

Supporting the Needs of Students Involved with the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice System in the School District of Philadelphia

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MICHAEL A. NUTTER
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May 30, 2014

In 2006, the Philadelphia Youth Transitions Collaborative Steering Committee commissioned a study on the serious and concerning dropout problem in our schools. The resulting report, *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis*, detailed the educational challenges of students at the highest risk for dropping out of our public schools. The report showed that, although dropping out was a significant issue across all ethnic groups and genders, disconnected and at-risk students, like youth in the juvenile justice system, students in foster care or teens who are pregnant or parenting, were in need of additional educational supports to prevent dropping out.

Using the report's data, a companion policy recommendations report, *Turning it Around*, was issued. The critical policy outcome was the creation of Project U-Turn, a city-wide initiative aimed at understanding, focusing public attention on, and resolving Philadelphia's dropout crisis.

When I became Mayor in 2008, I set two ambitious, but attainable, educational goals: to double the percentage of Philadelphia residents with a four-year college degree by 2018; and to increase the high school graduation rate to 80% by 2015. Today, our high school graduation rate is 64%, an increase of 11 percentage points over 2007. That change is a step in the right direction, but our Administration knows that there is more work to do, particularly in reducing the dropout rate.

As the next step in our city's effort to address the dropout crisis and achieve my goals for education, the Mayor's Office of Education, in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia, the School Reform Commission, the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Philadelphia Youth Network and PolicyLab at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, conducted this study to closely examine the academic outcomes of public school students who are involved with the child welfare or juvenile justice system. This report, *Supporting the Needs of Students Involved with the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice System in the School District of Philadelphia*, describes the level of DHS involvement in our system of public schools and helps to better illustrate these students' educational needs.

The purpose of this report is to inform education policy decisions and, ultimately, ensure that our agency-served youth have the supplemental emotional, behavioral and academic support that they need to stay in school, graduate, and pursue success in a post-secondary learning opportunity or the workforce.

I'd like to recognize the hard work and tireless efforts of School District of Philadelphia Superintendent Dr. William R. Hite, Jr. and DHS Commissioner Anne Marie Ambrose. The critically important findings of this report were made possible through the cross-system collaboration of the Department of Human Services and the School District of Philadelphia. I would also like to thank all of our partners and Chief Education Officer Dr. Lori Shorr for leading this effort.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Nutter
Mayor



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION:

In January 2013, PolicyLab at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) was commissioned by the Mayor's Office of Education (MOE), School District of Philadelphia (SDP), Philadelphia School Reform Commission (SRC), and Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) to examine the distribution, concentration, and academic outcomes of youth in Philadelphia's public schools involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system. The research was requested to inform policy decisions intended to improve educational success for youth involved with DHS in Philadelphia. This report presents data from a targeted cross-system review of students in the 3rd, 7th, 9th, and 12th grades from the 2011-2012 academic year across all schools within the SDP.

The goals of the review were to (1) describe the level of both ongoing and previous child welfare and juvenile justice involvement of students in the SDP and (2) better understand these students' educational needs. The key findings are highlighted below.

KEY FINDINGS:

- I The population of students who have ever been involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system across the School District of Philadelphia is substantial.**
 - A** Overall, 17% of students have ever been involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system—this increases to one in five for high school students.
 - B** Almost half of the high schools in the School District of Philadelphia have more than 100 students ever involved with DHS or more than 20% of the population ever involved with DHS—with some schools having both.
 - C** The enrollment of students ever involved with DHS is geographically dispersed across the School District of Philadelphia.
- II Students who have ever been involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system have greater identified educational needs than their peers.**
 - A** Nearly one in four students ever involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system received special education services, a rate 64% greater than their peers who never had child welfare and/or juvenile justice involvement.
 - B** Educational outcomes (measured by Pennsylvania System of School Assessment scores, high school credit accumulation, and grade promotion) and attendance rates were poorer among students ever involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system.
- III Although enrollment of students who have ever been involved with DHS is geographically dispersed across the school system, these students tend to cluster in certain school types and have lower educational outcomes than students without DHS involvement. However, within the same school type, the performance of students with DHS involvement over time is similar to that of their peers without DHS involvement.**
 - A** Students ever involved with DHS are concentrated in Comprehensive and Alternative Education Schools compared to Traditional Charter or Special Admission and Citywide Schools.
 - B** Educational outcomes vary by school type, but within similar settings, students ever involved with DHS tend to mirror the performance of their peers who never had DHS involvement.

CONCLUSION:

The findings of this report document key educational challenges for the School District of Philadelphia serving students with DHS involvement. These data highlight the opportunity to align resources to best meet the needs of the diverse student population across the School District of Philadelphia.

INTRODUCTION

In January 2013, PolicyLab at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) was commissioned by the Mayor’s Office of Education (MOE), School District of Philadelphia (SDP), Philadelphia School Reform Commission (SRC), and Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) to examine the distribution, concentration, and academic outcomes of youth in Philadelphia’s public schools involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system. The research was requested to inform policy decisions intended to improve educational success for youth involved with DHS in Philadelphia. This report presents data from a targeted cross-system review of students in the 3rd, 7th, 9th, and 12th grades from the 2011–2012 academic year across all schools within the SDP. The goals of the review were to (1) describe the level of both ongoing and previous child welfare and juvenile justice involvement of students in the SDP and (2) better understand these students’ educational needs.

FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS:

DHS	Philadelphia Department of Human Services
MOE	Mayor’s Office of Education
PSSA	Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (annual standards-based assessment used to measure student proficiency in various subjects)
SDP	School District of Philadelphia
SRC	Philadelphia School Reform Commission
SY	School Year

BACKGROUND

Students with a history of child welfare or juvenile justice involvement are more likely to have poor academic outcomes.

