



# REACHING EVERY CHILD

Addressing Educational Attainment of  
Out-of-Home Care Children in West Virginia

**VALUING AND SUPPORTING THE QUALITY EDUCATION OF OUT-OF-HOME CARE CHILDREN IS ONE OF THE MOST VITAL CONTRIBUTIONS WE IN WEST VIRGINIA CAN MAKE TO THEIR LIVES, BECAUSE IT'S ABOUT INVESTING IN THE FUTURE AND RECOGNIZING THAT EDUCATION IS THEIR PASSPORT TO BETTER CHANGES IN LIFE.**

*--Frank D. Andrews, Task Force Chair*



**West Virginia Out-of-Home Care  
Education Task Force**

**Preliminary Report**  
(Final Version)

**REACHING EVERY CHILD**

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## A Message from the Task Force Chair

### *Hope and Appreciation*

While *collaboration* is an oft used word in the world of working relationships today, it none the less offers hope in solving significant problems that are multi-faceted, complex and span across different organizational jurisdictions. The challenges are markedly higher when the topics center on people, especially children. Often rooted in and manifested through the policies, processes and performances of individual organizations or programs, the ultimate success of truly improving current conditions rests in bridging embedded cultural habits that drive behaviors and actions. As shown in other research and our work here, there must be greater effective communication and attention to professional development to ensure everyone working with the out-of-home care education population is sensitive to the different needs and challenges.

The West Virginia Out-of-Home Care Education Task Force recognizes the greatest achievement of its work rests in the ability of the represented entities to sustain on going effective collaborative commitment to carry out the actions envisioned in this report. The first step to do this is to leverage a common trust that brings about continual improvement and ultimately significant change that turns hope into reality.

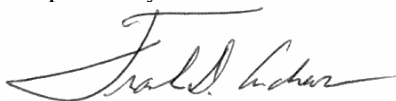
The WV Department of Education truly appreciates each individual who participated in some manner with the Task Force's work. The organizations and agencies that contributed both time and resources from data analysis to the time invested by staff in the Task Force meetings are to be commended. Hopefully, their working together to address the critical issues at hand regarding educational attainment of out-of-home care children of West Virginia this past year will not be in vain.

Make no mistake about it – the future of the children for whom we have responsibility for the care, treatment, and education depends upon our successful collaboration and commitment. Children, families, and society will pay a high cost for our failure. Failure is simply not an option!

In any discussion of out-of-home care, it would be remiss not to recognize the efforts of the West Virginia Legislature, the Executive Branch of Government, the Judiciary and the State Board of Education in their commitment and efforts during the past decade and a half to improve the treatment, care, and education of juveniles in institutional settings. From the construction of new facilities to the expansion and improvement of services, West Virginia has made significant progress in providing quality treatment and education for children in detention, correctional and residential foster care settings.

Finally, it cannot go unrecognized that many dedicated personnel devote their life's work to helping troubled youth. They reach out in heart and mind every day to better the lives of children. It is in this spirit that the Task Force approached its work!

Respectfully,



Frank D. Andrews, Task Force Chair  
Superintendent, Office of Institutional Education Programs

## LIST OF TASK FORCE MEMBERS

The following members participated in one or more of the Task Force meetings and outside work activities.

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## Companion Task Force Planning Work Outcomes and Reference Material Notebook

A master copy of a large amount of background information and detailed data collected used during the Task Force’s work has been gathered into a separate notebook. This material contains a number of studies done in other states or by specific organizations regarding out-of-home care education issues. The notebook serves as a ready-made resource for continued work at the operational level regarding benchmarks and best practices found elsewhere. The notebook can be accessed through Frank D. Andrews, Office of Institutional Education, WV Department of Education (304.558.8833).



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2004, a number of concerns were raised regarding the present situation of the public education of children in out-of-home care in West Virginia. The call for attention to this issue was based, in part, on a position paper, *The Education of Children in Out-of-Home Care* (2004), written by the Alliance for Children. Taking the lead to bring together those most entrusted to the welfare and education of the out-of-home care children, Dr. Pamela Cain, Assistant Superintendent, WVDE, asked Superintendent Frank D. Andrews to chair a special task force.

At any given time there are approximately 2,500 to 3,000 children in out-of-home care in West Virginia. Sometimes referred to as “foster children”, these children are in the overall custody of the Department of Health and Human Resources. Recent information showed these children are placed in different types of settings from family homes (about 60%) to group residence facilities (about 30%). Another 10% are placed in an institutional facility setting.

Beyond developing deeper understanding and stronger working relationships among those most vested with helping out-of-home care children, the Task Force’s work confirmed critical issues needing addressed, some of which were delineated in the position paper. Specifically, there exists definite need for policy development, procedural change, and training both within the child welfare system as well as education. This includes additional investment in making processes better and in instituting policy that ensures appropriate measures are in place to advance the welfare and education of out-of-home care children.

The Task Force found that a large number of West Virginia children in out-of-home care are seriously behind in educational achievement. This was based on a match of database records between the Department of Health and Human Resources and the Department of Education. This first time match process, developed through the Task Force, provided objective insights into a number of important data items from standard test results to occurrences of disciplinary action.

