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Poverty 423

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## Foster Care Youth and Education

### I. Introduction and Thesis

*In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a pre-requisite..." --*

President Barack Obama, Address to Joint Session of Congress, February 24, 2009

In 2010, 3.3 million alleged reports of child abuse and neglect were made in the United States that involved an estimated 6 million children (Children's Bureau, 2010). On the last day of the 2009 Fiscal Year, there were 435,00 children in foster care (Children's Bureau, 2010). The youth that are a part of the child welfare system<sup>i</sup> are almost exclusively from impoverished backgrounds, a point explained further in section IV. Throughout the course of my studies of poverty, one solution continued to present itself: a quality education. A quality education is one of the best tools, if not the best tool for helping a child from an unstable background overcome adversities and succeed as an adult, yet impoverished children, and children in the foster care system in particular, are at a disadvantage and obtain disproportionately worse outcomes than their peers.

In my research paper I will focus on education for youth in the foster care system. First, I will discuss the history of the foster care system and outline the

protocol of the child welfare system and how a child moves through the child welfare system. Second, I will review the makeup of the population of children in the child welfare system as well as the number of placements youth receive during their experience in foster care. Third, I will chart the developmental outcomes these youth experience and show the stratification of the best and worse placements of these children. Fourth, I will discuss the problems of the system paying particular attention to those that involve education and their effects on children's wellbeing. I will also assess the legislation already enacted that promotes better educational outcomes for foster care youth and show ways that these laws can be improved. Finally, I will make some policy suggestions to improve children's educational attainment in the child welfare system as well as the overall development of a child.

## II. The History of Foster Care

Child welfare services became federally funded under Title V of the Social Security Act of 1935 under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. However, the deeper origins of foster care and the child welfare system are in private charitable organizations like the Children's Aid Society founded by Charles Loring Brace in 1853 to give aid and provide homes to orphaned or abandoned children in New York City. In 1923, the Children's Aid Society created the first formal foster care department that included adoption services.

With increased federal funding under the Social Security Act of 1935, government child welfare organizations began to come together after federal funding was established and a series of programs including services meant to

replace or enhance parental care were added to the Social Security Act of 1935. In addition, the amendment established requirements for states to match federal funding. This federal and state grant went to foster care funding for children who benefitted from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children in 1961, if the court decided it was contrary to their welfare to remain in their home of origin (*Child Welfare League of America*, 2003, 1).

Concern grew among Congress members in the 1970's when the numbers of children in foster care placements grew in number and duration (*Child Welfare League of America*, 2003, 2). This observation made the federal government question whether the guaranteed funding for foster care encouraged states to place children into foster care unnecessarily. Leading up to the Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Amendments of 1980, Congress, through a series of hearings, determined several problems with the child welfare system at the state level which included: lack of provision of alternative services that may allow a child to remain at home, overly restrictive foster care placements,<sup>ii</sup> a lack of written case plans and consistent review of cases, etc. (*Child Welfare League of America*, 2004, 2-3).

The information gleaned from Congress about the problems with the child welfare system led to the Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Amendments passed in 1980. The Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Amendments added funding to two specific categories of child welfare services: reimbursements for foster care families so that they could supplement the cost of providing for an additional child and monetary support to adoptive parents. In addition, the Foster Care and

Adoption Assistance Amendments increased protection for children in the foster care system and also required that states make “reasonable efforts” to preserve families and reunify parents and children in the system (*Child Welfare League of America*, 2004, 3-4). However, there has been a more recent shift in the child welfare system that views the safety and stability of the child as primary priority, even if original families cannot be preserved or reunited.

### III. Foster Care System Procedures

This history of the system to care for abused and neglected children reveals efforts to keep families together and yet protect children. This next section outlines how a youth moves through the child welfare system (See Appendix A):

First, a report of possible child abuse or neglect is reported by a friend, neighbor, social worker, or other mandated reporters (varies by state) is made to Child Protective Services (CPS). The worker hearing the report screens the call in, or records the report and passes along the report information to CPS, if he or she believes the child may be at a safety risk. The call may be “screened out,” or simply not recorded and left alone if there is not sufficient information gleaned in the report. In some cases, the caller may be referred to community services or law enforcement for additional help.

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974 defines *child maltreatment* as “serious harm (neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse or neglect) caused to children by parents or primary caregivers, such as extended family members or babysitters...; [it] can also include harm that a

caregiver allows to happen or does not prevent from happening to a child” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011, 2).

Depending on the concern for risk of safety, Child Protective Services will either investigate and find a case “substantiated” (found to contain instances of neglect or abuse) or “unsubstantiated,” (found not to contain instances of child abuse or neglect) or conduct a home visit where community-based services may or may not be offered to address the family’s needs (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011, 9). After investigation, if the case is found “unsubstantiated,” then the case is closed.

