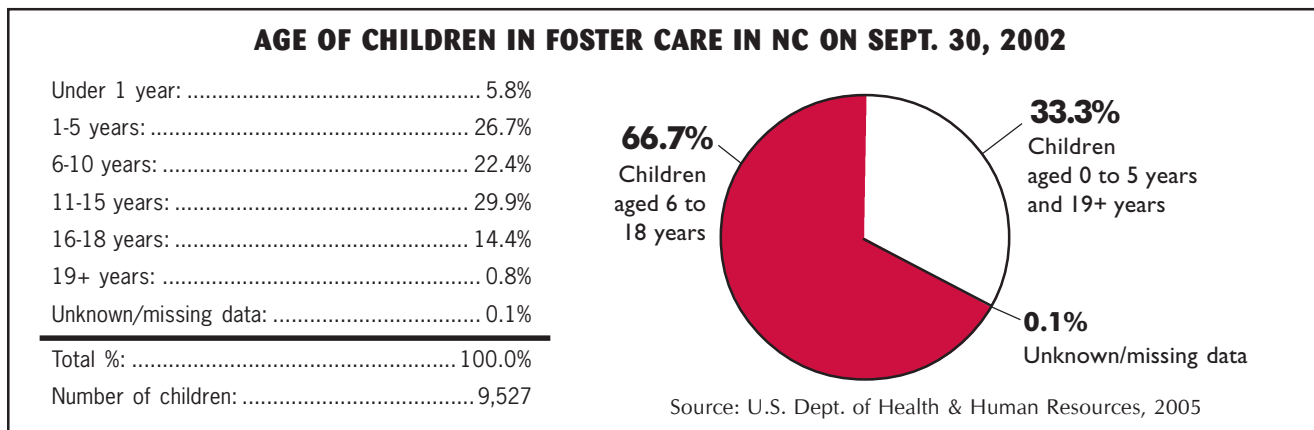
Since 2001 North Carolina has acted to rectify its performance in the area of education and other areas that were in nonconformity on the federal review. For example, it adopted the use of structured decision making tools, modified its approach to Independent Living services by creating the LINKS program, and launched the Multiple Response System (MRS) reform effort. These activities improved our performance and satisfied federal reviewers: our state exited federal Program Improvement status in June 2005.

**County-Level Reviews.** Individual county departments of social services also seem to be doing a good job around education. According to a report by the NC Division of Social Services, 94% of the 81 counties reviewed between December 2003 and June 2005 successfully ensured that children involved with the child welfare system received appropriate services to meet their educational needs (NCDSS, 2005).

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information considered here, two conclusions seem warranted. First, it seems fair to say that since 2001 North Carolina’s child welfare system has made some improvement in its ability to meet the educational needs of children.

Second, given what we know about length of stay, placement stability, and the extent to which many children in foster care struggle in school, there is no room for complacency. ♦



# WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP CHILDREN SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

Why do children involved with the child welfare system struggle in school and what can you (and your agency) do about it? An important first step is to understand why so many children involved with the child welfare system struggle in school.

## UNDERSTAND ROOT CAUSES

Sometimes factors that contribute to school difficulties are more or less beyond the control of child welfare agencies. Examples include:

**Child maltreatment.** Because of the abuse, neglect, and other stresses to which they have been exposed, many children in foster care are at great risk of developing physical, emotional, and behavioral disorders that interfere with learning (Christian, 2004; Finkelstein, 2002).

**School difficulties prior to placement.** Although many children in foster care have what it takes to succeed academically, Chapin Hall's study of children in foster care found that "a disproportionate number enter school with significant delays and never catch up." They found that in 2002 and 2003 almost 66% of the third through ninth graders in foster care in Chicago's public schools were either old for their grade when they entered care or scored well below their peers in reading (Courtney et al., 2004).

**Stress during placement.** Many children experience difficulty focusing due to grief and loss issues caused by separation from parents and other family members. Uncertainty about their current living situations and their futures can also negatively impact children's ability to concentrate on their school work (Noble, 2003).

