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**EDUCATION FOR FOSTER CHILDREN:
REMOVING BARRIERS TO
ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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It is our hope that the results of this study will be used to empower individuals who care for children, both professionally and personally, to work together to ensure that children's educational needs are fulfilled. It is through such efforts that all Bay Area foster children may achieve their fullest academic success.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Interested readers may obtain copies of the case extraction form and phone survey data collection instrument by contacting Pamela Choice at (510) 642-1899. The case extraction form identifies specific information that was searched for and documented in children's case files. The phone survey data collection instrument contains a list of all questions and response choices offered to foster parents who reported on the experiences of the randomly selected children in their care.

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Education for Foster Children: Removing Barriers to Academic Success

Approximately 72% of children in foster care in California are school age (Needell, Webster, Cuccaro-Alamin, Armijo, & Brookhart, 2000) and child welfare services regulations require social workers to monitor children's educational progress. With the Adoption and Safe Families Act (1997) the main goals of the child welfare system have been identified to ensure children's safety, permanence, and well-being. Concern for meeting foster children's educational needs falls clearly within the social services domain of child well-being, yet it is the school system that ultimately is responsible for ensuring that all children receive appropriate education. Thus, these two social systems share in certain practical matters involved in the education of foster children. Ideally, these two systems could work together to enrich and enhance educational opportunities for foster children. In reality, however, both systems represent large social institutions with complex sets of regulations and practices. Unfortunately, the complexity of these systems may create multiple problems for foster children and evidence suggests that large proportions of these children perform poorly in reading, math, and vocabulary (Sawyer and Dubowitz, 1994; Stein, 1997), leave foster care without a high school diploma (Blome, 1997), fail or repeat grades (Benedict, Zuravin, and Stallings, 1996), have difficulty performing at grade level (English, Kouidou-Giles, & Plocke, 1994; Fox and Arcuri, 1980; Iglehart, 1994; Fanshel, & Shinn, 1978), and need special education services (Berrick et al., 1994; English et al., 1994; Goerge, Van Voorhis, Grant, Casey, & Robinson, 1992).

Both the child welfare system and the school system may contribute to these poor educational outcomes for foster children. For example, as children move through the child welfare system they tend to have various social workers assigned responsibility for their care. Among other challenges social service agencies face in the governance of the care of dependent

children, this general discontinuity in the management of children's lives may create problems in child welfare professional's ability to advocate for the educational needs of individual children. Furthermore, these problems are complicated by the fact that foster children represent our region's most vulnerable youth, having entered the child welfare system (and their respective school systems) following traumatic events in their lives.

Compounding this situation, it is unclear whether school districts have the resources to meet the educational needs of this special population. While fiscal responsibility for children's educational needs lies in their individual school districts, the transitory nature of foster care for many children may affect their educational needs and access to educational resources. For example, it is unknown to what extent foster children may experience delays in school admittance if the school and child welfare agency perceives that some children may not be assigned to a particular school district for the duration of time it would take to secure records needed for enrollment procedures. When children do enter new schools, the circumstances that may prompt an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) request are unclear and questions exist regarding the extent to which there may be reluctance to assess children for enhanced educational services. If reluctance does exist, to what extent is it based on the belief that foster placements are temporary and the children may be leaving the school soon? In cases where children's needs are assessed and children are found to qualify for IEPs, how easy or difficult is it for children to access delivery of these services?

In sum, the situation surrounding education for foster children is problematic and complex. Many questions exist regarding the extent to which foster children are, and are not, receiving needed educational and special educational services. The ambiguity surrounding these questions produces practice challenges for meeting foster children's educational needs and

provides the impetus for Bay Area child welfare professionals' interest in sponsoring this research study.

The overall purpose of this research is to develop a fuller understanding of problems associated with the identification and delivery of educational services for Bay Area foster youth. This is the first study to document educational services received by Bay Area foster children, and the timelines for those services. Specifically, the study investigates the following research questions.

1. How are educational services received, and not received, by foster youth including the timeliness of services such as how long it takes children to enter school, be assessed for educational needs, and receive specialized services?
2. What is the nature of the relationships between the educational services received by foster children, and where they reside and attend school, and their types of child welfare placements?
3. What are child welfare directors' and school respondents' perceptions of the ways in which model programs may assist in meeting foster children's educational needs?

Taken together, the findings from this study clarify specific barriers to attainment of educational services for foster children and provide practical recommendations to nurture foster children's academic success. The following section provides a review of the extant literature on education for foster children, which was used as a guide in developing the methods and instruments used in this study.

Review of Literature

In order to provide a fuller understanding of the factors that affect the educational experiences of Bay Area foster children, literature pertaining to their child welfare and school contexts was reviewed. First, general information regarding child welfare performance indicators for foster children living in California is provided. Next, existing literature that focuses on foster children's academic outcomes is reviewed. Finally, educational rights of foster children and their caregivers are summarized, including recent legislative activities that affect education for foster children in California.

Highlights of Child Welfare Performance Indicators in California

According to the most current set of performance indicators for child welfare services for the State of California, as of July 1, 2000, 99,380 children were in foster care in California (Needell, et al, 2000). Between 1988 and 1999 the numbers of children in foster care in California more than doubled. Recently, however, the California foster care caseload has declined 4% between 1999 and 2000. Nevertheless, approximately 10 out of every 1,000 children in California are in foster care and nearly three quarters of them are school age. Of the 99,380 children in foster care in California, 45% have been placed with kin while Foster Family Agency (FFA) homes account for 21% of all placements. Group homes cared for 7% of California's foster children, which are used almost exclusively for children age 6 and older. With regard to ethnicity, 36% of children in care are African American although only 7% of California's child population is African American. By contrast, Hispanic children account for 31% of the year 2000 foster care caseload while 42% of the state's child population is Hispanic. African American and Hispanic children are more likely than White children to be placed in kinship care and are less likely to be placed in foster family homes.

Although much attention has been devoted to understanding the characteristics and case outcomes of children in foster care, only a limited number of studies have examined academic variables for children in foster care. Interest in children's education, however, is growing among researchers and practitioners of child welfare. The emerging literature on foster children's educational experiences indicates that high percentages of children in foster care experience difficulties and undesirable outcomes on an assortment of academic outcomes. The findings from these studies are summarized below.

Academic Outcomes

Recently, Ferguson (1999) reviewed and synthesized the literature on academic and school behavior outcomes of children in foster care. In general, Ferguson found few studies that directly examined the academic experiences or outcomes of foster children. He noted, however, that the studies that do exist tend to provide data on a range of variables including high school degree attainment, grade-point-average (GPA), failure and grade repetition, grade level performance, achievement level, standardized test scores and placement in special education. Ferguson's work was used as a guide for this summary of the literature, but the interpretation of the research studies is unique to this report.

Several studies used high school degree attainment as an indicator of academic achievement. Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, and Nesmith (in press) conducted a longitudinal study of 141 young adults who had been out of foster care for 12 to 18 months. Data collected through interviews with former foster youth suggested that 37% of the young adults had not received a high school degree or GED. Similarly, Cook (1994) interviewed 810 young adults, between the ages of 18 and 24, who were discharged from foster care between January 1987 and July 1988. She found that 54% of the young adults in the study had completed

high school, as compared to 78% of 18 to 24-year old adults in the general population and 53% of adults in that age range living below the poverty level. In a related study, Festinger (1983) conducted interviews regarding education and employment with 201 young adults who had recently left foster care. In this case, approximately 22% of youth who left foster care two years previously had not received a high school degree.

One study examined foster children's GPA as an indicator of school performance. Rosenthal and Glass (1986) compared the school performance, delinquency rates, cost of services and out-of-home placement of two groups of school-age children in foster care. The first group of 125 children entered care prior to implementation of a program designed to reduce the risk of out-of-home placement. The second group of 115 children entered foster care after the program was implemented. The researchers looked at each child's GPA for the two semesters prior to foster care entry, the semester of foster care entry, and the five semesters following entry. The children's GPAs were obtained from their school districts. GPAs were calculated from a grade scale of one to four, one being the worst and four the best. The average GPA for foster children in the comparison group was 1.22 two semesters before entering care and 1.38 five semesters after entering care. In the experimental group, the average GPA for foster children was .97 two semesters before entering care and 1.38 five semesters after entering care. In both cases, the student's grades improved while in foster care, however the children's GPAs were still extremely low.

One study examined the relationship between foster children's IQ and their academic test scores. Fox and Arcuri (1980) administered standardized intelligence tests to 163 school-age children living in foster homes in Philadelphia. They used the tests to calculate IQ and found that foster children's IQ scores were below the national average, but similar to IQ scores of low-

income and minority children not in foster care. Foster children's IQ scores, in turn, were related to their achievement on reading, writing, and arithmetic tests.

Several studies provide evidence that a large percentage of foster children have failed or repeated at least one grade. Benedict, Zuravin, and Stallings (1996) explored associations between foster care placement and adult outcomes by interviewing 214 individuals, 40% of whom were formerly in kinship care and 60% of whom were formerly in non-kin foster care. The interviews focused on education, employment, health, stresses, supports and risk-taking behaviors. The researchers reported that one-third to one-half of the adults in the study had failed or repeated one or more grades. A higher percentage of adults formerly in kinship care (45%) were placed below grade level than adults formerly in non-kin care (33%).

In a related study, Berrick, Barth and Needell (1994) identified characteristics of kinship care and foster family care with regard to implications for placement. They conducted a quasi-experimental, exploratory study through surveys and interviews. A random sample of 246 kin providers and 354 foster care providers in California participated in the study. Nearly one-quarter of children in kinship care and one-third of the children in non-relative foster care had failed or repeated one or more grades.

The findings of these studies are consistent with an earlier study by Canning (1974), who conducted an exploratory study of the school experiences of foster children. She interviewed 25 students and their teachers to learn about the attitudes, feelings, behavior and academic performance of foster children. She found that foster children did not behave or perform well at school. Of the children in the study, 80% had failed at least one grade by the third grade, one-half were identified as withdrawn, one-third were identified as aggressive and the rest were identified as conformist. Many of the children represented in the study were missing information

in their cumulative records, and experienced poor school attendance and gaps in time when they were not enrolled in school.

Several studies have explored whether foster children perform at the appropriate grade levels for their ages. For example, English, Kouidou-Giles and Plocke (1994) conducted a descriptive study identifying the characteristics of the population eligible for the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP). Through telephone interviews with youth and their caregivers, as well as a review of children's case records, information was gathered on 431 foster youth over age 16 who were eligible for ILSP, yet had not received ILSP services. Almost a quarter of the foster children in the study were performing one or more years behind grade level. The findings also indicated that 54% of the foster children experienced disabling conditions, including behavioral and emotional disabilities. Similarly, Fox and Arcuri (1980) found that 23% of the foster children in their sample were performing below grade level. In a related study, Iglehart (1994) compared 352 adolescents in kinship care to 638 adolescents in non-relative care with respect to current functioning. The outcomes for children in this study were less positive than for children in the previous two studies. Iglehart found that approximately 40% of children in the sample were performing below grade level and that more children in non-relative care performed below grade level than children in kin care.

In 1978, Fanshel and Shinn conducted a comprehensive 5-year assessment of various indicators of foster children's educational achievement. Halfway through the five-year period, 123 foster children were participating in the study. Forty seven percent of those students showed improvement in academic performance (as indicated on an age-adjusted achievement-level index score) while 46% showed a decline. However, for students whose academic performance declined, their scores decreased so rapidly that the overall results of the study showed a decline

in the academic performance of foster children. Of the 76 children who completed the study, 58% showed improvement in their academic performance, 32% showed a decline, and 53% were performing below grade appropriate achievement. In general, although foster children performed lower than average in school, they performed equally to those in a similar socio-economic group.

In addition to exploring high school degree attainment, GPAs, failure and grade repetition, grade level performance, and standardized test scores of foster children as a group, it is important to place these findings in context by understanding how they are related to educational outcomes for foster children's peers in the general population. Seven studies compared the educational outcomes of children in foster care with the educational outcomes of children not in foster care. For example, Dumaret (1985) compared the rates of school failure of 35 adopted children, 46 children living at home with one or more biological parents, and 21 children in foster care. All of the children selected for the study belonged to sibling groups. The findings show that 0-10% of the children in adoptive homes failed one or more school subjects, close to 50% of the children living at home failed one or more subjects, and almost 100% of children in foster care failed one or more subjects.

Building on Dumaret's work, Wald, Carlsmith, and Leiderman (1988) examined the educational outcomes for 19 children living at home and 13 children in foster care. All of the children included in the sample were developmentally comparable, had experienced abuse or neglect, and lived in similar environments. The authors also included a comparison group of children who were neither abused nor neglected. At the end of the two-year study period, teachers ranked the school performance of 9 of the children in foster care, 10 of the children living at home, and 41 children in the comparison group. They reported that 22% of the children

in foster care were performing above average, compared to none of the children living at home and 54% of the children in the comparison group. The teachers ranked 33% of the children in foster care, 40% of the children living at home, and 29% of the children in the comparison group as completing average work. Finally, 44% of the children in foster care, 60% of the children at home and 17% of the children in the comparison group were categorized as performing below average. Thus, in considering academic achievement, children in foster care performed consistently above the children living at home and below the comparison group.

In a related longitudinal study, Heath, Colton, and Aldgate (1994) compared the standardized test scores of a non-random sample of 49 foster children in long-term foster care with the test scores of 58 children receiving social services while living with their parents. Results indicated that foster children who remained in foster care throughout the course of the study showed no evidence of educational progress and performed lower than the national average on academic achievement.

Sawyer and Dubowitz (1994) evaluated the academic achievement of 372 children in kinship care in Baltimore. They formed a comparison group comprised of all children, not in kinship care, attending the same schools at the same grade levels as the children included in the study sample. In comparing the school performance of the children in the two groups, the authors found that about 58% of the children in kinship care were performing below or well-below average in reading and writing, and 49% of the children in kinship care were performing below or well-below average in math. Mean scores on standardized tests of reading and math were lower for children in kinship care than for the comparison group.

In 1996, Smucker, Kauffman, and Ball explored the educational experiences of children in foster care and children not in foster care. The study included 32 children in four groups:

eight children in foster care and receiving special education for emotional and behavioral disorders, eight children in foster care without special education, eight children in special education for emotional and behavioral disorders but not in foster care, and eight children not receiving foster care or special education. Results of the study indicated that children in foster care, whether receiving special education services or not, were more likely to repeat a grade.

More recently, Stein (1997) completed a study comparing the academic performance of 178 children in foster care in London, Ontario to the academic performance of 1,751 children included in the Ontario Child Health Measurement Study. Results from this study indicated that between three and eight times more foster children were performing below grade level than above grade level, while an equal number of students from the comparison group were performing below and above grade level.

Using data from a survey administered by the Department of Education, Blome (1997) compared the educational experiences of 167 children in foster care to the educational experiences of 167 children living with at least one parent. Blome ensured that the 167 students in each group were comparable in gender, age, and ethnicity, and she controlled for standardized verbal and math scores. She reported that 37% of the children in foster care left high school before graduation, compared to 16% of the children living with a parent. After approximately five years, 23% of the foster children who left high school early still had not received a high school degree or equivalent, while only 7% of youth in the comparison group had not received a high school diploma or GED. Blome also found that 15% of the foster children were enrolled in college preparatory classes, compared to 32% of children in the matched group.

In addition to studying foster children's academic outcomes such as grade failure, grade repetition, and grade level performance, three studies have devoted attention to the proportion of

foster children in need of special education services. Berrick et al. (1994), English et al. (1994), and Goerge, Van Voorhis, Grant, Casey, and Robinson (1992) reported that approximately one-quarter to one-third of the foster children in their samples were enrolled in special education courses. One study (Fox and Arcuri, 1980) reported that only 11% of the children in their sample were enrolled in special education classes.

Additional research has focused on child welfare characteristics associated with receipt of special education services. Goerge et al. (1992) linked the databases of the Illinois departments of social services and education in order to understand the demographics, service characteristics and experiences of children in foster care and special education. They separated all children in the foster care system in Illinois into two groups: those receiving special education and those in mainstream classes. The data showed that foster children receiving special education and those in mainstream classes were equally likely to live with foster families, while foster children in mainstream classes were more likely than foster children in special education classes to be in kinship care. In addition to these findings, the study was noteworthy in its finding that foster children in special education classes were almost five times as likely as other foster children to live in group home settings.

Based on the realization that so many foster children receiving special education reside in group homes, child welfare and school-based professionals have expressed a growing interest in learning more about children's group home experiences. Recently, American Institutes for Research (2001) completed a comprehensive study detailing the educational experiences of children in group home (Licensed Children's Institution) care. Data were gathered from state databases; interviews with group home staff; surveys completed by social service, mental health, probation and County Office of Education service providers and group home operators;

interviews with group home residents; and case record reviews at schools and group homes. Survey respondents indicated that educational records often were delayed, missing information, or lost, resulting in compromised educational placements for children. Group home operators, probation officers and social workers reported that their agencies do not always notify the local school when a child is placed in a group home. Although service providers indicated that interagency collaboration is valuable in planning and providing services to children in group homes, they reported that collaboration does not always occur. Group home staff stated that they receive little educational information from children's social workers. Group home residents expressed their desire to complete high school, although they reported that they felt like no one cared about their education.