Academic achievement gaps were found in the data analysis of the four *WESTEST* subject areas (2004). In the area of Math, whereas an average of 68% of all children taking the test met the proficiency criteria, only 39% of children in out-of-home settings did so. In the area of Science, 82% of all children taking the test met proficiency criteria compared to an average of only 57% of children in out-of-home care. Similarly, in the area of Reading, the comparison was 77% for all children to 51% for out-of-home children and, in Social Studies, 69% compared to 38%. Important to consider, however, is that this data reflect a single day test result and does not reflect possible progress trends made by the students.

Beyond academic data, the Task Force looked at other potential areas that could provide insights. For example, 34.3% of the out-of-home care children were identified as having some disability compared to the state average of 17.2% of the students. Additional data analysis was completed regarding discipline occurrences, numbers of suspensions and percentages for students who were enrolled in the same school for the full academic year. Comparison results in these areas did show significant differences between the out-of-home care children and the total population studied.

A survey of private providers of out-of-home care found only 12 of 35 facilities had direct Department of Education programs under the Office of Institutional Education Programs. Programs provided by the Office of Institutional Education Programs are meeting basic

education standards. However, the survey findings point to a significant inconsistency in education practices among the facilities without these direct education programs. Key findings also pointed to difficulties in defining a continuum of care that integrates both the social welfare and education of the children in out-of-home care.

A number of other findings were delineated to include:

No consistent standards setting educational attainment expectations and requirements are in place that apply to all out-of-home care children, regardless of where the child may reside or be placed. There is presently not a way to assure quality education processes will be required to be in place for newly established or recertified residential facilities (e.g., no standards).

Despite the good intentions of each agency or entity engaged in some aspect of working with the out-of-home care children, there appears a perpetual air of distrust, lack of communication and understanding among all parties. Further, a seamless continuum incorporating all aspects of care and education for out-of-home children presently does not exist in West Virginia at an integrated systems level.

The dynamics of the out-of-home care children who ‘move often and move far’ call for the highest level of collaborative work by a multitude of professionals willing to share resources, change systems, create innovative solutions and be accountable.

The primary recommendation calls for closing the achievement gap for the out-of-home care children. This includes a number of focus areas needing addressed to close the gap. Also recommended were the following actions to be implemented as quickly as possible:

- Every out-of-home care child should have seamless, transparent and full access to public education anytime, anywhere in West Virginia.
- An interdisciplinary team of practitioners and educators should be charged with investigation and assessment of the educational experience of out-of-home care students to ascertain the nature of and remedies for disparities in performance and quality outcomes by this population.
- A WV Collaborative Council on Out-of-Home Care Education should be established as a high-level, mandated body charged to help carry out the Task Force’s long term recommendations and be empowered to continuously improve the system and resolve issues.

**“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say, ‘It’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.’ Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.”**

—*Fred Rogers*

*“Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood”*



Photo: Lynn Johnson

## SETTING THE STAGE

### *A Segment of Children Already Behind*

Substantial research and other specific studies clearly show that the vast majority, if not all, of the children in out-of-home care lag behind their peers in school. The research over the past three decades has demonstrated, in part, that this population:

- has poorer attendance rates;
- is less likely to perform at grade level;
- is more likely to have behavior and discipline problems;
- is more likely to be assigned special education classes; and
- is less likely to graduate, let alone attend college.

Thus, *the child in out-of-home care is already behind* his or her peers when it comes to educational attainment. The Task Force outlined some major obstacles and challenges that delay or impede the education of out-of-home care population. These challenges and obstacles are strong contributing factors that must be addressed to close the achievement gap.

**Prior experience impacts education.** Children are placed in out-of-home care as a result of negative, difficult, or traumatic childhood experiences (e.g., abuse or neglect, juvenile proceedings, emotional or behavioral disorders, etc.) Consequently, the out-of-home care student has already experienced personal challenges impacting his/her development, progress, and growth. Although schools and the child welfare system clearly face substantial obstacles in collaborating to improve the educational performance of children once they are placed in out-of-home care, studies of these students suggest that experiences prior to placement may contribute significantly to educational delays; thus, *the child is already behind*.

**Education becomes secondary.** Historically, education has not been a priority when working with the out-of-home care population. School is often forgotten or treated as a side issue as priority issues become more about protecting the children from abuse or neglect, finding new homes, and/or transferring them when placement does not work. In fact, only recently has the requirement been made to have education as part of the Multi-disciplinary Team. From judges to teachers, everyone needs to have education as an equal priority in developing the plans for the out-of-home care child. There is a need to pay attention to education, first and foremost, because many obstacles faced by the out-of-home care children trying to get an education are created by adults; thus, *the child is already behind*.

**Changes delay learning.** There is a lack of continuity in education for out-of-home care students because a change in placement often means a change in schools. These transitions become harmful in many ways by delaying learning and impeding the student's social integration (i.e., getting to know new teachers and other students). Change reduces stability; thus, *the child is already behind*.

System requirements conflict with educational demands. There are competing demands placed on the out-of-home care child by the system, including appointments with caseworkers, sessions with counselors and therapists, and in some cases, court appearances. Often, this results in missed tests, neglected homework, and truancy; thus, *the child is already behind*.

Stigma results in lower expectations. The stigma of being in out-of-home care is manifested in lower expectations, often from adults in the child's life. Absence of an education 'advocate', or champion for the child, and the child's own avoidance of social interaction are both motivational and social factors found within this population; thus, *the child is already behind*.

