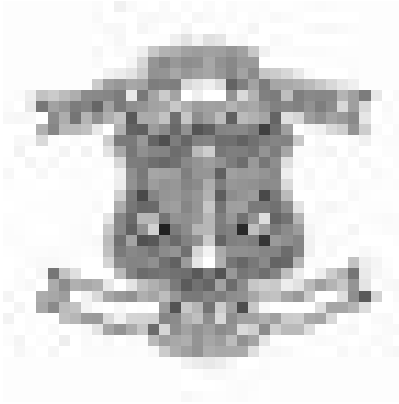




Joint Task Force on the Education
of Children and Youth in the Care
of the Department of Children,
Youth, and Families

March 2012

Senator Rhoda Perry and Representative Eileen Naughton
Co-Chairs of the Joint Task Force on the Education of Children and Youth in the Care of
the Department of Children, Youth, and Families

We are pleased to present these findings and recommendations on the issue of educational stability and success of children and youth involved with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. This report represents the best thinking of a distinguished and dedicated Task Force whose membership consisted of elected officials, the Department of Education, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, local school districts, advocates for foster youth, and youth involved in DCYF and their families. Over the course of several hearings, Task Force members heard informed testimony, examined the impact of relocation of a child in his or her educational success, reviewed best practices in addressing the issue of educational stability, and considered the most reasonable and effective means to stabilize the education of children involved with DCYF and ensure a successful educational experience.

Children and youth involved with DCYF are among the most educationally vulnerable children in the state and often face significant challenges, with many in need of special education services and many others at risk for not completing high school. National studies have shown that children and youth in the state system move placements one to two or more times per year and these moves usually involve a change in educational placement. Studies further indicate that these frequent school changes negatively affect students' educational growth and graduation rates. The Fostering Connections Act of 2008 recognizes the importance of educational stability for children and youth in foster care and requires state child welfare agencies to ensure the educational stability and success of children and youth who are placed in the system.

We offer these findings and recommendations with confidence that we can increase the educational stability and success of children in youth in the DCYF system. If implemented correctly, the Task Force's recommendations will help identify and create new strategies to address the challenges associated with children and youth in the state child protection system.

We are grateful to every member of the Task Force for their willingness to take part in these discussions and further express our gratitude to the numerous members of the public who took time to appear before the Commission to contribute to understanding the challenges and impacts that educational instability can have on children and youth.

Sincerely,

Senator Rhoda Perry
District 3- Providence

Representative Eileen Naughton
District 21- Warwick

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* This recommendation is preliminary and the task force plans to address it in greater detail at a later date.

Task Force on the Education of Children and Youth in the Care of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children and youth involved with DCYF, especially those in the Training School and other out of home placements, are among the most educationally vulnerable children in the state and often face significant challenges- with many in need of special education services and many others at risk for not completing high school. Numerous national studies have shown that children and youth in the child welfare system move placements one to two or more times per year and these moves usually involve a change in educational placement. Studies further indicate that frequent school changes negatively affect students' educational growth and graduation rates; and even when educational placement changes are in the best interest of the child or youth involved- enrollment in the new school disrupts their academic progress, important student records may not follow the child, effective programs and interventions to assist students to achieve grade level proficiency in reading and math may not be the same or may not continue, and appropriate credits for secondary level coursework may not be recognized.¹

Ensuring that children and youth in DCYF care enter school ready to learn, and that they receive the supports they need while in school, maximizes their chances of successfully graduating from high school and of entering adulthood ready to lead productive lives. Additionally, the federal Fostering Connections Act of 2008 recognizes the importance of educational stability for children and youth in foster care and requires state child welfare agencies to ensure the educational stability and success of children and youth who are placed in the state's foster care system.

Recognizing that the educational stability and success of children and youth involved with DCYF requires the collaboration and commitment of numerous other parties including the Department of Education, the Office of Higher Education, local school districts, advocates who work directly with youth, and youth involved with DCYF and their families, the General Assembly commissioned the Joint Task Force on the Education of Children and Youth in the Care of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. The Task Force was co-chaired by Senator Rhoda Perry (District 3, Providence and Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Human Services) and Representative Eileen Naughton (District 21, Warwick and Chair, House Finance Subcommittee on Human Services). It was charged with identifying those challenges to the educational stability and success of children and youth involved with DCYF from pre-K through college undergraduates, and identifying and recommending to the General Assembly strategies to address such challenges.

¹ See, for example, Russell W. Rumberger et al, "The educational consequences of mobility for California students and schools," Berkeley, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education, University of California at Berkeley, 1999; and Lily T. Alpert, "School Mobility and Issues of Educational Access for Children in Foster Care," Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut School of Family Studies, 2005.

The Task Force's major findings are:

1. School Stability is Paramount to Ensuring Educational Success of Children in DCYF Care
2. Current Systems, Rules, and Regulations Must Be Improved to Better Promote School Stability
3. A Welcoming and Understanding School Culture is Vital to Success in a New School Placement
4. The Rhode Island Family Court Plays a Critical Role in Ensuring the Educational Stability and Success of Children in State Care
5. Children in State Care with Special Education Needs can be Better Served with Additional Supports for Students and Caregivers, Including the Strengthening of the State's Educational Advocate/ Surrogate Parent Program
6. Positive and Enriching Early Learning Experiences for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers are Critical for Brain Development and as a Foundation for All Future Learning

In response to these findings, the Task Force recommends the following:

1. Prioritize Educational Stability in Child Placement Decision-making and Clarify the Right of Children to Remain in their Original School When it is in the Child's Best Interest
2. Improve Cross-Agency Alignment of DCYF, RIDE/LEA, and Other Agency Data Systems and the Capacity to Analyze this Data
3. Improve Student Transitions and Minimize Delays in Enrollment
4. Ease Transfer of Credits, Transcripts, and Performance Based Evidence for Secondary School Students to Ensure School Changes Do Not Inhibit Students' Ability to Graduate
5. Develop and Implement Solutions to the Appropriate Sharing of Student Information, Including Sensitive Information
6. Find Collaborative Transportation Solutions for DCYF-involved Students
7. *Preliminary recommendation to be further developed:* Consider Further Revising Statewide School Funding to Account for Education of Foster Care Youth
8. Increased Coordination between the Family Court, the Department of Education and Local School Districts, and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families is Critical to Informing the Court of the Child's Best Interest
9. Improve Supportive Services for DCYF-involved Students at Risk or in Need of Special Education Services and Their Parents and Strengthen the Educational Advocate/Surrogate Parent Program.
10. Ensure Access to Early Learning Programs for Children in DCYF Care as Well as Those Still at Home but Receiving Preventive Services from the State

The Task Force was originally created by 2010 Resolution No. 363. On June 28, 2011, Resolution No. 391 was passed by the General Assembly authorizing the Task Force to continue its study and make a report to the General Assembly on or before March 22, 2012. Thus, although this report marks the end of the Task Force's responsibilities as set forth in its enabling resolution, the members of the Task Force agree to continue to meet, whether informally or formally through an extension approved by the General Assembly, to monitor the state's progress in responding to the findings and recommendations contained herein.

FINDINGS

1. School Stability is Paramount to Ensuring Educational Success of Children in DCYF Care

One of the most significant barriers to educational success for children and youth in DCYF care is placement instability and the resulting high rates of school mobility. Testimony indicated that many youth in state care experience multiple placement changes within a short period of time (one Task Force member testified that his daughter endured 35 *placements* within a ten year period). Nationally, studies indicate that children in foster care move an average of one or two times each year², and that almost 65 percent of children entering foster care had to transfer to a new school in the middle of the school year³. For the 12 month period ending March 31, 2011, 14.4 percent of children served in foster care during that period who were in foster care for more than eight (8) days had three (3) or more placements.⁴

The impact and effect of placement changes and school mobility is significant. Studies have shown that it takes foster youth approximately three to six months to recover academically from each school transfer.⁵ With each school change, a child must adjust to different curricula, different expectations, new teachers, and new classmates. Frequent placement changes can also negatively affect the child's social experiences as they have fewer opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities and sports and to develop strong and healthy relationships with their peers and teachers. Lastly, there are countless logistical challenges associated with each school change including transportation and scheduling changes, differences in graduation requirements, and slow transfer of academic and medical records.

By contrast, school *stability* has been associated with improved educational progress and outcomes for children and youth in state care. One national study found that youth who had one fewer placement change each year, with greater school stability resulting, were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before they left foster care.⁶ Based on compelling national and local data, as well as personal testimony regarding the negative impact of multiple placements and school changes, the Task Force finds that ensuring school stability is in a child's best interest and is critical to ensuring the educational success of children and youth in state care. DCYF and RIDE are the state's best sources of data about educational, residential and placement stability. Tracking this data, and issuing an annual report of this data, is critical to successful management of mobility issues, because of the implications that placement instability has for educational stability and success.

² Advocates for Children of New York, *Educational Neglect: The Delivery of Educational Services to the Children in New York City's Foster Care System*. As reported in *National Conference of State Legislatures. Educating Children in Foster Care*

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rhode Island Child and Family Service Review Data Profile, August 25, 2011.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Peter J. Pecora. "Assessing the Educational Achievements in Adults who Formerly were Placed in Foster Care" *Child and Family Social Work* 2006. As reported in *National Conference of State Legislatures. Educating Children in Foster Care*

2. Current Systems, Rules, and Regulations Must Be Improved to Better Promote School Stability

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families' transition to a "systems of care" model (a collaborative statewide care model wherein DCYF and community partners take collective responsibility for a system of care and wraparound services for children, youth, and families) offers a distinct opportunity to further the goals of the Task Force. The Department's support of using its Family Care Community Partnerships in schools as a means to provide wraparound services and supports to students in the community and classroom is a unique tool that can be leveraged to promote school stability and success. However, while reforms and programs such as these demonstrate that state and local agencies recognize the importance of school stability to a child's educational development, some current systems and processes in place throughout school districts, the state foster care system, and the state education system do not adequately and consistently promote school stability for children in state care and, in some instances, may discourage it. Consideration of the child's *best interest*, which is the paramount concern when deciding a child's physical placement, has not always included, as a central consideration, the child's education and the proximity of their placement to their current school. Likewise, testimony from current and former foster youth indicates a lack of youth voice when determinations regarding their own residential and educational placements are made.

Questions related to funding and determinations of school residency have also served as a barrier to school stability. There are multiple statutory methods for determining school residency and a District's responsibility to pay for educational services when a child is involved with DCYF.⁷ Each of these methods creates incentives and disincentives for Districts to take ownership of a DCYF-involved student's education and for inter-district and interagency collaboration to ensure student success. The Task Force finds that present funding models do not sufficiently account for the priority of educational and placement stability of children in state care.

Previously, there had been persistent questions regarding whether the community housing the group home should cover the cost of the child's education or whether the child's previous district should be responsible. Under the current system, school districts in host communities receive from RIDE a per bed amount for every licensed group home *bed* located in their district, regardless of whether that bed is occupied and regardless of whether a youth occupying such a bed is educated by that district; with the expectation that these funds will be used to educate any child that may reside at the group home. While this is a clear and predictable funding mechanism, it is not yet clear whether it has improved and enhanced the quality of education for children in DCYF care. Such a funding method complicates matters when a child is placed in a residential program outside of their home community but a determination is made that it is in the child's best interest to maintain enrollment in the school of origin.

⁷ § 16-64-1 *Residency of children for school purposes*; § 16-64-1.1 *Payment and reimbursement for educational costs of children placed in foster care, group homes, or other residential facility by a Rhode Island state agency*; and § 16-64-5 *Children under care and control of state agency*, among others.

Other systemic challenges to school stability relate to transportation to and from the child's school if that school is in a district other than the district in which they are currently residing. Additional challenges concern transportation to extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, and school events. How to arrange for transportation to the original school when a child's new placement does not correspond to the district's bus routes, and who is responsible for funding these transportation needs are but two questions that must be answered to ensure school stability for the child.

The Task Force finds that, while all involved parties seek only the best for DCYF-involved children; current systems, methods of determining residency, and funding mechanisms have failed to sufficiently preserve and promote school stability and must be addressed.

Children who move to and from the Rhode Island Training School face particular challenges, including multiple transitions in a short period of time. In 2010, 73 percent of youth who had stays at the Training School were there for six months or less.⁸ With no system of dual enrollment to keep youth connected to their district of origin while in the training school, the transitions to and from the training school can put a group of students who are often already behind their peers in school even further behind. And while the Training School principal reports that many students show measureable improvement during their time there (many are attending school daily and receiving substantial attention in their instruction for the first time in months or years), the lack of coordination between RITS and the district of origin often means that any progress a student makes at the RITS may be lost when he or she leaves, according to Training School Principal William Cauley.

In addition to broader funding and residency issues, and the specific challenges facing children in the Training School, the communication between the child welfare system and school is a critical asset in supporting students. In particular, information must be better shared with teachers and administrators regarding any behavioral, health, or safety issues that may affect children in DCYF care. The Task Force recognizes the delicate balance between the legal right to privacy of a child, and the need of a teacher to know pertinent information about the student and his or her history. The Task Force heard reports of previous meetings of the Child Welfare Advisory Committee's Educational Subcommittee where there had been competing testimony regarding some students who felt their personal history was "nobody's business" and dedicated teachers who "wished they had known" about certain events in the child's history before exercising discipline in response to the child's behavior. The Task Force believes it critical to establish effective communication and support for child welfare and education professionals to coordinate care while respecting the child's choice and confidentiality laws. The better alignment and sharing of child welfare and educational data can also help to ease the process of transferring student records between schools and monitoring the educational progress of youth in DCYF care.

⁸ Rhode Island Kids Count, 62011 Rhode Island Kids Count Fact Book: Youth Indicators. Accessed online, 18 January 2012, www.rikidscount.org/matriarch/documents/FINAL_Youth%20Indicators%20Summary%20Sheet_2011%20Factbook.pdf

3. A Welcoming and Understanding School Culture is Vital to Success in a New School Placement

An engaging, friendly, and nonjudgmental school culture is vitally important to welcoming youth in DCYF care and helping them succeed in their school placements. Beyond the afore-mentioned administrative and systemic challenges, children and youth involved in DCYF care also face social and emotional challenges to their educational success. Anecdotal evidence suggests that current and former foster youth report feeling “labeled” in school as the “group home kids” or the “foster kid” and often feel prejudged by their peers, and even some adults, before they even enter the classroom. When trouble is reported in the school or surrounding community, DCYF-involved youth describe being among the first suspected, sometimes with no basis other than their DCYF status.⁹ The need for a welcoming school culture is particularly acute at the very time when students may experience the most bullying and other social challenges – adolescence. For adolescent youth in foster care, as research has shown that adolescence is a critical period of brain development and that when adolescents are involved in “positive relationships and opportunities to contribute, create and lead,” they make the most of the opportunity for brain development in this period and develop skills necessary to life as successful adults.¹⁰

Beyond these issues, the Task Force stresses the importance of ensuring that DCYF involved students have the same access to school activities and extracurricular activities as any other student. Students’ lives are shaped as much by their academic program as their engagement with peers and adults in positive activities such as music program, drama programs, clubs, school sports and a host of other school-related groups and activities. Too often, DCYF-involved students are unable to participate in these activities due to lack of funds to support their involvement, lack of available transportation, or even simply the need for adult encouragement because of self confidence and self-esteem challenges they may have. A welcoming school culture is one which works collaboratively with all students, including DCYF involved students, and parents and caregivers to encourage every student to participate in the activities they choose.

4. The Rhode Island Family Court Plays a Critical Role in Ensuring the Educational Stability and Success of Children in State Care

The Rhode Island Family Court, with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, is primarily responsible for oversight of children in state care. The Court works to assure that children within its jurisdiction receive care, guidance, and control conducive to their welfare. Additionally, if the court removes a child from the control of his or her parents, it must seek to secure care equivalent to that which the child’s parents should have provided. A stable, quality education is a critical element of that care.

The Court’s jurisdiction in matters relating to children in state care uniquely positions the Court to influence the educational stability and improve educational outcomes of these children. The Chief Judge of the Family Court has indicated a strong interest in guiding reform efforts, and opening stronger lines of communication between the Courts, the Department of Education, and

⁹ Rhode Island Department of Children Youth and Families. “Report of the Child Welfare Advisory Committee’s Subcommittee for the Education of Youth In the Care of the Department of Children, Youth and Families, 2 September 2011, p. 6.