Through the group home case record review, researchers found that little educational information was contained in the records. The school record review results show that almost half of the records were missing important pieces of information, including transcripts, progress reports, psychological assessments, and educational records available at enrollment. Analysis of the state databases revealed an estimated 47% of children in group homes in California are receiving special education services.

In summary, emerging literature indicates that children from economically secure, abuse-free environments tend to perform better in school than children in foster care. With regard to high school degree attainment, one-quarter to one-half of children leave foster care without a high school diploma. A large percentage of children in foster care have failed or repeated at least one grade, and many foster children are performing below grade level. One-quarter to one-third of foster children are enrolled in special education classes. Findings regarding the academic performance of children in kin care appear to be mixed. Some studies have found that children

in kin care, compared to children in non-relative foster care are more likely to repeat a grade. Other studies have found the opposite. One study found that children in kin care performed lower in reading and math compared to their city-wide peers and another study found that children in kin care were more likely to be placed in mainstream classes than to be receiving special education services. Finally, children in group homes appear to be particularly vulnerable to experiencing difficulties in school, as almost half of all group home residents in California are enrolled in special education.

As a result of this review, specific areas were identified for investigation in the current study. For example, because evidence suggests that children in foster care perform poorly in school and are less likely to receive high school diplomas than children not in foster care, questions were developed for the case record review tool and telephone survey to gain information about children's current enrollment in school, grade level, grade performance, special needs, IEP requests, and service receipt. Additionally, since the review suggested that foster children are more likely to be enrolled in special education, the phone survey and case record review tools sought information on foster children's placement in special education.

In light of the findings summarized in this review, it is reasonable to wonder how federal and state laws may support or mitigate the difficulties foster children have in school and how the rights of individuals responsible for their care mesh with child welfare and school-based regulations. Foster children's educational rights, as well as the rights of their caregivers to monitor and advocate for children's educational needs, are summarized below.

Educational Rights of Foster Children and their Caregivers

The educational rights of foster children and their caregivers may appear complex to professionals involved in children's care because many foster parents are not legally authorized

with educational rights for their children. When children are removed from their biological parents, the courts and county agencies make important decisions about their lives. Foster caregivers are responsible for ensuring that the children in their care receive appropriate schooling. However, the biological parents may still retain education rights for their children. Educational rights are a necessary part of obtaining special education services and authorizing various school services for children. This section of this report describes how laws and education codes affect foster children's ability to have their educational needs met.

One challenge that foster caregivers face immediately upon receiving a new foster child is enrolling that child in school. When foster children move to a new residential placement, they often move into different school districts. It is the foster caregivers' responsibility to immediately enroll children in school, if necessary. Children's school records must be transferred from their previous schools to the new schools in order for enrollment procedures to be completed. Foster caregivers are empowered to take their children into the school and submit copies of the children's transcripts for enrollment. When foster parents do not have children's transcripts, the school can request that the transcripts be sent from the prior school or district. Under Education Code 44809, each school district must maintain a "Mandatory Permanent Pupil Record." The district "indefinitely" should legally maintain this record or a copy of the record for all students that have been enrolled in programs in that district. Records include pertinent information such as student's name, date of birth, school records, and immunization records. When children move to a new school, the new school that has enrolled, or intends to enroll, the students should request the records. The previous district shall forward either the records or copies of the records. The law does not specify a time period within which records must be transferred to the new school.

Foster children often are moved from placement to placement within the welfare system and, consequently, moved from school to school. During their stay in foster care, children may experience several changes in their home placements, caregivers, schools, and even social workers. Due to the lack of continuity in many foster children's lives, legislation was formed to create a record for foster children to keep track of their educational information. The Federal Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1989 created the Health and Education Passport for children in foster care. In 1988, SB 933 proposed, among other things, that the Health and Education Passport requirements be added to the Education Code. The passport is an electronic summary of health, mental health, and educational information that follows children throughout placement moves. Some of the educational information recorded includes education providers, children's grade level performance, school records, and assurances that placement in foster care take into account proximity to the schools in which children are enrolled at the time of placement.

According to the legislation, within thirty days of placement, the county or foster family agency will provide caregivers with the passport information. The caregivers will maintain the records and report back to the county with changes and updates. On each home visit, the county will inquire about new passport information and update information before the next court date or within 48 hours of a placement change. In addition the county will take "all necessary steps" to assist caregivers in obtaining information. Passports can be shared with foster parents, schools, and doctors.

Furthermore, SB 933 recommends that the Judicial Council adopt appropriate rules, standards, and forms regarding the educational placement of children in foster care. The purpose of this recommendation is to ensure that state courts routinely indicate the party that maintains or

assumes the educational rights of children placed in foster care in order to facilitate children's prompt educational placement. When a parent maintains educational authority for a child, the parent also has the right to designate another person or entity to maintain educational authority. The Judicial council is encouraged to ensure that courts consistently authorize the agencies that place children in foster care to receive the children's records. Additionally, the bill states that schools will transfer children's records and Health and Education Passports in a "timely manner" when requested by the placing agency. Notice shall be made within five working days, and information transferred within five additional working days, of receipt of information regarding the new educational placement of pupils in foster care. In order to expedite and facilitate smoother school transitions for children in foster care, AB 2453 was enacted to permit foster family agencies to gain access to foster children's school records and IEPs. In addition, the new law allows social workers better access to obtain necessary school related records and documentation.

SB 933 also addresses the assignment of educational surrogates. Biological parents maintain educational rights for their children unless they designate another person with this authority or the court terminates their rights and assigns an educational surrogate. The surrogate should be a person who has contact with the children and is consistent in the children's lives. People such as relative caregivers, foster parents and Court Appointed Special Advocates may be appointed as surrogates. If none of these persons are available, other surrogates like retired teachers, social workers, or probation officers may be appointed. When the courts do not address educational rights, biological parents retain authority over their children's education. The rights of a parent or guardian or an appointed surrogate are described more fully below.

Both federal and state legislation have addressed certain rights that students have to access education. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that it is illegal to discriminate against a person because of a disability. Individuals must have equal access to programs and services. In 1975, the Education of Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142, was created to guarantee certain educational rights to children with disabilities. This law was reauthorized in 1990 and 1997 as the Individual With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under IDEA students with disabilities have a right to a free, appropriate public education. Individuals between the ages of 0 and 22 can be served through IDEA. There are several aspects of IDEA that pertain to students in the IEP process. First, special education services must be free to the student and caregiver. Appropriate education means that the child must be assessed for special education services, in the student's native language, and the assessment must be re-evaluated at least every three years. Second, the child must be placed in the "least restrictive environment" that will meet the student's needs. In a practical sense, this clause limits schools from placing children in a higher level of care if it is not proven to be necessary. For example, a school would not be able to place a child in a Special Day Class because there are no openings in the Resource classes. Third, parents or guardians must be a part of the IEP process. Parental consent is needed before any educational decision is made. In the case of foster children, parental consent refers to the parent, guardian, or designated surrogate. If a parent disagrees with the IEP team, the parent has certain due process rights to challenge the school district's decision, such as an impartial hearing.

The IEP process begins when the child is identified as needing special services. In some cases a teacher or administrator will observe a child and request an IEP. A parent or foster parent may also request an IEP, since any person can write a request to the district referring the child for assessment for special education services. Under California education code, after

receiving an assessment request the district has 15 days to develop an assessment plan and obtain parental informed consent. The district then has another 50 days to assess the child, hold a team meeting or IEP, and obtain the parent's approval of the IEP and placement. The months of July and August are not included in the 50-day period, unless the school operates year-round. In some cases, the school district may want to provide preliminary support, such as a Student Study Team, prior to a formal assessment. If the district requests to exceed the specified timelines, they must obtain permission from the parent or guardian.

Parents and guardians have several specific rights with regard to IEP procedures. The school must inform the parent in writing 14 days before a proposed meeting. Additionally, parents must be notified before a change can be made to an IEP, before any evaluations can be done, before any IEP meetings, and if any part of the educational plan cannot be implemented.

The IEP is a written document that is created at the meeting. A program team is assembled to attend the meeting. The team must include the parent or guardian (or surrogate), the child's teacher, an individual knowledgeable about the evaluation, and a school system representative.

In the case of foster children, it can be especially difficult to find advocates to monitor their educational progress. To address this need, among other things, SB 933 provides funding for the program Foster Youth Services (FYS) which provides academic advocacy for group home children. The bill establishes that foster children often are working below grade level and that educational plans are needed for these children. The bill provides funding for six FYS programs with proven effectiveness. It adds that in addition to the six program sites, any other school district may provide educational services for children who reside in a regularly established licensed or approved group home, located within the boundaries of the program site,

pursuant to a commitment for placement. The bill specifies that school districts that provide these educational services shall receive funding for support of those school-centered foster children services that are effective and create potential cost savings for the state. The success of the six core programs resulted in expanded funding. The 1998 Budget Act provided three million dollars for expansion of FYS programs to be implemented on a countywide basis and the 1999 Budget Act provided six million dollars for fiscal year 1999-2000.

In summary, federal and state laws, as well as education codes, exist to empower biological parents, foster parents, and educational surrogates to meet the educational needs of dependent children. However, the laws are not always adequate for meeting children's needs. For example, SB 933 provides aid for foster children who are struggling in school through Foster Youth Services, yet the law applies only to foster children in group homes. Other legislation mandates that children's previous schools send children's school records to their new schools in order to complete enrollment, however the legislation does not specify timelines for the transfer of records. Additionally, legislation is needed to clarify and enforce who is authorized to sign for children's special education services. Although county social service agencies are required to monitor foster children's educational progress, social workers typically do not have the authority to compel schools to implement educational services and enforce timelines to meet children's needs. This paradox generated the interest of child welfare professionals, which led to this study, namely to investigate how foster children's needs are met, and how the school and child welfare systems can further support the delivery of needed educational services to foster children. In consideration of the gaps in legislation concerning education for foster children, several questions were developed for the interviews with child welfare and educational experts to

explore their views of the interaction between the child welfare and educational systems. The next section of this report describes the research methods used to address the goals of the study.

Methods

Telephone Surveys

Sample selection. Foster parents providing service to selected children across nine Bay Area counties participated in this study. For cases in which selected children resided in group homes, study participants were residential staff persons most familiar with the selected children (as determined by the group home administrator). As illustrated in Table 1, from each county, case numbers of 165 school age (6-18 years old) children were randomly drawn from the CWS/CMS database housed at the Center for Social Services Research at the University of California at Berkeley. One county did not have 165 school-age children in care at the time: For this county, the universe of eligible children (N=100) was selected. The starting sample consisted of 1420 cases.

BASSC provided each of the counties with the randomly generated list of numbers. Each county generated information on the children's first names, location and caregivers. Counties were not able to gather information on 338 children due to denied access of children's case information from the CWS/CMS database, or placement of the child out of state, resulting in a reduced sample size of 1082.

Consistent with Dillman's (1978) total design method for maximizing participant responses and minimizing participant attrition, mailed invitations to participate in the study were sent to foster parents in three rounds. The first mailing contained a letter from the placing county, an informational letter from BASSC personalized with the child's first name, two consent forms, and a stamped return envelope. The second mailing consisted of a brief reminder letter. The third mailing was identical to the first except for a slight rewording of the

informational letter from BASSC. Contents of all mailings were sent in county envelopes from county offices. Consent forms were returned directly to the BASSC office.

Inspection of Table 1 reveals that 225 consent forms were returned, for an initial response rate of 21%. Of these, 73 did not participate due to: a) the interview was unable to be scheduled after multiple attempts; b) the child was no longer in their care; c) they declined to participate; d) they needed the interview to be conducted in Spanish; or e) the case was closed.

To increase the sample size, county staff made calls to caregivers who had not returned consent forms. In some instances this required county staff to make multiple phone calls. For example, multiple messages may have been left before caregivers responded. If phone numbers were incorrect or no longer in service county staff made attempts to locate current phone numbers. If children had changed placements or for other reasons were no longer in caregivers' custody, attempts were made to locate their current placement. In addition, attempts were made to find correct addresses on all returned mail. When current information was not found in CWS/CMS, some county staff used alternate information systems such as county payment records to locate children's placements. In total, 857 outreach calls were made by county staff. The combination of these attempts resulted in 151 more children being added to the sample, for a final sample size of 303, or 28% of the second stage sample of 1082. Respondents who completed all or part of a telephone interview were sent a thank you card and a \$5 gift certificate to Blockbuster Video for participating.

Table 1: Participant Recruitment and Response (By county)

	Alameda	Contra Costa	Monterey	Napa	San Francisco	San Mateo	Santa Clara	Santa Cruz	Sonoma	Totals
Random Sample N=	165	165	165	100	165	165	165	165	165	1420
Access Denied	31	49	35	9	1	68	44	31	70	338
Adjusted Sample n=	134	116	130	91	164	97	121	134	95	1082
Consents Returned	21	30	14	33	31	8	24	39	25	225
Unable to Complete	13	4	3	10	12	4	10	7	10	73
Adjusted Sample	8	26	11	23	19	4	14	32	15	152
Outreach Calls	113	86	116	58	133	89	97	95	70	857
Non-participants	100	48	97	28	107	74	62	36	47	599
Outreach Response	8	12	9	17	30	16	12	27	20	151
Final Sample	16	38	20	40	49	20	26	59	35	303

Procedure. Consent forms were color coded by county. Upon receiving a consent form from a caregiver, BASSC researchers checked to see that the child named by the caregiver on the consent form was the child originally identified through the random selection process. Once this was confirmed, contact information was entered into a computerized tracking log, and appointments were scheduled with caregivers by telephone.

The telephone survey protocol was developed by BASSC researchers in collaboration with Bay Area county child welfare directors' representatives. The survey was developed based on indicators suggested by the literature, input from each county regarding their specific interests, and child welfare practice wisdom. The survey was pilot tested with volunteer foster parents and appropriate revisions were made.

Five BASSC graduate student researchers and the project director conducted telephone interviews for eight of the nine counties. One county (Sonoma) used their own county staff to conduct the telephone interviews of respondents from that county. Phone interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes per interview. Caregiver responses were written on forms, which were scanned and fed into the computer software program “Teleforms.” Teleforms allows scanned data to be fed directly into an SPSS database for coding and analysis, avoiding the need for human data entry and potential error. At the researchers’ discretion, some respondents were asked to expand upon certain questions, in order to gather fuller descriptions of the diversity of children’s typical educational experiences, especially when there was an IEP or experience with the IEP process. These cases were then reviewed in greater detail and discussed by the research team to ensure that they represented children’s usual experiences. Illustrations of these children’s experiences (with identifying information changed to preserve participants’ confidentiality) appear as vignettes throughout the results section of this report. In addition, at the end of each interview participants were invited to respond to open-ended questions regarding recommendations for improvement of the education of foster children. These recommendations are summarized in the recommendations section of the report.

Each interviewer received training from the project director and a senior research associate on conducting phone interviews and using Teleforms. In addition, BASSC researchers met with each other and the project director weekly throughout the interviewing process to discuss questions that arose during interviews and to clarify decision rules regarding the documentation of data and the coding of participants’ responses. In addition, interviewers were trained regarding the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of subjects.

Domains of information collected by the telephone survey process included the following:

- ?? General Child Characteristics (date of birth, gender, ethnicity, special needs)
- ?? Case Characteristics (date of entry to care, number of placements, reason for entry, time in care, case plan, social worker contact)
- ?? Child Health and Behavioral Characteristics (special needs, mental health, difficulty of presenting behaviors)
- ?? School Information (current enrollment, changes, grade level and achievement, behavior in the classroom)
- ?? IEP Information (services received, service delays, process, qualifying conditions, educational rights, advocacy involvement)
- ?? Enrichment Information (classes, activities)
- ?? Birth Parent Information (degree of involvement with child)
- ?? Caregiver Information (challenges to educational involvement, employment, education, income, type of care, RCL level, recommendations).

Children's individual and case characteristics. The average age of foster children reported on through the phone surveys was 12.8 years (see Table 2). Monterey and San Mateo counties had the oldest average age for school-aged foster children, 14.2 years, and Alameda County had the youngest average age for school-aged foster children at 11.4 years.

Table 2. Mean Age by County

	Mean Age (years)	N	%
Alameda	11.4	16	100.0
Contra Costa	12.9	38	100.0
Monterey	14.2	20	100.0
Napa	12.1	40	100.0
San Francisco	12.0	49	100.0
San Mateo	14.2	20	100.0
Santa Clara	12.6	26	100.0
Santa Cruz	13.4	59	100.0
Sonoma	12.8	35	100.0
Group Mean	12.8	303	100.0

Table 3 shows the representation of children's ethnicities by county. In Alameda, San Francisco and San Mateo Counties three quarters of the children were African-American. In Napa, Santa Cruz and Sonoma Counties the majority of children were Caucasian. In Monterey County, the majority of children were Hispanic. In Contra Costa County 42% of the children were African American and 29% of the children were Caucasian. In Santa Clara County 42% of the children were Hispanic and 31% of the children were Caucasian.

