FosterEd: Indiana

Evaluation and Recommendations

Executive Summary

The educational outcomes of foster children are extremely poor, even compared to other at-risk children. This results in tragically high rates of unemployment, incarceration, homelessness and reliance on public benefits among former foster youth. At any given time, approximately 10,000 foster children live in Indiana. As of June 2012, 1,963 children were in foster care in Marion County. These children have been removed from their families because of abuse or neglect. Without an adult supporting their educational success, most fail to receive the educational opportunities they need. Studies show that:

- Only 54 percent of foster care alumni complete high school.[1]

- Youth in foster care are about half as likely to have graduated with a high school diploma by the age of 20 as young people who have not been in foster care.[2]

- Children and youth in foster care who attend public schools score 16 to 20 percentile points below youth not in foster care on statewide standardized tests at grades three, six, and nine.[3]

FosterEd, an initiative of the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL), improves the educational outcomes of foster children by ensuring they each have at least one educational champion supporting their success in school. FosterEd: Indiana is a partnership between FosterEd and the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS). It has been led by FosterEd director Jesse Hahnel, and guided by a state leadership team that includes representatives from the Indiana Department of Child Services, Indiana Department of Education, Indiana Division of State Court Administration, the Indiana Youth Institute, The Mind Trust, and the Lilly Endowment. The project began in 2011 with a pilot focused on improving the educational outcomes of Marion County foster children.

The Marion County pilot was designed by a team comprised of key partners, organizations and agencies from the community who are committed to improving the educational outcomes of local foster children. The pilot planning process was facilitated by FosterEd

director Jesse Hahnel and FosterEd Project Manager Rita Mack-White of the Indiana Youth Institute. Pilot partners included Child Advocates, Connected by 25, the Marion County Department of Child Services, the Indiana Youth Institute, Indianapolis Public Schools, and the Indianapolis Bar Association. The Marion County pilot launched on September 6, 2011.

FosterEd: Indiana employs two primary strategies. The **first strategy** involves new education related objectives and associated processes that are implemented by DCS family case managers (FCMs). FCM education objectives include: 1) identification of educational strengths and needs; 2) integration of education into case plans and court reports; 3) increased involvement of biological parents in supporting educational success; 4) improved communication with school corporations and local school districts; and 5) improved school stability.

The **second strategy** involves objectives to be accomplished by newly hired Educational Liaisons. These objectives include: 1) assisting with the identification of educational strengths and needs; 2) ensuring individual foster children receive needed educational services and supports; 3) building the capacity of FCMs, foster parents, biological parents and other stakeholders; 4) building partnerships with community organizations; and 5) building partnership with local school districts.

With respect to an individual foster child, these strategies are implemented as follows: Soon upon entry into foster care, the FCM assigned to the child assesses the child using the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool, which includes an education module. A CANS education rating of 2 or higher, or an identified issue with the child's education, initiates a referral to the Educational Liaison, who opens a FosterEd case for the child. The Educational Liaison reviews the child's educational history and identifies and documents the child's unmet educational needs. Together with the family, the local school, caregivers, DCS staff, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), the child, and other key people in the child's life, an education plan is developed to ensure all unmet educational needs are met. The FCM integrates this plan into court reports and the child's larger case plan. Whenever possible, the Liaison ensures educational needs are met by building the capacity of biological parents, relatives, caregivers and community partners to support the child's educational success, both while they are in foster care and afterwards. The Education Liaisons continue monitoring, updating and assisting with the FosterEd case until all the child's educational needs are met.

Pilot implementation began on September 6, 2011 with two part-time Education Liaisons operating within Child Advocates, a non-profit organization that represents and protects the best interests of children in Marion County

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1 Cook, R., Fleishman, E., and & Grimes, V. (1991). A national evaluation of Title IV-E Foster Care independent living programs for youth: Phase 2. Final report, vol. 1. Rockville, MD: Westat, Inc., 1991

2 Smithgall, C., Gladden, R. M., Howard, E., Goerge, R., & Courtney, M. (2004). Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care. Chicago: University of Illinois, Chapin Hall Center for Children.

3 Burley, M., & Halpern, M. (2001). *Educational attainment of foster youth: Achievement and graduation outcomes for children in foster care.* Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

who are involved in legal proceedings by providing each child with Guardian Ad Litem/CASA services. On November 17, 2011, the project hired an additional full-time Education Liaison, operating within the Marion County Department of Child Services. New pilot processes were first implemented within one Marion County DCS unit.

By late 2011, the model was receiving attention for successfully addressing significant barriers to the education of youth in care. Early outcomes included:

- 44 children had been served by FosterEd Education Liaisons.

- 76 separate unmet educational needs had been identified and addressed by an Education Liaison.

- 100 percent of participants in trainings conducted by Education Liaisons reported the training to be helpful for their job and helpful for children.

- 100 percent of Family Case Managers interviewed by the Indiana Youth Institute reported the program to be useful for youth, caregivers, and professionals.

Based on these early successes, Indiana's Department of Child Services acted to expand the pilot into a statewide project. Upon approval from Indiana's Governor's Office and State Budgeting Agency, the Department created a new program of Educational Services, a new Director of Educational Services position, and secured funding for 16 full-time Educational Liaisons and a full-time Director of Educational Services. In the summer of 2012 these positions were filled. Dr. Anita Silverman, the pilot's full-time Education Liaison was hired to direct FosterEd: Indiana, the statewide program. In August 2012 the 16 Educational Liaisons were deployed throughout Indiana to support the educational success of youth in care.

As of the end of 2012, the initial data on the statewide program showed:
- A total of 748 foster children had been referred to FosterEd's Education Laisons for educational support; each had received an educational assessment identifying their educational strengths and needs. 473 of the children referred to the Education Liaisons had open FosterEd cases, meaning the Education Liaisons were still working to ensure all educational needs were met.

- 275 of the children referred to the Education Liaisons had closed FosterEd cases, indicating that the Education Liaisons had ended their involvement.

- Of the 275 closed FosterEd cases:

  o 205 cases were closed as successful because all the child's identified educational needs were met.
  o 14 cases were closed because no unmet educational needs were identified.

o 53 cases were closed as unsuccessful because not all of the child's identified educational needs were met. While data was not collected to determine why Education Liaisons closed these cases prior to all educational needs being met, reasons may include the child's dependency case being closed prior to all educational needs being met, thus ending the involvement of DCS. In 22 of these cases some of the child's identified educational needs were met prior to the FosterEd case being closed as unsuccessful.

o 3 cases were closed as unsuccessful with no unmet educational needs identified. This might indicate that the child's dependency case was closed before the Education Liaison was able to assess the child's educational strengths and needs.