¹⁰ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, “The Adolescent Brain: New Research and Its Implications for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care,” p2ff. Published 2011. Accessed online 23 January 2012, <http://www.youthtoday.org/doc/The%20Adolescent%20Brain%20-%20Final%20Paper.pdf>.

DCYF to better share information, coordinate efforts, and effectively leverage inter-agency resources to promote and improve the education of children in their jurisdiction.

Although the Rhode Island Family Court recognizes the important role it plays in promoting a child's education, limited resources and competing priorities make it difficult to comprehensively address these issues in the courtroom. The Task Force finds that increasing the Court's access to information and resources of other agencies, such as RIDE and DCYF, would strengthen the Court's ability to respond to the educational needs of children in its jurisdiction.

5. Children in State Care with Special Education Needs can be Better Served with Additional Supports for Students and Caregivers, including the Strengthening of the State's Educational Advocate/ Surrogate Parent Program

Children in DCYF care with special education needs face particularly steep odds to educational success. For a variety of reasons, these students or their parents need additional support in navigating the educational system or in ensuring that there is an adult there who can effectively advocate for their needs. For some parents, a lack of understanding of how to advocate for their child may be addressed with assistance from non-profit parent support organizations. At other times, either because a parent refuses to participate or their parental rights have been terminated, a trained adult must step in and serve as an Educational Advocate for the child.

The Education Advocate / Surrogate Parent (EA/SP) program entitles youth in DCYF care with special education needs to the assistance of an independent Educational Advocate to advocate for them in the IEP process and ensure that they have the best and most appropriate possible educational opportunities. The Advocate / Surrogate Parent displaces the decision-making rights of a parent found to be unable or unwilling to advocate for the child themselves.

The program was established and is governed by a 1983 Consent Decree entered into in US District Court by the RI Department of Education and DCYF (then DCF) which was developed in response to a lawsuit filed by the Child Advocate and the Rhode Island Protection and Advocacy System, on behalf of youth in state care with special education needs. RIDE and DCYF established an Internal Review Committee pursuant to the Consent Decree that meets quarterly. The advocate participates in a student's IEP meeting, and is expected to follow up on the children in his or her jurisdiction to ensure they are receiving the best and most appropriate education. The Consent Decree cites training for DCYF case workers. The program also reaches out to parents, relative foster parents, and foster parents to train and assist them in being the most effective advocate possible for children in their custody. RIDE contracts with the Sherlock Center on Disabilities for the Educational Advocate program. Their director Jonathan Dyson explained in testimony that, in one quarter in 2011, referrals to the program fell below the Internal Review Committee's threshold of 15% of the total number of students aged 3 to 21 in DCYF; Mr. Dyson believes that the impending reappointment of an Education Coordinator within DCYF would increase the number of referrals and improve the relationship between the program and the department.

Although data provided to the Task Force indicates that the Education Advocate / Surrogate Parent program has been predominately successful in meeting or exceeding its Internal Review Committee obligations, in terms of sheer numbers of students served, under the terms of its establishing consent decree, some on the Task Force questioned whether a program based solely

on the Rhode Island model of using exclusively paid staff can continue to sufficiently serve this population and meet the requirements of IDEIA and NCLB, notwithstanding the hard work done every day by the program's talented and experienced staff. As it is, each employed staffer in the program is assigned more than 80 students every year, making it difficult for them to truly fulfill the role of replacing a parent in terms of the amount of time, effort and advocacy that is needed to ensure each of those 80 children's unique educational needs are met. In addition, the program is likely not serving every child in DCYF care with special education needs – the 15 percent are required by the consent decree is lower than the estimated 16 percent of all Rhode Island youth with special education needs, and there is reason to think the rate of youth with such needs in the DCYF population is substantially higher. Thus, newly vigorous efforts that are likely to occur with the hiring of a DCYF Education Coordinator to refer more young people to the program are likely to stretch the small staff even further.

In some other states with similar programs, well-trained and educated volunteers augment paid staff and help to ensure the robustness of the programs and increase the number of youth that may be served. Consequently, Mr. Dyson testified that only 14 percent of youth in Rhode Island's programs are served by volunteers, and in that case he is referring to foster parents or family members who are trained by the program, not individuals who specifically volunteer their expertise in education and related issues to serve other foster youth who are not in their care.

While the EA/SP program has done an excellent job of compiling the statistics required of it under the Internal Review Committee, the lack of data and coordination between RIDE and DCYF, as noted previously, has made it impossible to evaluate whether these youth are underperforming their peers in terms of graduation rates, test score proficiency, grade promotion and other educational outcomes. Ultimately, such data needs to be collected in order to truly evaluate the success of the program and to consider what other supports may need to be provided to youth with special education needs in state care.

6. Positive and Enriching Early Learning Experiences for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers are Critical for Brain Development and as a Foundation for All Future Learning

Much of the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their counterparts can be attributed to experiences that occur even before they enter the elementary education system. Nationally and locally, there is an increasing focus on young children in the child welfare system. Even as Rhode Island's overall number of children in out-of-home placement dropped by more than 30 percent between 2006 and 2010¹¹, the number of infants and young children in care has remained steady. There is ample scientific evidence that early learning experiences play a key role in development of the brain architecture, and that this in turn is the foundation for all future learning.

Regrettably, according to data provided to the Task Force by RI Kids Count, roughly 48% of children who are victims of abuse and neglect in Rhode Island are under the age of 6. Abuse and neglect as well as experiencing persistent stress in the first year and beyond can substantially harm the developing brain and language development, and lead to learning delays. The sooner

¹¹ "Early Learning and Young Children in DCYF Care". Presented to Task Force by Rhode Island Kids Count, December 7, 2011

that intervention can occur, the more possible it is to mitigate the impact of early abuse and neglect.¹²

While there are numerous early learning program opportunities for children in state care, including the Child Care Assistance Program, Head Start and Early Head Start, pre-K, early intervention and preschool special education, access and capacity of these programs is generally quite limited and together they do not constitute a unified system that covers all young children, or even all children in state care. In addition, not all child care programs that foster children access have a meaningful educational component. While some of the existing programs are operated by the Department of Human Services, no single department in state government has responsibility for the education of the state's young children.

¹² Ibid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prioritize Educational Stability in Child Placement Decision-making and Clarify the Right of Children to Remain in their Original School When it is in the Child's Best Interest

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act affords children who are awaiting foster care placement the right to remain in their original school. The 2008 federal Fostering Connections Act requires child welfare agencies to maintain, whenever possible, a child's educational placement once a decision is made to remove that child from their home or otherwise change the child's living situation. The Task Force has found that ensuring school stability is in a child's best interest and is critical to ensuring the educational success of children and youth in state care. Therefore, the Task Force recommends that decisions about the placement of a child in state care take into account the appropriateness of the child's current educational setting and the proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled. The Task Force further recommends that every effort be made to place the child in a setting that keeps the child's educational placement as stable as possible unless it is determined that it is in the child's best interest to change educational placements. The Task Force recognizes that the simplest way to ensuring a child's educational stability is to avoid home placement changes in the first place and thus supports the efforts by DCYF to support families and prevent initial state intervention.

To effectively prioritize school stability, formal partnerships must be established between DCYF, RIDE, and all school districts throughout Rhode Island so that placement decisions are fully informed and decision-makers have immediate access to all relevant information. Furthermore, to the extent possible, the child should have a voice in determining his or her educational placement and procedures should be established to quickly resolve any disputes that may arise as to whether remaining in a school is in the child's best interest.

The Task Force recommends that state agencies review and consider adoption of best practices in other states such as model programs wherein, at the time of removal, the state's child welfare agency can access a student's school emergency contact list in hopes of quickly identifying a friend or relative with whom the student has a relationship; who is willing to accept the child into their home with a moment's notice; and who, presumably, lives close enough to the child's school that the child's educational placement does not have to be interrupted. Using such best practices as a model, the Task Force recommends that DCYF and RIDE work together and establish a consistent statewide policy whereby safe and appropriate placements for a child can be identified which have minimal impact on their education and ensure school stability. The Task Force further recommends the consideration of legislation that would amend RIGL Chapter 16-64 to clarify the right of all school-aged students in the care of DCYF to attend their school of origin in the school they attended before receiving a placement out of that district so long as they remain in any DCYF placements that are not permanent.

2. Improve Cross-Agency Alignment of DCYF, RIDE/LEA, and Other Agency Data Systems and the Capacity to Analyze this Data and Share with Parents and Caregivers

The Department of Children Youth and Families and the Department of Education each have important responsibilities they must meet for the children within their authority and data systems that reflect those responsibilities. Over the past several years, RIDE has developed and expanded an extensive data set regarding student performance, student background, and other information. Almost simultaneously, DCYF has established a data-based evaluation framework that is focused on the safety, permanency, and wellbeing of youth in state care, which includes, but is not limited to, measurements of limited educational outcomes, and physical and behavioral health.

Ensuring that the data sets of RIDE and DCYF can be aligned to allow for appropriate levels of access by each agency to the other agency's data is critical to ensuring that every student succeeds and is prepared for adulthood. Streamlining and aligning the academic performance data at RIDE with the educational outcome measures at DCYF is critical to informing and guiding each agency's decision-making and ensuring that children in state care are being positioned for success and not being left behind. Allowing parents and caregivers an appropriate level of access to this data can help inform decision-making and empower the caregiver to effectively advocate for the child's education. While significant progress has been made through the establishment of the Data Hub at The Providence Plan, the level of alignment of these data sets is not at the point where it can be useful.

Preliminary work has focused on: identifying the data collected by each agency; determining which data from each agency should be included in the Data Hub; and preliminary technical and legal discussions as to how each agency can use the data provided by the other agency. Although fully implementing this project may require additional resources, the departments report that this process can be done in steps, and that most of the early steps can be completed using current department assets.

The Task Force recommends that the two state agencies work together to provide for a system whereby DCYF's RICHIST (Rhode Island Child Information System) and the Department of Education's SASID (State-Assigned Individual Student Identifier) can be linked together. The Task Force further requests that a formal status update and a joint interagency work plan be delivered by no later than March 15, 2012, and in three-month intervals thereafter until completion, to the full membership of the task force through either a written report or at public meetings of the task force membership. These updates should inform the Task Force how far along the development process has come, how far it has to go, and what additional resources may be needed to sufficiently link RIDE and DCYF's data sets together and to meet the analytical needs of both agencies. The Task Force further recommends that each agency include any additional resources that may be needed to finish this project in their respective FY 2014 budget requests. If the departments are unable to present an initial plan by March 15 or regular updates thereafter, the Task Force asks that they identify any obstacles that prevent them from meeting these requests and identify a potential alternate timeline.

Lastly, the Task Force further recommends that the departments work towards being able to collect, track, and report, as soon as possible, data that will enable the state to document advances in providing greater educational stability, and improved educational outcomes, to children in DCYF care. In addition to all other important data on educational progress and success, it is important to know about key indicators such as the number of school changes

children in foster care experience, as well as the length of enrollment delays that may occur when children move to new placements if they are also moved to a new school. The ability to report specifically on the educational progress and success of children with special education needs should also be part of any new systems. In the interim, before such data can be gathered and reported, the Task Force recommends that DCYF immediately conduct a review of the placements of children in their care by proximity to, and change of, educational setting, and report the results of such analysis through either a written report or to a public meeting of the Task Force membership by no later than June 15, 2012. If the department is unable to conduct and present on such a review by June 15, the Task Force asks that it identify any obstacles that prevent them from doing so and identify a potential alternate timeline.

In addition to collaborative efforts between RIDE and DCYF, the Task Force also recognizes the need for data sharing between DCYF and the Department of Human Services for those children within DCYF care, but who also receive services and supports such as child care or RiteCare through DHS. Decision-makers in both agencies could better respond to the needs of children if they had a “full picture” of the child’s health, wellbeing, and educational needs. Access to data and information across agency boundaries would help in this regard.

3. Improve Student Transitions and Minimize Delays in Enrollment

When it is decided that a change in school placement is in a child’s best interest, or that no other alternative is available, the ability to enroll the child in his or her new school immediately is sometimes dependent on the District or the school in which the child is being enrolled or in the ability of the “sending” District to provide the information necessary for enrollment to occur. Through no fault of his or her own, the child at times lacks the documents required for school enrollment such as transcripts, vaccination records, proof of residency, and other items. These children endure significant delays in enrollment- missing days, weeks, and sometimes even months of critical class time. The Task Force recognizes that the Department of Education has administrative policies in place designed to minimize delay and enroll new students as quickly as possible, and that the Department believes the issue is no longer as widespread as it may have been in the past. Furthermore, existing state law¹³ requires the immediate enrollment of DCYF-involved youths provided the department successfully provides an updated Intrastate ID card and updated immunization records. Despite these provisions, DCYF representatives have reported that some children still face enrollment delays due to school district requirements that remain contrary to state law, or through otherwise well-meaning staff who are ignorant of their obligations. Therefore, the Task Force recommends the state consider adding reasonable yet effective penalties for districts who fail to meet their responsibilities for immediate enrollment under state law and agency regulation. The Task Force further requests that DCYF begin to more formally track and collect data on cases of youth in its care who are unable to have immediate enrollment, and report that data to the task force by December 31, 2012. If the department is unable to conduct and present on such a review by December 31, the Task Force asks that it identify any obstacles that prevent them from doing so and identify a potential alternate timeline.

The Task Force recommends that DCYF and RIDE jointly establish procedures for all school districts to follow facilitating the transfer of student records and make the process as streamlined as possible. In those circumstances where a child has an anticipated date to move from the Rhode Island Training School to a new district, or where a transition may be set ahead of time,

¹³ § 42-72.4-1 Children under state care – Admission to public schools – Intra-state education identification card.

procedures should require school districts to begin the process of working with DCYF to enroll the child up to 30 days before they are expected to move to the new district. In addition, the receiving LEA should participate in the student's transition planning process and ensure that they immediately enroll the student in the most appropriate school setting on the first school day following the youth's release. This thirty (30) calendar day time frame must be flexible due to the practice of the Family Court releasing youth early based on the youth achieving defined rehabilitation goals sooner than anticipated. The departments should also work to establish procedures to enable an easier process for re-enrollment of children who have previously been enrolled in a school system within the preceding year.

Many youth entering the DCYF Limited Local Education Agency (including the Training School, North American Family Institute's ACE Program and The Ocean Tides School) have a history of not attending school or of limited school attendance, are identified as at risk for needing, or are already receiving, special education services, and are often several grade levels behind in multiple academic subjects. Given the significantly shorter lengths of stay within the DCYF LEA's schools, close collaboration with the responsible public school LEA for each student is critical to the state's ability to re-establish each youth's feeling of connectedness to school and his or her ability to improve their educational outcomes.

While some LEAs transitioning youth to and from the DCYF LEA take a proactive role with these students, significant gaps and barriers remain.

The Task Force recommends that any youth entering the DCYF LEA be dually enrolled in their identified LEA of origin and maintain that status until such time they meet the state's requirements for graduation, obtain a GED or other equivalent alternative to graduation, or are successfully transitioned from the DCYF LEA to their community LEA or another educational setting. RIDE staff has suggested this may be done through policy changes and may not require legislation, and the Task Force hopes the two departments can collaborate on developing and implementing such a policy change.

The Task Force further recommends that that RIDE and DCYF identify and implement mechanisms to track school attendance and educational outcomes of youth who have been placed in a DCYF LEA school and who have transitioned back to the community as part of their broader collaboration on data that is discussed in recommendation 2 above.

To address the need for a school culture that is welcoming to foster youth, the Task Force recommends that school districts make every reasonable effort to ensure a welcoming and supportive environment for all foster youth. Some policies or programs that districts may choose to consider include the identification of an adult within the school who can socialize with the child and monitor their academic and social progress (this could be part of the duties of a district's foster care liaison as recommended below), the establishment of peer groups who can welcome the child and support their initial transition, and the consideration of temporary leniency for new students for school rules or procedures they may not yet be familiar with.