Table 3: Children's Ethnicity by County

	African American		Caucasian		Hispanic		Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alameda	12	75.0	1	6.3	2	12.5	1	6.3	16	100.0
Contra Costa	16	42.1	11	28.9	5	13.2	6	15.8	38	100.0
Monterey	4	20.0	5	25.0	10	50.0	1	5.0	20	100.0
Napa	6	15.0	27	67.5	5	12.5	2	5.0	40	100.0
San Francisco	36	73.5	2	4.1	6	12.2	5	10.1	49	100.0
San Mateo	15	75.0	3	15.0	1	5.0	1	5.0	20	100.0
Santa Clara	6	23.1	8	30.8	11	42.3	1	3.8	26	100.0
Santa Cruz	0	0.0	32	54.2	24	40.7	3	5.1	59	100.0
Sonoma	2	5.7	17	48.6	9	25.7	7	20.0	35	100.0
Totals	97	32.0	106	35.0	73	24.1	27	8.9	303	100.0

With regard to foster placement, Table 4 shows that two-thirds of the sampled children were not in kin care, however, within each county large numbers of children were cared for by kin. In Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties more than half of the children in foster care were in kinship care. In Contra Costa, Napa and Santa Cruz counties, almost one-third of foster children were in kinship care and in Monterey and Sonoma counties about 15% of foster children were in kinship care.

Table 4: Children in Kin Care by County

	Children in Kinship Care		Children Not in Kinship Care		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alameda	9	56.3	7	43.8	16	100.0
Contra Costa	13	34.2	25	65.8	38	100.0
Monterey	3	15.0	17	85.0	20	100.0
Napa	12	30.0	28	70.0	40	100.0
San Francisco	30	61.2	19	38.8	49	100.0
San Mateo	11	55.0	9	45.0	20	100.0
Santa Clara	17	65.4	9	34.6	26	100.0
Santa Cruz	17	28.8	42	71.2	59	100.0
Sonoma	5	14.3	30	85.7	35	100.0
Totals	117	38.6	186	61.4	303	100.0

According to the foster parents, most children in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and Sonoma counties had just one foster placement, while children in Monterey and Napa counties typically had two placements (see Table 5). For the entire sample, the median number of placements was 2 and the mean was 5.9.

Table 5: Number of Foster Placements by County (Mode)

	Number of Placements (Mode)		
		N	%
Alameda	1	16	100.0
Contra Costa	1	38	100.0
Monterey	2	20	100.0
Napa	2	40	100.0
San Francisco	1	49	100.0
San Mateo	1	20	100.0
Santa Clara	1	26	100.0
Santa Cruz	1	59	100.0
Sonoma	1	35	100.0
Totals	1	303	100.0

Table 6 shows that only about 10% of the foster parents who participated in this study intended to adopt the children in their care. In Napa County, one quarter of foster children lived with caregivers who intended to adopt them. In Contra Costa, Santa Clara and Sonoma counties, 10-20% of children lived in homes where caregivers intended to adopt, and in Alameda, Monterey, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties fewer than 10% of children in foster care lived with caregivers who intended to adopt them.

Table 6: Children to be Adopted by County

	Children Whose Current Caregivers Intend to Adopt Them		Children Whose Current Caregivers Do Not Intend to Adopt Them		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alameda	1	6.3	15	93.8	16	100.0
Contra Costa	5	13.2	33	86.8	38	100.0
Monterey	0	0.0	20	100.0	20	100.0
Napa	10	25.0	30	75.0	40	100.0
San Francisco	2	4.1	47	95.9	49	100.0
San Mateo	0	0.0	20	100.0	20	100.0
Santa Clara	5	19.2	21	80.8	26	100.0
Santa Cruz	3	5.1	56	94.9	59	100.0
Sonoma	5	14.3	30	85.7	35	100.0
Totals	31	10.2	272	89.8	303	100.0

According to the foster parents, most of the children in their care had special needs such as a learning or emotional disability or medical problem (see Table 7). In Napa and Sonoma counties, almost 90% of the children had special needs. In Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco and Santa Cruz counties, children with special needs accounted for one-half to two-thirds of the sample, while in Monterey and San Mateo counties foster children with special needs accounted for almost three quarters of the sample. In Santa Clara county a little less than half of the children had special needs.

Table 7: Children with Special Needs by County

	Special Needs		No Special Needs		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alameda	10	62.5	6	37.5	16	100.0
Contra Costa	21	55.3	17	44.7	38	100.0
Monterey	15	75.0	5	25.0	20	100.0
Napa	35	87.5	5	12.5	40	100.0
San Francisco	29	59.2	20	40.8	49	100.0
San Mateo	14	70.0	6	30.0	20	100.0
Santa Clara	12	46.2	14	53.8	26	100.0
Santa Cruz	39	66.1	20	33.9	59	100.0
Sonoma	31	88.6	4	11.4	35	100.0
Totals	206	68.0	97	32.0	303	100.0

Case Record Review

Sample selection. For each county, information on the children from the first 25 completed phone surveys were submitted to the county contact. County staff pulled case files for these children for researchers to review. Of the initial sample of 225, 75 files could not be located, resulting in a total of 150 cases for review.

Procedure. Case reviews were conducted on county sites during the summer and fall of 2000. The paper case files were reviewed by trained graduate students in social welfare, using case extraction forms that were designed by BASSC researchers in collaboration with county staff.

Prior to beginning the case extraction process, five researchers conducted an inter-rater reliability test by randomly selecting two case files from Contra Costa county to review. The results of that test indicated that the information collected by the researchers was consistent across 86-90% of the variables. In instances of coding disagreements, a senior research associate

discussed the variables with the other researchers until consensus was reached regarding item definitions.

Each researcher received training on how to interpret the case files and accurately complete the case extraction forms. In addition, the reviewers met with the project director weekly throughout the process to discuss questions and to clarify decision rules regarding the documentation of data. In addition to the points mentioned earlier taken to ensure security, all files were delivered to a designated area by county staff, and all files were accounted for to county staff upon completion of the file reviews. No files were removed from designated county sites except by county staff. Each review of a case file took approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

The primary sources of data in case files were court reports, particularly the jurisdictional court report written by the court investigations social worker. In addition, face sheets, court order summaries, child abuse reports, and out-of-home placement records were reviewed. Case narratives were not reviewed. Domains of information collected by the case review process included the following:

- ?? Case Characteristics (reason for detention, status of case, number of social workers)
- ?? Educational Characteristics (current enrollment, grade level, grade performance)
- ?? Special Education Issues (IEP requests, service receipt, educational rights, advocacy)
- ?? Child Characteristics (gender, ethnicity, special needs, placement history)
- ?? Parent Characteristics (special needs, education, involvement with child)

Data from the case reviews were entered into SPSS for Windows Version 10.0. A coding manual was developed that assigned a variable name to each item in the case extraction form and which documented data entry instructions and decision rules.

Children's individual and case characteristics. Researchers searched children's files for information regarding issues such as substance abuse, incarceration during period case open, history of mental health problems, and other special needs that affected the birth mothers and fathers of the children represented in this study. Children's files reliably documented less than 20% of the information searched for across counties regarding their characteristics. For children's birth fathers even less information was available in children's case files. With regard to educational information, researchers searched children's files for documentation of their grades, whether or not a child was held back, IEP paperwork, and birth mothers' and fathers' educational history. Less than half this information searched for was available in county records. Due to the small number of cases for which information was available on these characteristics, these variables were not included in further analyses.

Telephone Survey and Case Review Data Analysis

Data from the case records were manually entered into SPSS for Windows Version 10.05. A coding manual was developed that assigned a variable name to each term in the case extraction form and which documented data entry instructions and decision rules. Data entry was completed by an undergraduate assistant whose work was reviewed by the project director. No systematic data entry errors were found. Data from the phone surveys were scanned into a database using the computer program Teleforms. This program translates handwritten marks into computer text and datafiles. Any ambiguous marks are required to be verified and confirmed.

Data frequencies were run by county to compare differences on variables of interest. Simple chi square tests of association were undertaken to determine if counties differed on variables of interest to a statistically significant degree.

Several logistic regression models were developed for the outcomes of interest. Logistic regression is an appropriate statistical procedure to use in order to explore the relationship between a set of independent variables (such as child or parent characteristics) and a binary response variable (such as “enrollment delay” or “no enrollment delay”). The procedure produces “odds ratios,” which estimate the odds of an event occurring for individuals with a specific characteristic, compared to individuals who do not have the characteristic. For each variable examined, other factors in the model are held constant. An odds ratio greater than one means that individuals with the characteristic are more likely than those without it to experience the event, while an odds ratio less than one means the odds of the event are reduced for those with the characteristic.

A confidence interval is reported along with each odds ratio estimate. The confidence interval shows a range of values that 95% of the time (should repeated samples be taken) will contain the true odds ratio. Therefore, a wide confidence interval means the estimate is imprecise; a narrow confidence interval gives us greater confidence in the precision of the estimate.

Lastly, a “p-value” is shown. The p-value indicates the probability that the true odds ratio is “one.” This would be the case if in fact the characteristic had no influence on the outcome. The p-value therefore reports the probability of obtaining the estimate from the data if in fact there were no relationship between the characteristic and the outcome. A finding with a very low probability or p-value less than .05 is said to be “statistically significant,” and provides evidence to support the conclusion that the characteristic does have an influence on the outcome beyond that which would occur by chance. The smaller the p-value is, the stronger the evidence supporting this conclusion.

The procedure was performed on three outcomes: delayed enrollment, needs an IEP, and school success. Each analysis began with a full model using variables that the literature suggests may be associated with the outcome, and that in a simple chi-square test of association with the dependant variables had p values $< .20$; that is, the degree of association suggested by the data between the independent variables and the outcomes was relatively strong before controlling for the other variables. Backward stepwise regression was used, in which variables were removed from the model one by one if they were shown to have little influence on the outcome, when controlling for the other variables. For dichotomous independent variables, missing data were recoded as “not present” or “no.” For example, if parental substance abuse was noted in the case file, a variable “parental substance abuse” was coded as a “yes.” If entries in the case file revealed parents did not have substance abuse issues, or if substance abuse was not mentioned in abuse or neglect reports to the court, the variable was coded as a “no.” Final models consisted only of those variables shown to contribute significantly to the outcome when the other variables in the model were controlled. The models are described in the Results section of this report.

Interviews

The purpose of the qualitative phase of the study was to gain information regarding how educators and social service directors in the nine counties perceive the educational services available to foster children, the delivery of these services, and possible barriers that may exist. Educational respondents consisted of individuals from the nine bay area counties participating in the study. A purposive sample was selected with assistance from county social service agencies. Researchers spoke with a contact person in each of the nine county agencies, and requested names of potential educational respondents. In 4 of the 9 counties, social service staff gave the name of one educational respondents. In 5 of the 9 counties, liaisons gave 2 or more names of

educators. In these counties, researchers contacted the person that seemed most appropriate for the interview first. Potential participants were contacted through telephone calls to discuss the study. During this phase, researchers screened educators to insure that they were linked to the school system and had basic knowledge about foster children's education. In cases where the educator was not appropriate, they were asked to refer the researchers to a more appropriate contact. Additional information about the research project was then faxed to potential participants. Those educational contacts agreeing to participate in the study set up interview times with the researchers. The participants included one SELPA director, one director of the Office of Education, two teachers, one school counselor, one Associate Principal, one Superintendent, one Foster Youth Services Coordinator, and one Healthy Start Coordinator. In total, eight interviews were conducted. One interview involved two educators who wanted to be interviewed together. Eight of the nine participants held masters degrees. Two participants held masters of social work degrees and had worked in child welfare. All participants had over ten years of experience. Most participants had experience working directly with children and in administrative positions.

Four child welfare directors also were interviewed and were asked similar questions. The directors were asked to comment on the results from the educational respondents and to provide suggestions. In one county, an Education Services Coordinator joined the interview. One child welfare supervisor, who works with the Independent Living Skills Program was also interviewed. All of the Child Welfare Directors held Masters in Social Work and had over fifteen years of experience, and over ten years of administrative experience.

Procedure. The literature on education for foster children was used to develop protocols and conduct interviews. Prior to the interview, educators were faxed (and asked to review) a

copy of the interview questions, an informed consent form, and descriptions of three key programs already operating in the Bay Area designed to assist foster children, and their caregivers, in meeting children's educational needs: Foster Youth Services, Parents Helping Parents, and Court Appointed Special Advocates (see Boxes 1-3).

Box 1: Foster Youth Services.

Foster Youth Services (FYS) is specifically designed to address the complexity of educational problems for foster children and help them with their educational needs (Ayasse, 1995). The program provides school placement and student advocacy services, tutoring services, counseling services, and employment readiness services. The goal of the program is to address some of the complex issues around the education of foster children by employing experts to bridge the gap between the schools and social service agencies, and by tracking educational information and records for foster children. The first four Foster Youth Service programs began in 1973 in the San Juan, Mt. Diablo, Sacramento, and Elk Grove unified school districts. In recent years the program has begun to operate widely across most California counties. Major components of the program are highlighted below.

Components of Foster Youth Services:

- ?? Tracking missing transcripts and assessments
- ?? Generating an Education Passport
- ?? Providing tutoring services
- ?? Counseling foster children, foster parents, and kinship providers
- ?? Consulting with school and public agency personnel
- ?? Advocating for specialized educational services and assessments
- ?? Insuring timely placement in the correct school program
- ?? Provides support and assistance to foster youth

Box 2: Parents Helping Parents.

Parents Helping Parents (PHP) provides immediate and intensive advocacy for foster children facing educational barriers by visiting school sites, observing children in classrooms, and meeting with foster parents, teachers, school administrators and social workers. Program staff review children's educational histories, write letters on behalf of children, and teach foster parents letter-writing and advocacy skills. The program helps caregivers understand and be informed about dependent children's special needs and rights within the educational system. It is a parent directed non-profit program. Similar to a hotline, PHP has a "zero-reject" approach, meaning that staff respond to all requests for assistance and referrals. PHP offers support through the instruction and advocacy they offer to parents. In addition, PHP works to involve other members of the child welfare system such as social workers, therapists, and probation officers to assist in advocating for the children's educational rights. Major components of the program are highlighted below.

Components of Parents Helping Parents:

- ?? Empowering foster parents with educational information
- ?? Instructing caregivers to write letters for special educational referrals and assessments
- ?? Providing phone instruction and consultation to parents
- ?? Mailing informative handouts and materials to parents about education and advocacy
- ?? Instructing parents on ways to set up educational files for the children in their care
- ?? Informing caregivers on the ways to obtain and track children's educational records
- ?? Assisting child welfare workers through phone consultation and written materials
- ?? Advocating for children who face expulsion through collaboration with others
- ?? Assisting children with behavioral and social emotional issues

Box 3: Court Appointed Special Advocates.

The Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program provides children with a consistent person to follow their case throughout the court system. CASA uses trained community volunteers who commit to follow the life of the child's case. In most cases, volunteers devote themselves to one child at a time, thus being able to become a knowledgeable person on all aspects of the case. The National CASA organization formed in 1982 to unify the movement. It has developed an intensive 40-hour training curriculum, including information about children's educational plans and progress. There are now more than 900 CASA programs nationwide. Major components of the program are highlighted below.

Components of CASA:

- ?? Providing children with a constant advocate throughout the court process
- ?? Speaking for the best interests of the child
- ?? Conducting thorough research on each case and reviewing files
- ?? Making reports and recommendations to the courts about progress and needed services
- ?? Interviewing all members a case, including the child
- ?? Assuring that the child receives the educational services ordered by the court
- ?? Advocating for a child's special educational needs

At the beginning of each interview, the educator completed an informed consent, and was given an extra copy for their file. The interviewers also read a protocol to further describe the study and the rights of participants. Nine individual interviews were conducted. The director of the study conducted the interviews and a researcher took extensive notes. Questions for educators focused on the educational process for children, possible barriers in education for foster children, and suggestions and recommendations (see Table 8). The respondents also were asked to give opinions about the advocacy organizations in the program descriptions. Open-ended structured interviews were conducted and lasted approximately one-hour. Following each

interview, participants completed contact summary forms with relevant information about themselves, such as years of service and areas of experience.

