# Promising Models for Improving Educational Outcomes for Foster Youth

# FACT SHEET

**Introduction**

In the context of the Children's Stability and Well-Being (CSAW) study findings on poor attendance rates for children with child welfare involvement, this document provides an overview of several programs in place throughout the U.S. addressing these issues. Throughout the country, leaders in education, child welfare, health, law, and policy are working to develop interventions that will improve educational outcomes for children involved in the child welfare system. Many programs are developing in response to the federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*, and others were in place prior to the legislation.

Overall, in examining the current landscape of programs and policies addressing educational issues faced by children in the child welfare system, three major themes emerged:

- **Systematic data-sharing** for individual case management and program/policy development

- **Interagency workforce and resource sharing** that includes co-location of services, shared financing of personnel, and cross-systems training

- **Child-level case management** practices that employ shared decision-making to coordinate care between agencies and schools, and systematically screen and establish educational case plans

This document provides detailed descriptions of three programs currently in place in Baltimore, Maryland; Marion County, Indiana; and Fresno County, California. The description of each jurisdiction includes information on the agencies and individuals involved, their responsibilities, and how each program functions. The initiatives highlighted are among many throughout the U.S. that serve as examples of how data-sharing, cross-systems resource-sharing, and case management interventions may improve educational success for children involved in the child welfare system.

| Program Example #1: |
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**Program Example #1:**
**Data-Sharing, Interagency Work-Group, School-Based Social Workers, Absence Protocols**
(Baltimore, MD)

**General Info**
Administered on a local level by Baltimore City; Expansion of research on attendance in Baltimore schools began in 2008; Program serves all students in Baltimore City schools, with particular focus on children involved in foster care or homeless students – those with higher rates of chronic absenteeism.

**Components**

1) Data-sharing between Baltimore City Department of Social Services (DSS) and Baltimore City Public School District
2) Baltimore Student Attendance Campaign (interagency work group on attendance)
3) School-based social workers (Family Preservation Specialists) placed by DSS in schools
4) Baltimore City Public Schools protocols for addressing absences

| | Component | Agencies Involved | Process and Responsibilities |
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| Systematic Data-Sharing | Data-sharing | Baltimore City Public School District<br><br>Baltimore City Department of Social Services (DSS) | **School district provides student-level data to DSS monthly;** DSS data analyst pulls info on DSS-involved children and generates reports (with attendance, grades, discipline, etc.) for social workers<br><br>**If child has missed 10% or more school days, attendance is flagged** by DSS and social workers are expected to intervene to address educational issues; Reports are retrospective to the prior month<br><br>**School principals receive chronic absence data weekly** on data dashboards, and many hold regular meetings with teachers and child welfare workers to discuss systemic interventions<br><br>**School district and DSS created online data site for parents** where student attendance, grades, courses, and disciplinary actions are recorded by schools; Currently working on securing access for DSS social workers and foster parents |

| | Component | Agencies Involved | Process and Responsibilities |
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| **Interagency Workforce and Resource Sharing** | Interagency work group on attendance | Mayor's Office (lead)<br><br>Baltimore City Schools Superintendent<br><br>Baltimore Education Research Consortium (Johns Hopkins, Morgan State)<br><br>Open Society Institute<br><br>Representation from parents, teachers, local nonprofits | **Monthly meetings** to discuss and develop strategies and solutions to attendance issues<br><br>Work group developed uniform, tiered definition of attendance measures |
| | School-based social workers | Baltimore City Public School District<br><br>Baltimore City Department of Social Services (DSS) | **DSS provides the Baltimore City school district with 14 Family Preservation Specialists (FPS)** who work within the schools; FPS are alerted when students have shown signs of chronic absenteeism and their families are flagged for contact<br><br>Quarterly, schools pull attendance data on children in K-2nd grade who are severely chronically absent and their families are flagged for a door-knocking by FPS |
| **Child-Level Case Management and Decision-Making** | Absence protocols | Baltimore City Public School District<br><br>School-based attendance team (attendance monitors, teachers, guidance counselors, Family Preservation Specialists) | **District-wide protocols for addressing sporadic and chronic absences**; Steps are specific to the number of absences and the grade-level of the child<br><br>**1 day absent**: District is responsible for sending out daily automated phone calls about the risks of student absence to parents whose children are absent for 1+ days; School staff call the parent/guardian to inquire about absence and offer support if needed<br><br>**2-5 days absent**: Attendance monitor calls parent/guardian daily and provides student-level attendance data daily to school team; Day 3 – if parent/guardian not reached by phone, mail letter; Day 4 – If no contact, student placed on an attendance 'watch list'<br><br>**6-9 days absent**: If still no contact, school attendance team sends certified letter and schedules a home visit; Determines follow-up actions through discussions with school nurse, social worker, psychologist; Connects with Family Preservation Specialist to provide resources as needed<br><br>**10+ days absent**: School-based team continues to implement all strategies for contact and support; City will assume that all necessary steps have been taken |

