



Collaborative Quality Improvement

Division of Child Protection & Permanency

2024 BRIEF #3: SUPPORTING THE EDUCATION OF NJ'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Overview

The Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) is New Jersey's child protection and child welfare agency within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). DCF's vision is to assist all New Jersey residents to be safe, healthy, and connected. DCP&P is responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect and, if necessary, arranging for the child's protection and connecting families to appropriate services and supports. When CP&P determines that a child of school age must be removed from their living situation to ensure safety, the Division prioritizes maintaining the child in their school and ensuring the appropriate educational supports are in place to facilitate their academic success.

Social interactions with classmates, peers, and school staff can serve as a source of stability and well-being in a child's life, particularly when the child has been separated from family.ⁱ Additionally, movement between schools can present a barrier to academic achievement.ⁱⁱ The term educational stability refers to the continuity of a child in his or her educational setting at the time of placement or the facilitation of a smooth and timely transition to a new school when continuity in the pre-placement school is not in the child's best interest. In addition to promoting educational stability, CP&P aims to ensure that each child in foster care is developing, learning, and progressing at a rate commensurate with their age and ability, and any child with a disability or special needs receives necessary evaluations and recommended support for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).^{iii, iv}

KEY FINDINGS

- For families with school-age children that experienced separation, children were maintained in their pre-placement school or had positive, planned school changes (**94% quality score**).
- Appropriate interventions were in place to address academic challenges (**82% quality score**).
- There is opportunity for CP&P to improve communication with school personnel regarding each child's academic performance and progress (**61% quality score**).

Please note, while the case practice areas displayed here are similar to those reported in the [2023 Education Brief](#), scores cannot be compared across years as the methodology was changed; for more information see: [Methods](#).



OFFICE OF
QUALITY

Areas of Strength

EDUCATIONAL STABILITY:

In the review of families with children in out-of-home placement, with a focus child who was enrolled in school, **school stability was a case practice strength (94% quality score)**. This means that while children were in out-of-home placement, they remained in their pre-placement school or had a positive, planned school change.

When there were planned or unplanned changes to the child's academic setting (n=42), the review found that **steps were taken to prevent future moves**, and there was collaboration with the child, parent, law guardian, and school personnel as appropriate (**80% quality score**).

ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS FOR CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT:

Research shows that nationally, youth in foster care experience more academic challenges and have lower educational achievement than their peers, suggesting the need for increased support while children and youth are still enrolled in school.^v

Among the 53% of families in which the child experienced academic challenges, **CP&P worked to put appropriate interventions in place (82% quality score)**. Interventions included tutoring or other specialized services to address the child's educational needs, directly.

Area of Focus

ONGOING COMMUNICATION WITH SCHOOLS:

Engaging with schools and gathering information from school personnel pertaining to the child's education is an important part of a CP&P caseworker's role. CP&P staff use this information to corroborate and clarify information gathered while working with families. Information from school staff also provides additional context about the children CP&P serves and can enhance the opportunity for a holistic assessment of strengths, needs, and provision of the most relevant and appropriate services to address children's needs. This review found that the documentation of CP&P's staff's communication with school personnel regarding the child's academic performance and progress is an area for focus (**61% quality score**).



SUMMARY

Maximizing educational stability and ensuring appropriate educational supports are in place can help to facilitate youth's academic success.^{vi} Findings from this record review highlight CP&P's strengths and areas for focus in meeting the educational needs of the children it serves out-of-home. For families with school-age children in out-of-home placement, CP&P ensured youth remained in their pre-placement school and that appropriate interventions were in place when children experienced academic challenges. However, this review also found that CP&P staff can focus on the frequency and quality of communication with school personnel regarding each child's academic performance and progress.



What's Next?

DCF has developed several approaches to support ongoing communication with schools, including training CP&P staff and hosting a new forum for state partners to collaborate and generate recommendations.

TRAINING: All CP&P staff receive general training around the educational stability of youth in foster care, but to address observed challenges, CP&P began delivering supplemental educational stability trainings for Educational Liaisons within local offices in April 2025. Educational Liaisons are CP&P staff who assist Workers of school-aged children in out-of-home placement address each child's education-related needs.ⁱ These trainings focus on best practices for school engagement and refresh CP&P staff on educational stability policies and protocols to ensure that DCF is meeting the educational needs of all children in foster care.

Inter-Agency Collaboration: Beginning in July 2025, DCF staff from the Office of Adolescent Services, CP&P Educational Liaisons and staff from New Jersey's Department of Education will convene on a monthly basis. During these meetings, participants will identify outstanding communication barriers, discuss best practices, and develop recommendations ongoingly for CP&P staff to improve communication with schools.

