

## **Educational Outcomes of Youth in Foster Care**

### **EDUCATIONAL ISSUES IN CHILD WELFARE**

**State Court Administrative Office**

**Child Welfare Services Division**

**Michigan Court Improvement Program**

August 17, 2010—East Lansing, Michigan

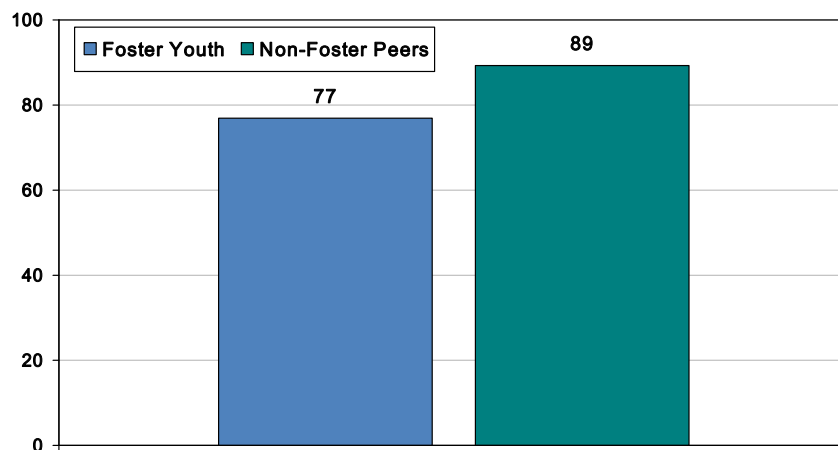
- Education is as important for children and youth in foster care as it is for their non-foster peers
- Many foster youth have postsecondary education aspirations
- However....

### Compared to their non-foster peers....

- **Foster youth are less likely to complete high school**

Approximately 50% of foster youth complete high school by age 18 compared to 70% of youth in the general population (Wolanin, 2005)

### High School Diploma or GED by Age 21 (Midwest Study)



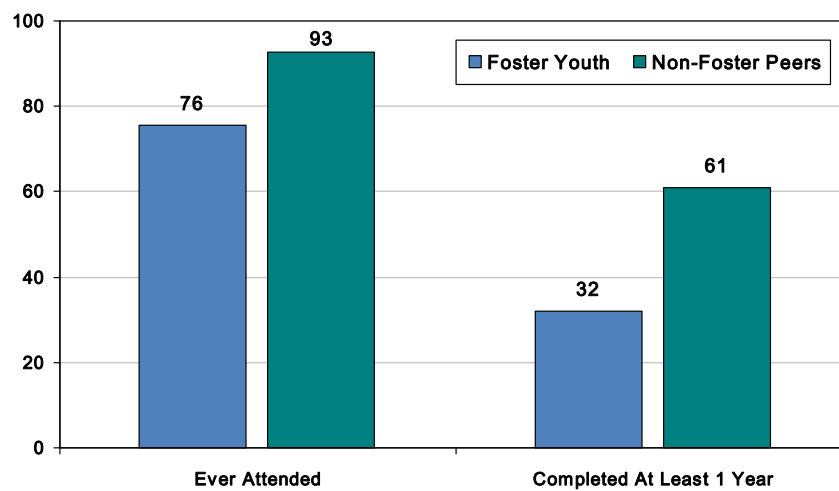
Source: Courtney, Dworsky, Cusick, Havlicek, Perez & Keller (2007)

### Compared to their non-foster peers....

- **Foster youth who complete high school are less likely to attend college**

Approximately 20% of foster youth who graduate from high school attend college compared to 60% of high school graduates in the general population (Wolanin, 2005)

