

# **Meeting the Educational Needs of Students in the Child Welfare System: Lessons Learned from the Field**



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# Executive Summary

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Education can be a powerful tool for child welfare-involved youth to overcome their circumstances and become successful adults. Sadly, educational outcomes for young people in care are notoriously poor. Students in foster care have lower standardized test scores, and they repeat grades and are suspended much more frequently than other students. They are significantly over-represented in special education programs, change schools repeatedly and often miss substantial amounts of school. Youth who age out of foster care are more likely to drop out of high school than other young people; most do not enroll in college or other post-secondary programs, and few ever complete a college degree.

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*“In five years, I see myself happy in college. I see myself studying social work and just smiling a lot. In five years I wanna be able to look at my past and laugh, and tell all the people who said I won’t amount to nothing, thank you.” – T.G., youth in foster care*

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Over the last decade, child welfare agencies and advocates have begun to recognize that the students they serve need access to greater educational opportunities, and that education is critically important to child wellbeing, permanency planning and a successful transition to adulthood. In particular, best practices research has consistently identified education advocacy as an effective strategy to improve school stability and educational outcomes for this population of vulnerable youth. This report offers insights from one program, called Project Achieve, which pairs Advocates for Children of New York (“AFC”), a non-profit that provides education advocacy to low-income students in New York City, with local foster care and preventive services agencies.

The report explains how Project Achieve works and examines its long-term impact on the children and families served by these agencies, the people who work there and the city’s child welfare system itself.

The project, which places an attorney, a non-attorney advocate and a Project Associate on site at least once a week at partnering foster care and preventive services agencies, operated at Forestdale, Inc. from September 2004 to June 2009 and at Graham Windham’s Brooklyn-based Neighborhood Family Service Center from September 2005 to June 2009. During our time at these agencies, Project Achieve assisted staff and families with 916 referrals and conducted 49 workshops for staff, birth parents, foster parents and youth. In addition to solving day-to-day education-related problems, Project Achieve worked with agency employees at every level, from case planners to senior management, to build the agencies’ overall capacity to meet the educational needs of the families they serve.

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## Findings

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In order to evaluate Project Achieve’s impact at Forestdale and Graham Windham, we collected data on every referral we received between September 2004 and June 2009. We also collected evaluation forms from 277 parents and child welfare professionals who attended our workshops; surveyed 39 agency staff members on Project Achieve and its effect on their work; interviewed 18 birth, foster and adoptive parents on their experience working with Project Achieve; and conducted in-depth interviews with two program directors from Forestdale and one program director from Graham Windham. Our findings are summarized below. They show the project’s dramatic impact on individual students and families, as well as its potential to improve outcomes for many more children and youth by making deep and lasting changes in the way child welfare agencies address students’ educational needs.

### **Half of the referrals received by Project Achieve involved a special education-related issue.**

Overall, three quarters of students referred to Project Achieve were eligible for special education services or were suspected of having a disability. In contrast, 19% of students served by the New York City public schools are classified as having a disability. In addition to being over-represented in the

special education system, students referred to Project Achieve were **four times more likely to be classified as having an Emotional Disturbance** than special education students in New York City as a whole.

Outside of the special education arena, agency staff commonly came to Project Achieve for help:

- Locating an alternative school or program for older students;
- Resolving problems with truancy;
- Obtaining resources, such as tutoring or an afterschool program, to address academic struggles;
- Getting a school transfer because of safety or other concerns;
- Addressing behavioral problems in school, including help with suspensions or other disciplinary exclusions; or
- Enrolling students in school and setting up transportation.

**Project Achieve successfully resolved all of the students' presenting educational concerns in 78% of the 130 cases we took on for legal representation.** We resolved some, but not all, of a student's presenting problems in another 2% of cases.

**Children performed better in school because of Project Achieve.** Seventy-seven percent of agency staff surveyed agreed that children's performance in school improved as a direct result of help from Project Achieve. Staff most commonly pointed to students who were receiving appropriate special education services and teens who were succeeding in non-traditional school settings because of Project Achieve's assistance. All of the parents who responded to our survey agreed that their child had received more appropriate services because of assistance from the project.

**Project Achieve helped empower families to take a more active role in their children's education.** Parents reported being more knowledgeable about how to work with schools, and agency staff reported being more sensitive to birth parents' rights, as well as using information from AFC to help birth and foster parents better understand their children's educational rights and needs.

**Collaborating with Project Achieve enhanced the agencies' ability to engage families.** The project made staff more knowledgeable and confident when approaching families

*Project Achieve first met Monique the summer she turned thirteen, when she had moved into her eighth foster home and her foster mother needed help getting her into a special education class in a school near her new home. Project staff got a copy of Monique's Individualized Education Program ("IEP") from the Department of Education and explained how to request a new placement to her foster mother. When reading through the IEP, we noticed that Monique's reading skills were several years below grade level. We pointed this out to Monique's foster mother and encouraged her to contact us again if she had any concerns. Several months later, she did: she was very worried about Monique's reading skills, which were so delayed that Monique could not help her seven-year-old sister with her homework.*

*Project Achieve arranged for Monique to get comprehensive evaluations, which showed that she had above-average intelligence, but because of severe language delays, was reading, writing and spelling at a first- or second-grade level. The evaluations recommended increased speech therapy, assistive technology, individual tutoring and a specialized school for Monique. Monique's middle school largely ignored the evaluations, and when she moved on to high school, school officials there also refused to offer Monique additional services. With legal representation from Project Achieve at an impartial hearing, Monique's foster mother won her all of the recommended services, including placement at a school that specializes in language and communication disorders. Four years later, Monique graduated from high school with a Regents diploma; she now works full-time and is a freshman in college.*

around educational issues, which encouraged families to open up to case planners and trust them to help with school and other issues. Project Achieve's involvement helped demonstrate to families that everyone, including the agency, was working to get the best services possible for their children.

**Access to education advocates improved permanency outcomes for children.** Seventy percent of agency staff that completed our surveys agreed that Project Achieve helped facilitate permanency for families. The project helped to smooth reunifications, facilitate the transition to adulthood for youth in care, relieve stress in foster families to prevent further placement changes and address truancy issues in educational neglect cases, keeping families receiving preventive services together.

**Project Achieve made staff more knowledgeable about educational issues.** Among survey respondents, 94% of agency staff believed that the project increased their knowledge of the educational system. Staff reported greater familiarity with special education, suspensions, educational resources and, most commonly, how to navigate the school system.

**Agency staff who worked with Project Achieve felt more confident interacting with schools.** Eighty-eight percent of staff reported being more confident when addressing students' educational issues. Directors reported that staff was better versed in educational terms, better equipped to identify students' educational needs, more comfortable discussing educational issues and more realistic about options available to help students overcome their challenges.

**The project changed the way staff approached their casework.** Among survey respondents, 83% agreed that Project Achieve affected the way they integrate education into their work. Staff indicated that they attend more school meetings and make more school contacts; are more proactive with respect to educational issues; can read school records and identify problem areas more easily; approach children differently when discussing educational issues; and give a greater priority or focus to education than they have in the past. A surprising number of survey respondents also discussed how having access to an education expert can relieve stress in busy caseworkers.

**Project Achieve's presence made education a greater priority at our partner agencies.** Rosemarie Ewing-James, the Associate Executive Director at Forestdale, expressed it this way: "The agency has raised its expectations of students. We had 11 or 12 students graduate from high school or get their GED this year, and all but one of them are going on to college. We have seen small results, but they are really positive."

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## Recommendations

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Students involved with the child welfare system frequently have poor education outcomes because they are disconnected from school. Many have never experienced academic success, or have been disciplined frequently and made to feel unwanted in school; some lack the chance to get involved in extracurricular activities; and others have attended too many schools to feel like they 'belong' anywhere. If these students can access schools where their needs are finally being met, they can begin to rebuild their hopes for the future and change the trajectories of their lives. Project Achieve offers the following recommendations for child welfare agencies to help the children and families they serve overcome these challenges, engage in school and reach their educational potential.

- I. Develop internal education advocacy expertise, with support from a partner non-profit organization or other institutional expert in education advocacy.** Because child welfare agencies traditionally do not have education specialists on staff, most agencies will need to



collaborate with an outside source of expertise to train staff, develop institutional knowledge around education and help create educational resources tailored to the agency's specific needs.

- 2. Hire education specialists qualified to work directly with schools, clinicians and families; manage educational and clinical data; advocate actively for students' education needs; and take on leadership roles within the agency.**

Education specialty staff needs to be knowledgeable about the school system, have strong negotiation and investigatory skills and be able to develop and maintain positive relationships with schools, families and their coworkers. Education staff also should be committed to being a "cheerleader" for education within their agency.

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*"Agencies need to realize that doing education well takes time and effort. It is different from just making sure the report card is in the chart – you need to dig deeper."* – Linda Ford, Administrative Director, Preventive Services, Forestdale

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- 3. Ensure that education specialists are readily available to meet with case planners, families and students on site, in person and in the field.**

Because the on-site component of Project Achieve was so critical to its success, it is especially important that education staff is readily available to interact with coworkers and families in person. Agencies should carefully consider students' needs, travel time and fieldwork when determining realistic caseloads for new programs to be optimally effective.

- 4. Create practices and protocols within the agency to improve school stability for students, especially for children and youth in foster care.**

Agencies must consider a child's school placement the moment he or she enters foster care and work to maintain that placement, as long as it is appropriate, for as long as the child is in care. Agencies should ensure that their employees are familiar with the importance of school stability and the legal requirements in the federal Fostering Connections Act, involve education staff in placement decisions, and improve communication around children's educational needs between staff, foster parents and families.

- 5. Train all staff on education-related issues and offer educational workshops regularly to families and youth.**

Workshops for staff should be frequent and mandatory for all employees that work with families. Workshops for birth parents, foster parents and youth can most easily be incorporated into already occurring meetings, such as parenting classes, independent living classes and support groups. Once agencies are comfortable with these education trainings, they can begin planning independent education events.

- 6. Make concerted efforts to involve families in educational planning and advocacy for their children.**

Agencies can create a pro-education environment by building discussions about education into Family Team Conferences and regular visits; sharing information about schools with families publicly and frequently; recognizing educational accomplishments by students, families and staff; and encouraging parents to achieve their own educational goals.

- 7. Use data effectively to develop policies and programs that support educational success in children of all ages.**

Agencies can be much more systemic and purposeful about using the wealth of educational data they have on students to match students to appropriate schools, services and programs, especially students approaching transition points in their education. Agencies should also consider using data to secure private funding for effective, research-based academic interventions so they don't have to rely on schools and other programs for all of the supports that students need.

# I. The Educational Needs of Students Involved with the Child Welfare System

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*Darius was 15 years old and had lived in the same foster home for six years. His birth parents' rights had been terminated, and his foster mother was planning to adopt him. Darius had an intellectual disability and functioned at about the first-grade level. Since elementary school, Darius had been in small special education classes because of his disability. When he got to ninth grade, however, he was placed in a high school without special education classes, in a building with thousands of students.*

*Darius was completely overwhelmed at school. His only outlet was helping the coach of the basketball team, who let him serve as team assistant as long as he behaved in class. When Darius got bored or frustrated, he would bother his classmates. He started a few fights and was suspended several times. Disengaged from class, Darius would wander the hallways, leave school early, and eventually was recruited by members of a local gang. His foster mother asked Darius's school for a transfer to a smaller setting, but school staff were unable to get him a new placement. His behavior got worse, and when Darius started staying out all night, his foster mother told the agency that she couldn't keep him anymore; she was worried about his safety and the safety of the other children in her home. The agency began exploring residential placements for Darius, and it seemed likely that Darius would be moved to a new foster home or even institutionalized.*

*Project Achieve promised Darius's foster mother that we would get a safer, more suitable school for him and asked her to give him another chance while we worked on his school placement. We met with Darius's school to change his special education plan so that he could attend a small class in a specialized school for children with intellectual disabilities. Initially, the Department of Education offered Darius a seat in a school with a large gang presence that primarily served students with emotional disturbances. Project Achieve advocated for another school site for Darius, one primarily for students with intellectual delays, where he would have the opportunity to socialize with general education students and participate in school activities, while still receiving the extra support and supervision he needed. Darius and his foster mother have been very pleased with his new school. His behavior has improved, and he was able to remain in his home.*

From early on in their lives, children in or at-risk for placement in foster care face tremendous challenges to succeeding in school. Approximately one-third of infants and toddlers investigated by child welfare services have a developmental delay, with an even greater percentage of maltreated infants demonstrating some form of cognitive delay.<sup>1</sup> Roughly 60% of children in foster care have at least one chronic medical condition,<sup>2</sup> and between one-half and three-fourths have mental health needs that require clinical intervention; the rates are comparable among children receiving preventive services in the home.<sup>3</sup> In addition to special medical and mental health needs, studies consistently show that one-third to one-half of school-age children in foster care have special education needs, a rate 2.5 to 3.5 times greater than the general population.<sup>4</sup> Students in foster care also often miss substantial amounts

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<sup>1</sup> Zero to Three Policy Center, *A Call to Action on Behalf of Maltreated Infants and Toddlers* 3, 5 (2011); see also A. Stahmer, et al., *Developmental and Behavioral Needs and Services Use for Young Children in Child Welfare* 116 *Pediatrics* 891, 897 (2005) (reporting serious developmental or behavioral delays in roughly 40% of infants and toddlers and 50% of preschoolers with child welfare involvement).

<sup>2</sup> N.Y. State Office of Children and Family Services ("OCFS"), *Working Together: Health Services for Children in Foster Care* xi (2009), [http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/sppd/health\\_services/manual.asp](http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/sppd/health_services/manual.asp).

<sup>3</sup> Casey Family Programs, *Mental Health Care for Children and Adolescents in Foster Care: Review of Research Literature* 15 (2006), <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/MentalHealthCareChildren.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, *Education is the Lifeline for Youth in Foster Care* 12-13 (2011), <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/EducationalOutcomesFactSheet.pdf> (summarizing special education data).

of school before coming into care, and many continue to have poor attendance after entering the foster care system.<sup>5</sup>

Although intended to help struggling children, foster care may compound students' educational difficulties. Entering foster care is itself a traumatic experience that separates children from their parents and often from other family members, friends and their community as well. Most students in foster care change schools frequently, when they come into care or move between foster homes.<sup>6</sup> Frequent school moves can cause students to regress academically; highly mobile students have lower test scores, are more likely to repeat a grade and are less likely to graduate than other students.<sup>7</sup> Instability among caregivers, lack of involvement from birth parents, many of whom live far from their children's schools or are inappropriately excluded from educational planning, and frequent caseworker turnover all contribute to students' difficulties in school, since there is often no adult in the child's life in a position to advocate effectively for his or her educational needs.

The cumulative effect of these challenges is not hard to guess. Students in foster care are twice as likely to repeat a grade<sup>8</sup> or be suspended from school as students with no child welfare involvement.<sup>9</sup> While exact numbers for graduation rates vary, studies consistently show that former foster youth are more likely to drop out of school,<sup>10</sup> more likely to get GEDs instead of high school diplomas<sup>11</sup> and more likely to be incarcerated than other young people.<sup>12</sup> Most do not enroll in college or other post-secondary programs, and few will ever complete a bachelor's degree.<sup>13</sup>

Over the last decade, child welfare agencies and advocates have begun to recognize that the students they serve need access to greater educational opportunities, and that education is critically important to child wellbeing, permanency planning and a successful transition to adulthood. In particular, best practices research has identified education advocacy as an effective strategy to improve school stability and long-term outcomes for students in care.<sup>14</sup> Across the country, jurisdictions are exploring different methods of providing education advocacy to youth in care, including agency, school and court-based

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<sup>5</sup> Id. at 3.

<sup>6</sup> One study found that 65% of youth who aged out of foster care had experienced seven or more school changes from elementary through high school. Casey Family Programs, *Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study* 28 (2005).

<sup>7</sup> Arthur J. Reynolds, Chin-Chih Chen, & Janette E. Herbers, *School Mobility and Educational Success: A Research Synthesis and Evidence on Prevention* 22 (2009) (concluding that school mobility is consistently linked to lower school achievement and higher rates of dropout, especially among highly mobile urban youth); Kai A. Schafft, *The Incidence and Impacts of Student Transiency in Upstate New York's Rural School Districts*, *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 2 (2005); David Silver, Marisa Saunders, & Estela Zarate, *What Factors Predict High School Graduation in the Los Angeles Unified School District* 16 (2008) (finding that students who changed high schools even once were nearly half as likely to graduate as students who stayed in the same school).

<sup>8</sup> National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, *supra* note 4, at 12 (summarizing multiple studies).

<sup>9</sup> Mark E. Courtney, Sherri Terao, & Noel Bost, *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Conditions of Youth Preparing To Leave State Care* 42 (2004); Cheryl Smithgall, et al., *Behavior Problems and Educational Disruptions Among Children in Out-of-Home Care in Chicago* 36 (2005) (finding similarly elevated suspension rates among students with indicated maltreatment reports who were not placed into care).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Cheryl Smithgall, et al., *Educational Experiences of Children in Out-of-Home Care* 27-31 (2004); Mark E. Courtney, Sherri Terao, & Noel Bost, *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21* 26 (2007).

<sup>11</sup> Casey Family Programs, *supra* note 6, at 35.

<sup>12</sup> Courtney, et al., *supra* note 10, at 64-67.

<sup>13</sup> See studies cited in National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, *supra* note 4, at 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Ada Skyles, Cheryl Smithgall, & Eboni Howard, *School Engagement and Youth Who Run Away from Care: The Need for Cross-System Collaboration* 19-21 (2007); National Council on Disability, *Youth with Disabilities in the Foster Care System: Barriers to Success and Proposed Policy Solutions* 65-66, 77 (2008).

models. This report offers insights from one such model, called Project Achieve, which pairs Advocates for Children of New York (“AFC”), a non-profit legal services organization that provides education advocacy to low-income students in New York City, with foster care and preventive services agencies over the course of several years. The report explains how Project Achieve works and examines the project’s long-term impact on the children and families served by these agencies, the people who work there and the city’s child welfare system itself.

## **An Overview of Education and Child Welfare in New York City**

The size, complexity and bureaucracy of New York City’s Department of Education (“DOE”) make attaining academic success a challenge for the best-informed and most stable of families. The city’s five boroughs comprise the nation’s largest school district, which is divided into 32 geographic areas for certain administrative purposes, with additional administrative districts for students with severe disabilities, called District 75, and students in alternative educational settings, such as GED programs and correctional facilities, called District 79. There are over 1700 public schools in New York City, serving about 1.1 million students.<sup>15</sup>

There are no zoned or neighborhood high schools in the city, and in many geographic areas, there are no zoned middle or elementary schools either. Families must apply to pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, middle and high schools. Competition for many schools is stiff, and some parents must go through multiple rounds of applications before getting their child into a school. The DOE opens and closes dozens of schools every year, and it has reorganized its administrative structure at least three times in the last nine years. Added to this mix are multiple special education reforms and an over 30-year-old lawsuit over the city’s failure to offer timely special education services to students with disabilities.<sup>16</sup> Given these complexities, it can be difficult for any family to navigate the educational system, let alone a family in crisis that has come to the attention of the city’s child welfare system.

In New York City, the Administration for Children’s Services (“ACS”) investigates allegations of parental abuse or neglect and manages the preventive and foster care services provided to families in response to any substantiated allegations. ACS investigates about 60,000 families each year.<sup>17</sup> Most allegations involve neglect – the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision or medical care to children – and are closely tied to a family’s poverty or lack of community resources. A smaller percentage of cases involve physical or sexual abuse, and over 11% of allegations in New York City concern educational neglect:<sup>18</sup> the failure to ensure regular school attendance for children between the ages of six and seventeen.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> New York City Department of Education (“DOE”), *About Us*, <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/default.htm> (last accessed July 6, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Advocates for Children, *Jose P. v. Mills*, [http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/litigation/class\\_actions/jose\\_p\\_vs\\_mills](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/litigation/class_actions/jose_p_vs_mills) (last accessed Apr. 26, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> City of New York, *The Mayor’s Management Report* 32, 33 (Sept. 2011), <http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/mmr/acs.pdf> (reporting 59,992 State Central Registry investigations and 375 childcare investigations in fiscal year 2011).

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Administration for Children’s Services (“ACS”), *NYC 2010 Community Snapshots, CD 1 Mott Haven, Melrose 2* (last accessed July 6, 2012) (listing types and percentages of reported allegations by community district, borough and city-wide), [http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/cd\\_snapshots/bronx\\_cd1.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/cd_snapshots/bronx_cd1.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> New York City has a higher compulsory school age than the rest of the state, where compulsory attendance ends at age 16. N.Y. Educ. Law § 3205. In New York City, children are required to attend school from the age of 6 through the end of the school year in which they turn 17. DOE Chancellor’s Regulation A-101.

In over half of these investigations, there is no indication of parental abuse or neglect.<sup>20</sup> In other cases, parents are referred for preventive services, to stabilize the family and to prevent placement into foster care,<sup>21</sup> and in a smaller number of cases, where they cannot remain home safely, children come into foster care.<sup>22</sup> There are roughly 14,000 children in foster care in New York City and about 24,000 receiving preventive services.<sup>23</sup> Children and youth in foster care range in age from birth to 21, with the greatest concentrations of admissions occurring among babies and youth between the ages of 14 and 17.<sup>24</sup> Most children in foster care live in licensed foster homes with non-relatives; about one-third live in “kinship” homes, with relatives or close family friends; and roughly 10% are placed in group homes or residential facilities, generally for children with significant behavioral or emotional needs.<sup>25</sup>

Children in care are disproportionately poor and of color. African-American children are especially over-represented in New York City’s foster care system; they are more likely than children from other racial and ethnic backgrounds to be the subject of a child welfare investigation, more likely to enter foster care instead of receiving preventive services when there is an indicated case and spend more time in care than other children when they do return to their families or get adopted.<sup>26</sup> Over 60% of the children who come into foster care are eventually reunified with their parents. The rest are adopted, go to live with a relative or “age out” of the system,<sup>27</sup> meaning that they remain in the custody of the state until they are too old to be in care any longer.<sup>28</sup> Most New York City children who enter foster care return home quickly, within five or six months,<sup>29</sup> but many young people, especially those who eventually age out, spend years in foster care; some spend most of their lives there.<sup>30</sup>

While ACS oversees all foster care and preventive services, the city contracts with private non-profit agencies that provide preventive, foster care, adoption and independent living services<sup>31</sup> directly to children and their families. There are currently 28 agencies offering family foster care services and/or residential care to children and another five agencies that provide only residential care.<sup>32</sup> Fifty-eight

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<sup>20</sup> City of New York, *supra* note 17, at 31 (showing substantiation rate near 40% from 2007 to the present).

<sup>21</sup> Some families also receive preventive services without any indication of abuse or neglect or prior ACS involvement.

<sup>22</sup> In other circumstances, a parent may voluntarily place his or her child into foster care. N.Y. Soc. Serv. Law § 384-a.

<sup>23</sup> ACS, *Children receiving services*, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/home/home.shtml> (last accessed May 28, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> OCFS, *Monitoring and Analysis Profiles, New York City 12* (2010), [http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/reports/maps/Maps\\_NYC\\_2010.pdf](http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/reports/maps/Maps_NYC_2010.pdf) (last accessed May 28, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> See City of New York, *supra* note 17, at 33.

<sup>26</sup> See Toni Lang, *Examining Disproportionate Minority Representation and Disparities in the New York City Child Welfare System* (Sept. 28, 2010) (on file with the author).

<sup>27</sup> See ACS, *ACS Update Five Year Trend 2* (FY 2005-2009), [http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/stats\\_5\\_year\\_2009.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/stats_5_year_2009.pdf) (last accessed May 28, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> At 18, a young adult must consent to remaining in foster care, and may stay in care until his or her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Most youth in New York City elect to stay in foster care until they turn 21, although some choose to leave earlier.

<sup>29</sup> City of New York, *supra* note 17, at 33.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Children’s Rights, *The Long Road Home: A Study of Children Stranded in New York City Foster Care* 37-38 (Nov. 2009) (examining lengths of stay for children who had been in foster care for at least 2 years).

<sup>31</sup> Independent living services are designed to help youth in foster care transition to adulthood. All child welfare agencies must provide independent living services, which can include academic support, vocational training, adaptive living skills or aftercare services, to youth in their care between the ages of 14 and 21. See OCFS, *Federal Fiscal Year 2008-2009 Independent Living Allocations*, 09-OCFS-LCM-06, [http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/policies/external/OCFS\\_2009/LCMs/09-OCFS-LCM-06%20Federal%20Fiscal%20Year%202008-2009%20Independent%20Living%20Allocations.pdf](http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/policies/external/OCFS_2009/LCMs/09-OCFS-LCM-06%20Federal%20Fiscal%20Year%202008-2009%20Independent%20Living%20Allocations.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> See ACS, *Recommended Child Welfare Award List of Agencies by Type of Service* 2-3 (Sept. 2010), <http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/contracts/Child%20Welfare%20Awards%20by%20Service%20Type.pdf>.

agencies provide preventive services to families.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, many of these agencies are poorly equipped to advocate effectively for the educational needs of the children they serve. Although educational issues arise frequently in their cases,<sup>34</sup> most agency staff members have minimal knowledge of the school system when they are hired,<sup>35</sup> and even those caseworkers whose own children attend public schools are often unfamiliar with the system as a whole, especially with respect to special education issues.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the prevalence of educational issues in cases and the lack of knowledge among staff, most agencies provide little formal training on education advocacy and have few educational resources to offer. Staff frequently learns on the job and relies on sometimes inaccurate information from schools or basic trial and error to resolve questions about educational issues.<sup>37</sup> Typically, agencies do not have an education specialist on site, or if they do, this person may also be responsible for vocational training or independent living services, and may be restricted to working with older adolescents.<sup>38</sup> One long-time child welfare professional described her agency this way: “[W]orkers really struggled with the education piece, and supervisors often didn’t understand how to negotiate with the schools either. Caseworkers would be overwhelmed with constant calls from the schools, with whom they did not have great relationships across the board.”<sup>39</sup> As a result, few school-aged students involved with the child welfare system have access to a well-trained professional to advocate on their behalf with schools and the Department of Education.

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<sup>33</sup> Id. at 4.

<sup>34</sup> In a Project Achieve survey completed by 39 agency employees at Forestdale and Graham Windham in 2009, nearly 80% of respondents reported that educational issues arise in their cases “frequently” or “all of the time.”

<sup>35</sup> Over half of survey respondents rated themselves a 1 or 2, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least familiar and 5 the most familiar with the Department of Education and educational issues overall; the average response was 2.3. These numbers are skewed somewhat by the fact that 20% of respondents were education specialty staff; the average response among case planners alone was 2.0.

<sup>36</sup> See Interviews with Rosemarie Ewing-James, Associate Executive Director, Forestdale, Inc., in Queens, N.Y. (Aug. 25, 2009); Linda Ford, Administrative Director, Preventive Services, Forestdale, Inc., in Queens, N.Y. (Aug. 25, 2009); Grace Pasion, former Program Director, Brooklyn Preventive Services, Graham Windham, in Brooklyn, N.Y. (July 7, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Id.

<sup>38</sup> ACS did revise its most recent Request for Proposals to include a requirement that every foster care program designate one staff member to serve as an Educational Liaison, although the position is described as “recommended.” The Liaison is responsible for using DOE performance data, building relationships with schools, advocating on behalf of students and focusing on children’s school stability, attendance and academic progress. ACS, *Child Welfare Services Including Community Partnerships Request for Proposals* 94, App. F 56-57 (May 2009) (on file with the author).

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Rosemarie Ewing-James, *supra* note 36.

## II. The Project Achieve Model

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Project Achieve brings AFC's 40 years of experience in education advocacy directly to staff and families at partner foster care and preventive agencies. AFC plays a unique role in New York City as a center of considerable expertise on the education system and the needs of particular student populations, including children with disabilities, English Language Learners, students facing suspensions or delinquency proceedings and students experiencing homelessness.

When fully staffed, Project Achieve consists of a full-time attorney, a full-time non-attorney advocate (or Education Specialist) and a Project Associate, with intensive support on casework, trainings and policy initiatives from a supervising attorney.<sup>40</sup> The project began in September 2002, when we partnered with Louise Wise Services' foster care and preventive programs in Harlem.<sup>41</sup> After those programs closed in the spring of 2004, directors from two other contract agencies, Forestdale, Inc. and New York Foundling's Queens Services office, expressed interest in receiving assistance from Project Achieve. We began on-site operations at both agencies in the fall of 2004. The following year, in September 2005, we moved Project Achieve to Graham Windham's Brooklyn-based Neighborhood Family Service Center<sup>42</sup> and ended on-site hours at New York Foundling.<sup>43</sup> We continued operating Project Achieve on site at Forestdale and Graham Windham through June 2009. This paper focuses on Project Achieve's impact at Forestdale and Graham Windham from 2004 through 2009.

Although AFC was their home base, project staff spent at least one regularly scheduled day a week at each agency, where we offered training and technical assistance to agency employees and accepted referrals to provide education advocacy to individual students and families. We also visited with families in the community, attended school meetings and other appointments pertaining to children's educational needs and represented families at administrative hearings. The majority of Project Achieve's time was dedicated to advocating on behalf of students and their families, with responsibility for direct advocacy shifting toward agency staff as the project became established and successfully built capacity at a particular agency. In addition to our help on education-related questions and issues that arose on a day to day basis, Project Achieve worked closely with staff at every level, from case planners and education specialty staff to Program Directors and senior management, to build the agencies' capacity to meet the educational needs of the children they serve. These efforts included traditional staff development and training, but more importantly involved creating policies and systems that effectively

### Project Achieve: Key Strategies

- On-site assistance from an attorney and an Education Specialist
- Advocacy and legal representation to students and families with school-related difficulties
- Training for agency staff, families and youth
- Targeted technical assistance to build agency capacity around educational issues
- Systemic policy advocacy

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<sup>40</sup> Over the years, we have filled the Project Associate position with volunteers from the AmeriCorps VISTA program and the Jesuit Volunteer Corps.

<sup>41</sup> For more information on Project Achieve during its pilot phase at Louise Wise, see Advocates for Children, *Advocates for Children's Project Achieve: A Model Project Providing Education Advocacy for Children in the Child Welfare System* (2005), <http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/pubs/2005/projectachieve.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> We selected Graham Windham for Project Achieve because of its emphasis on education. Literacy is one of the key components of Graham Windham's signature mission; in fact, the agency's 2003-04 annual report was entitled *Child Welfare for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Education, No Exceptions, No Excuses* (on file with the author).

<sup>43</sup> New York Foundling experienced significant turnover at this time, leading to vacancies in managerial staff and decreased support for our project. As a result, we determined with the agency that our resources could be best used elsewhere.

support student educational achievement, such as screening tools to help case planners and parents identify children's educational needs more quickly and databases to track student performance and target youth for appropriate interventions. As our relationships with our partner agencies evolved, Project Achieve also began working on city and state policy initiatives pertaining to the educational needs of students involved with the child welfare system.

During the 2008-2009 school year, when it became clear that our partner agencies had built their capacity to the point where they were equipped to handle most educational issues without assistance from Project Achieve, we gradually decreased on-site hours at Forestdale and Graham Windham. We reduced our weekly site visits to twice-monthly visits in February 2009 and continued on that schedule through the end of the school year, when we limited on-site visits to occasional workshops and meetings with families. At the same time, project staff chose a new partner agency through a written application process.<sup>44</sup> Twelve agencies completed the application, and we conducted site visits at five agencies before selecting Cardinal McCloskey Services as our current partner, beginning in August 2009.

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## A. Project Achieve's Partners

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While Project Achieve's core components and activities have remained the same throughout the years at each of our partner agencies, the day-to-day details can vary significantly depending on the agencies' size, staffing, resources and client population. Given these differences, it would be instructive to describe pertinent characteristics of each agency and how we adapted Project Achieve to meet their particular needs.

### I. Forestdale, Inc.

In September 2004, Forestdale served roughly 265 children in foster care and 60 families in preventive, primarily in the borough of Queens.<sup>45</sup> Forestdale's foster care census increased dramatically throughout our time there. The agency currently supervises over 500 children and youth in foster care and serves about 100 families in its preventive programs each year.<sup>46</sup> Most of Forestdale's programs are housed at one site in Forest Hills, Queens. The agency occupies over three acres and is made up of several buildings that were formerly residential cottages for children in foster care. Most of the families served by the agency do not live in the immediate area, and while the agency is fairly accessible by public transportation, many of the agency's clients, and the schools they attend, are not. Thus, working with Forestdale's families required a significant amount of travel time for Project Achieve and agency staff.

When Project Achieve started at Forestdale, the agency did not have any staff that specialized in education, and caseworkers were responsible for education-related issues for all of the children on their caseload. Forestdale's part-time Educational/Vocational Specialist, who served young people aged 14-21,

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<sup>44</sup> AFC announced that Project Achieve would be choosing a new partner agency in November 2008 and invited all city foster care and preventive agencies to apply. In January 2009, we held an informational meeting for interested agencies, where we described the project and distributed application materials. A copy of the materials is included in the Appendix.

<sup>45</sup> Erika Palmer, *Agency Stats 11-04*, Advocates for Children (Nov. 2004), private computer file.

<sup>46</sup> Forestdale, Inc., *Foster Care*, <http://forestdaleinc.org/programs-services/foster-care/>; *Keeping Families Together (Preventive)*, <http://forestdaleinc.org/programs-services/keeping-my-family-together/> (last accessed July 6, 2012). In addition to general preventive services, Forestdale also has a Fathering Initiative and a Teenage Services Act (TASA) program, which serves pregnant and parenting teens and young women at risk for unplanned pregnancies. Although staff from these programs sometimes came to Project Achieve's workshops, they were not the focus of our outreach, and we received few referrals from their staff.



did little education advocacy; she primarily worked with youth who had left school and were looking for a GED program or who needed assistance with college. The medical department handled Early Intervention referrals<sup>47</sup> and had some knowledge of preschool special education, but did not have the capacity to follow up on referrals once they were made.