Lastly, borrowing from a model that is included in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and which has been mirrored in a number of states, the Task Force recommends requiring that each school district in Rhode Island identify and appoint a foster care liaison who would be responsible for the timely enrollment of children entering a school district, and the expeditious transfer of student records for children leaving a school district as this

responsibility should not solely be imposed on the DCYF social worker. This individual would preferably be appointed from among current staff, and could be a designee of the district Superintendent. Testimony has indicated that some Rhode Island districts, and even individual schools, have tried similar programs with a measure of success ñ these programs can serve as models for rest of the state. One key responsibility for this liaison would be serving as a point of contact for DCYF and its case managers in any school transitions, but especially in cases where youth are denied immediate enrollment as required by R.I.G.L Chapter 42-72.4. Because RIDE suggested the goals of this recommendation may be able to be achieved through cooperative administrative action between it and DCYF, and may not require legislation, but the Task Force believes this issue must be addressed with a sense of urgency, the Task Force requests that the Departments report on the status of their efforts to address the need for Foster Care Liaisons along with their report on data collaboration planning on March 15, 2012 and in future reports thereafter if necessary.

4. Ease Transfer of Credits, Transcripts, and Performance Based Evidence for Secondary School Students to Ensure School Changes Do Not Inhibit Students' Ability to Graduate

As the state continues to roll out its ambitious high school graduation requirements, now in place for the graduating class of 2014, the Task Force is concerned that a lack of transferability and consistency in academic credits, district-to-district expectations, and graduation priorities may leave DCYF-involved students vulnerable. Students may focus on building their portfolio in their former district, only to find their new district places more emphasis on exhibitions (such as a senior project). A former foster youth testified regarding a student who was not allowed to attend her prom because her portfolio was incomplete- the student remarked that her previous school did not require a portfolio.

The Task Force encourages the Department of Education to continue work on and complete a number of ongoing efforts:

- Developing statewide policies which will enable the quick and easy transfer of school credits;
- Requiring all districts to have clear and publically available transfer policies which meet the needs of students with high mobility;
- Developing an Instructional Management System (IMS) which is envisioned as ñone-stop shoppingö for data analysis and curriculum resources statewide. The IMS would be designed to allow users to access multiple sources of student data through a single, user-friendly point-and-click data dashboard;
- Developing a digital portfolio, which would be continuously available online and would ñfollowö the student wherever they go;
- Expanding access to online coursework as a means for students between placements, or temporarily out of the classroom for some other reason, to maintain their educational progress and keep ñup to speedö with their peers;
- Reviewing other potential ways to leverage technology as a means to assist students with high mobility;

The Task Force views these as laudable and proactive steps, and also believes it is important to ensure that they are used to assist students as a part of the student's larger educational program and not to isolate them from the rest of the student population.

Recognizing the positive work that is underway in ensuring consistency and fairness in graduation requirements and expectations of students in DCYF care, the Task Force requests that the Department of Education present a formal status update to the task force on the development of the e-transcript/ digital portfolio; the establishment of clear and streamlined credit transfer policies statewide; and the assurance of consistency in graduation requirements for highly mobile youth and any other related efforts no later than June 15, 2012, with additional reports as needed thereafter. This update should inform the Task Force how far along progress on each of these items has come, how far this progress has to go, and what additional resources, if any, may be needed to bring the efforts to completion. These reports will serve to inform the Task Force as to whether any legislative action may be necessary. If the department is unable to make and report on any progress by June 15, the Task Force asks that it identify any obstacles that prevent them from doing so and identify a potential alternate timeline.

5. Develop and Implement Solutions to the Appropriate Sharing of Student Information, including Sensitive Information

An important part of ensuring a DCYF-involved youth's success in his or her new school placement is determining what behavioral, health, or safety information about a child is appropriate to share with teachers and administrators, and what information may infringe on the child's right to privacy or personal preference. Having prior knowledge of a child's history is important to addressing any behavioral issues that may occur and determining the best way to reach and educate the child; however, all children should have reasonable level of control over what personal information about them is shared. The Task Force recommends that RIDE and DCYF jointly establish a statewide policy for schools and caseworkers to follow concerning the sharing of a child's information upon their arrival at a new school. Such a policy should focus particularly on what information can and should be *immediately* shared with a teacher or administrator, and what items the child or his or her guardian must consent to releasing. In instances where a student's health or safety may be at immediate risk if information is *not* shared, the priority to inform teachers and administrators should take precedent, and such a clear hierarchy should be delineated. The Task Force recommends that the departments work closely with the legal community, including the Rhode Island chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, in establishing this policy to make sure the state's obligation to a child's privacy is met. The Task Force believes that rules and regulations promulgated in response to Rhode Island General Law § 42-72.10, the Foster Parent's Bill of Rights (which, among other items, requires "the timely sharing of available and appropriate information on a foster child with the foster parent, where the information could reasonably be expected to impact the care provided to the child and/or the health and safety of the child and/or a foster family member") could serve as a model for this policy.

6. Find Collaborative Transportation Solutions for DCYF-involved Students

Allowing students to stay in their school of origin after they have moved due to an out of home foster care placement, in many cases, is only possible for the student if they have a reasonable means of getting to the school from their new home. Requiring the student's school district to fully fund this transportation, without providing additional funding, would be an unfair burden

on those districts. However, one option that the state has for all students who are Title IV-E eligible is to have more than half of the cost of their transportation paid for by the federal government as part of foster care maintenance payments.

The Task Force recommends legislation establishing which entity has the ultimate financial responsibility for transportation of students who are in a placement outside of the district where they are attending school, and requiring DCYF and the district of origin to collaborate on a transportation plan. Regardless of which entity is financially responsible for the student's transportation, the Task Force believes that DCYF should take the lead role in developing and overseeing the child's transportation plan.

Emphasizing the important role that extracurricular activities play in the growth and development of a student, the Task Force believes that transportation to and from such activities must be included in any collaborative solution to the transit issues facing children in state care. For children in state care with special needs, the Task Force believes that the state's PASS (Personal Assistance Services and Supports) program, which can provide transportation services for children with special needs, can be utilized for transit to extracurricular activities.

7. Consider Further Revising the Statewide School Funding Formula to Account for Education of Foster Care Youth

By establishing a core instruction funding amount, and applying that figure to the average daily membership of a district, the statewide education funding formula established in 2010 indirectly accounts for the base costs of educating a foster child wherever their placement may be. No matter where they ultimately attend – the costs of educating a DCYF-involved child will be recognized since the child's attendance will be reflected in the district's average daily membership figure. The Task Force recognizes that the newly adopted statewide school funding formula and the student success factors included in it were the result of extensive legislative study and deliberation and further recognizes the significant accomplishment that was the 2010 passage of the funding formula.

However, even though the funding formula ensures that basic funding will "follow" a student no matter their placement; it is unclear whether the formula sufficiently accounts for the particular educational challenges, such as mental and emotional stress and social detachment, that children in state care may face. Such children may need additional supports and services that extend beyond those provided in core instruction.

An additional concern of the Task Force relates to the apparent contradiction between the way the state reimburses communities for the costs of educating children in group homes, and how that same child's residency, for the purposes of the funding formula, is determined. Group homes receive a fixed education funding amount for each group home "bed" that is housed in their community, regardless of whether the bed is occupied. The funding formula is based on the average daily census within a district. If a child in state care is placed in a group home in a new community; but remains in their original school placement (consistent with the goal of educational stability), the "residency" of that student for the purpose of determining funding becomes blurred – they are being educated in one district, but are residing in a group home which has already been provided funds for the child's education. Presently, Rhode Island

General Laws Chapter 16-64 relating to residency for school purposes, as well as the statewide funding formula, offers little guidance on how to resolve such instances.

While the Task Force believes some changes, either to RIGL Chapter 16-64, or the statewide education funding formula, or both, are necessary; the group has not yet come to a definitive and unanimous conclusion on how best to proceed on the issue. For this reason, the Task Force will continue to study the issue more in depth and issue a separate formal recommendation in the future.

8. Increased Coordination between the Family Court, the Department of Education and local school districts, and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families is Critical to Informing the Court of the Child's Best Interest

Recognizing the critical role that the Family Court plays in determining, promoting, and protecting the best interest of children in state care, the Task Force recommends that the Family Court, the Department of Education, and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, cooperate on the sharing of vital information related to the educational needs, status, and progress of any child in the court's jurisdiction in order to assist a judge in making an assessment of the youth's overall best interest. In particular, DCYF caseworkers, or Court-Appointed Special Advocates in concert with RIDE, local school districts, and DCYF, should make special effort to supply the court with the following information:

- Current school placement and duration of that placement
- Education history, including any available information on the student's particular areas of educational strength and weakness.
- Current grades and attendance, including GPA and credits earned
- Reports of the youth's behavior in school
- Whether the youth is meeting Grade Level/Span Expectations and Graduate Requirements
- Whether the youth qualifies for, or is participating, in special education services
- Current IEP and IEP progress reports, if applicable
- Extracurricular involvement, if applicable
- Personal success of the youth in school (i.e. attainment of elected class office, volunteerism), and;
- The youth's personal assessment of their school experience

In addition to such child-specific information, the Task Force recommends that DCYF and RIDE keep the Family Court fully aware of the best and most current social and scientific thinking and information regarding the education of children, and specifically children in state care. Such information can help better inform Court decisions regarding the best interest of the child and his or her final disposition.

9. Improve Supportive Services for DCYF-involved Students at Risk or in Need of Special Education Services and Their Parents and Strengthen the Educational Advocate/Surrogate Parent Program.

Improvements in the capacity and number of youth served by the Educational Advocate/Surrogate Parent program will require concerted action by DCYF, RIDE and the Sherlock Center, which holds the contract to run the program. The Task Force recommends that DCYF emphasize, as part of its training of caseworkers, the importance of referring youth to the program who may have special education needs, and that the Department make a focused effort to increase the number of youth referrals and services consistent with the consent decree, IDEIA and NCLB. The Task Force further recommends that, as a part of its next contract with the Sherlock Center or any other potential contractor, RIDE consider requiring that the contractor establish a robust program for recruiting, training and utilizing outside volunteers to expand the capacity of the program and limit the number of youth that each paid staffer must work with.

The Task Force recommends that RIDE and DCYF find a means of connecting the data on which students are in the program to educational outcome data, to allow for robust evaluation of students' educational outcomes, and that the departments establish a system to enable sharing of such data on a population basis with the EA/SP staff.

The program's initial goal is and if possible, such a program should be implemented by the Sherlock Center prior to the expiration of its current contract must be to ensure that paid staff and volunteers alike have enough time to personally attend IEP meetings and make additional visits to the school for monitoring the child's progress, as well as to attend parent-teacher conferences. The Task Force recommends that RIDE and the Sherlock Center consider the models for volunteer advocates utilized in Massachusetts and Connecticut. The ultimate goal should be to ensure that children in state care with special education needs are not substantially underperforming their peers in terms of educational outcomes.

It is important to recognize that the primary goal for the state should be to empower parents with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful on their own, and that the Educational Advocate program is intended only in cases where the rights of parents to make those decisions has been legally severed. As such, there are other families and students for whom this program is not appropriate but who could nevertheless benefit from other sources of support. School districts, DCYF and the Courts should strengthen their ties with existing parent support agencies to provide parents with help in understanding, navigating and negotiating the educational system. Furthermore, recognizing the efforts that the Educational Advocate program has made in voluntarily educating foster parents and other caregivers even those whose decision-making rights have *not* been severed- on how best to advocate for their child and navigate the education system, the Task Force recommends that such outreach continue and expand; aiding as many parents as possible to be the strong advocates for their child's education. The Task Force applauds the EA/SP program director for his stated interest in expanding the volunteer training of parents, foster parents, and relative foster parents.

10. Ensure Access to Early Learning Programs for Children in DCYF Care as Well as Those Still at Home but Receiving Preventive Services from the State

Numerous steps should be taken to ensure the utmost access and take-up of early learning programs by children in state care as well as those remaining at home who are receiving child welfare services from the state through the new system of care approach. Eligibility for Early Intervention referrals should expand to allow all children with an indicated case of child abuse or neglect to be categorically eligible for the EI program. DCYF should follow through with plans to improve its consent process to ensure that an initial parental consent form can also be used to enroll a child in EI services. Foster parents and parents of DCYF-involved children should receive education and information about the state's Bright Stars system for rating early learning facilities, so that those receiving child care assistance funds can ensure their children are attending the highest quality programs. Ideally, overall access to early learning programs for all children should be expanded, but as an interim step, children involved with the child welfare system should receive some enrollment priority for space-limited programs like Head Start and Early Head Start, with a certain number of slots being reserved for these children.

In addition, DCYF should prioritize ensuring that parents and foster parents of children who have experienced abuse and neglect are aware of and access programs like the Parents as Teachers home visiting program, which is designed to provide all parents of children from before birth to age three with the information and support they need to give their child the best possible start in life. DCYF should also work to streamline its training programs for foster parents of young children, so that all such foster parents receive a quality, standard training program that includes a focus on early learning. The Task Force does believe the state must set a goal of providing pre-Kindergarten education for all youth in foster care to ensure that they begin their K-12 education with the least initial disadvantage to their peers, and hopes that these various suggested efforts can be part of helping the state to reach this goal.

Beyond these immediate recommendations; to ensure ongoing supports for early youth, the Task Force recommends that DCYF develop formal partnerships with those programs and divisions within with the Department of Human Services that provide direct services to early youth in DCYF care. Collaborative relationships between DCYF, the Early Intervention program, and the Child Care Office within DHS would help each agency better meet the needs of the youngest and more vulnerable children in state care. Furthermore, the Task Force recommends that DCYF strengthen its collaboration with the Department of Health's new Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting initiative to ensure that high-risk pregnant and parenting young families can access evidence-based home visiting programs that are known to improve parenting skills, reduce child maltreatment, and support young children's early learning and development.

Appendix – Meeting Notes from the Six Meetings of the Task Force held between September 2011 and February 2012.

Joint Task Force on the Education of Children in the Care of the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

First Meeting Summary (not intended as official minutes) ñ September 7, 2011

Members present:

Senator Rhoda Perry, co-chair

Representative Eileen Naughton, co-chair

Representative Jack Savage

Mike Burke, Department of Children Youth and Families

Maya Colountuono, foster parent representative

Janice DeFrances, Director of the Department of Children, Youth and Families

Jo-Eva Gaines, urban school committee appointee

Dr. Fran Gallo, Central Falls School District Superintendent

Lisa Guillette, RI Foster Parents Association

Michael Laferriere, Parent Support Network representative

Stephen Scott Mueller suburban school committee appointee

Dr. Roberta Sue Perlmutter, RI College School of Social Work

J. David Sienko, RI Department of Education

Dee St. Franc, the Voice, advocacy group for youth in DCYF care

Members not present:

Senator Francis Maher

Kathy Crowley, Little Compton Superintendent

Dennis Langley, Director, Urban League

Phanida Philvay Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asians

Kimberly Velasquez of the Voice, advocacy group for youth in DCYF care

Doris Blanchard, Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA).

Senator Rhoda Perry opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. She opened the floor for nominations for co-chairs of the task force and Director DeFrances nominated Senator Perry and **Representative Eileen Naughton** to serve as co-chairs. The nomination was approved without objection.

Senator Perry and Representative Naughton offered opening remarks. Rep. Naughton noted that even when placement in a new school is in the best interest of a child, there can be disruption for the child which can be harmful. She said the task force's aim is to ensure that every child in state has access to the best educational opportunities.

Director Janice DeFrances remarked that she felt privileged to be a part of this important commission and was pleased to see so many influential parties around the table. The work of this Task Force is essential to the success of youth in state care. She also noted that success of phase two of the Systems of Care transition is dependent on ensuring educational success of youth.

Senator Perry noted that one of Director DeFrances's qualifications is the many years she has spent in the educational system

Mike Burke and Lisa Guillette were asked to present on the Report of the Educational Stability Subcommittee of the Child Welfare Advisory Council. Burk thanked the co-chairs for their longstanding leadership on these issues and holding those who do this work accountable. Mr. Burk remarked that due

to recent reforms, families that may have previously been involved in DCYF care are now remaining in their homes and in the community, receiving supports to prevent DCYF involvement. The Department admits that it has not done a good job collecting the educational data necessary to improve outcomes. Mr. Burk remarked that the Task Force's name, mentioning children and youth in DCYF care, not just foster children, was intentional; as this includes children in other placements including the training school. Mr. Burk cited a study from 1997 which indicated that 37% of foster youth dropped out of school, as compared to 16% of other students; additionally, 77% of foster youth who dropped out eventually returned to school, compared with 93% of the general population. Mr. Burk further remarked that children often come into state care with educational deficiencies already- including a high percentage of students with special education needs. He pointed out that many of the issues facing the state are systemic- such as issues in school culture and environment in welcoming and assisting students in DCYF care. A primary focus is on enrolling such students quickly- and while the state has improved on this issue; there is more to do. Burk said we need to do our best to maintain child's placement but if student moves to new group home but stays in original school, the funding formula does not account for this.

