

A Guide to Improve Educational Opportunities for Florida's Foster Youth

Youth in "out of home" care have the right to a free, appropriate and high quality education guaranteed by the Florida Constitution as well as several state and federal laws, including the recently enacted Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.

The following basic goals and specific actions to accomplish the goals in education of youth in out of home care are established as the departments' goals and actions.

1. Educational Stability

Summary of Problem

Youth in state care frequently move to a new home and each move typically results in a change in school. Not only does a youth have to adjust to the new curriculum and learning environment, but may not receive credit for work already completed, resulting in lower grades, lower test scores, grade retention and potentially dropping out of school. A youth must also develop new relationships with teachers, administrators and peers, creating further instability in the youth's life. Multiple school transfers can also prevent or interrupt the provision of special education services.

Data

A 2005 OPPAGA report found that during the 2003-2004 school year, 38% of Florida's youth in care changed schools at least once, compared to 7% of the general population. Office of Program Policy and Government Accountability (Dec. 2005). Report No. 05-61, *Improvements in Independent Living Services Will Better Assist State's Struggling Youth*. Youth lose up to six months of education each time they change schools. Yu, E. Day & Williams, M. (2002). *Improving educational outcomes for youth in care: A national collaboration (background paper)*. DCF League of Am. Press. A national study found that youth who had one fewer placement change per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before leaving care. National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, *Educational Outcomes for Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care* (September 2007).

Goal 1: Youth should remain in their same school when in their best interests. When a youth is first moved into shelter care, DCF should ensure that he or she remains in the home school whenever possible. When a youth is placed into foster care, his or her case plan should include a plan for ensuring his or her educational stability while in foster care. As part of this case plan, the Community Based Care agency should include assurances that:

- *the placement of the youth in foster care takes into account the appropriateness of the current educational setting and the proximity to the school in which the youth is enrolled at the time of placement; and*

- *the CBC agency has coordinated with appropriate local educational agencies to determine if the youth can remain in the school in which the youth is enrolled at the time of placement.*

Suggested Actions

- a. DCF: Before transferring any youth to a new school, assess whether the move is in the youth's best interests and ask the school of origin whether remaining in the same school is feasible and advocate for the youth remaining in the school of origin when that is in the youth's best interests.
- b. DCF: If placement into shelter care is necessary, attempt to place youth in homes close to their current school. When this is not possible, work with the shelter care parents and the school district to keep the youth in the current school.
- c. DCF: If the youth is moved while in care, attempt to keep the youth in a new home near the current school or seek transportation options to keep the youth in the same school.
- d. DCF: Examine new expansion of uses of Title IV-E funding to include school transportation.
- e. School Districts and DCF: Coordinate to provide transportation for youth in care.
- f. School Districts and DCF: Collaborate to recruit shelter homes and foster homes from the local school community, including school parents, employees and partners.
- g. School Districts: Allow youth to remain in the same school if at all feasible. Consult with the local McKinney-Vento coordinator and check to see if the youth has an IEP that would dictate placement.
- h. FLDOE: Amend the State's McKinney-Vento Plan to expressly include youth who find themselves with no permanent home due to entry into the dependency system.
- i. School Districts: Use McKinney-Vento or Title I funds to provide transportation for youth in care, or seek other resources for this important education related service.

2. Seamless Transition Between Schools (Regardless of School District)

Summary of Problem

The diminished educational and emotional progress caused by changing schools is magnified when the transfer does not happen smoothly. Sometimes there are delays in enrollment, caused by not having or failure to transfer school or immunization records. Other issues include lack of required school uniforms or other supplies. Unfortunately, sometimes apathy among foster parents and caseworkers leads to delays in enrollment. Youth are also impacted when schools have different schedules or graduation requirements which without special attention cause youth to lose credits and fall behind.

School records are sometimes lost or incomplete. Compounding those problems are jurisdictional fights over which school district is responsible for the education of the youth when the youth is removed from a home in one District and placed in a home in another District.

Data

The Broward County School District found that 12% of students in care were not enrolled in school by the 20th day of the school year. After an extensive campaign to apprise DCF and school system staff of ways to resolve the problem, 98% of youth were enrolled by the 20th day of the following school year.