In summary, the Task Force fully recognized that when it comes to out-of-home care education, these children are truly *already behind* when entering or re-entering school. The Task Force fears the great risk of these children **never catching up** without serious attention to resolving the fundamental obstacles that are barriers to educational attainment. The Task Force strongly urges state leaders to continue the momentum started with this working group so as to ensure we reach every child.

#### One of Ten "Recommendations for Improving Educational Outcomes"

Help adults in my life, especially my teachers and guidance counselors, understand the system with which I'm involved.

The general public does not have an understanding of foster care and the young people that are involved with the system. We need to build awareness and educate the public about the unique strengths of and challenges facing youth in care. It is especially important to provide information, resources, and training to educators—and to involve young people and foster parents in the design and delivery of such staff development opportunities. Young people in foster care possess a wealth of information about the system. Their knowledge, insights, and expertise represent an untapped resource that is invaluable to the adults who work with them.

—*National Foster Youth Advisory Council*

*"Promoting Educational Success for Young People in Foster Care"*

### *Task Force Charge*

In 2004, a number of concerns were raised regarding the present situation of the public education of out-of-home care children. There was call for attention to this issue based, in part, on a position paper, *The Education of Children in Out-of-Home Care* (2004), written by the Alliance for Children, an association focused on supporting the work of out-of-home care service providers in West Virginia. Taking the leadership to bring together those most entrusted to the welfare of the out-of-home care children, Dr. Pamela Cain, Assistant Superintendent, WVDE, asked Frank Andrews, Superintendent of the Office of Institutional Education Programs (OIEP) to chair a special task force. The intent and commitment was to conduct a review of present practices regarding education and the out-of-home children, and make recommendations where warranted. The goal was to apply objective assessment and

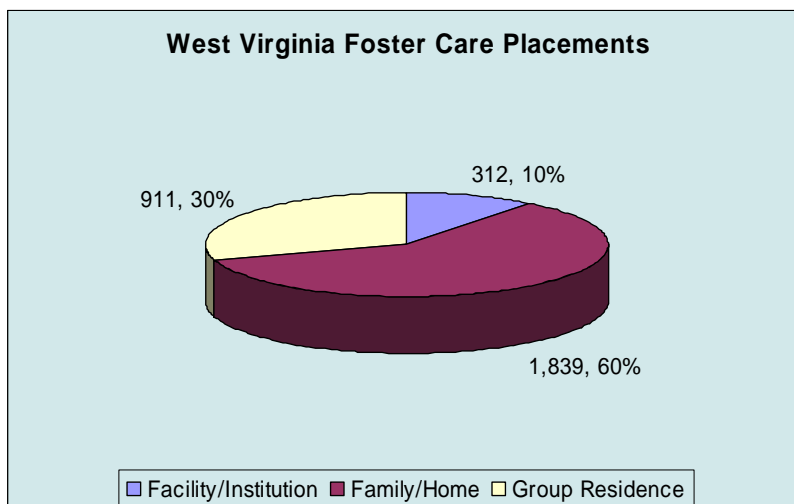
engage in open, honest discussion in seeking solutions that would make a difference. From the onset, the focus was both on improving working relationships among the responsible entities, as well as on developing specific ways to improve the present education environment for out-of-home care students.

In essence, the Out-of-Home Education Task Force was formed to develop a future oriented, problem-solving approach with key leadership from the multiple agencies and providers involved in providing residential and educational services to children in placements away from their families. The overall purpose of the Task Force was to ensure that the best educational and transitional programs and services are being deployed in an effective and efficient manner by identifying issues, analyzing them and offering possible solutions.

Appendix A contains the formal charter for the Task Force. This document, agreed to by all Task Force members, specifies the purpose and expected outcomes of its work.

### *A Note on Terminology*

In many state and national studies, the out-of-home care children are generally referred to as 'foster children'. West Virginia's Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) is responsible for the custody of foster children that are placed in a number of different facilities or arrangements, most often based on their level of mental or physical status. Appendix B provides more specific types of out-of-home care placements including an explanation of what each entails. The term 'educational attainment' is often used to cover topics concerned with various aspects of a child's education from course content to enrollment processes. The Task Force focused on both out-of-home care children under the responsibility of the West Virginia DHHR and the in-custody children under the responsibility of the WV Division of Juvenile Services. The Office of Institutional Education Program within the West Virginia Department of Education has responsibility for the education of many of the children who are institutionalized in West Virginia, but not always, by definition, in out-of-home care status. Not all out-of-home or foster children are in institutional settings. Based on an analysis in April 2005, the following pie chart categorizes placements into three groupings. The Family/Home reflects that approximately 60% of these children are in a home-based family situation.



## *Related Initiatives*

During the Task Force's work, other initiatives were either already in place or emerged that have some bearing on its work. Through OIEP a major 'transitions' project has been focusing on operational level processes and inter-agency linkages regarding any West Virginia youth transitioning from a facility for neglected or delinquent children back into the community and community schools. The working group comprised of diverse representatives from education, DHHR, OIEP, Juvenile Services, the West Virginia court system, and community organizations have studied many of the operational issues, completed process mapping of transition services, and are finalizing a report at this time.

The WV Department of Health and Human Resources Bureau for Children and Families was charged by the WV Legislature to develop a strategic plan regarding the reduction on dependence on out-of-state placement of youth. This plan, issued in July 2004, addresses a myriad of issues centered on those out-of-home care children placed in facilities outside West Virginia. Many of the Task Force members participated in the development of this plan, which is being implemented now.