- A total of 1,536 unmet educational needs had been identified.

- 1,001 unmet educational needs had been identified in the 473 open FosterEd cases. 298 of these unmet needs had been met; the Education Liaisons were working to ensure the remaining 703 needs were met.

- 535 unmet educational needs had been identified in the 275 closed FosterEd cases.

  o 478 of these unmet educational needs had been met.
  o 57 of the identified needs were not fully resolved prior to FosterEd case closure.

While the statewide program is still in its infancy, all indications are that, similar to the Marion County pilot, FosterEd: Indiana is ensuring foster children receive the support they need to succeed in school and in life.

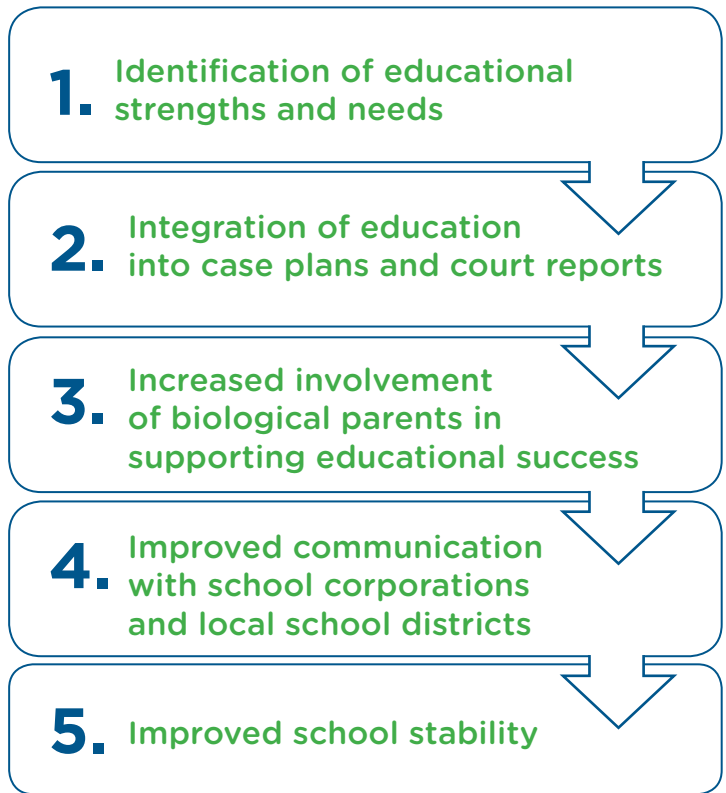## A SPECIAL THANKS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Program Design

FosterEd: Indiana began in 2009 with a series of stake-holder meetings at both the state and local level facilitated by FosterEd's director, Jesse Hahnel. The goal of these meetings was to establish consensus as to the primary obstacles making it difficult for Indiana's foster children to succeed in school, to build partnership between stake-holder organizations and agencies, and to develop a plan for collectively ensuring the educational needs of Indiana foster children are met. The stakeholder groups identified the following topics:

1. Information sharing among systems
   a. Who are the youth?
   b. What information should be shared?
   c. With whom?

2. Priority around education for foster youth: roles and responsibilities
   a. Social workers
   b. Youth
   c. CASAs
   d. Biological parents
   e. Foster parents
   f. Court
   g. Caregivers
   h. School administrators

3. Lack of knowledge
   a. Trainings
   b. Technical assistance

4. Identification of foster youth struggling in school
   a. Early in the CHINS process
   b. Before there is a crisis
   c. Early childhood

5. Grade level performance
   a. Tutoring
   b. Intensive services
   c. Assessment

6. Special education

7. School discipline

8. Tracking outcomes

9. Enrollment issues
   a. Prompt enrollment
   b. Educational records transferred
   c. Mobility

A consensus was reached that these issues would be prioritized, and the group began developing two parallel strategies. The **first strategy** was for Family Case Managers (FCMs) within the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) to adopt five new objectives, to ensure the foster care system is attentive to the educational needs of children in care.

The five FCM education objectives are:

1. Identification of educational strengths and needs

2. Integration of education into case plans and court reports

3. Increased involvement of biological parents in supporting educational success

4. Improved communication with school corporations and local school districts

5. Improved school stability

These objectives were then translated into specific procedures within the daily case management functions of the FCM. General educational strengths and needs are identified through administration of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment tool that includes a module for education. This assessment is coupled with a more detailed analysis of the child's educational strengths and needs conducted by the Educa-tion Liaisons for those children whose education score on the CANS indicates a need for further analysis. Integration of education into the child's case plan and court reports is a deliberate effort to ensure educational information is provided to stakeholders who have a role in supporting the child's educational success. Increased involvement of biological parents is to be achieved through increased support from the Educational Liaison and improved communication between biological parents and school districts. Improved communication with school corpora-tions and local districts is to be attained through a series of letters and phone communications between school and DCS personnel when children come into care or change placement. Additionally, guidance on the philosophical approach to increase school stability is provided to staff and supported by management.

The **second strategy** was the hiring, training and deploy-ment of Educational Liaisons. These Liaisons assist with the identification of educational strengths and needs; work to ensure individual foster children receive needed educa-tional services and supports; build the capacity of FCMs, foster parents, biological parents and other stakeholders

through regular trainings and dissemination of resources; build partnerships with community organizations; and build partnerships with local school districts.

The Educational Liaisons provide direct assistance to FCMs, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), families, schools, professionals and youth. Upon receiving a referral from an FCM, Education Liaisons open an education case and determine and document the child's educational strengths and needs. This leads to the joint development of an education case plan. Some needs can be met by an Education Liaison working directly with the FCM to quickly answer questions. Other times the plan calls for the Liaison to connect the FCM, family, school district or child with a community or school district resource; thus the importance of establishing strong relationships with community organizations and local school districts. Other cases are more complex and Education Liaisons spend hours working with an individual FCM, family or child, including attending case conferences and/or school meetings, and navigating complex questions regarding a child's educational needs. Education Liaisons continue monitoring, updating and assisting with the case until all the child's educational needs are met.