School policies may hinder the transfer of prior school records and prevent immediate enrollment of youth in out-of-home care when enrollment documents are not forthcoming. Studies in Pennsylvania, New York, and California have found that gaining access to prior school records is a serious barrier to school access for youth in care, resulting in significant enrollment delays. *Patricia Julianelle, J.D. (November 2008.) The McKinney-Vento Act and Youth and Youth Awaiting Foster Care Placemen: Strategies for Improving Educational Outcomes Through School Stability. Published by The National Association for the Education of Homeless Youth and Youth.*

Goal 2.: If remaining in the same school is not in the best interest of the youth, the case plan should provide for immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school and provide all of the educational records of the youth to the new school making any move a seamless transition, whether between schools or school districts.

Suggested Actions

- a. DCF and School Districts: Share information to ensure that schools identify youth in care and DCF officials have school records, while ensuring that youth's privacy is protected.
- b. DCF: Change schools only during the end of a marking period or school term. If the change is between one school with block scheduling and one without, change schools only at the end of a full semester.
- c. DCF: Enroll youth in school immediately.
- d. DCF: Maintain complete school records for youth in state care.
- e. School Districts: Enroll youth in state care immediately even if they do not have all necessary paperwork.
- f. School Districts: Ensure evaluations are completed and special education services are provided to youth with disabilities.
- g. FLDOE: Set statewide policy directing which District is responsible for paying for the education of a youth when the youth is moved between Districts during a stay in state care.

- h. DCF and School Districts: Work together to ensure that barriers such as required school uniforms and required school supplies are addressed.

3. School Readiness (See also goal 9)

Summary of Problem

Youth in state care have higher rates of physical, developmental and mental health problems. They often enter care with unmet needs. Many youth are language delayed. Caregivers and early learning staff may not be aware of the needs of those youth or how to obtain appropriate screenings and services. Too often, substitute caregivers are not knowledgeable about, nor involved in school readiness activities.

Data

A 2005 national study of youth in state care found that 40% of toddlers and 50% of pre-schoolers had significant behavioral and developmental needs. Yet only 21% of the youth were receiving services. National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, Educational Outcomes for Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care (September 2007).

Goal 3: Young youth enter school ready to learn.

Suggested Actions

- a. DCF and School Districts: Coordinate to ensure that all youth in state care have access to Early Steps and Child Find screenings and services, with DCF ensuring early and regular screening of all young youth using well baby/ youth check ups.
- b. DCF: Coordinate efforts to educate out-of-home caregivers on the medical and developmental needs of youth in their care and train and support them on how to be effective advocates for those youth.
- c. DCF and DOE: Examine home based learning readiness programs such as HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters), PAT (Parents As Teachers), and the Build Better Readers/Just Read Florida Programs to see if those programs could be brought to the caregivers of pre-school aged youth in state care.
- d. DCF: Ensure that all youth have medical, behavioral, mental health and developmental screenings and assessments upon entry into care and that all recommended treatment is provided. Require attention to language acquisition deficits.
- e. DCF and DOE: Work together to ensure that Department of Health (DOH)/DOE programs for developmental and behavioral screening for youth birth to 3 are

appropriately accessed and that there is a seamless transition to DOE/School-based programs that begin at age 3.

f. DCF and School Districts: Work together with the Early Learning Coalitions on quality youth care, and with the providers of Head Start and Early Head Start to give youth in state care appropriate access to these programs.

g. School Districts: Provide developmentally appropriate counseling and supports in early learning programs. Train all early learning personnel to be sensitive to youth's abuse and neglect experiences.

h. DCF and DOE: Share the Sunshine State Standards or its successor and provide access to training on the understanding and use of developmental milestone measures.

4. Full Participation in the School Experience

Summary of Problem

Some youth in state care are sometimes excluded from academic programs, extracurricular activities and school events. Even if the exclusion is not blatant, the conditions for participation make it difficult if not impossible for youth in care to join in. Likewise, many group homes have rules and practices that preclude youth from participating in activities and events. These opportunities are critical not only for the youth's social and academic development, but are necessary for admission to certain post-secondary schools.