If the case is “substantiated,” the child’s family will be referred for voluntary services or the case will be closed when there is little to no risk of future abuse. In cases where the child is at risk for harm in the near future, a CPS agent files a court petition to remove the child from the home. If the child is in imminent danger, Child Protective Services can remove him or her from the home without a court mandate (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011, 9). If Child Protective Services finds that it is in the best interest of the child to be placed in temporary out-of-home care, then a Protective Hearing to determine whether a child should be placed in out-of-home care is scheduled within 72 hours.

Once a child is placed in out of home care, the family is provided services so that appropriate measures can be taken to improve the home environment in the hopes that children can return to their families of origin. It is the view of the Child Welfare System that reasonable efforts should be taken to reunify families; however,

under the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, if children are in the foster care system for fifteen of the most recent twenty-two months “[s]tate agencies are required to seek termination of the parent-child relationship” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011, 7). Exceptions to this ruling occur if termination of the parent-child relationship is proven not to be in the best interest of the child, if a relative has cared for the child, or if adequate services were not provided to the family by the state (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011, 7). The ultimate goal of the child welfare system is to arrange for safe, appropriate permanent family connections or new family for a child.

#### IV. The Foster Care Population

It is important to get an accurate understanding of the children that make up the Foster Care system:

Table 1

### Characteristics of Children and Youth in Foster Care

Number of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2009		423,773
Characteristics of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2009	Number	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
Young children (age 0–4)	129,753	31
School age children and youth (age 5–17)	286,895	67.7
Young adults (age 18–20)	18,333	5
<b>Race/Ethnicity*</b>		
White	167,235	40
Black	127,821	30
Hispanic (any race)	8,118	20
Other children and youth of color	41,588	10
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	222,685	53
Female	200,999	47

\* Includes 2 percent whose race/ethnicity was unknown

School age children in foster care in FY 2009 experienced a number of moves while in foster care as shown in Figure 1, a factor that can significantly impacted their school experiences. Federal data indicate that school age children in foster care in FY 2009 experience an average of 3.38 placements.

As the table shows, the vast majority of children in the system are of school age. It also shows that there are slightly more males in the system than females. One of the most important insights this chart shows is that black children and other minorities are much more likely than white children to be in the system, although there is still a large number of white children. Racial minorities in the foster care system are disproportionate to their fraction of the population. Minorities make up 35% of the total U.S. population and 60% of the foster care population (Santa Cruz, 2010). Though the percentage of minorities does not correspond to their percentage of the total United States population, it is closer to the percentage of minorities in poverty, 65% (Tavernise, 2011). Barbell and Freundlich, in their article on the foster care system today, discuss the foster care system and its relation to poverty. The authors state that poverty affects the ability of parents to provide for their children, and, in light of this information, stress that children from poor families are much more

likely to be reported as victims of neglect (Barbell and Freundlich, 9). Barbell and Freundlich expand on child abuse and its relation to poverty by citing Sendlack and Broadhurst's 1996 study that found children from families with a household income at or below \$15,000 to be at greater risk of every form of child maltreatment (9).

Though the extent to which poverty affects the prevalence of child abuse and neglect has not been determined, there are definite ties linking the social issues of poverty and child abuse and neglect (9). This helps us combat problems in the foster care system, especially problems pertaining to education. We need to understand the culture of the youth in the foster care system.

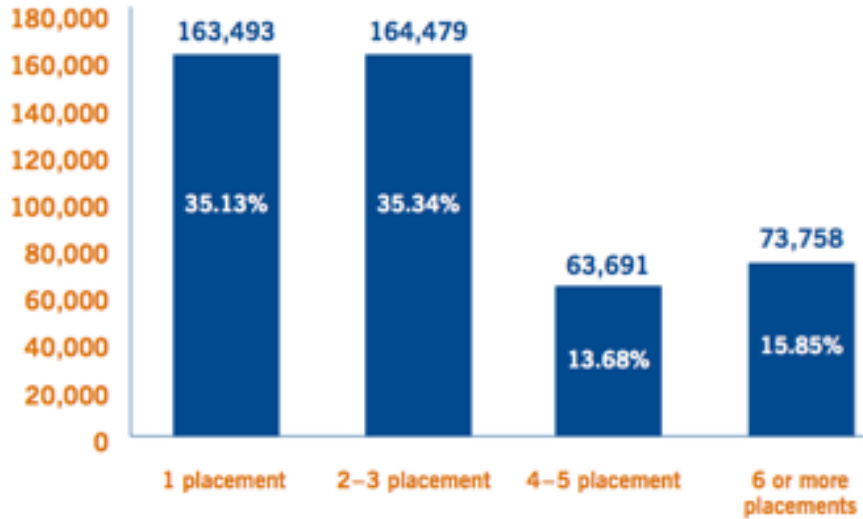
#### V. Frequency of Placements of Foster Care Youth

Instability and the average number of moves children of school age in the foster care system make over the course of their experience affects children's educational attainment vital to adult success.