Educational Liaisons also perform functions not specific to an individual child. These include: training professionals and caregivers and building their capacity to support educational success; establishing and strengthening relationships with community organizations and service providers so they are better able to serve foster children; and improving communication and collaboration between local child welfare and education agencies.

Report Methodology

To assess the new processes implemented by Family Case Managers (FCMs), evaluators conducted a review of cases within the pilot unit. The goal of the case review was to determine the degree to which FCMs were implementing the new objectives and the degree to which these new processes were resulting in a greater focus on educational success. In addition, it was important to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the project's design and to provide recommendations to the Department of Child Services (DCS) for FCM policy and practice with respect to education.

A second source of data was a series of stakeholder interviews. Interviewees included foster parents, professionals working within child welfare, school personnel, Marion County court staff, FCMs, and DCS staff working within the Educational Services Division. These interviews were unique to the collaborative work within Marion County.

All data on the individual children served by the Education Liaisons came from a new FosterEd: Indiana

case management system built for this project. The case management system allows the Liaisons to track the educational strengths and needs of the foster children referred to FosterEd, develop the child's education case plan, document the actions needed to ensure the child receives appropriate educational supports and services, record the dates on which these actions are completed, and record the degree to which the actions result in the child receiving appropriate educational services.

The case management system was designed, developed and implemented in response to the expansion of the initiative to all 92 counties in Indiana. Initially, the DCS explored the idea of enhancing their statewide child welfare information system to include the functionality needed to allow the Educational Liaisons to manage the education cases. This was not possible at this stage because the project's rapid statewide expansion required an immediate solution. The DCS is engaged in a major revision of its information system and did not feel it was fiscally prudent to make changes to the system that was expiring. Instead, the FosterEd: Indiana case management system was developed as a stand-alone, web-based tool used by the Educational Liaisons to manage their cases, by the DCS to manage the program, and by the evaluators to analyze the project's success. While highly functional, its stand-alone nature makes it more difficult to integrate the information and educational case plans into existing FCM documents and processes. The long-term plan is to incorporate the FosterEd case management system's functionality into the more general DCS case management system.

All but a few cases entered into the FosterEd case management system were included in the analysis for this report. Those few cases were eliminated because there was insufficient information entered by the Liaison. This primarily occurred early in the pilot when Liaisons operated outside of DCS.

Analysis: Family Case Manager Objectives

The Family Case Manager (FCM) objectives incorporated into this project are the result of a long, sometimes difficult, process, and they continue to evolve and be refined by the DCS in an effort to ensure they are regularly implemented and effective. This evaluation found that when implemented as designed, the objectives and associated processes created an infrastructure within the DCS that supports identification of unmet educational needs and ensures action is taken to meet these needs.

The expansion of the pilot to a statewide program increases the complexity of evaluating the FCM objectives moving forward. While the FosterEd: Indiana case management system facilitates analysis of the Education Liaison objectives, there is no parallel method of analyzing,

at the state level, the FosterEd FCM objectives. Yet it is critical that both internal and external system capacity be evaluated, developed and enhanced. It is therefore this evaluator's recommendation that these objectives and associated processes be monitored as part of the DCS Quality Service Review (QSR) program. The DCS QSR evaluates and monitors child welfare service provision much like the federal Child and Family Service Reviews. Integration of the new educational policies and processes into the review process will help ensure the FosterEd FCM objectives supporting the educational attainment of youth in care are met.

1. IDENTIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

All youth supervised by the DCS are assessed by their assigned FCM utilizing the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool. The CANS is a multi-purpose tool developed for children's services to support decision making, including level of care and service planning. A CANS rating in the education module of 2 or higher, or an identified issue with the child's education, initiates a referral to the Educational Liaison for further assessment or support.

There has been no systematic collection of CANS scores for cases that were referred to the Education Liaisons, or cases that were not referred to the Education Liaisons. It is therefore impossible to calculate the average score on the education module portion of the CANS for those cases that were referred to an Education Liaison. It is likewise impossible to say whether every case with a score of two or above on the education module of the CANS has been referred to a Liaison.

DCS leadership is currently exploring the possibility of requiring FCMs to automatically refer a case to an Education Liaison if the child has been in care for an extended period of time to ensure the educational needs of the child have been identified and addressed. This evaluator believes this would be a good practice.

A second process for identifying educational strengths and needs involves the FCM observing the child in their school setting. This process is intended to be separate and distinct from the FCM meeting with the child, which can and sometimes does happen at school. The evaluator found that not all FCMs were clear on the purpose of observing the child in their school setting. Moreover, this required process was sometimes in conflict with the wishes of the foster child, who did not want the FCM observing them in school, as that would mark them as a foster child. The evaluator recommends that a clear philosophy and expectation be set for FCMs with respect to observing the child in the school setting.

2. INTEGRATION INTO THE CHILD'S CASE PLANNING AND COURT REPORTS

The case file review revealed limited evidence that education goals and objectives are being integrated into the child's case plan. The case plan is a legal requirement for all children in Indiana's foster care system. The objective is to integrate the child's educational goals into the overall case planning for the child. It was difficult to analyze if this integration is occurring because the Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) notes were missing for many of the cases reviewed. Further, where there were CFTM records, many failed to indicate that education was discussed. In interviews, however, FCMs indicated that the educational needs of the child were being discussed at the CFTM, but that such discussion was not documented.

However, data from the FosterEd case management system suggests that education is being integrated into the broader process of planning for the child. In 47 of the cases referred to the Education Liaison, the Liaison attended the CFTM, educational issues were discussed at the meeting, and action steps were developed to address unmet educational needs. This indicates increased usage of the CFTM within the DCS practice model to discuss educational issues and develop plans for supporting the child's school success. Furthermore, the educational needs of the child had been integrated into the court reports in the sample of the cases reviewed.

This evaluator recommends that integration of the child's educational needs and progress in the child's case planning and court reports continue to be the focus of FCM training, such that education is more frequently discussed during CFTMs, this discussion is more frequently documented, and the recommendations and actions are integrated into the case plan.

Moreover, it is recommended that this objective and associated processes be incorporated into the DCS's Quality Service Review (QSR). The QSR is part of a comprehensive quality improvement process that DCS implemented several years ago to evaluate and monitor child welfare service delivery throughout Indiana. Going forward, the QSR should give specific attention to whether the child's educational well-being is included in case records, case plans and court reports.