Prior research shows that students with child welfare involvement are more likely to experience higher rates of school changes, delays in school enrollment, and chronic absenteeism.^{1,2,3} Similarly, students with a history of juvenile justice involvement are more likely to be below grade level for basic reading and math skills, identified as having learning disabilities and receive special education services, and experiencing behavioral problems when compared to students with no involvement with the juvenile justice system.^{4,5,6}

Students involved with both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (i.e., “crossover youth”) are also at risk for negative academic outcomes.⁴ Poor educational outcomes of youth involved with these systems can be due to many factors, but are likely influenced by exposure to adverse childhood experiences including poverty, toxic stress, and trauma.⁴ Given the complex needs of youth involved with various public systems, it is imperative for information sharing to take place among professionals serving these youth to ensure that services are aligned, adequate, and appropriate. Unfortunately due to barriers such as limitations in capacity, inconsistent levels of knowledge regarding policies and procedures, and concerns about privacy, cross-system information sharing often does not occur.⁷

With the passage of federal legislation over the past few years, there has been progress regarding information sharing across the child welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems resulting in policy and programmatic strategies that better support academic success. Earlier, in 1994, the *Improving America’s Schools Act* amended the federal *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* to encourage educational agencies to share information with juvenile justice system personnel when disciplinary action may be taken against a student (*PL 103–382*).⁸ This was a positive first step, but proved insufficient. Two relatively new federal laws facilitated more active information sharing and collaboration between the child welfare and education systems. The 2008 *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* required education and child welfare agencies to work together and prioritize “educational stability,” which ensures that foster care placement does not disrupt school enrollment and attendance when possible (*PL 110–351*).⁹ The 2013 *Uninterrupted Scholars Act* amended *FERPA*, permitting the sharing of educational records with



child welfare agencies; this enabled both systems to better meet the academic needs of child welfare-involved youth (*PL 112-278*).¹⁰ These advances in federal legislation have made it possible for Philadelphia to engage in cross-system research and policy efforts, which are in line with other jurisdictions (e.g., Chicago, California) and part of a growing national movement to better address the educational needs of child welfare-involved youth.^{2,11}

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

Approvals from all of the involved agencies were obtained and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at both CHOP and the City of Philadelphia reviewed the research protocol. Data for this project were derived from the following sources: (1) SDP enrollment, attendance, and achievement data for four cohorts of students (all 3rd, 7th, 9th, and 12th graders totaling 68,525 students) from the 2011-2012 school year; and (2) DHS records for matched students summarizing varying levels of involvement in the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system beginning from the first instance when the child became known to DHS until June 2012.

Although identifying information (first name, last name, and date of birth) was initially used to link student education and DHS records across systems, all identifiers were removed once the initial match was conducted to protect the privacy of the students in this retrospective data set. Thus this population-level analysis was conducted only on a de-identified data set.

The population of interest was students who were enrolled in the School District of Philadelphia during the 2011-2012 academic year.^a Students were classified into four categories:

- 1 No DHS involvement;
- 2 Receipt of **out-of-home child welfare** services (e.g., foster care, kinship care, congregate care, Supervised Independent Living) before or during SY 2011-2012;
- 3 Receipt of **juvenile justice** services (e.g., home-based detention, detention center placement) before or during SY 2011-2012; and
- 4 **Other type of child welfare** involvement (e.g., substantiated reports, in-home protective services, prevention services) before or during SY 2011-2012.

^a With the exclusion of Figure 7, this report does not compare data from SY 2011-2012 to prior or more recent school years.

In an effort to condense these categories, DHS involvement was also classified as “**never** involved” (category 1) or “**ever** involved” (categories 2-4).^b The magnitude and distribution of students with DHS involvement were calculated by grade and displayed geographically by mapping the concentration of these students by school location. In addition, PSSA scores and the receipt of special education services were reported for all school types in the School District of Philadelphia (including Charter Schools and Alternative

Education Programs). Other academic outcomes, such as grade promotion, attendance, and credits earned, were only reported for SDP Neighborhood Schools, Promise Academies, and Special Admission and Citywide Schools. Charter Schools (both Traditional and Renaissance Charters) and Alternative Education Programs were omitted from certain analyses, as determining the reliability of these data were beyond the scope of this initial effort. Table 1 provides an overview of the types of high schools in Philadelphia.

TABLE 1: TYPES OF HIGH SCHOOLS IN PHILADELPHIA^c

MANAGED BY THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA		SPECIAL ADMISSION SCHOOLS ▶ Magnet schools offer a rigorous curriculum and may concentrate on a particular area of study. With competitive entrance requirements related to attendance, punctuality, behavior, grades and standardized test scores, these schools select the students who best meet admission criteria.
		CITYWIDE SCHOOLS ▶ Magnet schools offering specialized courses that may concentrate on academics, career, or technical programs. Admission is based upon some elements of competitive entrance requirements, space availability, and selection by computerized lottery, rather than neighborhood boundaries.
	COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS (NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED SCHOOLS WITHOUT ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS)	NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS ▶ Schools giving priority to students living within an attendance boundary or catchment area. Students within the boundary do not need to submit an application as long as there is proof of residency for enrollment.
		PROMISE ACADEMIES ▶ SDP-led turnaround program using extended school day, intensive supports, increased professional development, and other evidence-based strategies to improve student achievement in low performing schools.
MANAGED BY OUTSIDE PROVIDERS		RENAISSANCE CHARTER SCHOOLS ▶ Charter Schools that operate former SDP neighborhood schools and enroll students living within the catchment area. These Charter-led turnaround programs are included in SDP accountability systems.
		TRADITIONAL CHARTER SCHOOLS ▶ Independently operated public schools that are funded with federal, state and local tax dollars. Charters are non-profit and non-sectarian organizations that function as independent Local Education Agencies free of many of the local and state requirements that apply to traditional SDP public schools.
		ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS ▶ Option for students who dropped out, have low high school credit, were expelled, came from court-ordered placement, and/or violated the Code of Conduct and want to obtain a SDP diploma or GED.

^b For “crossover youth” who may have received multiple services from DHS, we hierarchically classified them so categories were mutually exclusive and students were not double-counted in this analysis. Thus if a student received out-of-home foster care, juvenile justice services, and in-home protective services at various points in time, the student would only be included in the “out-of-home child welfare” category. To further elaborate, if students received both juvenile justice services and in home-protective services, they were included only in the “juvenile justice” category. In both instances, these students would be part of the “ever involved” category.