At first, Project Achieve's desk was located in an empty office near the foster care program director. Because we were physically separated from most of the agency staff, we generally only sat in the office for private meetings with families or students and spent most of our time on site walking around the campus, visiting with case planners and medical or clinical staff.<sup>48</sup> During our years on site, Forestdale eventually expanded its Youth Development Department,<sup>49</sup> created a youth lounge and hired two additional Educational Specialists. Project Achieve spent a significant amount of time providing training and technical assistance to these staff members. After Forestdale moved our desk into the Youth Development office, we became particularly accessible to youth at the agency and began to consult more extensively with staff on adolescents' educational issues, but we continued to circulate around the campus and work with children of all ages.<sup>50</sup>

## 2. Graham Windham

Graham Windham is a much larger social services agency than Forestdale. It has foster care and preventive programs in Brooklyn, Manhattan and the Bronx, with additional preventive sites at Beacon programs within public schools.<sup>51</sup> The agency served roughly 850 children in foster care and up to 270 families in preventive when Project Achieve began going on site. Given the limits of our own resources, we agreed to restrict on-site assistance to Graham Windham's Brooklyn-based Neighborhood Family Service Center, but to offer technical assistance to other sites by phone and email whenever possible. The Brooklyn office is located in a commercial area downtown with excellent access to public transportation. The agency occupies the first floor of an office building and includes programs for preventive services, regular foster care, adolescents with the goal of APPLA<sup>52</sup> and therapeutic foster care,<sup>53</sup> in addition to an early childhood education resource center.

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<sup>47</sup> Early Intervention is a program run by the New York State Department of Health that offers therapeutic and support services to eligible infants and toddlers with developmental delays and their families.

<sup>48</sup> We tried instituting a written referral form several times, but staff rarely used it; instead, they preferred to refer cases in person or, later in the project, by phone or email.

<sup>49</sup> Youth Development is now usually referred to as Preparing Youth for Adulthood ("PYA"), an initiative started by ACS in 2006 that works with youth aged 14-21. See ACS, *Preparing Youth for Adulthood* (2006), [http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/youth\\_for\\_adulthood.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/youth_for_adulthood.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> Forestdale also hired several reinvestment staff during our time on site, charged with reducing the amount of time children spend in care by connecting youth and their families to community-based, long-term social services. These staff members worked closely with families and frequently collaborated with Project Achieve to address students' educational goals.

<sup>51</sup> The agency also runs several early childhood programs and operates a Residential Treatment Center and day school in Westchester County for children and youth with emotional, behavioral and learning disabilities.

<sup>52</sup> APPLA, or Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement, refers to young people whose case plan no longer requires efforts to be reunited with their birth families or to be adopted. APPLA used to be commonly known as "independent living;" the term APPLA came into regular use in New York City after implementation of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act. See Memorandum from Nicholas Scoppetta, Commissioner of ACS 7-9 (May 16, 2001), [http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/asfa\\_4.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/asfa_4.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> ACS recently renamed Therapeutic Foster Boarding Homes "Treatment Family Foster Care." The program serves children who require clinical interventions and supports that are not available in standard foster home programs, but who do not need a residential setting and would benefit from living with a family.

When Project Achieve began at Graham Windham, the agency had just expanded its education staff through foundation funding to form a “Literacy Department,” which consisted of a Director of Literacy, two Educational Coordinators, and a Family Literacy Specialist. While the Brooklyn Educational Coordinator had been the agency’s sole education staff member for several years, the other education staff members were brand new, and their roles were still being developed. The Coordinators were located in Brooklyn and the Bronx and were responsible for children in foster care in their respective boroughs, with split responsibility for the Manhattan office, which was much smaller. The Family Literacy Specialist, who worked out of Brooklyn, was responsible for educational training for the agency and also worked extensively with families receiving preventive services, as well as birth and foster families whose children were in the therapeutic program and required more support.

Project Achieve shared an office with the Family Literacy Specialist when we first started going on site and formed close ties with staff in the preventive and therapeutic programs as a result. In addition to working on student cases, we focused our energies on training staff in the Literacy Department. They learned effective advocacy skills quickly, and most referrals to Project Achieve came from them. These education staff used a basic form to collect referrals from case planners and tried to resolve problems on their own first. If they needed additional assistance, education staff would refer the case to Project Achieve, and we would work together to develop a plan to address the issue.

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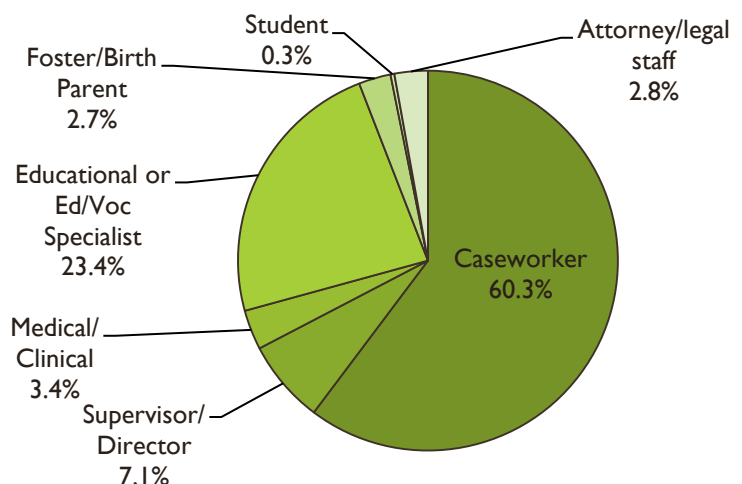
## **B. The Core of the Project: Bringing Outside Expertise on Site to Child Welfare Agencies**

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Based on our own experience and feedback from agency staff, we determined that the on-site component of Project Achieve is one of the most critical to its success. Directors interviewed unanimously agreed that our on-site presence was the most helpful aspect of the program, as did the majority of agency staff surveyed. Staff praised the hands-on nature of Project Achieve, our regular and consistent follow-up, even on cases that were not emergencies, and the way we walked around the agency, approaching caseworkers directly for referrals. When Project Achieve arrives on site on a typical day at an agency, we start by checking in with our main contacts and then “make the rounds.” This process entails saying hello to everyone at the agency, including case planners, case aides, clinical or medical staff, receptionists, program directors and supervisors; reminding them what we do; and introducing ourselves to any new staff. Our regular presence encourages staff to stay on top of students’ educational needs and serves as a visual reminder of the importance of education in their daily case practice.

While on site, we take new referrals from agency staff and follow up on existing cases. Referrals come from a variety of sources, but the majority, roughly 60%, come from the child’s case planner, with an additional 24% of referrals coming from Educational Coordinators or Specialists, seven percent coming from a supervisor or program director, and the remaining referrals coming from medical or clinical staff, the birth or foster parent, the child’s or parent’s attorney or the student him or herself. Referrals may be

**Sources of Referrals to Project Achieve**



made in person at the agency, by calling or emailing Project Achieve at AFC or by leaving a message in our agency voicemail, mailbox or email account. Our decision to make the referral process as open as possible, especially in the early stages of the project, was a conscious one; we wanted to avoid creating artificial barriers to referrals and make it as easy as possible for everyone at the agency to utilize us as a resource. This convenience helps staff and families see us as a real asset to the agency and increases the likelihood that they will engage meaningfully with the project later on.

These physical, direct check-ins are particularly important given the busy schedules of most case planners, as it may have been several weeks since the case planner last spoke to a Project Achieve staff member.<sup>54</sup> This time is also critical given the high turnover among agency staff, the multiple Project Achieve team members, and the often transitory lives of many families involved in the child welfare system. Families move, children come into and are discharged from care, young people transfer between foster homes, or some new allegation or court development may come up that puts education advocacy on the back burner, at least temporarily. Although the case planner or education staff member is primarily responsible for the educational aspects of a child's case, checking in with supervisors to share updates is also critical when case planners are in the field. Supervisors can alert Project Achieve staff to seek out a case planner for a referral when a student on their caseload needs attention but the case planner is not around or, for whatever reason, has not referred us the case.

In addition to meeting with individuals about particular students, part of Project Achieve's goal on site is to increase knowledge of education advocacy among staff and to raise the general visibility of educational issues within the culture of the agency. At the most basic level, staff needs to be able to access information about the students they are working with so they can begin to develop an accurate educational profile of the student. One of the first things we did at Forestdale and Graham Windham was to help the agencies revise the forms and releases they used to request records from schools, to ensure they were getting as much relevant information about students as possible. At the suggestion of Graham Windham's Educational Coordinator, Project Achieve also created an education advocacy manual to post on the agency's Intranet,<sup>55</sup> which the agency has expanded to include an entire education advocacy folder with relevant resources and other information. Periodically, we hung posters to alert families and agency staff to important school dates, like upcoming parent teacher conferences, and sent out email blasts on applicable DOE deadlines, announcements and programs, such as available seats in nearby transfer or charter schools.<sup>56</sup> Every year, we distributed memos to staff about how to access free tutoring for students under the No Child Left Behind Act; we also posted signs and shared memos with staff each fall explaining high school admissions so that they could guide families through the increasingly complicated process. As New

#### Project Achieve: A Typical Day on Site

- Talk with case planners, supervisors and other staff about new referrals and ongoing cases
- Meet with families or students at the agency
- Hang flyers and posters with education-related news
- Inform staff about school deadlines and resources
- Conduct workshops
- Participate in case reviews, conferences and meetings

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<sup>54</sup> Project Achieve staff members always tried to follow up by phone or email, but often physical contact was the best way to reach agency staff, especially during the initial stages of the project, when our relationship with agency employees was just getting under way.

<sup>55</sup> Although we developed this manual for Graham Windham, we have since shared it with staff at Forestdale, New York Foundling, the Children's Aid Society and several other agencies. A modified version of the manual is available on our website at [http://advocatesforchildren.org/get\\_help/guides\\_and\\_resources](http://advocatesforchildren.org/get_help/guides_and_resources).

<sup>56</sup> We recently helped Cardinal McCloskey's Education Unit develop an e-newsletter that serves a similar purpose. A recent version of this monthly e-newsletter is included in the Appendix.

York City's pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and middle school application processes become more involved, we have started distributing information and emails to staff about these processes as well.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, if the agency has education specialty staff, Project Achieve frequently uses our time on site to participate in team meetings to review cases, develop new initiatives and strategize about how to improve education advocacy within the agency. Depending on the day, we also may meet with program directors to discuss agency-wide policy issues, staff development needs or the progress of Project Achieve at the agency. To ensure that our work on site is going smoothly, we periodically attend supervisors' or unit meetings to learn about new programs at the agency, review cases and reintroduce ourselves to staff.

### **I. Helping Children and Youth with Educational Difficulties**

Most of our time on site is spent discussing individual students' educational needs. Project Achieve staff first tends to emergencies, such as when a child is out of school or has a suspension hearing pending. We then ask follow-up questions on ongoing cases and accept new referrals, taking down the child's information and reviewing available records. How we proceed depends on the nature of the case, the complexity of the problem and the expertise of the staff member, birth or foster parent involved. Once the project is firmly established at the agency, we tend to get referrals throughout the week, either by phone or email, just as frequently as while on site, and we respond to every referral we get. From September 2004 to June 2009, Project Achieve assisted families and agency staff with 916 referrals. We responded to 54% of these referrals by providing brief assistance to the agency staff person or parent and to another 32% by consulting with the referral source over an extended period of time.<sup>58</sup> Project staff provided legal representation or advocacy directly to the student or family in 14% of the referrals we received.

Whenever possible, we respond to referrals by providing brief assistance to agency staff members so that they can learn how to resolve common educational problems on their own. If an issue requires more in-depth or long-term advocacy on the part of the parent or agency, Project Achieve will provide step-by-step instructions until the problem is resolved. This might include sharing pertinent school district contact information, helping the case planner write an advocacy letter, doing a conference call together with a school or offering follow-up assistance. Often, agency staff can identify students' educational needs, but do not have access to

### **Advocacy in Action: Providing Technical Assistance to Agencies**

*Sean's story was typical among older students in foster care. He was almost 18 and in his fourth year of high school when the agency's Educational/Vocational Specialist approached Project Achieve for help. Sean had high aspirations for himself, but a lifetime in foster care, with multiple placements and limited contact with his biological family, had caused him to lose motivation. Although academically capable, Sean had failed a number of classes over the years and only had the credits of a 10<sup>th</sup> grader. He had already attended two large high schools with minimal success and, after changing foster families again, needed a high school placement closer to his new home.*

*His caseworker felt that Sean would benefit from a smaller, more supportive setting with students his own age. Project Achieve helped the agency get the most recent copies of Sean's records. We reviewed the records with the Specialist and Sean's caseworker and determined that he was a good candidate for a transfer high school, an alternative high school for overage, under-credited students. Project Achieve suggested several schools that might be suitable for Sean and provided contact information and admission requirements to the agency. The agency then arranged for an interview at one of the schools and accompanied Sean to his appointment. Sean was accepted and graduated from high school three years later.*

<sup>57</sup> Samples of some of these memos, posters and flyers are included in the Appendix.

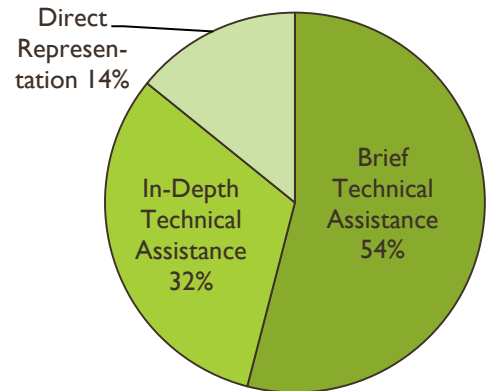
information about critical resources, especially when students' needs are unresponsive to traditional solutions.

Although Project Achieve responds to most referrals with brief or in-depth consultation services in an effort to help agency staff learn education advocacy skills, we also work directly with families to provide legal representation or advocacy on a number of cases when less formal channels have not or will not work. This approach is especially important in the first few years at an agency, when staff may not have the expertise to resolve a problem, even with extensive coaching from Project Achieve. Project staff first meets with the birth parent, foster parent and student, usually at the agency.<sup>59</sup> Depending on the nature

of the case, the meeting may consist of simply answering the parent's or student's questions and providing a list of resources. In other cases, Project Achieve will conduct a detailed interview with the student and parents to obtain information about the student's situation, including a thorough history of the student's child welfare experiences, education and any medical or mental health issues. Project staff members also clarify who holds educational decision-making rights, a critical component of education advocacy for students in care, and obtain necessary release forms from that person. As Project Achieve works on the case, we try to involve all stakeholders, including birth and foster parents, students, schools, agency staff, therapists and tutors in each step of the process.

Education advocacy varies widely depending on the individual student's situation, but most cases consist of determining a student's strengths and needs, identifying resources that will meet those needs and are in line with the family's goals and developing a client-directed plan to get those resources for the student. Conducting an educational assessment may be as simple as talking to the student, parent or case planner, but more often involves reviewing existing records, tracking down old ones, talking to teachers, school staff, and other providers, observing the child in school and determining the need for new evaluations. This collection and review is the foundation for creating effective education plans for youth and is vital to forming a complete picture of the student's educational background. A thorough records review will show what types of programs and services have been attempted or recommended in the past, as well as the student's current academic levels. Records to be reviewed include clinical evaluations, progress reports, attendance records, transcripts, report cards, standardized test scores and disciplinary actions. For students with disabilities, the records review must include previous Individualized Education Programs ("IEPs") and special education evaluations. Often the most recent IEP or report card will not reflect the student's true abilities or how the student has fared over time and in various settings, so a thorough records review is imperative.

### Referral Type



#### Key Educational Records to Review

- Report Cards
- Progress Reports
- Attendance Records
- Current Transcript
- Standardized Test Scores
- Disciplinary History
- Clinical Evaluations
- Individualized Education Programs ("IEPs")
- Special Education Evaluations

<sup>58</sup> We refer to these referrals as "brief" and "in-depth" technical assistance.

<sup>59</sup> We conducted home visits in about 10% of our cases, usually when some medical or transportation issue made it difficult for family members to come to the agency.

## Spotlight on Educational Decision-Making

Parental involvement is critical for educational success among all students, including students in foster care. Research shows that family involvement is a strong predictor of educational success, and schools that work to create strong school-family partnerships can expect better test scores, increased attendance and higher rates of high school completion.<sup>60</sup> But how does parental involvement work when children are not living with their parents, and who makes educational decisions for children when they live in out-of-home care?

The law, rather surprisingly, offers very little guidance in general education matters. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”) gives us some answers with respect to educational information – that is, who may access a child’s educational records, who can authorize the records’ release to third parties and who can petition to have inaccurate records amended. FERPA defines parent as a natural parent, guardian or person acting as a parent in the absence of a parent or guardian,<sup>61</sup> such as a foster parent who is acting as a child’s parent.<sup>62</sup> New York City explicitly includes non-custodial parents and representatives from a child’s foster care agency in its Chancellor’s Regulations.<sup>63</sup> Presumably, then, a child’s birth parent, foster parent and agency all have the right to access a child’s educational records when he or she is in foster care.

Other important general education matters, such as enrollment, school choice, suspension or other disciplinary matters and permission to participate in field trips or extracurricular activities, are less clear. The term “parent” is rarely defined in these contexts, and case practice varies depending on the agency, case planner or family involved. Typically, parents who ask to be consulted are generally kept informed, while non-assertive parents or those perceived as “difficult” are often excluded from decision-making or simply not considered. In some situations, this might be appropriate; for example, if a child comes home with a permission slip to attend a field trip later that week, it may not be practical to wait for the birth parent to sign it, or if a child needs to transfer schools for safety reasons and the birth parent cannot be located, it hardly seems wise to send the child back to the unsafe environment or keep him out of school in the meantime. In other circumstances, however, it may be perfectly reasonable to expect, or even require, birth parents to be involved in educational decision-making for their child, especially when they are in regular contact with the child and the agency.

In the special education context, the law is much more explicit. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (“IDEA”), which was first passed as the Education for all Handicapped Children Act in 1975, grew out of the larger disability rights movement. Before passage of this federal law, four out of five children with disabilities were not educated in public schools at all, and those students who were enrolled in schools were often segregated in substandard special education classes, special schools, or institutions where they were not allowed to socialize with typically developing peers.<sup>64</sup> In addition to requiring states to provide appropriate education services to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment possible, the IDEA grants parents important due process rights to ensure that school districts comply with the law’s mandates.

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<sup>60</sup> See Anne T. Henderson & Karen L. Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Annual Synthesis 24 (2002); Harvard Family Research Project, *Family Involvement in Elementary School Children’s Education* 3 (Winter 2006/2007); Harvard Family Research Project, *Family Involvement in Middle and High School Students’ Education* 1, 3 (Spring 2007).

<sup>61</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 99.3

<sup>62</sup> Family Educational Rights and Privacy, 61 Fed. Reg. 59292, 59294 (Nov. 21, 1996).

<sup>63</sup> DOE Chancellor’s Regulation A-820(III)(E), (IV)(C).

<sup>64</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Archived Information: Thirty Years of Progress in Educating Children with Disabilities Through IDEA, <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/idea/history30.html> (last visited Mar. 13, 2012).

For students in foster care who are over-represented in the special education system, especially in the most restrictive special education settings, these safeguards are particularly important; however, confusion can arise when there are multiple parties, such as foster parents, birth parents, case planners or group home staff, with varying care-giving or parental roles in a child's life. Under the IDEA, a child's birth parent is presumed to be the parent for special education purposes unless he or she no longer holds legal authority to make educational decisions for the child. A person in parental relationship to the child, such as a relative with whom the child lives, a legally appointed guardian or a foster parent may assume the role of special education "parent" in the absence of a birth or adoptive parent. Importantly, employees of a city or state agency involved in the care or education of a student, including private agencies that contract with public agencies, may not act as the student's parent for special education purposes.<sup>65</sup> This means that foster care agency staff cannot consent to special education evaluations or services for children in their care. When a child's parents are not available to participate in the special education process, the school district must assign a surrogate parent to act in place of the child's parents. A surrogate parent may be required if the parents are deceased, if their identities are unknown or if, after making reasonable efforts, the school district cannot locate the parents.<sup>66</sup> Children living in foster care and residential facilities and unaccompanied homeless youth are most likely to need a surrogate parent.

It is essential that employees of schools and foster care agencies understand special education law so that parents' and students' rights are protected and confusion about who should be involved in decision-making does not delay a student's receipt of necessary services. If applied appropriately, special education can be a critical resource for students in foster care struggling with learning disabilities, developmental delays, medical problems or mental illnesses. It can also provide an important opportunity for birth parents to remain involved in their child's life, better understand their child's needs and practice positive parenting, even when their child is living in foster care.

Once a thorough assessment is complete, which may involve scheduling or accompanying families to appointments for additional evaluations, we begin looking for potential resources for the student. These might include tutoring, mentoring or educational activities within the community; a contract or plan to modify a child's behavior; school-based interventions, accommodations, or services for high-achieving or at-risk students, students with disabilities or students learning English; interventions available through ACS or the foster care agency; or more costly, specialized services, such as intensive tutoring or behavioral therapy, to be paid for by the DOE. Addressing the problem often means balancing the benefits of changing the child's school with the harm of educational mobility, especially among students in foster care who may have transferred from school to school in the past as they moved between foster care placements. Project Achieve is lucky to be able to draw on AFC's extensive expertise in the New York City public school system when identifying potential resources or schools for a student, especially since students involved with the child welfare system tend to have unique educational needs and come from unique circumstances.

*Donald, a 14-year-old who had recently entered foster care, was one such student. Donald had been kept out of school for nearly four years when he came into care. Although bright and very verbal, Donald had the academic skills of a second grader because of all of the school he had missed. He also had been diagnosed, by various doctors, with Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, Schizotypal Personality Disorder and Anxiety Disorder.*

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<sup>65</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.30; 8 N.Y.C.R.R. § 200.1(ii).

<sup>66</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.519; 8 N.Y.C.R.R. § 200.5(n).

### Advocacy in Action: Protecting Students' Legal Rights

*Shaday was a hyperactive six-year-old whose mother sought preventive services to get help finding the right school for her daughter. Shaday had been evaluated for special education when she was a toddler and again in preschool, but she had not qualified for services. When she continued to have behavioral difficulties in kindergarten, Shaday was again referred for evaluations. This time, the school recommended a special education class in a special school, a very restrictive setting for a child who had never before received services. Shaday's mother believed that Shaday was not being challenged academically in her new school and that the other students' behavior was causing her to regress.*

*Project Achieve helped Shaday's mother get new evaluations, which recommended moving Shaday back to a community school, in a special education class with an aide to assist her in the classroom. We represented Shaday's mother at an IEP meeting, where we advocated for this new placement. When the team refused to change Shaday's school, we filed an impartial hearing on her mother's behalf. Project Achieve was able to settle the case with the DOE, and Shaday moved to a school in her neighborhood that her sister and cousins also attend. She made remarkable progress in this new setting and gained tremendous confidence in herself.*

*When Donald's case planner referred him to Project Achieve, he was sitting in a general education classroom with no support services while the school district looked for a placement in a special education school for children with severe emotional and behavioral disorders.*

*After meeting with Donald and his foster mother and speaking to his school and his therapist, we knew that this would not be the right placement for Donald. We asked that his school create a new IEP that would better address Donald's social and academic needs. Donald's school wrote another IEP for him, this time recommending an even smaller class in a special school for children with autism. Project Achieve visited the recommended program with Donald and his foster mother, who were very upset by what they saw; most of the students there were non-verbal, and many displayed dangerous behaviors like banging their heads into the desk or walls. Staff there suggested an inclusion program for Donald, which his current school's IEP team had not even known existed. This program offered special education support to higher-functioning students on the autism spectrum so that they can attend general education classes for most of the school day. Donald and his foster mother were eager to try this program. Project Achieve participated in a third IEP meeting with Donald's foster mother and urged the team to write a new IEP, recommending the inclusion program for Donald. Donald entered the new school, where he has thrived.*

*After project staff and the family have identified the students' educational goals, often with substantial input from the agency, Project Achieve develops and carries out an advocacy plan to accomplish these goals. Common strategies include advocating for different or additional services for students with disabilities at IEP meetings; helping families apply to, and accompanying them to interviews at, schools that can better meet a student's needs; or negotiating with the child's current school to move the child's class, promote an already over-age student to the next grade or pursue a less severe form of discipline if a suspended student agrees to engage in counseling or other behavioral supports. Given the constant restructuring of and turnover within the DOE, project staff often must make numerous phone calls, emails and in-person visits to various offices within the city's school system before*

reaching someone who can answer our questions and help the student. If the child's school or DOE official will not agree to our request or offer a suitable alternative, project staff may need to take the matter up the chain of command, file an official complaint or request an administrative hearing on the student's behalf and represent the parent at that hearing.

While some cases may be resolved fairly quickly, others, particularly complex special education cases, can span a year or more. Students may have attended many schools in different districts over the years, and it can take a great deal of time to gather a student's records or piece together her educational history, especially when the records have not followed the child from one school to the next or there



are gaps in the child's education. School reports or assessments conducted by the agency sometimes contain conflicting or incomplete information, and new assessments may be necessary to get an accurate picture of a child's educational profile. Waiting lists for evaluations, whether done by the school, agency or another clinical provider, are often quite long, particularly when a comprehensive evaluation is required. School programs often have waiting lists as well, or may only accept students at the beginning of the school year or semester. Add to these constraints the often chaotic nature of the lives of those involved with the child welfare system, and the fact that a particular parent or student may be in crisis and not ready to engage with Project Achieve or in an intensive educational program, and it is no wonder that many education-related issues take years of persistent advocacy to resolve. Developing a relationship of trust with families also takes time, especially considering the trauma families have experienced, the many professionals who have come in and out of their lives over the years and the many disappointments they may have encountered with those professionals. One of Project Achieve's strengths is that we continue to represent families even after their case with the agency ends, and we have maintained ties with families long after their preventive case closes, a child is adopted or the family is reunified.

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## **2. Training Agency Staff and Families**

As part of Project Achieve's efforts to help agencies, parents and students identify and resolve educational problems themselves, we offered regular workshops to staff and families on site at our partner agencies. From August 2004 to August 2009, we conducted 27 workshops for agency staff, 17 workshops for birth and foster parents and five workshops for youth at New York Foundling, Forestdale and Graham Windham. The format, approach and content of these workshops varied, depending on the agency and the stage of its relationship with Project Achieve, so that we could present material in a way that would best meet the needs of agency staff and families at the time.

Workshops for agency staff were sometimes presented to discreet units or programs, while at other times, we presented to all staff at once. Some trainings were mandatory, and others optional; some relatively short and part of a regularly scheduled staff meeting, while others were stand-alone workshops that lasted two or three hours; and some covered a broad spectrum of educational issues, while others focused on specific areas, like suspensions, English Language Learners or alternative options for older youth. In general, it was easier to schedule workshops for preventive staff members than for foster care employees, who often were in court in the morning and doing home visits in the afternoon. Typically, we offered the same training to staff multiple times to accommodate schedules and to keep the number of people at any one workshop low, which tended to increase participation and engagement.

Similarly, workshops for parents generally were offered at multiple times, such as morning and afternoon or afternoon and evening, to accommodate parents' schedules. Depending on Project Achieve staffing, we tried to offer separate workshops in English and Spanish, although sometimes we were forced to ask an agency staff person to interpret for Spanish-speaking participants. Because Graham Windham has multiple locations, Project Achieve often presented the same workshop in Brooklyn and the Bronx, and occasionally in their administrative office in Manhattan as well. Workshops for foster parents typically were scheduled as part of mandated recertification trainings or offered as

shorter presentations in conjunction with foster parent support groups.<sup>67</sup> Trainings for birth parents also tended to occur as part of regularly scheduled meetings, such as parenting classes or birth parent support groups. At workshops for parents, the subject matter tended to be more general than the material presented to agency staff, unless the workshop was tied to a particular event, such as parent teacher conferences or the kick-off of the high school application process.<sup>68</sup> Both birth and foster parents were invited to attend these more specialized workshops.

We usually scheduled workshops for youth in care in conjunction with the agencies' Youth Development departments. Since agencies are required to offer independent living workshops to youth in foster care, it was fairly easy for Project Achieve to schedule workshops on educational rights for youth as part of this regular training program. Similar to parents, workshops for youth tended to be more general than trainings presented to case planners, covering basic information on educational rights, discipline procedures and resources to help young people graduate.<sup>69</sup>

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**As education staff at the agencies built their own expertise, we began to draw them into the process, first as observers, then as limited co-presenters, then as equal partners and finally as the primary presenters at trainings for birth parents, foster parents and their co-workers.**

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Workshops for families and youth receiving preventive services were the most difficult to coordinate, since most agencies do not offer regular groups for parents or adolescents receiving preventive services. Project Achieve did present two workshops to young people in Forestdale's preventive program as part of the program's career exploration group, but the group only met regularly for about a year. We also presented several workshops for parents receiving preventive services that coincided with the start of the

school year. At Graham Windham, Project Achieve participated in the agency's annual Literacy Fair, held at the end of each summer, when all families involved with the agency were invited to come and get school supplies and books, participate in activities like story-telling, puppet-making and face painting, meet representatives from a variety of educationally-related community organizations and compete for prizes, and we continue to do so.

From the beginning, Project Achieve developed our workshops with input from agency case planners and supervisors, informed by their expressed interests and our own observations of those problems that came up most frequently at each agency. As education staff at the agencies built their own expertise, we began to draw them into the process, first as observers, then as limited co-presenters, then as equal partners and finally as the primary presenters at trainings for birth parents, foster parents and their co-workers. Education staff at Forestdale and Graham Windham can now capably present at workshops without assistance from Project Achieve, although we are available to answer questions and provide support when necessary. We are starting to implement a similar process at Cardinal McCloskey Services.

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<sup>67</sup> New York City's Circle of Support, formerly funded by ACS, runs monthly support groups for foster, kinship and adoptive parents; we have worked with several of these neighborhood-based groups.

<sup>68</sup> New York City requires all eighth graders to apply to high school, which involves researching and ranking up to 12 high schools and potentially writing essays, visiting schools and taking competitive exams. See Insideschools, *How to Apply*, <http://insideschools.org/high/how-to-apply> (last accessed Dec. 4, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Project Achieve received a grant from New Yorkers for Children during the 2011 calendar year to conduct workshops for and provide education advocacy to youth in foster care aged 12-21. The grant was not limited to any particular agency, and so enabled us to assist young people affiliated with any agency in the city. With this grant, we conducted an additional 24 workshops for youth in foster care. A sample youth workshop curriculum and training materials are included in the Appendix.

### 3. Project Achieve's Timeline for Developing Agency Educational Expertise

Through our partnerships with Forestdale and Graham Windham, we have learned that Project Achieve is most successful when it operates on a four- to five-year timeline, with the exact details depending on the agency's resources and the expertise of its staff. At both agencies, Project Achieve's first year on site focused on starting up operations and getting to know the agency. The second and third years involved strengthening our agency presence and handling a large number of referrals, including ongoing cases from previous years. During the third and fourth years, Project Achieve shifted more of the direct advocacy responsibility to agency staff, particularly education specialty staff, and focused on building agency capacity. Finally, in our fourth and fifth years on site, we gradually decreased the amount of time we spent at the agency, providing off-site technical assistance, planning for our eventual departure and accepting only complex cases for representation.

Because Forestdale had no dedicated Education Specialists when we first started going on site, it took Project Achieve longer to gain a foothold at the agency and institutionalize its education advocacy capacity. Over a period of several years, Forestdale expanded its Youth Development Department from one person to four to five staff, including a full-time specialist tasked with addressing young people's educational needs. During our fourth year on site, the agency made an even more significant step into the education advocacy arena, hiring two Education Specialists to work with younger children in foster care and all students receiving preventive services. Project Achieve helped the agency craft the job description and shared ideas about what qualifications to look for in candidates. Once the new specialists were selected, Project Achieve staff devoted a substantial amount of time to their training; we also intensified our training of the Education Specialist in the Youth Development Department, with a focus on resources of particular importance to adolescents in care. After an initial transition period, Forestdale placed the two Education Specialists directly under the supervision of the agency's Associate Executive Director and the Youth Development Department's Education Specialist under the agency's Assistant Executive Director. This structure ensured that the agency could develop an organization-wide educational vision and that the Education Specialists committed to implementing that vision would have the authority and resources to carry it out, without being limited to a particular unit or program.<sup>70</sup>

At Graham Windham, the presence of a Literacy Department enabled us to begin developing the agency's educational expertise immediately. During our first two years there, Project Achieve collaborated frequently with staff from the Literacy Department, providing extensive training, helping them set goals for the Department and working together to develop programming for birth families, foster families and youth. We also spent a lot of time training the Educational Coordinator in the Bronx, who often came to Brooklyn on Project Achieve's on-site day to attend workshops and consult on cases. Toward the end of our first year on site, the Brooklyn Educational Coordinator was replaced with a new staff member; with Project Achieve's guidance, the new Coordinator redefined her role at the agency. Instead of simply gathering records and initiating special education referrals, she became a true advocate, examining records with a critical eye toward student achievement, following through on referrals to ensure that students were receiving appropriate services and encouraging fellow staff members to increase their own focus on their clients' educational needs. She has taken the resources we developed together to train several new Educational Coordinators as they have come on board at the agency and to support case planners in their daily casework.

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<sup>70</sup> After Project Achieve ended our on-site presence at Forestdale, the agency reconfigured its education staff. The agency currently employs a Director of Educational Opportunity and Workforce Development, who reports directly to the agency's Associate Executive Director and supervises the PYA Department and the two Education Specialists.

Due to staff turnover and loss of funding, the Literacy Department was disbanded about halfway through our time on site at Graham Windham; the Educational Coordinator positions were kept in the Bronx and Brooklyn and moved under the foster care budgets. This retrenchment necessitated a shift away from capacity building for awhile, as Project Achieve focused its energies on supporting the two Educational Coordinators and working with the preventive case planners, who no longer had access to a Literacy Specialist to help them on their cases. Luckily, the agency was soon able to hire another Educational Coordinator to serve its therapeutic program, and also brought on a staff member to serve older youth. Eventually, this new staff person became the Director of an Education Department, paid for under the Preparing Youth for Adulthood (“PYA”) budget and reporting directly to the agency’s Chief Executive Officer.<sup>71</sup>

Although the agencies experienced regular staff turnover (in addition to staff turnover at AFC), restructuring, and changes in leadership while Project Achieve was on site, both agencies demonstrated a commitment to sustaining gains in agency education capacity over time that was essential to Project Achieve’s overall success. Throughout the transition to off-site assistance and after setting up on-site operations at another agency, Project Achieve has continued to provide ongoing support, resources and training to staff at Forestdale and Graham Windham and to accept case referrals as needed.