3. INCREASED INVOLVEMENT OF BIOLOGICAL PARENTS

Increased involvement of biological parents is key to improving educational outcomes for youth in care. Increasing the capacity of parents can prepare them to advocate on behalf of the child once the family is no longer involved with the child welfare system.

It proved difficult to contact and interview biological parents served by this project, but those interviewed indicated that the additional support was critical and that they felt better equipped to support the educational success of their children. Evidence of increased involvement of biological parents was also documented in notes from Child and Family Team Meetings during which education was discussed and education plans developed.

A second, indirect method of increasing the involvement of biological parents involved FCMs making clear to schools which biological parents should be sent educational records, updates and reports, and included in school-based teams. Early in the model design it was determined that schools are often unclear about the biological parent's role. The increased communication between FCMs and schools, discussed at more length below, is designed, in part, to increase communication and collaboration between schools and biological parents.

4. COMMUNICATION WITH SCHOOLS

Early in the planning stages the lack of communication between the DCS and local schools was identified as a major obstacle. The primary goals were to help school districts know which of their students were in foster care, which school they had previously attended, and which adults should receive educational records, updates and communications. As the school systems in Marion County are large, it was determined that written communication would best support this objective. Multiple templates were developed to assist FCMs in communicating with the school, including templates to be used when a child entered care, exited care, changed residential placement, exited a school, or entered a school. Each of these letters indicated the adults to whom reports, records, updates and communications should be directed, usually the FCM, caregiver and biological parent. These letters were included in the case files for review.

In those cases examined, FCMs did not consistently send the appropriate letter. Yet, while the letters were not consistently sent to schools, interviews reflect there has been increased communication with between FCMs, CASAs and schools as a result of this work via FCMs, CASAs, and Educational Liaisons. Moreover, interviews reflect that schools see the Education Liaisons as helpful and that they provide important information regarding the children in care. In 55 cases, Liaisons attended meetings with the school, thereby facilitating and increasing communication between the DCS and the educational partners.

In the short-term it is recommended that there be a continued focus on ensuring FCMs communicate regularly with schools. FCMs need to provide information to schools

regarding the needs of individual foster children. Liaisons assist and communicate with schools only with respect to a subset of the children in care, while information should be shared with schools regarding every foster child's educational needs. In the long-term it is recommended that the DCS and the Department of Education develop strategies and practices to share information on youth in care between the data systems each agency oversees.

5. IMPROVED SCHOOL STABILITY

In Indiana, the term "school of origin" refers to the school the child attended upon entering the foster care system. Ideally, foster children should be able to stay in their school of origin whenever possible to maintain school stability. However, in the cases reviewed many of the children referred for educational support had been in care for many months such that it was no longer practical or in the child's best interest to return them to their school of origin. As a result, the evaluator looked for school stability in the previous six months. In only one case reviewed was a child moved from his or her school in the previous six months without documentation as to the appropriateness of the decision relative to the needs of the child. Moreover, it was clear that in all cases referred to Education Liaisons, education was carefully considered when making residential placement decisions for the child. Educational stability has been a focus of recent federal legislation and is a priority for the DCS. Interviews with DCS leadership reflect a focus on school stability. This has clearly been communicated to FCMs, both by incorporating education stability as one of the five FCM objectives of this project and through direct communication from DCS leadership.

Analysis: Education Liaison Objectives

The Liaison positions are seen as vital and a true support for many working with foster children. Schools report that communication has increased in cases with an Educational Liaison. Other professionals in the community report that the Education Liaisons have positively impacted responses from the schools. One professional stated, "Schools respond differently when a Liaison is working on the case." FCMs report they are seeing positive results on the cases referred to Liaisons. They report that in cases where children were being expelled, suspended or falling behind, the Liaison was able to work closely with the school to ensure that the child's best interests were served.

On the other hand, many interviewed were unclear about the exact function and purpose of the Liaisons. Some interviewees could not name the Liaison working with the child or did not know about the FosterEd pilot or program. It is difficult to know to what extent unfamiliarity with the program and program staff is a

product of the rapid and recent statewide expansion and to what extent it is indicative of a need to better promote and advertise FosterEd. In either case, to maximize the program's efficacy, a wide array of diverse stakeholders should know of and use the services and supports provided by the FosterEd Education Liaisons.

1. ASSISTING WITH THE IDENTIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

DEMOGRAPHICS

Before analyzing the individual outcomes in the 748 cases referred to Education Liaisons, this evaluation provides a brief overview of the demographics for these individual cases.

The FosterEd: Indiana case management system is the source of all data related to individual cases in this report. Four case types exist in the case management system: open, monitoring, closed-resolved, and closed-other. Each case status is determined by the Liaison overseeing the case. As of December 21, 2012, for the 748 total cases:

- Open cases represented the largest sample with 365 cases.
- There were 108 cases listed with a status of monitoring on the date of the extraction.
- There were 219 cases with a case-type of closed-resolved.
- There were 56 cases with a case-type of closed-other.

Gender - Of the 748 cases referred to the Liaisons: 437 (59%) were male, 278 (37%) were female, and 33 (4%) were missing gender data. The most recent demographic data available from the DCS from 2010 reflects that 51% of foster children are female and 49% are male.

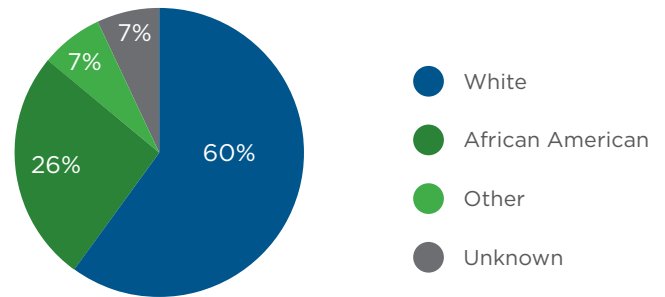### GENDER OF CHILDREN REFERRED TO LIAISONS
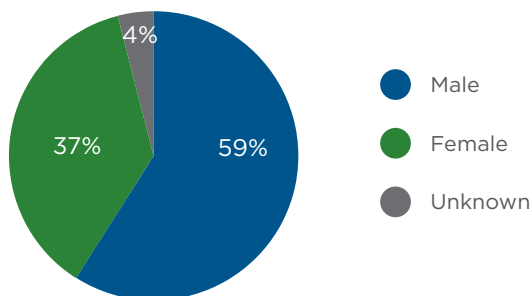
Race – Of the 748 cases referred to the Liaisons: 191 (26%) were African American, 451 (60%) were White, 53 (7%) were Other, 3 (.4%) were Asian, 1 (.1%) was Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 1 (.1%) was American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 48 (7%) were unknown. In 2010 the DCS reported the following racial breakdown of children

in care: 31% African American, 56% White, 5% two or more races, .3% Unknown, .2% American Indian /Alaskan Native, < .1% Asian/Pacific Islander.

