

Educational Risks and Interventions for Children in Foster Care

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Preface

Questions relating to the impact of institutional care on the children and youth who are recipients of this care have important implications for their welfare in the future. Here is a knowledge review which aims to collate the findings of several research programmes in the USA that attempt to improve the results of foster childrens' studies.

The article also makes suggestions about what ought to be done from the point of view of different actors to improve the educational situation and study results of foster children.

IMS would like to thank Richard P Barth and Charles Ferguson who carried out the knowledge review and hope it will prove to be an inspiration for those who work with foster children in Sweden and want to improve the educational situation of the foster children in their care.

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Sammanfattning

Artikeln är en kunskapsöversikt som sammanställer och bedömer resultat av vetenskapliga studier som berör fosterbarn och deras skola/utbildning. Bakgrunden till översikten är främst erfarenheten att barn som är eller har varit placerade i fosterhem har sämre utbildningsresultat jämfört med barn som växer upp med sina föräldrar. Författarna har valt att undersöka resultaten av olika program som använts för att förbättra fosterbarns utbildningsresultat.

Författarna har studerat utvärderingar av tre olika typer av program vars syfte är att förbättra utfallet av fosterbarns skolgång. Det första programmet kallas *Foster Youth Services* (FYS) och är ett program som syftar till att stödja fosterbarnen i deras skolgång från förskola till gymnasium. Det andra programmet som kallas *Independent Living Programs* (ILP) har ett bredare syfte och försöker även att hjälpa fosterbarn till oberoende och självförsörjning efter tiden som fosterbarn. Den tredje gruppen av program är två så kallade *Experiential Learning Programs* (ELP) som är mer erfarenhetsbaserade till sin inriktning. Det ena är inriktat på fosterbarns skolgång (ELITE) och det andra (WWP) kan ses som ett komplement till ett större serviceprogram.

Författarna menar att man måste genomföra fler utvärderingar av dessa program för att nå säkrare resultat om deras effekter för fosterbarns utbildning. Detta är mest påtagligt för FYS-programmet som innehåller flera typer av interventioner från förskola till gymnasium. Trots att programmet funnits i 30 år har det inte genomgått någon rigorös utvärdering. ILP-programmet har författarna bedömt som lovande för äldre ungdomar när de förbereder sig för ett liv på egen hand. Framtida utveckling och utvärdering av programmet borde fokusera mer på utbildningsresultat, speciellt på betygsnivåer. Slutligen är utvecklingen av innovativa program som ELITE och WWP lovande och värda en fortsatt utveckling vars prövning bör följas av utvärdering som en integrerad del av utvecklingsarbetet.

Författarna konstaterar att de dåliga utbildningsresultaten för fosterbarn ofta inte skiljer sig från utbildningsresultaten från barn med liknande bakgrund som lever med sina föräldrar. Många av dessa ungdomar är dåligt förbereda och ofta belastade med olika typer av problem som i sin tur påverkar möjligheten till inläring. Här påpekar författarna vikten av att fokusera på själva inlärningsprocessen i skolarbetet. Artikeln ger i detta sammanhang några nyckelstrategier för att ge mindre förberedda elever bättre möjligheter att förbättra sina skolresultat.

I artikeln ges också förslag på insatser för skola, socialtjänst och fosterfamiljer och på vilka olika roller, mål och aktiviteter dessa aktörer bör ha och genomföra. Dessa aktiviteter bör dock samordnas mellan de olika aktörerna för att bättre kunna hjälpa fosterbarn och före detta fosterbarn att nå goda akademiska resultat.

Författarna menar också att stödet till fosterbarn måste vara långsiktigt. Det kan ta många år för ett fosterbarn att komma över tidiga problem och även om de har en stabil fosterfamiljesituation så kanske de aldrig hinner ikapp andra barn som vuxit upp under mer stabila förhållanden. Många fosterbarn kan dock få en bättre utbildningssituation om de får ett mer långsiktigt stöd som de kan förlita sig på även långt efter det att de blivit myndiga.

Risks of Poor Educational Attainment Among Foster Children

A limited amount of research has been conducted regarding the impact of being in foster care on the development and functioning of foster children. Even less is known about interventions that make a difference with this group of children at risk for educational failure. An emerging American focus on closing the achievement gap between the achievement of Black and White children and rich and poor children offers additional tools for addressing the risks of underachievement among foster youth. All these are herein explored.

Recent reviews of outcomes for children who have left foster care help to clarify the risks that are attendant with life circumstances of children before and during foster care. Pecora et al. (2000) reviewed a number of research studies that explored the impact foster care placement has on the development and functioning (e.g., social, emotional, cognitive, educational) of children and found the results less than consistent or conclusive. Two studies (Littner, 1950; Young, 1950) that tested the assumption that the trauma of placement can lead to negative effects over time reported inconclusive results, as did subsequent studies investigating differences in adjustment of children in temporary and permanent foster homes (Iowa Department of Social Services, 1977; Jones, Neuman, & Shyne, 1976; Lahti, 1982). Two later studies (Fein, Maluccio, Hamilton, & Ward, 1983; Fein, Maluccio, & Kluger, 1990) revealed that children in short-term family foster care and children in long-term family foster care appeared to be functioning well in all but one area. Children in short-term family foster care exhibited difficulty in the area of school functioning. Functioning levels varied, in both studies, depending on family characteristics and placement history. Similarly, a study by Fanshel, Finch, and Grundy (1990) found that children's level of adjustment at the time they left foster care was significantly correlated with a variety of family and placement history characteristics. A literature review conducted by Maluccio and Fein (1985) indicates that the initial traumas of placement may be reduced through quality foster homes and social services. Yet these assumptions have not been tested.

An important component of the larger picture regarding the impact of foster care on the development and functioning of children are the questions related to the academic and school behavior issues of children in foster care. While not absolutely established, research studies (Barnett, Vondra, and Shonk, 1996; Brassard & Gelardo, 1987; Christiansen, 1980; Crozier & Barth (in press); Kendall-Tackett and Eckenrode, 1996; Kinnard, 1999; Kline & Christiansen, 1975; Oates & Peacock, 1984; Perez and Widom, 1994; Reyome, 1993) investigating the impact of maltreatment on academic achievement and school behavior indicate adverse outcomes for maltreated children (Leiter & Johnson, 1994). Given the intended ameliorative effects

of foster care, it follows that maltreated children subsequently placed in foster care should be doing at least as well as similarly children who are maltreated but not placed in-care, given the intended ameliorative effects of foster care.

Yet, there is little evidence that suggests that foster care has been a substantial equalizer of educational outcomes for maltreated children. To the contrary, there is overwhelmingly transnational evidence (e.g., Biehal, et. al., 1995 {UK}; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001 {US}; Kufeldt 2003 {CA}, Vinnerljung, personal communication, 2000 {SE}) that youth who are leaving foster care remain seriously behind the norms. Although there is a good bit of evidence that their outcomes may have superceded those that would be obtained by other similarly situated children who did not go into foster care (Triseliotis, 2002), this is somewhat besides the point. If the goal of children's services is to provide children with meaningful opportunities to succeed as adults, then the appropriate standard is to assess the outcomes for foster youth against other children with a typical chance at adult success.