### Timeline for Implementing Project Achieve

#### Initial Phase

- Set up operations on site and get to know the agency
- Develop rapport and credibility with staff
- Focus on outreach
- Respond to many referrals by providing legal representation to families

#### Ramp-Up

- Field greater number of referrals, providing ongoing technical assistance to agency staff in routine cases
- Intensify training for staff and families
- Begin assessing agency needs and developing long-term goals

#### Turn-Key

- Continue to handle high volume of referrals
- Begin shifting primary responsibility for advocacy to agency staff
- Focus on capacity-building, systemic and structural reforms and targeted training

#### Phase-Out

- Substantially implement agency capacity-building goals
- Focus on the most complicated cases; provide technical assistance in vast majority of referrals
- Gradually decrease time on site and plan exit with agency

Year 1



Year 2



Year 3



Year 4



Year 5

<sup>71</sup> The education unit currently reports to the Director of PYA and includes a Supervisor of Education Services who serves children in preschool through eighth grade and provides support to the more junior Coordinators, another Educational Coordinator who serves children in preschool through eighth grade and an Educational Coordinator who works with high-school aged youth. There is still no funding for an education staff member within the agency’s preventive programs. Education staff shares resources and consults with preventive staff on cases whenever possible, but cannot provide more direct assistance to families. Project Achieve also continues to consult on cases and offer extensive training to Graham Windham’s preventive programs.

### III. Project Achieve's Results

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To study Project Achieve's impact on our partner agencies and the families served by those agencies, we conducted surveys, interviews and an analysis of the data collected on referrals to project staff. A detailed description of our survey instruments and data collection methods, as well as a summary of our results, is included in the Appendix. Given the promising results Project Achieve has shown thus far, a more rigorous analysis of the program seems warranted.

#### A. Students Served by Project Achieve

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The following trends are based primarily on data Project Achieve collected during our five years on site at Forestdale, four years on site at Graham Windham and one year on site at New York Foundling. We also received a number of requests for assistance from other city child welfare agencies during this period. We collected limited data related to these other referrals and responded to the vast majority of them with brief technical assistance. The discussion that follows pertains almost exclusively to cases referred from our three partner agencies; however, we did track the type of problem for all referrals we received, including those from other agencies, and that data is reflected in our overall analysis.

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*“Education is the key in order for these children to get ahead in the future.” – Nancy Santiago-Muniz, Education Advocate, NYC Administration for Children's Services*

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Although an exact figure is hard to determine given changing census figures and the diffuse and cumulative nature of technical assistance and staff training, Project Achieve probably touched on about one-third of the children and youth served by Forestdale and Graham Windham's Brooklyn office during our time on site.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, while we cannot claim that these findings are representative of all students involved with the child welfare system in New York City, we can assert that they are at least typical of children and youth served by our partner agencies, especially those with education-related challenges. Most importantly, the following data illuminate the experiences of students and families referred to Project Achieve and reveal the diversity of issues agencies need to be prepared to address if they want to practice effective education advocacy on behalf of students and families.

##### I. A Portrait of Children and Youth Referred to Project Achieve

A slight majority (55%) of students referred to Project Achieve were male. Strikingly, over 20% of students referred to the project were in the ninth grade, many for the second or third time. Very few students in 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade were referred to Project Achieve. Otherwise, referrals were fairly evenly distributed from preschool to eighth grade, with a dip in referrals in grades two through five. We also received a significant number of referrals involving students in ungraded programs, given the small number of students in ungraded programs in the public school system as a whole.

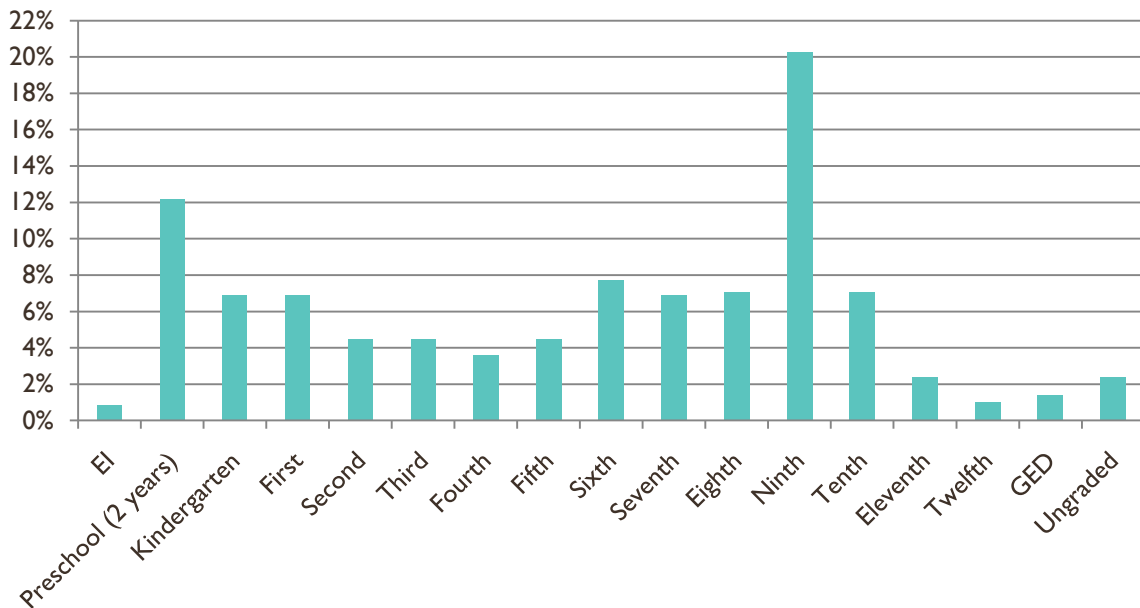
Students ranged in age from two to 20 years old. The median age of students referred to Project Achieve was 15, constituting nearly 11% of all referrals. Over one-third, or 36%, of students referred to Project Achieve were between 14 and 17 years old. Between the ages of three and 13, referrals were fairly evenly distributed, with a dip in referrals for nine- and ten-year-olds. There were very few two-year-olds or 18- to 20-year-olds referred to Project Achieve, which is not surprising given that few two-

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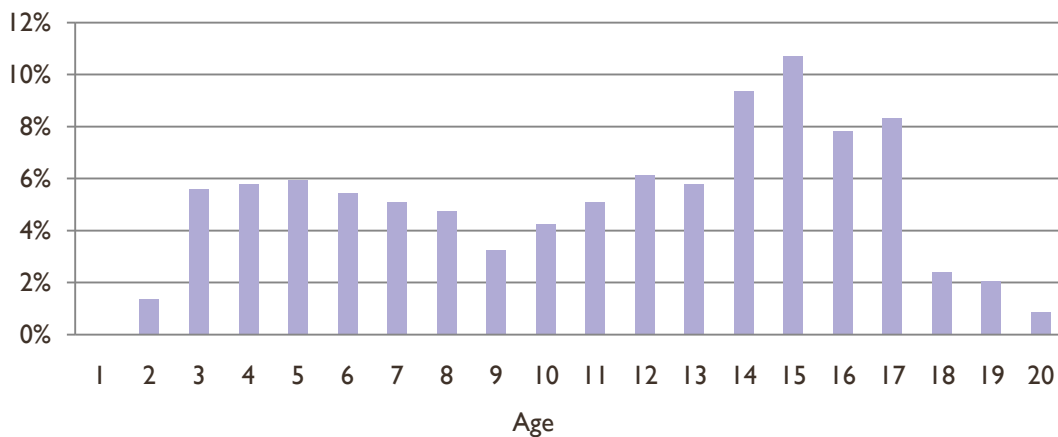
<sup>72</sup> The Director of Graham Windham's preventive program in Brooklyn estimated that we worked on roughly 40% of their cases while she was overseeing that program. Interview with Grace Pasion, *supra* note 36.

year-olds are in school, that preventive services end at age 18 and that Project Achieve typically does not work with students who have graduated from high school.<sup>73</sup>

**Percentage of Referrals to Project Achieve by Grade**



**Percentage of Referrals to Project Achieve by Age**



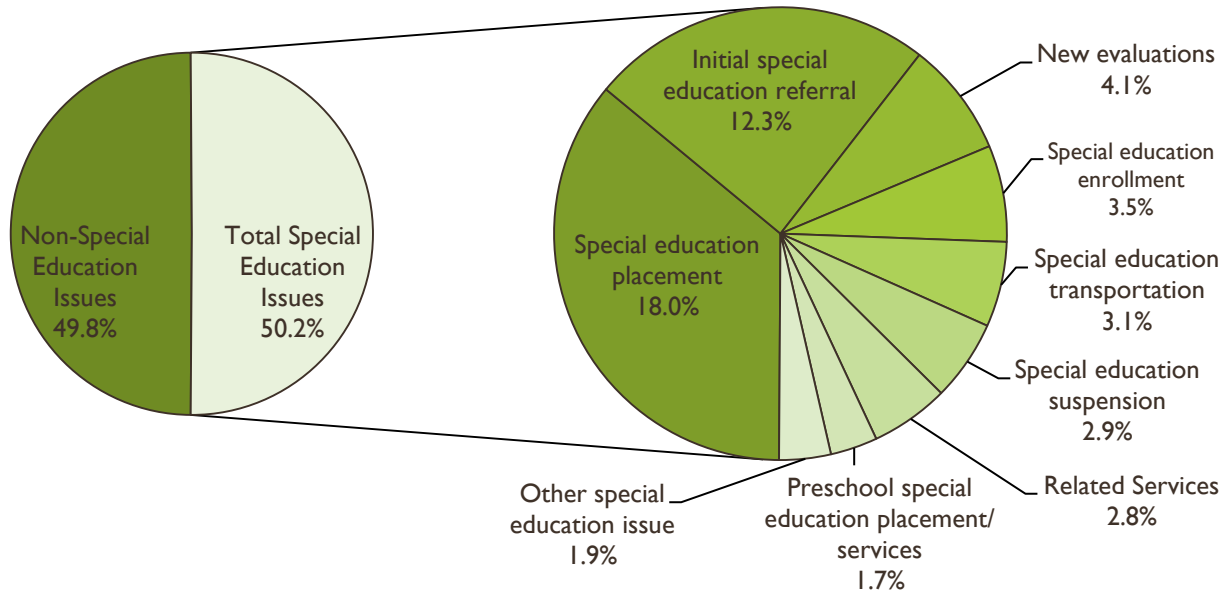
## 2. Issues Involving Students with Disabilities

Of those cases referred to Project Achieve, over half (50.2%) involved a special education or disability issue. An even greater number of referrals pertained to a child with a disability, but the referring problem – such as the need for a safety transfer or help enrolling in summer school – was not directly related to the child’s special education needs. Overall, about three-quarters of students referred to Project Achieve were classified as a student with a disability or were suspected of having a disability, but

<sup>73</sup> Among two-year-olds, most cases involved referrals for preschool special education services and not Early Intervention services, indicating that agencies had less trouble accessing Early Intervention through the Department of Health than accessing special education through the DOE. Interviews with agency staff confirmed this finding.

were not yet classified.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, 19% of students served by New York City public schools are classified as having a disability.<sup>75</sup> Most studies from around the country show that children in foster care are over-represented in special education programs, and Project Achieve’s work certainly supports this proposition for students in foster care or receiving preventive services in New York City.

### Special Education Referrals Received by Project Achieve



The most common special education issue, comprising 18% of all problems referred to Project Achieve, was an inappropriate special education placement; other common problems included difficulty making an initial referral for special education evaluations, trouble obtaining new evaluations for a student, struggles enrolling a special education student in school or problems accessing mandated special education services. Special education settings were inappropriate for a variety of reasons, including a lack of special education placements citywide, especially in high schools. For many students, their special education setting was not sufficiently therapeutic; sometimes it was too restrictive; and in other circumstances, the student had been misdiagnosed, and the classroom did not address the student’s primary disability (i.e., the child was being served as a student with an intellectual disability when he should have been classified as autistic). We also received a fair number of referrals involving students with dyslexia or some other type of learning disability who, despite years of special education services, were struggling with basic reading skills and needed more specialized reading interventions than those typically offered by the Department of Education.

Most of the cases that involved an initial referral for special education evaluations were for younger children, beginning at age two or three and typically decreasing each year as children got older. Agencies commonly encountered difficulty with referrals to the Committee on Preschool Special

<sup>74</sup> At the time of referral to Project Achieve, 51.7% of children were classified with special education needs, 21.8% were suspected of having a disability but not yet classified and 26.5% were not suspected of having a disability.

<sup>75</sup> Federal Education Budget Project, *New York City Public Schools*, New Am. Found., <http://febproject.newamerica.net/k12/NY/3620580#Demographics> (last accessed June 4, 2012).

### Advocacy in Action: Fighting for the Least Restrictive Environment

*Kevin was a five-year-old kindergarten student with speech and language delays who also had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Rather than working to address Kevin's impulsive behavior, Kevin's school would call his case planner or foster parent to pick him up from school several times a week. The school eventually suspended Kevin, despite laws that protect students from disciplinary actions that are the result of a disability. Project Achieve armed Kevin's case planner with information about his legal rights, and she got Kevin's suspension overturned.*

*We then brainstormed additional services that would help address Kevin's behavior and enable him to stay in his school, rather than moving him to a school for only special education students. With Project Achieve's support, Kevin's case planner and the agency Education Specialist requested a new IEP meeting for Kevin, where they successfully argued that the school should provide him with a one-to-one aide and additional sessions of occupational therapy. Kevin's behavior has improved immensely with the new services, and he is learning much more now that he can spend the full day in the classroom.*

Education ("CPSE"), which uses a different evaluation process than that for school-age children.<sup>76</sup> Cases were often closed multiple times because evaluations were not scheduled quickly enough or because the DOE was unsure how to proceed when the child's birth parents were not available to participate in the evaluations. Project Achieve worked on a number of cases involving children who had received Early Intervention ("EI") services, but had aged out at three years old without a plan in place to begin receiving services through the CPSE. Some of these children had disabilities like autism or Cerebral Palsy, where a loss of or delay in services could mean a significant regression in skills. Because of a lack of coordination between EI, the agencies and the CPSE, some children experienced gaps in services of several months or more. The medical department at Forestdale addressed the problem to some extent by copying Project Achieve on all CPSE referrals, but many cases that did not come to the attention of medical staff still fell through the cracks.

By age eight, most students suspected of having a disability had already been found eligible for special education services, and after the age of 15, there were very few cases involving initial referrals for special education evaluations. Typically, these referrals concerned adolescents diagnosed with an acute mental illness, although we did receive a few referrals involving older youth with undiagnosed learning disabilities who were years behind in school as a result. The most common classifications among students referred to Project Achieve who had already been identified as having special education needs were Emotional Disturbance, Learning Disability and Speech or Language Impairment.

An analysis of our cases reveals disturbing trends among students with special education needs, especially those identified as having behavioral challenges. First, students referred to Project Achieve were *four times more likely* to be classified as Emotionally Disturbed ("ED") than special

education students within New York City public schools generally.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, among students referred to Project Achieve because of a suspension, over 70% were already classified as having special

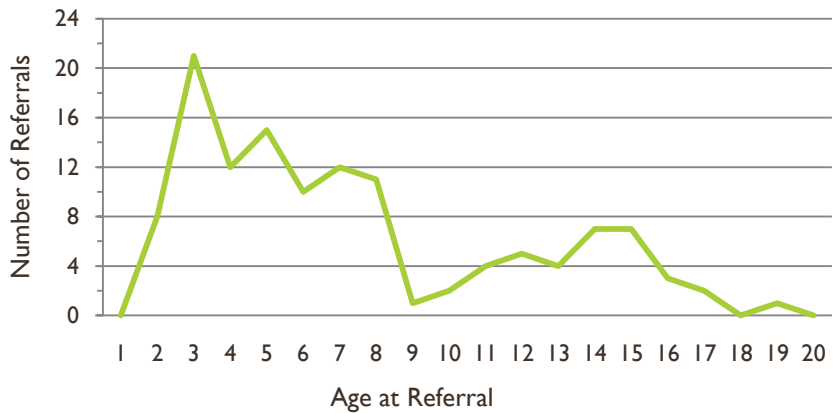
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<sup>76</sup> In New York City, the DOE contracts out preschool assessments to private evaluators. Parents receive a list of evaluation sites and must schedule appointments on their own; they also must consent to the evaluations, often in person. For children in foster care, who live separately from their parents, this process can be particularly difficult.

<sup>77</sup> Among school-age students referred to Project Achieve who had already been identified as eligible for special education services, an astonishing 38.2% were classified as Emotionally Disturbed ("ED"), compared to 9.3% in the city's overall special education population. See State and District Data Summaries of Special Education Data, N.Y. State Educ. Dep't, <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sedcar/state.htm> (click on "School-Age Student Reports," dates Oct. 6, 2010, "By Disability, County, and School District.")

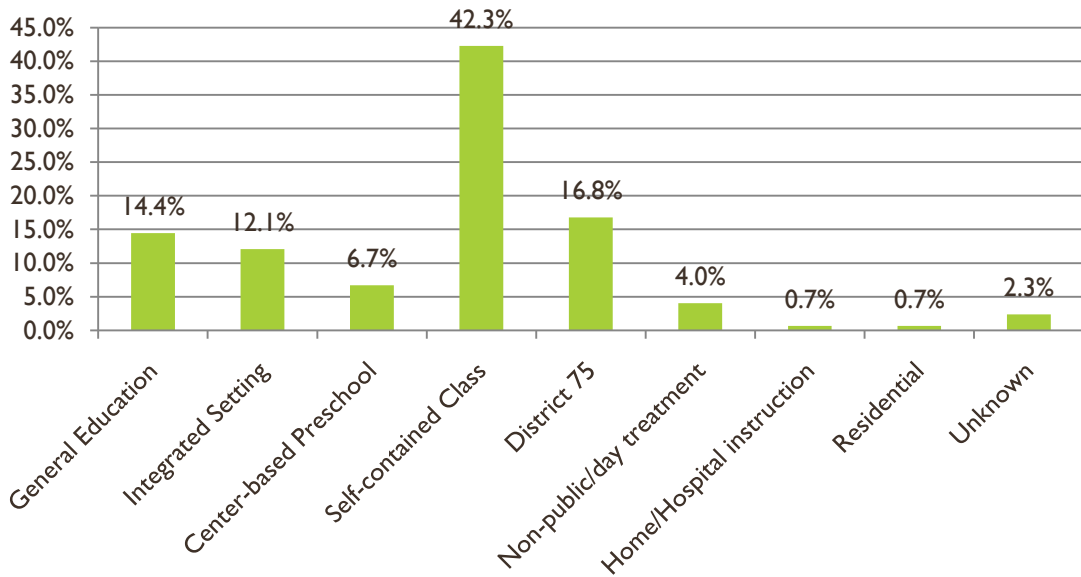


**Number of Referrals for Initial Special Education Evaluations, by Age**



Special Education Classification	Students Referred to Project Achieve	NYC School-Age Students
Autism	2.2%	5.2%
Intellectual Disability (formerly mental retardation)	5.1%	3.6%
Multiple Disabilities	0.7%	2.1%
Orthopedic Impairment	1.5%	0.6%
Other Health Impairment	5.5%	6.9%
Speech or Language Impairment	12.1%	31.2%
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.4%	0.1%
Learning Disability	30.9%	39.4%
<b>Emotional Disturbance</b>	<b>38.2%</b>	<b>9.3%</b>
Deafness/Hearing Impairment	--	1.3%
Visual Impairment	--	0.3%
Unknown	3.3%	--

**Classroom Settings for Special Education Students Referred to Project Achieve**



education needs or were suspected of having a disability.<sup>78</sup> This fact is particularly striking given that federal law forbids schools from suspending a student if the behavior that led to the suspension is substantially related to the child's disability.<sup>79</sup> Among students classified as ED, over 100 in our sample, nearly half were referred to Project Achieve because of an inappropriate special education placement. These numbers indicate that students involved with the child welfare system are much more likely to receive the stigmatizing ED classification than other children, and are at the same time unlikely to receive appropriate services to address their disability.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, students referred to Project Achieve were more likely to be placed in restrictive special education settings than students in the special education population overall.<sup>81</sup> While these results are not surprising, given that Black and Latino students have long been over-represented in restrictive special education placements in New York City<sup>82</sup> and that students classified as ED have historically been segregated from their classmates at rates exceeding students with other disabilities, it highlights the need for child welfare staff to be vigilant at IEP meetings when a student's classification and program recommendation are being discussed.

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**Students referred to Project Achieve were four times more likely to be classified as Emotionally Disturbed (“ED”) than special education students within New York City public schools generally.**

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### 3. Other Common Educational Problems Students Faced

After special education issues, Project Achieve staff were most likely to receive referrals involving older students who had been unsuccessful in a traditional school setting and needed an alternative school or program to continue their education. Many teenagers who were looking for an alternative program were also struggling with truancy, behavioral issues or academic difficulties; others had already left

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<sup>78</sup> Among the 62 students referred to Project Achieve because of a suspension, 44 were either classified as having a disability or suspected of having a disability, while only 18 were general education students with no suspected disability. Data from a statewide longitudinal study in Texas supports this finding. There, students with disabilities were slightly more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than students without disabilities, but students classified as ED were 23.9% more likely to be disciplined than other students; in fact, nearly half of the students classified as ED had been suspended *eleven or more times* between seventh and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Tony Fabelo, et al., *Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement*, Council of State Governments Justice Center 50-51 (July 2011).

<sup>79</sup> 20 U.S.C. §1415 (k)(1)(F).

<sup>80</sup> Chapin Hall has conducted several studies examining this phenomenon among students in foster care who attend Chicago Public Schools. See Smithgall et. al., *supra* note 9. The researchers found that ED students were more likely to enter foster care than other students; that students who had not previously been identified as disabled were more likely to acquire an ED classification after coming into foster care; that students with disabilities were more likely to have their classification changed to ED after entering care; and that students classified as ED were less likely to leave foster care through reunification or adoption than students with other disabilities or nondisabled students.

<sup>81</sup> Based on DOE statistics from March 2012, 29.5% of special education students in New York City were recommended for general education classes, compared to only 14.4% of special education students referred to Project Achieve, and 29.3% were recommended for Integrated Co-Teaching classes, compared to only 12.1% of Project Achieve students. Within more segregated settings, 26.8% of New York City special education students were recommended for self-contained classes in community schools, compared to 42.3% of special education students referred to Project Achieve, and 12.6% of New York City special education students were recommended for District 75 settings, the most restrictive public school settings, compared to 16.8% of students referred to Project Achieve. See Erika Palmer, *Students with Disabilities in NYC*, Advocates for Children (Apr. 2012), private computer file. Another 5.4% of students referred to Project Achieve were recommended for nonpublic schools, day treatment programs, home or hospital instruction or residential settings.

<sup>82</sup> See, e.g., ARISE Coalition, *Educate! Include! Respect! A Call for School System Reform to Improve the Educational Experiences of Students with Disabilities in New York City 20-22* (April 2009).

### Advocacy in Action: Assisting Older Youth

*Maria was a ninth grader who lived in a kinship foster home with her aunt. She had struggled during her first year of high school, failed several of her classes and was frequently bullied. One day, a group of girls from her school jumped Maria while she was waiting for the subway. Maria's aunt tried to get Maria transferred out of the school, but was unable to do so on her own. Project Achieve staff helped Maria's aunt understand the process to get a safety transfer for her niece. We also convinced the school to support the transfer and made sure they prepared the necessary documents. When the Department of Education denied the request because the incident in the train station did not occur on school grounds, Project Achieve contacted one of the supervisors at the district office and convinced her to grant the transfer. Maria was able to start off the school year at a new school where she felt safe.*

school entirely and were looking to get back into some kind of educational program. New York City has a number of alternative schools and programs for youth in these situations, and we found them to be quite effective at reengaging some of the young people in school;<sup>83</sup> however, space in these programs is limited, and many of the students with whom we worked, particularly those with special education needs, did not meet eligibility requirements. Furthermore, referrals to Project Achieve concerning behavior problems and truancy both spiked at age 13; nearly all truancy referrals involved students aged 13 to 16. Unfortunately, most New York City programs designed to serve truant, overage and disengaged youth target young people between the ages of 16 and 24, meaning there were very few options for students when they initially needed them. As a result, some students referred to Project Achieve had completely disengaged from school before any programs became available to help them.

Requests for transfers, including safety transfers, were by far most common among 14- and 15-year-olds. The Department of Education only grants requests for transfers in very limited circumstances – documented safety concerns, medical need or significant travel hardship – so while a transfer was a common request, it was not the quick fix that many students would have liked it to be. Some requests for transfers came from students who had been held over multiple times and were several years behind their middle-school classmates.<sup>84</sup> Other

students had reached high school, but had been placed in a program where they were struggling academically or did not feel comfortable.

For children in foster care, who tend to move between foster care placements frequently, case planners sometimes needed help enrolling students in school, setting up transportation or getting a child's educational records. The following story illustrates the difficulties that foster parents and agencies can have enrolling a child in school and demonstrates the importance of knowing how to navigate the education system:

*Jasmine was a ninth grader who had just arrived in New York City. She had been suspended from school in Virginia when she moved to New York and was placed into foster care. Jasmine's foster mother took Jasmine to their school district's Enrollment Office, where she was placed into a high school that was slated to close for poor performance. Her foster mother tried to get a better school for Jasmine, but was told that this was the only school available. When they went to school the next morning to enroll, the school refused to admit Jasmine, saying she could not come to school because of the pending suspension in Virginia.*

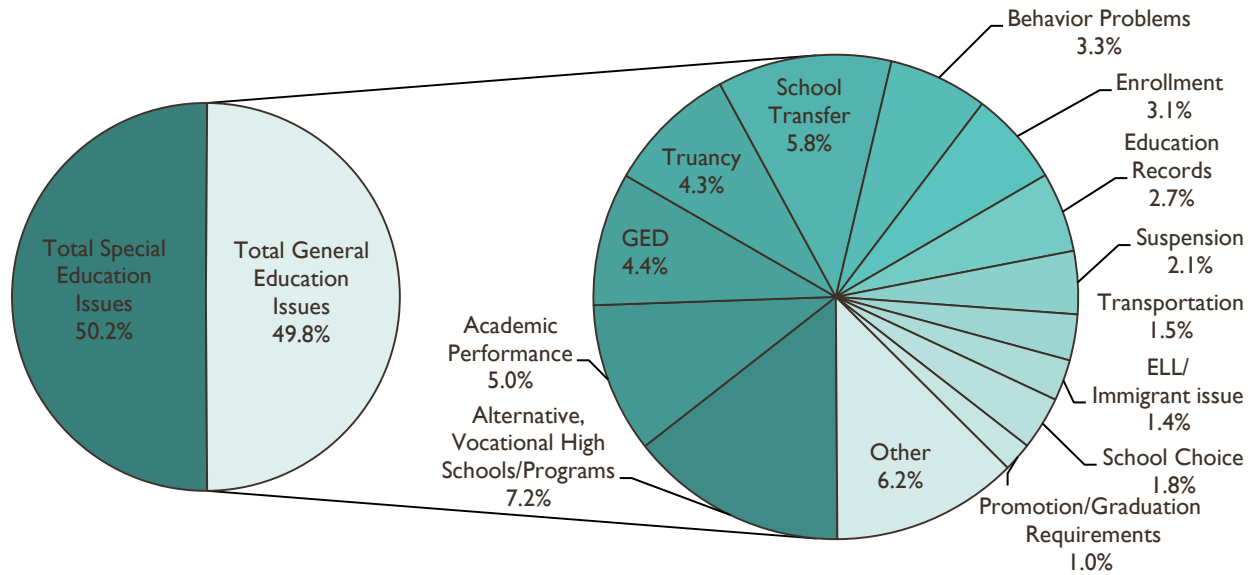
*The agency's Education Specialist contacted the Enrollment Office on Jasmine's behalf, and the office assured the agency that the school would enroll Jasmine. Jasmine and her foster mother went back to the school and were turned away again, this time because they did not have a recent report card from Virginia. Even when the*

<sup>83</sup> For more information on New York City's multiple pathways to graduation, visit DOE, *Other Ways to Graduate*, <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/AlternativesHS/default.htm> (last accessed Dec. 4, 2011).

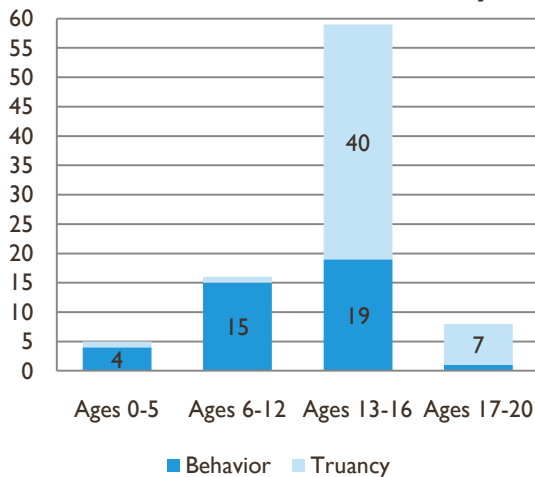
<sup>84</sup> For a thorough discussion of overage middle school students in New York City, see Advocates for Children, *Stuck in the Middle: The Problem of Overage Middle School Students in New York City* (2008).

agency got the report card and faxed it to the school, the principal still refused to admit Jasmine. After consulting with Project Achieve, the agency Education Specialist contacted the Borough Director of Suspensions to alert him that Jasmine was being illegally excluded from school. He responded immediately and got Jasmine admitted to a much higher-performing school in the district.

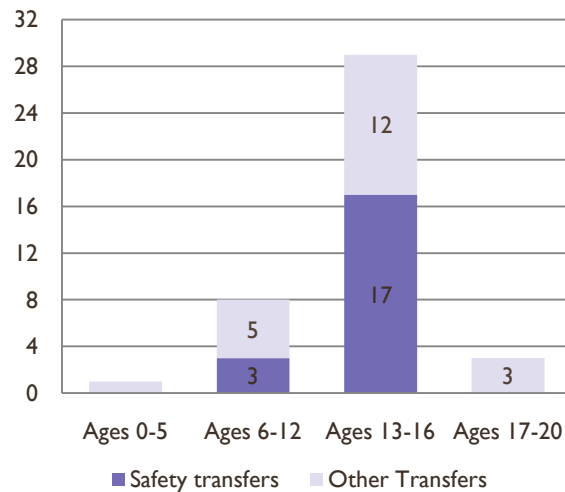
### General Education Referrals Received by Project Achieve



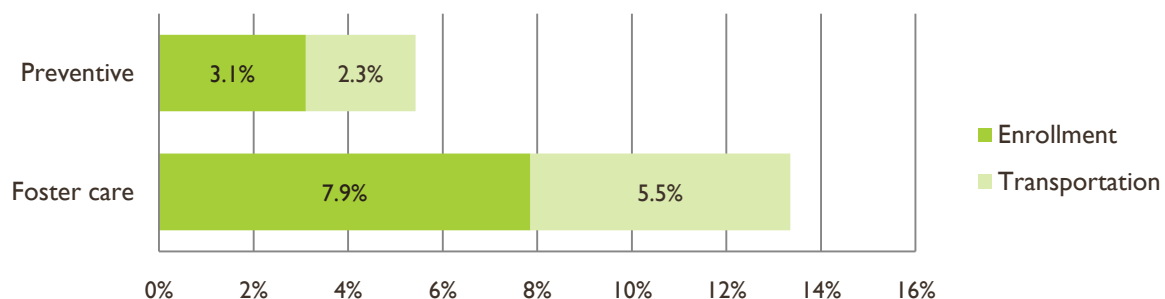
### Students Referred for Behavioral Issues or Truancy



### Students Requesting Transfers



### Percentages of All Cases Referred to Project Achieve, by Program



#### 4. A Closer Look at Students Receiving Preventive Services

Project Achieve served students in foster care as well as those whose families were receiving preventive services. Roughly two-thirds of students referred were in foster care and roughly one-third were in preventive. Given census numbers at our partner agencies, preventive cases were slightly more likely to be referred to Project Achieve than foster care cases. This is primarily because, after our second year at Graham Windham, preventive case planners could no longer refer cases to an agency staff person who specialized in educational issues, and so referred cases to Project Achieve instead.<sup>85</sup> Overall, preventive cases were less likely to involve enrollment and transportation issues than foster care cases, since families in preventive tend to move less frequently.<sup>86</sup> Preventive cases were just as likely, however, to involve difficult special education issues.

Preventive cases referred to Project Achieve also were more likely to concern English Language Learners or issues related to a family's immigration status, undoubtedly because Forestdale's preventive program served communities with large numbers of immigrant families. Few of the families with whom we worked directly needed help with a younger child with English Language Learner needs.<sup>87</sup> Instead, most cases involved high school-aged students, whose parents were having difficulty navigating the school system due to cultural differences and language barriers, or new arrivals with little- to-no formal education in their native countries who were having difficulty finding an appropriate educational program given their age and limited academic skills.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, preventive cases were more likely to involve truancy or a request for a school transfer than foster care cases.<sup>89</sup> This was undoubtedly due to the large number of educational neglect

#### Advocacy in Action: Supporting Immigrant Families

*David was a sixteen-year-old student, born in the Dominican Republic, who recently had been diagnosed with a learning disability. The school had not adequately explained the nature of David's disability to his mother, whose primary language was Spanish, and she did not understand why David had not been placed in a special education classroom. In addition, David had started avoiding school, and an educational neglect case was called in against his parents.*

*In order to advocate effectively for David, his mother needed a better understanding of his educational needs. Project Achieve arranged to have the school translate David's evaluations and IEP into Spanish for his mother. Once she could read the documents for herself, his mother realized that David's disability was not as severe as she had thought and could better evaluate his options. Project Achieve also arranged for her to have regular communication with one of David's teachers, so she could monitor his attendance and homework completion and respond appropriately. David's attendance improved, and his family's case with ACS was closed.*

<sup>85</sup> At Forestdale, which had no education specialty staff until our final years on site, preventive and foster care referrals were more proportionally represented among Project Achieve's cases.