Table 2

**School-Age Children and Youth in Foster Care (5–18 Years) in FY 2009:  
Number of Children by Number of Placements**



Source: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY 2009 data (October 1, 2008 through September 30, 2009).



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Note that a vast majority of foster care youth, over 65%, experience two or more moves while in the system, while 29.53% of youth cope with four or more placements. Only 35.13% have a first placement that is permanent (*National Working Group on Foster Care Education, 2012*). A sizable percentage of the population of foster care children is given multiple placements and move frequently. This instability affects how well children do in school if they were to remain in the same school, and probably correlates with movements to different schools.

## VI. Developmental Outcomes of Youth in Foster Care

Knowing the developmental outcomes of children in foster care assists us in understanding the impact of the experience on children. E. Christopher Lloyd examines these outcomes in his article, “Developmental Outcomes After Five Years

for Foster Children Returned Home, Remaining in Care, or Adopted.” As the title indicates, the author compares the outcomes of foster children who are returned home, who remain in foster care, and who are adopted. The author acknowledges the vulnerability of children to dangers of maltreatment and poverty in their early years before foster care (Lloyd, 1383). By looking at previously performed studies (Rubin et al. (2007), Ringeisen et al. (2009), Feigelman (1997), Taussig et al. (2001), and Doyle (2007)), Lloyd expected to find increased developmental risk for those children who reside in foster care. The author uses data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), a federally funded study that explains the pathways of children through child welfare services (Lloyd,1385). The sample included children ranging in age from infancy to 14 years of age. The children who participated in the study were specified by gender, race, age, maltreatment type, final placement type, time in placement, household income, size and year. In addition, these youth were assessed for Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME), caregiver education, social competence, adaptive behavior, preschool language scales, cognitive development, level of achievement, and behavior problems (Lloyd 1385-1386).<sup>iii</sup>

Lloyd and his colleagues then ran regressions on the data in order to answer the key question: “what effect the final child welfare placement has on children’s developmental outcomes at time of entry into primary education” (Lloyd, 1387). Two shortcomings of this study are that it does not account for the effects of placement changes that are almost certain in foster care and that there were few infants included in the study (Lloyd, 1388). The small number of infants in the

study often skews the results and gives inaccurate data. Ultimately, the author found that returning to the home of origin and adoption had the most positive outcomes for development. He also found that foster care children, other than having good adaptive behavior, had the poorest developmental outcomes based on the data collected (Lloyd 1389). This study gives a solid foundation for understanding the barriers children in the welfare system face in gaining a good education, and, in a broader sense, most aspects of development.

As E. Christopher Lloyd's study identifies, the vast majority of youth enter the foster care system enter for the reasons of neglect and abuse in their home of origin. Even before educational barriers arise, children who are subject to physical, sexual, or psychological abuse and neglect face additional consequences that heighten the obstacles youth must overcome to obtain a good education. Also addressed is the prevalence of income poverty in the lives of foster care youth before their placement (Lloyd et al., 2011, 1384).

In terms of stratification of outcomes from best to worst, this study makes it clear that children who remain in foster care throughout their childhood have the worst outcomes. Conversely, children who returned to their home of origin or were adopted experienced better developmental outcomes compared to their peers that still remained in foster care (Lloyd, 2011, 1398). Reunification is contingent on improvement in the home, so it is logical that children did well coming back into their original home. The stability and familiarity of the home setting likely also plays a role in the improved developmental outcomes for this group of youth. The

focus on stability for foster youth reflects current policy that gives preference to returning children to their biological parents or official guardians if it is in the child's best interest.

For children who are adopted, it also is valid that their outcomes are improved because of the stability acquired with a permanent family placement. Also, though not the main reason adopted children have better outcomes, a family who is able to adopt is almost certainly not poor and can provide adequately for their children's needs. Also, as previously touched upon, under the Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Amendment of 1980, adoptive parents receive some monetary support to help with the financial burden of caring for an additional child. Children placed in the foster care system are disproportionately from income-impooverished families who cannot sufficiently provide for their children's needs. These foster care youth, many from income-impooverished families, also suffer developmental and educational setbacks though the exact relationship between income, educational, and developmental outcomes is unknown.