The review presented here focuses on the question: are maltreated children receiving foster care services doing better on academic and school behavior outcomes than maltreated children at home? The method of meta-analysis (see Berrick and Barth, 1992; Bruvold and Rundall, 1988) was not used in this review due to the non-evaluative nature of the studies under review, as well as to the lack of pretest/posttest assessment in the majority of the studies.

Interventions to Improve the Outcomes for Children in Foster Care

A limited number of evaluation studies exist that assess the effectiveness of programs implemented to improve the educational status of children in foster care. The studies discussed in this review include evaluations of Foster Youth Services, Independent Living Programs, and two experiential learning programs: the Everyone Learning with Information Technology (ELITE) School and the Wilderness Work Program (WWP). Foster Youth Services and the ELITE School were designed to assist foster youth in achieving better educational outcomes. Independent Living Programs and the WWP retain a broader goal of assisting foster youth in achieving independence and self-sufficiency after leaving foster care. A brief description of each intervention is followed by a summary review of each evaluation, highlighting the primary strengths and/or weaknesses of each study. The findings from the studies are summarized and reported separately.

Intervention Programs Evaluating Education-Relevant Interventions with Foster Children

Studies relevant to this review were included if they met two criteria: (1) an evaluation study of an intervention for children in foster care that, at minimum, included educational variables as outcomes of interest; (2) the availability of a study report, in either published or unpublished form. A listing of the studies and their relevant characteristics appear in Table 1.

Table 1: Evaluations of Interventions

Study	Program / Populations of Focus	Data Collection Method ^a	Sample Size ^b	Measurement Method	Outcomes
<i>Foster Youth Services (FYS)</i>					
Seashore (1985)	FYS School-age children receiving FYS in 1984-1985 & 1985-1986	One-shot case study	N=114 (84-85) N=78 (85-86)	Questionnaire	Overall effectiveness Monitoring & facilitating academic progress Facilitating adjustment Credits earned/semester
Grayson (1989)	FYS School-age children receiving FYS prior to 1988	Retrospective one-group pretest - posttest One-group pretest - posttest	N=97 N=248 N=578	School records Achievement test Achievement test	Academic Growth Academic Growth
California Department of Education (2000)	FYS School-age children receiving FYS in 1998-1999	One-group pretest - posttest One-shot case study One-shot case study	N=2,911 N=1,430	School records School records	Expulsions Attendance Rate
<i>Independent Living Programs (ILP)</i>					
Baker, Olson, & Mincer (2000).	ILP for children in Residential Care for > 6 months vs. those <6 months	Quasi-experimental Design	N=241	Multiple	High School Completion
Cook (1994)	ILP Youth 2.5 to 4 years after discharge from foster care	One-shot case study	N=810	Interview	High school completion
Waldinger & Furman (1994)	ILP ILP vs. nonILP	Retrospective static group comparison Retrospective static group comparison	N=289/N=? N=289/N=40	Survey Survey	Performance at grade-level Education topics on court reports
Austin & Johnston (1995)	ILP Youth receiving ILP	Retrospective one-shot case study of 2 time periods com-	N=278/N=255	Database	Level of education attained Current school status

Scannapieco et al. (1995)	ILP ILP vs. nonILP	ILP ILP vs. nonILP	Retrospective static group comparison	N=44/N=46	Case records	High school completion Receipt of special education
Mallon (1998)	ILP Youth in residential care	ILP Youth in residential care	One-shot case study	N=46	Case records	Educational attainment
Lindsey & Ahmed (1999)	ILP ILP vs. nonILP	ILP ILP vs. nonILP	Retrospective static group comparison	N=44/N=32	Survey	High school completion Post high school education Desire for education
Experiential Learning Programs						
Donlevy (2000)	ELITE Schools Youth in residential care in 1997, 1998, 1999	ELITE Schools Youth in residential care in 1997, 1998, 1999	Retrospective one-shot case study	N=75 (97) N=83 (98) N=61 (99)	Achievement test	Global studies, Math, Science
Wolf et al. (2000)	Wilderness Work Experience Program	Wilderness Work Experience Program	Retrospective static group comparison	N=106/N=?	Case records	High school completion

a denotes data collection method for the education variable(s)

b denotes the largest sample size for the education variable(s)

Foster Youth Services

In 1972, four counties in California began implementing Foster Youth Services (FYS), a program designed to improve the educational outcomes of children in foster care.

FYS operates under three basic suppositions (Ayasse, 1995; Fitzharris, 1989). The first supposition is that a structural deficiency in the social service and educational systems allows foster care children to become “lost in the system.” For example, agency and school personnel often make changes in school placements without planning or preparation. School records and transcripts are often misplaced or never received by the new school and various assessments and tests are missed due to the timing of student transfers. These various miscues can result in the improper placement of children in academic programs, be it special education or mainstream academic courses, prolong the time to graduation, and exacerbate an emotional and behaviorally trying period in a child’s life. The second supposition is that the educational needs of the child usually take a lower priority than other needs with the foster care provider, the social worker, and school personnel. The third supposition stresses that intervention for foster care children must begin as soon as children enter into the foster care system. Early support and advocacy are the most effective way to prevent the need for more costly and intensive assistance in the future (Ayasse, 1995).

FYS employs the concept of an ecological approach to human development and the idea of interagency collaboration to implement their service program. The program seeks to encourage the participation of adults and community organizations that are influential in the child’s life in the educational process. In addition, the program stresses the collaboration between school and social service agency and attempts to link these two institutions for the benefit of the child (Fitzharris, 1989).

The FYS program is comprised of four main components: (1) school placement/advocacy services; (2) tutoring services; (3) counseling services; and (4) employability training (Fitzharris, 1989). The tracking of student records, including school transcripts, immunization records, and test and assessment results is the primary service provided by the program (Ayasse, 1995). The process is conducted in several counties by a social services/school liaison in an attempt to ensure the student’s proper educational placement. Many foster care children have an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) that may indicate the type of school the student should attend (i.e., alternative, non-public, or home-schools). IEPs require a biological parent or legal guardian act as the student’s advocate to ensure proper implementation of the plan and an educational representative may be assigned to act on the student’s behalf if neither parent or guardian is available. FYS staff serve in this capacity for foster care children.

FYS tutoring services attempt to assist students in their academic courses through remediation. Tutoring is conducted in one-on-one sessions either weekly or biweekly. Topics for focus are determined by the student’s academic performance in courses, achievement test results, and suggestions and requests from the child, the teacher, and the caregiver. A special education

referral may result if tutoring is found to not meet the academic needs of a student (Ayasse, 1995).

Behavioral issues often impact on the academic progress of foster care children and FYS offers counseling services in response. Specific methods of intervention vary by FYS staff member (Ayasse, 1995), with support, encouragement, and empathy serving as the general means. Behavior modification plans are sometimes used to assist younger children who have difficulty in tutoring sessions or classroom settings.

The fourth component of the FYS program focuses on assisting older students develop adult decision-making skills, and a sense of personal responsibility and independence. The goal is to help students in their quest to graduate from high school prepared for post-high school independence (Ayasse, 1995). The California State Legislature, in 1981, formalized FYS by enacting legislation that included the intervention in Education Code, making it available as a programmatic intervention to all county governments in California. Fiscal limitations, however, slowed the replication of FYS in other counties. Thirty-two counties were receiving FYS program grant funding by 1999-2000 (California Department of Education, 2000). FYS has been evaluated twice by external evaluators and has also been evaluated internally, during even-numbered years.