<sup>86</sup> One notable exception to this trend occurs among homeless families. Graham Windham's preventive catchment area included several shelters, and we worked on a number of cases where homeless families were experiencing difficulties related to school mobility.

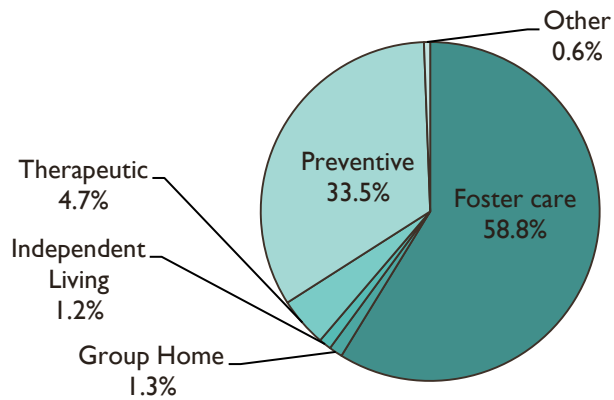
<sup>87</sup> Trouble accessing appropriate bilingual evaluations is common in New York City for students of all ages, but it was not a problem we came across frequently on Project Achieve. We did assist one child in foster care who had not received preschool special education services because the agency and birth parent had been unable to locate a bilingual Fukienese psychologist.

<sup>88</sup> Students with Interrupted Formal Education, or SIFEs, are generally defined as older immigrant students who come from a home where a language other than English is spoken, have at least 2 years less schooling than their peers and who are at least 2 years behind in reading and math. For more information on SIFEs, including recommendations for meeting their educational needs, see Advocates for Children of New York, *Students with Interrupted Formal Education: A Challenge for the New York City Public Schools* (2010).

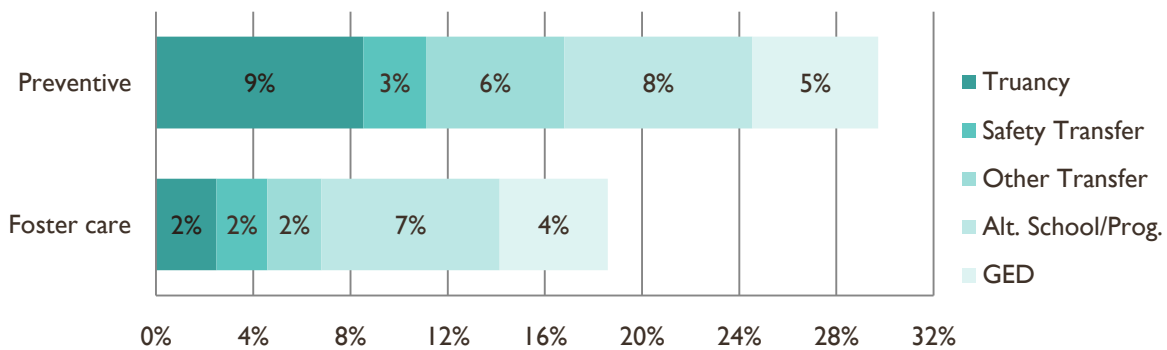
<sup>89</sup> For a lengthier discussion of truancy, school attendance and the child welfare system, see Erika Palmer, *Educational Neglect: An Advocate's Perspective*, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (Dec. 2010), at [http://www.scaany.org/childrens\\_policy\\_agenda/documents/cpaenews\\_issue27\\_educationalneglect.pdf](http://www.scaany.org/childrens_policy_agenda/documents/cpaenews_issue27_educationalneglect.pdf).

**Child Welfare Involvement Among Students Referred to Project Achieve**

cases referred by ACS to preventive agencies.<sup>90</sup> Preventive cases were also slightly more likely to be referred to Project Achieve staff for an alternative school or GED program than foster care cases. In general, truancy or educational neglect allegations were also present in these cases, since students typically do not ask to leave a traditional high school setting if they are doing well there, or even passing most of their classes. Overall, nearly 30% of issues referred to Project Achieve among students receiving preventive services involved a teen struggling with truancy, requesting a school transfer, or interested in an alternative school or GED program, while nearly 18% of issues in foster care cases – still a substantial number – were referred for these reasons.



**Truancy and Transfer Cases as a Percentage of All Cases Referred to Project Achieve, by Program**



**B. Project Achieve’s Impact**

Based on the data we collected from our cases, agency staff and birth and foster parents, we determined that Project Achieve’s accomplishments can be divided into three broad categories: the project’s impact on children and families served by our partner agencies, its impact on the agencies themselves and its broader impact on the child welfare system as a whole.

<sup>90</sup> The rise of educational neglect allegations, and the limited resources available to respond to widespread truancy in many communities, has been the focus of much discussion and several policy initiatives of late. See Jessica Gunderson, Megan Golden & Lizzie Elston, *Rethinking Educational Neglect for Teenagers: New Strategies for New York State* (2009); VERA Institute of Justice, Policy Brief: Getting Teenagers Back to School: Rethinking New York State’s Response to Chronic Absence (Oct. 2010), <http://www.vera.org/download?file=3062/Ed-neglect-summary-revised-v5-copyedit.pdf>; DOE, *Mayor Bloomberg Announces Comprehensive New Strategies to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy in City Schools* (Aug. 19, 2010), <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/2010-2011/truancy-prevention.htm>.

## I. Project Achieve’s Impact on Children and Families

First and foremost, Project Achieve aims to improve educational outcomes for children and youth by resolving discreet educational difficulties facing particular students. In the course of our work with agencies, however, we have discovered other positive, and sometimes surprising, benefits to educational advocacy, including empowering parents to be more actively involved in their children’s education, helping agencies engage and build better relationships with families and enhancing family functioning to improve permanency outcomes for children. Each of these aspects will be discussed below.

### a. Resolving Educational Issues

In 78% of the 131 cases Project Achieve took on for direct representation between September 2004 and June 2009, we successfully resolved all of the students’ presenting educational issues, and in another two percent of cases, we resolved some, but not all, of the students’ educational issues.<sup>91</sup> Depending on the case, resolution could mean securing a school transfer for a student who is not attending school because of safety concerns; moving a child with a disability to a different special education placement; obtaining remedial services for a student who was struggling academically; or getting a suspension dismissed or reduced so a student can return to his or her regular school setting.

Among the 18 parents we interviewed, 100% agreed that their child had received more appropriate services because of assistance from Project Achieve, and 77% of the 39 agency staff surveyed agreed that children’s school performance improved as a direct result of assistance from Project Achieve. Of those agency staff who believed that students’ performance in school had improved, most pointed to examples involving children with disabilities who had been in inappropriate special education placements, or who had not been receiving mandated special education services. With intervention from Project Achieve, the DOE began providing appropriate placements and/or services to these students, and the students learned more as a result. As one case planner explained, “With Project Achieve’s help, I was able to get a child who had severe speech delays into an appropriate school and classroom setting. He is now less frustrated because the work is at his pace, and he is receiving speech therapy. He can now speak a lot clearer than when I first opened the case.” Other staff specifically mentioned students with emotional and/ or mental health difficulties who were thriving in more supportive educational settings.

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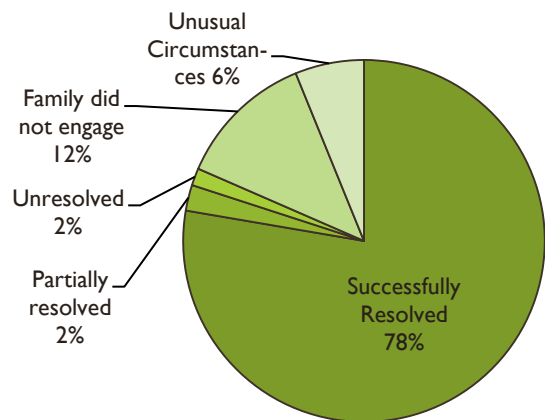
*“Project Achieve was excellent and did a very good job in talking to my daughter and managing to get her on the right track. Through Project Achieve, my daughter is now a paraprofessional in the schools working with autistic children.” – Patricia Reyes, parent of a young woman with a disability*

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**We have discovered positive, and sometimes surprising, benefits to educational advocacy, including empowering parents to become more actively involved in their children’s education, helping agencies engage and build better relationships with families and enhancing family functioning to improve permanency outcomes for children.**

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**Project Achieve Case Outcomes**



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<sup>91</sup> While most referrals included only one educational problem or issue, some included two, three or more discreet educational issues, for a total of 1,247 total problems.

### Advocacy in Action: Stabilizing Students and Empowering Caregivers

*Kareem was a six-year-old living in kinship foster care with his grandmother when his caseworker contacted Project Achieve for help. By December of his first-grade year, Kareem had been suspended from school five times, and his grandmother was being asked to pick him up early from school several times a week for behavior problems. A recent evaluation showed that Kareem was gifted academically but suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which was triggered by stressful situations in school. With permission from Kareem's mother and grandmother, Project Achieve shared this evaluation with Kareem's school and worked with them to develop an IEP based on the findings.*

*The Department of Education never located a special education program for Kareem, and his family worried that he would have to stay in the same school for second grade. Project Achieve contacted some schools on our own to find an appropriate therapeutic setting for Kareem that would also challenge him academically. We arranged for Kareem's family to visit some schools and eventually located a day treatment program in a public elementary school that Kareem and his family liked. Its location in Brooklyn also meant that it was accessible to Kareem's grandmother in Queens and his mother in Staten Island, and that he could continue to go there after returning to his mother's care. Kareem began attending the new school at the beginning of second grade. His behavior improved significantly, and he was not suspended again.*

Another recurring theme among staff who responded to our survey involved improved school performance among teens in transfer high schools and alternative programs. Several survey respondents, as well as the program directors, mentioned particular teens who had been cutting classes or receiving frequent suspensions when enrolled in traditional high schools settings. These same students were functioning much better in the smaller, more individualized settings offered by transfer schools and some of the DOE's other "Multiple Pathways to Graduation" programs. Linda Ford, Forestdale's Preventive Director, summed up Project Achieve's impact on these students nicely when she said, "I have seen particular progress in some of the older youth who weren't attending school but have now gone to the transfer high schools. We would not have known about them without Project Achieve's input, but they have given some of the youth real hope in their future so they can turn their school performance around. Often times when you have a resource that can address the emotional piece, or even find a program that will improve the child's confidence, academics will follow."

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*"My son had gone through two public schools where he had been pushed through the system. He had been in one special education school with no progress. Now he's in [the right school], and things have changed dramatically." – Dawn Johnson, parent of a child with a disability*

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While Project Achieve successfully resolved the majority of cases referred to us, we were not able to resolve every issue. Occasionally, the parent or student would be reluctant to work with us, and we would be unable to engage them in educational planning, despite multiple meetings, phone calls and other outreach attempts. Parental engagement, though rarely an insurmountable problem, was most often a barrier to successfully resolving special education issues, because the parent would not provide consent to special education evaluations, make him or herself available to exercise due process rights on behalf of the child or voluntarily assign his or her rights to another trusted individual. Lack of engagement on the part of older students was also at times a barrier to successfully resolving a case. Sometimes, students would express an interest in completing school, but would repeatedly skip appointments necessary to apply to programs or refuse to change schools, even though their current program was clearly not meeting their needs. Occasionally, we were asked to assist an older student with special education needs who recognized that he or she needed intensive remedial services

in order to finish school, but years of failure in academic settings had left the student too disillusioned to put in the work needed to complete his or her education. The dearth of alternative programs and services within the DOE for older students with special education or English Language Learner needs contributed to this sense of despair and desire to give up. Finally, circumstances outside of our control,



such as the death of the child’s caregiver or the family’s sudden move out of state, might also interrupt a case before Project Achieve could successfully resolve the child’s presenting educational issue(s).

### **b. Empowering Parents**

Parents whose children struggle in school often feel overwhelmed and experience enormous amounts of stress. This is particularly true for parents involved with the child welfare system. Their child may be unable to read, despite years of asking for help; they may get constant phone calls to come pick their child up from school because he or she is acting up or being suspended again; or their child may be refusing to go to school entirely. Parents know something needs to be done, but feel powerless to proceed in the face of a behemoth school system that seems adversarial and dismissive instead of supportive, especially if ACS is investigating their family, their child has been removed from their home and they have only sporadic contact with their child’s school or as foster parents they feel that their input on the child’s needs is not wanted or appreciated by the school or agency.

While reviewing feedback from parents and agency staff about their experience working with Project Achieve, we heard from a surprising number that, in the course of helping families resolve children’s educational issues, Project Achieve also helped empower families to take a more active role in their child’s educational success. Among those parents surveyed who had worked directly with Project Achieve, 78% felt to a great extent, and 22% felt to some extent, that they were more knowledgeable about how to work with schools because of information they received from the project. One foster parent stated that he learned how to get specialized assessments for children with disabilities and do his own hearings from Project Achieve. Another parent who could not understand why her teenage foster child was struggling in school expressed, “I didn’t know how to focus our search. With Project Achieve’s help, we did an evaluation and were able to find out the cause of the problem.”<sup>92</sup> Once she knew the reasons behind her daughter’s struggles in school, she was able to advocate for a more appropriate program for her.

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*“Without Project Achieve I would have been lost.” – Daisy Waddy, grandmother and foster parent*

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**Project Achieve helped empower families to take a more active role in their child’s educational success.**

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Even when Project Achieve did not work with a family, our training of agency staff enabled case planners to share information with the parents on their caseloads, who in turn became more involved with their children’s schools. As one case planner put it, “I am now able to show parents the importance of participating in their child(ren’s) education.” Several agency staff members mentioned that Project Achieve gave them education advocacy “tools,” which they shared with birth and foster parents to help them navigate the DOE’s complicated system. Others reported that they used information from AFC to help parents better understand their children’s educational needs and educational rights.

Several staff members also reported that they are more aware of birth parents’ rights when their children are in care and now work more closely with parents to ensure that they are involved with their child’s education, giving parents a sense of empowerment. Staff talked specifically about accompanying parents to parent teacher conferences or helping to prepare parents for certain school meetings. Finally, several staff members mentioned how Project Achieve’s presence at the agency helped raise awareness among foster parents that they are also responsible for the education of children in their homes. “AFC involvement has provided the foster parents with a private perspective of the need to be involved on a one to one level with the educational needs of the children in their care. [AFC’s]

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<sup>92</sup> Telephone Interview with Roseanna Contreras, Foster Parent, Forestdale, Inc. (Jan. 12, 2009).

inclusion of the foster parents with educational planning for the children made them aware of their role in the total life of the child.”<sup>93</sup>

While Project Achieve was very successful at involving parents in their children’s education when we worked directly with them on their children’s educational challenges and when we helped case planners support families, we had a harder time engaging parents through workshops. Parents who attended our workshops were overwhelmingly pleased with them; however, there were a number of parents at our partner agencies that the project did not reach, and Program Directors felt that, with more time, we could have worked to make even more parents active participants in educational planning for their children. In total, Project Achieve conducted 17 workshops attended by 179 birth or foster parents from Graham Windham and Forestdale between September 2004 and June 2009. Among those parents who attended the workshops and completed surveys afterwards, 97% found the workshops helpful, 95% thought they were easy to understand, and 95% agreed that the workshops met their expectations.

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**Parents responded best to activities that encouraged them to share stories about how they had successfully advocated for their children in the past, allowing them to learn from each other’s considerable experience.**

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Workshops were best received by parents when they were applicable to a range of students and touched on a variety of education-related topics. Workshops focused on a particular topic, such as the “Application Night” workshops that we held to help families of fifth and eighth graders complete middle and high school applications, did not generate enough interest to justify the amount of outreach and

preparation that went into them.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, parents were excited about topics aimed at a broader audience, such as workshops on student rights, special education advocacy or school discipline. Parents responded especially well to interactive activities that encouraged them to share stories about how they had successfully advocated for their children in the past, allowing them to learn from each other’s considerable experience. Scheduling workshops to coincide with the distribution of checks, stipends or other incentives (such as meals, gift cards or prizes) tended to increase attendance and participation among foster parents, birth parents and youth.

#### Tips for Successful Parent Workshops

- Offer daytime and evening sessions
- Conduct workshops in parents’ native language
- Make the topic applicable to a wide range of parents with children of various ages and abilities
- Provide food and childcare whenever possible
- Reward attendees with incentives, like raffles, stipends and prizes
- Schedule workshops as part of regularly meeting groups and survey attendees on areas of interest
- Share lots of resources with parents that they can review on their own time

We were most successful securing attendance at workshops scheduled as part of a regularly occurring meeting, such as periodic foster parent recertification trainings, monthly foster or birth parent support groups or regular parenting skills classes.<sup>95</sup> Incorporating

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<sup>93</sup> Andrea Crichlow, Health Care Integrator, former Case Planner, Graham Windham.

<sup>94</sup> For the past several years, ACS has held a “High School Goal Saturday” with workshops and volunteer guidance counselors to help students in foster care apply to high school. See ACS, *NYC Administration for Children’s Services and Department of Education Host High School Goal Weekend for 7th & 8th Grade Foster Care Youth* (Sept. 24, 2011), [http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/pr\\_archives/pr11\\_09\\_24.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/pr_archives/pr11_09_24.shtml). Because the program serves all New York City students in care, it generates sufficient attendance to justify the preparation and planning involved. Any one agency may not have enough students to hold its own event.

<sup>95</sup> For two years while we were on site, Graham Windham mandated three extra hours of education-only training for foster parents, but the initiative was not particularly successful; while a small group of foster parents came to

education topics into regularly meeting groups proved to be particularly efficient because it did not require a great deal of outreach and the participants usually knew each other, which facilitated discussion within the group. Project Achieve conducted several successful workshops with the Family Literacy Specialist and Parent Advocate to parenting skills groups at Graham Windham over a two-year period. We also developed and presented an extra session of the “Parenting Journey” at Forestdale,<sup>96</sup> which examined ways in which parents’ own experiences in school impact the choices they make as parents.<sup>97</sup>

Although participation tended to be highest at workshops held as part of regular meetings, we did present several extremely successful and well-received Back-to-School workshops for preventive parents while on site at Forestdale. The workshops were held at the agency in late August, dinner and childcare were provided and parents who attended received free school supplies for all of their school-age children. Attendance at all of the workshops was high, and parents asked lots of questions and were actively involved in discussions. The Director of the program noted that the workshops were empowering, especially for immigrant parents, many of whom did not know about the concept of school “rights” before. She reported receiving very positive feedback from parents on the workshops and expressed disappointment that the agency did not have funding to host the workshops again. Graham Windham’s annual Back to School Literacy Fairs, which offer a less formal forum for parents to learn about education-related resources, also have been consistently well attended by birth and foster families and families receiving preventive services.

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*“It’s easier when you have facts to back you up rather than just telling a parent they have to send their child to school because it’s the law. Explaining how to assist their child [to get the services they need] made it easier for me to approach my clients.” – Jocelyn Martinez, Preventive Case Planner, Forestdale*

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### **c. Strengthening the Agencies’ Ability to Engage Families**

One surprising effect Project Achieve had on our partner agencies was in strengthening the relationship between agency staff and the families they serve. Seventy-four percent of agency staff who responded to our survey indicated that Project Achieve changed the way they interact with birth parents, and 88% said the project changed the way they interact with foster parents. Several staff members, including two program Directors, noted that information from Project Achieve made staff more knowledgeable and confident when approaching families about educational issues, which encouraged families to open up more to the workers and trust them to help with school and other issues. As one Director explained it, “Knowledge about the education system helps [workers] engage with parents – before, some didn’t have a clue what they were talking about; now they have much more confidence when approaching the families, and it shows.”<sup>98</sup>

Several other agency employees noted that Project Achieve serves as an outside resource to parents that can help staff develop a better rapport with families, because our involvement demonstrates to families that all of us, including the agency, are working to get the best services possible for their

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and enjoyed the workshops, the majority of foster parents did not complete the additional hours, and the agency ended the initiative.

<sup>96</sup> The Parenting Journey is an evidence-based 12-session curriculum developed by The Family Center in Somerville, MA. It was created for parents whose own childhood did not provide them with a solid foundation for nurturing themselves or their children, and is utilized by many New York City child welfare agencies.

<sup>97</sup> Over the years, we noticed that many parents involved with the child welfare system whose children are struggling in school rarely experienced educational success themselves as students. Many of them were frequently suspended or had special education needs that were not addressed, and most did not complete high school. Our curriculum is meant to impart education advocacy skills to parents while recognizing this reality.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Linda Ford, *supra* note 36.

children. Based on our survey of parents who worked with Project Achieve, 94% of parents strongly agreed, and six percent agreed, that Project Achieve staff acted in a professional and respectful manner toward them, their child and school or agency staff; was responsive to their needs; and respected their opinions, knowledge and experience as a parent. Because of our ability to form strong relationships with families, Project Achieve could serve as “a much needed bridge in presenting situations for involvement of parents, some of whom are resistant to agency related workers but who were more accepting of AFC involvement. Eventually, [parents] began to interact with agency workers more as they realized that agency staff was fighting for the best for their children.”<sup>99</sup> This increased trust of and engagement with agency staff on the part of families ultimately makes case planners more effective and hopefully shortens the length of a family’s child welfare case.

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*“When the child’s education is stabilized, it makes the foster parent’s and the birth parent’s jobs easier.” – Emily Cassada, Education Specialist, Forestdale*

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#### **d. Improving Permanency Outcomes for Children**

Of those agency staff that completed our survey, 70% agreed that Project Achieve helped facilitate permanency planning for students with whom they worked. Staff noted improved permanency in several areas, both among students in foster care and students whose families were receiving preventive services. Among students in care, staff focused on three main areas: smoothing a child’s reunification with his or her birth parent, facilitating a successful transition to adulthood for youth leaving care and relieving stress within foster homes and birth families.

Ensuring that a student is enrolled in an appropriate placement or receiving appropriate services when a child is discharged to his or her birth parent can reduce some of the anxiety associated with a child’s return home, and hopefully make a successful reunification that much more likely. Families have enough to deal with when their children are returned from foster care without having to worry about whether

#### Project Achieve: Helping Families Attain Permanency

Intervention from Project Achieve helped to:

- Smooth family reunifications
- Relieve stress in foster homes and reduce subsequent placements
- Facilitate the transition to adulthood for youth in care
- Keep families receiving preventive services together

their child is in the right school setting or if they will be able to enroll their child in a new school at all. Staff noted that Project Achieve helped develop discharge plans for families that would take into account a child’s school placement, and if a change in school could not be avoided, Project Achieve helped agency staff minimize school disruption by identifying a new school for the family before the child went home. Similarly, several staff surveyed indicated that Project Achieve helped the agency think more carefully about the educational needs and goals of youth in care so that they complete some form of education in order to function on their own once they age out of care.

Even when a child is not ready to return to his birth parents, several staff who responded to the survey noted that appropriate school placements were essential to alleviating

stress within families, which helps preserve foster care placements, avoiding the further trauma that additional moves can cause in children and helping to improve school stability. Several staff referred to the “stress” of the education system, which itself can be overwhelming for families. As one case planner put it, “Getting children stabilized in their school is extremely important to making sure a child can maintain his or her foster care placement. If a child is constantly suspended or in the wrong school setting it requires much more time from a foster parent that sometimes they do not have.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Andrea Crichlow, supra note 93.

<sup>100</sup> Alexandra Hall, Case Planner, Forestdale, Inc.

Finally, multiple preventive case planners at both agencies noted the importance of Project Achieve’s work in closing educational neglect cases and avoiding placement for students on their caseloads. Educational neglect and truancy are major problems for families receiving preventive services, and staff recognized that resources, information and assistance from Project Achieve helped resolve these issues in many of their cases. According to the Preventive Director at Graham Windham,

“One of the biggest reasons for ACS involvement is truancy. When you have a child who is acting out in school for whatever reason, this puts tremendous stress on the parents, then the siblings, which leads to a downward spiral. On the other hand, if we can even scratch the surface of addressing that problem concretely, or offer the family some step toward making the child feel more comfortable with respect to school, this will improve family functioning and increase the likelihood that they can stay together.”<sup>101</sup>

## 2. Project Achieve’s Impact on Agencies

While the Project’s direct impact on families cannot be overstated, Project Achieve can have an even greater impact on the community as a whole by training agency staff to advocate on behalf of students without our assistance and by helping agencies make deep and lasting changes in the way they approach and address students’ educational needs. Despite the importance of education advocacy to students served by the child welfare system, most case planners reported that they had minimal familiarity with the educational system when they started their job. Project Achieve used two primary methods to train agency staff in education advocacy: intensive assistance to staff members on individual student cases and more formal group workshops for agency staff. We also trained staff to a lesser extent through written materials, such as our guidebooks, resource manuals, Tip Sheets and email blasts.

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**70% of staff surveyed agreed that Project Achieve helped facilitate permanency planning for students with whom they worked.**

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*“I think Forestdale is a much better agency because of AFC.”*  
– Norma Gavin, Director of Medical Services, Forestdale

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### a. Training Staff by Offering Technical Assistance

Of those staff members from Forestdale and Graham Windham who completed our survey, 92% had received help on a case from Project Achieve. A large majority of staff, over 80%, reported receiving help on special education issues; 64% received help navigating the Department of Education; and over half reported receiving help addressing student’s academic and behavioral difficulties. By examining patterns of staff referrals over the years, we can actually measure the effect of our work on the agencies’ ability to address students’ educational issues. As agency staff became more adept at resolving educational issues, our level of assistance to staff at our partner agencies decreased. For example, at Forestdale and New York Foundling, we responded to over 40% of referrals in our first year on site by taking the case on for direct representation, and we took on 25% of cases for direct representation during our first year at Graham Windham.<sup>102</sup> In our final year on site at Forestdale and Graham Windham, however, we took on only three and four percent of referrals for direct representation, respectively.

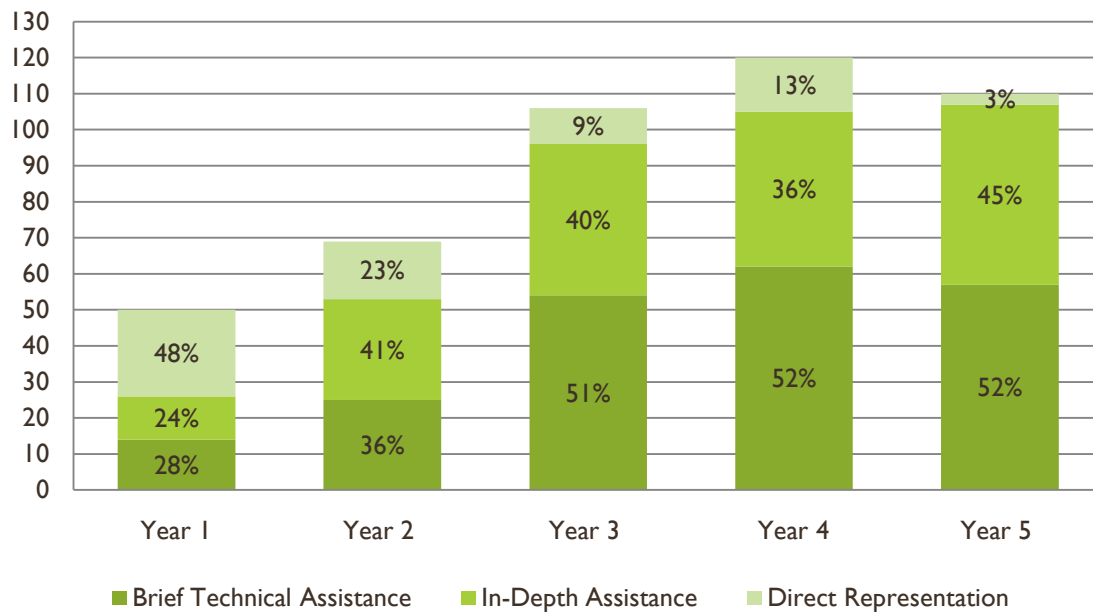
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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Grace Pasion, supra note 36.

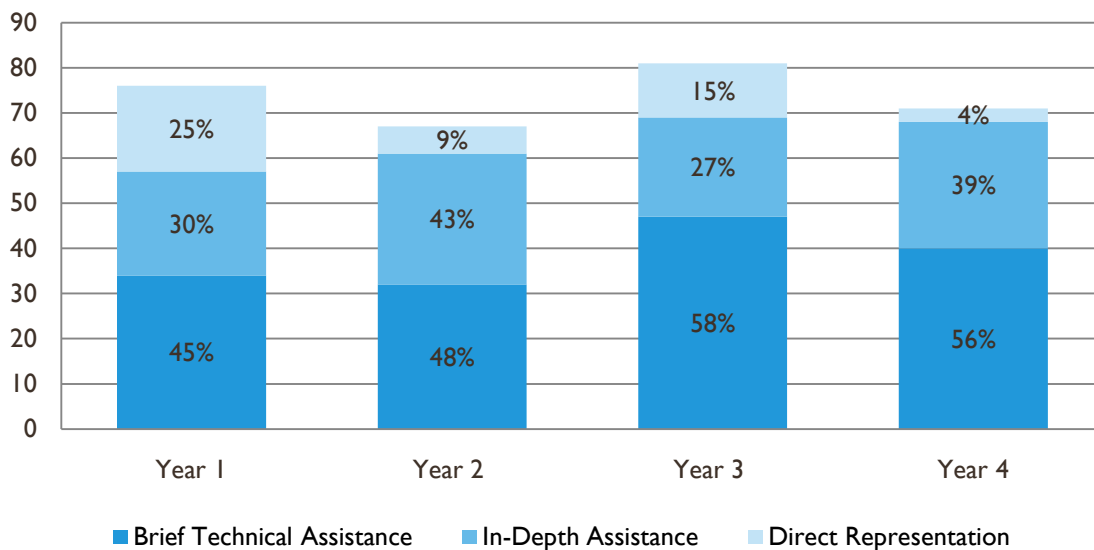
<sup>102</sup> The difference between the agencies can be attributed to the fact that Graham Windham had education specialty staff on site from our first year at the agency, while Forestdale and New York Foundling did not.

## Patterns of Assistance from Project Achieve Over Time

### Forestdale Referrals Every Year, by Type



### Graham Windham Referrals Every Year, by Type



At Forestdale, the number of referrals we received steadily increased each year until we phased off site, while at Graham Windham, the number of referrals we received each year remained fairly constant. At both agencies, however, the intensity of assistance we provided in response to referrals diminished as agency staff became capable of advocating on behalf of students with only limited assistance from Project Achieve. In these charts, “Technical Assistance” refers to services Project Achieve provided to agency staff, while “Direct Representation” refers to cases where Project Achieve worked directly with the family, rather than coaching an agency employee through advocating on behalf of the student or family. The percentage of cases that required direct assistance from Project Achieve decreased significantly over the years at both agencies.

In addition to commenting on how much they had learned from Project Achieve, a surprising number of survey respondents discussed how having access to an education expert can relieve stress for busy case planners, a difficult job where burnout is notorious. As one case planner put it, “Managing a case load of 19 children can be extremely time consuming, so sometimes education has to take a back seat to more immediate issues such as safety. AFC provided short cuts to me that made my job easier when it came to addressing children’s educational needs.” Another case planner described Project Achieve as “constantly supportive,” and said the project “alleviates a lot of the stress off the case planner, who is dealing with a lot of issues in the home.”

### **b. Training Staff through Workshops**

Project Achieve presented 27 workshops to staff at Forestdale, Graham Windham and New York Foundling between September 2004 and June 2009. Ninety-five percent of staff surveyed had attended at least one of Project Achieve’s workshops. All of the Directors interviewed agreed that staff trainings were helpful and effective, especially for new staff. Survey results confirmed these impressions, as the overwhelming majority of staff who completed workshop evaluation forms indicated that the workshops were helpful and easy to understand, and comments routinely referred to the workshops as “informative” and to the resources distributed as helpful and relevant to their work.<sup>103</sup>

Preventive Directors from both Forestdale and Graham Windham stressed that they worked hard with us to make trainings relevant to staff needs. All of the Directors agreed on the most important topics for trainings: special education, options for older students, suspensions and school transfers. All of the Directors interviewed also made the workshops mandatory for their respective programs and felt strongly that any workshops that were not should have been mandatory for all staff that works with families. Making trainings mandatory sends the message that management prioritizes education; on a more practical level, it also ensures a good turnout.

Overall, staff felt that trainings were more effective when they were held in smaller groups, rather than for all agency staff, although some of the larger trainings also received strong reviews. Regardless of size, workshops were most successful when they were participatory in nature, allowed workers to share their own experiences with others and encouraged attendees to brainstorm ideas to improve case practices.<sup>104</sup> At both Forestdale and Graham Windham, the preventive programs requested a series of trainings on specific topics, rather than one longer training on a variety of educational issues, that were well-received by staff and supervisors alike. One Preventive Director specified that more closely tailored workshops are preferable because too much information can be overwhelming for staff. This format is more realistic for preventive staff given their greater time in the office and more flexible schedules; on the whole, foster care staff seems to prefer fewer, longer workshops that cover a greater breadth of information in less depth. All staff preferred short and concise resource materials to longer

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*“AFC guided me through advocating for many children that were initially denied services, ranging from provision of a paraprofessional to placement in a private Therapeutic School District. This knowledge has empowered me to advocate for other students with similar challenges.” – Andrea Crichlow, Health Care Integrator, former Case Planner, Graham Windham*

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**All of the Directors agreed on the most important topics for trainings: special education, options for older students, suspensions and school transfers.**

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<sup>103</sup> All but one of the 93 staff members who completed evaluations of Project Achieve’s workshops found the workshops to be helpful, and 96% of respondents reported being satisfied with the workshops overall.

<sup>104</sup> One Director suggested that caseworkers could best retain information by participating in role plays, which we incorporated into future trainings for staff, parents and youth.