Other issues focus on funding, expansion of the interstate education ID card which ensures immediate enrollment while the school waits for educational records. Despite some progress, education records do not follow the child fast enough. He noted that with the current mission at RIDE, everyone wants every child to succeed. Implementation of SASID (common identifier) is helpful when youth move from district to district and school to school, but there is more work that can be done on how this is used.

Mr. Burk described some recent changes the state has undertaken including reforms concerning how communities are reimbursed for the education of children in group homes. Host communities now receive \$15,000 for each *bed* located in the community, whether the bed is occupied or not. This method of funding education is far improved from the previous arrangement wherein communities had to chase each other for funds. DCYF does its best to maintain the child's best educational interest. The Department recognizes that all parties involved in the care or decision-making around a child want that child to succeed.

Kids Count has been taking a lot of leadership on issue of early care in education. Also on the other far end, the state has the Chafee educational voucher program. Dee St. Franc, a member of this Task Force, is one of students who are helped by funding from this program. Other success stories include a young woman who was a former foster care youth graduate last spring from Roger Williams Law School (DCYF helped with her undergraduate costs).

The Department of Children Youth and Families is actually its own school district; encompassing Ocean Tides, the Ace Program, and those in the training school. The Department is in the process of linking all three student information systems into one.

In closing, Mr. Burk implored the Task Force to consider what it means for a child to have to change schools midyear and how it feels to be identified as a foster child immediately upon entering a new school. He stressed that information sharing among schools, both personal and educational, is important when a child first arrives. Finally, he noted that we can do all this work here, but we have 36 school districts and that's where the rubber meets the road - helping them how to understand what they need to do.

Lisa Guillette remarked that after passage of the federal Fostering Connections Act, it is important that the state convene a task force like this. To help start the Task Force's work, Ms. Guillette described the Subcommittee's 10 findings:

- School stability- when a child is removed from his or her home, the Department must make keeping the child in his or her current school placement paramount.
- Transportation - In a sense, the federal government has given the state an unfunded mandate to transport children to the most appropriate school setting regardless of their home placement.

- Youth voice ñ The child him/herself should have a say in decisions about his or her education
- School culture ñ Children have a right to privacy, yet teachers and administrators need to know certain educational/social/emotional information about the child.
- Transitions ñ Although sometimes moves are necessary, the Department continues to prioritize keeping transitions as limited as possible to avoid disrupting the child's education.
- Transfer and Portability ñ Student records and enrollment must be easily transferable and portable to follow the student. Ms. Guillette described how some students may temporarily leave their school and be admitted to the training school, only to lose their enrollment and have to re-enroll in their original school all over again.
- Support roles ñ there must be clearer delineation of who has the rights to make educational decisions for a child.
- Graduation requirements ñ children in transition from school to school need flexibility in meeting graduation requirements.
- Data systems ñ Data systems need to be better aligned and improved so the Department can know what the outcomes are and where problems lie. Overall funding for these systems must be improved.
- Interagency collaboration ñ Educators, social workers, and departments must communicate more quickly and effectively. One teacher at a Subcommittee meeting spoke about the need for information about a child's home life; they remarked how they would have responded differently to a disciplinary situation had they known the child's personal history.

Danphargie St. Franc remarked that she serves on a youth board which communicates directly with foster youth and listens to them about issues they are facing. The Youth Board includes individuals from age 14 to 21. Ms. St. Franc described a few of the challenges facing children in DCYF care, including the failure of previous schools to forward transcripts- she mentioned one student who could not attend prom because their "portfolio" was incomplete- her previous school did not even require a portfolio. Ms. St. Franc also discussed the difficulties students face concerning extracurricular activities such as cheerleading, band, or sports. Ms. St. Franc had to leave such activities when she transferred to her new school. She commented that it is hard to adapt to a new school, let alone leave behind all the friends and activities she enjoyed.

Dee's Personal story ñ She was in two homes while in high school and thus only went to two high schools. She had a lot of support in both communities and was able to participate in ASPIRE program. She was very open with telling guidance counselors and others that she was in care. Guidance counselors helped immensely. When she transferred from West Warwick to East Providence, the counselor from West Warwick called over to the new school to share what Dee's goals were.

Senator Rhoda Perry asked if Ms. St. Franc would have preferred to stay in her original school had she had a say as provided for in the Fostering Connections Act?

Dee said Yes. When she went to East Providence, she really didn't like it. She brought up to her guidance counselor idea of going for junior and senior year of High School in a program at a local college like CCRI or Johnson and Wales. She really didn't want to drop out. She tried to make the best of the situation she was in. A lot of youth feel defeated, they hate the school, and they drop out without knowing that they have any other opportunities.

Rep. Naughton stated that DCYF has custody of children of all ages and she wants to make sure we address very young children and infants. She noted that there is automatic eligibility for children under 3 in DCYF care for early intervention, and asked, how the Department is tracking children in these years and what is the transition after this to head start, more advanced day care providers, etc?

Mike Burk responded that he has been involved with early childhood intervention systems and that he will gather data to better inform the Task Force on this issue.

Rep. Naughton said there has been sporadic attendance from DCYF on the Interagency Coordinating Council on Early Intervention, and she believes it is really important for Dept to participate. The state should be able to have access to children's KidsNet records from the Department of Health.

Mr. Burk responded that the Department has access to KidsNet health information systems and are working with the EOHHS secretariat on a separate data hub sharing info throughout those agencies. All of Family Care Community Partnership (FCCP) lead agencies have Head Start agencies as part of their partnerships. The expectation is that families who need EI services will be getting them.

Dr. Sue Pearlmuter asked for more information about the different perspectives that children take as it pertains to sharing personal information. She further pointed out that Rhode Island College has submitted to a federal RFP to study the intersection between child welfare and education. They hope to have a response by October 1st.

Lisa Guillette responded that some children would prefer that teachers and administrators know their personal history so they can understand where the child's behavior stems from and what topics to avoid. Others want this information kept private and feel it's no one's business. It is a tough balance to maintain.

Michael Lafferiere remarked that he believes children in DCYF undergo too many transitions and the Department must work to reduce or prevent transition. His adopted daughter has had to endure 35 placements in 10 years. The state should minimize transitions to address the education issue.

Ms. Guillette responded that the Department had introduced several recent initiatives that respond to Mr. Lafferiere's concerns including the use of emergency placement foster homes rather than shelters- this arrangement moves children in foster homes that are near their homes and help to maintain their original school placements. Funds are provided to these foster homes to transport the child to their school of origin. Ms. Guillette commented that a child's first removal, the first disruption to their education, is critically important. She also described a study which found that the trauma a foster child experiences as comparable to that of a Gulf War veteran.

Mike Burk mentioned that the Department has been reviewing policies that are in place in Tennessee including a family team meeting which takes place at the time of the child's removal and involves family members in discussions of the child's best interest. In California, the state requires a foster care liaison to serve as a single point-person who serves as the go-to individual when a child first enters a school or district- this person is in charge of making sure that all relevant files and documents are retrieved and can help support and befriend the child in the new environment. In conducting these reviews of other states, the Department has worked with the NCSL, who has volunteered to help the work of this Task Force.

Rep. Naughton asked if the Department has reviewed how other states helped keep siblings together?

Mr. Burk responded that the Department has not yet reviewed how other states keep sibling groups together but that DCYF has prioritized this recently, particularly in the emergency foster homes.

Scott Mueller discussed the issue of resources for support services for children. Mr. Mueller understands that states are under increasing financial stress and that some states have thinned support services for older adolescents as a result; he hopes that Rhode Island is not one such state. He asked whether there is data that tracks and differentiates educational successes among foster youth (and, perhaps more importantly, defines what we mean by "success")?

Ms. Guillette responded that while there is more work to be done in getting better data and processing it better, we know with certainty that children that age out of foster care have fewer positive educational outcomes than those who do not. Consider the 37% dropout rate versus national data suggesting 50% of those who have aged out of foster care have dropped out. When kids age out, their educational outcomes

are significantly less than those who do not. Young people who have benefit of ASPIRE program do have improved outcomes as best as we can tell.

Mr. Burk responded that the quality of older youth support services has increased and this effectiveness is documented through surveys. However, the use of these surveys is still in its early stages.

Mr. Mueller explained that, while not dealing with the issues of privacy that had been previously mentioned, he has witnessed some success through working through the principal of the elementary school who met the child on their first day, took the child around the school, became the child's buddy and built a relationship with the child. This principal earned the child's trust and was able to carefully share information with the teacher about any behavioral issues the child may have.

Mr. Burk was pleased to hear of this success and related a story he was told by a teacher who was *not* shared such behavioral information. The student was required to attend an assembly with a topic that related to a traumatic event in their past. The child resisted going for this reason but was forced. Ultimately the student ran out of the auditorium.

David Sienko remarked that the challenge here is the state's ability to substantiate issues through the use of data. During the Department's and the Education Commissioner's work on this issue, they have learned that teachers, nurses, and school administrators want to be a part of the solution and help, but lack the information and tools they need to help with the child's transition. Often he hears teachers remark "had they only known about a child's background, they would have reacted differently."

Mike Burk remarked that DCYF has working to pull disparate interests together on this issue. The new principal at the Training School has brought some new progressive ideas including dual enrollments with the child's original school district. Doing so requires working across boundaries with the original district and the Training School, but these efforts can lead to far better outcomes for the child.

Mr. Sienko commented that the juvenile justice system does not always consider the child's best educational interest when making decisions about a child's disposition.

Rep. Naughton asked where there has been any involvement with the juvenile justice system on this issue?

Mike Burk responded that there has been no briefing with the courts of the Fostering Connections Act, but that, recently, there has been a marked difference in the way the courts interact with the department, along with a noted willingness to work together. This cooperation can lead to greater work on the Fostering Connections responsibilities.

Rep. Naughton remarked that she has heard from foster parents who were shared only minimal information about an incoming foster child- information on behavioral or emotional concerns and other background information is important.

Michael Lafferiere asked whether there appeared to be any correlation between the number of placements a child receives and their progress (or lack thereof) in the classroom?

Empirical evidence suggests an increase in the number of placements makes it more likely a student will fall behind.

Mike Laferriere remarked that DCYF seems to have one data system, and RIDE has another and that these two data sets should be matched against each other.

Mike Burk responded that, in practice, this merging of data sets can happen ñ the questions is what information needs to be pulled from this comparison; who gets this information; and what do they do with it?

Dr. Sue Pearlmutter commented that the state is only just beginning to understand this cross-system data. At the same time, confidentiality and privacy rules complicate matters and rise to a federal level of concern.

Rep. Naughton remarked that the state passed legislation to address some of these concerns and the department can now access some hospital data.

Mike Burk offered to find this information for the Representative.

Lisa Guillette remarked that funding for all these data collection and analysis services is lacking.

Director DeFrances stated that the state has much of the data members are talking about but we need to ask the right questions ñ such as, what do we mean by "success"?

Rep. Naughton mentioned her concerns about truancy. She discussed several models around addressing truancy including a Connecticut model where the state will find the appropriate school for the child and try to address the reason for the student's truancy. She does not believe Rhode Island's truancy courts work ñ other states such as Connecticut have taken a strong position to get the student into the right environment instead of simply punishing the student or the parent.

Mike Burk added that part of intent of truancy courts was to provide a level of preventive services. In practice that has not always happened.

Jo-Eva Gaines stated that a truancy summit was recently held in Newport. Community agencies have committed to adopting certain families and making sure they are working with them but the family court has been totally ineffective in Newport.

David Sienko, RIDE, directed the Task Force to Thrive.org, the Department of Education's health website that includes information on truancy, along with information on other social and emotional health needs. The website looks at best models and evidence-based practices.

Rep. Naughton announced that the General Assembly Data Service will provide the Task Force with a website.

Mike Burk announced that the Department's education subcommittee has not disbanded and is there to serve as a resource for the Task Force.

Dr. Sue Pearlmutter added that there are two very good national studies about older kids aging out of foster care which may be helpful to task force.

Rep Naughton asked about continuing education opportunities for foster parents.

Lisa Guillette responded that 30 hours of preservice are a requirement but there is no requirement for in-service (ongoing) education for licensing. Relatives do not necessarily consider themselves foster parents and often bristle at having to do training ñ this could be a concern in terms of adding continuing education requirements.

Senator Perry closed the meeting, noting that members would be informed about the next meeting date and that Wednesday, October 5 at 3pm was being considered.

Joint Task Force on the Education of Children in the Care of the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

Second Meeting Summary (not intended as official minutes) ñ October 5, 2011

Members in attendance:

Co-chair Senator Rhoda Perry, Democrat of Providence

Co-chair Representative Eileen Naughton, Democrat of Warwick

Senator Francis Maher, Republican of Exeter

Doris Blanchard, representative of Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA)

Mike Burk of the Department of Children Youth and Families

Channavy Chhay, of the Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asians

Janice DeFrances, Director of the Department of Children, Youth and Families

Jo-Eva Gaines, of Newport, urban school committee appointee

Fran Gallo, Central Falls School District Superintendent, urban superintendent appointee

Lisa Guillette, of the RI Foster Parents Association

Mary Johnson, representative of the Parent Support Network

Michael Laferriere, of Johnston, Parent Support Network representative

Dennis Langley, Urban League of Rhode Island

Stephen Scott Mueller, of South Kingstown, representing suburban/rural school committees

Dr. Roberta Sue Perlmutter of the RI College School of Social Work, representing the Commissioner of Higher Education;

J. David Sienko, representing the RI Department of Education

Dee St. Franc, representing the Voice, advocacy group for youth in DCYF care.

Guests in Attendance:

David Lauterbach of the Kent Center.

Members not present:

Rep. Jack Savage, Republican of East Providence

Maya Colountuono, of Warwick, foster parent representative

Kathy Crowley, Superintendent, suburban superintendent appointee

Kimberly Velasquez of the Voice

Co-Chair Rep. Naughton opened the meeting by welcoming the members of the task force and asking them to introduce themselves, and briefly summarized the previous meeting while also noting that representatives of the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) were present to testify to the Task Force. **Senator Perry** added that **Jonathan Dyson** of the Educational Advocates program, run through the Sherlock Center at Rhode Island College, was also in attendance to present to the group.

After introductions, **Colleen Caron**, Director of Data and Evaluation for DCYF, spoke to the task force. She noted that the Department has an evaluation framework that looks at three levels: the child and family level; the organizational level; and the system level, and is focused on the safety and well being of youth in care, which includes measurements of educational outcomes, physical and behavioral health.

Caron said the department is working on more effectively being able to track educational outcomes of youth in care. They do collect data within the department through their Management Information System. But given the amount of information that caseworkers have to collect and report, there is sometimes a lag time in this data being entered into their system. In addition, she noted the department only has this information so long as a youth is in the department's care. This makes it difficult to be able to do any measurement of long-term outcomes. With more longitudinal data on youth who have left DCYF care,

they would be able to more effectively evaluate what the relationship between spending a certain amount of time in care is to graduation rates, for example.

Michael Laferriere asked if the Department has data showing any relationship between placement stability and academic achievement. Caron said that the Department does have data on the number and form of placements that they give to the Providence Plan for the RI DataHub and that this data is merged with education data there. However, it is not linked to individuals in this process.

Rep. Naughton asked whether the department currently has educational data such as suspension rates specifically for children and youth in DCYF care. Caron said they do not. Rep. Naughton said that there are some promising models for data sharing amongst agencies in other states and specifically mentioned the report “Solving the Data Puzzle” issued by the Legal Center for Foster Care and Education in 2008. Rep. Naughton added that with the passage in September of the Child and Family Services Innovation and Improvement Act, extending federal Title IV-B funding through 2016, there are opportunities for states to come forward with demonstration projects along these lines and receive federal funds.

Lisa Guillette noted a particular model of interagency cooperation in Baltimore County, Maryland, where the schools facilitate access to a child’s emergency contact persons and their contact information in cases where a child is removed from their home in the middle of the night. This helps to allow a child to be placed temporarily with a relative or family friend and also helps to maintain school stability in some cases. With regard to educational data measurements, Guillette added that it is important not only to be able to look at suspension, expulsion and graduation rates but also to be able to see what level of access youth in DCYF care have to vital extracurricular opportunities.