Led by the Alliance for Children, serious effort to reduce the number of out-of-state placements of children by having them placed in West Virginia was initiated during the 2005 West Virginia Legislative Session.

The result of this effort was passage of House Bill (HB) 2334, which created a commission to study the out-of-state placement of children. The work of the West Virginia Out-of-Home Care Education Task Force should serve the commission well as to background material and resource for many aspects of issues regarding the placement of children in West Virginia instead of out of state.

## *Task Force Work Plan*

The following are the highlighted steps the Task Force completed as part of its established work plan:

**Agreement to the Task Team Charter** – The charter (appendix A) was reviewed, adjusted and agreed to by all Task Force members as a first step in its work.

“Research has shown that education is a leading indicator of successful youth development and adult self-sufficiency for foster youth.”

—*Casey Family Programs*

*“Assessing the Effects of Foster Care: Early Results from The Casey National Alumni Study”*

**Guiding Principles Developed** – Task force members fully embraced a set of collectively developed guiding principles forged early in their work. Appendix C contains the agreed-upon list. Going forward, these guiding principles should serve as a foundation and commonly shared focal point for fostering effective working relationships and sound decision making.

**Agency Roles, Responsibilities, and Current Status Reviews** – Those state agencies and other organizations represented on the Task Force prepared informational briefings regarding their roles and responsibilities as applied to the out-of-home care populations. Current status as to statistical data, initiatives, and challenges were covered in short presentations at early Task

Force meetings. An extension of this effort was a presentation from a budget/funding representative within the Department of Education.

**Survey of Out-of-Home Care Residential Facilities** – Led by a Task Force sub-group, a detailed survey instrument was design to assess the present state of educational offerings in these facilities. The Task Force as a whole assisted with final survey development. A survey administration sub-team spent extensive effort in maximizing the survey returns and providing detail analysis of the results. This work is presented in a separate section of the Task Force’s work.

**Data Match of Out-of-Home Care Children and Education Records** – Another significant outcome of the Task Force’s work regarded gaining objective data on the out-of-home care population, especially as to educational attainment. As covered in detail later in this report, the decision to include this work in its work plan resulted in beneficial information that confirms the Task Force assumptions. However, it required additional time to establish the data match process, gain appropriate clearances and complete the programming needed to get the data in a usable form for the Task Force. This activity, in of itself, provided valuable insights to the Task Force regarding data analysis in the future.

**Visioning the Ideal System** – Before approaching issues from a problem solving stance, the Task Force spent time defining what the ideal system for ensuring educational attainment of out-of-home children would look like in West Virginia. This visioning was an approach to see what Task Force members thought most important in the system. That is, what is the ideal system if we could build it our way? Appendix D contains the results of this work. Many of the recommendations are targeted to help build what has been envisioned by Task Force members.

**Research and Benchmarking** – The issues facing West Virginia and addressed by the Task Force are not unique to West Virginia, nor are the potential solutions. Task Force members and CESD provided various research articles and specific studies from other states or research organizations. In part, these afforded opportunities to benchmark the work of the Task Force, including data analysis and recommendation considerations. The majority of gathered material is found in a reference notebook provided to the Task Force chair.

**Situational Analysis and Focus Areas Development** – The Task Force spent considerable meeting time reviewing research, discussing the out-of-home care education landscape in the state, completing a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis on the present environment for educational attainment of out-of-home care children in West Virginia, brainstorming areas for improvement and testing potential recommendations. The results of this work are at the heart of the Task Force’s progress report.

**Task Force Sub-Team Work** – Several times during its work, the Task Force divided tasks into sub-teams for further analysis and recommendations. All sub-team work was reviewed by the full Task Force and ultimately incorporated into the progress report.

## TASK FORCE WORK AND FINDINGS

In West Virginia, it is estimated that over 3,000 children are placed in out of home care – residential behavioral health care, foster care, shelter care and/or detention – on any given day. Although these ‘foster’ children have experienced significant hardships and uncertainty, there is an expectation for each to participate and advance in school, be it a fully integrated public educational system or an institutional education program. The responsibility for the general well-being, safety and successful education of these children rests with a number of different entities ranging from state agencies to private service providers. From appropriate placement to quality educational programs, there are often problems in ensuring that these out of home youth receive the same educational rights and privileges as any other youth in the West Virginia public school system. Of particular note is the consideration that education programs be in place to close identified achievement gaps. It is almost universally agreed that the system is failing to provide smoothly integrated, efficient, supportive transitional care into the educational environment, and, in some instances, effective educational services once the child is placed.

The following sections provide specifics regarding work of the Task Force to gain greater objective insights on the present conditions.

### *Residential Providers Survey*

An original survey to the residential providers was designed and administered by the Task Force. These are private entities that offer programs and services within residential facilities they operate. Primary clients of these facilities are out-of-home care children. The survey focused on main or educational services either provided by the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) or by another source.

A total of 35 residential programs in West Virginia responded to the survey. (It should be noted that a physical facility may have more than one program.) Table 1 reflects the breakdown of services as reported by the 35 respondents.

Level I.....	15%
Level II.....	41%
Level III.....	21%
Emergency Shelter.....	15%
Diagnostic.....	3%
Transitional Living .....	3%
Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility .....	21%

### Summary Findings for Programs with Educational Services Provided by WVDE

- 12 of the 35 respondents stated they had school or school programs provided by the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE).
- 10 of 12 respondents who have programs provided by WVDE stated they (the agency) provided full time behavioral support to the classroom or school.
- All 12 respondents who have programs provided by WVDE reported that students receive more than 180 days of educational services a year.
- All 12 respondents who have program provided by WVDE reported that students receive between 6 and 7.5 hours of educational instruction per day.

