



Children at Risk in the Child Welfare System: Collaborations to Promote School Readiness



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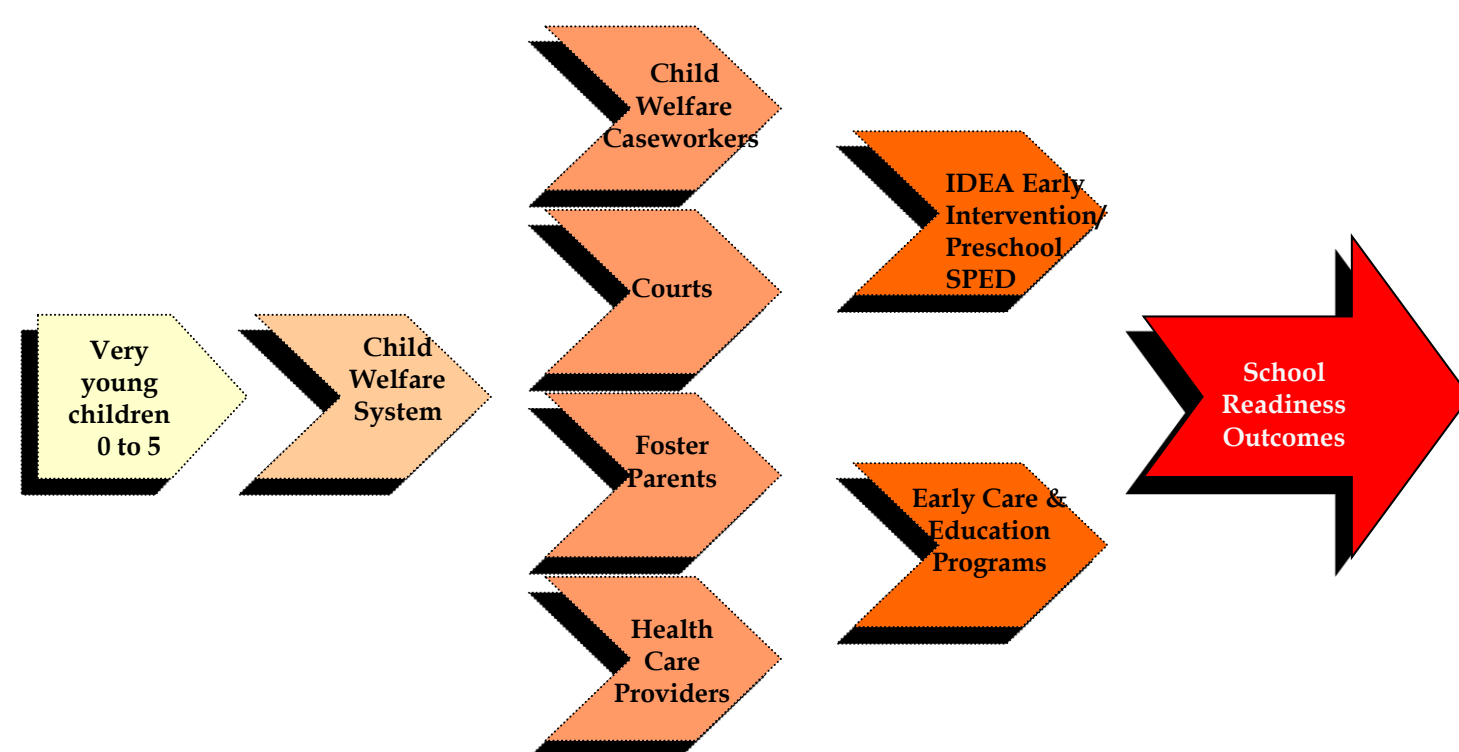
Selected Findings Related to Early Care and Education

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Cross - Systems Collaboration



Exploratory Case Study in Colorado

Overall Research Question:

What are the facilitators and constraints to effective collaboration between the child welfare, IDEA Early Intervention/Preschool Special Education (EI) and Early Care and Education (ECE) systems in addressing the developmental needs of very young children (ages 0 to 5) in the child welfare system?