Hispanic / Latino Origin – Of the 748 cases referred to the Liaisons: 38 (5%) were documented to be of Latino or Hispanic Origin, while in 163 (22%) of cases it could not be determined whether the child or youth was of Latino or Hispanic origin. In 2010, the DCS reported 6% of children in foster care to be of Hispanic Origin.

RACE OF CHILDREN REFERRED TO LIAISONS

Age – The data contained usable date of birth information for 627 of the referrals. The average age of the children referred was 12.47 years old. The children referred to the Liaisons were primarily school-aged, consistent with the initial expectations of the project. However, there were some pre-school children referred for early childhood education and this is a trend to follow as the project grows. The breakdown of those referred by age was: 15 were in the 0 – 4 age range (2%), 102 were in the 5 - 7 age range (16%), 108 were in the 8 – 10 age range (17%), 147 were in the 11 – 13 age range (23%), 158 were in the 14 – 16 age range (25%), 96 were in the 17 – 19 age range (15%) and one was over 19 years of age (.01%). In 2010, the age breakdown of children in care was reported by DCS as: < 1 year of age: 5%; 1 – 5 years of age: 31%; 6 – 10 years of age: 22%; 11 – 15 years of age: 25%; 16 – 18 years of age: 14%.

Length of time in care at time of referral:
While not all of the cases contained information on the length of time the child had been in care at the time of referral, for those that did contain this data the average time in care at time of referral was 17.38 months. The data is consistent across the state. That the average length of time in care at time of referral is so high is worth noting for at least two reasons: 1) the program is new, and for all children, regardless of how long they have been in care, this program represented the first time they could be referred for educational assistance; 2) children in care for longer periods of time are more likely to have challenges in a number of areas, including education. One would expect the average time in care at time of referral to fall steeply over time, as all children are assessed and referred soon after they enter the system. Early identification of

unmet educational needs should both help the child and reduce the resources needed to ensure educational needs are met.

IEP/504 designation:

A child referred to the Education Liaisons may have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Accommodation Plan already established at the time of referral, or one of these plans might be created after the referral as part of meeting the child's educational needs. An IEP describes the educational program that has been designed to meet a child's unique needs, should the child qualify for special education services under the federal Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IEP process provides an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when age appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with special education needs.

504 Accommodations are designed to meet the unique needs of an individual with a disability, as required by the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). Children who have disabilities, but whose disabilities do not interfere with their ability to progress in a general education setting, are not eligible for special education services; however, they may be entitled to a 504 Accommodation Plan. School districts must ensure that students with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to participate in all aspects of school on an equal playing field with students without disabilities.

Of the 748 children and youth referred to the Education Liaisons, 346 (46%) had an IEP and 20 (3%) received 504 Accommodations. There was missing data on 162 (22%) of the children and youth referred regarding their IEP or 504 designations.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLANS / 504 ACCOMMODATIONS OF CHILDREN REFERRED TO LIAISONS

- IEP 46%
- 504 3%
- Unknown 22%
- None 29%
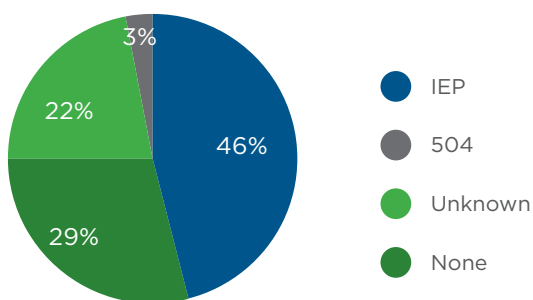
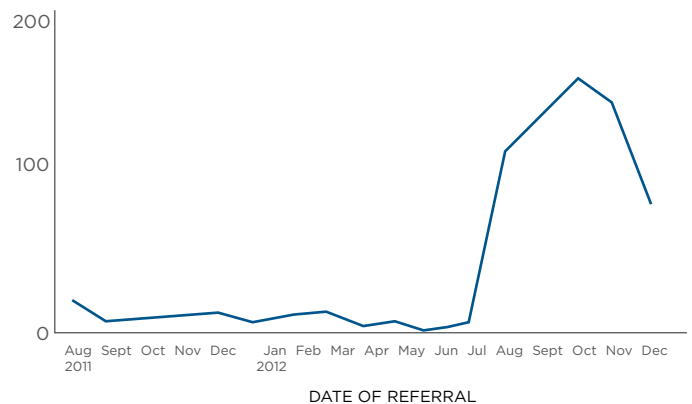### IDENTIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

The first step in identifying educational strengths and needs is referral to an Education Liaison. The program's design called for all children and youth with a score of 2 or higher on the education module of the CANS to be referred to an Education Liaison for further assessment

and for the development of a FosterEd education plan. This ensured children and youth would receive further evaluation when there was a concern regarding their education. FCMs are also able to refer any case to an Education Liaison, regardless of the child's score on the education module of the CANS.

The chart below documents the increasing number of referrals as the project has expanded. Referrals are tracked as of the date the Liaison receives the referral from the FCM. In August 2012, the number of referrals spiked as this was the time period in which Liaisons were deployed throughout the state. August also marked the return of most students to school. Going forward, it will be critical to track referral data as trends and spikes will inform program and staffing needs for FosterEd: Indiana.

While the increasing number of referrals is generally a positive sign, at least in terms of FCMs seeing FosterEd: Indiana as a useful program for themselves and children, Liaison caseloads should be carefully monitored. It is important that Liaisons be able to provide assistance to those youth and families most in need. If referrals and caseloads rise too quickly, thought should be given to how best to screen which cases are referred to the Liaisons, including possibly limiting referrals to those foster children with a score of 2 or higher on the education module of the CANS.