### College Attendance by Age 23 or 24 (Midwest Study)

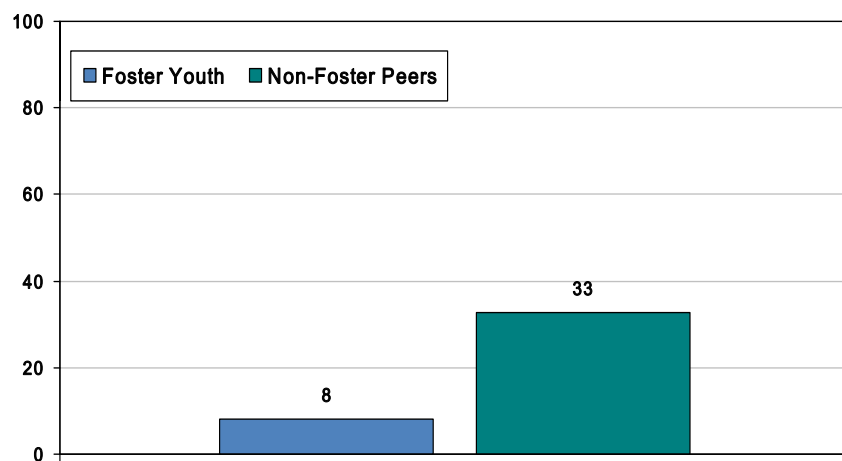


Source: Courtney, Dworsky, Lee & Rapp (2010)

### Compared to their non-foster peers....

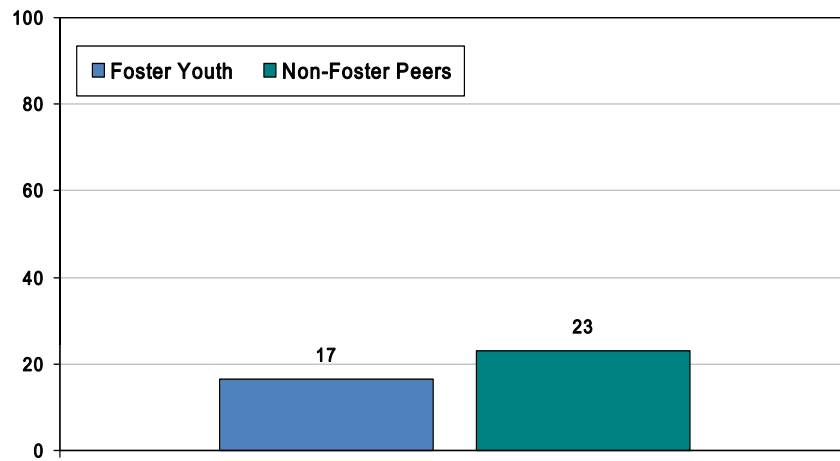
- **Foster youth who enroll in college are less likely to graduate**
  - Estimates of the college graduation rate among foster youth range from 1% to 11%.
  - By contrast, about 30% of 25 to 29 year olds in the general population have at least a bachelor's degree.

### Earned a College Degree by Age 23 or 24 (Midwest Study)



Source: Courtney, Dworsky, Lee & Rapp (2010)

### Enrolled in School at Age 23 or 24 (Midwest Study)



Source: Courtney, Dworsky, Lee & Rapp (2010)

• Why?

- **Chapin Hall Research**
- **on Foster Children in the**
- **Chicago Public Schools**

#### **Concentrated in Low-Performing Schools**

- Low- or extremely-low performing elementary schools (as measured by percentage of students achieving national reading norms) have the highest concentration of foster children
- High schools with the highest concentration of foster youth have above average drop out rates
- Foster children under-represented in magnet and selective enrollment schools

### **Old for Grade/High Retention Rates**

- Foster children are retained at higher rates than other students and are nearly twice as likely to be old for grade
- Being old for grade is a strong predictor of dropping out

### **Achievement Gap**

- Foster children are, on average, more than one year behind other students in reading
- Controlling for demographic and school characteristics reduces the achievement gap to just over half a year
- Some of the achievement gap can be attributed to the low-performing schools which many foster children attend

### **Lag Behind at Entry**

- Nearly two-thirds of foster children are either old for grade or in the bottom quartile in reading **when they enter care**
- Almost a quarter are both old for grade and in the bottom quartile
- Some of the lag can be attributed to experiences prior to placement