Being placed into an adoptive home that has adequate means to provide for the child and will be a stabilizing force in the child's life is beneficial. Interestingly, the author also finds that experiences in early foster care placements in poverty did not have a significant effect on children's development; in other words, "poverty is less important in driving developmental outcomes than permanency of placements" (Lloyd, 2011, 1398). These data cause me to believe that perhaps placement back into the original improved home is more beneficial than adoption. This assertion

does not mean that the rule is always home placement is best option, adoption is better, and foster care is the worst option; it is important to remember that every case is different and what is a perfect solution for one child may not be perfect for another. In addition, a child's educational and developmental outcomes rely on a combination of factors. There is still a lot we do not know about the complex relationship between the factors (education, number of placements, etc.) and adult outcomes. I focus specifically in my paper on the factor of stability that I argue plays a prominent role in foster youth educational achievement.

## VII. Problems with the Foster Care System Under Education

The problems that need to be addressed in the child welfare system are clear.

Foster care youth have worse educational outcomes as well as developmental outcomes than their peers. Legislation that combats these issues already exists at the state level. One problem, which I will elaborate on later, is the fact that these acts and corresponding programs that are supposed to help solve educational problems of foster care children are not universally available. It is up to the states to decide which policies to enact, if any, to combat these issues.

D. Wood et al., in his study, "Impact of family relocation on children's growth, development, school function, and behavior," finds that children subject to school mobility experience decreased academic progress and opportunities for educational success (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2008, 4). David Kerbow in his study on patterns of urban student mobility and school reform, found that children who changed schools four or more times by the sixth grade had lost one year of

educational progress. In addition, children who attended public schools who were also in the foster care system scored 16%-20% percentage points lower on statewide standardized tests than students who were not in the child welfare system (Burley and Halpern, 2001).

#### VIII. Foster Care Legislation

Instability clearly has a negative effect on all children's education, but especially already at risk populations of youth in the foster care system. The National Conference of State Legislatures estimates that two-thirds to three-quarters of children who enter the child welfare system must change schools and that almost 65% had to do so mid-year (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2008, 4). Recognizing this problem, legislatures have developed policies aimed to decrease the effects of instability that changing schools may cause.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.) helped to promote educational stability by offering children "awaiting foster care placement" the right to remain in their school of origin among other rights and protections (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2008, 5). One problem with this act is that it does not concretely define "awaiting foster care placement" so there is variation in the action taken among states. The following state acts were a response to this legislature and an attempt at promoting a steady, consistent education for foster youth.

Interagency coordination, collaboration, and information exchange expedites the process of changing schools by streamlining the exchange of school records and

the process of notifying the necessary parties (social worker, court system, foster parents, etc.) (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2008, 2). California and Washington D.C. are the leaders in fostering the connection between the child welfare and education systems.

California Assembly Bill 490 was breakthrough legislation that promotes this connection. This bill required that “educators, care providers, advocates, and the juvenile courts [should] work together to maintain stable school placements and ensure each pupil...has access to the academic resources, services, and extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to all other pupils” (3). This bill also required that children in foster care were given educational liaisons that ensured timely transfers of school and medical records and educational placements.

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Similarly, in 2003 Washington D.C. passed legislation requiring child welfare agencies and school districts to work with an interagency oversight committee to develop protocols to ensure “communication, coordination, collaboration, and effective sharing of information” (National Conference of State Legislatures, 3).

Other states enacted programs to foster a better connection between the child welfare and education systems. For example, an Arkansas House Bill from 2005 required all individuals directly involved “in the care, custody, and education of foster children [to] work together to ensure continuity of educational services to foster children” (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2008, 3). In 2007, New Hampshire law (NH H 205, Chap. 295) was passed that requires courts to notify

school districts if they are considering an out-of-district placement and gives the school the opportunity to provide a representative for the child at a placement hearing (4). All of this state legislation helped to expedite the process of changing schools and provide information to parties involved with foster youth to help them navigate the school system.

In Washington D.C., a 2002-2003 legislature developed key strategies to promote educational stability after recognizing the importance of neighborhood-based foster care and early court involvement in educational issues (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2008, 5). This legislation has three parts:

The first part of the mandate required a working group that addressed educational stability for children in the welfare system to prepare a plan for educational success. The second part of the mandate lead two school districts to employ a pilot project that helped children in foster care to continue attending their school of origin. The third part of the legislature mandated that the child welfare agency establish “an interagency oversight committee to develop strategies to recruit foster parents in school districts with high rates of foster care placements and to work with the courts to develop protocols to ensure educational stability” (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2008, 5). This working group and interagency oversight committee have been active for a number of years, and the “legislation has resulted in increased training and greater awareness of the importance of supporting the educational achievement of children in foster care” (5-6). However, advocates have only just received the funding necessary to begin work



to increase foster home recruitment in targeted areas (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2008, 6).