REFERRALS (AUGUST 2011 THROUGH DECEMBER 2012)

DATE OF REFERRAL

Initial identification of educational needs is part of the referral process. When referring a case to an Education Liaison, the FCM is asked to indicate on a referral form whether one or more of the following was a reason for referral:

- Extended education screen needed
- Lack of clarity about educational rights and responsibilities
- Parent or caregiver wants educational training
- Missing education records or credits
- Early childhood education issue
- Enrollment in appropriate school or classes

- Attendance
- Student wants academic support
- Student requires academic support
- Student wants behavioral support
- Student has behavioral issues in school
- Student wants extra educational opportunities
- Student needs help with transition to college
- School stability
- Special Education or 504 Accommodations
- Other

In the cases reviewed, the most common educational issue areas identified by FCMs when referring cases to Education Liaisons were:

1. Student has behavioral issues in school
2. Special Education or 504 Accommodations
3. Enrollment in appropriate school or classes
4. Student requires academic support.

Many of the youth had multiple educational needs identified at the time of the referral by the FCM. In total, 1,536 unmet educational needs were identified, or an average of two unmet educational needs for every child, each of which created a barrier to educational success. Additionally, many of the children had multiple school placements, had been in care for a number of years, and had complex educational needs that the FCM had already been working to resolve.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IDENTIFIED AT TIME OF REFERRAL
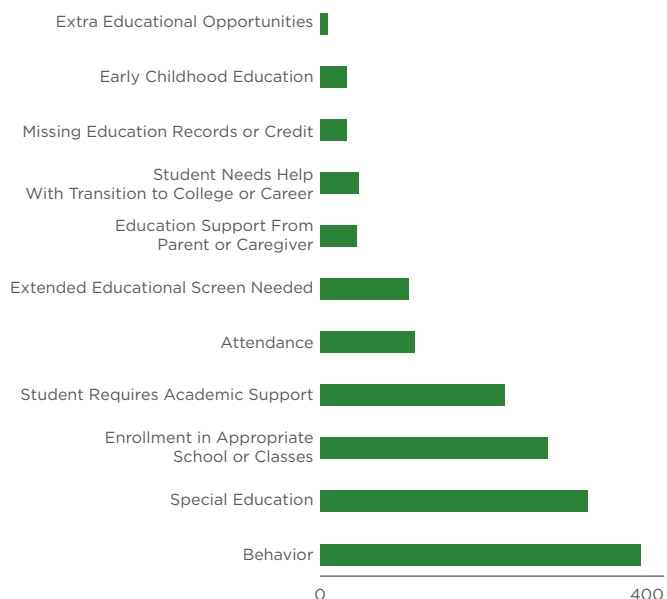
Under this model, once the main unmet educational needs are identified and documented, either by the FCM as part of the referral process or by the Education Liaison as they work on the case, the Education Liaisons create an education plan for the child. This includes identification of sub-issues within each unmet need along with the actions needed to resolve the sub-issues. Sub-issues describe in much more detail the nature of the challenges confronting the foster child. Actions describe the steps necessary to resolve the sub-issue, who is to take the steps, and the anticipated date by which the action should be completed.

In the cases reviewed for this evaluation, the average length of time from the identification of an unmet education need to the need being met was 18 work days.

2. ENSURING INDIVIDUAL FOSTER CHILDREN RECEIVE NEEDED EDUCATIONAL SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

ACTIONS ON BEHALF OF INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN

FosterEd: Indiana's case management system contains 60 pre-programmed actions for possible inclusion in an education plan to address identified unmet needs and sub-issues. Liaisons are also free to enter any other actions. In the cases reviewed for this report, the most frequently taken action was that the education need was assessed or further explored; this occurred in 79 of the cases. This is understandable, as further assessment is often necessary to better understand the educational needs of the child. Attending meetings at the school, occurring in 55 cases, and attending IEP meetings, also in 55 cases, were the next most frequently taken actions. This is significant as interviews suggest that the presence of the Liaisons at these meetings both builds communication with the school and the capacity of the referring FCM as the FCM learns how to best work with the school to support the educational needs of the child.

Another common action was attending a Child Family Team Meeting (47 cases) in order to discuss educational issues and actions necessary for resolution. The next most common action was enrolling the child in the appropriate school (22 cases) to assure the child's educational needs were addressed.

Actions were typically taken relatively quickly after being included in the education plan. The average number of work days from the action being recommended until the action was completed was 10.62 work days. Review of cases referred to the Education Liaisons revealed consistent follow-through.

INDIVIDUAL CASE OUTCOMES

Through the end of 2012, 748 cases had been referred to the Education Liaisons. The majority of cases were referred from August to December. As of December 21, 2012, 473 of the children referred to the Education Liaisons had open FosterEd cases while 275 of the children referred to the Education Liaisons had closed FosterEd cases. Of the 275 closed FosterEd cases: 205 cases were closed-successful because all the child's identified educational needs had been met; 17 cases were closed- because no unmet educational needs were identified; and 53 cases were closed-unsuccessful because not all the child's identified educational needs were met (an education case is closed when all issues have been resolved). 56 of these cases were closed for other reasons than fully resolved. Of these 275 cases, 17 cases were closed with no educational needs identified.

Through the end of 2012, a total of 1,536 unmet needs had been identified. The unmet needs most identified in descending order of frequency were: behavior (374), special education (312), enrollment in appropriate school or classes (265), the student requiring academic support (215), attendance (110), extended educational screen needed (103), student needs help with transition to college or career (46), education support from parent or caregiver (43), missing education records or credit (31), early childhood education (31), and extra educational opportunities (6).

Of the 219 cases closed with successful resolution, 14 had no educational needs identified. In the other 205 cases, 428 unmet identified needs were identified and met. They were, in descending order of frequency: behavior (100), special education (99), enrollment in appropriate school or classes (84), the student requiring academic support (59), attendance (22), extended educational screen needed (19), education support from parent or caregiver (17), student needs help with transition to college or career (10), missing education records or credit (9), early childhood education (8), and extra educational opportunities (1).

There were 56 FosterEd cases that had been closed as "other" or unresolved. It cannot be determined why the cases were closed prior to all the child's educational needs being met, as this information is not collected in the data management system. While data was not collected on why Education Liaisons closed cases prior to all educational needs being met, reasons likely include the child's dependency case being closed prior to all educational needs being met. There were 107 unmet educational needs identified for these children. While some cases are closed for reasons other than resolution, there were 6 sub-issues resolved for the 56 cases that had been closed in this category. This reflects that many sub-issues were successfully resolved in these cases, even though all of the issues

could not be successfully resolved prior to case closure. Some cases will inevitably be closed by the DCS prior to resolution of the educational case successfully addressing all educational issues for a child. The issues facing the youth in the cases closed as "other" or unresolved were: behavior (23), special education (23), enrollment in appropriate school or classes (16), the student requiring academic support (15), attendance (15), extended educational screen needed (5), student needs help with transition to college or career (3), education support from parent or caregiver (3), missing education records or credit (2), and extra educational opportunities (2).

