



Minn-LInK Issue Brief **No. 1, Spring 2006**

Graduation Rates are Low for Teens in Child Protection System

Contributing Factors

Anyone who works with teens who come from troubled neighborhoods, families struggling with chemical dependency, poverty, or abuse is aware of the challenges of getting these youth through high school. The problems that these students face can involve chronic relocation, placement in foster homes, mental health issues, and entanglements with the justice system. This context adds even more stress to what is already a time of rapid/profound change for all teens.

Related Work

Research done in other states has focused on the educational outcomes of older teens who are, or have been, in long-term foster care. Adolescents enter foster care when they have been maltreated or neglected to such an extent that their family of origin can no longer live with them or care for them. The high school graduation rates of long-term foster care adolescents are usually between 45 and 50%.

Research Focus

While Minnesota's overall high school graduation rate is relatively high, researchers and advocates wanted to know **whether the high school graduation rates for teens who have had contact with the child protection system in Minnesota were different from those found in other state studies.** The Minn-LInK project chose to examine data on a broad group of teens involved with child protection over the period of January 2001 through June 2003, not just those who were in out-of-home placement. The out-of-home placement (foster care) rate for the group studied was 7%.

Major Findings

Teens with recent child protection involvement had much lower high school graduation rates than all 12th graders in 2003. **Of the 387 seniors in the study group, 47% successfully graduated from high school.** Minnesota's high school graduation rate is anywhere from 78% - 92%, depending upon the calculation method used.

Graduation rates were different depending upon

- Race
- Geography (a metro or non-metro county)
- Gifted and talented status

When comparing the characteristics of 2003 child welfare graduates and non-graduates to all Minnesota 12th grade graduates, child welfare 12th graders were more likely to

- have lower incomes (indicated by meal program eligibility)
- participate in special education
- be a child of color (non-Caucasian)

(refer to chart *Characteristics of 12th Grade Adolescents Group Graduates and Non-Graduates and All Minnesota 12th Grade Graduates* on next page)

Overall Progress

The full group of child welfare teens (N=501) spanned multiple grades and not all students would be expected to graduate by June 2003. When examining the status for students in all grade levels:

- 70% were making educational progress.
- 21% had experienced set-backs
- 9% had an unknown status

Limitations

One of the goals of this descriptive study was to learn about linking two different administrative data sets. The educational records of half of the original child welfare group could not be matched. There were patterns as to whether or not records could be located across both systems with education records least likely to be located for caucasian children and children in non-metro counties.

Next Steps

Potential next steps in this analysis include:

- examining the post-high school earnings of the child welfare group
- investigating the post-high school use of public assistance programs, and
- exploring post-high school births for female child welfare adolescents.

Minn-LInK is also considering completing this analysis annually as an outcome measure for Minnesota youth. To read the full report, visit the CASCW web site at <http://ssw.che.umn.edu/cascw.html> and follow the link to Publications or Minn-LInK.

The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) Minn-LInK is a resource for students, faculty, and policy-makers concerned about child welfare in Minnesota. Minn-LInK uses state administrative data from multiple agencies to answer questions about the impacts of policies, programs, and practice on the well being of children in Minnesota.

Minn-LInK provides a unique collaborative, university-based research environment with the express purpose of studying child and family well-being in Minnesota. For more information, contact Anita Larson at 612-626-3831 or email her at amlarson@umn.edu

Characteristics of 12th Grade Adolescent Group Graduates and Non-Graduates and All Minnesota 12th Grade Graduates, 2002-2003 School Year