**Preliminary Outcomes**
Of children in K-2nd grade flagged for door-knocking, most (70%) have not been previously flagged for door-knocking; Chronic absence rates among Baltimore's middle grades have been cut in half since the start of the Campaign (but elementary and HS rates remain unchanged)

**Funding Sources**
Grants from the Open Society Institute of Baltimore funded initial research; DSS currently funds Family Preservation Specialists and internal data analyst

**Similar Programs Elsewhere**
Similar attendance-tracking and principal attendance review model in 25 pilot schools in New York City

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**Sources**

1. Attendance Works, www.AttendanceWorks.org
2. Baltimore City Department of Social Services, dhr.maryland.gov/county/baltimorecity/index.php
3. Baltimore City Public Schools, www.BaltimoreCitySchools.org
4. Baltimore Student Attendance Initiative, personal communication, May 23, 2012
5. New York City Mayor's Task Force on Truancy and Absenteeism, www.nyc.gov/html/truancy/html/home/home.shtml
6. Open Society Institute – Baltimore, www.soros.org/about/offices-foundations/open-society-institute-baltimore

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**Program Example #2:**
**Targeted, Education-Specific Improvements to Case Management**
(Marion County, IN)

**General Info**
FosterEd program piloted in Marion County, Indiana in September 2011, led by National Center for Youth Law; May 2012 announced expanding state-wide in Indiana, expected to be adopted and funded statewide through the Indiana Department of Child Services by the end of 2012; Serves children with open dependency case only

**Components**

1) Preliminary education screening of each child upon entry into care
2) Educational case plan
3) "Educational champion"
4) Regular screening and support

| | Component | Agencies Involved | Process and Responsibilities |
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| **Child-Level Case Management and Decision-Making** | Preliminary educational screening | Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) | **DCS social worker conducts education screening for each child** as soon as a dependency case has been opened<br><br>For children who score below a certain level, another more targeted educational assessment is conducted |
| | Educational case plan | Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) | **DCS social workers and Foster Youth Education Liaisons (education specialists employed by DCS) create educational case plan for each child who enters care**, based on the educational assessment<br><br>Carrying out the case plan is the joint responsibility of the DCS social worker and the child's educational champion |
| | Educational champion | Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS)<br><br>Family court system | **Educational champion (EC) is an adult in the child's life who is responsible for helping the child to succeed in school**<br><br>EC is screened and **selected by the Foster Youth Education Liaison and the DCS social worker, and is then appointed by the court** (similar to an educational surrogate for special needs children)<br><br>Screening for educational champion includes questions about reading report cards, willingness to access community resources for child, speaking with the child regularly about school, providing a space for homework<br><br>EC is often foster parent, grandparent or other bio family member<br><br>EC is responsible for carrying out the educational case plan and making all educational decisions on behalf of child |
| | Regular screening and support | Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) | **Screenings conducted regularly by DCS social worker for child <u>and</u> educational champion to ensure progress is being made**<br><br>Foster Youth Education Liaison provides ongoing technical assistance, training and resources to educational champion |

**Preliminary Outcomes**

Because the program is young (piloted in Marion County in September 2011), only process outcomes are currently available.