^c Derived from office listings on the School District of Philadelphia website: <http://phila.k12.pa.us/>.

KEY FINDINGS

I The population of students who have ever been involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system across the school district of Philadelphia is substantial.

A Overall, 17% of students have ever been involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system—this increases to one in five for high school students.

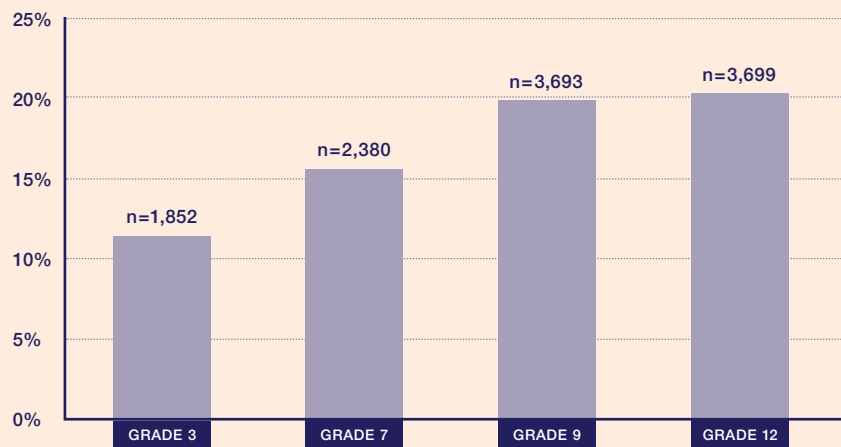
Across 3rd, 7th, 9th, and 12th graders in the 2011–2012 school year, 17% of students have ever been involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system. The likelihood of receiving child welfare or juvenile justice services increases with age, as about 20% of high school students in the SDP have been involved with DHS at some point in their lives (Figure 1). It can be noted that while the rate of DHS involvement does not increase between 9th and 12th grade, there is a possibility that greater numbers of youth are involved with DHS, but are not part of the 12th grade population because they dropped out of high school.

B Almost half of the high schools in the School District of Philadelphia have more than 100 students ever involved with DHS or more than 20% of the population ever involved with DHS—with some schools having both.

The level of DHS involvement is high across the SDP, particularly for high school students. Because the data revealed a higher rate of child welfare and juvenile justice involvement with older students, this part of the analysis focused on high school students. The challenge of serving this population can be captured by discussing either the magnitude (number) or proportion (percent) of students with DHS involvement by high school (Figure 2).

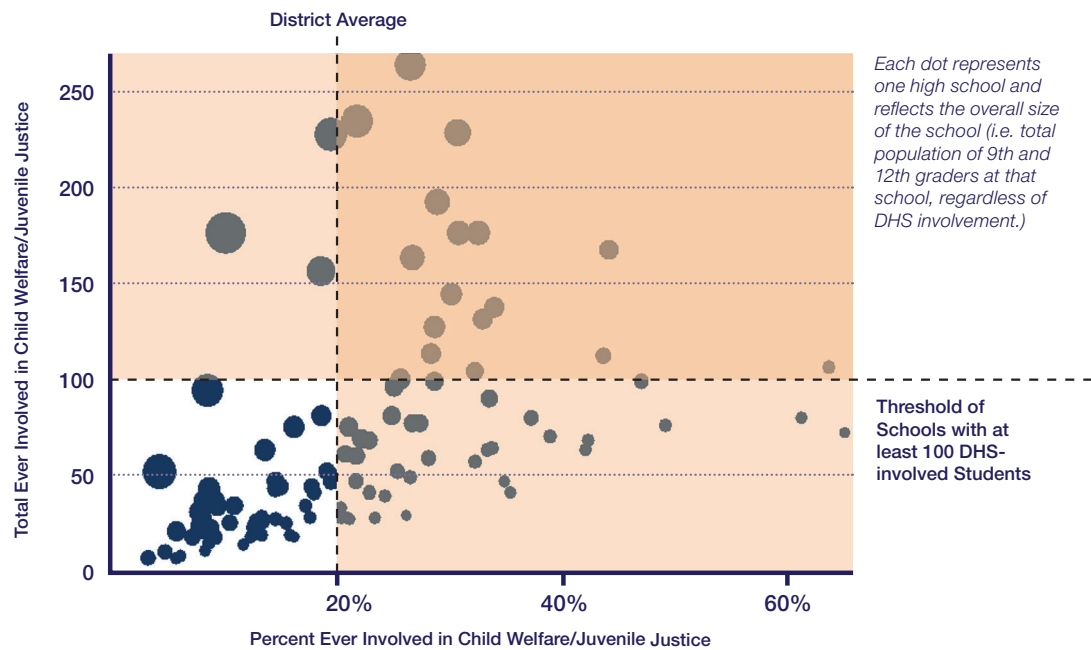
The y-axis represents the **total number** of students in the 9th and 12th grade who had child welfare and/or juvenile justice involvement before or during SY 2011–2012. The x-axis represents the **percent** of 9th and 12th grade students in a high school who had child welfare and/or juvenile justice involvement before or during SY 2011–2012. Each dot is proportional to the overall size of the school (i.e., total population of 9th and 12th graders at that school, regardless of DHS involvement). Almost half of the high schools in the SDP (47%) have over 100 students and/or over 20% of the student population that have ever been

FIGURE 1: PERCENT OF 3RD, 7TH, 9TH & 12TH GRADERS EVER INVOLVED WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES IN ALL SDP SCHOOLS



KEY FINDING: A substantial number of SDP students have ever been involved with DHS and the likelihood of receiving child welfare or juvenile justice services increases with age.

FIGURE 2: MAGNITUDE AND PROPORTION OF DHS INVOLVEMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL^d



KEY FINDING: Almost half of the high schools in the SDP (47%) have over 100 students in the 9th and 12th grade and/or more than 20% of the student population that have ever been involved with DHS (indicated by shaded region).

involved with DHS; these schools are highlighted by the shaded region in Figure 2.