In addition to these causes, there are many practice-

and system-level barriers that interfere with the school success of children in care. The rest of this article suggests ways you can overcome these obstacles.

## TAKE OWNERSHIP

Sometimes child welfare workers are unsure what is expected of them when it comes to the schooling of children in foster care. This uncertainty can cause confusion and miscommunication among teachers, foster parents, and other people concerned with the child's education, which in turn can negatively impact the child's learning.

Although there are a lot of details to master in this area of practice (IEPs and how they work, communicating with foster parents, birth parents, and teachers), the basic role and status of child welfare workers is easy to understand: their job is to help their agencies meet the educational needs of the children they serve.

To discharge this responsibility, workers and agencies must continually approach children's education as parents would, inquiring about school progress at every opportunity and regularly asking, "Are we doing all that can be done to help this child succeed in school?"

## PARTNER WITH SCHOOLS

Altshuler (2003) characterizes the relationship between schools and child welfare agencies as being one of "historical mistrust." Although it is by no means universal, poor communication and coordination between the child welfare agencies and schools can significantly

cont. p. 5



Photo illustration

**Preventing placement disruption is one way to promote school success.**

## SCHOOLS, CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES, AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality and information sharing are common points of friction between child welfare agencies and schools. Often the problem is a lack of understanding. Some educators feel caseworkers withhold vital information. Some caseworkers feel schools expect them to disclose confidential, nonessential information (Altshuler, 2003). In both cases, frustration results.

North Carolina's confidentiality laws (NCGS § 7B-302, 7B-2901, and 108A-80) do limit what DSS agencies can share with others about the children and families they serve. In general, these laws are a good thing because they give people the confidence to share sensitive, personal information with child welfare staff. This helps us protect children.

However, confidentiality laws **do not** prohibit child welfare agencies from telling teachers and other school personnel certain things—for example, that a child has entered foster care. By providing teachers with pertinent details, child wel-

fare workers can help them understand and respond appropriately to a child's behavioral and academic difficulties.

The solution to the confidentiality "problem" is to face it head on. Child welfare workers and agencies should talk regularly with school personnel about the type of information DSS can share, when DSS can share that information, and any restrictions (e.g., students and teachers who do not have responsibility for teaching the child do not need to know he or she is in foster care). For clarity and consistency, it can be helpful to put this information down in writing.

Mutual understanding about confidentiality helps pave the way for the trusting, collaborative relationships that caseworkers and educators need if they are to work together to help children involved with child welfare.



Photo illustration



interfere with children's academic progress. Frequent points of confusion and friction include confidentiality and the question of who has the authority to make educational decisions for children in care (McNaught, 2005).

Child welfare workers can help the children they serve by cultivating positive relationships with school personnel. Don't wait for a crisis to try to form a good working relationship with teachers, counselors, and other school employees. Sitting down at the table together and letting them get to know you is the best way to build strong, clear relationships. These will prove invaluable when you are advocating for the child, interviewing school staff as collaterals, or inviting them to attend a child and family team meeting (Poindexter, 2006). For more on partnering with schools, see page 7.

### **PREPARE AND SUPPORT FOSTER PARENTS**

Educators and child welfare caseworkers in Illinois told Altshuler (2003) that students with foster parents who are involved in their lives and at school did better academically than those with foster parents who were not involved. Based on this, child welfare workers should strongly encourage foster parents to take an active role in the education of the children in their homes.

Many foster parents worry most about the children's behavior, not about their educations (Finkelstein, et al., 2002). To counter this, child welfare workers should encourage foster parents to contact children's current and former teachers to obtain insights about the child's strengths and needs as a student and to get ideas for how best to support the child in school. Building the teacher/foster parent relationship can also make foster parents a more effective member of the school team determining the educational plan for the child (Noble, 2003).