Sue Pearlmutter asked about the potential to track individually the educational progress and outcomes of DCYF youth. Caron said that one possible route to being able to do this is to link the Department’s RICHIST ID, a unique ID that stays with each youth even if they leave DCYF care (in part to track reentry), with the SASID unique identifier given to each youth by RIDE. This would not require each department to eliminate their unique identifiers. Pearlmutter said that the Family Court has a unique identifier as well and that needs to be considered as it is a crucial source of data. **Mike Burk** stated that the DCYF does have limited access to some information from the court.

Colleen Caron said that next steps for the DCYF include discussions with RIDE on how data can be linked and shared between the two agencies. **Rep. Naughton** suggested that a memorandum of understanding could be developed between the two agencies that meets the requirements of confidentiality while still enabling significant data sharing. She suggested that an interagency team from RIDE, DCYF, and the Family Court should develop a proposal.

Michael Laferriere stated that as an initial step it seemed to him it should be relatively easy to be able to get de-identified data shared across the agencies. **Colleen Caron** stated that aggregated data would be helpful but does not allow DCYF to answer some of the critical questions it has, particularly related to outcomes over time.

Lisa Guillette asked how DCYF’s data will be collected in Phase II of the system of care, given that much of the data is currently collected by caseworkers but in Phase II much of the services provided to youth will be community based. Caron responded that some information will be entered into the system directly at DCYF, and that additional information will be entered by the network providers in Phase II, related to the specific services that they provide. Potentially this will include some education information as well as information about their care plans. Providers will be able to enter this information directly into DCYF’s RICHIST system. Guillette replied that she is concerned about the narrow margins within the RFP to support this work, and that it is important to keep an eye on how data needs are resourced within Phase II.

David Lauterbach asked how the DCYF keeps tabs on kids who have aged out of DCYF but are still in High School. **Mike Burk** noted that the Department has the ability to retain youth who have significant disabilities (the population that is likely to remain in the schools until age 21) within DCYF care. In addition, he said the Department does have some flexibility in other cases as well. In addition, most youth who do age out are currently accessing aftercare services through the YESS program and that is another way for the DCYF to keep tabs on their progress. Most youth who decide not to access these services when they initially turn 18 do decide after a short period of time that it would be helpful to access them.

Scott Mueller asked whether the data DCYF collects on educational outcomes is different from what RIDE collects, and Colleen Caron said it is different. Mueller asked if there is some way to align these, and whether DCYF has met with RIDE to share with each other what data each is collecting. Caron said the two departments have met to have initial discussions on how to pull data together from each side, and what additional data needs to be added to what each already collect. Mueller asked what the cost of connecting these data sets would be, and Caron said that this could be done in steps, and that some initial steps can be taken without exorbitant resources. **David Sienko** said there are opportunities through Race to the Top (RTTT) ñ RIDE is developing both an instructional management system and an early warning system that will be tied to students' SASID numbers. Sienko added that the data RIDE collects is based on the requirements of federal and state education statutes.

Scott Mueller said that he was interested in hearing from the departments at some point about how far the state can get in the project of combining databases over the next twelve months. **Rep. Naughton** agreed this is important, particularly given the impending institution of new graduation requirements in 2014 tied to high stakes testing, which means that many children in DCYF care are at exceptionally high risk for not receiving a diploma.

Rep. Naughton then called on the **David Sienko, Jan Mermin, and Sharon Lee** of RIDE for their presentation. Sienko noted that in addition to the relationship between DCYF and RIDE for working to improve the educational outcomes for all students in DCYF care, DCYF is also considered a Local Education Agency by RIDE because of the students whose education it directs at the Training School, NAFI/ACE and Ocean Tides, and that they treat the DCYF school system as they would any LEA. When RIDE approaches the issues that children in Foster Care face in schools, they consider them not in isolation but as part of a larger population of students at risk.

Jan Mermin presented on the RI Data Hub, which is able to help RIDE answer a lot of questions in detail about student performance, student backgrounds, and the challenges students face. However, he added that the Data Hub is not able to track the progress of individual students. He said that coding of data from DCYF will enable them to add more of what DCYF has collected to the Data Hub, and in response to a query from Rep. Naughton believed this process is likely to take six to twelve months. David Sienko added that once these data inputs are enabled in the Data Hub, they will be able to be updated with new data on an ongoing basis. In response to another question from Rep. Naughton, Mermin said that RIDE has had some very preliminary discussions with the family court as to including its data in the Data Hub, but that those conversations have not moved forward.

Sharon Lee, from RIDE's Office of Multiple Pathways, said RIDE is in the process of putting together the kinds of supports for students who might struggle with the new graduation requirements to ensure that these students have the opportunity for success. Lee said RIDE is aware of and working on the issue of making sure there are policies that enable the transferability of credits, and that RIDE is requiring all districts to have clear and publicly available transfer policies. The intent of these policies is to help students with high mobility.

Lee added that RIDE has been pushing for the development of digital portfolio. They are also working to expand access to online coursework, which may be a way for students between placements and between schools to be able to continue their educational progress. RIDE recognizes that they need to be able to

give students, including those who transfer schools multiple times, the opportunity to be able to finish school in a reasonable amount of time, and not take many extra years to finish.

Rep. Naughton asked if the Department has worked on having each school have a designated mentor for foster care youth who transfer into the school. Lee said that there is no such requirement, but that every student beginning in grade six is supposed to have an advisor that meets with them and a group of other students through there year. The goal of this is to have attention from some adult on an ongoing basis. Lee added that some schools do have excellent models that go beyond this requirement, such as schools that are working with college students who come in and train older students to in turn serve as mentors to younger students.

Michael Laferriere said that if a child is placed for the first time in a new school and home, they may well adapt. But by the time they are going into their third or fourth placement, it is much harder for them, and children in those circumstances need an advocate along the lines of the Educational Advocate program, even if they do not have special education needs. He recounted how difficult it was personally for him to be able to communicate to teachers about the challenges facing his daughter, who he adopted after she had had many foster care placements.

David Sienko noted that while RIDE and other stakeholders have done a good job at focusing on student achievement, they need to do more in terms of focusing on the social and emotional needs of children that must be addressed in order to make sure they are ready to achieve. He is encouraged that special education professionals are increasingly viewed as a resource that can help children, rather than a burden or problem. He added that he doesn't think it is feasible to have an advocate for every child in the schools.

Janice DeFrances said it would be helpful if there is an opportunity to make graduation requirements as consistent as possible for children in DCYF care, regardless of the district they live in. David Sienko said he is hoping that is what will come out of RIDE's processes currently underway. He also said that one of their RTTT projects is looking at how they can use technology to deal with some of the challenges that result from student mobility.

Lisa Guillette raised the suggestion of mandating dual enrollment for students who have shorter placements within the DCYF education system, so they can maintain a connection to their home district. **Fran Gallo** said this is a district level issue, in that while it seems a no-brainer for the child's well-being for districts to let former students return without a whole complex re-enrollment process, some districts do make the process more difficult. **Mike Burk** added that dual enrollment would be helpful for certain issues that DCYF deals with related to youth in its school system.

Rep. Naughton asked about the potential state waivers being introduced by the Obama Administration under No Child Left Behind and suggested that DCYF needs to be involved in the waiver discussion. David Sienko said that RIDE is watching the waivers closely and that the Commissioner is going to be very thoughtful about what if any waivers the state will apply for. Gist does not want any waiver to be a backdoor means for the state to limit its own reform efforts.

Rep. Naughton expressed concern about the fact that the new high stakes testing regime will not allow students who are on the Alternate Assessment to receive a diploma, and that parents of children with learning disabilities are being asked to decide whether to put their child on a track that will not lead to a high school diploma as early as second grade.

Scott Mueller said he believes the dual enrollment concept is an attractive one, but he wanted to have clarified what the responsibility of the school district of origin would be to continue to participate in a child's IEP. **Jo-Eva Gaines** asked how the child would be counted for enrollment data and school funding purposes. **Mike Burk** said he envisioned a system where there would be a primary district (where the student is currently attending) and a secondary district.

Lisa Guillette suggested that the current education financing model on the books that gives districts additional funds only for group home beds may be antiquated in a time when DCYF is moving towards having a greater reliance on community based care. **David Sienko** expressed concern about changing the funding formula now that there is finally some widespread understanding about what the rules are regarding who pays.

David Lauterbach added that we need to be thinking about additional resources for children in foster care, and kicking kids up with additional support rather than kicking kids out.

Sienko distributed a handout to task force members regarding the McKinney-Vento Act and how it also relates to resources available for some youth in foster care. Mike Burk suggested that the task force consider a foster care coordinator in each district along similar lines, to help newly placed students get their records and get acclimated to their new school. David Sienko expressed concern about how this would be resourced.

Sue Pearlmutter noted that the Central Falls and Woonsocket districts had collaboratively applied for federal funding for a pilot project to hire a shared foster care youth coordinator for the two districts, but that proposal was not funded. David Sienko said a focus on targeting districts with the greatest need may make more sense than imposing a requirement on all 36 school districts.

Representative Naughton asked whether RIDE's SASID will allow a district to go to a student's previous school and get the student's records transferred quickly and easily. Sharon Lee said the department is working on development of an e-transcript to facilitate this process and make student records readily available. **Lisa Guillette** asked whether items such as immunization or health records could accompany this e-transcript. Ms. Lee responded that they could not because of privacy and confidentiality concerns. **Representative Naughton** asked whether the barriers to sharing this information could be addressed. Ms. Lee was unsure.

The meeting concluded at 5pm with an announcement that Jonathan Dyson of the Educational Advocates program had agreed to delay his testimony to the next meeting on November 2nd.

Joint Task Force on the Education of Children in the Care of the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

Third Meeting Summary (not intended as official minutes) ñ November 2, 2011

Members present:

Senator Rhoda Perry, co-chair

Mike Burke, Department of Children Youth and Families

Janice DeFrances, Director of the Department of Children, Youth and Families

Dr. Fran Gallo, Central Falls School District Superintendent

Lisa Guillette, RI Foster Parents Association

Stephen Scott Mueller suburban school committee appointee

Dr. Roberta Sue Pearlmutter, RI College School of Social Work

J. David Sienko, RI Department of Education

Dee St. Franc, the Voice, advocacy group for youth in DCYF care

Dennis Langley, Director, Urban League

Doris Blanchard, Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA).

Channavy Chhay Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asians

Mary L. Johnson, Parent

Members not present:

Representative Eileen Naughton, co-chair

Senator Francis Maher

Representative Jack Savage

Kathy Crowley, Little Compton Superintendent

Kimberly Velasquez of the Voice, advocacy group for youth in DCYF care

Michael Laferriere, Parent Support Network representative

Maya Colountuono, foster parent representative

Jo-Eva Gaines, urban school committee appointee

Senator Rhoda Perry opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending, particularly the presenters from the NCSL who had flown from Denver. She remarked that Co-chair Representative Eileen Naughton was unable to attend the hearing and sent her regrets. She reminded the membership that the fourth hearing of the Task Force had been tentatively scheduled for Wednesday December 7th and invited Jon Dyson, Program Director of the state Education Advocate/ Surrogate Parent program to address the Task Force.

Jon Dyson, Education Advocate/ Surrogate Parent Program (Sherlock Center @ Rhode Island College) thanked the Task Force for the opportunity to speak and share some policy recommendations and suggestions for improvement. He had previously shared the federal Consent Decree establishing the Education Advocate program. He explained the process by which the program recruits and trains advocates, and advocates for and assists students.

Mr. Dyson remarked that the program has recently fallen short of its required target of 10% of all DCYF caseload but that the program found that 75% of DCYF social workers made only between zero to two referrals per year. Additionally, DCYF has not had a fulltime education director; however the program is working with the Department's new director on remedying the situation.

Currently, the Education Advocate/Surrogate Parent (EA/SP) program includes 5 fulltime and 2 part time staff members. Mr. Dyson has 1.5 years experience with the program, but 40 years experience in education. He stressed the quality and experience of his program staff and the thorough hiring process for new candidates. Training includes education sessions, job shadowing, case reviews, and quarterly monitoring through internal review commission meetings. During the summer, when school is not in session, staff conducts case reviews on all cases as well as outcome reviews. Professional development is frequently offered, usually in conjunction with the Department of Education.

The Advocate program works with parents, relative parents, and foster parents and offers training to them as well. The advocate will review the child's case with the parent to make certain they are equipped to navigate the education system and advocate for the child themselves. The program receives surveys on program quality, process quality, and success. While the program does not heavily rely on volunteers, they serve a purpose, particularly to cover geographic areas where the program may not have a large presence, to make certain that parents have access to staff no matter where they are.

Mr. Dyson offered a number of recommendations to the Task Force. He asked that DCYF hire a fulltime Education Coordinator; That, when making decisions regarding an out-of-home placement, DCYF consider a child's education as the number two priority behind providing them with a safe and secure environment. He pointed out that for every transition ("move") that a child faces it takes about 3-6 months to get back up to speed in the classroom. He also stressed the need for increased collaborative planning regarding home changes when the change is not the result of an emergency. For starters, he would like to see increased advanced notice to schools when a child is to be transferred.

Mr. Dyson also strongly recommended that the state prevent placement changes, as much as possible, during a student's senior year or when the student is 18 years of age. The program has seen instances where children have been moved from a foster home to an independent living situation in the middle of

their senior year- all of a sudden the child now must face the adult responsibilities of caring for themselves while still meeting school obligations- often it is the schooling that gets placed on the back burner.

Mr. Dyson remarked that school climate is a significant issue ñ new school districts do not feel the transferring student is “their” student. Mr. Dyson supports maintaining one school for one year for a student as often as possible. Mr. Dyson related to the Task Force that 65% of students in his program transferred once in a school year, 35% transferred more than once, and, within that 35%, 13% of students were in three or more schools. Mr. Dyson recommended moving students only in the summer to avoid disrupting the school year. Mr. Dyson remarked that his program has a good relationship with RIDE but would like to have better access to individual student data. Lastly, Mr. Dyson recommended developing and expanding job experiences for youth. He mentioned the Maine First Jobs Academy, which he considered a model until he found it was no longer funded. He endorses an RFP for Rhode Island to try to develop a similar program to give youth job experience, which helps them gain employment later in life.

In response to question by **Senator Perry**, Mr. Dyson remarked that of the 516 students the program is serving, 73 (14%) are being served by volunteers, who work with the child’s parent, relative parent, and/or foster parent.

In response to a comment by **David Sienko, Rhode Island Department of Education**, remarked that the program would be able to meet its responsibilities more effectively with access to RIDE data such as the SASID. Gaining access to this information, however, is a tough legal issue due to confidentiality concerns. This information could help the program better manage its resources by identifying which students are performing to grade level expectation and which are not.

DCYF Director Janice DeFrances commented that, regarding Mr. Dyson’s recommendation that a student remain in “one school for one year” she wondered what the outcomes were for those 65% of children who remained in one school. Staying in one school does not guarantee success and, in many instances, the department loses access to those administrators who are important to ensuring a successful transition.

Senator Perry thanked Mr. Dyson for his testimony and welcomed **Jack Tweedie and Kelly Crane of the National Conference of State Legislatures** ([Presentation available upon request](#)).

Jack Tweedie, NCSL, began his presentation by stating that a foster youth he interviewed in the course of his work commented that for all the changes a foster youth faces, education was one of the few sources of stability in their life. The youth commented that their education was one of the few things “no one could take away” Mr. Tweedie remarked that the NCSL works with legislators and focuses on what legislators need to “pay attention” to ñ often this relates to desired outcomes and performance measures, not program details. Mr. Tweedie mentioned that there are many questions that are worth the legislature asking including; how many foster children are performing to grade level? How many graduate, and on time? How long is it taking to get foster children for arrival to enrollment?

Mr. Tweedie explained that the federal Fostering Connections Act mandates that states improve on measures regarding educational outcomes for children in state care. The act places importance on education stability and, when a change in placements is deemed necessary, to make transitions as smooth and rapid as possible.

Mr. Tweedie presented to the Task Force regarding the federal Child and Family Services Review, which is a series of outcomes measures reviewing how state child and family welfare agencies are performing. Rhode Island met compliance on some important measures (see presentation) but feel short on others including ensuring a child is safely maintained in their home when possible. The state also fell short on both measures of permanency. Lastly, Rhode Island missed on wellbeing measures relating to access to

services to meet a child's education needs; however it did not miss by much and was considered as adequately meeting the education needs of children in foster care. Further, the report says nothing regarding whether students in DCYF care are actually succeeding in school or whether their educational needs are being met in the *school* setting.