Data

One study found that 39% of youth in care had low levels of engagement in school, as measured by the youth's attitude towards school work and doing well in school. Twenty-eight percent were not involved in any activities outside of school, such as sports, clubs, or lessons. Ehrle, J. & Kortenkamp, K., (Jan. 2002). *The Well-Being of Youth Involved With the DCF System: A National Overview*. Series B. No. B-43 New Federalism: Nat. Survey of America's Families.

DCF's 2007 Independent Living Survey found that only 60% of youth who failed the FCAT were provided with remedial services.

Goal 4: Youth have the opportunity and support to fully participate in all aspects of the school experience.

Suggested Actions

a. DCF: Expressly authorize foster parent or caseworker to provide permission for youth to participate in school clubs, after-school activities, sports and social events for all ages and utilize "Normalcy Plans" for older youth. Include this participation as a service to the youth in their case plans, and provide for transportation to and from all such activities. Explain in the authorization the connection between participation and educational progress and the link between school stability/progress and DCF goals of placement stability and permanency.

- b. DCF: Identify and refer youth to tutoring, remedial and enrichment programs in the community.
- c. DCF: Require all caregivers (including group homes and shelters) to establish a means for youth to participate in school related events and activities, including providing transportation.
- d. DCF: Establish some requirement for school involvement for persons acting as parents to the youth.
- e. DCF and School Districts: Allow and encourage youth in state care to participate in school clubs, after school activities, sports, and social events. Ask Booster clubs and PTSA's to set aside funds to underwrite the costs of participation for youth in state care.
- f. DCF and School Districts: Provide youth in care with access to tutoring, remedial and enrichment programs.
- g. School Districts: Reach out to substitute care parents to encourage participation in established parental involvement programs.

5. Support to Prevent Drop Out, Truancy & Disciplinary Actions (see also Goal 10)

Summary of Problem

Youth in state care have higher rates of truancy, discipline problems and school dropout that negatively impact their learning experience and ability to make successful transitions, whether to permanency or to adulthood.

Data

The 2007 DCF Independent Living Survey found that 33% of the 20 year-olds surveyed had a "highest completed grade" of 11th grade or lower. The 2005 OPPAGA report found that youth in care were twice as likely to have school disciplinary problems and were three times more likely to be involved in drop out prevention programs for youth who are parents, in the delinquency system or otherwise at-risk.

Goal 5: Youth have supports to prevent school dropout, truancy, and disciplinary actions.

Suggested Actions

- a. DCF: Develop or identify community programs to encourage positive behaviors and engage youth in school.
- b. DCF: Monitor educational progress and contact school at the earliest sign of trouble.
- c. DCF: Ensure that youth have an adult to advocate for them at school, especially in disciplinary proceedings. Ensure that Children's Legal Services receives immediate notification of all school issues, especially disciplinary actions.
- d. DCF: Minimize absences for court appearances and medical appointments. Always write school an excuse letter when such absences must occur.

- e. DCF: Add training for caseworkers and caregivers in drop out prevention strategies.
- f. DCF and School Districts: Develop and implement protocols for rapid notice by schools to DCF/case manager, foster parent, or surrogate parent, when a youth is evidencing at-risk behaviors in school, truancy, lack of school progress.
- g. School Districts: Attempt other forms of intervention before expulsion or referring youth in care to the delinquency system or alternative schools. Schools are required to follow board approved Code of Student Conduct procedures, which may include escalating levels of intervention for all students.
- h. DCF and DOE: Provide school staff and DCF staff access to information related to the specific needs of youth who have experienced abuse and neglect.
- i. School Districts: Ensure that youth with disabilities have behavioral intervention plans as appropriate and receive procedural protections so they are not punished for behaviors that are a symptom of their disabilities.
- j. School Districts: Define missing school or class for documented DCF purposes as an excused absence and prohibit loss of credit or other negative impact for unavoidable absences.