### Advocacy in Action: Refining Case Practice within Agencies

*One foster care case planner, who had worked extensively with Project Achieve, had a powerful impact at her agency when she transferred into its preventive program. She started helping all of her families refer their children under the age of three to Early Intervention for screening, a practice that is mandatory for children in foster care but not for many infants and toddlers whose families receive preventive services. She also developed a strong working relationship with an Early Intervention provider in the community. During a discussion at a staff meeting, the case planner brought up her new practice; after that, all of the preventive case planners began referring all of their clients to this Early Intervention provider. This organically developed screening process is helping young children with developmental delays get crucial services as early as possible and hopefully will obviate their need for more intensive services in the future.*

guidebooks, and many also appreciated resource lists with schools, programs and contact information they could share with families, as well as use themselves when navigating the DOE.

#### **c. Training Results**

The vast majority of staff who participated in our surveys and interviews agreed that training from Project Achieve made case planners and other agency personnel better educational advocates for the students served by the agency. Among survey respondents, 94% of agency staff believed that Project Achieve increased their knowledge of the educational system, and 88% felt that Project Achieve had made them more confident when working with the school system. Most commonly, agency staff members pointed to a greater familiarity with the special education process, suspensions, school exclusions, educational resources and different school settings as proof of what they had learned from Project Achieve; the biggest area of improvement reported by staff, however, was in their ability to navigate through the “red tape” of the DOE. As one employee put it, “The direct service provided by AFC representatives and explanation of how to navigate the Board of Education educated me, and surely all staff, about navigating the system, which is very complicated and bureaucratic. AFC’s assistance with whom to call with a particular problem was priceless.”

Although many survey respondents indicated that navigating the DOE’s bureaucracy could be intimidating, they also reported that Project Achieve helped them feel more confident when confronting that system. Staff mentioned feeling better equipped to attend school meetings, challenge DOE inconsistencies, request documents from schools, speak to school officials and contact DOE administrators. One case planner reported that she is “able to speak to school officials about areas I had no knowledge about before and have the confidence to advocate for the children’s needs.” Both Forestdale Directors felt their staff’s greater familiarity with students’ rights enabled them to challenge schools when schools told them things that were incorrect. “Caseworkers go to the schools armed: they have a better idea of what should be going on and are able to push back at guidance counselors if it’s not.”

Program Directors also agreed that their staff had become more knowledgeable as a result of Project Achieve’s work; one Director estimated that staff’s familiarity with the DOE had gone from a “one or two to a three and a half or four,” on a scale of one to five, while another Director described the agency’s transformation this way: “Workers went from having no skills to being much more comfortable with complicated education issues, to being able to push back

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**94% of agency staff believed that Project Achieve increased their knowledge of the educational system, and 88% felt that Project Achieve had made them more confident when working with the Department of Education.**

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*“I have gained a great amount of knowledge from the staff at AFC and share their hope and desire to ensure that children in care receive the best education possible.” – Cheryl Mayers, Education Specialist, Forestdale*

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when schools try things and work together with schools to develop appropriate programs for kids.” The Directors reported that staff is more well-versed in educational terms and comfortable discussing educational issues, better equipped to identify students’ educational needs early, because they understand what questions to ask and know what to look for, and more realistic about what options and resources exist to help students overcome their challenges. “We had one case involving an older student with very low reading levels,” recalled Linda Ford from Forestdale. “Project Achieve really helped the case planner come to a better understanding of the young man’s disability and how it affects his performance in school, as well as to understand how far the young man could go and help set realistic goals for him, given his skill level, his own willingness to work and what it would take to improve his skills.”

In addition to learning valuable information about New York City’s educational system, many agency staff actually used the information to change the way they approach their cases. Among those who completed our survey, 83% of respondents agreed that Project Achieve’s presence at the agency affected the way they integrate education into their casework. Staff indicated that they attend more school meetings and make more school visits and contacts, are more proactive with respect to educational issues, can read a report card or IEP and identify problem areas, approach children differently when discussing educational issues, and treat each case on a more individualized basis, with the knowledge that every child learns differently and has different learning abilities. Directors also felt that staff talks more about education than they used to and is more apt to collaborate with coworkers on education-related issues, both within units and across agency programs.

More abstractly, staff relayed that they give a greater priority or focus to educational issues than they have in the past, because they know they will get the support they need if they uncover educational difficulties with their students. Said one case planner, “I look at things with the background that I have AFC to support and advise me of the education process if I need it.” Another staff member reported that she feels better equipped to ensure that children’s educational needs are being met. Because staff members can identify and resolve educational issues with greater ease, case planners are in a better position to make education an important part of their case practice.

#### **d. Broader Impact on Agencies**

Sixty-three percent of agency staff reported noticing changes in agency-wide practice as a result of Project Achieve’s presence at the agency, and all three Program Directors agreed that Project Achieve’s presence had made education a greater priority at the agency. The longer the staff person was at the agency, the more likely they were to have noticed a change. A variety of staff members, including case planners, supervisors and directors, felt that staff was playing a more active role in educational planning for students and stressing the importance of educational involvement to families. Some felt that the agency as a whole was paying more attention to education and asking how it could be more supportive of families’ educational needs. Others noted that employees received more training and information on education than in the past, or commented on changes in supervision and at case conferences, where workers were explicitly asked to examine a child’s progress in school and address areas for improvement, including contacting Project Achieve or an education staff member if more help was needed. One Director felt that Project Achieve had helped

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**Sixty-three percent of staff noticed changes in agency-wide practice as a result of Project Achieve’s presence at the agency, and all three Program Directors agreed that Project Achieve’s presence had made education a greater priority at the agency.**

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*“Caseworkers go to the schools armed: they have a better idea of what should be going on and are able to push back at guidance counselors if it’s not.” – Forestdale Program Director*

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staff document students' education status more accurately, which was particularly helpful when transitioning cases in the event of staff turnover.

At Forestdale, most staff pointed to the creation of the Education Unit as proof that the agency was making education a priority. As one staff person put it, "As soon as the agency knew [Project Achieve] was leaving, it went out and found two Education Specialists. Project Achieve helped pioneer the job of Education Specialist at Forestdale." This priority was also reflected in grant applications. Ms. Ewing-

### Advocacy in Action: Identifying Decision-Makers for Students with Special Needs

*Elijah was five years old and struggling in school when his teacher recommended that he be referred for special education evaluations. In order to begin the evaluation process, the school needed consent from one of Elijah's parents; unfortunately, Elijah's father had not been in touch with his foster care agency for several years, and his mother, who had a terminal illness, was physically unable to provide consent or communicate in any way. His case planner suggested that Elijah's foster mother, who was also his aunt, serve as his surrogate parent and make educational decisions on his behalf; however, the school was unsure how to assign her as Elijah's surrogate parent.*

*A few weeks later, the school social worker got back to the agency and asked the case planner for help. Apparently, when the school social worker had contacted her supervisor, all she had received in response was a copy of the law, with no additional guidance. The agency case planner consulted with Project Achieve, who provided additional information to the school. The school eventually made Elijah's aunt his surrogate parent and proceeded with his case. Elijah was found eligible for special education services and placed into a special education class.*

James, the Director of Forestdale's foster care program while Project Achieve was on site, believed that the increased focus on education was a result of Project Achieve's presence at the agency and the agency's new leadership. She was particularly pleased with the attention Forestdale was paying to older youth's educational endeavors, including taking students on college tours all over the country and encouraging them to get excited about going away to college. "The agency has raised its expectations of students. We had 11 or 12 students graduate from high school or get their GED this year, and all but one of them are going on to college. We have seen small results, but they are really positive." Ms. Ford, the Director of the preventive program, agreed that improving graduation rates, especially among youth who had been in care for a long time, was a huge priority for the agency.

### **3. Project Achieve's Impact on New York City's Child Welfare System**

While Project Achieve focuses on improving educational outcomes and strategies for students, staff and families at individual child welfare agencies, a critical component of the project is to use our on-the-ground experience to inform policy discussions and participate in systemic reform efforts that can improve educational opportunities for all students involved with the child welfare system. Joining these broader advocacy discussions is particularly important for agency education staff, because they grapple with issues that require inter-agency cooperation across social service districts, school districts and the courts on an almost daily basis.<sup>105</sup>

#### **a. Surrogate Parent Initiative**

Several years ago, Project Achieve led a working group of advocates and agency staff to develop a strategy to ensure that all students with disabilities in foster care have access to an educational decision-maker to look out for their best interests in the special education process. The lack of an adult figure with the authority to make educational decisions can

<sup>105</sup> Education staff from Graham Windham, Forestdale, Cardinal McCloskey and other foster care agencies, as well as Project Achieve, currently participate in one such inter-agency initiative, called Project School Success, to develop best practices for sharing and utilizing data provided by the DOE on students in care.

leave students hopelessly lost in the special education system, and the group came together because we had all worked on cases where students' special education needs had gone unmet because DOE staff were unsure how to proceed on cases for certain students in foster care. After several months of research, we sent a letter to the DOE, outlining our concerns and summarizing our recommendations to improve the city's special education consent and surrogate parent appointment process. The DOE committed to implementing most of our recommendations; we have since developed a manual that explains the protocols for assigning surrogate parents and conducted several trainings for DOE employees on the manual and its policies.<sup>106</sup>

### **b. School Stability**

Project Achieve has also used its experience to inform systemic efforts to improve school stability for students in foster care when they come into care or move between foster homes. In early 2010, ACS invited Project Achieve to join the newly formed Educational Stability Collective, made up of representatives from ACS, the DOE and several foster care agencies, including staff from our three main partner agencies. The Collective's goal was to develop recommendations for implementing the educational stability provisions of the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act.<sup>107</sup> We asked each agency to collect data on every school-age child who came into care, and we were especially excited when three-quarters of the students remained in their school of origin and very few missed more than one or two days of school. At several of the agencies, including Graham Windham and Forestdale, supervisors began alerting education staff members to every new intake so that they could begin working on school placement or transportation issues the moment a child came into foster care. Based on feedback gathered from Project Achieve and the participating agencies, ACS developed and has begun implementing a series of recommendations for improving school stability for all students in foster care, while the members of the Educational Stability Collective continue working to maintain stable school placements for their own students.<sup>108</sup>

### **Advocacy in Action: Ensuring School Stability for Vulnerable Students**

*When 10-year-old Maya came into foster care, she was placed into a foster home in Manhattan and transferred to a school near her foster home. After six months, the court determined that Maya needed a foster home with no other children. While her agency searched for a new home for her, Maya was moved to a temporary foster home in the Bronx. Maya's case planner brought Maya to her school in Manhattan every day in order to spare her the trauma of changing schools again, but because her case planner had to bring her own children to school first, Maya arrived to school late every day. Maya's school eventually threatened to bring educational neglect charges against the agency because of Maya's tardiness.*

*Project staff immediately contacted the school and informed them of the laws pertaining to school stability for children in temporary housing, including a student's right to transportation back to her school of origin when she is awaiting a foster care placement. Project and agency staff then advocated with the school district to prove that Maya was entitled to bussing because she was in a temporary foster home. After six weeks, the district found a bus route for Maya. Maya loved traveling on the bus to school; she sat up front by the driver and chatted with him during her daily commute. Over the next four months, Maya changed foster homes twice more, but because she had bussing, she was able to remain in the same school and continued to thrive there.*

<sup>106</sup> A copy of the manual, which was drafted jointly by staff from Project Achieve, ACS and Legal Aid, is available at [http://advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/surrogate\\_parent\\_training\\_manual.pdf](http://advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/surrogate_parent_training_manual.pdf).

<sup>107</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 675(1)(G) (requiring child welfare agencies to develop educational stability plans for all children in foster care, with assurances that children will remain in their school of origin when they come into care or move between placements unless it is not in their best interests to do so).

<sup>108</sup> For a more detailed look at Fostering Connections and educational stability implementation strategies from across the country, see, e.g., American Bar Association, Center on Children and the Law, *Fostering Connections Act*, [http://www.americanbar.org/groups/child\\_law/what\\_we\\_do/projects/education/fosteringconnections.html](http://www.americanbar.org/groups/child_law/what_we_do/projects/education/fosteringconnections.html);

These collaborations offer a few examples of how employees from the child welfare and education fields can work together to make both systems more accommodating of students' educational needs. Because agency education specialists are fluent in both systems' languages, they are especially well-suited to facilitate a conversation between participants from both disciplines. If child welfare agencies find that appropriate services are not available within their communities or accessible to their students, they need to make educators aware of the problem. When school districts are more informed about the unique challenges students involved with the child welfare system face, they can develop better programs, create more sensible policies and work more efficiently with child welfare agencies to serve students, families and communities.

## IV. Recommendations

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Project Achieve offers the following recommendations for child welfare agencies looking to improve educational outcomes for the students and families they serve:

### I. Develop internal education advocacy expertise, with support from a partner non-profit organization or other institutional expert in education advocacy

All of the child welfare professionals we surveyed and interviewed recommended replicating Project Achieve at other agencies. As one case worker explained, “They have information and experience that caseworkers like myself never knew of...they are true professionals and have great knowledge of their work.” Child welfare agencies traditionally do not have Education Specialists on staff, and most will need to collaborate with an outside source of expertise to train staff, develop institutional knowledge around education and help create educational resources tailored to the agency’s specific needs. Since most program directors will lack the background and training to provide detailed supervision on education-specific issues, such a partnership will also help ensure that new Education Specialists have the

support they need at their agencies. As agencies develop in-house expertise, they can take over most of the education advocacy for the children they serve, but even seasoned education specialists need access to support and legal referrals on complicated cases. Nearly three years after ending our on-site presence at Forestdale and Graham Windham, Project Achieve regularly answers questions from and provides assistance to the agencies’ education staff.

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*“Students [in foster care] need an advocate who understands the Department of Education.”*  
– Case Planner, Forestdale

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Foster care and preventive agencies also must prepare carefully to ensure that they are ready to support a comprehensive program and the organizational changes it will bring. In order to be successful, Project Achieve or a similar effort requires the following:

- Upper-level management across the agency’s departments, including foster care, preventive, family treatment, clinical and agency operations, must be committed to offering the program sufficient resources, creative leeway and institutional support to grow. This level of commitment is absolutely necessary to ensure that staff in all departments is on board, because all employees have important contributions to make toward education advocacy, and departments need to collaborate on shared goals for systemic changes to be successful.
- Directors need to set clear expectations for agency staff related to students’ educational achievement, articulate these expectations publicly, provide support so that staff can meet enhanced expectations and hold them accountable if they do not.
- Program directors and supervisors also need to be actively involved in the development of the program to institutionalize knowledge within the agency; otherwise, given the realities of caseworker turnover, specialists or outside consultants will spend a great deal of time training line staff over and over again.
- Agencies should seriously consider building an education team, to avoid isolation among education staff and build institutional knowledge. With a team, if one Education Specialist leaves, the other members can maintain continuity and train new staff.
- Most fundamentally, Project Achieve or a similar program cannot work in an agency where there are concerns about a program closing, funding for staff or a lack of physical space. A foster care or preventive program needs to be stable in order to focus proper attention on developing education capacity.

## **2. Hire Education Specialists qualified to work directly with schools, clinicians and families; manage educational and clinical data; advocate actively for students' educational needs; and take on leadership roles within the agency**

Gone are the days when an Education Specialist's primary responsibilities were to gather report cards for the file and do school visits when case workers are too swamped to make all of their education contacts. If agencies want to advocate effectively for students' educational needs, specialists must take an active role building relationships with schools, identifying and planning for children's educational needs before they become emergencies and training parents, foster parents and their coworkers to cultivate a culture of high expectations within the agency.

First and foremost, Education Specialists need to be knowledgeable about the school system. They need to know how to navigate the Department of Education at the school, district, borough and citywide levels, must be familiar with educational resources within and outside the school system and must have a basic understanding of special education. Clinical knowledge about developmental or learning disabilities, mental health issues or education pedagogy would also be very helpful. Education Specialists are not just responsible for referring a child for services; they need to make sure any evaluations accurately portray the child's strengths and weaknesses, that the child is receiving recommended services and that the services are appropriate to meet the child's particular needs. No matter their level of clinical or technical knowledge, Education Specialists must be strong negotiators, have good investigatory skills, be prepared to spend time in the field doing school visits, meetings and classroom observations and, importantly, be persistent. Reaching Department of Education staff can be very difficult, and Education Specialists need to be prepared to make repeated phone calls, write multiple emails and do in-person visits if that is what it takes to get the school information they need.

Strong interpersonal skills are also necessary for Education Specialists to engage birth and foster families in their children's education. Given the number of case planners who commented on Project Achieve's success engaging families in educational planning for students, Education Specialists may be in a unique position to help otherwise disenfranchised parents feel empowered and become more involved in their child's life at a time of crisis. Education staff can support families by:

- Arranging for and inviting parents to school meetings, and encouraging parents to speak up and contribute their expertise about their children at these meetings
- Sharing educational information with parents, including positive information, such as when students are recognized for academic achievement, participate in a sports team or get a role in the school play, as well as students' challenges, such as academic struggles, behavioral difficulties or the nature of a child's disability
- Modeling how parents can help children with homework or read to them at visits; and
- Coaching parents on how to become effective advocates for their children when their preventive case closes or their children are returned to their care.

For agencies that serve a large number of immigrant families, especially within preventive programs, fluency in a second language or expertise in English Language Learner (ELL) issues may also be an important job skill for an Education Specialist.

Finally, Education Specialists need to be able to work with a variety of professionals, including educators, medical professionals, mental health clinicians and case planners. Clinical collaboration is especially important for students with special education needs who may need therapeutic school settings, are the subject of disciplinary proceedings, need prescriptions for occupational or physical therapy or require specialized transportation to get to school. An Education Specialist cannot do his or her job effectively

without the ability to form strong working relationships with case planners. Specialists need to be able to trust case planners to refer them cases, provide information about family dynamics and help get educational, medical and clinical documentation. Education Specialists may at times find themselves playing the role of partner, coach, resource or police to case planners within their agency, over whom they have no supervisory authority, to ensure that a student's education plan is executed effectively.

Thus, Education Specialists need deftness and maturity, as well as a great deal of institutional support from agency management. Because of the complexity of their role, Education Specialists should be committed to being a "cheerleader" for education at their agency. Even the most effective advocate cannot transform an agency by helping one student at a time. If an agency is truly committed to promoting education advocacy, it will empower its Education Specialists to inspire their coworkers to become education ambassadors for their families in their own right.

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**If an agency is truly committed to promoting education advocacy, it will empower its Education Specialists to inspire their coworkers to become education ambassadors for their families in their own right.**

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### **3. Ensure that Education Specialists are readily available to meet with case planners, families and students on site, in person and in the field**

Whether agencies contract with an outside provider or develop expertise in-house, geography matters, both within and between offices. The results of our surveys and Project Achieve's own experience indicate that the on-site component of the program is one of the keys to its success. Our constant presence encouraged staff to stay on top of students' educational needs, got them used to collaborative problem solving and served as a visual reminder of the importance of education in their work. When asked for suggestions for improving Project Achieve, two of the Directors thought increasing our on-site presence to two to three days per week, at least in the early stages of the project, would have made it even more effective, since staff could have become familiar with us and educational rights and resources more quickly.

Given the importance of maintaining a physical presence at foster care and preventive programs, Education Specialists or consultants should not be split between multiple agency sites, and certainly should not be asked to cover more than two locations at a time. Agency Education Specialists need to interact with their coworkers at least two to three times a week in order to maintain good visibility, keep in regular contact when working together on cases and be available to take referrals and offer feedback whenever necessary. Education staff should not be physically isolated from the rest of the social services staff, but should sit and work among them. If space constraints make it necessary for them to be placed apart, Education Specialists will need to get up and move around the agency every day to ensure regular face-to-face contact with their coworkers. This visibility will help specialists get referrals, especially when a program is just getting off the ground, but it will also remind case planning staff to integrate education into their regular case work and reinforce any email blasts, memos or other resources that Education Specialists share agency-wide in the course of their work.

Agencies should also avoid creating unnecessary barriers like assigning an Education Specialist to sites disproportionately. If specialists must be split between sites, they should spend relatively equal amounts of time at each office and maintain a desk, extension and mailbox at each site, so they are viewed by their office mates as a regular staff member. If a specialist sits in a particular area of an agency, such as with all of the therapeutic or all of the Preparing Youth for Adulthood ("PYA") staff members, program directors and supervisors need to reinforce the fact that the specialist is there to help everyone, and specialists should not be listed on agency phone directories or email lists with those departments alone, since this can lead to misconceptions that create hurdles to strong working relationships between staff in other departments.

Most importantly, agencies need to be realistic about manageable case loads and travel time when deciding how many Education Specialists to hire and what their roles will be. Therapeutic programs, group homes, programs that serve a large number of adolescents and specialized programs for children with developmental disabilities or sexually exploited youth will have a higher percentage of students requiring education advocacy than programs that work mostly with younger children, while general preventive programs typically need less direct assistance from Education Specialists, since caseworkers spend less time in court and completing paperwork than foster care caseworkers and can do more education legwork with families. One Education Specialist may be able to handle responsibility for 200 students within a regular foster care program capably, but the same person would drown trying to work with 200 therapeutic students, most of whom have special education needs, or 200 young people in congregate care, the majority of whom need alternative educational settings.

Agencies also need to consider travel time for specialists assigned to multiple sites. One person may be able to handle the educational needs of 90 families receiving preventive services, even if he or she is split between two sites, but that workload may not be feasible if one of the offices is in the Bronx and the other is in Brooklyn or Queens. Directors need to consider specialists' job responsibilities carefully: they are not just traveling between two offices, but attending school meetings, suspension hearings and home visits in two different boroughs, nearly every day. Specialists cannot be optimally effective if they are spending most of their time riding the train or driving in their car instead of helping students.

#### **4. Create practices and protocols within the agency to improve school stability for students, especially for children and youth in foster care**

No child welfare agency can expect to improve educational outcomes significantly for the students it serves without addressing the high rates of school mobility among students in foster care. Agencies must consider a child's school placement the moment he or she enters foster care and work to maintain that placement, as long as it is appropriate, for as long as the child is in care. All staff should be trained on the importance of school stability and the educational requirements in the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. Agencies can include school district information on foster parent vacancy lists so that intake staff can strive to keep children within their school district of origin when making placement decisions. If school information is not provided to agencies immediately upon referral, intake staff should push to get it from ACS, including New York City identification numbers, so that agencies can access school information as efficiently as possible when students enter care.

Agencies should alert education staff whenever a child comes into care or moves between placements so that specialists can help arrange for transportation, discuss school preferences with birth parents and

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**Agencies must consider a child's school placement the moment he or she enters foster care and work to maintain that placement, as long as it is appropriate, for as long as the child is in care.**

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students and facilitate records transfers and immediate enrollment if it is in the child's best interest to change schools. Staff can also improve school stability for students by improving communication around children's educational needs. Case planners will need to alert foster parents to the importance of school stability, provide them with the student's school information at intake and work with them to make sure that the child gets to school promptly every day. Agencies should develop protocols to discuss school placement at Parent to Parent Meetings, Child Safety Conferences, Family Team

Conferences and Placement Preservation Conferences. These discussions will help agencies and families make informed decisions about school placements and provide a space for stakeholders to brainstorm ways to get children to school, especially in the short-term while waiting for bussing to be initiated.



Education Specialists also should document school mobility for children at their agencies. If students are changing schools frequently, agencies need to identify common barriers to school stability and either work to address them on their own or advocate for systemic changes, such as legislative or regulatory action, if necessary. Agencies should be creative about developing ways to keep students in their school of origin when transportation is a barrier, such as utilizing case aides, interns or Bridges to Health staff to help foster parents bring students to and from school; reimbursing foster parents for mileage or carfare; providing them with public transportation passes; pursuing foundation funding to cover transportation costs; or even partnering with nearby agencies to contract with a private bus service.

## **5. Train all staff on education-related issues and offer education-related workshops regularly to families and youth**

All of the Program Directors we interviewed believed that their staff benefitted significantly from training from Project Achieve, and survey responses from staff overwhelmingly supported this notion. Workshops should be regular and mandatory for all staff that works with families. While smaller unit workshops are more time intensive, the Directors felt they were more effective, since they allowed staff to discuss individual cases and ensured that everyone could participate. Small workshops are especially good at introducing case planners to education staff if they have been reluctant to refer cases in the past. Larger group trainings work better once the majority of staff is familiar with the Education Specialists, have a basic understanding of education laws and can recognize when a case needs to be referred for more assistance. Facilitators can make the workshops feel smaller by frequently breaking up into small groups to aid discussion.

Overall, preventive staff seemed to benefit more from specialized trainings than foster care staff, since they generally have more time to attend workshops and do in-depth

education advocacy. Foster care staff seemed to respond better to broader workshops that covered a variety of issues. Workshop facilitators should relate the material to the work case planners do on a daily basis and be explicit about how the information will help them be more effective in the long run and help young people be more successful in school. Case planners appreciated lots of resources and materials at trainings, as long as they were well organized in a binder or folder; short, step-by-step, one-page handouts on a particular topic were popular among agency staff, as well as phone directories, contact lists and compilations of resources. In our interviews, one Director suggested that we share resources even more frequently with staff, through emails, flyers, memos, in-person reminders and education calendars that staff could use and share with families.

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*“AFC teaches us and we teach the parents.”*  
– Graham Windham Case Planner

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Agencies will be most successful incorporating education workshops for families into existing meetings, such as parenting classes, recertification trainings, birth or foster parent support groups and independent living classes. “Stand-alone” workshops should only be held at key points during the year, such as the start of the school year or during parent-teacher conferences; be heavily publicized by a variety of agency staff; and include incentives like food, stipends, raffles or free school supplies. While this may make it difficult for many agencies to host education workshops for families receiving preventive services, agencies should consider developing regular groups within preventive programs before organizing education workshops, and then incorporate an education workshop into the larger series. Within foster care programs, education staff should work jointly with PYA departments to develop curriculums and target students for particular workshops. Agencies also should strongly consider incorporating education advocacy into their trainings for new foster parents, so that foster parents have a realistic idea of the struggles they will encounter with schools and feel empowered to share responsibility for helping students succeed in school.

Like case planners, parents and youth enjoy workshops the most when they are participatory in nature and encourage attendees to learn from each other; this format also reinforces the message that agencies value parents and students who are active advocates for themselves. During Project Achieve’s workshops, youth responded best to games, activities and role-playing. They also expressed interest in hearing about the experiences of other youth, such as through peer educators, videos or case examples. Parents appreciated workshops on a broad array of topics that applied to children of all ages and allowed parents who had been through a challenging experience to share their insight with others who might be going through it for the first time. Workshops for parents should be offered at multiple times of the day and in different languages to accommodate parents’ schedules and needs. Unlike case planners, parents often did read longer booklets, although agencies should be careful about literacy levels. As a federally funded Parent Training and Information Center, Advocates for Children is particularly well-suited to provide resources and guides for parents struggling with the school system.

## **6. Make concerted efforts to involve families in educational planning and advocacy for their children**

Agencies need to make dedicated and sustained efforts to increase parental involvement in education for all of the children and youth they serve. One way to encourage parental participation is by creating a pro-education culture within the agency. Education staff can post colorful flyers with information about educational rights and resources or important school dates, like parent teacher conferences, statewide tests and Regents exams schedules, around the agency and on the agency’s website. They can include education tips in regular mailings to foster parents and encourage case planners to share up-to-date school information during home visits. When parents come to the agency for visits, agencies should have plenty of books available for readers of all ages and reading levels, along with school directories, college information and PSAT, SAT and GED prep books for families to use.<sup>109</sup> Agencies also can publicly recognize students, families and staff members who succeed in school or graduate from programs. While many agencies celebrate students who graduate from high school and college, they can also honor smaller achievements, such as student-of-the-month awards, perfect attendance, good report cards or success at extracurricular activities.

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**Foster parents are key players on a team that includes the birth family, the case planner, the Education Specialist and any clinical providers, all working together to ensure that students succeed in school.**

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Agencies can further promote educational involvement among families by paying attention to parents’ own educational needs and experiences. Staff should encourage parents to develop their own educational goals and provide support to help them finish school, take college courses or participate in a job training program. In addition to making the family more financially stable, parents will be able to model good attendance and study skills for their children. Case planners can help families develop educational goals for students and parents at Family Team conferences, and agencies can institutionalize the process by training conference facilitators to ask probing questions about education and

requiring case planners to come prepared with specific information on how students are doing in school, including inviting the Education Specialist to participate if necessary.

Agencies also need to change their expectations of foster parents. In our workshops and case work, we often hear from foster parents that they “can’t do anything” because they are just the foster parents. Foster parents must see themselves as front-line soldiers, battling on behalf of the child. Even when

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<sup>109</sup> Graham Windham has a “Family Achievement Center” at its Bronx site that offers many of these resources to families.

birth parents maintain the right to make education decisions, foster parents have valuable information and skills to contribute to a child's educational achievement; they should be encouraged, and eventually required, to be active participants. Foster parents are key players on a team that includes the birth family, the case planner, the Education Specialist and any Bridges to Health or other clinical providers, all working together to ensure that students succeed in school.

## **7. Use data effectively to develop policies and programs that support educational success in children of all ages**

Child welfare agencies can promote educational success among all of the students they serve by developing tools and systems that identify students' needs early; preparing students and families for school transitions; and linking students to proven interventions appropriate to their specific needs. First, agencies should screen all of their new intakes for educational difficulties. They should develop targeted intake procedures, including immediate record requests and reviews, standard interview questions about educational issues for students and parents and basic educational screenings on new cases, for staff to complete as a matter of course.

Foster care agencies can make better use of the wealth of educational data they have on students in care. On at least a quarterly basis, the DOE and ACS send spreadsheets to many foster care agencies with information on students' schools, attendance, course grades and test scores. Agencies can use this data to identify students who are overage for their grade, who should be referred for attendance monitoring or improvement programs and who may need tutoring, special education services or other academic interventions, as well as those who qualify for Supplemental Education Services, a form of free tutoring, under the No Child Left Behind Act. Agencies should be particularly attuned to the needs of students in second through fifth grade, who were the least likely to be referred to Project Achieve, as educational interventions can be particularly effective at this age. For students identified as having attendance issues, agencies can monitor their attendance on a daily basis by using their access to Automate the Schools (ATS), the Department of Education's data system. Agencies can also use information from the DOE's data match to identify students with exceptional abilities who would benefit from gifted and talented programs, selective middle or high schools and advanced placement courses, or who should be recognized for excellent performance.

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**Agencies should pay special attention to students in transition, whether transitioning from Early Intervention to preschool, preschool to elementary school, elementary to middle school or middle to high school.**

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In addition to identifying students who may need more support in their current educational programs, agencies should pay special attention to students in transition, whether transitioning from Early Intervention to preschool, preschool to elementary school, elementary to middle school or middle to high school. Agencies can use their DOE data to identify school-age students transitioning to the next educational level, but they will need to develop their own internal systems to identify students about to age out of Early Intervention or whose families need to apply to kindergarten. Considering the importance of early childhood education, especially for children from low-income backgrounds, agencies also must develop systems to ensure that all three- and four-year-olds in their care are enrolled in some type of educational setting, regardless of the child's developmental needs. With respect to older students, agencies need to do a better job making sure that transitioning youth apply to programs that can realistically meet their needs. Otherwise, case planners, foster parents and education staff will continue to spend large amounts of time helping middle- and high-school-aged students transfer schools, usually after falling well behind their peers.

Given the number of students in foster care and preventive programs who struggle academically, especially as they transition into high school, agencies should consider securing funding to provide effective, research-based interventions at their agencies or in students' homes so that they do not need

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*"I'm doing bad in school. But what kid in care is not? School is not easy for me...but my life just started to get better. Now all I got to do good is in school. It will be a task but I can do it."*

– R.R., youth in foster care

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to rely on schools or other organizations for all of the supports that students need. Education Specialists or consultants can help agencies document performance measures to monitor the efficacy of particular interventions, such as tutoring, education advocacy, mentoring or college prep programs, to help make the case to foundations and other private funders. Agencies also can explore collaborations with local colleges and universities who may be able to provide tutors and mentors to agencies, or even develop joint research studies, for little or no cost. Agencies should be very wary

of over-utilizing special education services for students struggling in school, especially students with emotional and behavioral challenges, as students in foster care tend to end up in disproportionately restrictive special education settings with notoriously poor student outcomes.

\* \* \*

Students involved with the child welfare system frequently have poor educational outcomes because they are disconnected from school. Many have never experienced academic success, or have been disciplined frequently and made to feel unwanted in school; some lack the chance to become involved in extracurricular activities; and others have attended too many schools to feel like they 'belong' anywhere. If these students can access schools where their needs are finally being met, they can begin to rebuild their hopes for the future and change the trajectories of their lives. Child welfare agencies will need to address each of the areas identified above, intervening early and often, to help students and families overcome these challenges, engage in school and reach their educational potential.