### **High Rates of Special Education Classification**

- Foster children are more likely to be identified as having a learning disability than other students
- Foster children are also more likely to be identified as being emotionally disturbed
- Could disruptive behavior be a response to trauma surrounding placement or experiences while in care?
- Special education classification is rarely removed

### **School Behavior Problems**

- Foster children are more likely to exhibit behavior problems than other students
- Higher-than-average rates of disciplinary code infractions, including many for violent offenses (e.g., fighting, bullying, or battery)

### **High Drop Out Rates**

- Drop out rate is much higher for foster youth than for other students
- Even after controlling for demographic characteristics, school characteristics and academic performance in elementary school, foster youth are nearly twice as likely to drop out

**Educational Risk Factors:  
Midwest Study Foster Youth at Age 17 or 18**

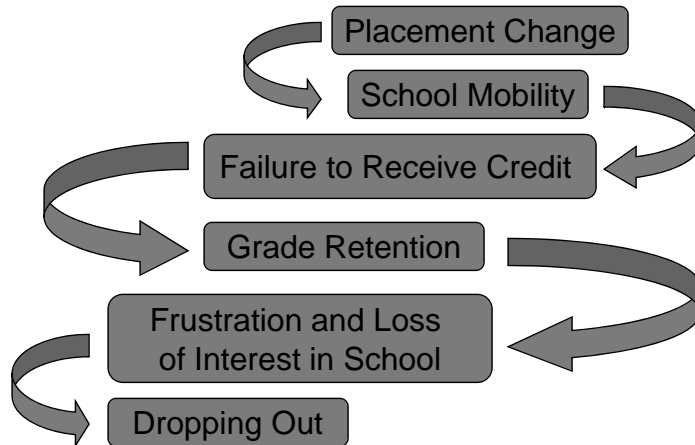
Ever retained	37.4
Ever received special education	34.6
Changed schools at least 3 times	53.9
Missed at least one month of school	24.7
Ever suspended from school	67.3
Ever expelled from school	16.5
Median reading level	7 <sup>th</sup> grade

**School Mobility**

- School changes often occur when foster children are removed from home or when their placements change
  
- Changing schools can lead to
  - Missing days or even weeks of school
  - Disruption in special education or other services
  - Disruption in peer relationships
  - Loss of academic progress (4 to 6 months per change)
  - Loss of credit for courses taken
  
- Provisions in Fostering Connections to promote educational stability

## Placement Instability

- Having one fewer placement change per year almost doubled the likelihood of graduating from high school before leaving care (Pecora et al., 2003)



## Are child welfare agencies addressing the educational needs of foster children and youth?

- CFSR Family and Child Well-Being Outcome 2:  
**Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs**
- Average achievement rate = 87% for the 32 states whose reviews were completed in 2007 and 2008 (which is less than the 95% needed for substantial conformity)

## Common Problems Identified During CFRs

- Multiple school changes at entry into care or when placements change
- **Lack of (complete) school records in case files (as required by a 2006 amendment to Title IV-E)**
- Failure to provide records to foster parents or schools in a timely manner
- Failure to adequately assess educational needs
- Failure to provide adequate educational services
- Failure to address problems with absenteeism, tardiness, and truancy
- **Lack of adequate advocacy on behalf of foster children**

## Compared to their non-foster peers...

- Foster youth who complete high school are less likely to attend college
- Foster youth who enroll in college are less likely to graduate
- So....

- How can we increase access to higher education?
- How can we increase college retention and graduate rates?

### **Increase Access to Higher Education by Removing Financial Barriers**

- **Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program**
  - 2001 amendment to the FCIA
  - Up to \$5000 per year for education-related expenses
  - Eligibility extends until age 23
- **State tuition waiver programs**
  - Attend public colleges and universities for free or at a reduced rate
  - With few exceptions, can only be used in-state
  - Financial aid from other sources usually needed to cover room, board and other costs