Resolution of issues has been successfully achieved in monitoring, open, and close/other cases, although for monitoring and open cases, there are still issues that require continued work and support of the Liaisons before the case can be successfully closed. However, once issues are identified, often there are sub-issues identified that need resolution before the larger issue can be addressed. In the FosterEd cases that are still open, either in the open or monitoring status, there have been 1,001 issues identified thus far. In these open and monitoring cases, 298 of the identified educational needs have been met. The identified challenges facing these youth are: behavior (251), special education (190), enrollment in appropriate school or classes (165), the student requiring academic support (141), attendance (73), extended educational screen needed (79), student needs help with transition to college or career (33), education support from parent or caregiver (23), missing education records or credit (20), early childhood education (23), and extra educational opportunities (3).

The average length of time from case referral to case closure for all closed cases was 43 work days.

Above and beyond the data extracted from the FosterEd: Indiana case management system, the evaluator found evidence that the expertise of the Educational Liaison is an important resource in addressing the unmet educational needs of the child. Those working within the system – the CASAs, FCMs, and FCM Supervisor interviewed – reported a favorable impression of the significance of the work being done by the Educational Liaisons to meet the educational needs of these youth.

3. BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF FCMS, FOSTER PARENTS, BIOLOGICAL PARENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

One of the primary Education Liaison objectives was to build the capacity of others to support the child's educational success. This was accomplished through two primary mechanisms: 1) working closely and intentionally with others when providing support to individual foster

children; and 2) providing training to a wide variety of stakeholders on the most common educational challenges confronting foster children and strategies for overcoming those challenges. The goal of this work is to build the knowledge and skills of those serving youth to ensure they are equipped to serve as educational champions.

While the FosterEd: Indiana case management system had the capacity to track when technical assistance was provided to FCMs or other stakeholders, and when such technical assistance resulted in the stakeholder feeling capable of ensuring the child's educational needs were met without further assistance from the Liaison, these data fields were sparsely populated. There were 37 cases in which the Liaison documented that he or she provided technical assistance to the FCM such that the FCM felt capable of resolving the issue independently, but anecdotal evidence suggests that technical assistance was provided to FCMs as part of almost every case. There were also cases in which caregivers were provided technical assistance, either by the Liaison or a community provider, but this was also largely undocumented. This evaluator recommends that the process for recording capacity building at the individual level be revisited.

Liaisons also developed and delivered a number of trainings for a diverse range of audiences, including FCMs, DCS Supervisors, attorneys, child support professionals, foster parents and biological parents. Training topics included:

- Special education
- School choice
- College Cost/How to Apply/How is it different for foster care?
- Summer – How to prepare for keeping academics in the summer
- Credit Recovery Programs
- What if a child fails ISTEP/ECA or IREAD
- Safe Summer
- School Starting? So soon? Getting a family organized for school
- Cultural Competency in the Classroom
- Let's apply to college!
- Special Education Alphabet Soup: IEP, RTI, and 504
- Survival Kit to Winter Break
- Life After High School

Trainings were often conducted in partnership with experts from school districts, state agencies, community organizations or attorneys. Initial findings from surveys indicate that the trainings were well-received; attendees reported increased knowledge about how to support the educational needs of youth in care.

4. BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

There are a myriad of educational services available to at-risk children in Indiana. Organizations like InSource and About Special Kids (ASK) help train and support parents and caregivers of children with disabilities such that they are better equipped to support their child's educational needs; both partnered with FosterEd: Indiana. The program also partnered with community organizations that work specifically to help foster youth, such as Connected By 25 and the Indianapolis Bar Association. Focusing on the utilization of outside partners and resources can be a great strength as those working with foster children may be able to identify and access community supports for these children.

Local engagement was largely supported by the work of Rita Mack-White, FosterEd Program Manager. Ms. Mack-White, a staff member with the Indiana Youth Institute, worked to ensure the capacity of the DCS and the community was maximized to provide a wide array of services for youth in care. Ms. Mack-White worked full-time in support of the project for 12 months. During that time she worked with the DCS and Child Advocates to refine the internal workings of the project. Ms. Mack-White also spent time networking and building relationships with Marion County community organizations that provide supportive services to youth in care. Partnerships with the Indianapolis Bar Association, Villages, ASK, and others were fostered through these efforts.

Ms. Mack-White's work played a significant role in the expansion of the FoserEd pilot to a statewide intiative. Moreover, her role in the pilot's success contributed to the DCS's decision to create a Director of Educational Services position, to whom the Educational Liaisons would report, rather than have the Liaisons report to their local child welfare director. The DCS hired Dr. Anita Silverman as Indiana DCS's first Director of Educational Services. Dr. Silverman has rich experience in the field of education; she is a former a charter school principal with deep ties to the education community. Her expertise and relationships contributed significantly to the pilot's success, and continue contributing significantly to the success of the statewide program, as evidenced by many interviews in which stakeholders expressed their appreciation for her efforts.

Dr. Silverman has also engaged state agencies in this effort. Systems working with youth in care have long acknowledged the need to improve information and resource sharing. Since the implementation of FosterEd: Indiana, progress has been made in addressing this pressing need. Dr. Silverman continues to to promote the need for collaboration in data sharing with the DCS and the Indiana Department of Education. It is recommended that data sharing remain a goal.

Another resource that was key to the growth of the program was the collaboration with other partners. Program leadership ensured that local out-of-school time programs were identified and a directory was provided to the Education Liaisons outlining the programs and services offered by organizations in the community. This directory allowed the Education Liaisons to easily navigate the wide array of services available in Marion County to best match children with appropriate programs. Relationships with out-of-school time organizations like the Indiana Afterschool Network were fostered, ensuring such organizations will continue to provide significant external supports for youth in care.

5. BUILDING PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Dr. Silverman's work in partnering with local schools on individual cases was reflected in interviews with local school leadership, who reported positive interactions and work with Dr. Silverman. This experience with Dr. Silverman resulted in schools seeking to work more directly with the DCS to resolve educational issues.