6. Youth are Involved, Engaged and Empowered

Summary of Problem

Youth in state care are often disconnected from the systems that serve them. Youth experience better outcomes when they are involved in the decisions that affect their lives. Yet, youth in state care change schools frequently and are not given the positive guidance and assistance to see that a good education can result in a better future. They need to have the vision of their future and assistance in the concrete steps that they can take to make it a reality. Moreover, many youth in state care with special educational needs will transition to adulthood without the on-going support of a permanent family – therefore their need to be empowered to advocate for themselves is even more critical.

Data

Youth who participate in their IEPs and education planning experience better outcomes than their non-participating counterparts. See studies collected at, **Implementation of Self-Determination Activities and Student Participation in IEPs** Journal article by Christine Mason, Sharon Field, Shlomo Sawilowsky; Exceptional Youth, Vol. 70, 2004. These studies show that, “Children who are involved in their IEP development or related educational goal setting and planning are more likely to (a) achieve their goals, (b) improve their academic skills, c) develop important self-advocacy and communication skills, (d) graduate from high school, and (e) gain better employment and quality of life as adults.” *Id. (internal citations omitted)*

DCF’s 2007 Independent Living Survey showed that 61% of youth in care between the ages of 13 and 17 did not have a written educational and career path plan.

Goal 6: Youth are involved and engaged in all aspects of their education and educational planning and are empowered to be advocates for their education needs and pursuits.

Suggested Actions

- a. DCF and School Districts: Work together to train youth on their education rights and on self-advocacy.
- b. DCF and School Districts: Work together to ensure school involvement in DCF education planning process. Help youth obtain educational mentors who will help them strive to complete school and continue to post-secondary education.
- c. DCF and School Districts: Train all personnel who work directly with youth on how to engage youth in education planning.
- d. DCF: Ensure that youth are consulted about their educational preferences and needs – including about whether they should change schools when their residence changes.
- e. DCF and School Districts: Ensure that youth are involved in the creation of their “educational and career path plan” and that this plan is jointly developed and implemented between the local school and DCF agency.
- f. School Districts: Ensure that youth are involved in their IEPs and Transition IEPs. Coordinate IEPs/Transition IEPs with DCF.

7. Consistent Adult Support & Educational Decision Maker

Summary of Problem

Youth in care may not have a consistent adult to advocate for educational services and support educational goals the way a parent typically would. For youth with (or suspected of having) disabilities, the need for an education decision maker is even more acute because federal law specifies that only certain individuals can act as a “parent” to make special education decisions and provides for the appointment of a surrogate parent when necessary. Not having a legally authorized education decision maker can hold up evaluations and appropriate special education services. In addition, confusion results when the custodian or caseworker can sign consents for school activities, but may not hold parent status for purposes of IDEA.

Data

One study found that IEPs and Transition IEPs of youth with disabilities in care were lower quality than their peers, and youth in foster care were less likely to have an advocate (family member, foster parent or educational surrogate) present at their education planning meetings. National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, Educational Outcomes for Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care (September 2007)

Goal 7: Youth have an adult who is invested in his or her education during and after his or her time in Out-Of-Home Care including a Surrogate Parent where appropriate.

Suggested Actions

- a. DCF: Ensure that case workers, foster parents and/or education liaisons reinforce the value of education and advocate at school for youth in care
- b. DCF: At shelter, disposition and judicial reviews, determine who is the legally authorized decision maker for youth with or suspected of having a disability. If there is no educational decision maker, ask the Court to designate someone or appoint a surrogate parent.
- c. School Districts: Appoint surrogate parents for all eligible youth. Review Technical Assistance Paper entitled, Surrogate Parents for Exceptional Students to ensure it is consistent with existing law. Courts may now appoint surrogate parents.
- d. School Districts: Recruit and train qualified surrogate parents. If the school is seeking to use a foster parent as an educational decision maker, ensure that the foster parent has knowledge of the youth and more than a fleeting interest in the youth's education.
- e. FLDOE: Update the Surrogate Parents technical assistance paper, as needed in order to align with the law and best practices to provide guidance to local schools to avoid short term shelter and foster parents, group home staff and other inappropriate persons from making education decisions for the youth.
- f. School Districts: Ensure that training offered for surrogates is also offered to caregivers, Guardians Ad Litem, and others who may act as parent, whether appointed by schools or Courts.
- g. School Districts: Review the surrogate parent training material used by schools, and incorporate best material for distribution to others, especially the material on the effects of abuse and neglect on accessing and benefitting from the educational environment. (FDLRS prepared)