### Summary Results of Programs with Educational Services NOT Provided by WVDE

- 23 of the 35 respondents reported they have school programs provided by another source other than the WVDOE.
- Examples of these other sources are:
  - Contracts between local county board of education and providers
  - Providers funding their own teachers to provide educational services with curriculum oversight by the county board of education
  - Providers and county board of education sharing costs for teacher to provide on-grounds classroom to students
  - County board of educations providing teachers to residential facilities so students can be educated on grounds
  - Providers utilizing their own staff to education students
- All providers that have contracts with a county board of education or that employ their own teachers reported these teachers are certified, however only a few reported oversight by someone at the county level.
- 21 out of 23 respondents reported receiving no ancillary services from the public school system.
- 9 of the 23 respondents reported students receive over 180 days of educational instruction in a year.
- Hours of education instruction range from 2 to 7.5 hours each day.
- 50% of respondents who have education programs not provided by WVDE reported students are sent back to the residential facilities on a regular basis. Reasons for this are:
  - Behavior
  - Non-compliance
  - Rule violations
  - Fighting, hitting, threatening

- Failure to respect authority
- Smoking
- 100% of respondents who have educational programs not provided by WVDE reported the agency/provider are responsible for transporting students to and from public school when there are problems with the student or they are sent back to the residential facility.
- Providers reported it can take three days to three months to get educational records and to get students enrolled in an appropriate educational program. Comments were as follows:
  - Responsiveness varies from county to county
  - Easier when the child is local or from the county the provider is in and more difficult when the child is out of county or returning from out of state.
  - A great deal depends on whether or not DHHR has the child's records and on DHHR's responsiveness when they have the records.
  - Takes too long to get educational records.

### *Service Providers Survey Themes*

According to the above survey of providers and discussions by the Task Force members, the following are issues identified as being problematic:

- Where programs are offered directly by WVDE (OIEP), educational standards appear to be met with fuller institution days.
- Educational and health records are difficult to obtain, particularly for children who have been in multiple placements, handicapping expedient and appropriate educational placement.
- Children with behavioral problems are frequently suspended rather than treated.
- Children often do better, at least initially, in a more sheltered educational environment such as an on-ground school. They can then be gradually transitioned to the public program as appropriate. This option is not available to many residential programs and not at all available to foster care parents.
- Funding systems for educational services to children in out of home care are fragmented and inconsistent from one county to the next, often leaving programs to wonder from one year to the next how many teachers they will have and who will pay for them.
- County Boards of Education are generally unable to assume the costs of providing educational services to new programs located in their area. The West Virginia Health Care Authority is not permitted to issue a certificate of need to new providers or providers planning an expansion of service until provisions for delivering appropriate educational services to the children of the facility are clearly established. This has led to the halt of new or expanded residential programming for children and youth with behavioral or developmental disabilities in the state of West Virginia for the past two years.

- The academic status of the child at the time of admission is difficult to establish. Children need to be evaluated for current academic functioning level prior to placement in an educational setting.
- Tutoring and mentoring services are not easily obtained. Children need assistance making the transition to a public and/or consistently implemented educational environment. Providers often must send staff with children to school, increasing their costs.
- Often, county educational staff are not adequately trained, prepared or supported to provide services to a population that tends to be disruptive, academically delayed and, in general, challenging.
- Children are sent back to the residence from school for seemingly inconsequential violations of rules. Transportation arrangements for suspended students are inconsistent.
- The recent 'zero tolerance' posture in school systems has led to even more difficulties for out of home students and for school staff. Alternative schools as they are currently designed in most counties are ineffective and sometimes counter-productive for children in out-home-care.

### *Matching DHHR and WVDE Databases*

Early in its work, the Task Force sought to obtain objective information that would help frame an understanding of the out-of-home care population regarding educational achievement. For example, comparing standard test scores between the out-of-home care students with that of all students provides a common benchmark for analysis. In addition, knowing more about the make-up of this population in West Virginia such as gender, economic status and age can assist in developing targeted recommendations. Completed benchmarking by the Task Force of other states clearly showed this population group had significant gaps regarding educational attainment.

The Task Force spent considerable time arranging for a data match of records from the DHHR with records from WVDE. After formal requests between the two agencies outlined the intent of the work were completed and the confidentiality issues were cleared, the exchange was authorized. DHHR then provided a computer generated data file that contained the records of all out-of-home care children in DHHR custody on its official database as of Fall 2004. Since children will be added and removed from the list based on the dynamics of this population, it was important to take a 'snapshot' that would map to a similar time period for records on the WVDE data files. WVDE's WVEIS (West Virginia Educational Information System) contains a wealth of information regarding students enrolled in the public school system. WVEIS houses standard test scores for students that were tested in Fall 2004. West Virginia is now using the *WESTEST*, which for data analysis by the Task Force, was last given in Spring 2004. The *WESTEST* is taken only in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10.

The Task Force thought this work, in of itself, was a significant step forward toward meaningful collaboration that will be beneficial over long term. As found in the

recommendations, this is an area that needs continued nurturing to become standard practice of data exchange, reporting, and analysis.