The most recent legislation on improving school stability for foster youth is an extension of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the federal mandate: Fostering Connections to Success Act and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.

The Fostering Connections to Success Act and Increasing Adoptions Act has six titles with sectional components that work to improve the outcomes for foster youth in these ways: “Connecting and Supporting Relative Caregivers,” “Improving Outcomes for Children in Foster Care,” “Tribal Foster Care and Adoption Access,” “Improvement of Incentives for Adoption,” and “Clarification of Uniform Definition of Child and Other Provisions” (Stoltzfus, 1-8).

Title II deals with “Improving Outcomes for Children in Foster Care” and closes some of the gaps left open by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act with regards to educational stability. “Section 204: Educational Stability” of Title II has three parts that work toward this goal of higher educational achievement for foster youth through the provision of reliable schooling (Stoltzfus, 5).

The first part of this section calls for states to provide children placed in foster care with a plan for educational stability and the means to carry out this plan. This provision includes working with relevant school authorities to create and execute the proposition for foster children’s educational stability (Stoltzfus, 5). This first portion of Section 204 gives more structure to the part of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance act that merely requires a plan to be drawn up that aims to

give a foster child educational stability (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2008, 5). This part of the Fostering Connections to Success Act not only requires the formulation of a strategy for educational stability, but also that the plan be carried out (Stoltzfus, 2008, 5).

The second part of Section 204 addresses state reimbursement for transportation services provided to children in foster care (Stoltzfus, 5). States are permitted to make claims for federal reimbursement to cover the cost of transporting a child to their “school of origin” (Stoltzfus, 5). The reimbursement rate is the same as is provided to the state for foster care maintenance payments or the state’s Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (5). This provision is extremely helpful because the financial burden of the provision of transportation to a foster child’s school of origin is so heavy. This part of the act correlates to the second part of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act that requires a state to have a plan that would allow the child to attend their original school, however, the burden of transportation fell heavy upon caseworkers, social workers, and/or foster parents and made such plans for transportation often unfeasible (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2008, 5). With the federal reimbursement stipulation of the Fostering Connections Act, transportation for foster youth to attend their original school is now feasible.

The final section of the Educational Stability section of the Fostering Connections to Success Act and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 is perhaps the most progressive part of this act that concerns educational stability because it

requires “a state to provide assurances that each school-age child who receives federal assistance” to be enrolled in school full-time (Stoltzfus, 5). This is also an extension of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act that mandated that all children “awaiting foster care placement” could attend their school of origin. The Fostering Connections to Success Act broadens the mandate to include all children who receive federal assistance and requires that they actually be enrolled in a school (Stoltzfus, 5). An act this far-reaching takes time to implement and enforce, so it is still unknown whether this act and the changes to the foster care system it introduces are effective. It will be interesting to learn more about the effectiveness of this act as time goes on.

#### IX. Policy Suggestions

The previously discussed state legislations collectively do a satisfactory job at encouraging educational stability and increasing educational achievement for foster youth. There are additional mandates and policies that could be enacted that would also be helpful in promoting these same goals for greater educational success.

Schools can take action to combat the problem of educational instability for foster youth. For example, it would be helpful for foster children who miss substantial amounts of school because of their changing home situation to be given a tutor or additional help once they are in school so that they do not fall behind their classmates. Another program that would be helpful is a program like Big Brother/Big Sister that would set up foster youth with older peers that could

provide emotional support, social stimulation, and even help in school to foster children.

Changes made in the foster care system can also help remedy the problem of educational instability. One possible remedy to poorer outcomes for foster youth is sibling or kinship placements. Rebecca L Hegar and James A. Rosenthal, in their article, "Kinship Care and Sibling Placement: Child Behavior, Family Relationships, and School Outcomes," study how children placed in the child welfare system fare better when placed with a sibling or siblings. Kinship foster care is "where children remain in state custody while placed with relatives, or sometimes with other family connections such as godparents or close friends," and sibling placement is a method where siblings enter the foster care and remain together (Hegar, 2009, 671). The authors also examine specifically the relationships among kinship foster care, sibling placement, and child welfare outcomes such as youth behavior, family and caregiver relationships, and school performance (Hegar and Rosenthal, 2009, 670). Cicirelli, a pioneer of sibling placement in the 1980's, provides one of the main observations that served as a catalyst for this study: "as interactions within the one subsystem decrease, the influence of the other subsystem on the individual is likely to increase" (Hegar and Rosenthal, 2009, 670). In other words, siblings influence each other most when parental influence is minimal.