8. Post-Secondary Education & Employment

Summary of Problem

Youth in state care want post-secondary education, but they are far less likely than their peers to achieve it. They need support and opportunities to overcome the numerous barriers that impede progress toward completion. This may be as simple as not having the requisite documents to enroll in school, or as complicated as not having a place to live when campus housing is closed for vacation. Moreover, youth who succeed in post-secondary education often attribute their success to adults who took the time to encourage them to keep going – they must have mentors, cheerleaders or coaches to help them envision their own potential.

Youth are also ill-prepared for work and likewise need assistance with barriers to meaningful employment. Group home rules, and rapidly changing placements, make it difficult for youth to obtain employment and gain real-world work experience. Without good mentoring, they may find it difficult to adapt to workplace norms.

Data

DCF's Independent Living survey showed that 55% of 17 year olds are below grade level and 58% of 17 year olds failed the FCAT.

One regional study showed that 80% of youth in out-of-home care hoped and expected to graduate from college. Courtney, M.E., Terao, S. & Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Conditions of youth preparing to leave state care*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Youth at the University of Chicago. Yet National data shows that only 9% of former foster youth complete college in comparison with 24% of the general population. National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, Educational Outcomes for Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care (September 2007)

A 1997 national study showed that teens in foster care were enrolled in college preparatory classes at half the rate (15% to 32%) of students not in foster care. Blome, W. (1997). What happens to foster kids: Educational experiences of a random sample of foster care youth and a matched group of foster care youth. *Youth and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 14(1), 41-53.

DCF's 2007 Independent Living Survey found that more than half those under age 18 have not been provided the opportunity for job training activities. Only 30% of 15 year olds, 39% of 16 year olds and 45% of 17 year olds had such opportunities. For those youth (ages 16-23) who were working for an hourly wage at the time of the study, the median wage was \$7.00 an hour.

Goal 8: Youth have supports to enter into, and complete, postsecondary education.

Suggested Actions

- a. DCF and DOE: Create uniform documentation for residency and tuition exemption purposes so that the DCF System can ensure that all youth exit care with the required documents to enroll in post-secondary institutions.
- b. DCF and School Districts: Ensure that youth fully understand all requirements for higher education and financial aid, including necessary testing and applications, and the deadlines for each. Ensure that youth are provided access, preparation and payment for the SAT, ACT, CPT, and/or the TABE.
- c. DCF and School Districts: Coordinate school based IEPs/Transition IEPs and DCF transition plans for each youth.
- d. DCF and DOE: Collaborate on employment programs such as Operation Full Employment and share information on tax credits and other programs available to encourage employers to hire former foster youth.
- e. DCF and School Districts: Examine as promising practice, designation of specific guidance counselors to serve only youth in state care.
- f. School Districts: Provide access to college, career and guidance counselors who understand the unique needs of students in state care vis-a-vis enrollment in post-secondary education.

- g. DCF: Provide information concerning housing for youth during vacations and other times when school housing is unavailable.
- h. School Districts: Educate students and caregivers on alternative education options including dual enrollment vocational programs and GED.
- i. AWI will promote the identification of employment and training services available at each Regional Workforce Board (RWB) One Stop Career Center and the availability of a listing of these services for local agency staff. Regional Workforce Boards provide employment and support for youth, including but not limited to eligible foster care participants and youth with disabilities. Services include job search assistance, resume preparation, and variety of online job seeker tools.

9. Youth with Disabilities are Identified Early & Served Appropriately

Summary of Problem

A large number of youth in the DCF system have undiagnosed disabilities. Although more youth are receiving comprehensive assessments upon entry into licensed care than in past years, not all youth who are removed from their families receive assessments.

Moreover, many youth who have been in care for years have slipped through the cracks and have not been diagnosed or treated for disabilities.

DCF does not currently track data on disabilities at a level of specificity that facilitates identification of trends and problems.