## V. Appendices

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- Appendix A: Data Collection Methods
- Appendix B: Workshop Evaluation Form & Summary of Results
- Appendix C: Parent Phone Survey and Summary of Results
- Appendix D: Agency Staff Survey and Summary of Results
- Appendix E: Interview Questions for Program Directors
- Appendix F: Summary of Case Referrals
- Appendix G: Project Achieve Application Materials
- Appendix H: Graham Windham Referral Form
- Appendix I: Cardinal McCloskey Education Unit Newsletter
- Appendix J: Materials Developed for Partner Agencies
- Appendix K: Sample Training Curricula

# Appendix A

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## Data Collection Methods

## Data Collection Methods

### Surveys

Project Achieve conducted surveys of parents, agency staff, and workshop participants to get feedback on the services we provided. Between August 2004 and June 2009, we collected surveys from 277 of the over 1400 birth parents, foster parents and child welfare professionals who participated in one of the 87 workshops we conducted. In order to increase our data set, we included surveys from parents and professionals affiliated with agencies other than Forestdale, Graham Windham, or New York Foundling in this sample. These statistics do not include any of the workshops we presented to youth involved in the child welfare system, since we had not yet developed a survey instrument appropriate for youth. Participants were asked to indicate if the workshop met their expectations, if it was helpful and easy to understand, and if the written materials were clear, and were encouraged to include additional comments as appropriate.<sup>1</sup>

During the spring of 2009, project staff also conducted phone surveys with 18 birth, foster, and adoptive parents whom we had represented over the years. This number is lower than we would have liked because we were unable to get in touch with a number of parents whose cases had been closed for a significant length of time, presumably because they had moved or changed their phone numbers in the interim.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the opportunity to provide general feedback, parents were asked a series of questions about the knowledge, respectfulness, and responsiveness of project staff. They were also asked if they felt more equipped to advocate on behalf of their children as a result of help from Project Achieve, and if their children received more appropriate educational services because of the project.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Project Achieve surveyed 39 social services staff at Forestdale and Graham Windham as part of our transition away from on-site assistance at those agencies. Most staff completed the surveys online, although a few were more comfortable using paper versions of the survey. Staff were asked about their knowledge of and confidence working with the Department of Education (both before and after training from Project Achieve); the frequency with which education issues come up in their cases and the type of issues that arise; what, if any, aspects of the project were most helpful; and the effect the project had on their personal case practice, the agency's practices, children's school performance, and permanency for families on their caseloads. Staff was also encouraged to offer suggestions for improvement and additional comments.<sup>4</sup>

### Interviews

To gain a broader perspective on Project Achieve's impact on our partner agencies, we conducted follow-up interviews with three Program Directors upon terminating on-site assistance at the agencies in the summer of 2009. We interviewed Rosemarie Ewing James, Assistant Executive Director at Forestdale; Linda Ford, Preventive Director at Forestdale; and Grace Pasion, Preventive Director at Graham Windham's Brooklyn site. All of these directors had been with their respective agencies long enough to observe the evolution of Project Achieve at their agencies. We asked them to comment on their staff's knowledge of and comfort managing students' educational needs, their initial and overall impression of Project Achieve, the most beneficial aspects of the project, our training of and

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of the workshop participant survey is included in Appendix B. It has since been updated.

<sup>2</sup> We determined that, in the future, parent surveys should be conducted more regularly, perhaps at the same time a case is closed or for all cases closed within the last quarter, so that parents are accessible and the information is fresh in their minds.

<sup>3</sup> A copy of this parent survey follows in Appendix C.

<sup>4</sup> A copy of the staff survey and summary of the results follow in Appendix D. We have since conducted a similar survey at Cardinal McCloskey Services to determine baseline levels of staff knowledge around educational issues and set goals for agency capacity building and trainings.

relationships with staff, the project's effect on student achievement and family permanency, barriers to implementing the project, suggestions for improvement, and the long-term impact of the project on case practice and agency policies. A copy of the questions is included in Appendix E. The Directors answered our questions thoughtfully and candidly. While all three suggested areas for improvement, they agreed that Project Achieve was a great success, and all expressed interest in continuing to work with us.

### **Data on Individual Cases**

In addition to gathering information from surveys, project staff collected data on every referral we received from fall 2004 through spring 2009. This data set included general questions about educational issues that were not tied to a particular child, such as how the reorganization at the Department of Education might affect student enrollment or how the No Child Left Behind Act impacts individual families, as well as specific questions about individual students, in-depth consultations, and cases where project staff advocated on behalf of the student directly. For any referral involving a specific child, we collected demographic information, including the child's age, grade, gender, and special education status and classification, if applicable; the source of the referral (e.g., caseworker, education staff, or parent); the nature of the problem(s); and the level of assistance required. In those cases where Project Achieve provided direct advocacy to the child or youth, we also recorded whether or not the presenting problems were successfully resolved. In a few of the cases with multiple issues, some, but not all, of the presenting problems were addressed. We considered those cases "partially resolved."



## **Appendix B**

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### **Workshop Evaluation Form & Summary of Results**

Workshop Information and Evaluation Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail address\* \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
Tel. # \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

1) Are you: \_\_\_ parent \_\_\_ professional

If a parent, please complete the following:

What are the ages of your children \_\_\_\_\_

Please tell us how many of your children are in: \_\_\_ public \_\_\_ private school

Please tell us how many of your children receive special education services \_\_\_\_\_

How many do not receive any special education services \_\_\_\_\_

What grade(s) are they in: \_\_\_\_\_

For children who receive special education, what are their classification(s)? *Please check one for each child.*

\_\_\_ autism            \_\_\_ deafness            \_\_\_ deaf-blindness            \_\_\_ emotional disturbance  
\_\_\_ hearing impaired    \_\_\_ learning disabled    \_\_\_ mental retardation    \_\_\_ multiple disabilities  
\_\_\_ orthopedic impairment    \_\_\_ other health impaired    \_\_\_ speech/language impairment  
\_\_\_ traumatic brain injury    \_\_\_ visual impairment            \_\_\_ not sure

What are their recommended services/program(s)? *Please check one for each child:*

\_\_\_ related services only (e.g. speech, PT, OT, counseling)  
\_\_\_ SETSS (special education teacher support services, also known as resource room)  
\_\_\_ CTT (collaborative team teaching)  
\_\_\_ special class in a community school            \_\_\_ special class in a special school  
\_\_\_ approved or non-approved private school    \_\_\_ day treatment program  
\_\_\_ residential program            \_\_\_ home instruction with a DOE teacher  
\_\_\_ home schooling            \_\_\_ other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ not sure

2) Did you find the workshop helpful?            \_\_\_ Yes            \_\_\_ No

3) Was the workshop easy to understand?            \_\_\_ Yes            \_\_\_ No

4) Were the written materials easy to understand?            \_\_\_ Yes            \_\_\_ No

5) Did the material discussed meet your expectations?            \_\_\_ Yes            \_\_\_ No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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\*If you provide your e-mail, we will add you to our e-mail alert list & will send you our newsletter & vital information regarding NYC schools. Do not give your e-mail if you do not wish to be contacted.            11/2006

## Workshop Evaluations: Summary of Results

### Project Achieve Workshop Evaluation forms

Total number of responses: 277

Project Achieve distributed evaluation forms whenever possible to workshop participants. From September 2004 to June 2009, we collected 277 completed evaluation forms. A summary of the results appears below.

- 273 (98.5%) of people who attended a Project Achieve workshop and responded to our survey found the workshop helpful
- 273 (98.5%) of people who attended a Project Achieve workshop and responded to our survey found the workshop easy to understand
- 273 (98.5%) of people who attended a Project Achieve workshop and responded to our survey found the written material distributed at the workshop easy to understand
- 263 (94.9%) of people who attended a Project Achieve workshop, and responded to our survey, said that the workshop met their expectations

### Comments

- Excellent!
- Everything the presenter said is useful to the work I do
- Every aspect of this training was helpful to me
- Workshop was very informative, and presenter appeared to be very knowledgeable. Workshop was helpful.
- Information was very informative and helpful.
- [The presenter] was very easy to understand she answered all of our questions. We value her information.
- I would like a little more info on student records.
- This training class was very informative and educational.
- Excellent workshop. Good information was shared and very informative.
- Workshop appeared to be very beneficial. Thank you!
- Very knowledgeable of the material
- Very good, concise, easy to understand
- Very informative training. Feel more confident navigating through the special education system
- The workshop was very informative
- Excellent, very informative and clear
- Everything very informative
- Found the workshop to be very assistful in answering any questions I had concerning my child in care and my rights in participating in their education
- I really enjoyed the workshop and hope to see you again
- Very informative
- Thank you - very informative
- The workshop was informative
- This training was helpful and the small groups were a good idea
- Excellent presentation

- Excellent workshop, perfectly easy to understand, the best materials. Advocates for Children is an extraordinary organization which offers the finest training and technical assistance (especially to foster care agencies). Always generous and well-prepared
- We need more trainings like this
- Wonderful, insightful and very informative
- Very informative, great details, easy to understand trainer. Tons of information at one time.
- Thank you for the training - BOE is the most difficult system to work with!
- There was a lot of information and some of it was not clarified
- Great workshop. Helpful!
- The workshop was very informative and well-organized - we need more of these educational type training.
- Need more time for such an informative and in-depth training. Thank you for all the wonderful and really helpful information.
- Easy to understand and a good presenter
- Knowledgeable and easy to understand presenter
- The presenter was very helpful
- Good presenter
- [The presenter] is very knowledgeable and very patient
- [The presenter] did a great job. Her presentation was easy to follow and had a lot of useful information. Extremely informative and will definitely be helpful in our practice, thanks!
- The workshop mediator was very informative and had in depth knowledge of special education laws
- This was very, very helpful. I will use the handouts ALL the time
- Helpful for professionals and parents
- Wonderful information that should be in PTA meetings in every school
- Too many handouts - can some be combined?
- It helped me in a lot of ways. I learned a lot tonight
- This workshop was helpful and informative
- [The presenter] is great! She has a great knowledge of the topic
- Thank you very much for providing this information, this is very important to our work
- Presented well
- The training was extremely informative. Workers were supplied with info that would enable them to better advocate for children on their caseload to help them succeed
- Workshop was very informative and gave many helpful resources
- The workshop was very beneficial and the knowledge will help me with future experiences with schools and families
- This workshop has been very helpful

## **Appendix C**

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### **Parent Phone Survey and Summary of Results**

**Parent Phone Surveys for Advocates for Children's *Project Achieve***

**Parent's Name:**

**Phone:**

**Child's name:**

**DOB:**

**Agency:**

**Date of phone call:**

1. How did you learn about AFC?

2. When you first heard about AFC, what did you hear about it?

3. When you first started working with AFC, what needs were you hoping the organization would address, and how well did AFC meet those needs?

*Now I am going to read you a series of statements and some possible answers. Please let me know if you agree or disagree with the statements.*

4. AFC staff was knowledgeable about the education and foster care/child welfare systems.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Comments:

5. AFC provided me with the information I needed to make decisions about my child's education.

Yes

No

Comments:

6. Because of information I received from AFC, I am more knowledgeable about how to work with schools.

To a great extent

To some extent

Not at all

Comments:

7. My child has received more appropriate services because of information or support I received from AFC.

Yes

No

Comments:

8. AFC staff acted in a professional and respectful manner toward me, my child, and school or agency staff (*i.e., on time and prepared for meetings, polite, presented him or herself well, etc.*).

Strongly Agree          Agree          Disagree          Strongly Disagree

Comments:

9. AFC staff was responsive to my needs (*i.e., returned phone calls, acted on requests in a timely fashion, provided on-going assistance when necessary, etc.*).

Strongly Agree          Agree          Disagree          Strongly Disagree

Comments:

10. AFC staff respected my opinions, knowledge and experience as a parent.

Strongly Agree          Agree          Disagree          Strongly Disagree

Comments:

11. To what extent have you shared the information you received from AFC with other families?

To a great extent          To some extent          Not at all

Comments:

12. What, if anything, could AFC have done differently to serve you better?

13. Do you have any additional comments about the services or information you received from AFC, or your experience working with AFC staff?

*The results of this survey will be used for a report we are writing about our program at Forestdale/Graham Windham/NY Foundling/Louise Wise, and to help our organization as a whole improve our services to families. If appropriate, do we have permission to quote you in our report? May we use your name, or would you rather we identify you in some other way?*

## Parent Phone Surveys: Summary of Results

### Project Achieve Parent Surveys

Total number of responses: 18

1. How did you learn about AFC?

**33%** (6) Graham Windham

**38.8%** (7) Forestdale

**29%** (5) Other (New York Foundling, Louise Wise, ACS, don't remember, met at a function)

2. When you first heard about AFC, what did you hear about it?

Top answers:

Could help get kids into better schools: **22%**

Could get reading or other educational services for child: **38.8%**

3. When you first started working with AFC, what needs were you hoping the organization would address, and how well did AFC meet those needs?

What:

Finding the right school placement: **72%**

How well:

All needs were met: **94%**

*Now I am going to read you a series of statements and some possible answers. Please let me know if you agree or disagree with the statements.*

4. AFC staff was knowledgeable about the education and foster care/child welfare systems.

Strongly Agree **83% (15)**      Agree **16.6% (3)**      Disagree **0%**      Strongly Disagree **0%**

5. AFC provided me with the information I needed to make decisions about my child's education.

Yes **100% (18)**      No **0%**

6. Because of information I received from AFC, I am more knowledgeable about how to work with schools.

To a great extent **77.7% (14)**      To some extent **22.2% (4)**      Not at all **0%**

7. My child has received more appropriate services because of information or support I received from AFC.

Yes **100% (18)**      No **0%**

8. AFC staff acted in a professional and respectful manner toward me, my child, and school or agency staff (*i.e., on time and prepared for meetings, polite, presented him or herself well, etc.*).

Strongly Agree **94.4% (17)**      Agree **5% (1)**      Disagree **0%**      Strongly Disagree **0%**



9. AFC staff was responsive to my needs (i.e., returned phone calls, acted on requests in a timely fashion, provided on-going assistance when necessary, etc.).

Strongly Agree **94.4% (17)** Agree **5% (1)** Disagree **0%** Strongly Disagree **0%**

10. AFC staff respected my opinions, knowledge and experience as a parent.

Strongly Agree **94.4% (17)** Agree **5% (1)** Disagree **0%** Strongly Disagree **0%**

11. To what extent have you shared the information you received from AFC with other families?

To a great extent **22.2% (4)** To some extent **38.8% (7)** Not at all **38.8% (7)**  
**(61% of parents shared what they learned with other families)**

12. What, if anything, could AFC have done differently to serve you better?

**83.36% (15) said AFC could not have served them any better**

13. Do you have any additional comments about the services or information you received from AFC, or your experience working with AFC staff?

*If I met another family with similar needs, I would recommend Advocates, and would call again if issues came up for another foster child.*

*Everything was excellent. Professional, it opened my eyes to a lot of things. I wasn't aware of this before. Thank you to social worker who referred me and to [Project Achieve] who did a wonderful job.*

*I would like to say thanks for letting [Project Achieve] into my life. Me and [my grandson] love them! Thank you very much for sending them my way.*

*I found that [Project Achieve] was excellent and did a very good job in talking to my daughter and managed to get her on the right track. Through them, my daughter is now a paraprofessional in the schools working with autistic children.*

## **Appendix D**

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### **Agency Staff Survey and Summary of Results**

## Survey for Agency Staff on Advocates for Children's Project Achieve

\*Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to help us improve our program. This survey will help Advocates for Children evaluate Project Achieve, its partnership with Forestdale and Graham Windham. When providing examples in your answers, please do not disclose case names. We appreciate your honesty and candor as you consider the following questions.

1. At what agency do you work, and how long have you worked there?

2. On a scale of one to five, with one being the least and five the most familiar, how familiar were you with the New York City Department of Education, including its special education services, when you first came to work at the agency?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. Have you received resources from or attended trainings by Advocates for Children ("AFC") staff? How frequently?

4. How often do education questions come up in your cases?

Never                      Occasionally                      Sometimes                      Frequently                      All the time

5. Have you worked with staff from Advocates for Children (AFC) on any of your cases during your time at the agency? If so, how often?

6. Did AFC help you with any of the following issues on your cases? (check as many as apply)

- Student enrollment
- Special education placement or services
- Transportation
- Suspension/ behavior problems in school
- Academic problems/interventions
- Truancy
- Navigating the Department of Education (e.g., finding the right contact, asking appropriate questions, etc.)
- Preschool
- Early Intervention
- School transfer
- Bilingual/ ESL services
- Alternative schools/programs for older students
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\* If you include your name, we may contact you to expand on your responses.



9. Have you noticed any changes in agency-wide practice as a result of AFC's presence at the agency? Please specify how agency practice has changed.

10. In your opinion, has the school performance of any of the children or young people you work with improved as a result of AFC's assistance to you or the student? If so, please explain (do not include specific names).

11. Would you recommend AFC's project to other foster care and preventive agencies? Why or why not?

12. If you were implementing AFC's project at another agency, what changes would you make to improve it?

13. Do you have any additional comments about AFC's services or your experience working with AFC staff?

Thank you for taking our survey. Please return the completed form to your supervisor. Feel free to attach any additional pages as needed.

An electronic version of this survey is available at [http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=SkTXcg6S37icIm0A5oBoug\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=SkTXcg6S37icIm0A5oBoug_3d_3d)

## Agency Staff Surveys: Summary of Results

### Project Achieve Staff Surveys

*Total number of surveys collected: 39*

In the spring of 2009, we distributed surveys to staff at Forestdale and Graham Windham to gather information about the effectiveness of Project Achieve's onsite services. Thirty-nine staff members completed the survey; a summary of the results collected appears below.

- On average, staff who responded to this survey rated their familiarity with the NYC Department of Education as 2.3, on a scale of 1 to 5, when they first started working at the child welfare agency.
- On average, staff who responded to this survey said that educational issues come up in their cases "Frequently." Respondents were asked to classify the frequency of educational issues in their casework as Never, Occasionally, Sometimes, Frequently or All the time.
- 95% of staff who responded to this survey had attended an AFC training or received resources from AFC
- 92% of staff who responded to this survey received direct assistance from Project Achieve
- Of those staff members who received direct assistance from Project Achieve:
  - 81% received assistance with special education placement or services
  - 64% received assistance with navigating the Department of Education
  - 58% received assistance with academic problems and interventions
  - 56% received assistance with suspensions or behavior problems in school
  - 47% received assistance with school transfers
  - 44% received assistance with student enrollment
  - 44% received assistance with transportation
  - 44% received assistance with finding alternative schools or programs for older students
  - 25% received assistance with truancy issues
  - 19% received assistance with Early Intervention
  - 17% received assistance with preschool issues
  - 8% received assistance with bilingual or ESL services
  - 6% received assistance with other issues (Due process hearings, effective communication techniques)
- 54% of respondents found on-site assistance to be the most helpful aspect of Project Achieve
- 19% of respondents found case consultation via phone or email to be the most helpful aspect of Project Achieve
- 11% of respondents found advocacy services provided directly to students to be the most helpful aspect of Project Achieve
- 11% of respondents found our publications and other education advocacy resources to be the most helpful aspect of Project Achieve
- 2% of respondents found our workshops to be the most helpful aspect of Project Achieve
- 2% of respondents did not find Project Achieve to be helpful
  
- 94% of staff who responded to the survey said that Project Achieve had increased their knowledge of the Education System
- 88% of respondents said Project Achieve increased their confidence working with the Department of Education
- 74% of respondents said Project Achieve affected their work with birth parents
- 88% of respondents said Project Achieve affected their work with foster parents

- 70% of respondents said Project Achieve helped facilitate permanency planning
- 83% of respondents said they integrate education into their case planning as a result of Project Achieve
- 63% of respondents said they saw a change agency-wide as a result of Project Achieve
- 77% of respondents said that the school performance of children or young people on their caseload had improved as a result of Project Achieve's assistance
- 100% of respondents said they would recommend that Project Achieve be implemented in other child welfare agencies

## **Appendix E**

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### **Interview Questions for Program Directors**



## **Interview Questions for Agency Management Staff on Advocates for Children's Project Achieve**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. The purpose of this interview is to conduct an internal evaluation of Project Achieve so that we can implement the project more effectively as we begin working with a new agency. We also would like to evaluate the efficiency of the project as a whole and publish the results for others who may want to replicate the project. We really appreciate your feedback, which is a critical component of this process.

1. Could you briefly describe your experience in child welfare?
  
2. How long have you worked at [agency]? What about in this position?
  
3. To begin, what were your overall impressions of Project Achieve?
  
4. Specifically, how familiar would you say your casework staff is with the Department of Education, including its special education services, when they first come to work at the agency?  

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  
5. How often would you say that educational issues come up in your staff's casework?  

Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time
-------	--------------	-----------	------------	--------------
  
6. Before Project Achieve started working with your agency, what, if any, trainings did staff receive on educational issues and advocacy? What resources were available to them?
  
7. Have you ever mandated that your case planners attend a training by AFC? How frequently?
  
8. If you or your staff attended trainings, which trainings were most helpful? Were there particular topics that staff most benefitted from?

9. How would you evaluate AFC's training program overall?

10. With which educational issues do you think caseworkers most commonly came to AFC for help?

11. Where there issues that they should have sought help with and didn't? What do you think were the reasons behind that?

12. Conversely, were there things they sought help with that they should have done on their own?

13. Which aspect of AFC's project do you think was most helpful to caseworkers, and why?

- Advocacy services provided directly to students and families
- Case consultation via phone or email
- On-site case assistance
- Publications and other education advocacy resources
- Workshops

14. How effective do you think Project Achieve has been in improving the ability of agency staff to address students' educational issues?

15. Are case planners better equipped to identify students' educational strengths and weaknesses?

16. Do you feel that staff has a more complete profile of each child's needs b/c of Project Achieve's focus on education?

17. Is staff more confident working with schools and the DOE?

18. In your opinion, has Project Achieve affected staff's work with birth parents around their children's education needs?

19. Has Project Achieve affected staff's work with foster parents around their foster children's education needs?

20. Has Project Achieve affected staff's work with children and youth around their education needs?

21. Have you noticed any other ways in which staff's case practice has changed?

22. Has AFC's presence at the agency affected the way you or your staff supervise case planners?

23. What were the project's strengths with respect to working with individual case planners? With supervisory staff?

24. How could Project Achieve work better with agency staff?

25. In your opinion, has the school performance of any of the children or youth at the agency improved as a result of AFC's assistance, either to the case planner or directly to the student?

26. Has Project Achieve increased the priority given to student's educational issues at the agency?

27. What, if any, changes has the agency made as a result of this new priority?

28. Could Project Achieve have provided any additional support to the agency to facilitate changes to agency-wide practices?

29. Has Project Achieve's presence at the agency, or an increased focus on education advocacy, helped facilitate permanency planning for any of the children or families at the agency?

30. Do you feel that the agency's partnership with AFC was a success? In which areas was it successful?

31. In which areas can Project Achieve be improved?

32. What, if any, barriers did you observe to implementing Project Achieve?

33. Were these barriers eventually overcome? Why or why not?

34. What short-term outcomes have you observed?

35. What long-term outcomes have you observed, or do you anticipate?

36. Was AFC staff sufficiently available to you as a Program Director?

37. In your opinion, was AFC sufficiently available to the case planners and Supervisory staff?

38. Would you recommend AFC's project to other foster care and preventive agencies?

## **Appendix F**

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### **Summary of Case Referrals**

## Summary of Case Referrals

### Referral Source

1. Caseworker: 552, or 60.3%
2. Supervisor: 65, or 7.1%
3. Medical/ Clinical Department: 31, or 3.4%
4. Educational or Ed/Vocational Specialist: 214, or 23.4%
5. Foster/ Birth Parent: 25, or 2.7%
6. Student: 3, or 0.3%
7. Attorney: 26, or 2.8%

**Total: 916**

### Age

1. 0
2. 8, or 1.4%
3. 33, or 5.6%
4. 34, or 5.8%
5. 35, or 6.0%
6. 32, or 5.4%
7. 30, or 5.1%
8. 28, or 4.8%
9. 19, 3.2%
10. 25, or 4.3%
11. 30, or 5.1%
12. 36, or 6.1%
13. 34, or 5.8%
14. 55, or 9.4%
15. 63, or 10.7%
16. 46, or 7.8%
17. 49, or 8.3%
18. 14, or 2.4%
19. 12, or 2.0%
20. 5, or 0.9%

**Total: 588**

### Child Welfare Status

1. Foster Care: 499, or 58.8%
2. Agency-Operated Boarding (Group) Home: 11, or 1.3%
3. Independent Living/ Preparing Youth for Adulthood: 10, or 1.2%
4. Therapeutic: 40, or 4.7%
5. Preventive: 284, or 33.5%
6. Other: 5, or 0.6%

**Total: 849**

*Note: Total does not include brief technical assistance provided to agencies other than Forestdale, Graham Windham or New York Foundling.*

**Gender**

1. Male: 334, or 55.4%
2. Female: 269, or 44.6%

**Total: 603**

**Grade**

- 2. Early Intervention: 5, or 0.9%
- 1. Pre-school (two years): 71, or 12.2%
0. Kindergarten: 40, or 6.9%
1. First Grade: 40, or 6.9%
2. Second Grade: 26, or 4.5%
3. Third Grade: 26, or 4.5%
4. Fourth Grade: 21, or 3.6%
5. Fifth Grade: 26, or 4.5%
6. Sixth Grade: 45, or 7.7%
7. Seventh Grade: 40, or 6.9%
8. Eighth Grade: 41, or 7%
9. Ninth Grade: 118, or 20.3%
10. Tenth Grade: 41, or 7%
11. Eleventh Grade: 14, or 2.4%
12. Twelfth Grade: 6, or 1%
13. GED: 8, or 1.3%
14. Ungraded: 14, or 2.4%

**Total: 582**

**Recommendation at Intake**

1. General Education: 286, or 48%
2. General Education with Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) and/or related services: 43, or 7.2%
3. Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) or integrated/ inclusion setting: 33, or 5.5%
4. Center-based preschool: 20, or 3.4%
5. 15:1: 27, or 4.5%
6. 12:1: 22, or 3.7%
7. 12:1:1: 77, or 12.9%
8. 12:1:1 District 75: 37, or 6.2%
9. 8:1:1 District 75: 8, or 1.3%
10. 6:1:1 District 75: 4, or .7%
11. 12:1:4 District 75: 1, or .2%
12. Non-Public School (day): 12, or 2%
13. Home/ hospital instruction: 2, or .3%
14. Residential: 2, or .3%
15. Early Intervention: 8, or 1.3%
16. Unknown: 7, or 1.2%
17. English as a Second Language (ESL) services only: 5, or .8%
18. Bilingual class: 1, or .2%
19. District 75 inclusion: 3, or .5%

**Total: 596**

### **Classification at Intake**

1. Autism: 6, or 1%
2. Deafness: 0
3. Deaf-blindness: 0
4. Hearing impairment: 0
5. Mental retardation (now Intellectual Disability): 14, or 2.3%
6. Multiple disabilities: 2, or .3%
7. Orthopedic impairment: 4, or .7%
8. Other health-impairment: 15, or 2.5%
9. Speech or language impairment: 33, or 5.5%
10. Traumatic brain injury: 1, or .2%
11. Visual impairment including blindness: 0
12. Learning disability: 84, or 14%
13. Emotional disturbance: 104, or 17.3%
14. Suspected disability, but not yet classified: 131, or 21.8%
15. Preschool student with a disability: 30, or 5%
16. No disability: 159, or 26.5%
17. Unknown: 9, or 1.5%
18. Early Intervention: 9, or 1.5%

**Total: 601**

### **Problem**

1. Enrollment: 39, or 3%
2. Special education enrollment: 43, or 3%
3. Suspension: 26, or 2%
4. Special education suspension: 36, or 3%
5. Special education referral (initial): 153, or 12%
6. Special education placement: 224, or 18%
7. Special education Related Services: 35, or 3%
8. New evaluations: 51, or 4%
9. Preschool special education placement or services: 21, or 2%
10. Early Intervention: 4, or .3%
11. Section 504: 7, or .4%
12. English Language Learner (ELL)/ Recent Immigrant issue: 17, or 1.4%
13. School discharge: 7, or 1%
14. Special education/ Section 504 school discharge: 9, or 1%
15. Transportation: 19, or 2%
16. Special education/ Section 504 transportation: 38, or 3%
17. Behavioral problems/ at-risk: 41, or 3%
18. Truancy: 54, or 4%
19. Academic performance/ at-risk: 62, or 5%
20. Supplemental Educational Services (SES): 3, or .5%
21. Educational records: 33, or 2%
22. School choice – general education (and charter schools): 12, or 1%
23. High school application process: 10, or 1%
24. Safety transfer: 31, or 2%
25. Other transfer (i.e., medical, distance, guidance): 41, or 4%
26. Early Childhood Programs (Day care, Head Start, Universal Pre-K): 7, or 1%



27. Afterschool/ summer program (camps): 5, or .3%
28. Alternative/ vocational high schools and programs: 90, or 7%
29. GED: 55, or 5%
30. College admissions/ scholarships: 8, or 1%
31. Home schooling: 2, or .2%
32. Home instruction: 3, or .2%
33. Summer school: 4, or .3%
34. Discrimination: 1, or .2%
35. Corporal Punishment: 0
36. Promotion/ graduation requirements: 12, or 1%
37. Other: 40, or 3%

**Total: 1243**

### **Referral Type**

1. Direct Representation: 130, or 14.2%
2. In-depth Technical Assistance: 291, or 31.8%
3. Brief Technical Assistance: 495, or 54%

**Total: 916**

### **Outcomes (direct representation only)**

#### New York Foundling: 20 cases

- 17, or 85% of cases resolved successfully
- 2, or 10% of cases unresolved because the parent did not engage with services
- 1, or 5% of cases unresolved because of unusual circumstances (youth moved outside the city)

#### Graham Windham: 40 cases

- 28, or 70% of cases were resolved successfully
- 6, or 15% of cases were unresolved because the student or parent did not engage
- 6, or 15% of cases were unresolved because of unusual circumstances (i.e., family or child moved out of the city, caregiver passed away, etc.)

#### Forestdale: 68 cases

- 54, or 79% of cases were resolved successfully
- 3, or 4% of cases were partially resolved (i.e., some, but not all, of the presenting problems were resolved)
- 8, or 12% of cases were unresolved because the student or parent did not engage
- 1, or 1% of cases were unresolved because of unusual circumstances (the student's caregiver passed away)
- 2, or 3% of cases were unresolved by Project Achieve staff

#### Other Agencies: 2 cases

- 2 cases, or 100%, were resolved successfully

## **Appendix G**

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### **Project Achieve Application Materials**



# ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

*Helping children succeed in school*

Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.  
151 West 30<sup>th</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
Phone: (212) 947-9779  
Fax: (212) 947-9790  
[www.advocatesforchildren.org](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org)

Nov. 21, 2008

Dear Executive Director,

We are pleased to invite your agency to apply for on-site assistance from Advocates for Children's (AFC's) Project Achieve, an innovative program that brings AFC's educational expertise directly to families involved with the child welfare system and to staff at foster care and preventive services agencies.

AFC's mission is to ensure equal access to a quality public education for all New York City's children, especially those at greatest risk for school discrimination and academic failure. AFC provides advice, information and training on education-related issues to families and professionals citywide and represents students at administrative hearings to assert their educational rights. Our expert staff speaks out on issues of public importance and publishes reports that inform the public and influence education policy in New York City. When necessary, our attorneys use impact litigation to drive positive systemic change in the New York City public schools.

Project Achieve brings AFC's knowledge and expertise about education advocacy to the child welfare system, to ensure that children in or at risk of placement in foster care receive access to appropriate educational services. The Project places AFC staff on site at selected partner agencies for regular office hours where they: (1) provide individual case assistance to all of the agency's clients with identified education-related needs; (2) build the capacity of agency social service staff to identify and solve routine school-related problems; and (3) empower birth parents, foster parents and young people to be actively involved in education planning.

This approach has proven to be extremely effective at addressing the educational needs of children in the child welfare system and in strengthening the ability of agencies to deal with these needs in-house. After the program's pilot at Louise Wise Services in 2002, AFC released a report (available at [www.advocatesforchildren.org](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org)) that describes the program model in depth and details its successes after the first year and a half. Since then, Project Achieve has been fully implemented at two other partner sites – Forestdale and Graham Windham's Brooklyn Office – and both agencies are now ready for less intensive assistance from AFC. Therefore, we are seeking one new partner agency for on-site assistance from Project Achieve starting in the summer of 2009.

An information session will be held from 10 am to noon on **January 8, 2009** at Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP, 180 Maiden Lane, conference room 38 F&G. A senior staff member from each agency, preferably someone who would be involved in implementing Project Achieve, must attend in order for an agency to be eligible. Please RSVP by January 5, 2009 to Kait Brown at [kbrown@advocatesforchildren.org](mailto:kbrown@advocatesforchildren.org).

#### Board of Directors

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David Pollak  
Mala Thakur  
Lysa Vanible

#### Executive Director

Kim Sweet

#### Deputy Director

Matthew Lenaghan



Please see the enclosed packet for more detailed information about how to apply. Applications are due at 5:00 p.m. on **January 29, 2009**. Please send completed applications by email, mail or fax to:

Kait Brown, Project Associate  
Advocates for Children of New York  
151 West 30<sup>th</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10001 Fax: (212) 947-9790

Interviews will be scheduled with finalists during the week of February 23, 2009, and we expect to select a new partner agency by early March 2009.

If you have any questions about Project Achieve or the application process, please do not hesitate to contact Gisela, Erika or Alice at the numbers or e-mails listed below.

Sincerely,

The Project Achieve Team

Gisela Alvarez  
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(212) 822-9504  
[galvarez@advocatesforchildren.org](mailto:galvarez@advocatesforchildren.org)

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Kait Brown  
AmeriCorps VISTA Project Associate  
(646) 871-6727  
[kbrown@advocatesforchildren.org](mailto:kbrown@advocatesforchildren.org)

**2009-2010 APPLICATION FOR ON-SITE PROGRAMMING**  
**Advocates for Children's Project Achieve**

The following questions will provide us with basic information about your agency and the program(s) you would like to target for assistance from Project Achieve. Please write or type your responses in the space provided. Feel free to attach supplemental pages if you need additional space.

Name and address of agency \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name of agency contact \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Alternate contact(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Name and location/address of targeted site and/or program(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

1. What geographic zones or catchment areas do these sites and/or programs serve?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. How many children or families are served by your targeted sites and/or program(s)? If requesting assistance with multiple programs, please specify the number of slots for each program (i.e., preventive, therapeutic, foster boarding home, etc.). \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Please estimate the age ranges of children served in each of your targeted sites and/or programs, based on the following categories: 0-5 years old, 6-13 years old, and 14-21 years old.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. How many and what type of staff are assigned to each site and/or program? Please include case planners, case aides, supervisors and directors on-site, as applicable. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you currently have employees at your agency who work on education issues? If so, please list their name(s), title(s) and job function(s) and which site(s) and/or program(s) they work with. \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Please attach an organizational chart that shows the supervisory structure for the targeted site/ programs, including supervision for any education specialty staff, or provide a description of the supervisory structure below. \_\_\_\_\_

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7. In order for Project Achieve to offer on-site assistance at your agency, we will need access to certain office items at least once a week during our regularly scheduled hours. Please check the box if your agency is able to provide us with:

- a desk
- a computer with Internet access
- a phone with voicemail
- private interview space to meet with clients when necessary

If not, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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The remaining questions will give us a better idea about your agency's mission and goals, especially with respect to education. Please type your responses separately and include them with your application form. Answers should be limited to a total of two pages.