**Funding Sources**

National Center for Youth Law provided initial funding for pilot program in Marion County; Indiana Department of Child Services is taking over funding for expansion and maintenance of the program.

**Similar Programs Elsewhere**

FosterEd program operates in Santa Cruz County, California with slightly different structure; Washington state – Treehouse Education Advocacy Program

**Sources**

1.  FosterEd, www.foster-ed.org
2.  FosterEd Initiative, personal communication, June 1, 2012
3.  Indiana Department of Child Services, www.in.gov/dcs
4.  National Center for Youth Law, www.youthlaw.org
5.  Treehouse, www.treehouseforkids.org

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**Program Example #3:**
**Foster Youth-Specific Data-Sharing and Foster Youth Education Liaisons**
(Fresno County, CA)

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**General Info**

Administered on the county level; State Assembly Bill 490, effective in 2004, mandated creation of foster youth education liaisons in each school district; Office of Education Foster Youth Data Sharing Project (Foster Youth Knowledge Engine – FYKE) houses information on youth in foster care, in partnership with a database initiative started by Sacramento County – Foster Focus; Data sharing system is continually evolving, most recent agreement executed January 2012

**Components**

1)  Fresno County Office of Education Foster Youth Data-Sharing Project
2)  School district-based AB 490 educational liaisons for foster youth
3)  School-based social workers (high school only)
4)  Child welfare agency-based education liaisons

| | Component | Agencies Involved | Process and Responsibilities |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Systematic Data-Sharing** | Foster youth data-sharing project | Fresno County Interagency Council for Children and Families: Fresno County Office of Education (FCOE) Fresno County Unified School District Fresno County Dept. of Social Services Juvenile courts system Fresno County Information Technology Services Dept. Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) | Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) developed **database system (Foster Focus) which allows data to be shared between youth serving agencies and schools**; Fresno County has contract with SCOE to utilize the database  Schools notified by email when a child in foster care has moved into their district; School can then go into Foster Focus and gather info about child  **School districts and agencies are responsible for providing individual-level data on children involved in the foster care system electronically to Fresno County Office of Education** (FCOE), who then gathers, matches and sends the compiled data to Foster Focus database  FCOE working to establish automated data-sharing through interfacing agency databases and Foster Focus |
| **Interagency Workforce and Resource Sharing** | School district-based foster youth educational liaisons (FYEL) | Fresno County Office of Education (FCOE) | As a result of State Assembly Bill 490, **FYELs have been placed in each school/unified district as well as in Fresno County Office of Education**  FYELs are responsible for helping to ensure proper educational placement and enrollment of foster youth, as well as transfer of records  Upon notification from FCOE that a foster youth will be transferred into their district, the FYEL is responsible for accessing the child's information through Foster Focus and then contacting the appropriate parties (guardians, social workers, etc) to ensure that the enrollment process is completed and that the child is connected with needed services |
| | School-based social workers | Fresno County Department of Social Services (DSS) | **Fresno County DSS places 14 school-based social workers in high schools** throughout Fresno County  Each social worker is assigned to high schools with large numbers of youth in care and visits their assigned schools several days a week  Social workers have case loads in each of the assigned schools and provide direct case management services to youth |

| | Component | Agencies Involved | Process and Responsibilities |
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| **Interagency Workforce and Resource Sharing** | Child welfare agency-based educational liaisons | Fresno County Department of Social Services (DSS)<br><br>Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) | **Education liaisons, employed by DSS are assigned to one of four age-based cohorts** (pre-school, elementary, middle school, high school) and consult with schools and child welfare agencies on how to best resolve educational issues for foster youth in each age cohort<br><br>Provide training and resources to staff in local child welfare offices, as well as to school staff<br><br>Educational liaisons participate in meetings with case teams in local offices to ensure that educational issues are being handled<br><br>Established Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee to smooth out issues, meets monthly |

**Preliminary Outcomes**

Data-sharing – High school graduation rates in Fresno County Unified School District have increased from 54% in 2008 to 73% in 2010. Fresno County has also seen **school test scores improve for children in foster care**, and improved educational stability for youth in the child welfare system. The data-sharing system has reduced the delays to provide education services to children in foster care when they transfer to new schools.