Seashore (1985). The first study was conducted by Seashore in 1985. Utilizing a one-shot case study design, the study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the FYS program based on assessments of the program by the teachers, foster parents, and social services and probation caseworkers of students receiving FYS. The evaluation focused on students who had received FYS for at least six months during the 1984-1985 school year (N=114), and on students who received FYS from the beginning of the school year until mid-November during the 1985-1986 school year (N=78). The respondents' assessment of FYS programs' overall effectiveness was positive. Between 82 percent and 94 percent of the respondents rated the program as adequate or better at meeting student needs. Between 76 percent and 94 percent of the respondents rated the program as adequate or better at meeting their needs in assisting the students. Caseworkers with experience working in school districts that did not offer FYS reported FYS county school districts were better at meeting the educational needs of students.

The respondent's were asked to judge the program's ability to match the educational needs of students with resources and found the program effective. Between 58 percent and 83 percent of respondents reported that students had problems in basic skills, working at grade level, passing classes or competency exams, getting good grades, handing in assignments, and paying attention in class. According to respondents, more than 50 percent of the students were at least one grade level below their age-appropriate grade. Between 77 percent and 97 percent of respondents characterized FYS tutoring and academic counseling as adequate or better and indicated that almost 75 percent of those students identified as having academic problems had shown improvement. Eighty-four percent of the caseworkers with experience working in school districts that did not offer FYS reported that FYS county school districts were better at promoting academic progress.

Finally, respondents reported that FYS was successful at facilitating student school adjustment. Between 40 percent and 77 percent of respondents reported that students displayed inappropriate behavior. Between 70 percent and 88 percent of the same respondents reported FYS support of students as adequate or better and between 70 percent and 100 percent reported improvement in students who had displayed inappropriate behavior. The evaluation certainly suffers from a number of limitations, principally, the lack of a comparison group. The study was also hampered by a low response rate (55 percent) and variability in the student sample and sample of respondents (e.g., teachers from a limited number of grades). Yet, this is quite probably the first study ever conducted on an intervention expressly designed to improve the education of foster youth.

Grayson (1989). The second evaluation, conducted by Grayson (1989), had two components. The first component used a retrospective one-group pretest-posttest to assess the credit attainment of high school age foster youth (N=97) when they were attending a school without the FYS program compared to when they were participating in the FYS program. Students were in grades 9-12, had attended high school for at least one semester before entering FYS as a foster youth, received FYS for at least one semester, and transitioned out of FYS between September 1986 and June 1988. School records were used to compare the average number of credits earned per semester. The second component of the evaluation sought to evaluate the academic effectiveness of FYS services using a prospective one-group pretest-posttest design. Students (N=248) were assessed using the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT), administered pre- and post-tutoring.

High school students enrolled in the FYS program attained an average of 10.1 additional credits per semester as they did when attending schools without a FYS program (FYS=29.3 credits/semester vs. nonFYS=19.2 credits/semester). The study's second component showed an on-average improvement of 2.5 months of academic progress for each month of tutoring. Students in group home placements had greater gains in test scores than both student in kinship home placements and foster family home placements (kinship home placement students had greater test gains than students in foster home placements), as did girls compared to boys and European-American students compared to African-American students. Greater improvements were seen in math versus reading and the effect of tutoring was most pronounced in the first four months of the program compared to later months for both primary and secondary students, although the difference was more pronounced for secondary students. Similarly, improvements for secondary students were greater than for primary students. Grayson's evaluation, like Seashore's, suffered for lack of a comparison group. Additionally, interpretation of the findings from the second study component was hampered by limited information regarding the assessment tool (PIAT) and the timing of its use.

CDOE (2000). The California Department of Education (CDOE) (2000) conducted an internal evaluation of FYS during the 1998-1999 school year, including all students (K-12) who received services in six counties. The evaluation assessed the program's impact on academic growth (N=578), discipline (N=2,911), and attendance (N=1,430). Students who received at

least three months of tutoring were pretested and posttested using a student achievement test. School records were reviewed in the one-shot case study design for expulsions and attendance.

The CDOE (2000) reported that the program surpassed expectations (60 percent) with 85 percent of the students achieving the goal of one month of academic growth for every month of tutoring. The growth rate was two months of gain for each month of tutoring. The CDOE reported that 0.48 percent of the students participating in FYS were expelled during the school year and that the monthly attendance rate was 97 percent for the month used in the assessment, concluding that FYS was successful in helping students in foster care improve academically and behaviorally. Yet, like the previous FYS evaluations, the CDOE (2000) study lacked a group with which to compare outcomes. Information about the sample, beyond the range of grades, was not provided. Similarly, there was no information provided about the timing of the measure used to assess academic growth, or about the measure itself.

Independent Living Programs

In 1985, the United States Congress passed the Independent Living Initiative (P.L. 99-272), legislation providing states with the authority to develop and implement programs to assist children in foster care 16 years of age and older in their transition to independence. Funding for the initiative began in 1987; in 1993, the initiative was reauthorized as part of P.L. 103-66, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993. In 1999, Congress passed the Foster Care Independence Act, of which Title I (known as the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, replacing the Independent Living Initiative) is the most pertinent for youth transitioning to independence (National Foster Care Awareness Project, 2000).

The Chafee Independence Program (CIP) gives states broad authority in designing independent living programs to best suit the needs of youth in their care. Five purposes set out in the CIP guide state initiatives: (1) identify youth likely to be in foster care to age 18 and assist their transition to independence, (2) prepare the identified youth for employment, (3) prepare the identified youth for post-secondary training and education, (4) provide the youth psycho-social support in their transition, and (5) provide services and resources to youth 18-21 that support their own efforts to achieve independence (National Foster Care Awareness Project, 2000). Specific services can vary by location but may include assistance such as living skills training, financial management skills training, mentoring, school achievement support, employment/career training and support, and health-related education and support. Notably, the legislation allows states to use 30 percent of its CIP funds to assist youth who were in foster care on their 18th birthday with room and board for current living arrangements (National Foster Care Awareness Project, 2000).

ILPs were not developed as interventions designed specifically to improve the educational outcomes of children in foster care. However, as previously discussed, the educational progress of a youth as it relates to independency and self-sufficiency is of great importance. A number of studies¹ have

¹ Two additional studies evaluated ILPs but were not included in this review because the original reports were not available to the author. They have been summarized in Lindsey and Ahmed (1999) and have been abstracted from that source. Shippensburg University Center for Juvenile Justice Training and Research conducted an evaluation of Pennsylvania's ILP in 1993. The researchers used a prospective static group comparison design, surveying former foster youth one year after discharge from foster care. One group was comprised of 32 youth who had received ILP services (response rate=24 percent) and another group was comprised of 24 youth who had not received ILP services while in foster care (response rate=41 percent). The study showed that a smaller percentage of youth receiving ILP services while in care had earned a high school degree by one year after discharge (ILP=59 percent vs. nonILP=79 percent). The Center on Children, Families, & the Law conducted a study of former foster children using a prospective one-shot case study to assess their progress one year after discharge. The sample included 58 former foster youth (response rate=48) who had received ILP services. The survey revealed that 15 percent of those

evaluated ILPs and included the impact of the program on education variables in their analysis.