Methods:

• **Field Study** – 134 interviews with key stakeholders in five selected counties

• **Statewide Foster Parent Survey** – 266 foster parents from 34 counties completed surveys (38% response rate)

• **Statewide Child Welfare Caseworker Survey** – 339 caseworkers from 52 counties completed surveys (32% response rate)

Study findings released April, 2009; data collected 2004 to 2007. Not all of Colorado's 64 counties agreed to provide us with lists of caseworkers and/or foster parents.

ECE: Missed Opportunity for a Partnership

➤ *"There needs to be more coordination. Sometimes early childhood feels like the least significant part of the team. Early childhood people have a lot to give – they know a lot about the child."*

-ECE Provider

Levels of Awareness/Training among Caseworkers and Foster Parents

While a large majority of child welfare caseworkers (81.2%) and foster parents (85.3%) reported receiving training on basic child development, they were much less likely (53.6% and 51.0% respectively) to receive training on the role ECE can play in enhancing child development, how to identify and access quality care and how to form partnerships with ECE providers.



Yet findings indicate that when that training is provided, it seems to make a difference.

• Caseworkers with this training reported higher levels of knowledge about ECE than those without this training (62% vs. 43% rated their knowledge as "good" or "excellent.") $\chi^2=8.81, p < .01$

• Caseworkers with this training were also more likely to enroll children in ECE. (74% vs. 63% reported having more than one-fifth of 3-5 year olds on their caseloads enrolled in ECE.) $\chi^2=3.51, p < .10$

Reasons for Enrolling in ECE Programs

Caseworkers often didn't see ECE programs as important for children involved in the child welfare system unless a parent requested it or the child already had a developmental problem and was placed there through IDEA.

➤ *"Not many of my caseload are in a [ECE] program. I don't know that they need it."*
-Caseworker

➤ *"Most kids in foster care are not in Head Start or another [ECE] program. They're usually at home. A lot of times, I don't know if it's even been brought up."* -Part C Service Coordinator

Training for ECE Providers

➤ ECE and EI providers reported a lack of training about the needs of children in the child welfare system.

"I don't know what to say to a child who says, 'I don't see my Mommy because she hits me.' We usually send him over to play with blocks."

Child Care Provider

➤ Head Start providers were more likely to report receiving this training than were other ECE providers.

➤ One administrator suggested that county child welfare offices open the training they provide for foster parents so that ECE providers can attend.

Assessment and Referral

- Confusion about who is primarily responsible for monitoring development
- Almost half (47.0%) of caseworkers and 51.5% of foster parents surveyed believed foster parents were primarily responsible. One-fifth (19.6%) of caseworkers and 30.4% of foster parents believed that caseworkers were. Almost one quarter (23.3%) of caseworkers and 14.0% of foster parents identified medical providers.

"You have Early Childhood Connections, [Colorado's Part C Program] Child Find, child welfare caseworkers, Medicaid, medical providers, hospital child development clinics, foster parents. It's so confusing – there's no clearly identified chain of command."

Caseworker

Barriers to ECE Enrollment

- Restrictive eligibility requirements for child care assistance
- A lack of awareness that many ECE programs give priority in enrollment to this population
- Difficulty obtaining required immunization records in order to enroll children in ECE.
- In some areas, a lack of quality ECE programs and/or a lack of programs willing to accept children with special needs

Collaboration and Information Sharing

- Child welfare seemed to have stronger collaborations with EI than with ECE.
- Information sharing was inconsistent, with multiple stakeholders expressing frustration at not receiving information about a child.
- In counties where formal Memoranda of Understanding were developed, referral processes seemed to go more smoothly and there was less confusion about roles.

Selected Policy Recommendations

- Expand capacity of quality ECE programs to serve this population
- Urge ECE programs to give priority in enrollment and raise awareness of these policies
- Expand eligibility for child care assistance for this population.
- Develop interagency agreements and provide cross-training opportunities

Selected Initiatives in Colorado Since Study

- State law expanding federal referral requirement to cover children ages 0 to 5
- Increased attention to developmental needs by the courts.
- Increased collaboration, interagency agreements
- DVD by Cutler staff on developmental needs as a training tool for multiple audiences
- Cross-systems curriculum developed by Cutler staff for multiple audiences

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To download the full report go to:

<http://www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/schoolreadiness/>

Colorado DVD available at:
http://tatis.muskie.usm.maine.edu/pubs/pubdetailWte.mp.asp?PUB_ID=V060048