8. Please give an overview of your agency's mission and array of services. (1-2 paragraphs)

9. State why you feel your agency needs assistance from Project Achieve, including goals for the project should your agency be selected. Explain how these goals relate to your agency's overall mission and work.

10. Please tell us how you think Project Achieve staff might collaborate with staff at your agency, including anyone that assists with or specializes in educational issues.

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this application! Completed applications, including the attached needs assessment, should be emailed, faxed or mailed to:

Kait Brown, AmeriCorps VISTA Project Associate  
Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.  
151 West 30<sup>th</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10001  
Email: kbrown@advocatesforchildren.org  
Phone: (212) 947-9779, ext. 580  
Fax: (212) 947-9790

**2009-2010 APPLICATION – NEEDS ASSESSMENT**  
**Advocates for Children’s Project Achieve**

Agency \_\_\_\_\_

The following are some common educational issues. Please indicate how serious you feel these problems are for the children at your agency.

Educational Issue	Not a Problem	→	→	→	A Very Serious Problem
A. Obtaining access to school records	1	2	3	4	5
B. Obtaining services for infants 0-3 with developmental delays	1	2	3	4	5
C. Obtaining services for children ages 3-5 with special needs	1	2	3	4	5
D. Assisting students who have behavior problems in school	1	2	3	4	5
E. Assisting students who have academic problems or are being held over	1	2	3	4	5
F. Assisting students who need appropriate evaluations	1	2	3	4	5
G. Assisting students who are not getting appropriate accommodations and/or special education services	1	2	3	4	5
H. Assisting students who are having difficulty enrolling in school (including students enrolling in a local school after leaving a RTC)	1	2	3	4	5
I. Assisting students who are getting suspended	1	2	3	4	5
J. Assisting students who are in need of school transfers	1	2	3	4	5
K. Assisting students who need transportation	1	2	3	4	5
L. Assisting students who are being pushed out of school	1	2	3	4	5
M. Assisting students who are English Language Learners to obtain ESL, Bilingual or Dual language programs and services	1	2	3	4	5
N. Assisting students with choosing/finding a school (e.g. HS applications)	1	2	3	4	5

- |                                                                                                                |   |   |   |   |   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| O. Identifying and assisting students in need of alternative school placements                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| N. Obtaining academic services for pregnant and parenting students                                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| P. Assisting students with obtaining No Child Left Behind services<br>(e.g. Supplemental Educational Services) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Using the list above, please list the 3 areas in which your agency needs the most assistance:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Using the list above, please list the 3 areas your agency handles well:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Provide any additional comments if necessary:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix H**

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### **Graham Windham Referral Form**



serving children  
supporting families  
strengthening communities

# Educational Coordinator Referral Form

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Rights Terminated: yes/ no

Child's Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Foster parent: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's School: \_\_\_\_\_ School phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Region: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ NYC ID# \_\_\_\_\_

Special Education: yes / no If yes, Classification \_\_\_\_\_

Type of class \_\_\_\_\_ Is the foster parent aware of the referral? yes/ no

Law Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check the item(s) you need assistance with:

- \_\_\_ School Enrollment
- \_\_\_ School Records - *indicate record(s) needed:* \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Citywide Test Information
- \_\_\_ School Transfer
- \_\_\_ CSE Reviews
- \_\_\_ Promotion/ Holdovers
- \_\_\_ Triennials and/or Requesting Evaluations
- \_\_\_ Transportation Issues
- \_\_\_ Change of Placement/ school setting
- \_\_\_ SPR Participation
- \_\_\_ Suspension(s)
- \_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for referral:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Please attach all relevant records to this form, including current report cards, attendance, IEP, etc.*

Primary Planner: \_\_\_\_\_ Ext: \_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

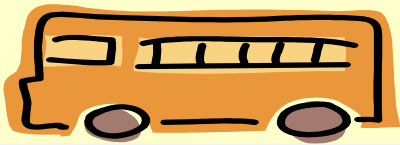
Education Coordinator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of referral: \_\_\_\_\_

Referred to Project Achieve(see back of page for detail) Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix I**

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### **Cardinal McCloskey Education Unit Newsletter**



# Education Department Newsletter

## Welcome to the Cardinal McCloskey's Education Unit's Newsletter!

Our goal is to provide you with the latest news and important dates regarding education on a monthly basis. Ultimately, we hope that the result will be better education outcomes for the youth in foster care with whom you work. Please feel free to contact any member of the Education Unit if you have any questions regarding the information in this newsletter, or if you need assistance with any of your children and families.

## Case Planning and School Visits

- How many school visits do I need to make a year?
  - 2 per year, preferably 1 in the fall and 1 in the spring OR anytime there is a serious issue (truancy, drop in grades, behavioral problems, etc.)
- Who should I contact to set up a visit?
  - The student's guidance counselor or the parent coordinator

For more information regarding school visits please contact the Education Department!

## Important Dates

- March 1<sup>st</sup>: Foster Parent Education Trainings
- March 2<sup>nd</sup>: FBH Staff Education Trainings
- March 2<sup>nd</sup>: Last day to register for Kindergarten Admission in September 2012
- March 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>: Round 2 High School Fair (See page 2 for details)
- March 5<sup>th</sup>: Pre-Kindergarten Registration for September 2012 Begins
- March 23<sup>rd</sup>: No School for Pre-Kindergarten
- April 6<sup>th</sup> – April 13<sup>th</sup>: Spring Recess, All Grades

**IEP Meeting Coming Up? Remember to invite Cleo Dendy!**



March 11<sup>th</sup> is Daylight Savings

## Attention College-Bound Students!

- Do you need help?**
- Setting up a College Tour?
  - Picking a school?
  - Preparing for the PSAT or SAT?
  - Filling out an Application?
  - Filing your FASFA?

**Contact Sister Jeanne Shary and Betty Guest!**  
914-997-8000 x142 or Jshary@cms46.org

## High School Admission Update

Students will receive Round 1 High School Admissions decision letters from their middle school by March 1, 2012.

### ROUND 2 HIGH SCHOOL ADMISSIONS



All high school applicants can participate in Round 2 of the high school admissions process, even students who received a match in Round 1.

In Round 2, students can apply to new small high schools opening in September 2012 and other programs with seats available. A list of Round 2 program options will be available through middle school guidance counselors and on Department of Education web page ([schools.nyc.gov](http://schools.nyc.gov)) by March 1, 2012. There may be different Round 2 options available for general education students, special education students, and students applying for tenth grade seats.

**If a student received a Round 1 match and is choosing to participate in Round 2, please note:**

- If the student does not receive a match in Round 2, he/she will keep the Round 1 match.
- If the student receives a match to a program selected in Round 2, **he/she will forfeit the Round 1 offer**; the student will not be able to choose between the Round 1 and Round 2 offers. Additionally, any appeal to the Round 1 offer will not be considered.

#### How to Apply in Round 2

1. Obtain a **Round 2 and New Schools Choice Form** and **Round 2 and New Schools Program List** from the student's guidance counselor.
2. Enter the high school choices in priority order on the Round 2 and New Schools Choice Form. You may choose up to 12 programs from the Round 2 and New Schools Program List.
3. Return the completed and signed Round 2 and New Schools Choice Form to your guidance counselor **by Thursday, March 15, 2012.**

### ROUND 2 HIGH SCHOOL FAIR

Learn about high school options, including new schools opening in 2012. Meet with school representatives and enrollment counselors.

Saturday, March 3 and Sunday, March 4, 2012  
10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Martin Luther King Jr. Educational Campus  
122 Amsterdam Avenue (between West 65th and West 66th Streets)  
New York, New York 10023





## Parent-Teacher Conferences

### Elementary School

Tuesday March 13<sup>th</sup>: Afternoon  
Wednesday March 14<sup>th</sup>: Evening

### High Schools

Thursday March 29<sup>th</sup>: Evening  
Friday March 30<sup>th</sup>: Afternoon

### District 75 Programs

Monday March 19<sup>th</sup>: Evening  
Tuesday March 20<sup>th</sup>: Afternoon

### Preparing for Parent-Teacher Conferences: Questions to Consider Asking Your Child's Teacher

- What is my child expected to learn, know and do at this grade level? How will it be assessed?
- What are the big projects my child will be doing in your class this year? Throughout the year, how will I know if my child is meeting grade level expectations?
- What does my child do well and what does he or she struggle with? Can you give me examples?
- If my child needs extra support or wants to learn more about a subject, are there resources to help his or her learning outside the classroom? Can you give me examples?
- How will you be introducing the Common Core standards to students this year
- Does my child turn in homework on time?
- Is my child happy at school? How does my child get along with classmates and adults?
- Does my child participate in class discussions and activities? What would make my child more effective in doing his/her work?
- What can I do at home to reinforce what my child is learning at school?
- Are there ways that I can help you in the classroom or the school?

### Fortunata Lardo-Dimarco, Director of Youth Support Services

Contact: 718-993-5495

E-Mail: [FLardo-Dimarco@cms46.org](mailto:FLardo-Dimarco@cms46.org)

### Cleopatra Dendy, Education Coordinator

Contact: 718-292-7135 x 318

E-Mail: [CDendy@cms46.org](mailto:CDendy@cms46.org)

### Greta Thomsen, Education Specialist

Contact: 718-292-7135 x328

E-Mail: [gthomsen@cms46.org](mailto:gthomsen@cms46.org)

### Advocates for Children /Project Achieve

Contact:

Christine Burke 212-822-9503 [cburke@afcnyc.org](mailto:cburke@afcnyc.org)

Michelle Eaton 212-822-9528 [meaton@cms46.org](mailto:meaton@cms46.org); [meaton@afcnyc.org](mailto:meaton@afcnyc.org)

Tamika Edwards 212-822-9543 [tedwards@cms46.org](mailto:tedwards@cms46.org); [tedwards@afcnyc.org](mailto:tedwards@afcnyc.org)

## Contact Us!



## **Appendix J**

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### **Materials Developed for Partner Agencies**

# Education Concepts for Child Welfare Practitioners

## A Brief Summary of the Law in New York State

### General Education

A child's parent has the right to control his or her child's education.<sup>1</sup> Parents also have the responsibility to ensure that their child attends school regularly.<sup>2</sup> In New York City, students are **required** to attend school from the age of 6 until the end of the school year in which they turn 17. Students have the **right** to be in school between the age of 5 until the end of the school year in which they turn 21 or until high school graduation, whichever comes first.<sup>3</sup>

Under New York State law, a 'person in parental relation' to a student is the person responsible for the student's education. A person in parental relation includes the student's:

- Father or mother, by birth or adoption;
- Step-father or step-mother;
- Legally appointed guardian; or
- Custodian – a person who has assumed the charge and care of the student because the parents or guardians have died, are imprisoned, are mentally ill, or have been committed to an institution, or because they have abandoned or deserted the child, are living outside the state, or their whereabouts are unknown.<sup>4</sup>

#### Definition of Parent under New York State Law

A parent or guardian may designate someone else to act as a person in parental relation to their child, pursuant to the New York State General Obligations Law (*see below*).

### Special Education

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides for a child's parent to play a crucial role in all aspects of the special education process, including consenting and contributing to evaluations, attending meetings, and, if the child is found eligible for special education, deciding if the child should or should not receive services.<sup>5</sup>

'Parent' is defined as:

- A child's birth or adoptive parent;
- A person in parental relationship to the child (such as a relative the child lives with);
- An individual designated by the birth parent as a person in parental relationship;
- A foster parent, if the birth parents' rights have been terminated or surrendered, their rights to make educational decisions have been limited, or the parent is deceased;
- A person appointed by the judge to make educational decisions; or
- A surrogate parent.

#### Definition of Parent under the IDEA

<sup>1</sup> *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 399, 401 (1923); *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 534-535 (1925); *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 166 (1944).

<sup>2</sup> N.Y. Educ. Law § 3212.

<sup>3</sup> N.Y. Educ. Law § 3205; N.Y.C. Chancellor's Regulation A-101.

<sup>4</sup> N.Y. Educ. Law § 3212.

<sup>5</sup> Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.



If more than one person falls within the definition of ‘parent,’ then the birth or adoptive parent is presumed to be the ‘parent.’ **The law is very clear that the state education department, school district, foster care agency or other social service agency cannot act as the ‘parent’ for a special education student in foster care.**<sup>6</sup>

When the child’s parents are not available to participate in the special education process, the school district must assign a surrogate parent to act in place of the child’s parents. A surrogate parent may be required if the parents are deceased, if their identities are unknown, or if, after making reasonable efforts, the school district cannot locate the parents.<sup>7</sup> A family court judge also may assign a surrogate parent to the child. A surrogate parent exercises the same rights as a parent in all issues concerning special education evaluations, services, and placement. An unaccompanied homeless youth may also need a surrogate parent.<sup>8</sup> School districts are required to maintain a list of individuals who are qualified to serve as surrogate parents for students who need them.<sup>9</sup>

**A School District must assign a ‘surrogate parent’ for a child who does not have a parent in his or her life.**

The school district must assign a surrogate parent within 10 days of determining that the student needs a surrogate parent.<sup>10</sup> An adult who has a relationship with the student, such as the foster parent, a relative, family friend, mentor, or coach can serve as the student’s surrogate parent. Otherwise, the student should be assigned a ‘stranger surrogate’ from the school district’s list of qualified surrogate parents.

### **Designating a Person in Parental Relation**

If a parent is unable to make education or health decisions for their child, he or she may temporarily designate another person to make those decisions, as long as the other person agrees. The person who is assuming this responsibility is called the ‘designee.’

#### **Requirements for Designating a ‘Person in Parental Relation’**

If the **agreement is for less than 30 days**, it must be in writing and contain the following information:

- Parent’s name;
- Designee’s name;
- Child(ren)’s name(s); and
- Parent’s signature and date of signature.

In order for an **agreement to last more than 30 days**, it must be notarized and contain the following information:

- Name, address, and phone number of the parent;
- Name, address, and phone number of the designee;
- Child(ren)’s name(s) and date(s) of birth;
- Date or event upon which the agreement begins;

<sup>6</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.30; 8 N.Y.C.R.R. § 200.1(ii).

<sup>7</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.519; 8 N.Y.C.R.R. § 200.5(n).

<sup>8</sup> An unaccompanied homeless youth is a homeless youth who is not in the physical custody of his or her parent or guardian. 34 C.F.R. § 300.519(f).

<sup>9</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.519(b); 8 N.Y.C.R.R. § 200.5(n).

<sup>10</sup> 8 N.Y.C.R.R. § 200.5(n)(3)(iii).

- Written consent of the designee;
- A statement that no court order prohibits the parent from entering into the agreement; and
- Parent’s signature and date of signature.

A parent may limit this agreement to a certain time period or to certain types of decisions, as long as these limitations are noted in the agreement. A parent may end the agreement at any time by notifying the designee, school, or health provider orally or in writing that he or she wishes to end the agreement.

The agreement automatically ends if the parent creates a new agreement and **automatically expires after six months**; it may be renewed. Any decision by the parent will trump a decision by the designee, even if an agreement is in effect at the time of the decision.<sup>11</sup>

## **Access to School Records**

Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), parents have the right to inspect and review their child’s education records maintained by the school and can request copies of the records from the school. A parent includes a natural parent, a guardian, or an individual acting as a parent in the absence of a parent or guardian.<sup>12</sup> In New York City, local regulations include the representative of a foster care agency in the definition of ‘parent’ with respect to accessing records.<sup>13</sup> Noncustodial parents, including parents whose children are in foster care, maintain their rights under FERPA unless a court order specifically states otherwise.

**Parents have the right to access their child’s records. Their consent is required to release a student’s education records.**

Schools and school districts may not release education records unless the student’s parent (or the student, if he or she is over the age of 18) gives written consent.<sup>14</sup> While the following list is not exhaustive, there are some exceptions to FERPA, which include:

- Requests from schools or school systems to which the student will transfer;
- Situations where the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals; and
- Pursuant to a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena, as long as the parent and student are notified prior to the release of records.<sup>15</sup>

If you have further questions, please call:

**The Jill Chaifetz Education Helpline**

Monday – Thursday, 10am to 4pm  
1-866-427-6033 (toll free)

**Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.**

151 West 30th Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10001

(212) 947-9779 phone | (212) 947-9790 fax

[www.advocatesforchildren.org](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org)

<sup>11</sup> N.Y. Gen. Oblig. Law Title 15-A § 5-1551 to 1555.

<sup>12</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1232g.

<sup>13</sup> N.Y.C. Chancellor’s Regulations A-820.

<sup>14</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1232g.

<sup>15</sup> 34 CFR § 99.31.

## School Stability for Students in Foster Care

Keeping a student in the same school when they come into foster care or move between placements can be a critical source of stability for that child in otherwise chaotic circumstances. It's also the law!

### Why is School Stability Important?

- Every time a student changes schools, it can take 4-6 months to recover academically
- When students change schools a lot, they are less likely to make friends, form connections to teachers and school staff, and engage in school activities
- Students who change schools frequently have significantly lower test scores and are far more likely to repeat a grade than students who stay in the same school
- High school students who change schools even once are less than half as likely to graduate as those who do not change schools

### What is Fostering Connections?

In October 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. One section of this federal law aims to **increase school stability for students in foster care**. The law requires case plans to include assurances that a child will remain in the same school at the time of placement unless it is not in their best interest to do so. Under this law, agencies must:

- Take into account the appropriateness and proximity of a child's school placement when determining a child's foster care placement
- Coordinate with local school districts to ensure that a child placed into foster care remains in his or her school of origin, unless it is not in the student's best interests
- Immediately enroll a child into an appropriate school, and ensure that the child's records are transferred, when a student must change schools

### How Can I Help Students in Foster Care Stay in the Same School?

Every child in New York City has the right to remain in their school following a move as long as they move within the five boroughs. This rule comes from a local education law known as Chancellor's Regulation A-101.

Students do not, however, have a right to school bus transportation. Many older students can travel on their own on public transportation and will receive a Metrocard from their school. For those students who cannot travel on their own, consider the following:

- **Can the foster parent bring the student to school?** Many foster parents can adjust their schedule to take children to school outside the immediate neighborhood. Think about ways the agency may be able to offer the foster parent extra supports to facilitate this.
- **Can the Department of Education provide bussing to the student?** Students in kindergarten through sixth grade can often receiving bussing from the Department of

## School Stability for Students in Foster Care

Education if they live a certain distance from the school and there is a route available, especially if their foster home is in the same school district as the child's school. More information on bussing is included on the Tip Sheet for Transportation.

- **Does the student qualify for special education bussing?** If the student already receives special education bussing because of a disability, it will be much easier to change the child's bus route to the new home address than if you are starting from scratch.
- **Is the student eligible for protections under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act?** The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal law that grants important rights to students in temporary housing, including the right to transportation back to the school of origin. This even covers students placed outside of the city, *as long as there is a bus route available*.

Students "**awaiting foster care placement**" are considered to be in temporary housing and are eligible for protections under the law. While many students in foster care are not McKinney-Vento eligible, ACS and the Department of Education recognize several broad categories of students in "temporary" foster care placements who may qualify for protections under the law. These are:

- Children in foster boarding homes where the agency is exploring kinship resources
- Situations where the court has ordered a different placement, and the agency is looking for a new home (i.e., therapeutic placement, home with only one child, home where siblings can be united, etc.)
- Children placed in respite foster home
- Students in diagnostic or evaluation centers
- Young women in maternity shelters
- Children awaiting an Interstate Compact
- Students in a temporary foster home pending the outcome of an OSI investigation

If you have a child who needs transportation in order to stay in the same school, but you're not sure how to go about getting it, it's important not to delay! Talk to Project Achieve as soon as possible (212-822-9539).

## EDUCATIONAL WARNING SIGNS

Educational records paint a picture of a student's academic and behavioral profile and can help determine whether a student is receiving appropriate services. If you see any of the following indicators in a student's report card, attendance records, transcript or IEP, it may be a sign of a larger problem that warrants further investigation and possible intervention.

### Report Card

- Student has all 1s and 2s in academic areas
- Student earned a 1 in the "Social and Emotional Growth" section
- Student scored a 1 on the annual ELA or math test (may be in a separate document)
- Student's average is under 70
- Student's promotion is in doubt
- Teacher's comments indicate that the student is making little or no academic progress
- Teacher's comments indicate behavioral difficulties in the classroom
- Student is cutting classes

### Attendance Records

- Student's attendance is below 85%
- Student is frequently late

### Transcript (High School Students Only)

- Student is not on track to earn enough credits to graduate. This means:

For 9 <sup>th</sup> graders:	8 credits
For 10 <sup>th</sup> graders:	20 credits
For 11 <sup>th</sup> graders:	30 credits
To graduate:	44 credits
- Student has failed a Regents or RCT exam (these scores also may be on the report card)

### IEP

- On page 3, student's academics are 2-3 years below grade level, depending on age and disability
- Comments indicate student is making little or no academic progress
- On page 5, comments indicate serious behavioral and/or emotional problems
- On page(s) 6, goals do not match student's abilities, do not change from year to year, or appear developmentally inappropriate
- On page 9, student is exempted from assessments (depending on disability), or promotion requirements are extremely low
- For students aged 14 and up – on page 10, transition plan is vague or missing altogether, or student without significant developmental disabilities is tracked for an IEP Diploma

## Where to Locate Manhattan High School Programs for Older Students

### Regular High School Programs

- + [www.insideschools.org](http://www.insideschools.org) (click on "High school" in the Find a School box and then search by any criteria on the next page)

### Alternative High School Programs

- + [www.insideschools.org](http://www.insideschools.org) (click on "High School" in the Find a School box and then choose "Alternative Schools" in the type of program box on the next page)
- + Transfer High Schools – visit the DOE website:  
<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/OMPG/TransferHighSchools/default.htm>
- + District 79 Student Support Services helpline: 917-521-3639

### GED Programs

- + **GED PLUS**- GED Plus is a citywide program that provides **full and part-time GED services at no cost** to students in New York City aged 17-21. It replaced four citywide GED programs (ASHS, OES, VTC and CEC) in September of 2007. For more information, contact the nearest Referral Center. The Manhattan center is located at the Alternative Learning Complex at 500 Eighth Avenue (at 35<sup>th</sup> Street), 7<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY.
- + Some GED Programs in Manhattan:

**City College – Adult and Continuing Education School** – Free GED class for students 19 and older. Classes are M-F but only four days week. Class size is between 18-25 people and classes are held in the morning and afternoon. This program is familiar with accommodations and has a disability office. Call 212-650-7596 or 212-650-7312 for more information.

**E3** – Pre-GED and GED program for young men ages 16-24. The program emphasizes literacy and provides GED prep five days a week with job training and computer skills training. There are internships and a possible monetary stipend available. Call 212-828-6111 for more information or email [youthservices@unionsett.org](mailto:youthservices@unionsett.org).

**ICD YES Adolescent Skills Center** – Pre-GED and GED program for students 17- 21 who are concurrently enrolled in mental health treatment, residential treatment, CDT, IPRT or other mental health program. Call 212-585-6043 for more information.

### Vocational Programs

- + [www.insideschools.org](http://www.insideschools.org) (click on "High School" in the Find a School Box, then choose "Vocational Schools" in the type of program box on the next page)
- + **Co-Op Tech**: 212-369-8800. Website: [www.co-optech.org](http://www.co-optech.org). Eligibility requirements: Students 16 – 21 years of age without a diploma must be actively registered at a New York City/Department of

Education High School or GED program. Applications must be signed by a High School counselor. Visit website for application.

- ✚ **Learning to Work:** A job readiness and career exploration program for students enrolled at one of the Young Adult Borough Centers, transfer schools, or GED blends. The Learning to Work initiative is *not* a separate program from those educational options.

Learning to Work offers academic support, career and educational exploration, work preparation, skills development, and internships. To find out which programs have a LTW component, visit their Website: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/OMPG/LearningtoWork/default.htm> or see Transfer school handout.

- ✚ **Job Corps:** A free education and vocational training program offered through the U.S. Labor Department in the Bronx and Brooklyn for youth ages 16-24. GED and HS Diplomas available.

## Programs For Pregnant/Parenting Teens

- ✚ **LYFE programs** provide childcare and referral services to support parenting students to stay on track to earn a diploma. Go to: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/District79/SchoolsProgramsServices/LYFE.htm> and click on the link for LYFE Programs to see a list of all sites or call 212.348.0608.
- ✚ **CUNY Brooklyn College** (childcare services on site): 718.951.5431

## Additional Programs

- ✚ **Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs)** are evening academic programs for high school students who may be behind in credits or may have adult responsibilities that make attending school in the daytime difficult. Students must be at least 17.5 years old, have been in school for four or more years, and have 17 or more credits. Students graduate with a diploma from their home school after earning the required credits and passing their exams while attending the YABC. Visit: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/OMPG/YouthAdultBoroughCenters/default.htm> for more information.
- ✚ **Re-Start** provides educational services for students aged 16-21 in temporary/involuntary educational settings, including substance abuse treatment centers, transitional housing, hospitals and social services agencies. The program offers differentiated instruction for high school credit accumulation or progress towards the GED. For a list of programs go to <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/District79/SchoolsProgramsServices/Re-Start+Site+List.htm> and click on the link for Restart directory.

## Useful Websites/Info:

- ✚ Electronic Version of HS Directory: Information on tours and open houses are found on school pages in both the book and electronic version. <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/Directory>

## WHAT TO DO WHEN A STUDENT'S PROMOTION IS IN DOUBT

### A Guide for Case Planners

*When students receive a promotion in doubt letter, they can feel discouraged. Having someone on their team who is informed and equipped with strategies to assist can provide hope and motivate students to make positive changes. The following tips are designed to help you guide families through the process of advocating for students who have received a promotion in doubt letter. They do not guarantee promotion or avoidance of summer school.*

- 1. Call the student's school** and find out why his or her promotion is in doubt. In NYC, there are several promotional criteria for each grade. Some reasons student can be held over include:
  - a) They haven't made progress towards learning standards in literacy and math
  - b) They scored lower than a 2 on state ELA or Math exams
  - c) They have less than 90% attendance without a legitimate excuse
- 2. Talk to the student** and **think proactively and creatively** about what efforts he or she is willing to make to address the concerns of the school, i.e. enrolling in tutoring; consistently attending school for the remainder of the year; attending a summer literacy program; or bringing in notes from a doctor to explain absences.
- 3. Schedule a meeting** at the child's school and be willing to negotiate special arrangements for the student to be promoted to the next grade.
- 4. Request Academic Intervention Services (AIS)** for the student. These services can include tutoring and counseling to address attendance, discipline, or health-related challenges.
- 5. If a parent disagrees with a school's decision to hold the student back, the parent has a right to appeal** to the Superintendent within the Department of Education.

### Special Circumstances

#### **Special Education**

If the student has been consistently struggling academically throughout the year, ask the student's teacher if any academic interventions were implemented to assist the student. If not, request AIS as mentioned above. If interventions have been implemented, discuss with the student's teacher and parent whether a referral for special education evaluations would be appropriate.

If a student is already receiving special education services, check his or her IEP (the last few pages) to find out whether the promotion criteria for the current year are standard or modified. If they are standard, discuss with the teacher whether the criteria should be modified. If they are already modified, discuss whether the criteria should be modified even more. It is also possible the student is meeting the modified criteria.

#### **English Language Learners (ELLs)**

If the student is an ELL, meaning they speak a language other than English at home and they score below proficient in English when they enter the school system, he or she may be eligible for exemptions from state tests. Speak to school administrators and Project Achieve for more information.

***For further assistance, please contact Project Achieve***

Christine Burke      212-822-9503  
Michelle Eaton      212-822-9528  
Tamika Edwards      212-822-9543

[cburke@afcnyc.org](mailto:cburke@afcnyc.org)  
[meaton@cms46.org](mailto:meaton@cms46.org)  
[tedwards@cms46.org](mailto:tedwards@cms46.org)



## Attention Parents of 8th Grade Students: It's Time to Apply to High School!



### Tips for HS Admissions

- ◆ Students may apply to 12 PROGRAMS- NOT SCHOOLS- in addition to the Specialized High Schools.
- ◆ It is VERY IMPORTANT that the student RANKS the schools in order, as students will be matched with the school that they ranked highest that accepts them
- ◆ You will only receive ONE offer, unless you are accepted to a specialized school, in which case you will have a choice.
- ◆ Students are no longer guaranteed a seat in their neighborhood or "zoned" school unless they APPLY. They must list it as one of their choices.
- ◆ Students should only apply to schools they really want to attend. It is difficult to transfer once a student is placed in a school they listed as a choice.

### Important Dates to Remember:

**October 3 & 4-Citywide HS Fair**  
10:00am to 3:00pm  
**Brooklyn Technical High School**  
29 Fort Greene Place, Brooklyn NY  
11217

**Early Oct- Students receive HS applications**

Oct 24 & 25- Borough HS Fairs

**November 7 & 8- Specialized HS Admissions tests for current 8th graders**

Nov 14- Specialized HS Tests, 9th graders, 8th & 9th special needs, 504 accommodations and extended time

**November 22-Make up tests**

**December 4- Applications due to guidance counselors**

Questions? Talk to your caseworker, or call Alice Rosenthal at Advocates for Children:  
(212) 822-9539





# Checklist for Supporting Your Child's Education

## ***Helping your child at home***

### HOMework HELP

- Set a daily routine for doing homework; for example, schedule snack-time at 3:30 and homework at 4.
- Create a quiet place that is free from distractions for doing homework. Clear off a table or desk, supply paper and pencils, and turn off the TV.
- Do your work while your child studies. You could pay bills, read, do your own homework, or help them, after letting them try first.
- Check your child's homework when they are done to make sure it is complete.

### SCHOOL VACATIONS

- Ask your child's teacher for extra work or buy age-appropriate workbooks to do at home to maintain learning during school breaks.

### READING PRACTICE

- Set a schedule for your child to read for 30 minutes each day. If your child is too young to read, read to them.
- Get library cards for everyone in your family.
- Go to the library and borrow books regularly.

## ***Getting involved at school***

- Attend parent-teacher conferences and other meetings.
- Review your school's "report card" and complete your school's parent survey.
- Volunteer in your child's school. You could go with your child's class on a field trip, join the PTA, or help plan a school event.
- If English is not your first language and you need translation services, request that all of your child's records and school notices be translated into your native language.

## ***Creating an atmosphere of learning***

### TRACK PROGRESS

- Keep a portfolio of your child's best school work to track their progress over the years.

- Develop an incentives chart or contract to reward positive behaviors like following school rules, good study habits, or regular attendance.
- Set consequences or take away privileges for negative behaviors like cutting class, failing to study, or getting in trouble at school.
- Use a communication book or homework log for your child's teacher to initial every day.
- Learn how to log on to ARIS, set up an account, and go online regularly.

#### BE PROUD

- Display your child's grades, tests, stories, awards, or drawings throughout your home.
- Develop your own educational goals and share your accomplishments with your child

#### BE AWARE

- Monitor dates of tests or due dates for big projects. Keep a large calendar with these dates marked visible in your home.
- Create a binder or folder for all of your child's school documents and keep them in order, with the most recent documents on top.
- Get the name and phone number or email address for each of your child's teachers, the parent coordinator, and the school principal.
- Read the Department of Education's "Great Expectations" curriculum for your child's grade and make sure your child is meeting the standards.
- Parents of 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> graders should visit at least 3 schools when applying to high school.

#### ***If your child has special education needs...***

##### INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)

- Go to your child's IEP meeting every year.
- Prepare 3-5 questions that you would like answered at the meeting and make at least 1 suggestion that is incorporated into the IEP.
- If your child is 14 or older, make sure that he or she also attends the IEP meeting.
- Fully understand your child's evaluations and IEP. If you have questions, schedule an appointment to meet with the school social worker or psychologist.

##### HELPING AT HOME

- Ask the school for suggestions on how to accommodate your child's disability at home.
- Attend a workshop on special education or your child's disability.

# Free Tutoring-No Child Left Behind

## Fall Session Information and Important Dates

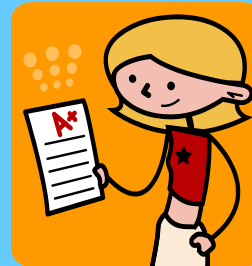
If your child qualifies for free lunch and attends an SES-eligible school, they can receive free tutoring. Students in foster care at eligible schools automatically qualify. Not sure if your child can receive these services? Contact your case worker for more information.

This is a **FREE** tutoring service in math, reading and ELA and parents are encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity! All students can benefit from extra help. Tutoring will take place in a variety of locations, including at schools, community centers and in student's homes.

### How to Apply:

Eligible schools are listed at:

- [http://schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/NCLB/SES/SESEligibleSchools/SES\\_Schools.htm](http://schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/NCLB/SES/SESEligibleSchools/SES_Schools.htm)
- In early September, sign up materials were sent home with children. If your child attends an eligible school and they have not received a packet, contact the school's parent coordinator to get materials.
- SES begins October 19, 2009. Sign up packets must be submitted before tutoring can start.
- Parents have until April 30, 2010 to sign up for SES this academic year.
- SES will continue until June 28, 2010 for this school year.



