

*Arizona Department of Economic Security
Education Highlights for Arizona's Youth in Care*

Arizona's strong performance in this area has been achieved through inter-agency collaborative efforts to support educational achievement of youth in out-of-home care.

Arizona Education Summit Team - Background

In 2004 the Division and its partners participated in an Educational Summit, sponsored by Casey Family Programs in Seattle, Washington. This summit brought together numerous State multi-disciplinary leadership teams to share and learn about the education issues facing children in foster care and to develop action plans for improving services, supports, and education outcomes for these students. The Arizona team included members from the Governor's Office, the Department of Economic Security, the Arizona Department of Education, the Office of the Attorney General, and Casey Family Programs. A plan was drafted at this summit that included:

- Addressing policy barriers to effective surrogate parent assignments;
- Developing, distributing, and training on an education manual focused on students in foster care;
- Training of the judiciary;
- Studying promising practices from other states; and
- Expanding and sustaining the Arizona Education Summit Team (AEST).

Since 2004 the Team has grown and now includes Judges from Pima and Maricopa Counties, foster parent and CASA representation, alumni representation, the Children's Action Alliance, the Arizona Early Intervention Program, and increased Department representation (including the Division's new Education Liaisons).

Arizona Education Summit Team - Outcomes

As described in the following paragraphs, all of the AEST's goals have been accomplished. The AEST is developing a new plan to build upon these accomplishments, which will include a statewide education convening in 2007. To inform the new plan, members of the AEST have personally visited States and schools with promising approaches to achieving educational outcomes. AEST members visited the school system in McComb, Mississippi that has made tremendous strides in improving education outcomes, school safety, student health, teacher retention, and generally improving the health of the community through integrated schools. The Team members met with the superintendent, Dr. Patrick Cooper, and have brought him to Arizona to speak and meet with educators. Dr. Cooper will be coming to Arizona again, for the statewide education convening. AEST members also visited a tutoring program in San Diego, California that is a University-child welfare collaboration to train future educators about the education issues facing children in care and how to effectively work with these children. The University students then receive credit for tutoring students in foster care. A representative from Arizona State University attended this trip and has invited child welfare representatives to address her students on a couple of occasions.

Many of the State's improvement activities address the needs identified by stakeholders for: (1) greater cooperation between schools, foster parents, and the Division – particularly greater sharing of child-specific information and professional expertise and (2) ongoing educational assessment and oversight, so children needing services are identified and appropriate services are provided. Stakeholders acknowledged that CPS Specialists are not educational experts, but need to be able to provide resource information to out-of-home care givers so the caregivers can be

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effective in a lead role to meet the child's day to day educational needs. In turn, schools need to be better informed about the special needs of youth in foster care. In relation to oversight, stakeholders observed that Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) and foster parents are more attentive to educational needs than CPS Specialists, and the Division more thoroughly monitors educational needs for youth with an IEP than those without special education needs or for whom these needs have not yet been identified. In particular, stakeholders recommended greater attention be given to the developmental and educational needs of children ages zero to three, to ensure they are prepared to succeed when they reach school age.

Resources

To address these and other school related issues for children in foster care, Casey Family Programs and the AEST produced a 200+ page **education advocacy manual**, with youth self advocacy pages in each chapter. This has been distributed with training across the State to foster parents, CASA, attorneys, Judges, social workers, youth, advocates, teachers, and others. This manual is available both in binder form and compact disc. An addendum to the manual with services specific to Pima County is also available. The Division and its partners also published a guide to foster children and education entitled "*What Arizona Schools Need to Know about Children in Care - A Guide for Teachers, Administrators, Foster Parents, and Case Managers.*" The pamphlet outlines pertinent legal acts and issues that promote timely admission and service delivery to children in out-of-home care. In addition to these resources, stakeholders reported that a website or other resource that provides information to foster parents on AIMS testing, tutoring, and other educational resources would be helpful.

To improve timely record sharing, the Division and its partners created a separate ***Order to Release Educational Records***, which is now included within all dependency petitions and requires schools to expedite the transfer and delivery of school records of children in care.