In the school setting, numerous factors contribute to the under-identification of youth with educational disabilities. These youth may not have educational advocates to take the place of parents in requesting evaluation. Youth may change schools so rapidly that teachers don't have enough time to identify concerns, let alone obtain assessments. Trauma related behaviors might mask educational disabilities.

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, sponsored a Self-Determination Initiative beginning in 1999. The Self-Determination Initiative was designed to provide training, technical assistance, and support to Florida's school districts wishing to implement self-determination activities. Staff conducted annual statewide or regional trainings on self-determination models and disseminated relevant curriculum, assessments and resources to training participants. Additionally, staff provided district and school specific workshops on a request basis and conducted awareness presentations at all major transition-related conferences in Florida. Thousands of educators, family members, students, and agency personnel benefited from training, technical assistance, and information dissemination conducted through the initiative.

Activities included facilitating development of Standing Up for Me, a Florida curriculum designed to teach self-determination skills with a focus on IEP participation. The curriculum was piloted in six school districts during the spring of 2003; statewide training was conducted on the final draft in September and October of 2003 and the published product in November and December of 2004. Staff continued to provide train-the-trainer

training through 2007. (The curriculum will be updated over the course of the next year through the activities of Project 10.)

Results of the Self-Determination Initiative included teachers with more knowledge of self-determination and resources available for teaching self-determination skills as well as increased instruction in the area of self-determination. A number of Florida students receiving instruction in self-determination displayed better school and post-school outcomes and provided testimonials at related conferences.

A requirement for the "consideration of instruction or the provision of information in the area of self-determination to assist the student to be able to actively and effectively participate in IEP meetings and self-advocate, if appropriate" was added to Florida State Board of Education Rules in 2004 for students with disabilities with IEPs beginning at age 14. The rules were updated and approved on December 2008. The new rules moved the requirement to age 16, but districts are being encouraged to continue implementation beginning at age 14.

Florida was recognized by the Office of Special Education Programs as an "exemplar" for their work in the area of self-determination and was one of only two states invited to present at a National Capacity Building Institute on Self-Determination in 2004.

Data

In response to a public records request, DCF generated data in June 2008 that showed that only 7% of youth in care under age 18 had a documented disability. In contrast, DOE data from February 2008 shows that 14% of the school aged population had a documented disability. Florida Department of Education, Education Information & Accountability Services, Statistical Brief, Series 2008-21B (February 2008). National data shows that youth in state care have disabilities at a greater rate than the general population – perhaps as high as 28% or more. The Well-being of Youth Involved in the DCF System: A National Overview, Katherine Kortenkamp and Jennifer Ehrle, The Urban Institute, January 2002.

http://www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/310413_anf_b43.pdf

Goal 9: Youth who have, or are suspected of having, a disability that interferes with their learning receive prompt and appropriate assessments, Individual Educational Plans, accommodations, supports and related services consistent with IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and applicable state law.

Suggested Actions

- a. DCF and School Districts: Identify screening and assessment resources for youth in care who do not automatically receive comprehensive assessments.
- b. DCF and School Districts: Share results of assessments to ensure that each system is working with all available information about youth.
- c. DCF and School Districts: Undertake to review status of all youth who are academically one or more grade levels behind their peers to ascertain whether they have been currently and appropriately assessed for educational disabilities.
- d. School Districts: Ensure that initial evaluations of students in state care who are suspected of having a disability are completed within the required timelines: 60

school days that the student is in attendance after the school district's receipt of parental consent (for prekindergarten youth, 60 school days). Assessments of these students with disabilities who transfer from one school district to another school district within the same school year must be coordinated with those students' prior and subsequent schools, as necessary and as expeditiously as possible, to ensure prompt completion of full evaluations.

e. School Districts: For students in state care who are suspected of having a disability; provide information to the parent or surrogate parent who has the authority for educational decision making regarding the right to request that the general education intervention procedures be completed concurrently with the evaluation.

f. DCF and School Districts: Identify the person(s) responsible for making educational decisions, including providing consent, in accordance with timeframes specified by IDEA for students in care.