**Additional Questions?  
Contact Alice Rosenthal  
(212) 822-9539  
[arosenthal@advocatesforchildren.org](mailto:arosenthal@advocatesforchildren.org)**

# Tutoría gratis – Que ningún niño se quede atrás

Información y fechas importantes para la sesión de otoño

*Si su hijo/a califica para recibir el almuerzo gratis y asiste a una escuela de Título I, puede recibir tutoría gratis a través del programa de Servicios educacionales suplementarios (SES, por sus siglas en inglés) de NCLB. Todos los alumnos en escuelas elegibles califican automáticamente.*

*SES es un servicio GRATIS de tutoría en matemáticas, lectura y lenguaje (inglés). Queremos que los padres de familia utilicen esta oportunidad—¡todos los alumnos pueden beneficiarse de una ayuda extra! La tutoría tomará lugar en una variedad de sitios, incluyendo en las escuelas, centros comunitarios y en casa de los alumnos.*

*Cómo solicitar:*

*Las escuelas elegibles aparecen en:*

- [http://schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/NCLB/SES/SESEligibleSchools/SES\\_Schools.htm](http://schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/NCLB/SES/SESEligibleSchools/SES_Schools.htm)
- Durante la primera semana de septiembre de 2009, los materiales de inscripción serán enviados a la casa con los niños. Si su hijo/a asiste a una escuela elegible y no recibe un paquete, contáctese con el coordinador de padres de familia de su escuela para obtener los materiales.
- SES empieza el 19 de octubre de 2009. Los paquetes de inscripción tienen que ser entregados antes de poder empezar a asistir a la tutoría.
- Los padres tienen hasta el 30 de abril de 2010 para inscribir a su(s) hijo(s)/a(s) en SES para este año lectivo.
- SES sigue hasta el 28 de junio de 2010 para este año lectivo.



*¿Tiene preguntas adicionales?*

**Llame a Arlen Benjamin-Gómez al 212-822-9521, a Marcia Del Ríos al 212-822-9575, o a Alice Rosenthal al 212-822-9539 en Abogados para niños (Advocates for Children)  
Por favor también refiérase a su asistente social.**

## **Appendix K**

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### **Sample Training Curricula**

## Sample Parent Workshop Curriculum

### Handouts

- Advocates for Children (AFC) Brochure
- Project Achieve flyer
- Alphabet Soup
- Education Calendar
- High School borough fairs flyer
- Parent teacher conferences info sheet
- Special education guidebook (available at:  
[http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/guide\\_to\\_special\\_ed.pdf?pt=1](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/guide_to_special_ed.pdf?pt=1))

### Introductions

- What is Advocates for Children? (refer to brochure)
  - Intro to Project Achieve and New Yorkers for Children grant (refer to flyer)
  - Outline of presentation, parking lot, questions

### Icebreaker – Alphabet Soup

- Distribute Alphabet Soup index cards
- Pass out cheat sheet after the activity

### Announcements

- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – SES tutoring
  - October 17 – Nov. 4: turn in SES forms to schools or providers
  - November 7 – SES begins
- High School Applications
  - Last day to register with guidance counselors for specialized high school test – tomorrow! October 12
  - October 22-23<sup>rd</sup>, borough high school fairs (refer to flyer)
  - Specialized high school assessment – Oct. 29-30 and Nov. 5
  - Dec. 2 – high school applications due
- Middle School Applications
  - November – applications go out to families
  - Dec. 16 – applications due
- Parent Teacher Conferences (refer to handout)

### School Stability and transportation

- Background – effects of school mobility
- Fostering Connections 2008 law
  - When a child comes into care or moves between foster homes, agencies must ensure that children remain in the same school unless it is not in their *best interest* to do so
  - If it is in a child's best interest to change schools, must immediately be enrolled in an appropriate placement, with records transferred from old school
- Transportation – how does the child get back to the old school?
  - Special education bussing – often can go to neighboring school districts

- McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
  - awaiting foster care placement

### Special Education

- Review
  - IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
  - Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) , Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- Activity - The Special Education Process
- Activity - The Continuum of Services
- Due Process Remedies – pass out special education guidebooks

Collect evaluations



# Project Achieve



*Do you work with youth having difficulties with school?*

## **Project Achieve can help!**

Project Achieve at Advocates for Children\* provides the following **free assistance** to students in foster care ages 12-21 who are experiencing problems obtaining appropriate education services:

- ❖ **INDIVIDUAL CASE ASSISTANCE**
- ❖ **WORKSHOPS**
- ❖ **LEGAL REPRESENTATION**

We can answer any questions you may have about:

- School Enrollment and Transfers
- Special Education
- Suspensions and Discipline
- Alternative High School programs
- Other School-Related Matters

### Contact:

**Erika Palmer**

212-822-9504

[epalmer@advocatesforchildren.org](mailto:epalmer@advocatesforchildren.org)

**Tamika Edwards**

212-822-9543

[tedwards@advocatesforchildren.org](mailto:tedwards@advocatesforchildren.org)

\*Thanks to the generous support of New Yorkers For Children, AFC's Project Achieve can provide education advocacy to adolescents in or transitioning from foster care in New York City. AFC works on behalf of children who are at greatest risk for school-based discrimination and/or academic failure in the New York City public schools. For more information on AFC, visit: [www.advocatesforchildren.org](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org)

## **Parent Workshop Activities**

### **Icebreaker: Alphabet Soup**

Materials required: Alphabet Soup index cards

*Ask the group if they are familiar with acronyms within the child welfare context, (i.e., ACS for Administration for Children's Services), then solicit other examples from the group. Ask for a few examples of acronyms for educational terms that they may have heard in schools (i.e., IEP for Individualized Education Program). Explain that the first activity is meant to familiarize the group with educational jargon, to help facilitate discussion for the rest of the workshop and at school meetings they have in the future.*

*Place the index cards in the center of the table, or post them on a wall or board. Each of the cards will have an education-related acronym on it. Ask the participants to take a card from the set if they know what the acronym stands for and/or are familiar with what the term means. Give them 30 seconds to gather as many cards as they can. Then, go around the room and ask participants what their acronyms stand for. If they aren't sure, let another participant help them out. The facilitator should explain any unclaimed index cards at the end. Then pass out the "Alphabet Soup" handout with the answers.*

### **Activity 1: The Special Education Process**

Materials required: Special Education placards

*Ask for 7 volunteers to come to the front of the room, and give each of them one of the 7 placards. Explain that each of the placards represents a step in the special education process. The group's task is to arrange the volunteers in the correct order to illustrate the steps of the special education process.*

Answer Key:

- Intervention Services
- Referral
- Consent to Evaluations
- Evaluations
- IEP Meeting
- Placement Recommendation
- Consent to Placement

### **Activity 2: The Special Education Continuum**

Materials required: Special Education Continuum Foam Boards  
Matching index cards with Velcro

*For this activity, the group should divide up into two or three teams. This activity involves placing the various special education settings, represented by the labeled index card, along the service continuum, from the least restrictive to the most restrictive setting. Facilitators should emphasize that special education is not a "place," but a continuum of services, and that a student's program should be*

*comprised of a mix of classroom settings if that is appropriate for the student. District 75 inclusion should be mentioned as another alternative that does not fit squarely within the traditional continuum.*

Answer Key:    General Education with Supplemental Aids and Services  
                  Integrated Co-Teaching, or ICT (formerly Collaborative Team Teaching, or CTT)  
                  Special Class in a Community School (self-contained classroom)  
                  Special Class in a Special School (District 75)  
                  State-Approved Non-Public School  
                  Residential Placement  
                  Home Instruction

# Alphabet Soup

- AIS** – Academic Intervention Services
- ARIS** – Achievement Reporting and Innovation System
- BIP** – Behavior Intervention Plan
- CFN** – Children First Network
- CPSE** – Committee on Preschool Special Education
- CSE** – Committee on Special Education
- DFA** – District Family Advocate
- DOE** – Department of Education
- EI** – Early Intervention
- ELL** – English Language Learner
- FAPE** – Free Appropriate Public Education
- FBA** – Functional Behavior Assessment
- ICT** – Integrated Co-Teaching
- IDEA** – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- IEP** – Individualized Education Program
- IFSP** – Individualized Family Service Plan
- LD** – Learning Disability
- LRE** – Least Restrictive Environment
- MDR** – Manifestation Determination Review
- OPT** – Office of Pupil Transportation
- RSA** – Related Services Authorization
- SBST** – School Based Support Team
- SETSS** – Special Education Teacher Support Services



# School Events Calendar

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>September</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School starts!</li> <li>• Registration continues for new students</li> <li>• SES applications for free No Child Left Behind tutoring go out at eligible schools early in the month</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>October</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> week of Oct: High school applications distributed</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Oct: Middle school directories distributed</li> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> Sat. of Oct: first date for the Specialized High School Exam</li> <li>• Oct. 28 &amp; 29: Parent Teacher Conferences for high schools</li> <li>• Gifted and Talented applications available for current pre-K – 2<sup>nd</sup> graders and 5<sup>th</sup> graders</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>November</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nov. 9 &amp; 10: Parent Teacher Conferences for elementary schools</li> <li>• Nov. 15 &amp; 16: Parent Teacher Conferences for middle schools</li> <li>• Mid-Nov: Gifted and Talented applications due for pre-K – 2<sup>nd</sup></li> <li>• Turning 5 orientation for families of 4 yr olds receiving special education services</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>December</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> week of Dec: High school applications due</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> week of Dec: Middle school applications due</li> <li>• Turning 5 orientations continue</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>January</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jan. 10: Kindergarten application period begins</li> <li>• Last week of Jan.: Regents and RCT Exams week for HS students</li> <li>• Jan. 28: Round 2 of SES applications due (for free tutoring)</li> <li>• Research summer camps for children with special needs</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>February</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feb. 16 &amp; 17: Parent Teacher Conferences for middle schools</li> <li>• New small high schools fairs &amp; applications for 8th graders</li> <li>• Begin charter school applications</li> <li>• Specialized HS acceptance letters</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>March</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mar. 4: Kindergarten applications due</li> <li>• Mar. 15 &amp; 16: Parent Teacher Conferences for elementary schools</li> <li>• Mar. 17 &amp; 18: Parent Teacher Conferences for high schools</li> <li>• High school acceptance letters sent</li> <li>• Specialized HS Institute applications due (for current 6th graders)</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>April</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apr. 1: Charter school applications due</li> <li>• High School Supplementary Round – applications due</li> <li>• Turning 5 IEP meetings (Mar. – May)</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May 4-6: State ELA exams, grades 3-8</li> <li>• May 11-13: State Math exams, grades 3-8</li> <li>• May 27: HS supplementary round acceptance letters go out</li> <li>• Middle school acceptance letters distributed</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>June</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• June 6: NYS Science exam, grades 4 &amp; 8</li> <li>• June 15: kindergarten placements due for 4-5 year olds receiving special education services</li> <li>• June 15-24: Regents and RCT Exam week for HS students</li> <li>• Summer school notifications arrive</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>July</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summer school beings</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>August</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registration for new students begins at the end of this month</li> </ul>

# **Parent Teacher Conferences Fall 2010**

## **Elementary Schools**

Wednesday, November 10 - Evening

Tuesday, November 9 - Afternoon

## **Intermediate and Junior High Schools**

Monday, November 15 - Evening

Tuesday, November 16 - Afternoon

## **High Schools**

Thursday, October 28 -

Evening

Friday, October 29 -

Afternoon

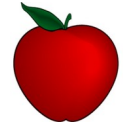


## **District 75 Programs**

Wednesday, November 3 - Evening

Thursday, November 4 - Afternoon

## 15 Questions to ask at Parent Teacher Conferences



Is my child working to his ability?

What are my child's strengths and weaknesses?

What skills will my child be expected to master this year in math, English, science and social studies?

How are grades determined ?

Which, if any, standardized tests will be administered this year?

What is my child like in class?

How does my child interact with other children?

Does my child participate in classroom activities?

Does my child understand what she has read?

Can she express her thoughts and ideas clearly?

How is my child progressing academically?

Does my child obey school rules?

How much time should my child be spending on his homework?

Is there anything that I can share with you about what my child's like at home?

What can I do to support my child's learning at home?



# Alternative Education



**PRESENTED BY:  
CMS EDUCATION UNIT  
MARCH 2, 2012**



# When to consider alternative programs...



- Typically when the student is over-age and under-credited.
- The student has not made much progress in traditional high school and he/she has exhausted support services at the school.
- The student does not have extensive special needs

# Transfer Schools



- Small high schools, usually for students ages 16-21, located in each borough that feature small classes and wrap around services
- Many transfer schools have credit recovery programs.
- To qualify, students must have been in high school for at least one year. Each school has its own admissions policies, including the number of credits and Regents required.
- To apply: contact the transfer schools directly. Typically students must fill out an application and attend an interview.

# Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs)



- An evening academic program for high school students who are behind in credits or have adult responsibilities.
- Students must be at least 17.5 years, have been in high school for 4 or more years, and have 17 or more credits.
- Students must be enrolled in a high school ; their guidance counselor should fill out part of the application.
- Students receive their regular high school diploma (Regents or local diploma) from the high school they are registered in

# GED Programs



- The DOE runs many full and part-time GED programs for students 17.5 years old and older.
- Most GED programs require an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. Students reading at a 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade level or above may enroll in a pre-GED program. Students with lower reading levels may enroll in a literacy program.
- To be placed into a GED program students must go to a referral center. They are located in all 5 boroughs. The referral center will facilitate the TABE (the placement test).
- Finally, the student will be placed in an appropriate GED program, according to his/her TABE score and future plans.

# GED Programs for College Bound Students



- **ACCESS GED**

- A full-day GED program that provides students unable to finish traditional high school with a high school atmosphere while they are studying for their GED.
- Students must complete a portfolio to “graduate” that includes a personal essay, a piece of work and other things necessary to applying to college.
- ACCESS GED programs are found in downtown Brooklyn and mid-town Manhattan.

# GED Programs for College Bound Students



- CUNY Prep
  - A GED program sponsored by CUNY for students between 16-18 who left traditional high school. CUNY Prep helps students pass their GED and prepares them for college.
  - Provides a college-prep curriculum with extra services to make sure that students not only make it to college but also succeed. This includes tutoring for the CUNY entrance exam and the College Success Network, which continues to follow students through their first few years at college.

# The Academy



- A program sponsored by FECS designed especially for students in foster care. The Academy is designed to help young people achieve their educational goals and prepare personally and professionally for the workforce.
- Services include: tutoring, homework assistance, GED classes, job readiness training, job shadowing, internships and job placement, post-secondary educational training, mentoring, and counseling.
- Each student is matched with a Youth Advisor who works closely with the student to devise an educational plan.
- The Academy believes that students in foster care deserve a stable school environment and has a “no reject, no eject” policy where students are always accepted and never asked to leave.

# Co-op Tech



- A DOE program that allows students to learn technical and trade skills. After attending Co-op Tech, students have marketable skills to enter the workforce.
  - ✦ Programs include: Early Childhood, Computer Repair, Building Superintendents Academy, Carpentry, Plumbing, Welding, Automotive Mechanics, Culinary Arts, and Unisex Hairstyling and Salon Services.
  - ✦ Many students are able to get the licenses necessary to work in that field.
- Students (ages 16-21) must be enrolled in a DOE high school or GED program for half of the day and will attend Co-op Tech the other half of the day. Youth under the age of 21, who have already earned their GED or high school diploma, are still eligible to attend.
- For more information or to apply visit <http://www.co-optech.org>.



# Other Vocational Programs



- Learning to Work (LTW)
  - A program in which students are able to explore potential careers and learn job readiness skills.
  - Found in most transfer high schools, YABCs and GED programs
  - LTW offers academic and student support, career and educational exploration, work preparation, skills development, and internships.

# Other Vocational Programs



- **ACCESS -VR (formerly VESID)**
  - Program for adults with physical, mental and learning disabilities
  - Provides transition services from school to adulthood
  - Offers vocational counseling and helps place adults into jobs within their communities
  - Most appropriate for adults with disabilities who can work independently after getting training
  - To apply in the Bronx, attend an orientation session which takes place on Mondays at 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. Call 718-931-3500 to schedule an appointment

# Other Vocational Programs



## • Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD)

- Program for people with developmental disabilities that occurred before age 22, i.e. mental retardation, Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism, etc.
- Provides service coordination, supported employment services, residential facilities, and other services to support individuals with disabilities and their families
- Appropriate for lower-functioning individuals
- Obtain applications from <http://www.opwdd.ny.gov> (Required to submit evaluations – psychological and psychosocial - to determine eligibility)

# Schooling for Court-Involved Youth



- Students released from detention in NYC
  - When a student returns to the community, Passages Academy is responsible for re-enrolling that student in the last school he or she attended
  - If a student would prefer to transfer to another school, contact the Borough Enrollment Office for assistance
- Students returning from OCFS
  - Students in high school must go to the Borough Enrollment Office when they return home to be re-enrolled in a community school
- Transfer of Credits
  - Passages should award students  $\frac{1}{4}$  credits for every 23 days of completed work. Students should keep a record of their credits.
  - While students may earn credits in OCFS, it is at the discretion of community school principals how many credits students returning are actually awarded.

## **Sample Youth Workshop Curriculum “Movin’ On Up: Getting to Graduation”**

### **Handouts**

- Quiz
- Know Your Rights brochure
- HS Promotion and Graduation Requirements Info Sheet

### **Workshop Outline**

- I. Introductions
  - A. Project Achieve staff
  - B. Group Introductions – Name and school program
  - C. Overview of session and ground rules
  
- II. Essential School Rights
  - A. Take quiz; go over answers together
  - B. Review remaining rights (pass out brochure)
    1. Point out Extra Help, emphasize speaking up to school, agency
    2. Special Education and Accommodations; GED as well as school exams
    3. Co-op Tech and Learning To Work; Job Corps; AmeriCorps, City Year
    4. Websites – youthsuccesstnyc
    5. AFC contact info (me)
  
- III. Video – “Set Up”
  - A. Have you ever thought about dropping out of school? What made you want to drop out?
  - B. What do you think is the difference between “drop out” and “push-out?”
  - C. Do you agree with the boy who says that he’s a drop out because he’s getting a GED?
  - D. Do you think that if a parent didn’t finish high school, their child won’t finish either?
  - E. What can you do to make sure that you don’t drop out, or get pushed out, of school? What can parents or the agency do to encourage students to graduate?
  
- IV. High School Promotion and Graduation Requirements
  - A. Cover high school promotion standards (refer to handout)
  - B. Activity – Getting to Graduation
    1. Review transcript (refer to handout)
    2. Discuss Summary
    3. Complete questions
  
- V. Wrap-Up
  - A. Reviewing your rights – Order in the Court!
  - B. Activity – Graduation Jeopardy!
  - C. Final Questions
  - D. Evaluations

# POP QUIZ!

## TRUE/ FALSE

1. An 18-year-old student with 2 credits has the right to attend high school. T F
2. If a student moves to a new school district within New York City, he or she must enroll in a school closer to home. T F
3. Special education students must pass their Regents exams to graduate from high school. T F
4. A student who is pregnant or raising a child has the right to go to school full-time. T F

## MULTIPLE CHOICE

5. What is a valid reason for getting a school transfer?
  - a. You are failing most of your classes
  - b. You broke your leg and need a school that is wheelchair accessible
  - c. It takes you an hour each way to get to school
6. Which of the following is NOT a reason that a school can discharge a student?
  - a. The student, who is over 18, signed himself out of school
  - b. The student has repeatedly been suspended
  - c. The student is over 17 and has over 20 absences in a row
7. Which of the following is NOT a high school diploma?
  - a. Regents Diploma
  - b. Local Diploma
  - c. IEP Diploma
8. A 16-year-old could enroll in which of these programs?
  - a. YABC
  - b. Transfer high school
  - c. GED program

### **Activity 1 – Getting to Graduation**

Francisco attends Mercy First High School. He is in his fourth year of high school and is 18 years old. As you can see from his transcript, he has not passed all of his classes.

**What grade is Francisco in?**

**How many credits does Francisco need to graduate?**

**Are there particular classes that he needs?**

**Is there anything else Francisco needs to do to graduate?**

**How long do you think this will take him?**

**If Francisco were your friend, what advice would you give him? What options does he have?**

## Activity 2: Order in the Court!

How many people like to argue? How many of you usually win your arguments? I have 3 cases, each involving a student. For each case, I'm going to choose someone to make an argument for the student and someone to make the argument against the student. I will be the judge, and make a decision based on whose argument is more convincing.

*For each scenario, choose a lawyer for the student and a lawyer for the defendant. Read each scenario, then ask each person to play the role s/he is assigned.*

### Scenario #1

- Shaneekwa is sixteen years old but will be 17 on Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>
- She feels that once she turns 17 she should be able to make her own decisions about her life, including her education
- She tells her caseworker that the morning after her seventeenth birthday she's sleeping in late and doesn't plan on going back to school

Should she be allowed to make this decision? What should the school do if she does?

### Scenario #2

- Assume Shaneekwa stops going to school on Jan. 2<sup>nd</sup>, but her caseworker eventually talks her into going back to school
- She decides to go back on Jan. 13<sup>th</sup>, but discovers that she has been discharged
- The Dean tells her to go home because she can no longer attend school

Is this legal?

### Scenario #3

- Steve is 14-years-old and in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- He earned 6.5 credits the first semester and passed all of his classes
- In April, he missed three weeks of school because he changed foster homes, had trouble re-enrolling, and didn't have a uniform
- Since moving to the new home, he's been about 30 minutes late to school because he has a hard time waking up early
- In June, the Dean tells him that he has to repeat the 9<sup>th</sup> grade because of his absences and tardiness, and that he should really go to another school that can better meet his needs

Should Steve have to repeat the 9<sup>th</sup> grade? Is it legal for the Dean to force him to attend another school?



## GRADUATION JEOPARDY

- 100 Students who earn 44 credits and pass 8 Regents exams can get this type of diploma.  
*What is an Advanced Regents Diploma?*
- 200 This type of school is for students who have been enrolled in high school for at least one year and are behind in credits for their age.  
*What is a transfer school?*
- 300 This academic program is the best option for someone over 17 who needs to go to school in the evening.  
*What is a Young Adult Borough Center (YABC)?*
- 400 A student who is over 17 can be discharged if he or she has this many unexcused absences in a row.  
*What are 20?*
- 500 A student must have at least this many credits to enroll in a YABC.  
*What is 17?*
- 600 Students who want to pass this exam, which requires a minimum score in five subject areas, should have at least an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and 7<sup>th</sup> grade math level.  
*What is the GED?*
- 700 Students in special education (with IEPs) may pass these exams, instead of their Regents, and earn a local diploma.  
*What are the RRCTs? (\$200 bonus if they can tell us what RCT stands for)*
- 800 Students attending a YABC will receive a diploma from this high school upon graduation.  
*What is their home high school?*
- 900 This program, located in many transfer schools, YABCs, and GED programs, helps students learn career planning, job search, and employment skills.  
*What is Learning to Work?*
- 1000 A student who wants to apply to a transfer school needs to do at least these 3 things.  
*What are 1) fill out an application; 2) get his/her records, including transcript; 3 )go to an interview( and diagnostic exam)*

**Final Jeopardy** Name three places where students who are struggling academically can receive help.  
*Local library, Community-based organizations, foster care agencies, after school (more specific answers are acceptable as well).*

## Advocacy Tips



- Read everything before you sign it! Don't sign anything you don't understand, and always keep copies.
- Get a folder and keep your education records together. If you don't have your education records, get them.
- When talking to people in the Department of Education, the Court System, or other city agencies, write down their name and phone number and some notes about what you discussed. You may need to get in touch with them later.
- Always be polite, but make sure you are being heard. If you feel yourself getting upset, step away and take a break.
- Ask questions when you need more information or something explained a second time. Never be afraid to ask for help.

**Remember, you can be your own best advocate!**

### Advocates for Children of NY

151 West 30th Street, 5th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
Phone: (212) 947-9779  
Fax: (212) 947-9790  
[www.advocatesforchildren.org](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org)



Check us out on Facebook!

## Contacts

### A Few Good Websites

<http://www.youthsuccessnyc.org/>

Resources for and stories by youth in foster care

[http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/support\\_youth/support\\_youth.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/support_youth/support_youth.shtml)

Announcements about ACS housing, employment, finance, and other programs for youth

<http://www.nycareerzone.org/>

Career exploration based on your personal strengths and interests

<http://www.insideschools.org>

Read reviews of NYC schools, or post your own!

<http://www.acces.nysed.gov/vr/>

Free vocational training/counseling for people with disabilities

<http://www.casey.org/Youth/>

National website with resources for and stories by young people in foster care

### Need Help?

If you are having trouble in school or need a different school setting, don't be afraid to ask for help. Tell your caseworker, your attorney, or your foster parent. ACS also has an Education Unit that can help; you can find the phone numbers for the people who work there at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/education/home.html>.

Advocates for Children helps students get the services they need to succeed in school. **If you are a student in foster care and need help with school, please contact Erika Palmer by phone or email.**

Phone: (212) 822-9504

Email: [epalmer@advocatesforchildren.org](mailto:epalmer@advocatesforchildren.org)

ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN  
OF NEW YORK, INC.

Knowledge is  
Power

A Guide to the  
Educational Rights  
of New York City  
Students



# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

## Push-out

You have the right to be in high school until you graduate or through age 21, whichever comes first. You cannot be asked to leave school because you're too old for your grade or you don't have enough credits. If you do leave school, you have the right to go back at any time until you're 21.



**You have the RIGHT to be in school until age twenty-one!**

## Discipline

You cannot be suspended, kicked out, or excluded from school without written notice to your foster parent or caseworker and a chance to tell your side of the story. Suspensions for more than 5 days require a full hearing. Whenever you are suspended, you have the right to get your class work and take your tests, including your Regents or RCTs.

## Transfers

You have the right to stay in the same school or transfer to a closer school when you come into foster care or move between foster homes. You have the right to voice your opinion about school, so speak up! You also have the right to request a transfer for safety or medical reasons.

## Pregnant and Parenting Teens

Girls who become pregnant have the right to stay in their school during their pregnancy and after giving birth. You cannot be excluded from school or school activities just because you're pregnant. You also have the right to medical accommodations as long as you have paperwork from your doctor. The Department of Education offers free daycare for parenting students at LYFE centers, located in some schools. You do not need to attend these schools to use the LYFE center.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Students must earn 44 credits and pass 5 Regents exams to graduate from high school. To get an Advanced Regents Diploma, students need 8 Regents and 3 years of a foreign language. Students who get special education services who have trouble passing their Regents exams have the option of getting a local diploma if they earn 44 credits and pass 6 Regents Competency Tests (RCTs).

## Extra Help

You have the right to extra help in school if you need it. If you are struggling with your class work, attendance, or controlling your behavior, you have the right to extra tutoring, help managing your behavior, or counseling services.

## Special Education

If you have a disability, you have the right to special services and accommodations to help you in school. This includes accommodations on tests, like your Regents, RCTs, SATs or ACTs. You also have the right to receive all of the services on your Individualized Education Program (IEP). If those services aren't working, or if you think you're not in the right placement, you have the right to be re-tested to get a new placement or services.

## College

All students who are in foster care, or who were in foster care when they were 16, have the right to an Educational Training Voucher (ETV) to help pay for college or vocational training. If you go away to college, you have the right to housing and food on campus paid for by ACS, at least until you turn 21 years old. You also may qualify for financial aid or scholarships. Talk to your caseworker or Independent Living department to make sure all of your paperwork is filled out on time.

## Alternative Schools

Don't like your community high school? Feel like you need more attention or are too old for the classes you're in? Traditional high schools don't work for everyone, so you don't have to stay — there are alternatives!

## Transfer Schools

These schools serve older students who have been in high school for at least one year and are behind in credits. Many transfer schools help you catch up by earning credits more quickly. They also have smaller classes and can offer more attention to students.

## Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs)

YABCs are evening programs designed for students who can't go to class during the day. Students must be at least 17 and a half, have 17 or more credits, and have been in high school for at least 4 years to be eligible.

## GED Programs

The Department of Education and many community-based programs have GED classes designed specifically for young people. Typically, you have to be at least 18 and pass an entrance test. The GED is not an easy test or a quick fix, so make sure you are prepared to do the necessary work.

## Co-op Tech

Co-op Tech is a technical school for students who want to learn a trade like cooking, computer programming or electronics. Students attend their home high school for part of the day and Co-op Tech for the rest of the day.

## Learning To Work

Learning to Work is a career exploration and job training program offered at many transfer high schools, YABCs, and GED programs.

For more information on any of these programs, talk to your guidance counselor or go to: <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/AlternativesHS/>



# High School Promotion and Graduation Requirements

For more information about promotions, see Chancellor's Regulation A-501, available on the Department of Education's website, <http://schools.nyc.gov>.

## The criteria for promotion from each grade are:

### Grade 9

- Earn at least 8 credits
- 90% Attendance
- Successfully complete standards in academic subject areas

### Grade 10

- Have at least 20 total credits, including
  - 4 in English/ESL
  - 4 in Social Studies
- 90% Attendance
- Meet NYC Performance Standards in Language Arts, Math, and Science

### Grade 11

- Have at least 30 total credits
- 90% Attendance
- Successfully complete standards in academic subject areas

## To Graduate:

- **Requirement of 44 credits**
  - 8 in English
  - 8 in Social Studies (4 in Global History, 2 in American History, 1 in Economics, 1 in Government)
  - 6 in Math
  - 6 in Science (2 in Life Science, 2 in Physical Sciences, 2 additional in Life Science or Physical Science)
  - 2 in Second Language
  - 2 in Visual Art, Music, Dance, and/or Theater
  - 5 in Health and Physical Education (4 in Physical Education, 1 in Health Education)
  - 7 in Elective Areas
- **Passing grades (65 or above) on 5 Regents exams**
  - English, Math, Global History, U.S. History, and Science
  - Regents exams are offered in January, June and August

### **Advanced Regents Diploma Requirements**

- Earn 44 credits
  - 6 must be in a language other than English
- Score a 65 or above on at least 8 Regents exams
  - Additional exams in Math, Science, and Foreign Language



### **Special Education**

- If you are a special education student, you most likely will be held to these standards. You also may earn a local diploma if you score a 55 to a 64 on your Regents exams. If you cannot pass a Regents and you entered high school before 2011, you can pass the Regents Competency Test (RCT) in that subject area to earn a local diploma.
- Students whose IEPs say that they will participate in alternate assessments will not be held to these promotion standards.



Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.  
151 W. 30th Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10001  
212-947-9779 phone · 212-947-9790 fax  
Jill Chaifetz Education Helpline: 866-427-6033



Student Transcript



LAW GOVT & COMMUNITY SERVICE

Name / ID: ██████████ / ██████████  
 Address: ██████████ ASTORIA NY 11106  
 Gender: M Ofc: L71 Grade Level: █████ Status: A  
 Admit Date: 07/02/2007 Discharge Date:  
 DOB: ██████████ Graduation Date:  
 Rank: Counselor: MAST MCTIER

Message Area

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Term Avg: 60.63% Term: Actual Credits / Credits Earned: 13.00 / 17.00  
 Term Credits Averaged: 8.00

**2009 / Term: 1**

		Actual Mark	Numeric Eq	
29Q494	E5PPM	55	55	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	ERP@	CR*		1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	HG1PM	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	MG21M	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	MGL1	70	70	0.50 / 0.50
29Q494	PA1	75*	75	0.50 / 0.50
29Q494	SL1	55	55	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	SL1L	F	55	0.00 / 0.00
29Q494	SRP@	NC*		1.00 /
29Q494	STF1	50	50	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	TCA1	65	65	0.50 / 0.50

Term Avg: 59.58% Term: Actual Credits / Credits Earned: 8.50 / 14.50  
 Term Credits Averaged: 6.00

**2008 / Term: 2**

		Actual Mark	Numeric Eq	
29Q494	E4PPM	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	FSC2	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	HG4PM	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	HLCV	55	55	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	MA44M	55	55	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	P\$1	55*	55	0.50 / 0.00
29Q494	SL2LM	55	55	1.00 / 0.00

Term Avg: 60.00% Term: Actual Credits / Credits Earned: 6.50 / 10.00  
 Term Credits Averaged: 6.50

**2008 / Term: 1**

		Actual Mark	Numeric Eq	
29Q494	E3PPM	55	55	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	ERP1M	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	FSCA	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	HG3PM	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	MA43M	50	50	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	P\$1	55*	55	0.50 / 0.00
29Q494	S\$P	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	SL1LM	55	55	1.00 / 0.00

Term Avg: 60.00% Term: Actual Credits / Credits Earned: 7.50 / 12.00  
 Term Credits Averaged: 7.00

**2007 / Term: 1**

		Actual Mark	Numeric Eq	
29Q494	E1PPM	55*	55	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	E2PPM	55	55	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	ER1PM	75*	75	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	ER2PM	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	HU6PM	65*	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	HU6PM	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	ME21M	65	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	ME22M	75	75	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	P\$SW	55*	55	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	PH1PM	65*	65	1.00 / 1.00
29Q494	PH2PM	55	55	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	SL1PM	55	55	1.00 / 0.00
29Q494	SL2PM	50	50	1.00 / 0.00

**Exam Summary**

Year	Term	Course	Grade
2009	Term 1	EXRL	ELA REG 30
2009	Term 1	MXRE	ALGEBRA REG 36
2008	Term 2	RCTG	RCT GLOBAL F
2008	Term 2	RCTH	RCT USHIST ABS
2008	Term 2	RCTM	RCT MATH 3B
2008	Term 2	RCTS	RCT SCI F
2008	Term 1	HXR\$	GLOBHISTRG ABS
2008	Term 1	HXRA	USHIST REG 16
2008	Term 1	RCTG	RCT GLOBAL F
2008	Term 1	RCTH	RCT USHIST F
2008	Term 1	RCTM	RCT MATH F
2008	Term 1	RCTR	RCT READ F
2008	Term 1	RCTS	RCT SCI F
2008	Term 1	RCTW	RCT WRITE ABS
2007	Term 1	HXRA2	USHIST REG 21
2007	Term 1	RCTH	RCT USHIST F

Cumulative Average: 60.09% Cumulative Credits Averaged: 27.00  
 Cumulative: Actual Credits / Credits Earned: 35.50 / 18.50

\* Not Averaged \*\* Weighted Courses

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Agency \_\_\_\_\_

## Project Achieve Educational Rights Workshop

1. I understand my educational rights better than I did before the workshop.  
a) agree                      b) neither agree nor disagree                      c) disagree
  
2. I learned new ways to advocate for myself regarding my education.  
a) agree                      b) neither agree nor disagree                      c) disagree
  
3. I learned new ways to get the help that I need in school.  
a) agree                      b) neither agree nor disagree                      c) disagree

4. What did you like most about the workshop?

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5. What did you like least about the workshop?

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6. What suggestions do you have for improvements or other topics we should present on?

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**Thank you for your feedback!**