Baker, Olson, & Mincer (2000). This evaluation is of an independent living and aftercare program operated by a residential care program outside of New York City. The WAY (Work Appreciation for Youth) Scholarship program at Children's Village in Dobbs Ferry, New York provides a range of services to youths beginning when they are about to leave care and continuing for up to five years. It is part of a broader WAY Works program that is intended to gradually teach work ethics to youth living at Children's Village, by moving them through a level system where each level involves increasingly independent work experience. The five core elements of the WAY Scholarship program are (1) educational advocacy and tutoring, (2) work experiences and work ethics training, (3) group activities and workshops, (4) financial incentives to help youth save, and (5) counseling and mentoring. The program is not primarily intended to support ongoing education. Rather, the use of the term "scholarship" is meant to convey high expectations of participants.

The evaluation assessed the outcomes of youth (N=155) served by the program and a comparison group (N=76) of youth who did not participate in the program. All of the youth served by the residential treatment program at Children's Village were male. In order to enter the treatment, group youth had to be at least 13 years of age, possess at least a third-grade reading level, and have some experience in the WAY Works program. As part of the selection process, program staff also rated youth on a number of dimensions (e.g., maturity, work habits, ability to handle supervision). Approximately 15 candidates with the highest assessment scores who were expected to be on campus for at least another six months were interviewed for the program and enrolled if they and their parents consented. The comparison group was intended to be similar to the treatment group, though not as likely to remain on campus long enough to benefit from the program.

The largest racial ethnic group of treatment sample members were Black (62 percent), with smaller proportions of white Hispanic (28 percent) and white non-Hispanic (10 percent) youth. They were, on average, 14 years old at the time of entry to WAY and remained at the Children's Village for about 15 months after entering WAY. The WAY and control group youth were compared on 27 background characteristics. The two groups were generally not significantly different on these indicators, except that the WAY Scholarship youth had more involved child maltreatment and child welfare histories. They were more likely to have had prior foster care placements, more likely to have been neglected, and experienced more types of abuse.

The study design is quasi-experimental and highly favorable to those who completed the program, because no effort was made to control for the propensity of youth to make educational progress. For the purposes of the study the researchers decided to treat WAY Scholars that stayed in the five-year program for 2.5 years or more as "program completers" and those who stayed less than 2.5 years as "program dropouts," though they acknowledge

questioned had not earned a high school degree, 30 percent had earned a high school degree, and 53 percent had earned some college credits or vocational training.

that this cutoff point is somewhat arbitrary. For the overall WAY Scholarship sample (N=155), 118 (76 percent) “completed” the program while 37 (24 percent) did not. For the 93 WAY Scholars in the first six annual cohorts (i.e., those with a comparison group) the completion rate was 71 percent (N=66) while 29 percent (N=27) remained in the program less than the requisite 2.5 years. In addition to comparing outcomes between groups, the authors also examined progress over time for the WAY Scholars. Research questions focused on reasons for attrition from the program, employment, educational achievement (high school degree/GED, college credit, etc.), self-sufficiency, criminality, and the effectiveness of program mentors.

The study relied on seven sources of data: (1) agency records, (2) counselor bimonthly report forms, (3) semi-structured interviews with participants as adults, (4) Internet data sets (e.g., criminal records), (5) exit interviews with youths who completed the five-year program, (6) staff updates, and (7) information obtained from a private detective. Due to limitations of the data, comparisons between the WAY Scholars and the comparison group were only possible for educational status at completion of the program (i.e., 2.5 into the program for the treatment group and 2.5 years after group assignment for the comparison group) and adult criminality. All other comparisons examine progress over time for WAY Scholars. Educational outcomes of WAY Scholars were also compared to national and regional norms using census data.

Program completers had generally positive educational outcomes (81 percent were still in school or had a high school degree/GED by the end of the program). They had higher educational achievement than comparison group youth and as good or better achievement than various populations generated from U.S. Census data (e.g., New York City youth, youth in poverty). The authors report that dropouts who were older at enrollment into the program were discharged from the Children’s Village campus significantly sooner, and experienced fewer types of documented abuse than youth who stayed in the program for 2.5 years or more.

Cook (1994). Cook (1994) reports on a study where a one-shot case study design was used and interviews were conducted with 810 former foster youth who had received ILP services and had been part of the first phase of a national evaluation of ILP services. The original sample (N=1,644) was acquired through a multistage, stratified design with probability sampling. The probability sampling occurred at each of the three stages of selection: state, county clusters, and youth 16 years old and older who were discharged from foster care between January 1987 and July 1988. National estimates representing 34,600 youth were obtained by weighting each case by the probability of being sampled, excluding youth who had been in care for less than one month, or had been adjudicated. Of the original sample (N=1,644), 854 youth were located and 810 youth were interviewed 2.5 to 4 years after discharge from foster care. They ranged in age from 18 to 24 years old, with a median age of 21.

Cook (1994) compared the located sample with the original sample on a number of variables and found differences between the groups on age at discharge, receipt of services, and state location. As a result, a non-response adjustment was made to the sample. The study is limited, however, by the

lack of a true comparison group, despite its use of U.S. Census Data for comparative assessments. Cook (1994) reported that 54 percent of the study sample had completed high school, a finding similar to those of youth living below the poverty line (53 percent) but well below that of the general population (78 percent), based on comparisons to data from the 1990 U.S. Census. Cook also conducted regression analysis to assess the impact of program components on the receipt of a high school diploma after discharge. The analysis indicated that the educational skills training offered through ILP had no impact on the receipt of a high school diploma after youth had been discharged from foster care.

Waldinger and Furman (1994). The study by Waldinger and Furman (1994) compares two models for delivering ILP services in Los Angeles County, California: the Categorical Independent Living Services (CILS) and the Integrated Services Pilot (ISP). The assessment of CILS was conducted in two phases, each with several data collection points. Phase I consisted of an initial needs assessment of youth age 16 and older in foster care (N=1,624), a six-month follow-up survey with previously assessed youth (N=883), in-person interviews conducted with youth and caretakers (N=117), and an organizational analysis conducted with administrators and practitioners (N=37). Phase II was conducted during the second year of the program and consisted of a needs assessment with new youth (N=595) and a follow-up survey with previously assessed youth (N=289). The ISP data were collected from individual case records of children in ISP (N=40) and interviews with two social workers and one supervisor from each of the two ISP units. No additional information was provided on either sample.

Drawing on the CILS Phase II portion of their study, Waldinger and Furman (1994) reported that 51 percent of the sample were performing at, or above grade-level, compared to 44.9 percent of a group of non-CILS youth (no information was provided by the researchers regarding the comparison group). A single comparison was made between CILS and ISP programs concerning education. ISP had a significantly greater percentage of cases with court reports including school and academic preparation topics (ISP=96 percent vs. CILS=85.7 percent; $p < .05$). Interpretation of the study is seriously complicated by the limited amount of information provided about the samples and about the comparison group used in the Phase II assessment.