### **PARTNER WITH BIRTH PARENTS**

Most children exiting out-of-home care go to live with their families: during FY 2003, 55% of those leaving foster care were reunified with parents or primary caretakers; 15% went to live with a relative or guardian (USDHHS, 2005b). This fact underscores the importance of establishing positive, supportive relationships with birth parents when it comes to the education of their children. Child and family team meetings and shared parenting are two key strategies for building these relationships. Shared parenting, in particular, presents many opportunities to keep birth parents "in the loop" about educational matters and allows foster parents to model effective educational advocacy for birth families.

### **IDENTIFY AN EDUCATIONAL ADVOCATE**

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, there is a great deal of confusion over who is responsible for enrolling chil-

### **HOW INVOLVED ARE YOU?**

When they interviewed a small sample of child welfare caseworkers about their involvement in the education of the children in foster care, Finkelstein and colleagues (2002) found they were more informed than foster parents or school personnel about children's developmental delays. These caseworkers also advocated for special treatment and programs.

Yet they also found that these workers lacked generalized knowledge about the academic performance of foster children, and what they knew about the performance of specific children "seemed limited to situations where information was easily obtained, where the child also exhibited behavioral problems, or where a child's performance was so poor it was reaching crisis levels." Caseworkers generally did not see low grades alone as a pressing issue.

Even if these findings do not resonate with your experience, it can be helpful to assess your own performance in this area periodically. For example, consider the extent to which you:

- Closely monitor children's grades throughout the year
- Initiate contact with children's teachers to discuss their school progress and overall well-being
- Help foster parents with school registration
- Arrange for tutoring and other school-related services

This is by no means a comprehensive list, but considering the extent to which you are involved in these activities will help you get a sense of your performance in this area.

dren in foster care in school, signing permission slips, meeting with the teacher, etc. Foster parents are sometimes uncomfortable with the school system, or they believe that they do not have the right to act as a legal guardian for the child. In some cases, birth parents are still capable of taking responsibility.

To minimize confusion, every child in foster care needs to have one adult in their lives who has a full appreciation of their educational needs and has their academic interests at heart. Child welfare agencies should designate a particular adult to play this role; the court should appoint this same person to be an educational advocate (Finkelstein et al., 2002).

### **MINIMIZE SCHOOL MOVES**

When they change schools, "not only must foster children cope with the emotional consequences of such instability, they also must adjust to new teachers, classmates, curricula and rules" (Christian, 2004). School change itself may lead to grade retention (that is, repeating a grade), which in turn can reduce the likelihood of completing high school at all (Smithgall, et al., 2004).

There are several things agencies and workers can do to minimize school moves for children involved *cont. p. 6*

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP CHILDREN SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

*continued from page 5*

with the child welfare system. One is to prevent foster care placement disruptions. As already mentioned in this issue, placement instability is an area of concern in North Carolina. In fiscal year 2004-05, 58% of the children who entered foster care in our state had 2 or more placements. Eighteen percent of these children had 4 or more placements (NCDSS, 2006). Careful matching of foster parent strengths and child needs before placement, adequate training of foster parents (especially on the topic of behavior management), the delivery of appropriate services to the child and family, and generally supporting foster parents have all been shown to contribute to foster care placement stability.

Even when placements disrupt, agencies should try to keep children in the same school. Developing an adequate number of foster homes in the area your agency serves is one way to do this. Making special transportation arrangements is another (Courtney et al., 2004).

If school moves are necessary, time them carefully. Moving children from one school to another can cause them to miss critical tests or other important events. Therefore, if circumstances permit, wait for a planned school hiatus (e.g., summer, spring, or winter break) before making placement moves. This will minimize the impact on the student's academic progress.

### **AVOID SCHOOL RECORD PROBLEMS**

Problems with school records can indirectly hurt children's academic performance. Missing, incomplete, inaccurate, or lack of access to education records can hamper our ability to understand and meet a child's needs. The same is true for lengthy delays in transferring records from one school to another (McNaught, 2005).