Education liaisons – Independent evaluation of the program that places education liaisons in child welfare agencies showed that social workers whose agency had an education liaison were more knowledgeable about educational resources, school procedures, and school regulations 18 months after the educational liaison was placed there; An analysis of school records for foster youth who had worked with an educational liaison in the county offices (compared to those in a comparable district who hadn't) showed an increase in reading and math test scores

**Funding Sources**

Grant funding from Stuart Foundation; ARRA funds for database; Fresno County Office of Education and the Dept. of Children and Family Services

**Similar Programs Elsewhere**

Several other counties throughout California have implemented similar multi-lateral interventions that include components such as data-sharing and co-location of services.

**Sources**

1. California Department of Education, www.cde.ca.gov
2. Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services, www.co.fresno.ca.us/Departments.aspx?id=126
3. Fresno County Department of Social Services, personal communication, June 18, 2012
4. Fresno County Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee, www.co.fresno.ca.us/Departments.aspx?id=666
5. Fresno County Office of Education, Foster Youth Education Services, www.fyes.fcoe.net
6. Stewards of Change, www.stewardsofchange.com
7. Stuart Foundation, www.stuartfoundation.org
8. Weinberg, L.A., Zetlin, A.G. & Shea, N.M. (2004). *The Education Liaison Model*. Mental Health Advocacy Services website. Retrieved from www.mhas-la.org/Ed%20Liaison%20Model-Main.pdf.

## KEY RESOURCES FOR ISSUES RELATED TO EDUCATION AND CHILD WELFARE

**Attendance Works**
Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that promotes awareness of the role that school attendance plays in achieving academic success starting with school entry. Their website provides detailed information on what jurisdictions throughout the country are doing to improve attendance.
www.attendanceworks.org

**The Data Quality Campaign**
The Data Quality Campaign is a national advocacy nonprofit committed to ensuring that all stakeholders – from parents to policymakers – are empowered with high quality data, particularly education data. The campaign focuses on promoting state longitudinal data systems, as well as state and federal policies that support effective data use. The website contains a great deal of information on what states are currently doing and how to utilize data to improve educational outcomes.
www.dataqualitycampaign.org

**Fostering Connections**
The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* aims to promote permanency and improved outcomes for children in foster care through policy changes in six key areas: 1) support for kinship care and family connections, 2) support for older youth, 3) coordinated health services, 4) improved educational stability and opportunities, 5) incentives and assistance for adoption, and 6) direct access to federal resources for Indian Tribes. This website contains information about the law, including its implementation in each state, and many resources for policymakers and practitioners relating to the law.
www.fosteringconnections.org

**Legal Center for Foster Care and Education**
The American Bar Association's Legal Center for Foster Care and Education provides technical assistance information, as well as information on legal and policy matters related to education and child welfare.
www.americanbar.org/groups/child_law/what_we_do/projects/education

**National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections – Fostering Connections**
The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections at the Hunter College School of Social Work is a training, technical assistance, and information services organization dedicated to help strengthen the capacity of State, local, Tribal and other publicly administered or supported child welfare agencies to: institutionalize a safety-focused, family-centered, and community-based approach to meet the needs of children, youth and families. Their *Fostering Connections* page contains extensive resources for policymakers and practitioners.
www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections

Note: Due to the ongoing work in which many of the agencies and programs are engaged, information provided about these initiatives is subject to change. The information in this document was gathered through personal communications and desktop research in May and June 2012, and therefore may not always reflect the most recent iteration of these programs.