Austin and Johnston (1995). This study was conducted to assess the effectiveness of Pennsylvania's Independent Living Initiative (PA-ILP). The study used a cross-sectional study design for the first component, a profile of the family situation and status of youth participating in PA-ILP, a one-shot case study for the second component, an assessment of the impact of the program on program recipients, and a one-shot case study with a comparison of the level of independence between youth who graduated from the program at two moments in time for the third component. A purposive sampling procedure was used to include 11 counties in Pennsylvania with ILP programs in operation since 1988. The third component of the study included educational outcomes. A comparison was made between youth receiving PA-ILP services between 1988 and 1991 (Group 1, N=278) and between 1992 and 1994 (Group 2, N=255). Youth in both groups were 18 years of age or older and had been discharged from care during one of the

two time periods. The first time-period was considered to be PA-ILP's "start-up" stage; the second time-period was considered to be PA-ILP's "fine-tuning" stage.

Educational attainment showed mixed results. The highest level of education completed by the year of ILP completion, showed little difference between the two groups (less than high school education: Group 1=54.6 percent vs. Group 2=54.6 percent ; GED diploma: Group 1=9.4 percent vs. Group 2=7.8 percent ; high school/vocational/college: Group 1=36 percent vs. Group 2=37.6 percent ; Group 1, N=278 vs. Group 2, N=255). There was a larger difference between the groups when they were compared on the youth's current school status at the time of ILP completion, particularly on drop-out status, with youth in Group 2 having better outcomes (dropped out of school: Group 1=24.7 percent vs. Group 2=17.9 percent ; in secondary education: Group 1=26.6 percent vs. Group 2=31.5 percent ; post high school: Group 1=48.7 percent vs. Group 2=50.6 percent ; Group 1, N=275 vs. Group 2, N=251). Once again, a weak study design hinders the development of confidence that the intervention was responsible for improved educational performance.

*Scannapieco et al. (1995).*² Scannapieco, Schagrin, and Scannapieco (1995) reported on a study that used a retrospective static group comparison design to evaluate the effectiveness of an ILP in Baltimore County, Maryland, specifically educational achievement, employment, and daily living skills. Youth who had received ILP services (N=44) while in foster care were compared to youth who did not receive ILP services (N=46). All children who were in foster care for at least six months and eligible for ILP services (i.e., between age 16 and age 21) between 1988 and 1993 were included in the sample. The researchers reported that in both groups, the majority of youth were white (68.0 percent), female (53.0 percent), and of average intelligence. The average age at discharge from foster care for both groups was 19. The groups did not differ significantly on their reasons for placement into foster care. They did, however, differ on family of origin: a significantly higher ($p<.05$) percentage of youth in the ILP group (31.8 percent) came from two-parent families, compared to the non-ILP group (10.9 percent). Data was collected from county foster care case record data using a 122-point case record abstraction form developed by the researchers and pretested for validity and reliability.

Scannapieco et al. (1995) found that a higher percentage of non-ILP youth (52.2 percent) were receiving special education services compared to their ILP counterparts (31.8 percent). Regarding graduation from high school, a significantly ($p<.05$) higher percentage of ILP youth (50.0 percent) had attained a high school degree at discharge from foster care, compared to their non-ILP counterparts (13 percent). The study is bolstered by its use of a comparison group and the relative uniformity of the groups. The scope of the analysis was straightforward and congruent with the design and constraints (e.g., small sample size) of the study.

Mallon (1998). This evaluation of an ILP in New York City using a one-group pretest-posttest design for some variables of interest. The education

² Scannapieco (1996) reported on the same study.

variable included in the study was assessed only at posttest. The sample included all youth in foster care discharged to independent living after having participated in the Green Chimneys Program between December 1987 and December 1994 (N=46). All of the youth were male, while 67 percent were African-American, 20 percent were Latino, 9 percent were multi-ethnic, and 4 percent were European-American. Twenty-eight percent of the sample identified as gay. Fifteen percent of the sample had some type of organic impairment, while 35 percent were learning disabled. The age of the youth in the program ranged between 16 and 20 years old, with an average age of 18 years old. At discharge, ages ranged between 18 and 23 years old, with an average age of 21 years old. The average length of placement in foster care of the sample was eight years. Ninety-three percent of the sample had achieved multiple placements and the average length of stay at Green Chimneys for the sample was 2.38 years. Mallon (1998) used the Green Chimneys Life Skills Assessment Tool to assess the change between intake and discharge on 14 areas of youths' life skills.

Mallon (1994) found a higher mean score at discharge for educational planning (intake=3.06 vs. discharge=3.78) using a life skills assessment tool. Seventeen percent of the sample had attained a high school diploma and some amount of post-secondary education, 26 percent had attained a high school diploma, 31 percent had attained a GED, and 26 percent had not attained either a high school diploma or GED. The study suffered from a lack of a comparison group and a small sample size. However, like Scannapieco et. al. (1995), the analysis was clear-cut and matched the design and constraints of the study.

Lindsey and Ahmed (1999). Lindsey and Ahmed (1999) reported on a study that used a retrospective static group comparison design to evaluate the effectiveness of an ILPS in North Carolina. Stratified cluster sampling was used in the evaluation to select youth and form two groups. Two counties in each of the state's four districts were selected, one urban and one rural. The ILP group included youth who had been in foster care, had received ILP services, and discharged from foster care between July 1992 and July 1995 (N=275). Addresses were available for 137 of these youth. The non-ILP group included youth who had been in foster care, had not received ILP services, and discharged from care during the same time period. A matching number (N=137) of youth were randomly selected from county lists to form this group. A survey was sent to the ILP group and to the non-ILP group, with a response rate of 32 percent (N=44) and 23 percent (N=32), respectively. The two groups differed significantly ($p<.001$) on the range of age (ILP=17-24 years old vs. non-ILP=16-21 years old) and the average age of participants (ILP=19 years old vs. non-ILP=18 years old). The ILP group was predominantly female (63 percent) and African-American (60 percent), with a smaller percentage of males (37 percent) and white youth (38 percent). The non-ILP group was predominantly male (52 percent) and African-American (57 percent), with a smaller percentage of females (48 percent) and white youth (43 percent). The survey used was designed specifically for this study and was based on the goals of the North Carolina ILPS and on measures used in other ILP studies. Education outcomes were assessed at the

time of the survey administration, between one and three years after the youth had been discharged from foster care.

A higher percentage of ILP youth had completed high school (ILP=37.0 percent vs. non-ILP=18.0 percent), had completed a technical/vocational program or some college (ILP=21.0 percent vs. non-ILP=0.0 percent, $p<.05$), were currently enrolled in an educational program (ILP=46.0 percent vs. non-ILP=34.0 percent), and were currently in college (ILP=16.0 percent vs. non-ILP=0.0 percent , $p<.05$). The researchers also reported that a higher percentage of ILP youth expressed a desire for a college degree (ILP=36.0 percent vs. non-ILP=29.0 percent) and a post-graduate or professional education (ILP=21.0 percent vs. non-ILP=10.0 percent). A significantly ($p<.05$) smaller percentage of ILP youth expressed satisfaction with only a high school degree or GED (ILP=19.0 percent vs. non-ILP=48.0 percent).