The relationship between the total number and proportion of students with any DHS involvement (“ever involved”) in each high school population is complex and illustrates the unique challenges that many schools face. For 19 schools, the total number of students ever involved with DHS exceeds 100 (schools above the dashed horizontal line in Figure 2). These schools may struggle to provide individualized case management and intervention support for such a large number of students. Alternatively, although

these students are large in number, they may comprise only a small percent of the student body and these students can be at risk for being overlooked. At the same time, many smaller schools with lower overall involvement numbers have high proportions of students ever involved with DHS—well above the SDP average of 20% (located to the right of the dashed vertical line in Figure 2). These schools may face challenges in securing academic supports for a large proportion of their students because it is viewed to be a small number of students by overall SDP standards. Therefore, these contrasts make the identification of need challenging as both the magnitude and proportion of students ever involved with DHS can be considered.

^d Only SDP-run, Alternative Education, and Charter high schools with at least 100 students in the 9th and 12th grades combined were included in Figure 2. Since 10th and 11th grade students were not included in this cross-sectional analysis, the total number of students in the school ever involved with DHS is much greater and would be approximately twice the size indicated.

C The enrollment of students ever involved with DHS is geographically dispersed across the School District of Philadelphia.

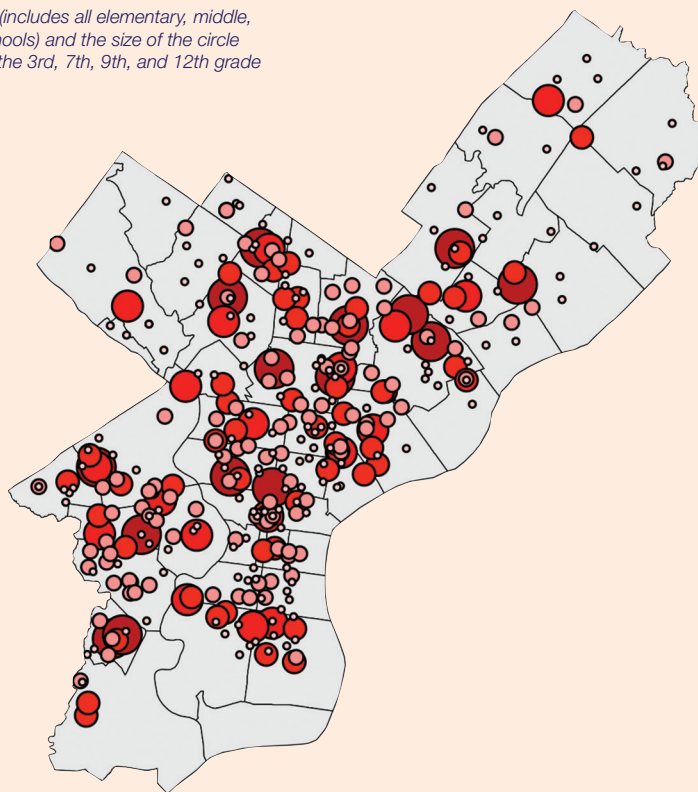
Students with child welfare and/or juvenile justice involvement are widely distributed across the School District of Philadelphia, rather than being concentrated in certain neighborhoods or zip codes. Figure 3 displays the distribution

of the child welfare and/or juvenile justice-involved population for all 3rd, 7th, 9th, and 12th graders in SY 2011-2012. Each circle represents one school and the size of the circle reflects the number of students who have some level of DHS involvement before or during SY 2011-2012. Since the DHS-involved population is not clustered in certain regions, a district-wide perspective must be adopted when conceptualizing student need.

FIGURE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD WELFARE AND/OR JUVENILE JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT THROUGHOUT ALL SDP SCHOOLS

Each circle represents one school (includes all elementary, middle, high, and alternative education schools) and the size of the circle reflects the number of students in the 3rd, 7th, 9th, and 12th grade who had DHS involvement.

Number of Students
Ever Involved with Child
Welfare and/or Juvenile
Justice System



KEY FINDING: The enrollment of students ever involved with DHS is geographically dispersed across the SDP.

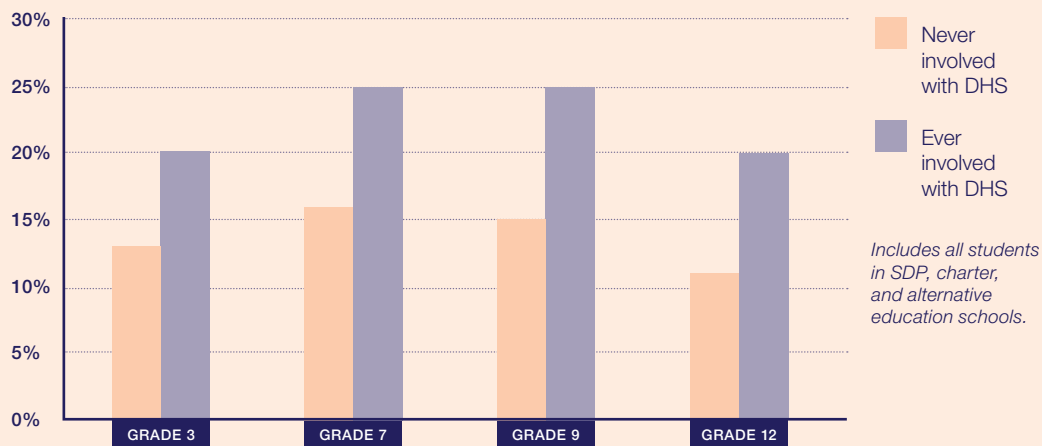
II Students who have ever been involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system have greater identified educational needs than their peers.

A Nearly one in four students ever involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system received special education services, a rate 64% greater than their peers who never had child welfare and/or juvenile justice involvement.