Courts statewide have been provided **educational checklists** published by Casey Family Programs to help Judges monitor educational services and progress. These checklists can also be used by CASAs, foster parents, CPS Specialists, and others. In addition, the ***Endless Dreams curriculum*** is available on-line for teachers through ASSET, to inform about the educational needs of foster children and how to more effectively work with these students.

Stakeholders identified maintenance of teacher, friend and other relationships formed at school as a critical foundation for child mental health, self-esteem, and academic achievement; and stated that Courts and CPS Specialists need to more carefully consider the affect of school changes when considering child placement changes. The **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act** provides a powerful resource to children in out of home care who experience placement and school changes, which can create substantial setbacks in a child's school performance. Under this law, a parent, guardian or Local Education Liaison may request the local school district to provide transportation of a child to and from their home school district when feasible and appropriate, even if they move outside that school's attendance boundaries. **Family to Family** initiative activities to increase the percentage of children placed within their home communities will also address this important issue.

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Recent Legislation

The Arizona legislature and Governor Napolitano have also passed legislation to support educational outcomes for youth in foster care. For example:

- State legislation passed in 2006 requires the Department to establish an **educational case management unit** to develop and coordinate educational case management plans for youth in the Independent Living Program. Additional responsibilities of the unit are to assist with the Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) testing, graduating from high school, and pursuit of post-secondary education and related financial resources. The two member unit has been staffed and began functioning in February 2007. The law further appropriates an additional \$500,000 in State funds toward the program function and to supplement the federal Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV). Efforts are underway to collaborate with the ADE to share data systems, facilitate outreach services to children and assist CPS Specialists with education planning. New Arizona law known as the Displaced Student Voucher Program also requires the ADE to provide funds for tuition to private schools for children who were previously in foster care through the Department. The Division's Educational Case Management Unit is assisting ADE in processing applications for eligibility. The first students can use this program beginning fall 2007. (House Bill 2613, 2006 Session Law Ch. 338).
- New law signed by the Governor in April 2007 and effective 90 days after the end of the current legislative session will allow a **surrogate parent** to be appointed by either a court *or* the Arizona Department of Education (ADE). Current law requires the court to appoint a surrogate parent. (House Bill 2393, 2007 Session Law Ch. 126).

Policy Revisions

The CPS Committee on Education, the Arizona Department of Education, the Arizona Early Intervention Program, and the Office of the Attorney General have approved revisions to the Division's policy on "Meeting the Educational Needs of Children in Out-of-Home Care." The revisions reflect changes to the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), McKinney-Vento Law, and State law; including new State law that aligns with the federal IDEA regulations that allow foster parents to act as the IDEA parent when the birth or adoptive parent is unable or unavailable to serve. Policy distribution is pending final Division approval. Along with this new policy, a detailed and comprehensive "Child's Educational Status" plan is being added to CHILDS. This plan will clearly document goals, action steps, responsible parties, and target dates of plan review related to the child's educational services. Educational needs and services are currently documented in the general out-of-home care plan.

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Additional Resources

- Chapin Hall Center for Children Reports: <http://www.chapinhall.org/>
- Arizona Children's Services Policy Manual, *Meeting the Educational Needs of Children in Out-of-Home Care*: <http://www.azdes.gov/dcyf/cmdps/cps/Policy/ServiceManual.htm>
- Education Checklist for Judges:
<http://www.ncjfcj.org/images/stories/dept/ppcd/pdf/2005educationchecklistfulldoc.pdf>
- Pima County Technical Assistance Brief:
<http://www.ncjfcj.org/images/stories/dept/ppcd/pdf/pimabrief.pdf>
- Education Advocacy Manual (Washington): <http://www.teamchild.org/manual.html>
- Arizona State Legislature: <http://www.azleg.gov/>
- Arizona Department of Education Guide for Teachers, Administrators, Foster Parents and Case Managers:
<http://www.ade.state.az.us/schooleffectiveness/specialpops/homeless/fostercarebooklet.pdf>