Experiential Learning Programs

Two experiential learning programs designed to assist foster youth have been evaluated and are included in this review. The first program was designed specifically for youth in foster care. The second program was designed to complement a larger service program, albeit one that deemed educational progress as an important outcome.

Donlevy, (2000). The ELITE School (Donlevy, 2000) was developed to improve the educational outcomes of youth in foster care. The program is based on the ideas of high standards, student potential, the acquisition of power (i.e., knowledge), and the importance of community. The school program, implemented at a residential school for children in foster care in New York, consists of high-level academic courses taught in combination with technology-based vocational courses for foster care youth in special education. The academic curriculum results in a high school diploma and uses a strategy of special education and regular education instructors teaching together in small classes. The vocational program, where students build, test, and use their own computers, results in certificates from companies working in the field of computer technology. Corporate internships are available and arrangements with local colleges and universities allow participating students to earn college credits. Additional social support services are also available to students.

Donlevy (2000) used a retrospective one-shot case study design with repeated observation points to assess the efficacy of the ELITE Schools program. The sample included all youth who had participated in the program in 1997 (N=79), 1998 (N=83), and 1999 (N=61). The youth had a history of truancy and school failure and were usually two or more grades below norms on reading and math exams. They displayed serious emotional and learning problems, were generally classified as emotionally disturbed by special education programs, and had histories of drug/alcohol/tobacco use. Students were assessed at the end of each year using the Regents Competency Test. In 1997, 9 percent (N=44) of the students passed the global studies portion of the exam. In 1998 and 1999 the percentages passing increased to 29 percent (N=42) and 40 percent (N=25), respectively. The same improvement was seen on the math portion of the exam, with percentage of passing increasing from 38 percent (N=75) in 1997 to 43 percent (N=83) in 1998 and 52 percent (N=61) in 1999. Percentage passing the science portion of the exam stayed constant from 1997 to 1998 (40 percent, N=75 and 39 percent, N=69), but increased in 1999 (53 percent, N=60).

The assessment of the ELITE Schools program conducted by Donlevy (2000) was hampered by the lack of a comparison group. Additionally, it is not clear what proportion of the sample are students in foster care. The interpretation of the study's results were strengthened by author's acknowledgement that students not taking the exams might have affected the results.

Wolf et al. (2000). The WWP, operated by the Casey Family Program (Wolf et al. 2000), was designed to assist foster care youth in a more general way. The WWP is located in Northern Idaho and takes place every summer. Youth who are part of the The Casey Family Program are eligible for participation in the WWP. Between 12 and 14 youth participate at a time for a two-week period, with supervision provided by three to four social workers. The youth spend the first part of each day learning work skills as they assist the National Forest Service in activities such as trail maintenance. Recreational activities, personal reflection, and interpersonal development occurs during the afternoons and evenings.

Wolf et al. (2000) conducted an assessment of the short-term effectiveness of the WWP as part of a larger investigation of The Casey Family Program. The sample included youth who attended the WWP and emancipated from foster care at 18 years of age between 1989 and 1993 (N=106). A comparison group was formed and matched on age. No additional information is available on the comparison group. The ages of youth participating in the WWP ranged from 13 to 15 years of age. The majority of youth in the WWP group were male (61.3 percent). European-Americans accounted for 71.7 percent of the WWP group, Latinos for 18.9 percent, African-Americans for 16.0 percent, Native-Americans for 14.2 percent, Asian-Americans for 11.3 percent, and Pacific Islanders for 9.4 percent of the sample.

Wolf et al. (2000) used a retrospective static group comparison design, reviewing case records to gather data regarding high school graduation/GED certificate attainment. A significantly ($p < .05$) larger percentage of WWP youth (67 percent) attained a high school diploma or GED certificate than did the non-WWP group (56.6 percent). The researchers found no significant or systematic differences between the WWP and the comparison group regarding abuse/neglect history or psychological treatment history. The study was bolstered by the use of a comparison group and simplicity of its design and analysis. Additional information regarding the non-WWP comparison group would have strengthened the interpretation of the findings.

Findings and Conclusions from Foster Care Research

There are a limited number of programs specifically designed to address the educational needs of children in foster care; only two became apparent through the process of conducting this review. A number of other programs, namely ILPS, include specific educational strategies in their package of services, or at least emphasize as a goal the importance of meeting the educational needs of children in foster care. Although the results from the studies included in this review do not provide a definitive answer in how to intervene on the behalf of children in foster care, fraught as they are with methodological restraints, they offer some insights into potentially helpful intervention strategies.

Foster Youth Services, is certainly the oldest and most evaluated service to address the educational deficiencies of foster youth. This intervention combines a psychosocial, structural, and cognitive approach to helping students across a spectrum of grades, was found to have a positive impact on student outcomes in each of its three evaluations. However, the limitations in each of the three studies require that the findings be viewed with caution. The respondents from the Seashore (1985) study indicated that FYS met the needs of students, as well as caregivers and professionals working with the child. The tutoring and counseling programs were highly rated, particularly their capacity to improve academic outcomes and the student's adjustment to the school environment, something a great importance to foster children who are often required to change schools when they enter the foster care system. Students, and subsequently respondents, were randomly selected from across a wide range of grades but the response rate was only 55 percent. Without a follow-up with non-respondents, the high ratings may have resulted from the non-responsiveness of individuals dissatisfied with the program.

The study conducted by Grayson (1989) is more rigorous than Seashore (1985), having included a pretest and posttest assessment for different populations. The finding of improvement among FYS high school students – a greater average number of credits per semester earned – is encouraging, as is the on-average improvement in academic progress for each month of tutoring. Without more knowledge about the assessment tool and the timing of the assessment, it is difficult, however, to place credence in the findings in general or the specific findings related to children in group homes, the impact of gender, and the impact of ethnicity.

The final evaluation of FYS in this review, conducted by the CDOE (2000), is part of a continual evaluation of FYS in California. The study reinforced the finding of Grayson (1989), with students displaying an accelerated academic growth rate for each month of tutoring. But also like Grayson, the lack of information regarding the student achievement test and its admini-

stration limits the strength of the finding. The percentage of expulsions appeared low and the attendance rate high, both positive findings that could have been strengthened by the inclusion of a comparison group.

The ILP studies, in contrast to those of FYS, provided stronger evidence for the efficacy of the intervention. Three of the studies included a comparison group of youth who were not receiving the services. In each of those studies (Waldinger and Furman, 1994; Scannapieco et al., 1995, 1996; Lindsey and Ahmed, 1999), youth receiving ILP services were performing better on educational outcomes than their counterparts not receiving ILP services. Waldinger and Furman found that a greater percentage of ILP youth were performing at or above grade level, although the lack of information about the comparison group limits the interpretation. Both Scannapieco et al., and Lindsey and Ahmed found a greater percentage of youth receiving ILP services graduated from high school. Lindsey and Ahmed also found that a significantly greater percentage of youth receiving ILP services had completed some technical/vocation training or college. The significantly higher average age of ILP participants may account for the second finding in the Lindsey and Ahmed study. Viewed together, the studies offer evidence of an effective educational intervention for youth 16 years of age and older.