Averaged across all grades, *students ever involved with DHS are more likely to receive special education services (23%) in comparison to their peers never involved with DHS (14%).*

For example in the 9th grade, 15% of those who have never been involved with DHS received special education services, while 25% of the students who have ever been involved with DHS received special education services (Figure 4). The finding that students with child welfare histories are more likely to receive special education services is consistent with prior research.¹²

FIGURE 4: DIFFERENCES IN RECEIPT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES BY DHS INVOLVEMENT



KEY FINDING: Across all grades, students who have ever been involved with DHS are more likely to receive special education services in comparison to their peers who were never involved with DHS.

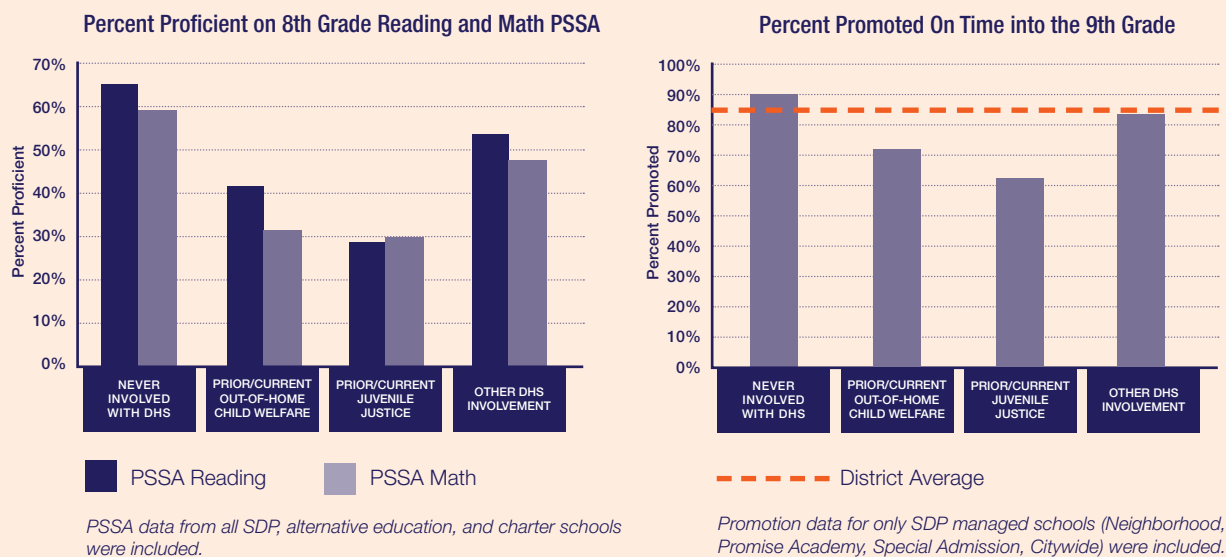
B Educational outcomes and attendance rates were poorer among students ever involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system.

Ninth grade students with child welfare and/or juvenile justice involvement at any time in their lives were likely to have lower PSSA scores in the 8th grade and were less likely to be promoted to the next grade on time. To better understand the nuances in academic outcomes according to the different levels of DHS involvement, the students were broken out into four categories, as shown on the horizontal axis in Figures 5a and 5b: (1) never involved with DHS; (2) received out-of-home child welfare services before or during SY 2011-2012; (3) received juvenile justice services before or during SY 2011-2012; and (4) experienced some other level of contact with DHS during their life.^c

Figure 5a describes the students when they entered 9th grade in September 2011.

- **PSSA Scores:** For both the 8th grade Reading and Math PSSAs, students with any type of DHS involvement scored lower than their peers without DHS involvement. In particular, students with juvenile justice and out-of-home child welfare involvement had the lowest percent of students scoring proficiently on either assessment.
- **Grade Promotion:** Only 62% of students with juvenile justice involvement were likely to be promoted on time into the 9th grade. Students with out-of-home child welfare or other child welfare involvement were also promoted at a rate lower than the SDP average, which is 86%.

FIGURE 5a: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE FOR ENTERING 9TH GRADERS BY LEVEL OF DHS INVOLVEMENT



KEY FINDING: PSSA scores and grade promotion for the 9th grade cohort was consistently lower for students with any level of DHS involvement.

^c Please refer to the methods section of page 4 for additional details regarding the DHS involvement categories.

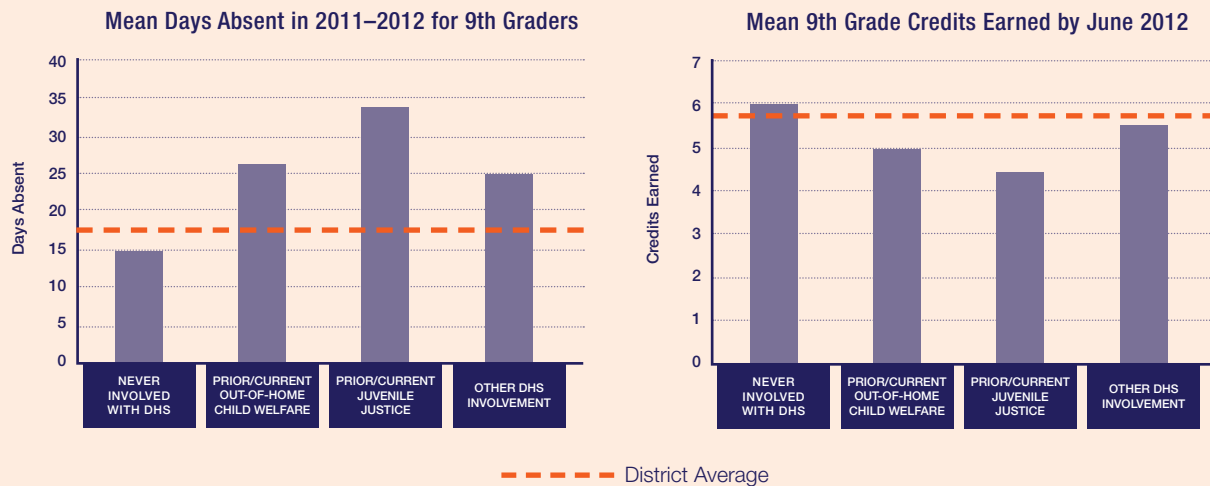
During 9th grade, students with child welfare and/or juvenile justice involvement had greater absences and earned fewer credits in comparison to their peers who have never been involved with DHS. Figure 5b describes this 9th grade population during SY 2011-2012:

- **Attendance:**^f Ninth graders with DHS involvement were absent two to four weeks more than students who were never involved during the school year. (Average days absent in SY 2011-2012 for all SDP 9th graders is 17.2 days.)