METHODOLOGY

DCF's Office of Quality conducts independent case record reviews to ensure that CP&P facilitates educational stability and progress among youth entering the foster care system and to identify opportunities for improvement. The record reviews assess educational stability for children in out-of-home placement, and CP&P's efforts to mitigate instability. In this review, educational stability considers the number of times a child in placement changes schools in a 12-month period and the reason for school changes - were changes planned and necessary to meet the needs of the child or were changes unplanned?ⁱ This review also examined whether caseworkers had regular communication with school staff around the child's academic progress and whether any assessments and other information shared, related to the child's education, were comprehensive. Additionally, if there was evidence of poor academic progress, this review examined whether interventions were in place to address academic challenges.

It is important to note, the quality scores in this brief solely reflect the results of the record review and are limited to documentation in the electronic case record and other supplemental documents.

For the current review, Office of Quality staff assessed the cases of 157 families that had a school-age child in out-of-home placement between February 1, 2023 through April 30, 2024, who was enrolled in an educational, vocational, day treatment or job placement program. Families were eligible for review if they became involved with the agency due to a concern of abuse or neglect and received ongoing supportive services from a CP&P caseworker for a period of at least four months. The review included families served across 35 CP&P local offices, representing 76% of CP&P local offices statewide.

Interpreting Quality Scores:

Reviewers sought to determine if there was evidence in the electronic record that casework performance aligned with best practice and policy. Performance scores were assigned to each casework activity reviewed, based on whether the observed practice was completely, substantially, marginally, or not at all aligned with best practice and policy. The quality scores in this brief represent a summary of performance scores within a practice indicator. Quality scores range from 0 to 100, for which 100 represents performance that is completely aligned with best practice and policy.

To interpret scores and identify areas needing improvement, several factors must be considered. Each domain can highlight strengths or areas for improvement, which may not always align with the overall domain rating. Scores are evaluated on their relevance to critical practice functions and their impact on child safety and outcomes. Contextual factors such as seasonal caseload fluctuations and systemic issues should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. In general, within this statewide report, scores of 80 or above are considered strengths, scores between 65 and 80 are considered areas for improvement, and scores below 65 are considered areas for significant improvement.

For more information see: [Quality Scores Guide](#).



OFFICE OF
QUALITY

Differences between 2023 & 2024 case record review:

For the reasons described below, it is not valid to compare quality scores between the case record reviews reported in 2023 and those reported in 2024:

The case record review tool was enhanced after the first cycle of CoQI, in part, to improve the quality of the data. A major change included modifying certain items in the review tool to focus on a single child participant within families with multiple children served in out-of-home placement. Focusing on a single child participant in the family yields a more detailed understanding of the child's experience while in placement, and it reduces complexity observed in families for which the number of factors and interactions a reviewer must consider can obscure the important aspects of service. This case study method centering items around a focus child or target child yields more accurate scoring and is also more closely aligned with federal reviews.^{vii}

The final scores described in this brief are also weighted based on new criteria. Scored case record review items related to safety were given weights between 4 and 5. Items related to casework practice were given weights of 3-4. Items related to case practice activities focused on gathering information were given weights between 1 and 3. Questions that yielded binary yes/no answers, and questions that were not applicable to all cases and don't fall into the above categories were given weights of 2 to 3.

REFERENCES

- i Education of Children in Out-of-Home Placement: <https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/CPP-VII-A-1-700.pdf>
- ii Clemens, E. V., Lalonde, T. L., & Sheesley, A. P. (2016). The relationship between school mobility and students in foster care earning a high school credential. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 68, 193-201.
- iii Education of Students with Disabilities: <https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/CPP-VII-A-1-200.pdf>
- iv Educational Services: <https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/CPP-VII-A-1-100.pdf>
- v Keenan, S. J., & Choi, S. (2024). Academic achievement among youth in foster care. *Children & Youth Services Review*, 166, N.PAG. <https://doi-org.resources.njstatelib.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107951>
- vi Pecora, P. J. (2012). Maximizing educational achievement of youth in foster care and alumni: Factors associated with success. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(6), 1121-1129
- vii U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau. (2020). Child and family services reviews aggregate report: Round 3, fiscal years 2015-2018. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/child-and-family-services-reviews-aggregate-report-round-3-fiscal-years-2015-2018>

Images:

Image from Yustinus Tjiuwanda on Unsplash, 2019. [Woman wearing white sweater photo – Free Test Image on Unsplash](#).
Image from CDC on Unsplash, 2020. [Boy in green sweater writing on white paper photo – Free Study Image on Unsplash](#).