The remaining studies provide information that is less evaluative of ILP and more descriptive of youth who have been discharged from foster care. Austin and Johnston (1995) used a comparison group in their study, although the comparison being made was between two groups of youth who had received ILP services during two periods of time, limiting the assessment of the program's impact. The maturity of the ILP program did not appear to influence whether youth earned a high school diploma. A smaller percentage of youth in the more mature ILP program had dropped out of school.

Austin and Johnston (1995) and Mallon (1998) also reported on the percentages of youth in their study achieving a high school diploma (excluding GED attainment) at the time of discharge from services, (45 percent) and 43 percent, respectively. These percentages are consistent with Barth (1990) who found that 45 percent of foster children in had completed high school at the time of discharge from foster care, and with the youth receiving ILP services (50 percent) in the Scannapieco (1995) study; foster youth from that study who did *not* receive ILP services had a lower percentage of graduates (13 percent). This may be attributable to selection bias or program effects.

Independent Living Programs, in the U.S., often have such broad goals that it leaves open the possibility that none will be accomplished, in the relatively short period of time allowed. Baker, et. al.s (2000) study of services for children in residential care had the advantage of the opportunity for a more intensive intervention over a longer period of time. Although the research design was not ideal, the service method did appear to result in educational benefits for youth who completed the program.

Cook (1994) reported that over half of ILP recipients (54 percent) had completed high school two and a half to four years after discharge from

care,³ edging closer to Barth's reporting of 62 percent having completed high school within three years of having left care and Festinger's (1983) finding that 78 percent of youth had completed a high school education two years after discharge. Contrary to other studies, Lindsey and Ahmed (1999) reported fewer foster youth, both ILP recipients (37 percent) and non-recipients (18 percent), had earned a high school degree within three years of leaving care.

The two remaining intervention studies focused on experiential learning programs. The first, a study conducted by Donlevy (2000) of the ELITE Schools program, showed improvement over a period of several years on three portions of the Regents Competency Tests in New York. However, it appeared likely from the study that at least some of the same children took the test during each of the three years included in the study; without a comparison group, a testing effect could account for the improvement. The study also did not make clear if the sample was comprised solely of youth in foster care or some combination of youth in foster care and youth not in foster care, furthering limiting interpretation of the intervention's effectiveness in assisting youth in foster care.

The second experiential learning program was focused on work experience and was evaluated by Wolf et al. (2000). The study reported that a significantly higher percentage of youth participating in the program graduated from high school or earned a GED certificate by the time they emancipated from foster care at 18 years of age than youth who had not participated in the program. It was not clear from the study whether program recipients had participated in the two-week, summer wilderness program on more than one occasion and what impact that might have had on the results. Additionally, while Wolf et al. found no significant or systematic difference between the groups regarding, the threat of selection bias still exists. Youth were selected to participate after a referral from their Casey Programs social worker and a 60-minute interview. Variables emerging from the initial referral and subsequent interview, unrelated to abuse/neglect history and psychological treatment history, may have made the two groups systematically different.

Providing a concrete and conclusive statement about what works to assist children in foster care improve their educational performance is impossible, given the dearth of literature and the methodological limitations of the studies that have been conducted. The findings do, however, provide promise, and preliminary indications of the types of interventions that might be successful with an important population of school children.

The findings from each of the studies in this review, if viewed as preliminary, argue for future evaluative research endeavors. This is perhaps most pronounced in the case of FYS. FYS, as has been noted, is a comprehensive, Kindergarten through 12th grade intervention that attempts to mollify the structural, cognitive, and psychodynamic influences that can negatively im-

³ Shippensburg University Center for Juvenile Justice Training and Research (1993) and the Center on Children, Families, & the Law (1994) both assessed former foster youth one year after discharge. Their reporting of graduation rates included GED attainment, which could not be separated from high school diploma attainment. The findings from the two studies were as follows: high school degree/GED/some college/vocational training=83 percent; and high school degree/GED ILP=59 percent, nonILP=79 percent; respectively.

pact the educational success of children in foster care. Despite its 30-year existence, it has not been subjected to a rigorous evaluation that could, at minimum, improve the services offered and the way they are delivered.

ILPS appear to hold promise for older youth as they prepare for self-sufficiency and independence. It is likely that ILPS will continue to be implemented and evaluated; subsequent programs and evaluations should continue to include educational outcomes, particularly graduation rates, as their focus. Finally, the development of new and innovative programming such as the WWP and ELITE Schools seems worthy of continued exploration. Evaluation can be useful at all stages of implementation and should be an integral part of program planning and development.

Evaluating programs designed to assist children in foster care achieve educationally presents many methodological challenges, primarily the need for a comparison group. While the use of a true experimental design may be practically and politically impossible, establishing a comparison group through other means (e.g., neighboring county, careful matching, statistical methods) will provide a high degree of rigor absent from the majority of studies included in this review, and is paramount to establishing the efficacy to any program.

Educational Interventions to Assist Children at Risk of Becoming Low Achievers

The educational attainment of foster children is disappointing, given the commonly held hopes that foster care will dramatically improve their lives. Still, the evidence is quite compelling that similarly situated children not in foster care are also falling behind educationally (Buehler, Orme, Post, & Patterson, 2000). Given that children who enter foster care are often from groups that are culturally, racially, and economically diverse, their struggles to achieve academically are quite consistent with diverse individuals not in foster care. Indeed, several scholars have found such gaps to exist between minority and majority students in the exclusive suburbs of America (e.g., Ferguson, 2000).

The achievement gaps are multiple in some instances, gaps exist among diverse groups of students in their achievement in various content areas (e.g., math or reading), in their curricular experiences, and in their access to conventional or corrective instructional resources (Goodwin, 2000). Although some children in foster care will achieve substantial educational gains, these children have often had strong educational preparation, prior to entering foster care because of parental breakdowns or sexual or physical abuse (e.g., Summer, 2003). Most of the children in foster care are there because of more chronic problems in parenting and have parents with very limited sets of positive educational experiences.

Across the world, there is a deep concern about *closing the achievement gap* for disadvantaged, minority, and non native-born children. The discussions about how to do this have often resulted in very broad initiatives. The implications cannot be boiled down to a small group of strategies. Research demonstrating the continued and, even, worsening gap between the performance of minority and majority students (e.g., Lee, 2002) has made finding ways to improve the achievement of all students even more imperative (Goodwin, 2000). The extensive literature on closing the achievement gap does not point to single strategies for working with individual children. Perhaps the best work done on working with low income children (Knapp, 1997) shows that the way material is taught is critical. "Teaching for meaning" is considered to be a particularly appropriate approach. This involves gearing mathematics instruction to comprehension and application and writing instruction to composing letters and action-oriented text.

Although there is a growing evidence base for educational instruction (see, also, Farstrup & Samuels, 2002; Learning First Alliance, 2000), this instruction must fit within an overall approach that increases the likelihood

that less prepared or troubled students can stay up with, or catch up with, their more prepared and less traumatized classmates.