- **Credits Earned:** Students with juvenile justice involvement earned approximately 1.5 fewer credits per year than their never involved peers. (Average credits earned in SY 2011-2012 for all SDP 9th graders is 5.8 credits.)

Another noteworthy trend is that although students with “Other DHS Involvement” (e.g., substantiated reports, in-home protective services) may have less exposure to the child welfare system, they still underperformed academically in comparison to their peers never involved with DHS.

FIGURE 5b: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE DURING 9TH GRADE BY LEVEL OF DHS INVOLVEMENT



Data for only SDP managed schools (Neighborhood, Promise Academy, Special Admission, Citywide) were included in these figures.

KEY FINDING: Ninth grade achievement outcomes were consistently lower for students with any level of involvement with DHS.

^f Absences include excused, unexcused, and other as categorized by the SDP.

III Although enrollment of students who have ever been involved with DHS are geographically dispersed across the school system, these students tend to cluster in certain school types and have lower educational outcomes than students without DHS involvement. However, within the same school type, the performance of students with DHS involvement is similar to that of their peers without DHS involvement.

A Students ever involved with DHS are concentrated in Comprehensive and Alternative Education Schools compared to Traditional Charter or Special Admission and Citywide Schools.

Approximately 20% of SDP 12th graders have ever been involved with DHS. However, *a larger percentage of students in Alternative Education and Comprehensive High Schools have ever been involved with DHS*, 30% and 23% respectively (Figure 6). Students ever involved with DHS are concentrated in these school types as these schools serve almost three-quarters of the 12th graders ever involved with DHS (2,676 of 3,699 DHS-involved 12th graders).

Consequently, fewer students ever involved with DHS attend Special Admission/Citywide High Schools and

Traditional Charter Schools. In these more selective schools, students with DHS involvement also comprise a much smaller percentage of the student body. Therefore, since the Comprehensive and Alternative Education Schools educate the majority of DHS-involved youth, they face greater challenges than other school types when serving this at-risk and high-needs population.

This over-concentration of youth ever involved with DHS in certain school types is not simply a matter of numbers—it is also a representation of the severity of need. This disparity is most striking for the SY 2011-2012 9th grade cohort, which is less affected by drop out than the 12th grade cohort. In Comprehensive High Schools, 28% (n=568) of youth who have ever been involved with DHS were currently receiving out-of-home child welfare or juvenile justice services from DHS during the 2011-2012 school year, compared to 14% (n=69) of youth currently receiving out-of-home child welfare or juvenile justice services in Traditional Charter Schools or 12% (n=69) in Special Admission/Citywide Schools. Thus, *Comprehensive High Schools received the greatest numbers of students who have ever been involved with DHS and also have more students that were more deeply system-involved*, as indicated by the receipt of current out-of-home child welfare and juvenile justice services during the 2011-2012 school year.

FIGURE 6: DHS INVOLVEMENT AMONG 12TH GRADERS BY SCHOOL TYPE



KEY FINDING: 12th grade students ever involved with DHS are concentrated in Comprehensive and Alternative Education Schools.

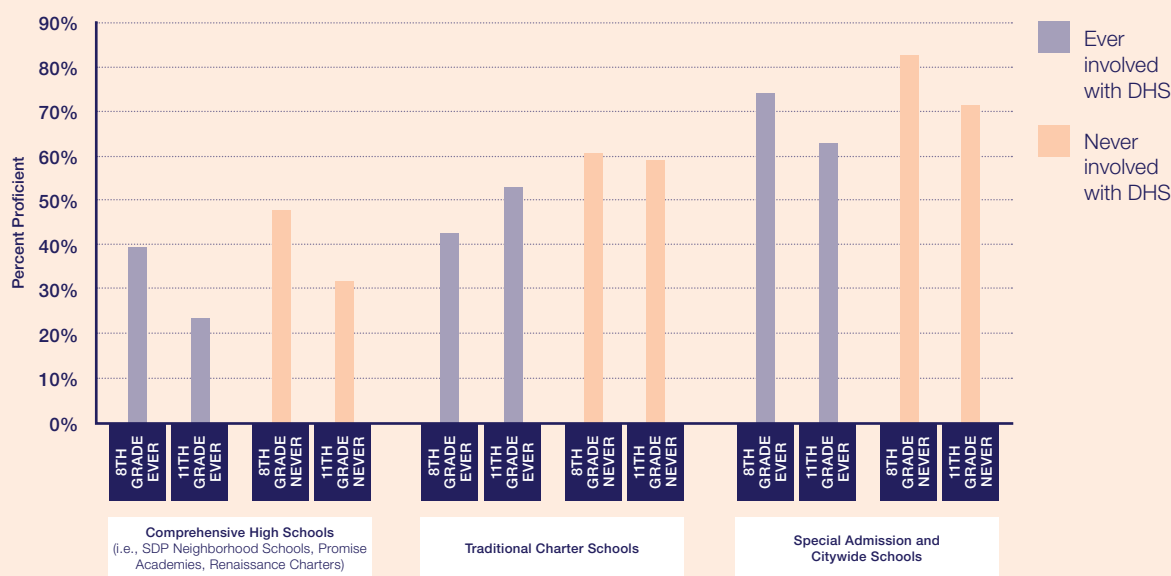
B Educational outcomes vary by school type, but within similar settings, students ever involved with DHS tend to mirror the performance of their peers who never had DHS involvement.