Parental absence and lack of influence is the case for so many foster youth, those who are victims of neglect in particular. Webster et al. and Leathers in their studies from 2005 also show that siblings placed together are more likely to be

reunified with their families of origin, result in adoption, or result in subsidized guardianship (Hegar and Rosenthal, 2009, 671). Previous research on kinship care is a bit less conclusive. Hegar and Rosenthal cite Scannapico and his 1999 study showing that this type of care lasted longer, resulted in reunification less often, and was stable. Several studies also have reported more prevalence of behavior problems (Hegar and Rosenthal, 2009, 672). However, children in kinship foster care are overall more satisfied with these placements than children in other types of care (Hegar and Rosenthal, 2009, 672). In Hegar's 1993 study, the author argues for the child welfare system to rely more on foster care placements that offer a child stability and kinship with a new family; Hegar, however, concludes that placement with a sibling can offer the same or even better stability because unlike placements that often change, the children still have the support of their brother or sister (Hegar and Rosenthal, 2009, 672). This study important shows the value of preserving of a part of the foster child's family of origin during out-of-home care.

The data that Hegar and Rosenthal use from the National Study of Child and Adolescent Well-being (NSCAW), the Child Protective Services (CPS) include 5,501 children whose families were referred to Child Protective Services from October 1999 to December 2000. The data also include Long Term Foster Care (LTFC) samples comprised of 727 children who had been in out-of-home placement for about a year before the study was conducted and who remained in out-of-home care for its duration. All children were in the age range from birth to fourteen years of age. These data are drawn from 46 states and the District of Columbia, and include extremely useful accounts from youth caregivers, teachers, and caseworkers. The

large sample size, varying locations of children, and detailed data collected make the outcomes of the study more likely to be an accurate representation of the truth.

The authors find that sibling placements had more positive responses than other placements when asked questions about whether they felt “very close” to the caregiver, whether they liked living with the people they live with, and whether they felt part of the family. In addition, they found that the percentage difference between sibling and non-sibling placements was more pronounced for youth in non-kinship placements than in kinship placements (Hegar and Rosenthal, 2009, 674).

When assessing the behaviors of youth in kinship foster care, teachers perceived more externalizing behavior problems while the youth perceived the opposite.

From the youth’s viewpoint, placement with a sibling was related to lower levels of internalization problems like self-blame and depression, and girls in kinship foster care experienced less externalization behaviors of anger and aggression than girls not placed in kinship care. Perhaps the most important finding is that “children and youth who are placed with one or more siblings are significantly more likely than others to feel emotionally supported, to feel close to a primary caregiver, and to like living with the people in the home” (Hegar and Rosenthal, 2009, 676).

This support or stability is one of the strongest positives of this type of solution of family child welfare system placement because it provides a form of familiarity and permanence to a very volatile and traumatic experience of being torn out of a previously known life into an uncertain, unknown new life in the foster care system. This feeling of stability would also have positive repercussions on

children's education, because feelings of stress that are a part of instability are known to have a negative effect on children's educational achievement. If the child can feel secure in his or her new life, then educational achievement is sure to improve. Hegar's finding support this assertion because Hispanic children and those in the "other" ethnic category performed at a higher level when placed with their siblings (Hegar and Rosenthal, 2009, 676).

More attention should be paid to recruiting foster care parents willing to provide care to sibling sets instead of just a specific age group or gender. This would be a long, grueling process since it is already difficult enough to find good foster parents, but the evidence shown by this research suggests it would be well worth the time and effort. Further research could compare the outcomes of siblings placed together in out-of-home care that was not in a home setting (an institution or group home) and those of siblings placed together in a foster care home setting. If the resulting evidence were favorable for sibling placement overall, then perhaps even sibling placement in group home settings should be considered more often when finding placements for children.