Mike Burk, DCYF, pointed out that, unlike several other states, Rhode Island has combined children in the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system- this likely impacted its rating under the CFSR. He further remarked that the current education funding system in place in Rhode Island, which he is not necessarily criticizing, has complicated the goal included in the Fostering Connections Act that the "money follow the child" because of the way the state ties funding to the residency definition,

Following up on Mr. Burk's point, **Lisa Guillette, Rhode Island Foster Parents Association**, pointed out that RIGL 16-64-8 states that when a child moves the child may complete the current school semester in their original city or town; this is one area for the Task Force to look at if the state wishes to be consistent with the Fostering Connections Act.

William Cauley, Principal of the Rhode Island Training School briefly addresses the Task Force and pointed out that youth in the Training School are, for administrative purposes, transferred from their old district to the "Training School district", and then must be transferred back to their old district- a complicated process which only serves to delay the child's enrollment and education.

Kelly Crane, NCSL, continued to present on the implications of the Fostering Connections Act and state's legislative responses to it. Nevada allows school choice for students in foster care. California created a grant for local districts to provide for the education of children in foster care; including counseling, tutoring, and mentorships. California also requires each school district appoint a foster care liaison. Data indicates that this assistance has led to success for foster youth in California including improved academic outcomes and decreases disciplinary actions. Ms. Crane explained that an important responsibility for the General Assembly is paying attention and shining light on positive and negative outcomes and figuring out what is working. Ms. Crane explained that Virginia requires, within 72 hours, the state child welfare agency must notify the principal of a new school that a foster child will be attending. The new school must receive and enroll the student while accepting minimal records.

Ms. Crane turned to the topic of costs associated with the Fostering Connections Act and how states have decided to pay for them. In 2010, Connecticut assigned responsibility for these costs to their child welfare agency, who is directed to work with the state's department of education. Other states with legislation relating to transportation costs include Minnesota and California.

Ms. Crane and Mr. Tweedie described the federal McKinney-Vento Act as an unfunded mandate on school districts, although there are federal funds available for Title IV-E eligible children.

Lisa Guillette again pointed to current Rhode Island General Laws which seem to run counter to the provision of the Fostering Connections Act and McKinney-Vento. RIGL 16-21.1-1 (through 16-21.1-3) dictates student transportation beyond city and town limits.

Ms. Crane and Mr. Tweedie discussed a Delaware law which "piggybacks" on McKinney Vento requirements for other students in state care.

David Sienko remarked that McKinney-Vento served an important purpose for homeless children and that its resources are limited.

Ms. Crane remarked that some state child welfare agencies have relied on GIS (Global Information Systems) to determine placements located near schools. GIS has also been used to direct recruitment efforts of foster homes by ensuring certain underserved schools, district, or areas are being covered.

Mike Burk pointed out that, in all these discussions regarding student transportation, it is important to note that the child welfare agencies assumed responsibility for *paying for*, not providing, the student's transportation.

Ms. Crane described the "education liaison" programs in place in Arkansas and California. Arkansas paid for this program out of TANF funds (Temporary Aide to Needy Families); a similar program in Kansas, although limited to older youth, was paid out of Chafee grants.

David Sienko commented that, rather than concentrate on "asset development" perhaps the state needs to look at what current assets it has at its disposal and which can simply be used better. Mr. Sienko believes it is critical that the state be aware of what we already have, and is or is not working, before we legislate.

Scott Mueller responded that, if the state is in "good shape" from a capacity and asset perspective, then why is it failing so many children? He nevertheless appreciated Mr. Sienko's point.

Ms. Crane concluded her presentation by describing the Foster Child Education Bill of Rights that has been developed in South Carolina and Missouri.

Chairwoman Perry thanked Mr. Tweedie and Ms. Crane for their presentation and welcomed **Jordan Cook** of The Voice to speak to the Task Force.

Jordan Cook, The Voice, described his personal history in the foster care system. Mr. Cook had been home schooled. When he attempted to enroll in public school his credits and grades were mishandled and resulted in a 2-year setback in his education. He decided instead to pursue his G.E.D and hopes to attend either CCRI or RIC to pursue a degree in security or social work. He described friends who have had to deal with lost records, missing grades, and other administrative errors.

David Sienko asked Mr. Cook what type of assistance he received from the Youth Center when pursuing his G.E.D.

Mr. Cook reported that the staff was helpful and offered personal instruction as well as testing.

Mike Burk also asked what sort of supports Mr. Cook received from DCYF and what the quality of that support was.

Mr. Cook responded that there was no opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities but the program was nonetheless helpful. Mr. Cook remarked further that he is participating in the YESS (Young adults Establishing Self Sufficiency) program and that it has been highly beneficial.

David Sienko stressed the importance of quick credit recovery for transferring students and making sure there are no attendance penalties for delays caused by the student's change in placement.

Mike Burk agreed and remarked that the child's own preference and voice is important in making decisions about their education.

Dr. Sue Pearlmutter, Rhode Island College, asked how Mr. Cook contacted the Youth Center for assistance.

Mr. Cook was informed of the Youth Center and its services through the Department.

Senator Perry thanked the Task Force membership and all those who testified. The Senator closed the meeting and reminded the members that the next hearing of the Task Force had been tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, December 7th.

Joint Task Force on the Education of Children in the Care of the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

Fourth Meeting Summary (not intended as official minutes) ñ December 7, 2011

Members Present:

Senator Rhoda Perry, co-chair

Representative Eileen Naughton, co-chair

Representative Jack Savage

Mike Burke, Department of Children Youth and Families

Maya Colountuono, foster parent representative

Dr. Fran Gallo, Central Falls School District Superintendent

Jo-Eva Gaines, urban school committee appointee

J. David Sienko, RI Department of Education

Lisa Guillette, RI Foster Parents Association

Stephen Scott Mueller suburban school committee appointee

Dr. Roberta Sue Pearlmutter, RI College School of Social Work

Vimala Phongsavanh, representing Channavy Chhay, SEDCSEA

Guests present:

David Lauterbach, The Kent Center

Members not present:

Senator Francis Maher

Doris Blanchard, Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA).

Kathy Crowley, Little Compton Superintendent

Janice DeFrances, Director of the Department of Children, Youth and Families

Mary L. Johnson, Parent

Michael Laferriere, Parent Support Network representative

Dennis Langley, Director, Urban League of Rhode Island

Dee St. Franc, the Voice, advocacy group for youth in DCYF care

Kimberly Velasquez of the Voice, advocacy group for youth in DCYF care

Rep. Naughton welcomed everyone to the fourth meeting. Noted that there would be discussion of a first draft of work on a report and these would allow for changes that could be incorporated into a new draft that would be available to the public for public comment. Then she noted that the earlier portion of the meeting would focus on issues related to education and brain development for young children in the DCYF system. She then introduced **Leanne Barrett** of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to make a presentation to the task force on this topic.

Leanne Barrett noted that she and John Neubauer from RIKC attended a regional meeting on child welfare and early childhood development in October that also included Rep. Naughton, representatives from DCYF and the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association.

Barrett noted that increasingly DCYF is a young childhood agency as more and more of the youth they serve are aged three and younger.

She noted there is increasing attention nationally on young children in the child welfare system and that infants and toddlers represent more than one quarter of all children who are abused and neglected. She noted also that infants who enter state care are less likely to be reunified with their family and tend to spend more time within the system.

In general, public education begins in kindergarten in Rhode Island when a child is five or six, meaning that young victims of abuse and neglect do not yet have access to a public education system. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of victims of abuse and neglect under age 4 rose by 60 percent. In general nationally and in Rhode Island, the number of youth in out of home placement has been going down, but the number of young children in care have stayed the same or increased slightly.

She then discussed how early experiences are crucial for developing the brain infrastructure for future learning. Language and literacy development comes out of the young child's need to develop and maintain relationships.

Barrett showed a video that illustrated how positive interaction between a baby and child is crucial and shows a baby reacting negatively to a caregiver who is not responding to her. Children who are without meaningful interaction from their parents suffer from inability to form attachment, which also has a negative impact on brain development.

Barrett went through the environmental risks facing young children who end up being involved with the child welfare system, and the research that shows the long-term adverse impact of negative early experiences. Half of all maltreated infants exhibit some form of developmental delay. Longer term outcomes can include school failure, juvenile delinquency, and continuation of the cycle of abuse and neglect into the next generation.

Barrett presented on research that shows the greater early exposure to language in higher income families than in lower income families, which helps lead to huge discrepancies in language skills that children have when they enter kindergarten.

She noted that Rhode Island doesn't have a publicly available widespread early learning system, it is pieced together from different pockets of various programs. These include Head Start, Early Head Start, Early Intervention, and Preschool Special Education as well as a small state-funded pre-K program. Children can at times be involved in more than one of these programs at the same time.

There are access and affordability issues with the early learning system. The average annual cost for infant care at a child care center, for instance, was more than \$11,000 per year in 2009. Most families cannot afford to access these sorts of programs unless they are high income or in a state or federally subsidized program. In addition, while programs like Head Start and Early Head Start are valuable and having a positive impact, there are many more children who are eligible for the programs than there is space available.

High quality programs are also difficult to find in the early learning system. In a random sample of various programs in the state, KIDS COUNT used a national tool to gauge quality of these programs and found less than ten percent of these were high quality programs, with the vast majority of programs being medium-quality and a small portion being low quality. Barrett presented data showing that people who work in early childcare programs receive far less pay than those who work in the public schools.

Barrett presented on the Early Intervention program and noted that children in DCYF care are much more likely to have developmental delays. She noted that the parental consent requirements for entering EI programs are a challenge in some cases for children who are no longer in their parents' care.

She noted that foster parents can receive support under the Child Care Assistance Program so long as they are working, even if they do not fit within the income eligibility requirements for other parents. She noted that the state is not tracking the quality of care received by children in the foster care system. There are also issues with continuity of the child care educational experience when a child is reunified with a parent who is not working, and thus not eligible for CCAP.

She also discussed the Rhode Island Child Welfare-Head Start Partnership, a 17 month grant from the Federal ACF with Children's Friend to plan and implement a child welfare and early education partnership to expand protective factors for children with child welfare involvement. A key first goal of this project, which is just getting underway, is to identify and address pragmatic barriers to foster child participation in Early Head Start and Head Start.

Barrett discussed recommendations from the national organization Zero to 3 on the developmental approach to child welfare ñ moving beyond safety and permanency. The five key elements of this approach are to have the state DCYF and courts make decisions guided by knowledge of child development and the importance for young children of stable, caring relationships; that states should work to ensure that all children have stable caring relationships; that children have access to early intervention services; to have the state engage in family and community partnerships to create a web of services for infants, toddlers and families; and to have state services engage in regular data collection on infants and toddlers and maintain a focus on these populations.

Ms. Barrett concluded her presentation with a series of recommendations, including adoption of a developmental approach to Child Welfare as recommended by Zero to Three that minimizes the number of placement experienced by infants and toddlers; and to seek to ensure all young children with an indicated case of child abuse or neglect or who are in foster care are participating in high-quality early learning programs, by strengthening Early Intervention and making all children with an indicated care of child abuse and neglect categorically eligible for Early Intervention; strengthening the partnerships between the child welfare system and Head Start and Early Head Start.

Rep. Naughton praised Leanne Barrett for her presentation and its focus on evidence-based research. She noted that there is no educational advocate for children age zero to three as there are for older children in the child welfare system who have special education needs. She noted that just a few years ago she was fighting for the very life of the Head Start program.

Ms. Barrett said one of the big challenges is the need for a set of preventive services that are available to families before their child has been removed from the home, and there simply aren't enough spots and funding available to ensure that children age zero to three get a good early education.

Rep. Naughton noted that data from RIDE shows only a small number of students who are in personal learning plans show substantial improvement, which is further evidence that more must be done to address the learning disparities before these children get to Kindergarten.

Ms. Barrett said we should really look at Early Intervention as a good opportunity, and that the state has been recognized nationally for having good access to its early intervention system. She also said home visiting is another great opportunity for prevention and that perhaps the state can look at other home visiting programs that are focused on helping children deal with trauma.

Rep. Naughton noted that while there would be a cost for expanding early intervention, there are significant costs later on for helping children to catch up educationally.

David Lauterbach commended Leanne Barrett for the presentation. In response to Ms. Barrett's discussion of the need for people involved in child welfare to be educated in the science of early development, Lauterbach said this is indeed essential but that we also have to educate parents and the entire community about this, and suggested we need to consider what our strategy is as a state to do this. Barrett agreed, and said home visiting in particular provides a great opportunity to do that. She noted that

many moms in the child welfare population have had tremendous trauma occur for them as well. While these programs focus more on low-income populations, there is also a need to extend this education and support to middle class parents as well.

Leanne Barrett noted that Zero to Three has child development education programs it has developed for judges in the child welfare system, and that reflects a need for broader public education on the topic.

Senator Perry thanked Ms Barrett for the presentation and asked whether we know of any states that have a categorical eligibility for early intervention for children who have had contact with the child welfare system?

Barrett said it is an option through the federal law that governs Early Intervention for states to identify populations who are at high risk. She believes Dr. Pam High has suggested another state has done this but that she would need to do further research.

Senator Perry asked if there are examples of a relationship therapy programs for parents of young children, and Barrett noted that there is a highly regarded program in Connecticut called Child First, which uses therapy to establish or reestablish healthy relationships between a parent and child.

Sue Pearlmutter commented that the state already has some structures already in place where trauma informed practice could be of help. One is the Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCPs), which is dealing with families that have yet to have had DCYF actual involvement, but are at some risk, and they are at a place where education and support can be helpful. Also, state has network of programs serving pregnant and parenting teens. (One of these programs is run through DCYF and one through DHS, and efforts to increase their communication could be helpful as well.)

Rep Naughton said it is important to make sure parents are aware of early intervention.

Barrett noted that through school districts, there is a child outreach program. The state has a goal of having every 3, 4, and 5-year old screened each year. She added that EI services are promoted through lots of avenues, but the primary way zero-3 year olds are screened is through their pediatricians. Even low-income high risk families are generally seeing pediatricians. She also noted that access to further programming beyond a screening is only for children who are found to have a delay or disability.

Rep. Naughton next asked for comments related to the draft version of the Task Force's Report, which had previously been distributed to all the members. She noted that the draft is a starting point, and that comments from the members would be integrated into a second draft that would then be posted online for public comment.

David Sienko noted that it might be helpful for the task force to hear from RIDE, DCYF and Family Court representatives who attended a recent national forum on November 3-4 on "Child Welfare, Education and the Courts: Collaboration to Strengthen Education for Children and Youth in Foster Care". David noted that he did get a briefing from RIDE staff who attended and also got a hold of materials from conference, and that there are numerous tools within those that relate directly to areas the task force has discussed and are in the report and may help guide the work.

Rep. Naughton noted that she had read the Solving the Data Puzzle report that was part of that toolkit and had shared it with RIDE and DCYF directors. She agreed that it would be worthwhile to hear the reaction of those who attended this presentation.

Sue Pearlmutter expressed concern that the family court did not show up in the first draft of the report. She noted that this needs to be a three-way conversation and that if the courts are not involved you can't set up a system that works for kids, because the court might have a very different plan from what the child welfare agency and the schools want to do.

Mike Burk noted that the family court is planning to put together a summit sometime in January on the education of children in DCYF care. Rep. Naughton said she believes strongly that the courts are a key partner in this and in their assurance of the protection and development of the child. She noted that Chief Judge Bedrosian of the court is very receptive to having scientific information on education and child development available to the judges for decision-making.

Rep. Naughton added that the Task Force needs to consider the question of how the best interest of the child is determined, and argued that part of this should include how it is expressed by child. She noted that Rhode Island typically begins expressly asking about the child's wishes at age 12, but the American Bar Association recommends asking the child beginning at age 7. Typically in Rhode Island, she noted that the child does not appear in the court setting unless it is for delinquency. She noted that the courtroom setting may not always feel welcoming and comfortable for a child.