10. Trauma-Sensitive School Environments: Stem the School to Jail Pipeline

Summary of Problem

Most youth who enter state care have experienced some form of trauma that will have long lasting effects on their physical, developmental and mental health. School personnel who are not aware of the youth's background may not understand reactive behaviors and refer youth to law enforcement for criminal prosecution. Such conduct has the consequence of placing youth who are the victims of abuse and neglect into school to jail pipeline.

Data

"Trauma may lead to psychiatric conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depressive disorder, and anxiety disorders. Traumatic experiences in childhood can also have profound effects on developmental progression, relationships with peers and family members, academic achievement and motivation for learning, memory, and full participation in society." Helping Youth in the DCF System Heal from Trauma: A Systems Integration Approach National Youth Traumatic Stress Network NCTSN.org.

After conducting its study, the National Youth Traumatic Stress Network notes that the ways in which systems share information about a youth's trauma history and treatment can have a direct impact on the quality of care given to the youth and on the youth's well-being.

Goal 10: Youth are educated in a trauma-sensitive environment that recognizes the root cause of inappropriate behaviors and provides appropriate behavioral supports that create a safe environment conducive to learning rather than punishing youth for acting in response to their anger and hurt.

Suggested Actions

a. DCF and DOE: Devise strategies to enhance communications between schools, foster care providers, DCF, and mental health systems to share information about a youth's experience and trauma reactivity, while still being

sensitive to confidentiality requirements.

b. DCF and DOE: Retrieve the data and study the incidents of school dropout, truancy, and disciplinary actions occurring for youth in DCF custody. Examine whether the cause of inappropriate behaviors is trauma related and develop proposed solutions to the over representation of youth in state care who are dropping out, truant, or subjected to disciplinary actions.

c. DCF: compile complete information on each youth's trauma history so that staff can see the impact of trauma on a youth's development, skills, and competencies.

d. DCF: Integrate into youth assessment and interview protocols the completion of a youth trauma profile instrument so that workers have a complete understanding of the youth's trauma history.

e. School Districts: Provide teachers with access to information about the incidence, prevalence, and impact of youth trauma and how to work effectively with youth who have trauma histories.

f. School Districts: Provide teachers and staff with access to information so that they can recognize traumatic reactions, reminders, and triggers and identify when a youth may be having a traumatic reaction as opposed to behavioral problems for other reasons. Include training on some of the more subtle or invisible symptoms seen with youth who become depressed or withdrawn following a trauma.

11. All Youth Attend & Complete School

Summary of Problem

The DCF system has traditionally focused on the physical well-being of youth. All too often, while youth are in safe places during the school day, they are not in school. Emphasis must be placed on the importance of continuous education of youth in care. Caregivers must be trained, and if necessary incentivized or penalized, to ensure that they understand and support efforts to ensure that youth attend school. Extra efforts are needed to ensure that teens remain in school.

Data

"Children who have not graduated from high school are 3 times more likely to be unemployed, under employed or working for low wages." Spotlight on Florida's Youth At Risk, Report to the Eckerd Family Foundation (2007) citing Sum, et. al, 2003, Confronting the Youth Demographic Challenge: The Labor Prospects of Out-of-School Young Adults, The Sar Levitan Center, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

DCF's own test analysis of youth who aged out of care in 2007 showed that 40% had dropped out of school in contrast to 16% of all youth. Only 26% of youth aging out of care that year received a standard high school diploma compared to 47% of all youth that year.

In DCF's Independent Living Survey, 130 youth between the ages of 13 and 17 with a written education plan had a goal that included no further education. This was an alternate answer to high school diploma, GED, college and vocational options.

Goal 11: Florida should support the well-being of youth by ensuring that every school-age youth in foster care, and every school-age youth receiving an adoption assistance or subsidized guardianship payment, is a full-time elementary or secondary school student or has completed secondary school.

Suggested Actions

- a. DCF, DOE, and School Districts: Review strategies designed to encourage and enforce school attendance and completion.
- b. DCF: Train all staff and caregivers on the importance of school attendance and completion.
- c. School Districts: Examine current drop out prevention programs to determine whether they are applicable to youth in state care.
- d. School Districts: Inform students, who would otherwise earn a special diploma or certification of completion, of alternative school completion options. Options can include dropout to enter GED program and credit make-up.