Table 8. Interview Questions

<p>Identification of Foster Children for Special Education</p>	<p>?? Can you describe the process of what happens when a new child gets admitted into your school? Who is often responsible for services such as enrollment, transferring records?</p> <p>?? What kinds of child behaviors, characteristics, or circumstances might trigger a request for special services, such as an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?</p> <p>?? How are teachers trained to recognize children’s special educational needs?</p> <p>?? Are foster children identified in the schools? If so, how?</p> <p>?? If needed, what kinds of special services may be offered to foster children in your school to address their educational needs?</p> <p>?? What ways are the circumstances that prompt an IEP different when dealing with foster children compared to their peers in the general population? How is the IEP request made for a foster child?</p>
<p>Delivery of Services</p>	<p>?? Who in your school primarily delivers special services to children?</p> <p>?? About how long does it generally take for a child to be assessed (tested) for an IEP?</p> <p>?? About how long does it generally take for a child to obtain the IEP after the testing?</p> <p>?? How is the delivery of special services different for foster children than for other children?</p> <p>?? What are some of the barriers that may delay the flow of services to foster children?</p> <p>?? Overall, how would you rate the availability, quality, and timeliness of educational services for foster children?</p>
<p>Suggestions for Reform</p>	<p>?? How could <u>identifying</u> and <u>assessing</u> children for special educational services be improved?</p> <p>?? How could the <u>actual delivery</u> of special educational services for foster children be improved?</p> <p>?? Who should be <u>the person</u> in charge of making sure foster children get what they need?</p> <p>?? Who should be <u>the person</u> who can sign on behalf of educational services for foster children?</p> <p>?? What suggestions can you offer for legislative, school, and child welfare reforms for foster children to improve educational services for foster children?</p> <p>?? What are your perceptions of the model programs? What do you see as the most helpful elements of these programs? What elements would you add to improve these programs?</p> <p>?? If you were designing your own program to help foster children succeed academically, what would you design?</p> <p>?? What kinds of resources would you need to implement your ideal program?</p>

Analysis strategy. Using the constant comparative method of qualitative data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), researchers shared and discussed their observations of the interviews, comparing them with previous findings and relevant literature, and the quantitative sections of the report. The researchers' notes were separately analyzed for themes and patterns by each of the researchers in the interview. Participant' responses were considered "themes" if they were mentioned by more than one participant. Responses offered by only one respondent were omitted unless they provided particular insight into education for foster children. Each time a new theme was generated, researchers reanalyzed the data to determine if the theme was consistent with the data. This process was repeated through several iterations, continuing until a saturation point was reached and no new themes emerged. Researchers shared and discussed their observations of the interviews in order to document themes.

Results

The findings reveal several major themes regarding foster children's educational experiences, barriers in meeting their needs, and suggestions for improving their access to services. These themes include issues concerning:

- (1) enrolling foster children in school,
- (2) identifying foster children in schools,
- (3) identifying children with special needs,
- (4) assessing children for special services,
- (5) the delivery of special education services,
- (6) school performance,
- (7) collaboration between schools and child welfare agencies,
- (8) and foster parent recommendations.

Within each of these topics, results from the face-to-face interviews and phone surveys are described below. In some cases, extended examples of children's experiences gleaned from the phone surveys are illustrated in the form of vignettes. Due to the small sample size and lack of information documented in many children's case files, analysis of the case record reviews was limited. Where possible, however, confirming or disconfirming information available from this data source is noted.

Enrollment

When children are removed from biological parents and placed in foster care, and when they change foster care placements, a school change may be required. Approximately half of the caregivers interviewed by phone indicated that they needed to enroll their foster child in school when he or she was placed with them. Of this group, just under 12% experienced delays of two

weeks or longer in the enrollment process. A logistic regression analysis was used to determine whether any child and case characteristics might predict delayed enrollment. As explained in the methods section, an odds ratio greater than one means that individuals with the characteristic are more likely than those without it to experience the event, while an odds ratio less than one means the odds of the event are reduced for those with the characteristic. A wide confidence interval means the estimate is imprecise; a narrow confidence interval provides greater confidence in the precision of the estimate. A p-value of less than .05 provides evidence to support the conclusion that the characteristic does have an influence on the outcome. The smaller the p-value is, the stronger the evidence supporting this conclusion.

As Table 9 suggests, the likelihood of delayed enrollment is increased for children who have more emotional and behavioral problems. The likelihood of a delayed enrollment also is increased for children in group homes compared to children living in other types of environments, and for children who were missing information from their prior school (such as enrollment records or grades) compared to children who were not missing information. This model accounted for approximately 25% of the variability in the outcome. That is, while these variables influence the likelihood of delayed enrollment for children, much of what may contribute to delayed enrollment remains unknown.

Table 9: Model of Delayed Enrollment

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	P-Value
Emotional Problems Scale	1.98	(1.20, 3.26)	.007
Child in Group Home	6.07	(2.00, 18.40)	.001
Missing Prior School Info	6.45	(1.95, 21.29)	.002

Cumulative school records. Interview participants mentioned several issues that arise when foster children enroll in a new school. Several participants commented that enrollment can be difficult due to problems surrounding the transfer of children's cumulative school records

when placement changes require changes in schools. About one quarter of the children from the phone survey sample (n=69) had changed schools three or more times since the first grade, for reasons other than graduation. Information concerning the last school that a child attended, or whether or not a child regularly attended school may be difficult to access. One school-based respondent said that getting a record transferred is “not impossible, but it takes persistence.” Several respondents said that getting a child enrolled could take several weeks due to the issue of transferring records from school to school. One respondent said that “sometimes it takes months to get a cumulative record.” In some districts, special personnel at the school, like an attendance clerk, contact the previous school until records are sent. One respondent explained that the cumulative school record can be forwarded to the new school when a student moves. This school respondent felt that the schools exercise stricter confidentiality regulations than the law requires and that there are problems with information sharing between schools and school districts. The previous school may neglect to transfer the record to the new school, or it may be lost in the system. In these cases, children might be enrolled without a record, or students may need to wait several weeks. In cases where children are enrolled without the cumulative record, children may be placed in an inappropriate classroom because there is no record of what classes they have completed and what services, if any, individual children received at previous schools.

Immunization records. Many participants discussed difficulties concerning enrolling children without immunization records. Interview participants explained that immunization records can be especially difficult to access if there is no cumulative record. If documentation of children’s immunizations can not be accessed, children may need to obtain a new set of immunizations before beginning school. If a child is coming from another country, often Mexico, there may be no cumulative record or set of immunizations. Concerns about obtaining

immunization records and requiring children to get more immunizations than needed for the purpose of enrollment was discussed by most respondents. Respondents felt that obtaining immunization records is one of the most difficult roadblocks in achieving enrollment for foster children. According to phone survey data, in over half of the cases in which youth did not have all the necessary information to enroll in school, it was medical information, such as immunization records, that was missing.

Enrollment in special education. Several interview participants felt that enrolling children in school can be especially difficult when children need special educational services, and this process can take “a month or more.” Many educators emphasized the need to enroll children in special education programs most similar to their previous program. Some participants stated that upon enrollment school personnel ask caregivers specific questions to find out what kind of programs are needed. However, many schools may not offer the full range of special educational services or may be filled to “maximum capacity.” In these cases, children may need to wait before they can be placed in appropriate classrooms. One special education respondent noted that accessing a special education record can be especially difficult because the districts try to protect the confidentiality of the information contained in the record even though they are not required to do so.

Approximately one-third of children represented in the phone survey (36%) receive some form of special education services (see Table 10). In Alameda, Contra Costa and Santa Clara counties, one quarter or fewer of the children had IEPs or were receiving special education services. In Monterey, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties, between one quarter and one half of the children were receiving special education services or had IEPs. Sonoma County was the only county where more than half of the children (60%) had IEPs. Of

the children not receiving services, 14% are considered by caregivers to need them. According to caregivers, another 9% were identified by adults other than the caregiver (such as a teacher, advocate, or social worker) as needing an IEP. Just under 15% of the children who did not have an IEP had a constellation of characteristics that suggest they could benefit from special education services: they were having behavior problems in the classroom, were not succeeding in school, and had some sort of special need.

Table 10: Children with IEPs and Special Education Services (By County)

	Currently Receiving Special Education Services/Has IEP		Does Not Receive Special Education Services/No IEP		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alameda	4	25.0	12	75.0	16	100.0
Contra Costa	9	23.7	29	76.3	38	100.0
Monterey	9	45.0	11	55.0	20	100.0
Napa	19	47.5	21	52.5	40	100.0
San Francisco	17	34.7	32	65.3	49	100.0
San Mateo	8	40.0	12	60.0	20	100.0
Santa Clara	5	19.2	21	80.8	26	100.0
Santa Cruz	18	30.5	41	69.5	59	100.0
Sonoma	21	60.0	14	40.0	35	100.0
Totals	110	36.3	193	63.7	303	100.0

Data from the phone surveys were analyzed to determine characteristics that predict the likelihood of foster children having an IEP (see Table 11). As explained in the methods section, an odds ratio greater than one means that individuals with the characteristic are more likely than those without it to have an IEP, while an odds ratio less than one means the likelihood of having an IEP is reduced for those with the characteristic. A wide confidence interval means the estimate is imprecise; a narrow confidence interval provides greater confidence in the precision of the estimate. A p-value of less than .05 provides evidence to support the conclusion that the

characteristic does have an influence on the outcome. The smaller the p-value, the stronger the evidence supporting this conclusion.

Controlling for other variables in the model, the likelihood of having an IEP increased as children had more emotional problems. Children with learning disabilities were more likely than those without to have an IEP. Similarly, children with developmental delays were more likely than those not delayed to have an IEP. The classification of children as having learning disabilities or developmental delays was determined by the researchers drawing from caregiver's reports of a host of children's special needs. Boys were more likely than girls to have an IEP, as were children whose social workers visited at least monthly. Children living with kin were less likely to have an IEP than children not living with kin. This model accounted for approximately 50% of the total variability in the outcome "having an IEP."

Table 11: Model for Having an IEP

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	P-Value
Emotional Problems Scale	1.60	(1.16, 2.2)	.004
Learning Disability	10.00	(5.18, 19.29)	.000
Developmental Delay	13.08	(3.91, 43.75)	.000
In Kin Care	0.42	(0.22, 0.81)	.010
Male	2.89	(1.51, 5.5)	.001
SW Visits At Least Monthly	2.34	(1.00, 5.48)	.050

The finding that odds of having an IEP are increased for boys was replicated in the analysis of the case file review data. Odds of boys having an IEP were 3 ½ times that of girls, (confidence interval from 1.6 to 7.8), controlling for group home placement.

Responsibility for enrollment. Typically parents or guardians enroll children in school by appearing in person at the school with their children. Many educators, however, said that this process is very casual. Foster parents are not routinely asked to identify their relationship to the children in their care. Educational representatives indicated that the schools wish to enroll children and provide services as quickly as possible. Several educators said they would enroll

children without records and ask the child or parent the information they needed. In contrast, one respondent strongly disagreed with casual enrollment procedures and felt that the schools need “clear policies and protocol to enroll kids” in order to eliminate random discrimination.

In general, most respondents felt that foster parents or group home staff are responsible for obtaining records and enrolling children. Some educators mentioned school personnel who will make sure records are transferred, but overall foster parents seemed primarily to be responsible for making sure children get into school placements. In some cases, there are advocacy groups that may assist foster parents in obtaining records and enrolling children. One child welfare director mentioned that the social workers in that county are ultimately responsible for making sure that records and immunizations are transferred. This respondent felt that foster parents are already overburdened. Although safety may be the social worker’s priority, other interests like school are still part of the social worker’s responsibility.

Identifying Foster Children in School

Most educators agreed that foster children are not identified in schools. In cases where respondents did know which children were foster children, it was through an informal process. In small counties especially, where there are only a few foster families, school personnel could recognize the caregivers as foster parents. Except for one school district in Contra Costa county, there was no systematic way of identifying children in any of the counties participating in this study. Educators generally agreed that foster children or caregivers needed to identify themselves if they wanted that aspect of their identities to be known in the school.

The interview data revealed that identifying foster children in school may be a controversial topic. As one respondent stated, foster children may have special needs, but specifically identifying them can stigmatize children. In general, educators saw no benefit to

foster children if they were to be systematically identified in schools. One child welfare director expressed deep concern about any system used to identify foster children in school. This person felt that foster children do not need special educational services by virtue of being in foster care and that systematic labeling may mean that they are perceived differently, and they should have the same opportunities as other children.

However, results revealed that schools, for various reasons, sometimes stigmatize foster children. Foster children are often a transitory group who may be coming from other counties and districts. Additionally, foster children are often missing an identified “parent” to sign for services and act as a contact person and advocate. Because of these reasons, schools may be reluctant to invest the same time and energy on a student who may move in a few weeks. One respondent described this situation as an “alarming mutual problem.” The child welfare system is concerned and affected by children’s frequent movement, and the movement of students also affects their experiences in schools.

Another aspect of identifying foster children in schools concerns the expenditure of resources on them. Since foster children may be moved to a new school far from their original home, they may be perceived as being the financial responsibility of another district (even though the district that currently has the children legally is fiscally responsible for their education). Many participants expressed discomfort pertaining to situations in which a new district receives many foster children due to the presence of a group home or increased numbers of foster families. One educator said “These are not our kids.” Another respondent stated that there might be tension between counties. Smaller counties may feel resentment toward larger counties for sending children to out-of-county placements where there may be a greater availability of homes for children. Some respondents suggested that children transferred from a

larger county may be denied needed services in a smaller county because smaller counties often claim they do not have the resources to provide appropriate educational services for these children.

Identifying Children with Special Needs

Behaviors and characteristics. The initial step in obtaining special education services is noticing children who may need special services and submitting a request to have those children tested. Interview participants identified behavioral issues, such as defiance and aggression in the classroom, as types of behaviors that might trigger a request for special services. Another notable trigger for an IEP request was if the child was not progressing academically.

In the case of foster parents requesting testing, they may find it difficult to gain support from the educational system and the child welfare system. Despite timelines, the requests of caregivers for services may be delayed or ignored by both systems. The following example (Vignette 1) shows a situation where an IEP was finally scheduled after much persistence. However, the school did not identify the child's needs for specialized services, nor respond to the caregiver's request for services, in a timely manner. Consequently, the foster parent did not feel sufficient support from the education and child welfare systems.

Vignette 1: Unresponsiveness of school personnel in obtaining special education services.

At the age of two, Susan was placed with her great-aunt in the Summer of 1984 due to her parents' voluntary relinquishment. Susan's great-aunt is currently her legal guardian. Susan entered a public elementary school at the age of five. Her aunt decided to have Susan repeat second grade because she did not know enough to be promoted. Susan received passing grades despite the fact that she was not learning the material presented.

Susan continued to have difficulties in reading and oral comprehension throughout elementary school. Her aunt monitored her progress and met with teachers to find out how to best help Susan. Susan and her aunt worked on her homework together each night, and she passed all of her classes. Susan was capable of completing all of her work, yet she needed extra time to understand each question. She did well on her homework since she was allowed extra time; yet she performed poorly in class because she was not allotted any extra time. Susan entered junior high and continued to work each night with her aunt until eighth grade. At this point, she rebelled and refused to do her work. She was frustrated that she could not keep up with the other students in her class. She told her math teacher that she could not follow his lectures and felt confused after each class. He moved her seat to the front of the room and gave her special attention. At the end of each class, he would ask what she hadn't understood and try to explain it. Susan was extremely embarrassed by this and felt that all of her classmates thought she was "dumb." She was too busy worrying about her classmates' opinions of her to benefit from the special attention, and she was unable to concentrate in class because she focused on her classmates rather than the teacher. She failed all of her classes and repeated the year at another school.

In high school, Susan routinely skipped her math and English classes because she could not keep up. She would sit in the school office pretending to read because she found that school administrators assumed she had a free period as long as she was quiet and did not roam the halls. Susan even helped school staff with office chores when she was not in class. When Susan's aunt noticed how Susan was spending her time in school she transferred Susan to a new high school, hoping that the administrators would keep a closer eye on the students. Susan's second high school focused on group work, which made Susan feel very inadequate and once again judged by her peers. She refused to do her work because she felt that the other members of her group would laugh at her. Susan's aunt felt that Susan must have a learning disorder because she was eager to learn and worked on her homework, but could not perform in class. She met with school officials to request an IEP and they told her that they did not have the capacity to assess Susan. They sent Susan to her previous high school for assessment. Susan's aunt had a very difficult time contacting the appropriate administrators at the high school. She never reached people she called, just answering machines, and she found that it was impossible to meet with administrators without appointments. When she finally did contact school administrators, they referred her to others. Once an IEP meeting was finally arranged, they immediately diagnosed Susan with dyslexia. They never had the chance to work with Susan, though, because during her sophomore year of high school, Susan found out about Job Corps. She dropped out of school and signed up. She hopes to take her GED soon and take more classes through Job Corps. She would like to make herself a competitive job applicant and find an appealing career.

Educational gap. Several respondents said that foster children may have an “educational gap” that results in a need for special education services. As one educator described, “there are [educational] gaps that have nothing to do with [student] efforts” because children are missing parts of schooling. A child may be missing schooling because he or she did not regularly attend school prior to entering the child welfare system due to parental neglect, or because the child was living in another country. In cases where children have been living in another country, language barriers might also hold them back and require special services.