The following information and analysis was targeted by the Task Force based on the match work:

- Determination of the total DHHR out-of-home care population in its custody, how many were found (matched) on WVEIS. For those that do not match, determine a sense of why there was no match at the time the analysis was done.
- For matches that were found between the DHHR provided file and WVDE's WVEIS, provide a profile regarding the students as to demographic type information and other relevant data that will help understand this population's profile of this population.
- Provide comparison on test score results between the whole population and those matched out-of-home students who took the test. The basis was to look specifically at the proficiency levels.
- Provide other useful information that helps frame a better understanding and potential benchmarks for the out-of-home care students, especially when compared to the general student population.

The Task Force appreciated the work by staff at both DHHR and WVDE for the data processing and analysis done to provide the valuable data reflected in this report and used in shaping the Task Force's recommendations. These efforts were led by Nancy Walker at WVDE and Brenda McPhail at DHHR.

### *Match and Non-Match Record Counts*

In determining the process for completing the match, the Task Force agreed that the initial matching should be done without undue burden on information technology staffs at either department. Since this was the first time for such a match, the approach was to do a simple match between the two databases knowing full well there would be some differences based on the timing of the match and the conditions of the two databases as to identification fields needed to find a match.

Below is a summary of the approximate records counts and final disposition of the matching process used for this preliminary report of the Task Force. Based on having some unknown non-matches and having not done a record-by-record analysis, the Task Force cautions those that use the presented data to do so carefully. As found in the recommendations, the Task Force strongly urges the continued refinement of the matching process along with more detailed analysis of outcomes.

There are undoubtedly additional logical explanations for non-matching conditions to occur. These can range from individual identification coding errors to some students being enrolled in private placement.

Of the 3,081 DHHR out-of-home care records, 2,014 matched into WVEIS for the time period selected. DHHR representatives surveyed the original data file to confirm the collective reasons for non-matches. The majority of non-matches occurred for the following reasons:

- Child is under school age (born after 9/30/00) .....449
- Child is in out-of-state placement .....375
- Child in is other facilities .....28
- Identified duplicates (28 representing 20 records) .....20
- Unknown status non-matched records .....195

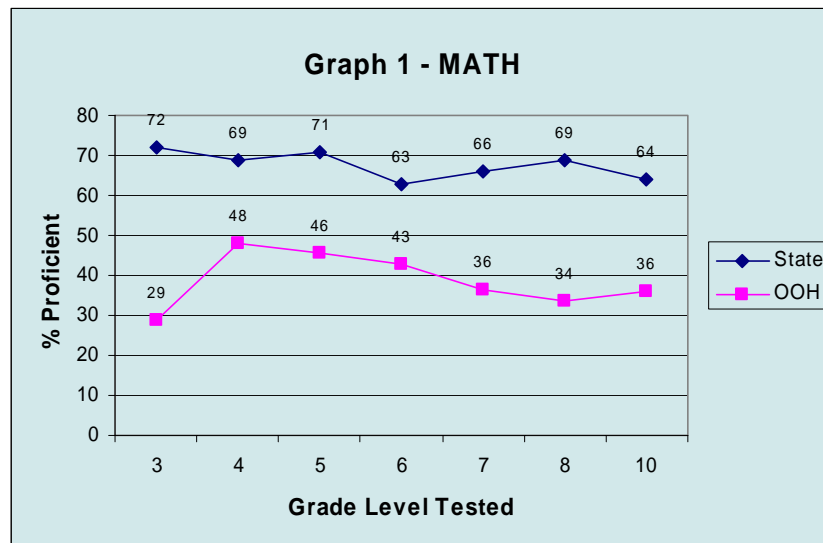
As noted in the recommendations, the Task Force strongly urges continued sharing of this type of data between the two agencies. With such practice, refinement of matching can be done.