To avoid problems with school records, child welfare professionals should be clear about several things. First, when a child involved with foster care must change schools, child welfare workers must play a role in expediting record transfers among schools and districts. Indeed, many times caseworkers are the ones responsible for enrolling students in a new school and notifying the old school of the child's move and need for records transfer (McNaught, 2005).

Second, child welfare workers should understand that their right to access the school records of children in foster care is not automatic. Typically your right to access can be obtained through one of three ways: consent of the parents, a determination that your agency is considered the parent for purposes of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), or through a court order allowing access (McNaught, 2005).

### **PREVENT DISRUPTIONS IN ATTENDANCE**

Given that many of them are already behind academically, absences and disruptions in school attendance can be especially detrimental to children in foster care.

To address this, it is important to minimize absences and interruptions to the school day. Instead of scheduling parent-child visits and other appointments during the school day, workers should try to schedule visits after school hours. Seek out psychologists and counselors who have some evening and night hours. Agencies should consider implementing a policy prohibiting child welfare workers from contacting children during the school day except in an emergency (GDHR, 2000).

### **KEEP AN EYE ON SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Child welfare workers and agencies should take pains to avoid unnecessary special education placements for the children in their custody. Assure that special-ed placement focuses on long-term needs rather than the child's reaction to crisis. "Consider alternative interventions to address short-term behavioral problems. Provide remedial education services instead of special education when appropriate" (Courtney et al., 2004).

For children who receive special education services, child welfare workers should understand what Individualized Education Planning (IEP) meetings are and how they work. Support foster parents, since they are the ones who will participate in these meetings and sign IEP documents. Child welfare workers are forbidden by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act from making special education decisions for children in their agency's custody. However, there is a difference between being an advocate and being the legal education decision maker. Just because you are not permitted to be the legal decision maker does not mean that you cannot play an important advocacy role in the child's education (McNaught, 2005).

### **SUPPORT EXTRACURRICULARS**

Although all children (including those in foster care [Shin, 2003]) are likely to perform better in school if they participate in sports, band, and other non-academic school activities, many children in foster care are unable to engage in extracurriculars. To address this problem, child welfare workers should make a point of actively encouraging children in foster care to participate in extracurriculars (if appropriate for the child) and supporting foster parents of children who want to participate in organized afterschool activities. Identify and overcome barriers—these may include agency policies that fail to make extracurriculars a priority. ♦

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH SCHOOLS

by Aileen Hays, MSW, School Social Worker, Asheville City School System

In my work as a school social worker and counselor here in North Carolina I have had lots of contact with child welfare workers. Sometimes this contact has been positive and collaborative, producing really great results for everyone involved. Other times it has felt more like the clashing of two huge systems that do not understand each other and cannot get along.

If you're an experienced child welfare worker, I bet you've had similar experiences. After all, nearly all child welfare workers eventually come in contact with public schools and the many people who work there. In my opinion a lot of the friction that arises when our two systems meet could be avoided if we understood a few basic things about each other. In that spirit—and in an effort to increase the number of effective, mutually productive partnerships we can form on behalf of children and families—I would like to share the following thoughts and suggestions with you.

## HOW TEACHERS THINK

School personnel come from a child-centered approach, not a family-centered approach. Although many school reform efforts include looking at the “whole child” and making schools more family friendly by providing family resource centers, student health centers, etc., the fact remains that schools focus on children, not families. It is important to understand this fundamental difference between teachers and child welfare workers.

When working with a child's school, remember that the teacher sees the child in the context of the classroom. Every day the teacher observes how that child compares with her peer group. This perspective shows very clearly how the child's life circumstances affect her chances for success in school and, by extension, in life. This is why teachers are so frustrated with truancy, untreated ADHD, lice, and other issues that the child welfare system may see as minor concerns that simply do not rise to the legal definition of neglect. Teachers often try many times to contact the child's family, without success. Imagine their frustration and growing concern as they watch the child fall further and further behind his or her peer group.