One educator identified two different types of children in foster care as needing different educational assistance. Neglected children may have missing pieces of school and may need help to catch up academically. Abused children may have difficulty in school because they have emotional issues; these children may need more intense or different types of help.

In addition to the educational gap that may be due to missing pieces of schooling, once the child enters the child welfare system they frequently move from placement to placement requiring changing schools. This creates an education gap that is perpetuated by the child welfare system. One problem that was recognized by child welfare directors as well as educators was the frequency with which foster children move from place to place. Data from the phone survey substantiates this concern: almost 35% of children represented by the phone surveys had experienced three or more placements during their current spell in care, and approximately 12% had five or more. When social workers change a child’s placement, their predominant concern is finding the most appropriate and safe placement. Due to the limited availability of placements, children often change schools in the process. One respondent stated, “The [child welfare] system is totally devoted to safety, and education is not even part of the equation.” Several respondents felt that the scarce number of placements for foster children seriously impaired the county’s

ability to keep them in the same school. When foster children change schools, the new school needs to begin the process of enrollment, transferring records, and placing children in appropriate classes. When children move several times over a short period, students can miss large periods of school, lose credits, and miss opportunities to be tested for special education. Children waiting for special education testing at one school can be moved before the testing takes place. When these children move to new schools, the process of waiting may begin again, rather than having their documented need for testing move with them. Frequent moves may prevent some children from ever being tested. One teacher spoke specifically about the problem of frequent movement because some students who may qualify as emotionally disturbed will not be assessed and provided with necessary services. Additionally, students may lose academic credits with frequent moves. One respondent discussed the problem of assigning credit to students who do not stay for an entire semester because the school only allows for teachers to give blocks of credit. There appear to be no regulations that adequately address how to give academic credit to students who complete an academic year at several schools. In this situation, students often lose credits for work that they have performed. One respondent stated that teachers “need to make up their own rules to get [students] credits.”

The needs of abused children. Children who have experienced abuse may have special needs that make success in school more difficult. Caregivers interviewed in the phone survey described many of the children in their care as having special needs. Specifically, 68% of the children were identified as having some special need. As Table 12 indicates, the predominant types of special needs characterizing the children in this study included behavioral and emotional problems, learning disabilities, and medical or health problems.

Table 12: Types of Children's Special Needs

Special Need	Number	Percentage of Sample
Medical or Health Problem	75	25%
Physical Disability or Need	23	8%
Learning Disability	88	29%
Developmental Delays	31	10%
Behavioral / Emotional Problems	139	46%
Psychiatric	28	9%
Other Special Needs or Problems	12	4%

One respondent suggested that many foster children need a step above school counseling, but the schools do not have anything to offer them. Other children may be able to receive services through the special education department.

Special needs that are not covered by special education. As previously described, foster children have unique stressors in their lives that may make school success exceptionally difficult. In some cases, foster children's needs may require extra services, even if they do not qualify for special education. These situations can be especially difficult for caregivers or social workers who feel that more educational support is warranted. The following vignette illustrates a case in which a child was denied special education despite having educational needs.

Vignette 2: Ineligibility for special education services.

Stephanie is twelve years old. She was born HIV+ and with seven drugs in her system. Stephanie's birth mother voluntarily released her for adoption and Stephanie was immediately placed in an emergency foster home with her current foster parent in May, 1988. The whereabouts of Stephanie's parents are unknown; no father was identified at birth.

At three months, Stephanie started an AZT trial, fitting the criteria for an AZT research study. At three years of age Stephanie no longer tested positive for HIV. She has, however, been identified with Attention Deficit Hyper-Activity Disorder, as well as an expressive language disorder. This language disorder also seems to affect Stephanie's social interactions; she misses social cues, inappropriately assesses social situations, does not know how to modulate her voice, and has difficulty grasping concepts such as time. She has difficulty with math concepts and with remembering math facts. Her foster parent has noted that Stephanie is extremely small for her age, has facial features associated with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and has trouble with fine-motor skills, exhibiting poor letter formation and coordination.

Stephanie was retained in kindergarten, appearing not ready for first grade. A special education assessment was requested in December 1996 when Stephanie was in second grade. The assessment was conducted without delays; however, Stephanie was found ineligible for special education services because there was not enough of a discrepancy between her cognitive abilities and academic performance. She was found to have a low IQ and appeared to be working to her potential. It is likely that Stephanie has benefited from a placement where both foster parents are former teachers. Her foster mother was a special education teacher and refused to let Stephanie fail. She spent extensive hours working with Stephanie to develop her academic skills. She believes that if she had not spent these hours with Stephanie, she would have been found eligible for special education services. The foster mother feels that Stephanie has a subtle developmental delay and that the current tests do not expose the nature or severity of Stephanie's needs.

The foster parent has decided not to adopt Stephanie but plans to raise her until adulthood. She is concerned that Stephanie has yet to exhibit the severity of her special needs. The foster parent believes that access to available services is solely dependent on a child experiencing failure. It is noteworthy that this foster parent seems uniquely skilled to provide a superior standard of care for this challenging child.

In some cases, special education may not be the best way to obtain assistance for children. Two educational respondents spoke about the need for programs to improve students' attendance and dedication to school. According to caregivers interviewed in the phone survey, 16% of the children in the sample had missed three or more days of school during the last month in which they attended school. One educator felt that that many foster children have "lived in the absence of authority" and now they need to find ways to attend school and become more

responsible. In some cases, truancy and attendance programs may be the first step in reducing absences. When children miss a lot of school they miss opportunities to receive services through the school and to be tested for special education. Sometimes caregivers are able to find academic help outside of the school system. In situations where foster parents feel that their children would benefit from counseling and support, these services may not be available through the schools. The following vignette illustrates a situation where a foster parent felt that an outside agency served as the main source of assistance and support for her child.

Vignette 3: Services provided through an outside agency in collaboration with the school.

Keisha is a 14-year-old who has been in foster care with her aunt since she was four years old. She entered foster care because of her mother's drug use. Keisha experienced no academic problems and was considered a strong student through elementary school. However, since entering middle school it has been a struggle to keep her in school. She is on the verge of dropping out despite recent standardized test scores that indicate good academic performance. She has not been promoted since 6th grade.

Keisha's aunt is worried about Keisha's choice of friends. She is concerned that Keisha considers prostitution and gang affiliation as acceptable. Keisha does not value education and has been suspended numerous times. She creates disturbances in the classroom, and is disrespectful of teachers. She often cuts classes, missing more than ten days of the last month of school this past academic year.

The foster parent/aunt does not consider Keisha depressed and does not think that Keisha needs special education services. The family is getting counseling and support through Family Mosaic, which has been the fundamental source of assistance and support for Keisha. Family Mosaic called a meeting at Keisha's school on her behalf, which involved the county social worker, her teacher, the Family Mosaic director and therapist, the foster parent and Keisha. Due to Keisha's high academic ability, an IEP was not found appropriate. Rather, these professionals formed a team to provide services or extra support hoping that it might turn Keisha around and motivate her to apply herself to school. The foster parent was able to arrange with the school a one-on-one aide to help keep Keisha from cutting classes. The therapist meets with Keisha at home in an attempt to arrange appointments that Keisha will keep. Furthermore, Family Mosaic is working on finding a mentor for Keisha. The foster parent feels that the school, the county social worker, and the therapist have done all they can to work with Keisha. She feels that Family Mosaic has been quite sincere and has worked hard on Keisha's behalf. The foster parent seems resigned that the child's success is more dependent on Keisha's effort to turn her life around than on anything that anyone else can do.

Training to recognize special needs. Most interview participants felt that children's needs for special education primarily were recognized by their teachers, although anyone, including foster parents, could request an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Several educators explained that their school districts use Student Study Teams. After a request is made for special services, a team, typically consisting of the student, teacher, and caregiver, will decide if testing is necessary.

Teachers are trained to recognize special educational needs primarily through their credentialing program and through annual in-services at their schools. In one smaller district, the special education teachers have regular contact with other teachers in the school and maintain good communication. There seemed to be a difference between smaller districts and larger districts, where smaller districts were able to hire only fully credentialed teachers. In two of the districts, the educators said that they do not hire any teachers with emergency credentials because they are small. Unfortunately, in larger districts, some teachers may be emergency credentialed, meaning that they have not received any training on how to recognize children with special education needs. Children with special needs in these classes may go unrecognized and un-served until a later time when they come in contact with a fully trained credentialed teacher or other professional.

Social workers also may notice a need for special education and request that an assessment be conducted at the school. There seems to be a discrepancy from county to county about special education training. Some counties stated the social workers receive training and in-services about special education issues. Other counties stated that the social workers are not trained specifically to deal with special education needs. However, there does not appear to be extensive training in special education for social workers in any of the counties. Additionally,

some respondents felt that identifying children's educational needs often is secondary to other concerns social workers have about safety and secure placement.

While training programs for foster parents address special education issues in some counties more than others, trainings may not provide foster parents with all the skills they need to advocate for the children in their care. Many foster parents who participated in the phone survey seemed quite knowledgeable about special education, and frequently served as advocates for the children in their care. In these cases, there may be tension between the foster parents and the schools when caregivers feel that children are not receiving appropriate services. In the phone survey, caregivers of children for whom IEPs had been requested were asked who had requested the IEP.

?? Among 9% of the children, requests were made by the social worker.

?? For 16% of the children, it was school personnel who made the request.

?? For 44% of children, caregivers made the requests.

?? For 26% of the children, caregivers did not know who had originally requested the IEP.

Vignette 4 describes a case in which the caregivers were teachers by profession. Despite requests to the school and multiple IEPs, the caregivers were not satisfied with the services the child received and disagreed with the school about the qualifying condition of the student.

Vignette 4: IEP services inadequate for child's needs.

Jack is twelve years old and was placed in his current non-relative foster home in January, 1996 due to his parents' neglect. Jack has had an IEP since he was in the second grade. His caregivers are both teachers and found that he was a pre-reader when he was placed in their home at age eight. The caregivers worked to assist Jack in catching up with his reading skills. Jack had an annual IEP meeting until he was in the sixth grade. In sixth grade, he had three IEP meetings. The first was the annual IEP meeting. The second was a transitional IEP, since he was completing the sixth grade and transitioning to Junior High School. The qualifying condition was determined to be a learning disability. The caregivers noticed that Jack had abandonment issues and was acting out in the classroom, which resulted in several suspensions from school. The caregivers requested a third IEP meeting and demanded that an emotional/behavior disorder be added to the IEP as a qualifying condition. The meeting was requested verbally by the caregivers and by Jack's social worker. This meeting took place in May, 2000. The school ruled out severe emotional/behavioral disorder and stated that Jack would need continued testing at the Jr. High School this fall to determine if he should have emotional/behavior disorder as a qualifying condition. The caregivers felt the meeting was of limited use since Jack is transitioning to Jr. High School and would need to resume testing there.

In other cases, foster parents may know little about special education. Data from the phone survey suggest that almost 20% of caregivers had not heard of an IEP. One respondent in the informational interviews mentioned that foster parents may not have enough information about the system to know about educational services. There are many reasons that a foster parent may be uninformed. Newly trained foster parents may not have the experience to navigate the system. Relative caregivers often do not know as much about special services because they have not received the same training as licensed foster parents. Group home staff have may have little or no knowledge about the school system.

Assessment

Timelines. Although the law specifies timelines for schools to respond to IEP requests, perceptions regarding the duration of time needed for children to be assessed for IEPs after requests are made seemed to vary greatly among educators. Some respondents believed that timelines are usually met and there is little delay in assessments. One respondent said that there

is a 30-day window, unless parents do not agree to the assessment. If the parents do not agree, children's cases are dropped. Another participant said that all assessments are done within 50-days. Another educator, however, stated that the assessment process can take anywhere from a very short time to a long time, depending on the children, the schools involved, and the children's needs.

As a group, child welfare directors seemed to feel that the schools are unable to finish testing along legal timelines. When asked about assessment, one director said, "If anything happens in six months, it is a miracle." However, data from the phone surveys suggest that for most foster children, the IEP meeting happens within the legal timelines (see Table 13). Specifically, for just over half of those children with IEPs whose caregivers knew the timeframes in question, the time between the request for the IEP and the actual meeting was 30 days or less. One-fourth of the children waited 1-2 months, and the remaining 25% had a delay of at least two months.

Table 13. Time Between Request for IEP and IEP Meeting.

Time to receipt of IEP	N	% of known	% of total with IEPs
Less than 30 days	37	53.6	33.6
1 – 2 months	16	23.2	14.5
More than 2 months	16	23.2	14.5
Total children w/IEPs whose caregivers knew timeframes	69	100.0	62.7
(Timeframes unknown)	41	----	37.3
Total children with IEPs	110	----	100.0

The following vignette illustrates the difficulty that caregivers can face when trying to obtain services for children in a timely manner.

Vignette 5: Extensive efforts made toward IEP request.

Aliyah was placed in her current foster care setting in October, 1993 when she was almost four years old. She was placed in a non-relative foster home for reasons that are unknown to her foster parents. Currently, Aliyah is ten and a half years old and her foster parents have guardianship rights. Aliyah had always been an average student in school, however, in the last two school years she had been showing signs of increasing difficulty completing her assignments. In September of 1999, Aliyah's foster parents made requests to the school to get specialized services for her. Aliyah's foster parents were convinced that she had a learning disability that was getting progressively worse and wanted to prevent Aliyah from falling behind even more than she was already. The school did not respond to the foster parents' repeated requests until the last week of school in June, 2000. Aliyah, in the meantime, started developing behavior problems. Aliyah began talking out of turn in the classroom, taking things without permission, and stopped listening to authority. Aliyah's foster parents felt that her behavior was a response to her frustration of falling behind in school. Aliyah's foster parents located a tutor to help her catch up, however, Aliyah did not complete her assignments.

At the end of school year in June, 2000, Aliyah met with the school psychiatrist who determined that she was functioning at a fourth grade level academically (approximately two years behind what she should be for her chronological age). These results of the testing were then disclosed at a meeting the foster parents had with the school psychiatrist and Aliyah's teacher. No services were identified to help Aliyah with her learning problem. The psychiatrist and the teacher recommended that she work more closely with her teacher next year. The foster parent requested that she be held back a year to catch up, however, the psychiatrist and teacher felt that would not be a good idea and decided to let her continue on to the 6th grade. Contrary to the school psychiatrist's and teacher's conclusion, the foster parents felt that the test results proved that Aliyah did have some form of learning disability and that the school just refused to provide special education services. The foster parents then contacted the county social worker and informed her of the school evaluation and asked if she might assist them with obtaining special education services for Aliyah. The county social worker stated that she would have the county conduct a psychological evaluation of their own. For a month now, there has been no further word from the school or county.

The foster parents feel that their battle to convince the school that Aliyah needs special education services has been very stressful and frustrating. The foster parents feel Aliyah is a good child, but has developed frustrations due to her difficulties in school, which have had a direct negative effect on her behavior causing her to continually fall behind in school. The foster parents continue to believe that Aliyah needs special education services and constant guidance, however, this experience has been so frustrating that they are considering relinquishing their guardianship if they do not receive any educational assistance for Aliyah. A disruption of placement would likely be harmful to Aliyah. Her self-esteem has been greatly diminished by failing in school and leaving her placement of nearly seven years could potentially further damage her self-esteem and future scholastic achievement.

Availability of school psychologists for testing. Several respondents mentioned the shortage of qualified individuals to perform testing for IEPs. In many districts, a school

psychologist is only available at a given school one day a week, if many children at the school are waiting for tests, there may be a waiting list. If a child is only in a placement temporarily and there is a backlog of children waiting to be tested, the child may not be tested before he or she leaves. When this happens, only the recommendation is forwarded to the new school. Additionally, one child welfare director mentioned that the shortage of school psychologists may result in IEP meetings only occurring on certain days, which may prohibit social workers from attending the meeting.

Phone survey participants representing children who had delays two months or greater between the IEP request and the meeting were asked for reasons why they thought the delay existed. Most described a process problem, such as a backlog of cases or scheduling difficulties. Vignette 6 illustrates the long delay that may result when children need to wait for IEP testing.

Vignette 6: Delayed IEP due to testing waitlist.

Juan is eleven years old. In April, 1997 when Juan was eight years old, he entered foster care along with four siblings. The children were neglected and subjected to physical and emotional abuse. In the next six months before Juan was placed in his current foster family agency home in October, 1997, he was moved three times. Before this placement, the foster parent believes he changed schools at least eight times. School records indicate kindergarten retention. He is currently in long-term foster care with this foster parent and lives with three of his siblings. He has not changed schools since he stabilized with this family.