Although youth may move between schools over time, the 8th grade PSSA scores for the 12th graders in SY 2011-2012 can illustrate the challenges schools face when receiving incoming high school students with varying proficiency levels. Interpreting population statistics on PSSA proficiency in the 11th grade requires an understanding of the selection differences for youth who attend different types of schools at the start of their high school experience. As such, we described and compared the 8th and 11th grade Reading PSSAs scores for the 12th grade cohort in the 2011-2012 school year according to school type and DHS involvement (Figure 7).^g We found that on average in the SDP, *there was a decrease in the percent of students scoring proficiently on the 8th to 11th grade Reading PSSA.*

In total across the SDP, more students scored proficiently on the 8th grade PSSA compared to the 11th grade PSSA, regardless of the level of DHS involvement. For example, in Comprehensive High Schools, 39% of students ever involved with DHS scored proficiently on the 8th grade PSSA, but by the 11th grade only 23% of these students scored proficiently. The students without DHS involvement in Comprehensive High Schools demonstrated the same trend (decrease from 48% to 32%). Similar findings were also seen in Special Admission and Citywide Schools in aggregate, although overall proficiency rates were much higher. In contrast, Traditional Charter Schools on average, maintained or improved PSSA scores over time, particularly for youth ever involved with DHS; 43% of students with DHS involvement scored proficiently on the 8th Reading PSSA, increasing to 53% in the 11th grade.^h

Another important finding is that *although students ever involved with DHS in all school types scored lower on the*

FIGURE 7: CHANGES IN AVERAGE PERCENT PROFICIENT ON THE READING PSSA BETWEEN THE 8TH AND 11TH GRADE – DETAILED BY SCHOOL TYPE



KEY FINDING: While the outcomes of DHS-involved students are consistently lower than their never involved classmates, their performance is similar to that of their never involved peers in the same school type.

^g This figure includes 12th grade students who remained in high school during SY 2011-2012 and had scores on the 8th and 11th grade PSSAs.

^h This trend may be due to several factors, including a small sample size of 12th grade students ever involved with DHS with 11th grade PSSA scores in Traditional Charter Schools (n=272), as well as selection bias from students remaining in Traditional Charters during high school. In contrast, there are 390 students ever involved with DHS with 11th grade PSSA scores in SDP Special Admission and Citywide schools and the vast majority (n=1,074) of students ever involved with DHS with 11th grade PSSA scores are in Comprehensive High Schools.

PSSA than their peers without DHS involvement, by the 11th grade they were not far behind in aggregate from their uninvolvement peers within the same school type. Across all school types and on both the 8th and 11th grade PSSA, the proportion of students ever involved with DHS who were proficient on the PSSA were always less than the proportion of peers without DHS involvement, ranging from a gap of 6%-18%, depending on school type. However, over time between 8th and 11th grade, average PSSA performance was similar for both DHS-involved and never involved students within school type. This suggests that *students ever involved with DHS tend to mirror the performance of their uninvolvement classmates in similar school types.* Figure 7 suggests that there is somewhat of a regression to the mean within school type, with students ever involved with DHS approaching the performance level of their peers without DHS involvement. In fact, in Traditional Charter Schools, we detected movement in the positive direction, as measured by increasing PSSA proficiency among youth with DHS involvement toward the performance of their peers by 11th grade. The finding that students ever involved with DHS tend to mirror the performance of their uninvolvement classmates in similar school types was also robust to students who were currently receiving out-of-home child welfare and juvenile justice services from DHS during the 2011-2012 school year, so it was not explained simply by selection differences among the ever involved DHS cohort across school types.

The following summarizes the findings from Figure 7:ⁱ

- **Comprehensive High Schools** show the lowest levels of proficiency on the PSSAs and also educate the greatest number of students ever involved with DHS (as noted in Figure 6). While a lower percent of students ever involved with DHS are scoring proficiently on both the 8th and 11th grade PSSAs, their performance demonstrates a similar pattern to their never involved peers.
- **Traditional Charter Schools** have more students ever involved with DHS becoming proficient on the PSSA between 8th and 11th grade. Students without DHS involvement maintained a level of performance stability over time with approximately 60% of these students scoring proficiently.
- **Special Admission and Citywide High Schools** had the highest proportion of students scoring proficiently

on the 8th grade PSSA exam compared to other school settings in the SDP. While these students' 11th grade reading PSSA proficiency decreases, students in this setting maintain a higher level of PSSA proficiency in aggregate in comparison to other school types.

DISCUSSION

This brief provides an evaluation of child welfare and juvenile justice experiences for students in Philadelphia. This analysis highlights the results of an integrated data sharing effort in a large urban school district and shows the potential of utilizing data to inform decision-making processes to better serve at-risk students. The presentation of these findings in Philadelphia is timely as school district and child welfare leadership are engaging in cross-system planning to improve the experience for students involved in multiple systems.

These data provide a first step in describing, quantifying, and documenting the needs of Philadelphia students with DHS involvement at some point in their lives. Many schools face enrollment where one in three students had some level of contact with DHS. Moreover, students who have ever been involved with DHS are widely distributed across the SDP regardless of neighborhood. Students with DHS involvement are an at-risk population experiencing poor academic outcomes; on average, they are less likely to be promoted to the next grade on time, earn fewer credits during the year, have lower PSSA scores, are more likely to receive special education services, and are absent more days from school.

Across all school types, the SDP experienced a decrease in PSSA proficiency for most students between 8th and 11th grade. The only exception was among the aggregate of Traditional Charter Schools, in which proficiency improved for youth ever involved with DHS. When comparing the 12th grade students ever involved with DHS in Comprehensive High Schools and Traditional Charters Schools, they had similar levels of proficiency on the 8th grade PSSA (39% and 43% respectively). However, their trend in proficiency went in opposite directions over time with achievement increasing for those in the Traditional Charter Schools. The increasing PSSA proficiency in charter settings is a particularly provocative finding in this study that should be explored further. It would be important to measure

ⁱ Complete definitions of school type can be found on Table 1 on page 5.



mobility and know when students ever involved with DHS transition in or out of Traditional Charter Schools, as our finding may also represent the migration of high-performing students to charter settings and under-performing students to Comprehensive High Schools. Within the ever involved DHS cohort, there is also great variation in DHS experience, although sensitivity analyses of youth who were currently receiving out-of-home or juvenile justice services during the 2011-2012 academic year revealed trends that were similar to the overall finding among ever involved youth. Nevertheless, additional research that examines the longitudinal relationship between DHS involvement and academic outcomes would be valuable, as this cross-sectional analysis cannot fully incorporate the selection differences of students into various school settings.