Teachers do not see children in the context of their family or their community—that's what you see. It is important to remember that both viewpoints are valid, and that both are the reality of the child's life.

## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

To understand schools today, one must understand the newest educational mandate, “No Child Left Behind.” This law,

**When they work together, our two systems increase the tremendous impact they have on the well-being of children.**

which came into effect in January 2002, strives to close achievement gaps between various groups of students, including students with disabilities, limited English language proficiency, and children of poverty.



**Aileen Hays**

The goals of the Act are laudable; however, the high stakes testing that is part of No Child Left Behind has significantly affected the atmosphere in public schools. (To learn more about No Child Left Behind go to [www.ncpublicschools.org/nclb](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/nclb). You can also read the National Association of Social Worker's views concerning this legislation at [www.sswaa.org/Joint\\_Statement\\_on\\_NCLB\\_306.pdf](http://www.sswaa.org/Joint_Statement_on_NCLB_306.pdf).)

As you work with school personnel, you need to know that stress and anxiety among adults in public schools is at an all-time high. Teachers and administrators feel a huge amount of pressure to ensure students perform well on end-of-grade tests. Life circumstances or disabilities of students are not taken into account when teachers, administrators, and schools are judged by their test scores. Chances are you will encounter this stress and anxiety when you interact with teachers and administrators. Don't take it personally. Schools are becoming increasingly difficult places to work, and sometimes it shows.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESS

- **Seek to understand.** Just as understanding families helps us serve them better, understanding teachers' point of view will help you to work more effectively together.
- **Educate the educators.** Take time to educate relevant school personnel concerning your role with a family, your goals, the Multiple Response System, and whatever information you can share in good faith and within the bounds of confidentiality.
- **Prepare us.** Let school personnel know what you need of them. If you are inviting them to a child and family team meeting, tell them ahead of time exactly what will be expected of them.
- **Partner with school social workers and counselors.** Get to know the social workers and counselors in the schools that serve your families. Developing a good relationship with them will foster productive school/child welfare communication. School social workers and school counselors have their feet in

*cont. p. 8*

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH SCHOOLS

from p. 7

both the school and social work worlds. They play by many of the same rules that you play by, and they can be a valuable ally.

- **Learn the rules.** Just like law enforcement, the courts, and the other professionals you interact with, schools have certain rules they must follow. If you're exceptionally frustrated by a situation, try to learn the rules. For example, what exactly is the school district's lice policy? What is its truancy policy? Learn about services available for your families and their children through programs such as Title I, Exceptional Children, English as a Second Language, and the McKinney Act for Homeless children. Knowing about these policies and programs will help you advocate successfully for your families.
- **Never underestimate the importance of school success.** Children spend 8 hours a day, 180 days a year in school. They learn to read, write, calculate, explore, question, and get along with others. School success is a primary predictor of life success.

Don't overlook schools or write them off in frustration—reach out to us. One of the very best ways to help a child who is in foster care or involved with CPS is to create a strong partnership between our two systems. In fact, it is one of the only ways to ensure that child's success and well-being both today and on into the future. ♦

### KEY POINTS FROM THIS ISSUE

- **Many kids involved with the child welfare system struggle in school.** Common signs of their educational difficulties include: poor academic performance, inappropriate special education services and placement, behavior problems in school, high rates of suspensions and expulsions, repeating grades, lower graduation rates, low rates of postsecondary education
- **Keep in mind these facts about kids in care in NC:** most are of school age, most spend more than a full school year in foster care, and many are at risk for school transfer because of placement instability.
- **There are many things you can do to promote the educational success of kids in care.** One of the most important of these is to establish strong partnerships with teachers and other school personnel.



**IN THIS ISSUE: PROMOTING SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR CHILDREN INVOLVED WITH THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM**

Family & Children's Resource Program  
Jordan Institute for Families  
UNC-School of Social Work  
Campus Box 3550  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550  
State Courier # 17-61-04

Children's Services Practice Notes