Within a month of enrolling him in school, the foster mother verbally requested a special education assessment. The school site team met with her within the week of the request to develop a plan for Juan's education, however, it took nearly two years to get the special education assessment from the district. Outside of the school's inability to get the school district to conduct the special education assessment, the foster parent credits the school site with being very aware and supportive of Juan's academic needs. These accommodations and supports, however, were not enough to keep Juan from feeling badly about his academic skills.

The school informed the foster parent that a district backlog prevented the special education assessment from taking place in a timely manner. Written appeals and phone calls to the school and the school district, from either the foster parent or the social worker, failed to result in an assessment. The foster parent was not aware of any advocacy organizations, and Juan was yet to be assigned a CASA worker. In the mean time, it became more and more apparent that Juan was unable to understand his schoolwork. He internalized his failure, attempting to seek teacher approval through other teacher pleasing behaviors. The foster parent eventually faxed a letter to the school district's superintendent indicating that she was about to contact a children's lawyer on Juan's behalf. Juan was tested one week later.

The eligibility criteria were somewhat unclear in the psycho-educational report. Juan was determined to have a learning disability despite no evidence of a processing disorder. He was found to have a disorder in expressive and receptive language that made him eligible for speech services, however, his conversational communication was age and peer appropriate. A mild cognitive delay also was determined, thus identifying him as a "slow learner." The foster parent stated that one could not tell from appearances or interaction that Juan might have learning problems.

With the special education assessment Juan was placed in a special day class with speech therapy. There were no delays in receiving services. He continues to work below grade level in reading and math, but is receiving A's and B's. With the day class placement, Juan is nearly grade-level with content knowledge, but continues to exhibit below grade-level skills. The foster mother noted that he experiences far greater success with teaching that involves kinesthetic and visual instruction. She attributes some of his gains to a tutor that works with him at home, and to family life experiences that enrich his knowledge base.

Language barriers and testing. Another barrier to obtaining IEP testing may be a lack of available resources to test a child in their fluent language. Like the lack of school psychologists, this language issue resource problem may result in failure to test children in a timely manner.

Vignette 7 shows the delay that can happen when a district does not have the means to assess children in their native language.

Vignette 7: Delay in IEP meeting due to language issues.

Marissa is a sixteen-year-old girl, who was born in Mexico in the Summer of 1984, where she experienced neglect as well as physical and sexual abuse. She attended 1st grade, but stopped going to school after the teacher told Marissa's mother that she was delayed and the school believed Marissa should not bother going to school. At 12 years of age, Marissa's mother passed away after a prolonged illness. Marissa moved to the United States to live with her sister in California. She was enrolled mid-year, in a local middle school under the last name of her married sister. According to the current foster parent, Marissa was assigned to the 7th grade, based on her age. Marissa did not speak English, nor was she literate in Spanish. Also according to the foster parent, it appears that the school never noticed her poor academic skills and promoted her to the next grade at the end of the school year, six months later.

Shortly thereafter, Marissa was made a dependent of the court based on physical abuse inflicted by her brother-in-law. She was placed with her current caregiver in October, 1998, a Spanish-speaking non-relative, county foster parent. The foster placement required a change in school districts. In order to get the documents necessary to enroll Marissa in a new school the foster parent called Marissa's social worker, the prior school district, and the prior school. She also contacted Marissa's sister who was able to give her the documents necessary for school enrollment. The foster parent accomplished this in one week's time, attributing her success to familiarity with school system enrollment policies.

At the time of this placement in October, 1998, the foster parent asked the Department of Social Services to conduct a mental health evaluation of Marissa because she was withdrawn and refused to speak. Despite her withdrawn affect, the foster parent realized Marissa's inability to communicate well in either Spanish or English. In November, 1998, immediately upon enrolling Marissa in school, the foster parent asked that the school counselor conduct a full educational assessment of Marissa in Spanish. She backed-up her written request with a mental health assessment that detailed some of Marissa's special needs. The school informed the foster parent that the district did not have the means to conduct an assessment in Spanish and offered an assessment in English, which the foster parent refused. The school then requested that the foster parent get a bi-lingual assessment from an outside agency. The foster parent worked with the social services agency to get an outside assessment and to maintain pressure on the school. A bi-lingual psycho-educational assessment was conducted over the summer. By November, 1999, the school district found a bi-lingual assessor who verified the outside assessment. The foster parent felt the delays were a result of a school district that was unable to identify qualified personnel to conduct the assessment and a social services agency that re-assigned a series of three to four social workers to the child's case over the course of one year.

During the course of this year, the caregiver sought information and support from various organizations, specifically Foster Parents of Contra Costa, a special education organization in San Francisco and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). The staff at Foster Parents of Contra Costa/Foster Family Network, an organization for new foster

parents, referred the foster parent to other agencies that were able to assist and inform the foster parent of the legal rights and responsibilities related to special education. Because of the delays and inability of school district administrators to consider the severity of Marissa's needs, the foster parent contacted a special education advocacy organization. This agency informed the foster parent of the federal laws and timelines associated with requests for a special education assessment. A CASA volunteer provided support for the IEP, and acted in the capacity of educational surrogate. Apparently Marissa's status as both a dependent of the court and an orphan caused the court to terminate the sister's educational rights and to appoint a surrogate to act on behalf of Marissa's educational needs. According to the foster parent, the CASA volunteer was appointed as the educational surrogate and signed the IEP. Each of these organizations provided the caregiver with the information and support necessary for her to push the school on behalf of the child's legally entitled rights to special education assessment and services.

Once the IEP meeting was held there were no delays in receiving services. Marissa now receives special education services for a learning disability in visual-motor processes with mild retardation. She is assigned to a special day class most of the day, and receives all requested services in a regular school setting. A Spanish-speaking para-professional has been assigned to Marissa to facilitate her understanding of academic content. Marissa also is enrolled in an Independent Living program, a county-sponsored program for teenagers. The foster parent is in constant contact with Marissa's teachers, and receives a written progress report weekly. The foster parent was a full participant at the IEP meeting, and felt free to ask questions and request the services that she felt were in Marissa's best interests.

Obtaining Special Education Services

Resources. Educational informants described a variety of specialized services offered in their schools. Programs such as special day classes, Severely Emotionally Disturbed (SED) classrooms, Student Study Teams, and tutoring are just a few of the many options that were mentioned as being available in schools. Table 14 shows the special education environments phone survey participants described children in their care receiving and Table 15 shows the qualifying condition for services. The most common types of special educational supports given to children represented in this study were resource support in addition to a regular classroom, resource specialists, speech therapy, and counseling. Almost half the children who qualified for special education were classified as having a learning disability. Approximately another third of the children who qualified for special education were seen as having an emotional or behavioral problem.

Table 14: Special Education Services Utilized by Children.

Classroom Type	Number (110)	Percentage
Resource Specialist	67	61.5
Counseling	49	45.0
Regular education class with resource support	48	43.6
Speech Therapy	47	43.1
Other services	32	29.1
Special education class most of the day	29	26.4
Tutor	25	22.9
Special education class part of the day	16	14.5
Non-public school	15	13.6

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% as child can receive more than one service.

Table 15. Conditions that Qualified for Special Education

Qualifying Condition	Number	Percentage
Learning Disability	51	46.4
Behavioral/Emotional Problems	29	26.4
Unknown	13	11.8
Other	10	9.0
Mental Retardation	5	4.5
Physical Disability	2	1.8
Total	110	100.0

Schools, however, may not always offer a full range of special education options, or only a limited number of classes may exist. Educational respondents explained that they are supposed to enroll children, place them in the least restrictive school program that is most like their prior placement, and then start the IEP process within 30 days. Yet there can be delays because schools may want to wait to enroll children until after the IEP meeting, but they do not want to set up an IEP until children are already enrolled. Ultimately, children may wait until an appropriate classroom opens or be moved to a different school where an open class exists.

In general, educational respondents and child welfare directors agreed that schools do not provide the services necessary to accommodate all of the children in attendance. Lack of resources was a concern raised in most interviews. One educator said that school programs are overburdened and it is “like herding cattle” because schools give children the basics and “ship them back to class.” There are more children who need special education than schools can

accommodate, and the schools desperately need more special education teachers. As one child welfare director explained, the schools have an “unfunded mandate.” The school system is mandated to give a certain level of services, but they are not given enough money to provide the mandated services. The schools may be reluctant to test children for IEPs or provide special education services because of the money that it costs the district. Additionally, there is pressure on special education programs not to deplete the fund for general education children. One respondent suggested that the number of children who need IEPs is so high that the schools are unable to give it to everyone, and they need to set up “roadblocks” because there are not enough resources. Vignette 8 illustrates the difficulty of enrolling a child in school, when sufficient services are unavailable.

Vignette 8: Inadequate resources from school and child welfare systems.

In 1998, when Charlie was six years old, he and his five other siblings were removed from their home due to physical abuse by their mother's boyfriend. Prior to that time, the family moved around a lot, changing schools and housing situations. Charlie and his twin brother were placed with a maternal aunt who lived near the family.

Initially, Charlie continued to attend the same school. He had difficulty at that school with his behavior, hitting other children, acting out, and not listening in class. His aunt moved to a different school district, but was able to keep the boys in the same school. Charlie's behavior problems worsened; he was suspended once, and his aunt began receiving almost daily phone calls from the school about his behavior. Eventually, 1½ months after the boys came to stay with their aunt, they were expelled from school. Apparently, no suggestion was made to the aunt to consider or request an IEP for Charlie and at that time, she was unaware special services existed.

The boys were out of school for two to three weeks while the aunt searched for a new school. Her search was difficult because she needed a school in her district that had availability in the appropriate classroom, as well as an on-site daycare that also had openings. She finally found a new school, but enrolling the boys in the new school was challenging. At the time of removal and during the early months of the case, the boys' mother was angry with the aunt for cooperating with social services, and wouldn't provide any information. The aunt had none of the paperwork necessary to enroll the boys in school: no information about the boys' school history, and no birth certificates, social security cards, nor immunization records. Obtaining the necessary items involved visiting the county records building to get birth certificates, locating a doctor that would take MediCal and provide new shot records, and obtaining a letter from the social worker regarding the boys' status in her home. The time it took to complete these tasks contributed to a delay in enrolling the boys in the new school.

Charlie continued to have behavioral problems in the new school, but at this school the teacher explained to the aunt at a student conference what an IEP was, and that she should request one for Charlie. In addition to having behavior problems, Charlie needed help in reading, math, and spelling. The IEP meeting did not take place for several months due to difficulty scheduling a date that everyone could attend. The IEP meeting provided Charlie with weekly tutoring. His teacher continued to have difficulty with him in the classroom and felt that he needed one-on-one help. The school did not have special education classrooms and at the end of that academic year, the aunt was told that the boys could not return to the school, that she needed to take them to their "home school" – the school nearest her home.

Because there was no day care on site at the school near her home, and no community day care available nearby, she again had to find another school. Eventually, she applied for an inter-district transfer, so that she could send the boys to a school in the district near her place of employment. After waiting for weeks and calling every day, the transfer was finally approved and the boys enrolled in school in October. However, once again, the services that Charlie received through the IEP were not adequately dealing with his difficult behaviors. The school was calling the aunt frequently and again at the end of this last academic year she received a letter from the school that Charlie could not return there and needed a more restrictive environment. Because he was not living in that district they directed her back to the district of origin. Once again, she is facing having to find a new school for Charlie.

Overall, the aunt feels that Charlie has made improvement. He can't read yet, but his reading skills are better. His math skills have greatly improved. His behavior, while still problematic, has substantially improved as well. However, the aunt is extremely frustrated with the lack of support she feels she has received from schools in helping her locate new placements, and with the failure of the child welfare system to provide respite care or emergency day care. As of July, 2000, she doesn't know where she will enroll Charlie in school for the upcoming academic year.

Timeliness in obtaining services. Educational respondents had a range of perceptions regarding the amount of time needed for children to receive special education services after they are identified in an assessment. Some respondents believed children were placed within 30 days. Others felt that, depending on the types of services needed, delays could be long. One educator described experiencing delays getting children into SED classrooms. In this example, there were only a few classrooms and each one was filled to capacity. The respondents described an “unofficial waitlist” where children are put in “the next best thing” until a space opens or the child is placed in a non-public school. Of the 110 children represented in the phone survey who had IEPs, 14% had delays of two weeks or longer in receiving at least one of the services indicated at the IEP meeting. In situations where there are adequate resources, services can be provided in a timely manner. Vignette 9 describes a situation where a child’s needs were successfully identified through continued IEP meetings, and appropriate services were provided.

Vignette 9: Successful identification of needs through continued IEP meetings.

Roberto is a ten-year-old boy who was born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in 1989 to drug-addicted parents. He was placed in a non-relative foster home in 1993, at the age of four, when his parents were sentenced to prison for drug-related charges. Roberto was placed with his current foster parents in October, 1998, which is also a non-relative, foster home. Prior to the 1993 placement, Roberto's parents spoke Spanish in the home, but Roberto could not communicate in Spanish or English. He relied on his older brother, who was placed in the same foster home, to communicate for him.

In his current placement, his foster parents arraigned for massive dental surgery because Roberto's teeth were rotten. Roberto's foster mother requested an IEP meeting in November and the school referred him to a speech therapist, a physical therapist, and a psychologist for assessment. The IEP meeting took place in January, as soon as the assessments were completed. The IEP focused mainly on Roberto's speech delay and the school administrators referred him to a speech therapist. Within a few months, he began speaking English and at the end of the school year he transferred to a public school.

Roberto just completed fourth grade in a regular classroom with special education services. Though he is still performing below grade level in most subjects, he is receiving satisfactory grades from his special education teacher. According to his caregiver, Roberto has made great academic progress and speaks clearly when he is concentrating. At the most recent IEP meeting, Roberto was identified as having ADD. He finds it difficult to concentrate and process lessons. Roberto has had some disciplinary problems. He was suspended for harassing a female student. Another time, Roberto took something from another student then tried to return the item. He was caught returning the item so he lied to cover his tracks. His foster mother believes that he acts impulsively. He does not take the time to think about the consequences of his actions. He does what feels right in the moment, and he feels awful when he realizes that he has hurt someone.

Roberto is generally very successful socially. He has many friends and he participates in a church group, Boy Scouts, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters. He plays basketball, soccer and water polo and he takes horseback riding and piano lessons. His foster parents are proud of the progress he is making at speaking, reading, and writing. They feel that the schools he has attended include them in the decisions concerning Roberto and keep them informed of Roberto's progress.

Authorizing services. Educational respondents offered a variety of strategies used for IEP authorization in their respective schools. Some educators emphasized the need for biological parents to authorize services, or for an educational surrogate to be assigned. Once the child is tested, in order to get services implemented, schools legally need the signature of the biological parent or surrogate. Obtaining signatures from biological parents may lead to long delays in children receiving services. Another respondent stated, however, that they always ask

who has the right to legal guardianship, and only the legal guardian can sign for child assessments. In practice, this respondent said that foster parents often sign for special educational services. Several respondents felt that there were no problems getting signatures for special education because foster parents can sign the forms. One participant said that the school does not differentiate between legal guardianship and foster parenting. Despite rules, in many cases, both foster parents and group home staff sign for services. One respondent stated that they “will put kids in programs even without signatures.” The goal of allowing many different people to sign is to obtain services for children. As one participant stated, the school “is just trying to get services to kids” and they “don’t want anything to stand in the way.” Data from the phone survey confirm that caregivers frequently sign IEPs as parents of the children. Eighty-one percent of caregivers of children with IEPs report having signed the IEP as parents of the children. Thus, although many children receive special education services, confusion surrounding legal rules and school practices regarding authorization of special education services remains problematic for many children in foster care.

Most participants felt that the circumstances that prompt an IEP were not different when dealing with foster children compared to the general population. It seemed to be a general consensus that the school strives to treat all children the same. However, one respondent suggested that emotional issues can create trouble for foster children. Additionally, foster children tend to have many more people involved in their cases. As one county child welfare director mentioned, social workers are very busy and are not always able to make it to school appointments. In turn, the schools may not be accommodating to social workers’ schedules when planning meetings.

Continuity and assigning education surrogates. The lack of continuity in a foster child's life was a recurring theme in the interviews. This problem can affect a child's educational experience in several ways. Firstly, many biological parents still maintain rights over their children's education. In cases where the district enforces rules around signatures, obtaining a signature from a biological parent can take a long period of time and be very difficult to secure. For mental health services, paperwork can delay services because of the time it takes to get the papers signed and sent back and forth. There were varying viewpoints around the idea of biological parents maintaining educational rights. One respondent stated that it is important to keep biological parents involved in education because it allows parents, who cannot currently care for their children, to remain involved. In cases where the biological parents are unable to maintain educational rights, this respondent thought that an eligible family member may be able to serve as a surrogate.

Alternately, another respondent felt equally strongly that the parent's educational rights should be terminated, and a surrogate should be appointed. Most respondents agreed that there can be problems obtaining signatures from a biological parent who is not involved in their children's education. In these cases, an educational surrogate should be appointed who is a consistently available person in the child's life. Many respondents felt that Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) are often appropriate surrogates. However, not every child has a CASA, and educational surrogate rights may be too much responsibility for some CASA workers. In some cases, social workers were suggested as good educational surrogates, however, frequent changes in social workers and a large caseload were cited as concerns. Many respondents emphasized that there was no one position that always served as the best educational

advocate, and it was important to find the most consistent, appropriate person in an individual child's life.

