
Improving Education Outcomes for Children in Child Welfare

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This Evidence to Action brief presents data from the longitudinal Children’s Stability and Well-Being study (CSAW), which followed a cohort of children in foster care placement, and identifies related systems recommendations to improve school success for children involved with child welfare.

Despite decades of research and intervention, poor education outcomes remain a persistent problem in the United States, as one in four students fail to graduate from high school on time. Poor education outcomes often stem from educational instability—characterized by frequent changes in schools, delays in enrollment, and chronic absenteeism—that begins early in a child’s education. Children involved with child welfare systems face educational instability at disproportionately high rates. These children, who have experienced abuse or neglect and enter the child welfare system to receive either in-home preventive services or foster care, often live with a high degree of transition and uncertainty. Because children in child welfare are at high risk for educational instability, and because they are served intensively by multiple public systems, their educational experiences are particularly instructive as we seek strategies for improving education outcomes for all high-risk students.

The Children’s Stability and Well-being (CSAW) study from PolicyLab at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia sought to understand the educational experiences of children in child welfare. Over a two-year period, researchers followed a cohort of children ages 5-8 years who entered a foster care placement in Philadelphia between 2006 and 2008. Researchers also conducted focus groups with professionals in both the education and child welfare systems.

This PolicyLab Evidence to Action brief details key findings from the study and highlights three opportunities for action as system leaders work to improve education outcomes for children affected by educational instability.

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