Cynthia V. Healey and Philip A. Fisher examine other possible solutions to problems in the foster care system in their article "Young Children In Foster Care and the Development of Favorable Outcomes." The authors recognize and address the established negative outcomes of the foster care: high prevalence (between 50%-66%) of emotional or behavioral issues that merit mental health treatment, exacerbated negative outcomes due to heightened vulnerability to stressors, and a

disproportionate number of severe academic skill delays (Healey and Fisher, 2011, 1822). However, Healey and Fisher choose to examine the possible factors for favorable outcomes, or “demonstrations of emotion regulation and school adjustment during middle childhood,” for foster youth in the hopes that this knowledge can be applied to the foster care system (Healey and Fisher, 2011, 1822). Early childhood, a period where children are especially perceptive to environmental influences, is the opportune time to look at the factors that influence such positive outcomes. Resilience and emotion regulation is one of the key factors that the authors address because these coping mechanisms are central to overall adjustment to a stressful event like being put into the foster care system and removed from family and even before that to maltreatment or abuse (Healey and Fisher, 2011, 1823). Interestingly, the emotion regulation mechanism corresponds to internalization and peer acceptance: children who have good emotion regulation are more accepted by their peers and experience lower rates of internalizing disorders than children who have poor emotion regulation (Healey and Fisher, 2011, 1823). This mechanism is particularly important in school adjustment and long-term functioning, because success in school is linked to increased educational attainment, employment and overall psychosocial adjustment through adolescence and into adulthood. Further, success early on is linked to future success (Healey and Fisher, 2011, 1823).

The authors look specifically at maltreatment, placement history, parenting practices, environmental stress, developmental status, and attachment behavior



variables that are known to contribute to emotional regulation and school adjustment (Healey and Fisher, 2011, 1823).

The data collected for this study are from the Oregon Social Learning Center as part of a program that called Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Preschoolers (MTFC-P). The MTFC-P is an alternative to the restrictive foster care setting that provides therapeutic support for children in a family setting (Healey and Fisher, 2011, 1824). The study compares three groups of children: treatment foster care, regular foster care, and age and SES-matched community control. Healey and Fisher found several strong correlations: emotional lability and negativity had a harmful effect on school adjustment, children with higher ability for emotional regulation had better developmental statuses, the experience of environmental stress correlated to decreased emotional regulation, and poor attachment behavior correlated to poor emotion regulation, and lastly the ability to adjust well in school correlated to better developmental outcomes. The most significant relationship associated with a favorable outcome, however, is environmental stress and developmental status (Healey and Fisher, 2011, 1826).

In light of these results, the authors make a few key suggestions for applying this information to the foster care system. First, early childhood intervention is essential because children become increasingly resistant to interventions targeting emotion regulation as they grow older. This corresponds to education as well; ensuring academic success for children, including foster youth, starts at a young age. Foster children would benefit from being enrolled in Head Start and other pre-

school programs. Second, focus should be on buffering and reducing stress for children in the foster care setting as place of recuperation from the traumatic events experienced by the child. Requiring foster care parents to be trained so that they can give emotional support to a foster child would help a child recover from the experience of leaving their homes and set them up for developmental and educational success. Third, special, direct effort should also be made to address developmental delays and to improve executive functioning (Healey and Fisher, 2011, 1828). Providing foster care children with the opportunity to attend a program like Head Start that helps young children developmentally to prepare to enter kindergarten could be a means of improving young foster care children's functioning.