Phone survey participants reported that for 19.5% of the children, parents' educational rights had been terminated. For over half of the children for whom birth parents' educational rights had been terminated, foster parents indicated that an educational surrogate had been appointed. In 72% of cases in which an educational surrogate had been appointed, the caregiver had been assigned the role. While CASA advocates rarely were appointed surrogates, over 20% of the children represented in this study had CASAs (Table 16). In Napa County a majority (55%) of the children had CASA workers. In Alameda, San Francisco and San Mateo counties, no foster children had CASA workers, and in Contra Costa and Santa Clara counties under 10% of foster children had CASA workers. In Monterey, Santa Cruz and Sonoma counties, one quarter to one half of foster children had CASA workers. Almost 30% of the sampled children had an advocate of some kind assigned to their cases.

Table 16: Children Appointed CASA Volunteers (By County)

	Has CASA Worker		Does Not Have CASA Worker		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alameda	0	0.0	16	100.0	16	100.0
Contra Costa	2	5.3	36	94.7	38	100.0
Monterey	7	35.0	13	65.0	20	100.0
Napa	22	55.0	18	45.0	40	100.0
San Francisco	0	0.0	49	100.0	49	100.0
San Mateo	0	0.0	20	100.0	20	100.0
Santa Clara	2	7.7	24	92.3	26	100.0
Santa Cruz	24	40.7	35	59.3	59	100.0
Sonoma	9	25.7	26	74.3	35	100.0
Totals	66	21.8	237	78.2	303	100.0

School Success

Another issue of concern regarding foster youth and education is school performance. In the phone survey, caregivers were asked about children's grades as well as whether the children were working at, above, or below grade level, in the subjects of math and reading. Based on caregiver responses, researchers computed a variable, "school success," defined as working at or above grade level, and receiving 'B's or better. Approximately half of the children were succeeding in math, and about half were succeeding in reading according to this definition. About 38% were succeeding in both subjects, 27% in one, and about 35% were not succeeding in either subject. A variable "doing poorly" also was computed, indicating when a student was working below grade level and getting C's or worse in both subjects. Approximately 8% of youth were doing poorly by this definition, and over 20% of youth in the sample had failed or been kept back a grade.

Table 17 shows children's school performance by county. About half the children from Monterey, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties were performing well in both reading and math according to their caregivers. In Alameda, Contra Costa, Napa and Santa Cruz counties, around one-third of the children were performing well in both reading and math. In Sonoma County, about 9% of foster children were performing well in both reading and math. Few of the children sampled for this study performed poorly in both reading and math. In San Mateo County, no children performed poorly in both subjects, and in Monterey, Napa, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Sonoma counties fewer than 10% of foster children performed poorly. In Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Francisco counties, fewer than 20% of foster children were performing poorly in both subjects.

Table 17: School Performance

	Good Performance in both Reading and Math		Poor Performance in both Reading and Math	
	N	% county sample	N	% county sample
Alameda	5	31.3	3	18.8
Contra Costa	15	39.5	5	13.2
Monterey	10	50.0	1	5.0
Napa	14	35.0	2	5.0
San Francisco	23	46.9	6	12.2
San Mateo	9	45.0	0	0.0
Santa Clara	13	50.0	2	7.7
Santa Cruz	22	37.3	3	5.1
Sonoma	3	8.6	2	5.7
Total Sample	114	37.6	24	8.0

Note: Totals do not add to 100% across rows because some children performed well or poorly in only one subject.

In order to predict which children were more likely to succeed in school, a logistic regression was run with the outcome of “school success.” As explained in the Methods section of this report, an odds ratio greater than one means that individuals with the characteristic are more likely than those without it to experience the event, while an odds ratio less than one means the odds of the event are reduced for those with the characteristic. A wide confidence interval means the estimate is imprecise; a narrow confidence interval provides greater confidence in the precision of the estimate. A p-value of less than .05 provides evidence to support the conclusion that the characteristic does have an influence on the outcome. The smaller the p-value, the stronger the evidence supporting this conclusion.

Prior to conducting this analysis, the bivariate relationships between each county and the outcome variable “school success” were inspected to determine if placement by a particular county was likely to be related to a child’s academic performance. The bivariate statistics

indicated that Sonoma and Santa Clara counties should be included in the model and the logistic regression was conducted with their inclusion. It should be noted that although each county had a different number of children represented in the study and that these numbers of children do not represent a consistent proportion of each county's dependent care caseload, the statistical findings are not affected and are considered robust against these idiosyncrasies. Results for Santa Clara were not significant, indicating that the influence of placement by Santa Clara county on school success was no greater than chance.

Controlling for other variables in the model, odds of school success were reduced for children with certain characteristics. Children with more emotional and behavioral problems were less likely to succeed in school. Children with learning disabilities were less likely than children without learning disabilities to succeed. Children who needed, or had, an IEP were less likely to succeed than children who didn't need or have one. Children placed by Sonoma County were less likely than children placed by other counties to succeed.¹ Finally, children with case plans of reunification were less likely than children with case plans other than reunification to succeed in school. Overall, these variables accounted for approximately 47% of the total variability in the outcome.

¹ Review of per pupil expenditures reported by the School Fiscal Services Division of the California Department of Education reveals that mean expenditures across participating counties are similar, however the number of school districts within participating counties ranges from 1 (San Francisco) to 38 (Sonoma) which may mean that tracking foster children's educational needs across school districts is more complicated in this county. In addition, Table 7 (p.31) of this report shows that 88% of children in Sonoma county have special needs (the highest percentage of any county represented in the study). Although this analysis controlled for emotional and behavioral problems, learning disabilities, and needing or having an IEP, it is reasonable to assume that children with special needs would have difficulty succeeding in school.

Table 18: Model for School Success

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	P-Value
Emotional Problems Scale	.52	(.37, .72)	.000
Learning Disability	.40	(.17, .93)	.034
Needs IEP	.11	(.03, .43)	.001
Age	.87	(.79, .95)	.003
Has IEP	.16	(.07, .36)	.000
Sonoma	.13	(.03, .51)	.003
Reunification	.23	(.07, .79)	.019

The finding that a child with an IEP had a reduced likelihood of school success was replicated and confirmed in the analysis of the case file review data. In that analysis, it was found that a child with an IEP was much less likely to be working at grade level than a child who did not have an IEP.

Collaboration

Lack of communication and difficulties with sharing information were themes found to affect most aspects of children's school experiences. In many situations, the child welfare system and the educational system cannot adequately communicate because of confidentiality rules and barriers to information sharing. For example, the school system may need to know how a child's history of abuse may affect his or her ability to learn in school, however the school system should not receive other information contained in a child's welfare care record pertaining to other family members such as siblings or parents. Respondents mentioned the need to maintain confidentiality requirements, however, it was also stated that it is necessary to find ways to share pertinent school information. Respondents mentioned that, in some cases, agencies have found ways to separate school information from children's case record, and thereby release only the school information.

Several respondents stated that beyond sharing information, there is little or no collaboration between agencies. In many ways, the child welfare and the educational system

work separately from each other. Respondents felt that the schools are primarily concerned with education and may be unaware of the special needs of foster children. Similarly, the child welfare system is primarily concerned with safety and the educational needs of children may be considered secondary. As one participant stated, “The system is totally devoted to safety and education is not even part of the equation.” Additionally, social workers may have little training in school issues. “The systems are not coordinated.... We need to work together with the school.” In general, respondents felt that increased collaboration between schools and child welfare professionals would be helpful in obtaining needed services for foster children. As one participant suggested, further collaboration needs to be required by “finding ways that the two systems would naturally work together.”

Summary

Several key themes emerged from the data. These themes included problems associated with transferring information, such as the cumulative record and immunization record, obtaining testing and special education services in a timely manner, inadequate resources in the school system, and increasing continuity in foster children’s lives. Missing information from prior schools increased the odds of enrollment delays 6 ½ times. In most areas, there was no consensus about how to ameliorate the situation and improve education for foster children, but many suggestions were offered. Findings concerning whether foster children should be systematically identified in the schools seemed particularly controversial. Additionally, school districts were found to vary in their interpretation of the law regarding authorization for special education services and assigning educational surrogates. Many respondents emphasized the need for increased educational training for social workers, increased information sharing (provided

that it would not jeopardize confidentiality), more funding for school psychologists, and greater collaboration efforts.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the educational experiences of Bay Area foster children. Specifically, the study examined how long it takes foster children to enter school, be assessed for educational needs, and receive specialized services. The strength of the study lies in its use of three sources of data, with phone surveys and case review techniques providing documentation on the same group of children. In addition, the study represents a regional approach to studying the educational experiences of foster children through the participation of small and large counties and the representation of urban as well as suburban children.

Although we started with a random sample and attempted to reach caregivers three times in writing and additional times by telephone, our response rate was quite low. This means that the information from the sample is not necessarily representative of the population from which it was drawn (school aged foster children in the nine counties). Also, it is possible that caregivers may not have had accurate information about children's experiences prior to their placement in their current settings. Likewise, information obtained from county child welfare case files can only be considered as accurate as the information recorded in the files. Due to the many burdens placed on social workers, it is possible that not all information known to them is routinely entered in children's files. For these reasons, caution should be used in interpreting the results of this study and future research focusing on foster children's educational services and academic outcomes would benefit from accessing children's school records as a source of data.

Review of the results suggests nine dilemmas that are not easily resolved and act as barriers preventing foster children from achieving their fullest academic success. Each of these areas are discussed below.

Difficulties Transferring Children's Cumulative Records for School Enrollment

Results from the phone surveys and interviews indicated that transferring the cumulative record when children move to a new school could result in delayed enrollment. During this time, children may or may not be able to begin attending classes and may lose valuable time in school. Research participants suggested various strategies to ameliorate this situation. One possibility is to allow children in California to enroll without the cumulative record on a temporary basis with records following within 30 days. Another option is to have social workers assist with locating and transferring the records. A third option is to employ a county liaison through the schools who would be empowered to transfer records. Fourth, the cumulative record could be placed on an electronic database that all schools statewide could access, like the Health and Education Passport.

Difficulties Obtaining Immunization Records for School Enrollment

In many cases, the immunization record may be the most difficult piece of information for a new school to obtain when children try to enroll. One half of the children in the sample were missing medical information and immunization records. Interestingly, while respondents listed immunizations as the largest roadblock in enrolling children in school, analysis of the phone survey data did not suggest that children missing medical information had a higher likelihood of delayed enrollment. Foster parents often are asked to get a new set of immunizations for their children for the purposes of enrollment. From a health perspective, it may be dangerous for children to be immunized when shots are not needed. One possible solution to this dilemma is to allow children in California to enroll without the record, provided they were previously enrolled at a California school. Another option is to create an electronic

database, or use the existing Health and Education Passport, to store the information so that it can be accessed and transferred more efficiently.

Responsibility for Enrolling Children in School

In most cases foster parents or group home staff enroll children in school. Most participants indicated comfort with this practice. Consideration also could be given, however, to the pros and cons of empowering social workers to enroll children, and the consequences of potentially having more than one person's position empowered to enroll children, so that enrollment situations can be tailored to meet each child's needs.

Analyses suggest that group home children were significantly more likely to have delayed enrollments. Children in group homes tend to have more complex cases than children in family foster care and may require more specialized services. As children's scores on the scale of emotional/behavioral problems increased, their likelihood of a delayed enrollment increased. One interpretation of this finding is that children with emotional problems are more likely to have IEPs, and the process of incorporating IEP services slows down the enrollment process. Having an IEP, however, did not appear to be associated with delayed enrollment. It remains unclear why children with more emotional problems are more likely to have delayed enrollments and future research is needed to further investigate this question.

Identifying Foster Children in Schools

Identifying foster children in school was considered a controversial topic among study participants. Some respondents shared strong feelings that identification of foster children in schools may stigmatize them. Others felt strongly that foster children should be identified in school enrollment processes so that they can automatically be tested or offered specialized services. The findings from this study do not clearly resolve this dilemma and administrators of

schools and child welfare agencies should consider working together to find a solution that best fits the children of their county. One possible solution would be to identify foster children to school principals, and perhaps teachers, so that appropriate action could be taken to provide these children with individualized services. Their identity as foster children, however, could be shielded from the children's peers.

One problem with identifying foster children to school administrators is that schools may be reluctant to provide services to foster children because of funding concerns. Due to the location of family foster homes and group homes, children may be moved to a new school district when their placement changes. Although "reluctance" is not allowable by law, the new school district may feel burdened by needing to support these children who, in their perspective, do not belong to them. This situation can cause resentment in a community when a new group home or foster home emerges. Likewise, the movement of children creates tension among school districts. Solutions are needed to decrease this tension and ensure that children receive the services to which they are entitled in a timely manner.

Study participants suggested that fiscal responsibility for foster children's educational services could reside with the county office of education. This approach presumably would ameliorate tension between school districts but it is likely that inter-county tension would still exist for children who are moved across counties by the child welfare agencies.

Another option is to assess children for special education services in their "home" school district before they are moved and have funding for identified services move with them to the new school district. This approach is designed to reduce the burden of expensive special needs felt by the new school district receiving a child, but it could also create new problems for the school district that must pay for services for children outside of their service area.

School districts and child welfare agencies need to work together to examine the potential benefits and pitfalls of each approach in order to develop a new model for meeting children's needs while decreasing the burdens felt by individual school districts. Potentially, county agencies could provide permanent educational surrogates for foster children while working to reduce the number of placement moves that foster children experience. Also, the counties and school districts could work together to pass legislation supporting children who wish to remain in the same school district when they are moved from one foster placement to another.

So far, discussion has focused on possible school-based solutions to meet the educational needs of foster children. The educational problems posed by frequent moves could be alleviated by lowering the number of home placements that foster children experience. Children frequently are forced to move from county to county because there are not enough placements available within the county of origin. Another reason that foster children switch homes is that foster parents and group home staff feel they are unable to appropriately handle foster children's behavioral problems. The counties could develop more intensive trainings for foster caregivers and group home staff to equip them with the skills necessary to manage the difficult behavior that their foster children exhibit.

Identifying Children with Special Needs

The findings suggest that some social workers and foster parents may not be adequately informed about special education to know when children in their care need special services, nor how to go about obtaining services. In addition, the training of social workers regarding the educational needs of children varied by county. New ways of informing child welfare workers about the educational needs of foster care children need to be found. One possibility is to target educational training to social workers. Another option is to have education specialists who work

either within child welfare or in the schools to specifically address foster children's educational needs. With regard to foster parents, information about special education could be included in Model Approach to Parenting Partnership (MAPP) training and efforts could be made to ensure that relative caregivers receive the same information.

With regard to the odds of children having an IEP, it was found that children in kin care are less likely to be receiving special education services. This finding is consistent with previous research (Goerge, et al., 1992). There are several ways this could be interpreted. Perhaps the security of living with relatives acts as a support to children in such a manner that special education services are not required. Alternately, perhaps many children in kin care could benefit from special education services, but kin caregivers are less knowledgeable and skilled at advocating for those services than are other kinds of caregivers. It was also found that children whose social workers visited most frequently were more likely to have IEPs. Perhaps social workers who are more involved in a case and visiting more frequently are more likely to understand the needs of the children and be more actively involved in advocating for children's educational needs. Because the statistical model controls for emotional and behavioral problems, learning delays and developmental delays, the finding seems unlikely to be purely a function of frequent social worker visits with more difficult children.

Assessing Children for Special Education

A variety of barriers were found to impede testing children for special education services in a timely manner. Foremost among these was the shortage of school psychologists in the Bay Area who are qualified to conduct educational assessments. The limited number of these professionals appears to be a serious problem that cannot be easily overcome.

In the short-term school districts may need to recruit school psychologists from outlying areas, or perhaps send children out of town to be tested. In addition, schools and child welfare agencies could work together to explore ways that they may be able to share information regarding the assessments of children so that duplicative assessments by different professionals are avoided. For example, if a child welfare agency wishes to have a psychological assessment performed on a child, perhaps that assessment could be expanded to include an educational assessment. Schools and child welfare agencies could share the cost of the assessment and relevant portions of the assessment could be shared with the appropriate system. This procedure could minimize the need to have a particular child tested again at school, thereby, decreasing the burden on the school psychologist.

Sharing child-specific information between the schools and the child welfare system can be very difficult. While schools need some information from the child welfare agency, they do not need access to highly confidential family and child information. Likewise, children could benefit if the child welfare system included more information about the academic progress of children in their child welfare records. It is possible that legislation ensuring that both systems follow the same rules regarding confidentiality could decrease these concerns.