A synthesis of the key strategies that research suggests (summarized in Goodwin, 2000) includes:

- Provide all students with a rigorous curricula.
- Help teachers improve instruction so that it accommodates different learning levels (Borman & Rachuba, 1999).
- Provide support to students around specific learning assignments.
- Create smaller classes and school units.
- Increase parent involvement by engaging parents early and often.
- Change the policies and incentives that make low-performing schools less attractive for students and teachers and develop ways to keep effective teachers in them.
- Establish strong, yet fair, accountability for the school serving all children (Goodwin, 2000).

Emerging evidence from the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement in the U.S. suggests room for optimism. School improvement models based on principles like these have, for the most part, shown an association to rising test scores (Borman, Stringfield, & Rachuba, 2000).

Institutions, Roles, Objectives, and Activities

A coordinated effort to improve the educational attainment of foster youth and former foster youth will require efforts of schools, child welfare agency leadership, child welfare worker and independent living program line staff, foster and group home caregivers, and universities. Table 2 offers a broad presentation of some of these activities – sometimes summarized from the discussion of interventions above. Some of these are also discussed in more detail below.

Table 2 Educational Interventions for Foster Youth and Former Foster Youth

Institution	Role	Objectives	Activities
<i>Schools</i>	Educational Liaison (a la Foster Youth Services)	Help children catch up with peers	Educational Liaison Tutoring
	Partner with Child Welfare Agencies	Communication between schools, foster parents, and child welfare workers	Counseling Employability Training
<i>Child Welfare Agency</i>	Child Welfare Worker	Minimize placement and school moves	Team meeting leadership Encouragement of foster parents
	ILP Provider	See that transitional barriers between educational institutions are minimized	Facilitating child's receipt of educational assessments or interventions
	Educational Liaison		Facilitate mentoring by "young adults" who have been successful in transitions to adulthood
<i>Foster Parent or Residential Provider</i>	Partner with Schools ILP Facilitator	Help children develop and maintain learning habits	Tutoring
	College Preparation	Promote curricular and extra-curricular involvement	Monitoring of transcripts to see that pre-college requirements are met
	Partner with Child Welfare Agency		Provide opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities Discuss and visit colleges or training programs

Child welfare agencies are responsible for the well-being of children in foster care and, to a somewhat more limited extent, to children who have left foster care. Educational attainment of children needs to be a central priority. Yet, children who enter foster care are often far behind other children (Crozier & Barth, in press) in academic achievement. These children have very often experienced disruptive and risky pre- and postnatal environments resulting from residential instability, trauma, and parental substance abuse or mental health problems. The road to academic and social recovery is a long one – often taking decades of exposure to better environments before their lives begins to approximate those of children in the general population (Fiegelman, 1997).

This improvement in educational performance can partially be facilitated by child welfare agencies that reduce unnecessary placement moves for children. Considerable evidence indicates that multiple placements of children are often unnecessary (James, 2004) and harmful to the well-being of children (Newton, Litrownik, & Landsverk, 2000). They are not always in response to an explicit need of foster children or in response to foster children's need for an alternative setting – instead, they may result from agency administrative practices. Increases in placement stability can be expected to improve the general well-being of children and youth, with educational gains to follow.

The problems of mobility are not unique to foster children – they are common in urban schools (Jacobson, 2001) and among children whose parents are in the American military (Cooper, 2001). Managing mobility also involves the prompt handling of educational and medical records so that children do not have to wait to attend school or be placed into the classroom best fitting their educational needs. This is less of a problem for children who remain in their local schools or within the same school district.

Foster parent and private agency involvement with the education of foster children is sometimes less than stellar because they are unclear about their role or how to implement it. Casey Family Program (2000) has developed guidelines for their foster parents, that have not been empirically tested, but which are based on a thorough review of the evidence on closing the achievement gap.

- Set high expectations and serve as a role model for your child.
- Establish and practice structured routines in the home, including providing a quiet place and set time for homework.
- Encourage reading.
- Limit after-school jobs.
- Discuss school work and school events.
- Stay involved with youth at the secondary level.
- Require challenging course work for middle and secondary school students.
- Monitor out-of-school activities (Casey Family Program, 2000).

Social workers assisting children in foster care also need to be involved with children's education. They may need to advocate in a range of ways to be sure that a child who enters school mid-year has the opportunities for class

and extracurricular activity that are available to other children. If children do not feel an attachment to their school, which usually develops from being actively involved with some special activity, then they are at greater risk for school failure and other undesirable outcomes (Pollard, Hawkins, and Arthur, 1999).

Efforts to help foster and adoptive children be attached to their school are complicated by their placement moves and by the scheduling of many activities in ways that foster or group care facilities cannot easily accommodate. For that reason, Illinois has developed educational advocates for foster and adoptive children – trying to help parents directly address the special needs and schedules of foster children. A system of Education Advisors provides ongoing support for staff and foster parents and Educational Liaisons to provide additional educational support for their foster parents and children (Illinois Department Of Children And Family Services, 2003). These educational personnel are supported by many other reforms which should result in the assessment of youth's educational needs and the development of appropriate educational plans and services.

The evidence on the efficacy of these efforts to increase the performance is not yet in place, although the broad set of needs evinced by foster youth suggests that the kind of individualized attention that can be provided through educational liaisons is critically important. The extension of these efforts for youth who will be growing up and out of foster care, makes it increasingly likely that there will be an increasing high school graduation rate for foster youth. A recent survey of foster youth in the US, indicated that 70 percent had college aspirations (McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, Thompson, 2003). Indeed, because this is occurring, the next generation of activities is to identify ways that colleges and universities fail to support the needs of former foster youth. Even when university tuition and fees are waived for foster youth, they face many other challenges that children with the ongoing support of their family do not encounter.

The educational challenges for foster youth seem rather generalizable across countries and communities (Biehal, et. al., 1995; Vinnerljung, personal communication, January 1, 2002). Interventions to address these problems will vary along many dimensions, including: the structural relationship between the child welfare/social services agency and the schools, the relationship between different schools that children attend and how easily they can make those transitions, privacy laws, number of placements that children experience, and whether children generally attend very high risk schools or schools that are more generally representative of the population.

Perhaps the most common intervention that can be proposed across settings is a two-headed approach that combines an analysis of system characteristics with information from individualized work with foster children. An *education and foster care* task force should be in place to consider structural components in the school-to-foster care link and within foster care and education. Further, this task force should be supplemented by child welfare workers, educational personnel, or educational liaisons who specialize in work related to this issue. These specialists can help to address children's individual educational shortcomings. They are also likely to be the ones who best understand the needs of these children and can help communicate

them to the task force for the purposes of program development and policy making.

This discussion of strategies for addressing the educational needs of foster youth would not be complete without a word about the need for longterm support. Foster children may take many years to overcome their early problems. Even if adopted out of foster care into a permanent supportive family, they may never catch up with children raised in stable two parent households (Feigelman, 1997). Yet, many former foster youth clearly can make progress if given substantial additional family support that they are allowed to draw on well after they reach the age of majority (Kerman, Wildfire, & Barth, 2002). Child welfare systems that do not have mechanisms for providing ongoing support from adoptive families or foster families that may continue to house and care for a child well after age 18, are unlikely to help former foster youth to break the family cycle of being poorly educated. There are some gains that a patient and loving family can best help to provide. At minimum, youth should benefit from work with caring specialists who work with foster youth to provide them with coordinated independent living services during their challenging transitions to adulthood.

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