Scott Mueller complimented the draft report. He commented on the recommendation related to sharing of information about youth in case with their schools — there are competing values of ensuring that professional educators get the information they need to know while recognizing and preserving children's rights to privacy. Mueller said he thought the recommendation made no effort to resolve that conflict but instead identified a process by which it might be resolved. He said it would be valuable to provide greater guidance on this to help insure that schools can provide a supportive environment to youth in care.

Mueller added that it is clear that DCYF has articulated RICHIST system and has continued to refine it, and that RIDE has developed over several years a much refined data collection system about student outcomes, but currently those two systems do not speak the same language. He said he doesn't think we now have an answer as to when they will speak the same language. If that is not a matter of months, if we're talking about a year or 18 months, that's a long time to have as little data as it has become clear we have about foster children's educational outcomes. He argued that being able to identify what is the timeline and, if it's not almost immediately, having a clear plan for how we collect data in the absence of communicating data management systems is necessary.

Mike Burk said he wants to caution use of term "integration" of the data management systems. He said the departments are not looking at the systems being one and the same but do want to enable them to talk to each other. He said that just this week he had received a copy of a newly signed memorandum of agreement between the child welfare and education agencies in Connecticut around data sharing, and that this may be a platform to make it easier for Rhode Island to take similar steps. Another technical piece is about how data goes into the Data Hub to make sure that when it is extracted again, it makes sense. He said he thinks we can move towards MOU relatively quickly, and will push for that to happen within the next six months. The technical issues may be more complex and timely to solve, Burk said, but there may also be interim steps we can take and he will go back to DCYF's Director of Data and Evaluation to get a better sense of what interim steps could be and what a realistic timeline is for the larger project of allowing the two data systems to work together.

Rep. Naughton urged Mike to indeed come up with interim steps, but she also said that given Scott Mueller's very valid concern about how long this will take, the task force may need to ask for a plan rapidly, even if it is not the conclusion. Until we get this finalized, she added, we need to see that there's a plan and that there is progress being made.

Rep. Naughton added that she and Sen. Perry would like to hear from the courts, and that the next draft of the report will indeed add a recommendation about the court system's role.

David Lauterbach said he was very impressed with the day's presentation from Kids Count but that he does not thus far see much on this crucial topic of younger children in the report, which is critical from the standpoint of preventing later challenges. He noted that he serves on the board of a head start agency that the children they are getting entering their program are more and more troubled. He noted that many parents are not getting the support they need and that his agency is implementing a program for the

courts called TAMAR ñ Trauma, Addiction, Mental Health and Recovery. It is a way to help people whose have been facing adverse experiences to understand that they are not pathological and are having a normal response to an abnormal situation. He said parents need the opportunity to understand that their children's challenges are not because they are bad parents but just need some additional education on parenting, and have an opportunity for these parents to learn some new skills. This could be an opportunity to help stem the flow of kids coming into the system at the early end. He added that parents are the biggest resource we have for children in our state.

Rep. Naughton thanked Lauterbach for these comments and agreed it is critical not to overlook early childhood. She noted that the Education Advocate program does not serve children under age three, as just one example of how young children's educational needs are more broadly neglected. She did say there are some promising models elsewhere for the state to look at, though, like the Child First program in Bridgeport.

Rep. Naughton thanked the members for all their input and said they should feel free to communicate further comments to the staff prior to the completion of a second draft that will go out for public input, hopefully for an early January meeting.

Joint Task Force on the Education of Children in the Care of the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

Fifth Meeting Summary (not intended as official minutes) ñ January 12, 2012

Members present:

Representative Eileen Naughton, co-chair

Mike Burke, Department of Children Youth and Families

Janice DeFrances, Director of the Department of Children, Youth and Families

Lisa Guillette, RI Foster Parents Association

Stephen Scott Mueller suburban school committee appointee

J. David Sienko, RI Department of Education

Dee St. Franc, the Voice, advocacy group for youth in DCYF care

Dennis Langley, Director, Urban League

Doris Blanchard, Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA).

Channavy Chhay Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asians

Mary L. Johnson, Parent

Maya Colountuono, foster parent representative

Jo-Eva Gaines, urban school committee appointee

Guests present:

Haiganush Bedrosian, Chief Judge of the Rhode Island Family Court

Regina Cost Gibb, Child Advocate

Kelly Monteiro, Assistant Child Advocate

Members not present:

Senator Rhoda Perry, co-chair

Senator Francis Maher

Representative Jack Savage

Dr. Roberta Sue Perlmutter, RI College School of Social Work

Dr. Fran Gallo, Central Falls School District Superintendent

Kathy Crowley, Little Compton Superintendent

Kimberly Velasquez of the Voice, advocacy group for youth in DCYF care

Michael Laferriere, Parent Support Network representative

Representative Eileen Naughton began the hearing and welcomed all Task Force members and guests in attendance. She noted that Senator Perry was unable to attend due to an illness and welcomed Chief Judge of the Family Court Haiganush R. Bedrosian, who was sitting in as a guest of the Task Force. Rep. Naughton welcomed Sarah St. Jacques and Trisha Molloy of DCYF, and Andrew Johnson of the Family Court's Court Appointed Special Advocate Program, - who were part of the RI delegation to a recent conference in Washington DC on the Fostering Connections Act and its implications for states and policymakers.

Andrew Johnson, Director- Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program thanked Chairwoman Naughton for her welcome and for inviting the panel to testify. He remarked that he was prepared to review the Task Force's final report and offer up lessons from other states for inclusion, but was pleased to state that the report covered many of the items that are being discussed on the national level. He mentioned that the keynote speaker at the Conference, from the federal Department of Human Services, explained that policymakers need to address the social, mental, and emotional needs of children in state care, given the impact that removal and new placements can have on a child and their education.

Representative Naughton strongly agreed about the need to prioritize a child's mental and emotional health. She asked whether copies of the Conference presentations were available, Mr. Johnson replied that attendees were given a thumb drive of all presentations. Representative Naughton believes that local education authorities can apply for funding for supports necessary to help children come to school able to learn.

Trisha Molloy, DCYF, introduced herself as social caseworker in Providence and have been working for the Department of Children, Youth, and Families for 6 years. Ms. Molloy stressed the importance of hearing from front line staff on these issues and ideas. The conference stressed the priority of collaboration across state departments. Working together between different agencies is both a strength and a deficit. In some ways, Rhode Island's size has worked against it - a small state relies on relationships which has sometimes hindered the state from moving forward. Staff recognized how simple things can make a huge difference in the lives of a child. Guests heard from a panel of children who had aged out of the system and were doing very well. One mentioned how he was never able to participate in a club, an activity, or sport because he had been switching between nine high schools in four years. All guests seemed to be on the same page about developing a unified approach to ensuring educational stability.

Sarah St. Jacques, DCYF policy staff, remarked that it was exciting to read the task force report because everything in there was addressed in the conference. The Conference invited people from every state. Ms. St. Jacques believes the state is on the right track with the plan outlined in the report consistent with what's being done nationally. The Rhode Island team spent a lot of time focusing on what we could do for the kids. There were some policy revisions that were identified right away - one being confidentiality concerns that everyone has. Staff prioritized working with the Department of Education to come up with joint policies regarding what can and can not be shared - work is starting on that now. Staff also discussed the value of keeping a child not only in the same school but in the same placement unit - Rhode Island does not have a good system set up for that. There has been a habit of placing children without that focus. At the conference, the Connecticut delegation was talking about a great system they had put into place using geo-mapping software. Bolstering foster parent recruitment efforts is also important for this issue. Challenges include the desire to place a child in kinship home- but what if the home is outside of the school district? The state has to weigh this issue in terms of what is in best interest of the child. The state also needs to work on integrating all of this into our system of care.

Representative Naughton commented that the Geo-mapping approach sounds like it could be very useful and asked whether there was a contact person in Connecticut. The panel agreed to get this information to the Representative.

Andrew Johnson remarked that Connecticut's efforts were part of an entire program that would identify foster homes within a specific school district. The system relies on the emergency contact list for a child as their first stop. If no placement is located in the immediate school district they go to next district, and so on and so forth.

Sarah St. Jacques remarked that the state needs to figure out clearly who will be the final decision-maker as to what is in a child's best interest, and if someone disagrees with that, what steps they can take to make that disagreement known.

Representative Naughton asked whether the Conference gave examples of the elements of a child's best interest.

Sarah St. Jacques replied that they did and that the state recently revised its education stability policy which lists some of those. Also, federal law has been revised again to ensure stability at the time of each change in placement, not only the original entry into state care.

Representative Naughton discussed the need to ask a child him or her self about their own best interest.

Andrew Johnson replied that this came up as a topic in the panel of former foster youth. One young man said his brother was in a foster home where education was not considered important. The Conference stated that children who had a say in the process had better outcomes.

Channavy Chhay asked whether there was a discussion about trying to be aware of the different cultural values that children may grow up with.

Trisha Molloy responded that the department utilizes community agencies, like SEDCSEA to help increase cultural sensitivities, but in terms of placements, the agency doesn't really have a say, particularly in emergency situations. In the new system of care, the state is prioritizing keeping kids in their immediate family. It really often falls on social workers to help kids maintain cultural connections. Sometimes families that children are placed with are not comfortable with cultural sensitivities and obligations that come with it.

Doris Blanchard remarked that she was concerned about hearing of foster parents thinking education is not important. She asked what kind of training foster parents went through.

Andrew Johnson replied that the children described were children from another state. In Rhode Island there is a background check and prospective foster parents must go through foster parent classes. He believes that the described story may have been different in Rhode Island if staff found out about parents saying education was not important.

Lisa Guillette, RI Foster Parents Association commented that, in Rhode Island, there is a 30 hour training program and that she hopes we can create in-service training for foster parents so they can be partners in the work.

Doris Blanchard commented that she thinks it is important to have nonprofit organizations be a part of the process about cultural issues and engaging people from various ethnic communities in becoming foster parents.

Trisha Molloy strongly agreed and stated that it is one of the identified goals in increasing recruitment. The department values being able to put children in a home that speaks the language that was spoken in the home they came from. Ms. Molloy stated that the state should be able to get a child from Central Falls into a home in Pawtucket that can get them to school.

Mike Burke, DCYF, commented that, before passage of the federal Fostering Connections Act, there was not a requirement on the state to promote education stability. There are some barriers in state law that need to be addressed, but the Fostering Connections Act require the state to protect a child's education.

Trisha Molloy remarked that it is a great time to look at this issue because the whole focus of the state's systems of care initiative is on wraparound services.

Dennis Langley, Urban League, remarked that at his organization, cultural sensitivity is a part of the training for foster parents. This even includes culturally specific grooming.

Dee St. Franc, the Voice, remarked that representatives from The Voice attend some Urban League training sessions and speak about why education is important. These representatives also give the youth perspective about support systems that are out there. Ms. St. Franc would like to see training expanded.

Janice DeFrances, remarked that the Department is looking at the consistency in training programs for foster parents and adoptive parents. The Department wants to have more ongoing training rather than just initial training.

J. David Sienko, commented that he is trying to sort out what requires recommendations from the Task Force require a legislative response, what requires a policy response, what requires interagency agreements, and what requires building capacity. He mentioned the issue of confidentiality and asked whether this issue requires a change in law, policy, or just better education.

Sarah St. Jacques replied that with regard to confidentiality she would say just a change in policy is required. The federal and state laws are there but there is a street level confusion on what the law means.

Andrew Johnson added that the policy and training changes are key. He mentioned an example of a parent at a meeting who wanted to find out if a foster child was HIV or HEP C positive; the social worker replied that she couldn't disclose that information. A clear policy is needed and a review of confidentiality laws is important because they are sometimes misinterpreted. Most importantly, all this information needs to get down to the front line staff.

Trisha Molloy remarked that, as a front line social worker, she has to weigh out what is the value of sharing certain information versus the downside of sharing it. The state does not have a direct policy about what should be shared with teachers, and also who is responsible to do the sharing. For instance, Ms. Molloy would prefer, on day one, when a child enters a school that people would know that the child is in DCYF care. To have a guidance counselor go up to a child and offer them a warm welcome and some personal attention would be helpful. Sometimes it is a few weeks later before social workers find out that no one in the school is aware of the child's status.

David Sienko commented that policymakers can write a whole bunch of things into law but they won't work if they don't make sense to the ground level workers.

Trisha Molloy remarked that her primary responsibilities are ensuring the safety, permanency and wellbeing of the child - even though staff believes education is important as well.

Maya Colantuono, foster parent representative, remarked that it is also important to engage foster parents in this discussion about operationalizing the Task Force's recommendations.

Director DeFrances commented that she suggests getting the two departments together to sit down and make some real decisions about what needs to be done. She stated that all parties have gone to enough meetings to know that there is a problem and now we need to start working on solutions.

David Sienko remarked that the task force recommendations provide a frame for the next conversation and that there are constituents attached to each of those focus areas who should be reached out to.

Dennis Langley commented that the Urban League has been working with some children who are displaying some really troubling behaviors. Some of these children need to be seen by a psychiatrist and receive medical care which they are not currently getting. The state needs to do comprehensive assessment of these youngsters and share that information with foster parents and teachers.

Representative Naughton asked whether the Conference discussed successful models of recruitment.

Sarah St. Jacques replied that there were many small breakout groups but that the RI delegation could not personally attend each one. The panel did have information from breakout groups that they would share with the Task Force.

Representative Naughton commented that the state needs to compare what it is doing to best practices in other states; particularly with a focus on ethnic communities.

Trisha Molloy remarked that, in some states, there has been a focus on targeting police, firefighters and teachers as potential foster parents- as these are populations who are likely to want to help.

Representative Naughton commented that the state is not going to accomplish everything it needs to accomplish with regard to improving education for youth in DCYF overnight but it would be good to have all this information available.

Channavy Chhay remarked that people coming from different ethnic groups may not fully understand foster care, adoption, and other items and need to be educated about how it works in this culture. There are people in these communities that want to provide this service for children but need better education.

Judge Haiganush Bedrosian remarked that once a child comes into the care of the state and DCYF files a petition; they must let the Court know where a child had attended school and what, if anything, the school had provided for a child. If judges can see that a child has gone to four different schools that is important information for them to have. The Family Court will reach out to both departments on this information.

Dennis Langley commented that, often times, the school district might not provide the foundational resources that a child needs.

Judge Bedrosian remarked that when a child is moved, they are not necessarily going to get the same treatment and educational or other assistance they received in the old setting in the new setting. If someone from CASA or a social worker speaks up regarding the need for educational stability, the Courts would listen - but judges need to get this information.

Andrew Johnson directed the Task Force to Page 16, Item 8 in the draft final report. He explained that the Court has discussed getting those bullet pointed items (specific information about a child's education) before the court for their consideration. The Court is discussing having DCYF place such information in the court letter. The Court is also working on getting information right from the Department's RICHIST system in front of judge. The Court plans to put information about a child's education placement into a new dashboard system that will be in front of the judge and populated by RICHIST information. Reviewing the Task Force's report prompted the Court to move on thinking about how to best get this information in front of a judge. Initially, this system will just track the number of placements, but as the court moves go forward and works with DCYF and RIDE, it hopes to add a more detailed phase.

Representative Naughton remarked that all these developments sound very promising and that it is inspiring to see the great work the court is doing to help address this issue.

Andrew Johnson drew the Task Force's attention to an upcoming Conference that the Court will be hosting on education issues.

Jo Eva Gaines asked how is it coordinated when a child leaves a school and arrives at another school – what information is the school able to receive and release, and how soon?

Trisha Molloy remarked that every child has an "interstate card" – a card which automatically gives the school permission to release all records immediately. Under the federal McKinney-Vento Act, schools cannot hold up enrollment for youth in foster care transferring into a district.

David Sienko added that, under state law also, districts cannot hold up enrollment. While progress has been made, the state needs to keep an eye on immunization issues and make sure such records are up to date and that DCYF has them and they are part of the interstate card.

Director DeFrances added that the law on immediate enrollment needs to be reiterated. The state still has instances where children are being told to go home and wait three or four days before they are accepted into a new school.

David Sienko remarked that this issue is one of the reasons why he asked whether changes are needed in law, education or policy. Somewhere in the pipeline, someone is making decisions that are contrary to the law. They may not do it intentionally, but ground level worker needed to be informed.

Mike Burke added that, in general, enrollment has been happening with little delay; but sometimes access to information from the previous school has been delayed. He pointed out that schools have seen their staff reduced.

David Sienko commented that the instructional management system the state is building through its Race to the Top grant will help teachers get important information immediately.