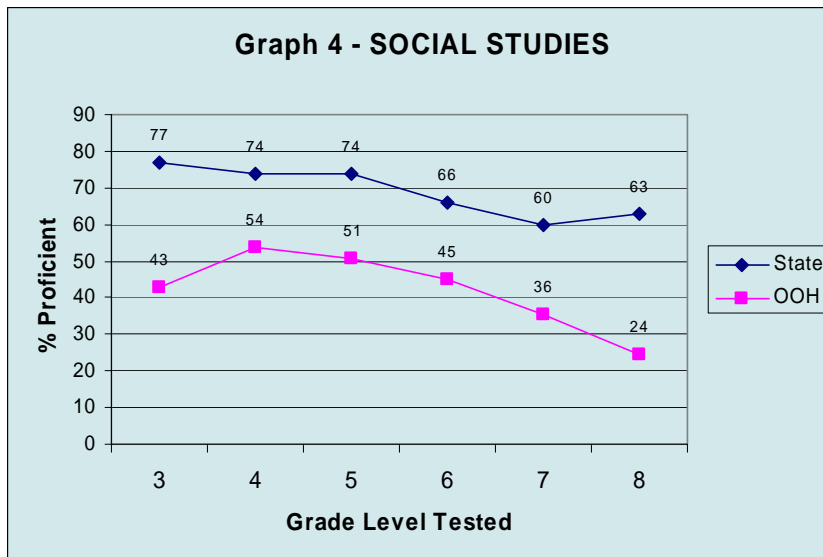
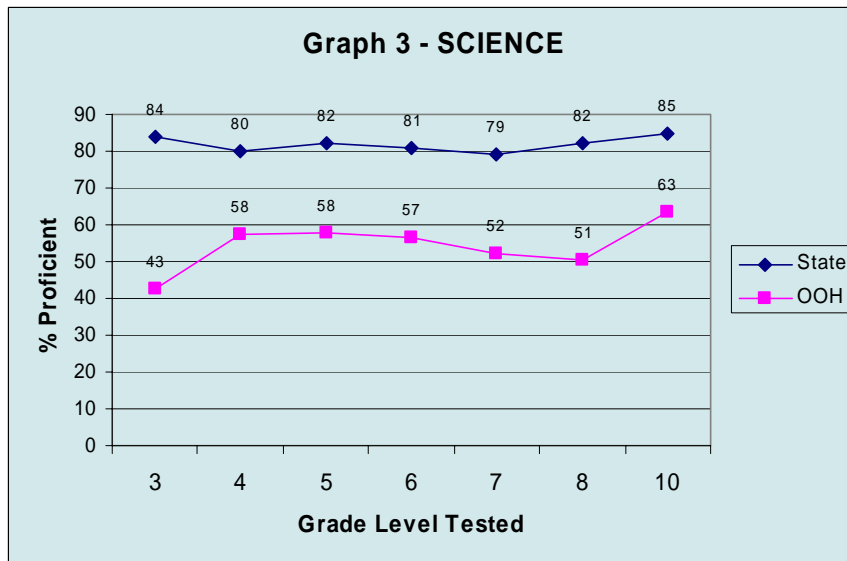
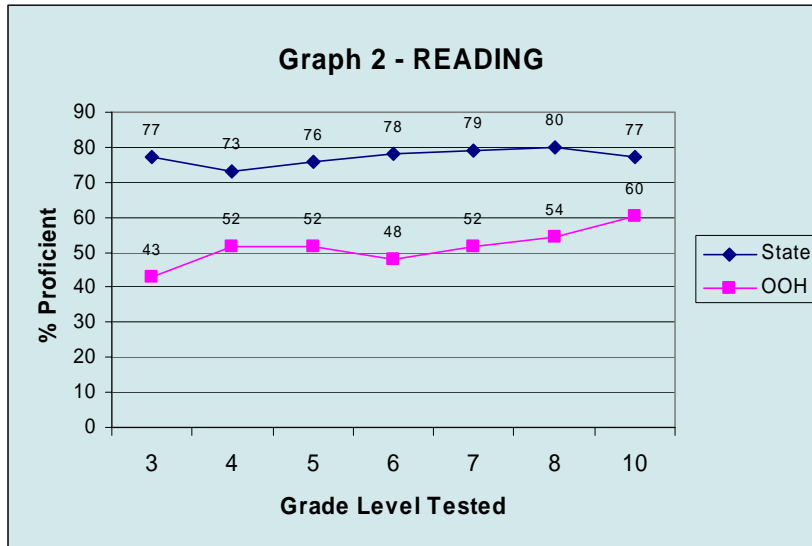
### Comparing WESTEST Results

The data match mapped children on the DHHR Out-of-Home Care database from Fall 2004 with WVEIS enrollment data for the October 2004 time period. Since the last given WESTEST for all students was Spring 2004, the matched records reported in the below data analysis will reflect different enrollment grades from the test grade. Exceptions will be where a student was held back a grade between Spring 2004 to Fall 2004.

The test results cover four subject areas: Math, Reading, Science and Social Studies. For each subject, a student can reach one of five mastery levels. These are in ascending order: Novice, Below Mastery, Mastery, Above Mastery and Distinguished. A student is considered **proficient** when at a level of Mastery and above based on the test results.

Graphs 1 through 4 show the comparable % proficient levels for the out-of-home care student and the total public school students (note that the out-of-home care children will also be in the total numbers). Appendix E has the full tables with the data used for the graphs.

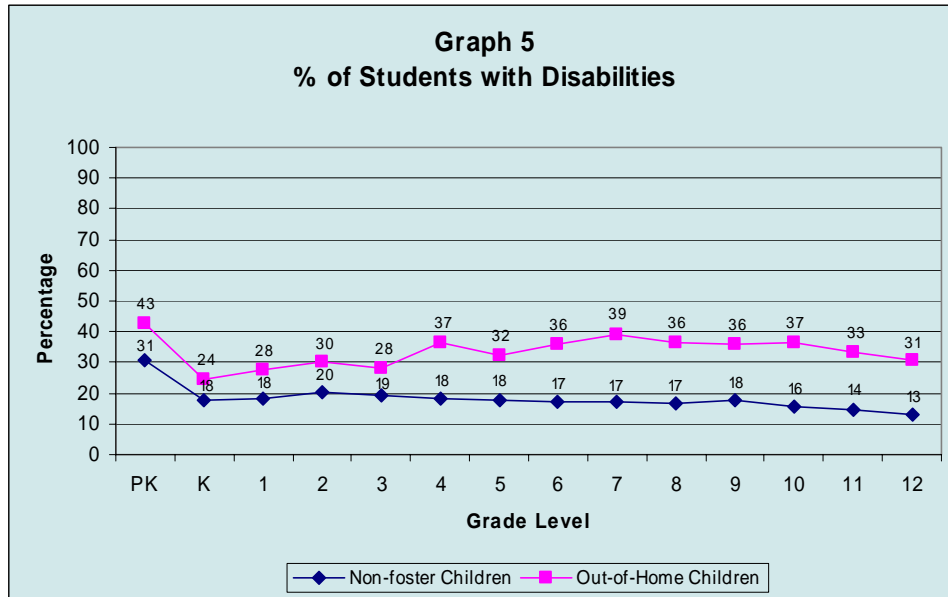




Other notable characteristics of the out-of-home care students enrolled in West Virginia public schools shed light on the challenges this population brings and echoes the notion of these children being already behind.