Educational outcomes of students ever involved with DHS are lower than their uninvolved peers, which is consistent with prior studies.^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6} However, this study sheds new light on possible reasons for this disparity beyond complex trauma histories and adverse childhood experiences leading to system involvement. For example, youth ever involved with DHS are more likely to be concentrated in Comprehensive High Schools and Alternative Education Schools, while other students with potentially stronger advocates enroll in the more selective Traditional Charter, Special Admission, and Citywide Schools, which have specific admission requirements and enrollment procedures. The over-concentration of youth ever involved with DHS in certain schools creates urgent challenges for Comprehensive High Schools to educate

students in difficult environments. It is important to point out that it is also possible that the resources of such schools fall short of what is available in many Traditional Charter, Special Admission, and Citywide Schools, thus enhancing the risk for continued disparity in educational achievement. Regardless of the underlying causes, understanding and acknowledging this disparity can allow DHS and the SDP to effectively provide resources to meet the needs of students with child welfare and juvenile justice histories.

The final district-wide trend we observed was that while students with child welfare and juvenile justice experiences may have lower levels of PSSA proficiency, they tend to mirror the performance of their never involved peers in the same school setting. Thus it is important to look at the school environment as a whole, as youth ever involved with DHS tend to regress to the mean performance of the school overall. Such a finding suggests that the resources in more enriched school settings provide equal benefit for students with and without DHS involvement alike. It may also suggest that one should not discount the potential benefit of heterogeneous peer environments raising the performance of at-risk youth. This would not be surprising given the literature regarding promising outcomes from peer mentoring programs, learning in mixed level groups in the classroom, and positive school-wide prevention and intervention programs.^{4, 13, 14, 15, 16}

It is important to acknowledge that a cross-sectional approach to administrative data has limitations and that

this study was not designed to follow cohorts longitudinally and examine trends over time. Still, the educational data demonstrate a widening achievement gap over time between students ever involved with DHS in comparison to their never involved peers. In fact, this study may underreport disparities, as the most affected and at-risk students likely dropped out before 12th grade, and are therefore not included in this analysis. This may explain the plateau in DHS involvement for 12th graders (Figure 1) or the decrease in students ever involved with DHS receiving special education services in the 12th grade (Figure 4). Additionally, we acknowledge that our categorization of DHS involvement does not capture the degree or intensity of the child welfare and juvenile justice services received. For instance, a student who spent one year in kinship care and another who was in multiple foster homes for twelve years, would likely have different academic outcomes, but are part of the same “out-of-home child welfare” category. We also realize that students have different academic strengths and challenges that cannot be measured by PSSA scores alone. As a result, we have not identified individual school performance in this report, choosing instead to focus on a cross-sectional approach and describing our findings about the school district as a whole.

Engaging a qualitative approach to build on these data:

To ultimately achieve a stronger environment for performance management and inform recommendations for quality improvement, the SDP will need to leverage quantitative data, such as those from this analysis, with in-depth qualitative assessments to identify the characteristics of the students, schools, and supports that can help explain these findings. With that in mind, DHS partnered with the School District of Philadelphia to conduct the first targeted education Quality Service Review (QSR) in June 2013 to understand the educational experiences of youth with DHS involvement (full report was produced by DHS). The QSR is a qualitative, interview-based assessment that evaluates both individual and system-level outcomes for each case selected to participate in the review. Pairs of child welfare and education experts conducted interviews with students, teachers, guidance counselors, principals, foster parents, biological parents, case managers, and/or mental health clinicians to identify the strengths and challenges of each case.

The targeted education QSR described the experiences of eleven students currently in out-of-home foster care during SY 2012–2013 attending five different high schools. The participating schools, which included both SDP managed schools and Traditional Charter Schools, were identified

based on this quantitative analysis as having large populations of youth ever involved with DHS. Based on these detailed case studies, the QSR found that *school safety* was an area of strength, as all eleven students were considered to have limited exposure to harm and were free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation in the school setting. An additional strength was that the adults and professionals involved with these students had a shared and common *understanding* of the of the student’s situation. The QSR also found that for many of the cases, improvements could be made in the *coordination and integration* of interventions, which could be supported by increased cross-system *teaming and functioning*.

Overall, the QSR identified areas for improvement and highlighted best practices that could be scaled up in the SDP. Some students interviewed in this small sample demonstrated excellent overall academic performance and may hold important keys to understanding what allows some children to succeed, despite many challenges before them. The leadership of the SDP, DHS, and MOE expressed a commitment to conducting additional QSRs so that it evolves into an ongoing service evaluation supporting increased systems-integration in Philadelphia. This would allow the QSR to serve as a platform for prioritizing the strategies needed to align resources with student need across the School District of Philadelphia.

CONCLUSION

The findings in this report provide an in-depth understanding of the educational complexity of Philadelphia students who have ever been involved with DHS. These data reveal the magnitude of the challenges that schools are facing when educating students with child welfare and juvenile justice involvement. The data also provide a baseline to help drive better integration between systems and enable the identification of students and schools that might be exceeding expectations, which could provide examples of best practices that can be replicated. The quantitative data analysis suggests that providing additional support to underperforming schools may provide equal benefit for students with and without DHS involvement alike. We hope that these data can inform next steps and guide the development of a systematic approach by the School District of Philadelphia, the Mayor’s Office of Education, the School Reform Commission, and the Philadelphia Department of Human Services to better support students with child welfare and juvenile justice involvement.

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