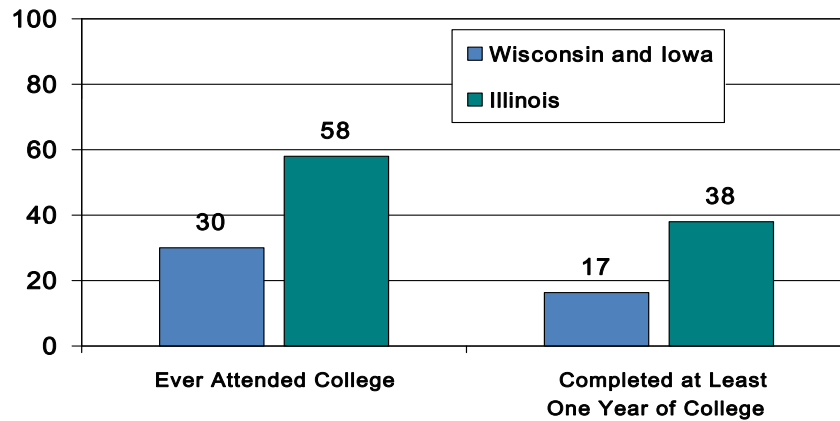
- **Would extending foster care until age 21 increase access to higher education?**

### Natural Experiment

- State laws differ with respect to whether young people are allowed to remain in foster care beyond age 18
- Illinois is one of the few states where courts can (and routinely do) extend foster state care and supervision until age 21
- Midwest Study participants from Illinois were, on average, more than two years older when they left care than their counterparts from Iowa and Wisconsin

State	Mean Age at Discharge in the Midwest Study
Wisconsin	17.8
Iowa	17.9
Illinois	20.0

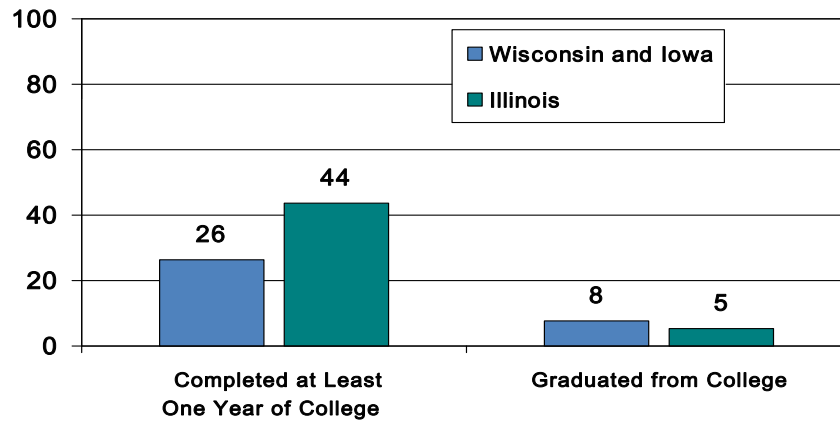
### Educational Attainment at Age 21 by State



Dworsky & Courtney, 2010

- **Would extending foster care until age 21 also increase retention and graduation rates?**

### Educational Attainment at Age 23 by State



Dworsky & Courtney, 2010

### Lessons Learned from the Midwest Study

- Extending foster care until age 21 seems to increase access to postsecondary education
- But, by itself, it is not enough if we want foster youth to graduate from college
- One option is campus support programs

- **Why don't we know more about the education of children and youth in foster care?**

**We don't know more about the education of children and youth in foster care because...**

- No national data tracking the education of foster children
- Studies of educational performance in single jurisdictions
- Inconsistent measures of educational outcomes
- Silo effect: Lack of communication and information sharing between schools and child welfare system

**We don't know more about the education of children and youth in foster care because....**

- NCLB does not require states to disaggregate student data for children in foster care
- No education-related elements in the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)
- Child welfare agencies generally do not collect non-mandatory education data

**New Data Collection Requirements???**

- Amendments to AFCARS proposed in 2008 would have required states to report whether a foster child has
  - Been diagnosed with a learning disability
  - Received special education services
  - Repeated one or more grades
- New data collection requirements will be proposed that reflect educational provisions contained in Fostering Connections

## **Why do we need better education data?**

- To make informed and appropriate placement decisions
- To increase accountability
- To identify needs
- To inform transition planning

- For more information
- about the Midwest Study:

• **[www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org)**