

EIMAC Fall 2007 Meeting
Child Welfare Data Connections
October 16, 2007

With support from the Annie B. Casey Foundation, CCSSO hosted a pre-session on connecting Child Welfare and State Education Agency Data at the 2007 Fall EIMAC meeting. Session participants included state education agency data managers, and representatives from child welfare agencies in the District of Columbia and Virginia Beach, Virginia.

California has legislation in place (Assembly Bill 490) that established a Foster Youth Services program. There are approximately 60,000 children in foster care in the state. County agencies get grants from the state. The state education agency (SEA) supports data sharing across county offices. Three counties—Fresno, Sacramento, and San Diego—have agreements in place among the child welfare agencies, the local education agencies (LEAs), and the courts to share data on foster children. San Diego is the only county that has successfully been able to share foster care data with other counties. The SEA facilitates mapping of the data, and identifying where gaps exist in needed data. There is a memorandum of understanding in place for matching data from Health and Human Services and the SEA. There has been discussion about establishing a foster care flag in the SEA student data system, but there has been no action to date, due in part to concerns about security and privacy. Also, California has no authority to require LEAs to submit flagged data.

Some observations and concerns:

- There is significant staff turnover in child welfare agencies; this impedes development of agreements.
- Many foster children are receiving special education services
- How is data shared with nonpublic schools?
- Social services (child welfare) workers know the foster children; the LEAs don't always know who they are.
- Social services goes by different names in different counties.
- Case workers enter the data, but they have lots of other duties as well. Senior managers need to understand the importance of data entry.

The child welfare agency in the District of Columbia sends DC Public Schools data on foster care children. About 2,300 children are in foster care in DC. Each agency houses the other agencies individual ID numbers for the students. They currently are able to share name and date of birth on students. Next will be sharing information about where the students are enrolled in school. Parents sign a waiver for release of data on the children. The child welfare agency believes it is important to share data, but in the foster care program, child safety and permanent placement are the top priorities for the case workers. Well-being (including education attainment) is a third priority. Benefits of sharing between the agencies include a more accurate accounting of special population students in DCPS. (This helps them pass the enrollment audit.) The child welfare agency has found that communications with DCPS helps with problem solving on foster

care issues. DC's biggest challenge is working with the suburban counties in Maryland and Virginia. It is difficult—if not impossible—to share data outside of the District.

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges sponsored a national initiative several years ago to develop and implement the use of a Judicial Education Checklist. The purpose was to enable juvenile and family court judges to check education attainment on children in the care of the courts. In Virginia Beach, VA, the Social Services agency and the courts collaborated on use of the checklist. It facilitated a conversation among the LEA, the Social Services agency, and the courts on foster children's education attainment.

FERPA is a concern in sharing data among agencies, but there is an exception in FERPA for judicial use of data if it is in the 'educational interest' of the child. Attorney generals in the various states interpret FERPA differently. If sharing is allowed, access rights and user protocols are important in protecting student privacy.

The attorney general in Massachusetts has a strict interpretation of FERPA. However, they have been able to develop memoranda of understanding with their Department of Social Service and Department of Youth Services. These agencies send a file of foster children data; the SEA sends back the file with education data included. No legislation was passed to do this—just an MOU. The Massachusetts SEA also runs the match on welfare and student records to determine student eligibility for free/reduced lunch. This has increased participation in the program.

Shared education/foster care data can be used to improve day-to-day services for the students, although this is not typically in the SEA's domain. Child welfare agencies can use the data to provide a complete picture on foster child's needs; it can help identify where interventions are needed. The shared data can also allow for longitudinal studies.

Common data elements shared on foster care students include program participation, enrollment, attendance, and academic progress. Child welfare agencies are interested in test performance, graduation rates, mobility rates, school placements, and special education services received by foster children. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 allows for foster parents to make educational decisions and sign Individual Education Plans for students.

In Florida, FERPA has not been an issue in sharing data among the SEA and the child welfare agency. The SEA provides aggregate K12 data on foster care students using an age cohort. The child welfare agency provides the data to the SEA. Under an MOU, the SEA matches that data to the education records for those students. The state is also looking at outcomes for students who have aged out of the foster care system; specifically, they are looking at postsecondary education attainment and employment.

Montana is developing a statewide IEP system. All team members will have access to student IEPs.

Tennessee is assisting LEAs in data-sharing with child welfare agencies. The SEA role is getting the foster care indicator down to the local level. The Tennessee Department of Children Services also acts as an LEA; they have some schools that are state-supported.

Another role of the SEA in facilitating data sharing on foster care students is to identify the relevant data to collect, the timing of the collection, provide assistance with interoperability, and run statewide searches for missing students. State can provide information to schools on new students if the student moved intrastate

The Arizona Department of Economic Security collaborates with the SEA on voucher eligibility for students, child protection needs, and conducting background checks for teacher certification. They don't flag foster children; only students eligible for the voucher program. The SEA shares data with universities and community colleges.

In Mississippi, they have six years of data in their state Student Information System. The Child welfare agency puts data one-way into the SEA database for matching. They don't specifically flag foster children.

The American Bar Association collects sample memos of understanding. They will be available on their website. Abanet.org/child/education

A question arose as to whether or not if a state is custodian of a child, can the child welfare agency access SEA data? Apparently, under FERPA it is considered a redisclosure and cannot be done.

The Georgia SEA is engaged in working with the state child welfare agency to share data. Aggregate sharing is okay; sharing data on individuals is a problem.

In South Carolina, the state is building a central data warehouse for all state data. The ultimate goal is for all agencies to combine data in one place and sign agreements to allow for sharing. The state office collecting the data is the Office of Research and Statistics. The state is paying that office for the data collection services.

Early Childhood data-sharing issues: Data may be collected preschoolers receiving special services under IDEA; students enrolled in Headstart; LEA programs for four-year-olds. Most are paper collections. The Mississippi SEA is working on a cooperative agreement with the Early Childhood Institute at the University of MS. The SEA will use an extended match key to produce research files for the Institute. Florida has a Kindergarten assessment / placement test that is now being used to evaluate preschool program providers.