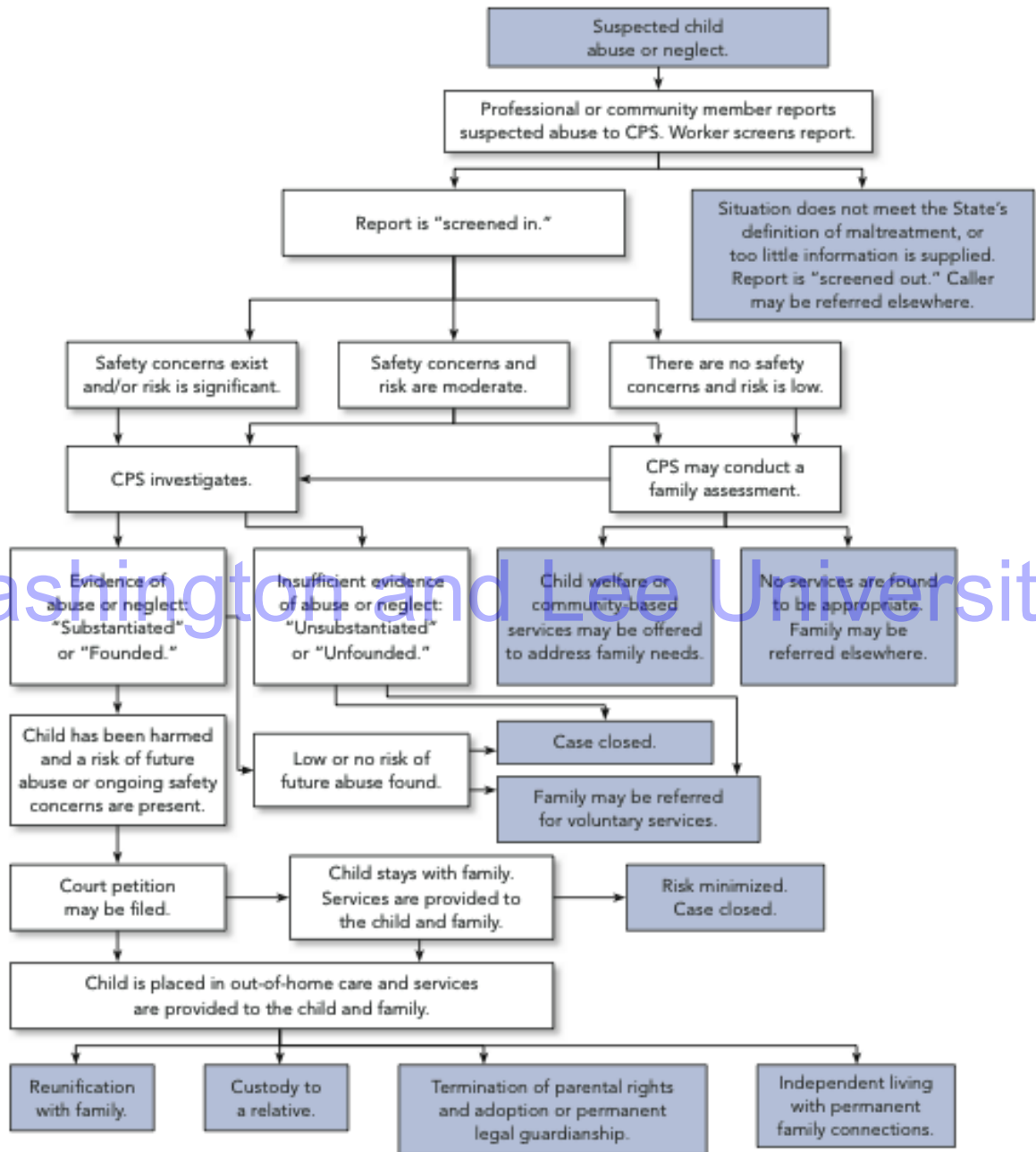
## X. Conclusion

In 2010, 3.3 million alleged reports of child abuse and neglect were made in the United States that involved an estimated 6 million children (Children's Bureau, 2010). On the last day of the 2009 Fiscal Year, there were 435,00 children in foster care (Children's Bureau, 2010). The youth that are a part of the child welfare system<sup>iv</sup> are almost exclusively from impoverished backgrounds and are a vulnerable population at risk for disproportionately worse adult outcomes. A quality education is one of the best tools, if not the best tool for helping a child from an unstable background overcome adversities and succeed as an adult. Recent policy changes of the Fostering Connections to Success Act have addressed many of the problems that educational instability creates for foster care youth. However,

there is still much research that needs to be done to learn about the relationship between educational attainment and factors like educational stability, number of placements, family situation, etc. A better understanding of this relationship will give real information of what needs to be done to help the youth in the foster care system.

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Appendix A



<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cpswork.pdf>

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Washington and Lee University

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<sup>i</sup> The Child Welfare System- a group of services designed to promote the well-being of children by ensuring safety, achieving permanency, and strengthening families to care for their children successfully. While the primary responsibility for child welfare services rests with the States, the Federal Government plays a major role in supporting States in the delivery of services through funding of programs and legislative initiatives (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011).

<sup>ii</sup> "Restrictive" placements refer to the placement of a child into a residential treatment center, or juvenile detention facility, a group home, or a treatment foster

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care placement. A group home placement is for adolescents who are involved in the juvenile justice system and residential campus facilities for children and youth with serious mental health problems. Residential programs may be operated by public or private agencies and often provide an array of services including therapeutic services for children and families, educational services, and medical services. A treatment foster care is a placement with foster families who have been specially trained to care for children with certain medical or behavioral needs. Examples include medically fragile children, children with emotional or behavioral disorders, and HIV+ children (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011).

iii The HOME measurement “scales for caregiver responsiveness and cognition stimulation,” the social competence measurement uses the Social Skills Rating System, the adaptive behavior measurement uses the Vineland Screener, the cognitive development measurement for children older than four years of age uses the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test, the level of achievement measurement uses the Woodcock-Johnson III tests, and the behavior problems measurement uses the Child Behavior Checklist (Lloyd 1385-1386).

iv The Child Welfare System- a group of services designed to promote the well-being of children by ensuring safety, achieving permanency, and strengthening families to care for their children successfully. While the primary responsibility for child welfare services rests with the States, the Federal Government plays a major role in supporting States in the delivery of services through funding of programs and legislative initiatives (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011).

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