Ms. Mack-White spent time working with the McKinney- Vento Liaisons in Marion County. The district McKinney- Vento Liaisons were identified as key professionals likely to be working with foster children. Accordingly, Ms. Mack-White conducted a training for them on the FosterEd program, including instruction on accessing the Educational Liaisons as a resource. This was an opportunity to engage a variety of schools and to build partnerships with schools throughout Marion County. Ms. Mack-White also met with individual schools to educate school leadership about the pilot.

Conclusion and Recommendations

FosterEd: Indiana was launched as a statewide program and fully integrated into Indiana's Department of Child Services (DCS) after a relatively short pilot in Marion County. The program represents a statewide effort to intentionally dedicate resources and realign processes to improve the educational outcomes of foster children. Effective strategies have been implemented and provide a solid foundation to continue this work. The goals of the program and accompanying objectives are proving to be more than the sum of their parts; evidence suggests they are shifting the culture and conversation such that Foster Case Managers (FCMs), parents, caregivers, school staff and agency administrators are increasingly focused on ensuring foster children succeed in school.

An array of partners should be recognized for supporting, developing, and implementing the Marion County pilot, upon which FosterEd: Indiana is based. The pilot received significant financial support from five Indiana-based foundations, benefited from the time and energy of a variety of community organizations during the planning process, and would not have succeeded were it not for the commitment and close collaboration of Marion County agencies. The Marion County pilot truly is the foundation upon which the statewide program was built. Each Liaison has been trained and supported to engage local community partners and school districts in the manner piloted in Marion County.

The DCS is to be commended for expanding the pilot into a statewide program and embedding the program within their agency and their practice model. The DCS's decision to create and fund 16 full-time Education Liaison positions and a Director of Education position to oversee the program reflects a true commitment to the children in their care. In addition to the Liaison and Director of Education positions, and equally critical to the success of improving educational outcomes of foster youth, are the new FCM objectives related to education. FCMs in the pilot unit each, to varying degrees, implemented new processes focused on meeting the new educational objectives. These new objectives and associated processes are now spreading statewide.

Building upon this initial success, there remain opportunities to continue to grow and develop the processes and policies within the DCS. First, it is recommended that the new FosterEd educational processes are reviewed and those directly impacting educational success are fully embedded into the Quality Service Reviews conducted by the DCS. Specifically, case referral eligibility could be analyzed to ensure that children are referred for educational support early in the case as well as at critical junctures in the case. This could also help with development of

consistent policies and procedures regarding observation of children in their school setting, as this evaluator recommends there be clarification of the expectations of the FCM regarding visitation and communication with the schools. FCMs are, for the most part, remaining connected with the schools. With a few exceptions they communicate either verbally or in writing with the schools. However, there remains opportunity for clarification of the expectation that the FCM will observe the child in his or her school setting. Continued evaluation of the case reports and case plans using the Quality Service Review processes could provide rich information to the Department leadership on how to best support this effort. The review process could also help the DCS determine the best processes for integrating educational needs into the case planning process and court reports.

Second, it is recommended that community partners continue to be engaged and leveraged. The resources they provide range from afterschool tutoring to targeted support for families learning to support their child's education. These community partners act as an extension of the Educational Liaison, increasing the capacity of the program to meet the educational needs of children and youth in foster care. It is important that these resources are identified and that all partners understand not only the scope of the services available but also how to best access these valuable resources.

Third, the DCS should continue to analyze data from the FosterEd educational case management system and eventually integrate this functionality into the DCS state child welfare information system. This will make it significantly easier to integrate the education related information from both systems into existing FCM documents and processes.

Fourth, the DCS and the Department of Education should continue to pursue opportunities to share data. The program, and the foster children served by the program, would benefit greatly if education information such as attendance, grades, test scores and school discipline records flowed directly into the FosterEd: Indiana case management system, and eventually into the DCS's case management system. School districts and schools would benefit from electronically receiving information indicating which students are in foster care and how to contact those students' caregivers, biological parents, and social workers.

Finally, it would be helpful to explore increasing the number of Education Liaison positions, as referrals are likely to increase. Tracking referral data going forward will assist in evaluating need and capacity, and determining if more Education Liaison positions are needed.

FosterEd: Indiana will continue to grow, both in terms of the number of children served and its impact upon Indiana's foster children. DCS leadership should continue to monitor the growth of the program and the actions needed to resolve educational issues. This will allow the system to proactively and effectively respond to the most common unmet educational needs.

It is imperative that children and youth in foster care experience educational success. FosterEd: Indiana is an extraordinary program that addresses educational barriers both systematically and individually, one child at a time. Indiana has and will continue to benefit richly from the vision and forethought of the leadership within the organizations, foundations, and agencies that developed and implemented this program.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Review the new educational processes and fully embed those directly impacting educational success into the Quality Service Reviews conducted by the DCS.
   a. Analyze case referral eligibility to ensure that children are referred for educational support early in the case as well as at critical junctures in the case;
   b. Develop consistent policies and procedures regarding observation of children in their school setting;
   c. Determine the best processes for integrating educational needs into the case planning process and court reports.

2. Continue to focus on identification of and linkage to external resources to support the educational needs of foster youth.

3. Continue to analyze data from the educational case management system and eventually integrate this functionality into the DCS state child welfare information system.

4. Continue to engage state level partners to share valuable data and resources regarding the educational needs of youth in care.

5. Explore increasing the number of Education Liaison positions, as referrals are likely to increase.

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ABOUT STEPHANIE YODER, INDEPENDENT EVALUATOR

Stephanie Beasley Yoder received her B.S. from Indiana University Bloomington, majoring in Criminal Justice and Sociology. She received her Master's in Social Work in 2004 from Indiana University School of Social Work. Ms. Yoder spent 14 years working within the Department of Child Services and then spent 4 years working with a statewide nonprofit. She serves local communities as an evaluator and facilitator of community development initiatives.

Ms. Yoder is Adjunct Faculty at Indiana University and is Principal Consultant of Beasley Yoder Consulting. She served as the independent evaluator for this project. As an evaluator, Ms. Yoder works with organizations to gather feedback from key stakeholders using interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, document reviews, observations, journals, and portfolios of work samples to review processes and recommend change. She develops evaluation protocols, designs instruments, analyzes data and generates recommendations for change. Ms. Yoder has significant experience in the application of outcomes-based planning and evaluation.