Other approaches to decreasing the time children wait to be tested could also be explored. Perhaps portions of the psychological assessment could be conducted by paraprofessionals. Similarly, the workload and support staffing of school psychologists could be examined to ensure that they have adequate clerical support and technology to conduct educational assessments as efficiently as possible. In the long-term, schools and child welfare agencies need to work together to examine the reasons why there are an insufficient amount of school psychologists.

Authorizing Services for Special Education

The findings of this study reveal that, in many cases, schools allow foster parents or social workers to authorize special education services for children because they want the children to receive the services. In fact, 81% of foster caregivers of children with IEPs reported that they signed the IEPs as parents of the children. Unfortunately, however, these individuals may not be adequately informed about a child's educational needs and may not know how to access or advocate for a full range of services. In addition, the authorization process may exclude biological parents. Currently, the authorization of special education services for foster children appears to vary within and between counties. Although regulations exist, they do not appear to be routinely monitored or enforced.

Furthermore, the issue is a sensitive matter because the school and child welfare systems, as well as the courts, want biological parents to stay involved in the lives of their children, especially if the children will be returning to these parents. However, if parents are unavailable or demonstrate a lack of interest in their children's education, efforts to involve them can create delays in delivering needed services to children. Clearly, schools and child welfare agencies need to work together with the courts to develop an updated set of standards for authorizing special education services that reflect the unique circumstances of various families. Similarly, the development of a set of standards regarding the assignment and training of educational surrogates would also be beneficial to the children. In addition, guidelines regarding educational surrogates would facilitate school and child welfare procedures for gathering the surrogate's input and authorization.

Provision of Special Education Services

Almost half of the foster children in this study (46%) were identified as having behavioral problems and one-third (36%) of the children had IEPs. The proportion of children receiving special education services is consistent with previous research demonstrating that approximately a third of foster children receive special education services (eg. Runyan & Gould, 1985; Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994). In 1990, the national rate of placement in special education was 10% (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). Only 8% of the children, however, were found to be performing poorly in both reading and math. Based upon the observation of many caregivers, it appears that intelligent foster children with behavioral problems in the classroom are given IEPs and placed in remedial learning classes because their behavioral problems prevent them from learning and often distract other children. The special education classes appear to be of limited value for these children because they do not address behavioral problems. In fact, the classes may exacerbate behavioral problems because the children may be bored with the slower learning pace and they may be angry for being mislabeled and placed in a remedial class.

School Success

Consistent with existing literature, the findings from this study suggest that a substantial proportion of foster children are not succeeding in school, and have failed or been kept back a grade. It stands to reason that children who need an IEP to assess emotional problems and learning delays, are less likely to be succeeding in school. Other findings are more difficult to interpret. Although statistical procedures controlled for emotional problems and learning delays, having an IEP appears to be uniquely and negatively associated with school success. It is likely, however, that there are other characteristics of children with IEPs that interfere with school success that were not examined in this study. It may be these characteristics, rather than the

special education services, that negatively affect school performance. Finally, it is not clear why children with case plans of reunification are less likely to succeed in school compared to other children. Future research is needed to assess these speculations.

Collaboration

Several participants suggested that greater collaboration is needed between the school and child welfare systems. Administrators of both systems need to explore ways to improve communication and cross-training across systems to ensure that the educational and safety needs of foster children are met. Alternately, each system could hire specialists from the other system to handle matters concerning the needs of children that may fall between the current capabilities of each system.

A related issue involves the professional practices used to meet the child welfare and educational needs of children. For example, the generalist approach to practice focuses on continuity by providing children with one or two people responsible to work with them even as they move from one placement to another. This practice model involves an increased number of volunteer workers and decreased social worker caseloads. While each child has a point person in this scenario it requires more funding, more volunteers, and the point person may not have expertise with all aspects of a child's case.

Another option is the specialist approach, where experts in different fields work together on a child's case (e.g. school social worker, child welfare worker, school nurse, school psychologist, etc.). The potential problems with this approach include too many different people working on a case, lack of one person providing continuity, and the need for extensive ongoing communication to maintain effective coordination. Child welfare administrators and educational

administrators need to further explore the potential benefits and costs of each of these approaches.

Summary

In summary, the findings of this study are consistent with existing literature on the topic of education for foster children. The data suggest that foster children are having difficulties with performing academically, behaving appropriately in the classroom, and receiving suitable educational services. On a positive note, only 12% of the foster children in this study experienced delays in school enrollment, 14% experienced delays in receiving special education services and just 8% were performing poorly in both reading and math. However, 22% of the children represented in this study were failed or held back a grade, 68 % were identified as having special needs and 36% were receiving special education services. Additionally, 14% of foster caregivers thought that their child needed special education services but had not received an assessment. Therefore, recommendations for improving the educational services for foster children need to be considered by all relevant parties.

Recommendations

In considering the findings from this study and the suggestions from child welfare administrators, educators, and foster care providers, the following recommendations were compiled and divided into three categories: school-based, child welfare agency-based, and legislative.

I. School-Based Recommendations

1. Develop strategies for increased communication and information sharing between school and child welfare systems. Foster caregivers expressed a desire to be more involved with their children's schools. They would like the opportunity to aid school personnel in getting to know their foster children and also to learn from school personnel about their foster children's behavior in the classroom. Foster caregivers would also like to be in closer communication with their children's social workers because they often do not feel included in decision-making processes. Perhaps caregivers could be included in meetings and trainings for school personnel and social workers. Gaps in communication can prevent children from obtaining needed services and the transfer of records can result in delays or children being placed in the wrong classes. Since foster children may not have a biological parent to follow their educational history, it is crucial that child welfare records document a child's educational progress. Specific suggestions include:

- ?? Expedite record transfers and improve record keeping using electronic information databases.
- ?? Actively support the implementation of the Health and Education passport, documenting all necessary health and education information for each child in the child welfare database.

- ?? Hire people within child welfare to supervise record keeping, record transfers, and immunization records.
- ?? Hire liaisons that are housed in either the child welfare agency or the school to ensure increased communication between child welfare agencies and the schools.
- ?? Support advocacy services, such as Foster Youth Services, and Independent Living Skills programs to help track and transfer records.
- ?? Increase collaboration between school-based personnel, foster parents, and child welfare workers through interagency case conferences and cross-training programs.

In providing feedback on a draft version of this report, Sonoma county noted that they have co-located public health and mental health staff with child welfare. In addition, they have created a multi-disciplinary case council to develop placement plans for hard to place children. In their view, these efforts have vastly improved communication between mental health, the Office of Education and the Family, and the Youth and Children's Division of Human Services. They note, however, that it is difficult to get representatives from children's schools to attend the meetings.

2. Utilize special education classes for children with behavioral problems. School districts should consider expanding their curriculum to include the four categories of special day classes for children with learning disabilities, learning handicaps, severe learning handicaps, and emotional problems. Many children in foster care have behavioral disabilities that prevent them from learning in regular classrooms, however they are capable of learning at grade level. These students would benefit from smaller classes and more one-on-one attention, but they do not need to learn at a slower pace than other students in their grade. Often, there is only one special

education class for all children at a school who have difficulty learning in a regular classroom. Special education classes that target behavioral needs of children while teaching an age-appropriate curriculum would greatly benefit students with behavioral problems.

3. Offer school credit in less than whole blocks for academic semesters. The findings of this study suggest that foster children may have “education gaps” for reasons having nothing to do with their effort or ability. Foster children often switch schools in the middle of the semester, losing credits for incomplete classes. Schools could develop regulations for assigning credits in less than whole blocks for academic semesters. In this way, students who move in the middle of the year will receive credit for the work that they completed.

4. Continue to study school issues facing foster children. Several findings from this study point toward areas for further research. First, the topic of identifying foster children in schools is controversial, despite shared concern about providing foster children with appropriate services. Child welfare and education experts described potential advantages and disadvantages to identifying foster children in schools. A research agenda needs to be supported in order to assess the merits for and against foster child identification. Several questions remain unanswered. For example, does it help teachers to know if their students are in foster care? Will foster children be over-looked out of fear of investing in students who may quickly move to another district? Does labeling foster children produce unanticipated outcomes? Do foster children take resources away from other children?

A second related area that begs further research is why children with behavioral and emotional problems had delayed school enrollment. Discovering the link between increased emotional disturbance and delayed school enrollment could lead to proposed solutions for the current situation in which these children unnecessarily miss school.

Third, findings from this study indicate that children with IEPs do not perform as well in school as children without IEPs. However, this study did not explore characteristics of children with IEPs that may contribute to their poor school performance. Since it may be these characteristics, rather than the special education services, that negatively affect school performance, research should be conducted to investigate the characteristics of children with IEPs.

II. Child Welfare Agency-Based Recommendations

1. Increase support for continuity in foster children's lives. Although it may be impossible to substantially reduce the movement of foster children from placement to placement, having consistent people in their lives can increase their chances of receiving educational support. Keeping children in the same school whenever possible may help preserve continuity in their lives. If children must be moved, a child welfare support system needs to be in place to assist foster parents in obtaining records and completing school enrollment to reduce transition delays. Additionally, consistent people, like CASA volunteers, can assist children in making changes.

2. Develop additional educational support in child welfare. Social workers in child welfare are often asked to make decisions regarding educational needs without much training. More training on the educational system may assist social workers in being advocates for the children in their care. Another option is to employ educational experts within child welfare to assist case managers with educational issues. These educational experts should also work with the schools to train teachers and school administrators on issues related to foster care so that the schools might be more sensitive to the needs of foster children.

3. Full utilization of CWS/CMS. Routine use of the Health and Education Passport could resolve many difficulties encountered by foster children and their caregivers and educators. The

potential benefit to children, as well as to facilitating social work practice, seems large in comparison to the start-up efforts required to encourage workers to systematically enter children's health and education information into the automated system. In addition to these benefits, regular use of CWS/CMS would allow researchers to more easily and frequently provide reports on children's educational performance indicators and outcomes in order to routinely monitor foster children's educational progress.

4. Study the educational needs of children in kin care. Almost 40% of the children in this study resided with kin, and these children were less likely than other foster children to be receiving special education services. Resources should be devoted to continuing to investigate why they were less likely to be receiving services as well as other special needs of children in kin care. Additionally, since kin caregivers do not receive all of the same trainings as other foster caregivers, more research is needed to explore which trainings and services could benefit children in kinship care.

III. Legislative Recommendations

1. Increase funding for schools and educational activities. Most respondents from both the child welfare and educational systems mentioned that a lack of resources acted as a major barrier to helping foster children in the school system. Since foster children often attend schools out of their home district because of the location of foster homes and group homes, districts can become resentful of the extra resources that need to be spent on foster children. Many of the issues with delays in testing and services were attributed to finances. Schools need additional funding to increase special education classes and provide more support to students. Legislation requires that schools provide a certain level of services to their students, however, as one child welfare director remarked, this is an "unfunded mandate." Schools may not provide appropriate

testing and services to children because they lack the funding to do so. Finding ways to mitigate this frustration is one step to improving the relationship between the school and child welfare systems. One option is to increase funding from the state or county to assist with the education of foster children. Another option is to have funding for foster children directed through the County Office of Education.

Within the category of financial support, foster caregivers offered two specific recommendations. First, caregivers would like to receive greater financial support from the county in order to better meet the educational needs of children to pay for tutors and enrichment activities. Second, many caregivers suggested that government agencies provide more financial aid and scholarships for foster youth as a way of encouraging them to pursue a college education.

Additional funding for Foster Youth Services also could benefit foster children. SB 933 provides funding for Foster Youth Services in order to aid children in group homes who are struggling in school. Foster Youth Services should be expanded to provide aid to all children in foster care so they could profit from tutoring, counseling, and support services.

2. Increase funding for school psychologists or license MSWs to perform testing. Since many school psychologists are only available at a school once a week, long wait lists can form for special education testing. Some schools cannot afford to have a school psychologist more than once a week. Schools need adequate funding to allow psychologists to test students in a timely manner. However, increased funding is not the only answer to the problem. Even if a school can afford a full-time psychologist, there appears to be a greater demand for school psychologists than there are available, qualified professionals. A strategy needs to be developed to expand educational testing resources as well as scholarships for students dedicated to careers in school psychology. In addition, school social workers could be trained and licensed to test

children for special education services. Schools with a significant percentage of students from disadvantaged families and students in foster care could be eligible for state funding to hire a school social worker, and that social worker could assess students for special education services.

3. Enforce role of educational surrogates. There was no clear consensus regarding the role of educational surrogates. In many cases, the schools allow foster parents or social workers to authorize services for children even if they do not have educational rights. This situation provides the children with services, but undermines the role of parents and the law. Legislators should consider providing foster parents with the legal right to enroll children in school and sign for certain academic services in order to decrease delays in enrollment and receipt of specialized services. However, if educational rights legislation is to be enforced, a consistent educational surrogate for each child needs to be clearly identified. Social workers need to be educated about the formal process necessary to determine whether or not the biological parents' educational rights should be terminated, and the law regarding termination of parental educational rights and appointment of educational surrogates needs to be enforced. If termination of parental educational rights occurs, then educational surrogates need to be identified and supported. According to SB 933, a CASA worker, child advocate, foster parent, or social worker may all be appropriate choices for educational surrogates. However, some counties consider social workers to have a conflict of interest in acting as educational surrogates, presumably because they are not volunteers but rather paid workers.

4. Re-evaluate funding distribution. There is inter-district tension surrounding the issue of funding educational services for foster children, especially for those who move from one school district to another. Possible solutions include:

- ?? Distribute funding for educational services through the County Office of Education.
- ?? Require the home school district for each foster child to manage and distribute educational funding for those children.
- ?? Place the financial responsibility for special education for all foster children, regardless of whether they are in public or non-public schools, on the state, thereby eliminating the current disincentive for public schools to provide special education to foster children.

Regardless of which of these suggestions seems more attractive to particular school districts, when foster children enter a new school they become part of that school district and community which share responsibility for educating the children.

5. Create and enforce timelines linked to the transfer of records. While legislation exists requiring children's previous schools to send children's school records to their new schools in order to complete enrollment, the law does not specify timelines for the transfer of records. Therefore, many foster children are still experiencing delays in enrollment due to missing school records. Requiring schools to transfer records within a week of student moves would reduce the risk of children missing school because of enrollment delays.

6. Assign funds to the development of additional stable placements for foster children. Although children in this study typically had one or two placements, the mean number of placements was 5.9 and 33% of the children had three or more placements. This study, as well as previous research, indicates that Bay Area child welfare agencies face a resource problem with regard to stable placements for foster children (Choice, Deichert, Montgomery, & Austin, 2000; Choice, Montgomery, Prince, Frenkel, & Austin, 2000). Additional funding is needed to

develop new placements for children so that agencies can be empowered to fully support continuity in children's lives.

7. Increase child welfare funding for liaisons and advocacy programs. The findings of this study suggest that foster children's educational needs can be supported through liaisons, housed in Child Welfare agencies, who are empowered to access children's school records. The liaisons could link the schools and child welfare agencies, while serving the best interests of the children. In addition, CASA, Parents Helping Parents, and Foster Youth Services can all assist social workers and the schools to provide support and advocacy for children. Research indicates that these types of programs are effective in improving children's academic performance, decreasing maladaptive behaviors, lowering the dropout rate, and promoting successful transitions to employment or college (California Department of Education, 1988; Fitzharris, 1989; Seashore, 1985). Similarly, this study found support for the benefits of advocacy programs to meet the educational needs of foster children. For example, CASA volunteers provide consistency and support for children. CASA workers can be helpful advocates and, at times, educational surrogates. Parents Helping Parents offers a venue for foster parents to provide each other with support and advice. Foster Youth Services provides school-based educational support for foster children, including tutoring. Foster caregivers mentioned that their children would benefit from extra tutoring programs. Increasing the utilization of these agencies can decrease the need for child welfare agencies to provide duplicate services. Independent Living Skills programs also work to meet the educational needs of foster children. ILSP provides educational support and financial assistance for foster children. The legislature can support these efforts by expanding funding for these types of programs to increase the likelihood that children receive educational support.

8. Provide funding to enhance CWS/CMS operations. Many of the barriers to meeting foster children's educational needs can be addressed through full utilization of CWS/CMS. However, the system suffers from operational problems that need to be fixed. The legislature should investigate these problems and provide funding to address them. In addition, funds should be provided to Child Welfare agencies to hire workers to enter data into the system.

9. Mandate that schools honor enrollment information from CWS/CMS. Child welfare agencies are encouraged to fully utilize CWS/CMS. Data entered into the system should include vital information from the school's cumulative school records, last school attended, and immunization records. Schools should honor information obtained from CSW/CMS in order to enroll children in school. If full educational records exist on CWS/CMS, no child should be denied immediate school enrollment.

10. Devote resources to studying the role of the courts in shaping foster children's educational experiences. All children who are county dependents are affected by court decisions. For example, only the courts can terminate a biological parent's educational rights and assign a surrogate. Future research is needed to more fully examine how court decisions affect foster children's access to services and academic outcomes.

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