Representative Naughton added that there still is a need for ensuring that children with special education plans are quickly attended to.

David Sienko explained that the Department's IMS system will include intervention data and that classroom teachers will have access to information regarding where the child left off in terms of their interventions.

Representative Naughton stated that the state also needs to make sure teachers have information about the social and emotional needs of the child, and about discipline hearings, seclusion and restraint.

David Sienko pointed out that the information that RIDE gets about suspensions, detention, and other discipline issues often is received "after the fact" at the end of the school year, usually. The question is how to best get up-to-date current information to judges.

Mike Burke added that the Connecticut Department of Child welfare and the Connecticut Department of Education just finished a Memorandum of Understanding exploring this issue.

Judge Bedrosian remarked that she is very interested in making sure that the Family Court, DCYF and the schools put children first (a key focus for the court's upcoming conference). She views this discussion as a beginning for the court to get ideas of what is working for children now and what we need to change. She remarked that all in the room have the same goal of doing what is right for children.

Representative Naughton noted that Regina Costa Gibb, the state Child Advocate, and Kelly Monteiro, Assistant Child Advocate, were in attendance.

The meeting was next opened up to public comment.

Jonathan Dyson, Sherlock Center, remarked that he sought to clarify a few items in the draft report relating to the Education Advocate/ Surrogate Parent program. Regarding the comment that the program missed its mandated requirement, he remarked that the program is not the entity that is either in or out of compliance. It is DCYF and RIDE that are either in compliance or out of compliance within the consent decree. The program is dependent on referrals from DCYF. A better phrasing of the requirement itself would be "15 percent of total number of students ages 3 to 21 in DCYF care"

One thing that has been not available recently has been the Education Coordinator at DCYF. That individual was the face of DCYF in all education issues, and made direct connections with special education directors. The state needs to look at what it already has in place and whose capacity it can build in terms of educational advocacy.

Mr. Dyson is also concerned about the first seven lines on page 10 which he believes is implying that the Education Advocate staff members were not doing their job. He does not think this was intended but he was not the only one who felt that. Mr. Dyson supplied the Task Force with information and data on the amount of meetings and school visits that the staff people participate in.

Mr. Dyson commented that not only are staff able to do their job, but the program outcome data he distributed to task force members demonstrates they are able to do their job exceedingly well. Mr. Dyson is not aware of any other surrogate parent program in the country that has a logic model or collects program data as his program does.

Director DeFrances agreed with Mr. Dyson that the program's staff work hard and do a good job in most cases and remarked that the Department sometimes has cases where there is not follow up or follow through and sometimes these become bigger issues. There are some isolated cases and in those instances, staff needs to do a direct call and resolve it.

Mr. Dyson commented that the Sherlock Center and Education Advocate program are ready, willing and able to collaborate with RIDE, DCYF and the RIFPA to redouble its efforts to recruit foster parents and relative foster parents to train them to be educational advocates for their foster children. Mr. Dyson thinks this can help the state build capacity and sustain the program. The Center would also be more than willing to have discussions with the RIFPA about where it can provide support in the general foster parent training, related to kids with special education needs.

Director DeFrances pointed out the need to also provide ongoing supports to adoptive parents.

Representative Naughton replied that the Task Force was glad to hear Mr. Dyson's remarks. She believes the confusion around what the consent decree includes and who is responsible is critical. Nevertheless, while the Consent Decree was a progressive document for the time; since then, the state has witnessed countless changes including NCLB, IDEIA, and science-based educational progress. The 10% or 15% measure is not just a measure of success, but also a fallback threshold set by the internal review committee. Rep. Naughton believes that if one looks at the LEAs around Rhode Island, the state numbers are showing a very high rate of special needs children (Mr. Dyson remarked that 16% of children in RI have special education needs). Rep. Naughton pointed out that the Child advocate is very interested in making sure that the supports the state is providing to children are effective and Rep. Naughton feels communication with the child advocate is important.

Mr. Dyson replied that the Sherlock Center works with the Child Advocate on a number of cases.

Representative Naughton replied that regular communication is needed. Rep. Naughton was alarmed to see NCLB data showing that children with IEPs have an 81% risk of not graduating. This is one group of students who have actually fallen backwards in recent years.

John Neubauer, RI Kids Count testified that his organization is very encouraged by the draft report and have a few recommendations (written comments provided)

Representative Naughton remarked that the state needs to look at DCYF's access to various day care program.

Jo Eva Gaines asked whether DCYF-involved children get priority in accessing the Head Start program,

Representative Naughton replied that they do not currently. All of the children who receive Head Start do truly need it, but with the state's new grant money there may be a chance to increase placements for DCYF-involved children.

Leanne Barrett, RI Kids Count replied that the state's early learning grant cannot go to direct services.

Maya Colantuono remarked that in some kinship cases, parents are not eligible for child care because there is a guardian present at all times (perhaps the child is living with a stay-home grandparent). Perhaps this could be changed to at least allow for part-time child care even in cases where a guardian is not working.

Director DeFrances emphasized the need to provide access to early intervention services for all DCYF children

Mike Burk commented that the Department has collaborative efforts with the Department of Health on home visiting. He asked whether there were specific areas the state can strengthen.

Leanne Barrett remarked that DCYF has been great partner in the establishment of a nurse-family partnership home visiting program. The program still doesn't have enough funding, however. She wondered whether there was a way to get parents in this through FCCP as a preventive measure or to look for other federal funding.

Mary Johnson, foster parent, member of Task Force, wanted to address the Task Force as a parent of a child with special needs who is in the system. Ms. Johnson appreciated that there are court appointed advocates and other advocates to help special needs children. She explained that DCYF referred her to an advocate program and she got the feeling that people at many of these agencies and social workers are overloaded with cases. Therefore, the more the state can do to educate parents and caregivers who are willing to advocate for their children, the better.

Ms. Johnson pointed out that in the draft report, IEPs are mentioned and Early Intervention is mentioned. Her child has an IEP but in addition he has a personal literacy plan (PLP). Had she known about PLPs sooner, she would have asked for one sooner. Regrettably, her child did not receive a PLP until he was in 6th grade (he is in the 10th grade now).

Ms. Johnson cited a Federal Reserve article which stated that $\frac{3}{4}$ of children struggling with literacy in 3rd grade will continue to do so later in life. She further stated that 3rd graders reading below grade level are four times more likely not to finish school by age 19. Ms. Johnson commented that she did not know that every student with an IEP may not have a PLP. Also, some that don't have an IEP may still need a PLP.

Representative Naughton thanked all in attendance and stated that the next hearing was tentatively scheduled for February 1st. She remarked that the Governor's office, the Senate and herself will be discussing opportunities to bring foremost national speakers to Rhode Island to talk about child development research and best assisting parents and teachers.

Joint Task Force on the Education of Children in the Care of the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

Sixth Meeting Summary (not intended as official minutes) ñ February 1, 2012

Members present:

Representative Eileen Naughton, co-chair

Senator Rhoda Perry, co-chair

Representative Jack Savage

Mike Burk, Department of Children Youth and Families

Channavy Chhay Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asians

Dr. Fran Gallo, Central Falls School District Superintendent

Jo-Eva Gaines, urban school committee appointee

Lisa Guillette, RI Foster Parents Association

Mary L. Johnson, Parent

Dennis Langley, Director, Urban League

Stephen Scott Mueller suburban school committee appointee

Dr. Roberta Sue Perlmutter, RI College School of Social Work

J. David Sienko, RI Department of Education

Dee St. Franc, the Voice, advocacy group for youth in DCYF care

Doris Blanchard, Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA).

Members not present:

Senator Francis Maher

Maya Colountuono, foster parent representative

Kathy Crowley, Little Compton Superintendent

Janice DeFrances, Director of the Department of Children, Youth and Families

Michael Laferriere, Parent Support Network representative

Kimberly Velasquez of the Voice, advocacy group for youth in DCYF care

Representative Naughton welcomed the members of the Task Force to the meeting and said that the group would consider its report for approval later on in the meeting. Then she introduced **Darlene Allen** of Adoption Rhode Island to present on the First Star URI Ram Academy.

Ms. Allen said she appreciated the opportunity to present and thanked the Task Force for all the work it has done. She said she is very hopeful about improving outcomes for kids in foster care. She noted that 70 percent of foster youth report they want to attend college, but only 50 percent of foster youth complete high school and only 6 percent continue their education beyond high school. In addition, half of aged out foster youth report using food stamps and nearly one quarter experience homelessness, and nearly half report being out of a job at some point. She said her organization and others who have come together on the First Star Ram Academy are concerned about those statistics.

Ms. Allen noted that in her work at Adoption RI she has seen foster youth succeed, especially those who achieve permanence, but she has also seen many who remain in foster care until they age out follow a downward spiral. So many aged out youth come back to her organization and to social service agencies for various kinds of social support. All children need the support of a family, the benefit of a high quality education, and the opportunity to pursue higher education.

Ms. Allen then introduced **Karen Davis**, Vice President for Community Relations at Hasbro, Inc. Ms. Davis was introduced to the First Star Program in Los Angeles, where Hasbro also is engaged in philanthropy. In the Los Angeles program, rising 9th graders in foster care spend five weeks on college campus at UCLA, where they receive 3 college credits, mentoring, and some initial preparation for college. The foster youth return each summer throughout high school to take additional classes and continue learning the skills they need to succeed in college, and they also get together with other First Star participants once a month throughout the school year. By the time they graduate high school they will have 15 college credits, know what it takes to be successful, will have caring adults around them. By the time they completed the First Star program, the first cohort of 30 students in the UCLA program all believed they would be able to go to college and succeed, whereas many had not believed this when they started.

Ms. Davis reported that the founder of the program, movie producer Peter Samuelson, was interested in expanding it to Rhode Island when approached. Ms. Davis also noted that she had had a wonderful meeting at URI about placing such a program there and the University could not have been more supportive. Hasbro has committed \$175,000 to what is a \$300,000 program this year and have also received a pledge of \$25,000 in support from the celebrity chef Mario Batali, who will also do cooking classes with the student participants. Two other individual donors have committed to \$20,000 each so most of the needed funds for the program's first year have been raised.

Ms. Davis then introduced **Matt Cullina**, the CEO of Identity Theft 911 Inc. and a member of the First Star board, who noted that he is also a licensed foster parent, has been one for over 7 years and has adopted three kids through the system. His firm provides services for identity theft issues and got involved with foster youth around reports that they have been susceptible to identity fraud. He noted that he worked with Rhode Island Congressman Jim Langevin on federal legislation that passed in 2011 to address this.

Mr. Cullina said the UCLA program includes a filmmaking training where kids are given laptops and video cameras and learn how to make movies. He said he and others have been working hard to bring the program to Rhode Island and that there are also First Star programs in the planning stages at the University of Michigan and George Mason University in Virginia. First Star is providing guidance and overview on curriculum to local programs but Rhode Island's program will be RI-specific.

He then introduced **Dr. Thomas Dugan**, Vice President for Student Affairs at the University of Rhode Island. Dr. Dugan reported that the university is very excited about the program and that President David Dooley's commitment to the program is absolute. This is a program about hope. Dr. Dugan will be responsible for administering the program and the director URI hires will report to him. Dr. Dugan invited all of the Task Force members to Kingston this summer to see firsthand what is happening. Students will apply, be accepted for admission, have a meal plan, live in residence halls, and have a real college experience at URI with college ID cards and many other elements of the college experience.

Rep. Naughton asked how those who want to support the program can make a contribution and **Karen Davis** said that it's a program run by the university and funds for the program go directly to the university. Rep. Naughton also asked whether this has been shared with the Board of Governors, and Ms. Davis said they are still working on putting together a presentation for the Board but thought it was important to share information on the program with this task force as well. Rep. Naughton commended the guests on the program and said she would love to take Vice President Dugan up on his offer to come visit.

Karen Davis noted that like the UCLA program the first cohort will come back each summer and a new cohort will be added each year.

Mike Burk noted that Rhode Island has a robust consolidated youth services program that provides many of the services the First Star Academy will also be working to provide. He suggested that the URI program connect with the RI Foster Parent Association, who currently administer that program, as well as with the Foster Youth advocacy group The Voice and with the Rhode Island Department of Education.

The meeting then moved to a discussion of the latest draft of a Task Force report. Rep. Naughton explained that the co-chairs hope to have the report be available to policymakers as they consider potential legislation addressing issues raised in the report as soon as this session as well as the proposed FY2013 budgets for RIDE and DCYF.

Mike Burk asked whether the draft's proposal for DCYF and RIDE to come back to the full task force with a joint interagency work plan on having the two departments's data systems communicate with each other might be moved back from March 15 until June 15, when other reporting is requested. Rep. Naughton noted that all that is being requested is an initial work plan and urged the departments to at least come forward to present by that date what any obstacles are to moving forward on this issue. She noted that many on the task force believe that efforts to solve the data puzzle should keep moving forward. **David Sienko** said that the task force members need to temper their expectations by the reality that the staff is overstretched, and noted that they may not have much more progress to report than when they reported to the Task Force previously. **Scott Mueller** said that he understands the departments's concerns but that it's hard for him to see what the plan is to get us from where we are to two systems that are fully aligned. That's what he'd like to see ñ the Departments's giving task force members the steps so they can see what the lay of the land is going to be, which seems like a reasonable request.

Scott Mueller also stated that he is impressed by the work of the co-chairs and staff in teasing out something very substantive with the report. He thinks the report makes a strong argument that children in substitute care are educationally challenged by the fit of systems together. Even if all the recommendations are implemented, children in substitute care are going to continue to be educationally challenged. That's the point of Recommendation 7 related to possibly revising the school funding formula to account for the number of foster youth in a district. He said he wonders if there is a comfort in looking at authorizing or ensuring that children in pre-school years who are in substitute Care have access to pre-K programs. If we know that by the time they get into regular education that they are at risk of falling behind, pre-K can have a major impact in terms of life opportunities. He proposed that the Task Force formally consider a recommendation that the state make an investment in pre-K for all these kids. **Dean Sue Pearlmutter** noted that a speaker at Family Court's conference the previous week indicated that was one of primary strategies being used in some states. Rep. Naughton said she believed this suggestion was timely because state has received early learning Race to the Top federal grant, and Dean Pearlmutter also said it aligns with the grant that Children's Friend has received from the Administration for Children and Families for Early Education Partnerships to Expand Protective Factors for Children with Child Welfare Involvement. **Dennis Langley** said the proposal was a great idea, and that if you fail a child between ages 1 and 6 you fail them for life.

The proposal to amend the report as made by Scott Mueller was seconded by Mr. Langley and all members of the Task Force who were present voted in favor, and none opposed.

Dean Pearlmutter said she was concerned with the treatment of the funding formula issue in the report. She noted that some communities receive funding from group homes and other residential treatment centers and that this has created an incentive for kids to be kept in those districts which may run counter to the general focus within the report of encouraging kids in foster care to leave those facilities for their schooling and return to home district. She said she is not sure how to resolve this but doesn't believe the current version of the report does it sufficiently.

Rep Savage said he does not believe the current system provides an incentive for districts to keep more kids in these facilities because it still is more expensive to educate these kids than the \$15,000 per year

that they receive, and Scott Mueller agreed. **Mike Burk** stated that for towns like East Providence and South Kingstown where DCYF places youth with special education needs, there is definitely not a financial incentive. But he did note that unlike youth in these facilities, kids in foster homes treated like any other child and districts do not receive additional funds for their education. The education of Youth in residential treatment is funded by a combination of DCYF and the school district.

Rep Naughton suggested the report be amended ñ to note that the Task Force believes it needs to discuss the funding formula issue further and how it interacts with residency rather than making a formal recommendation at this time. This change was approved unanimously.

David Sienko said that RIDE was concerned about the recommendation proposing legislation requiring districts to have foster care liaisons. He believes this would be an unfunded mandate on LEAs and suggested this could instead be done by RIDE adopting policies for districts to follow. Rep Naughton responded that she recently spoke to a school social worker who believes that it is an excellent recommendation and that the work of a foster care liaison is consistent with the work that school social workers already do. Task Force staff **Peter Asen** suggested the report could be amended by simply eliminating the word "legislation" so that the task force would still recommend requiring a foster care liaison in each district but allow for non-legislative means of implementing this recommendation. This amendment was approved without opposition.

Mike Burk made a motion to approve the report pending the drafting of the approved changes, and Jo Eva Gaines seconded the motion. All members of the Task Force present voted in favor.