### Special Education Students

Graph 5 shows the percentage of the students with disabilities reflecting the numbers of students considered within the definitions of special education.



### Discipline Occurrences

The occurrence of disciplinary action is to be reported within WVEIS. Graph 6 shows the percentage reported from the data used by the Task Force in its work.

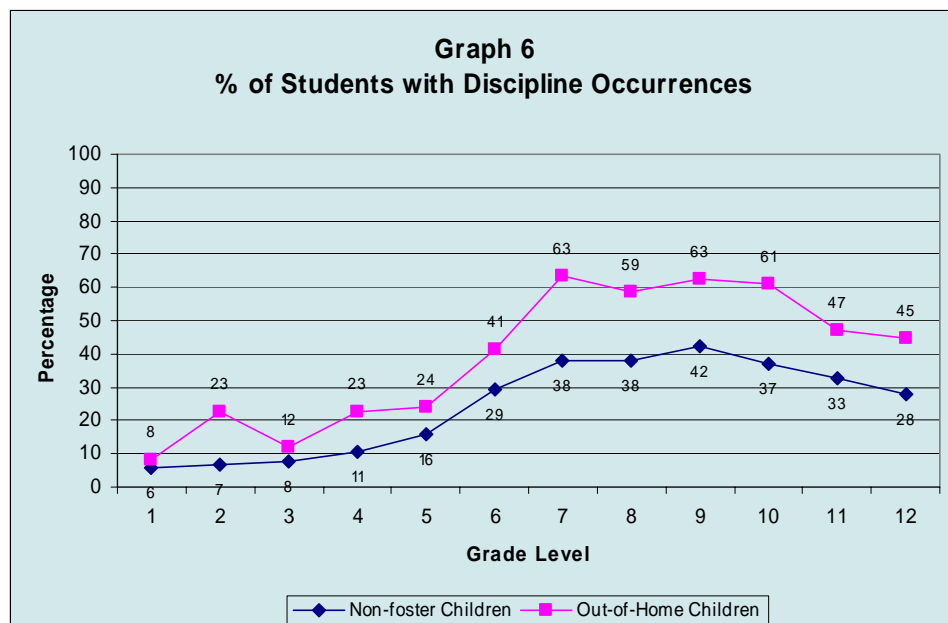
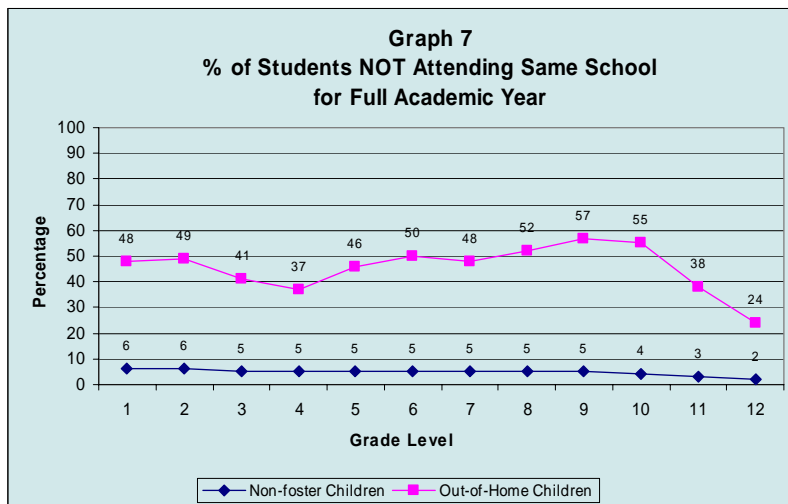


Table 2 shows the major categories of discipline. Although only occurrences of discipline are reported for purposes here, more detail can be extracted, especially at the county level were more specific (discretion) of coding the disciplinary infraction.

Code	Major Area
B	Disrespectful/Inappropriate Conduct
C	Aggressive Conduct
F	Failure to Obey Rules/Authority
G	Gang Activities
L	Legal Concerns
P	Failure to Work to Full Potential
S	Illegal Drugs, Tobacco, Alcohol
T	Tardiness and Truancy
V	Violation of Detention/Suspension
W	Weapons
X	Other

### Number of Schools Attended

As stated throughout this report, the need for stability in placement, especially for education, is paramount to successful education attainment. One way to view this is to understand how many different schools a student may attend over a school year. Using the data provided to the Task Force through the WVEIS system, the percent of the out-of-home care students is reported by grade level.



“Perhaps the single most important thing that each of us can do to improve the educational outcomes for foster children is to ensure that their school placement remains stable. Historically, change of placement of the child has meant an almost automatic change of school. Yet for every school change, a child experiences serious loss and suffers academically.”

—Tracy L. Wareing and Ruth Solomon

“Improving Educational Outcomes for Children in Foster Care”  
Presentation, January 24, 2005

## Suspensions

Studying the numbers and times out-of-home care children are suspended provides another window into understanding the challenges in closing the educational achievement gap. As part of Table 3, the suspension incidents as reported on WVEIS are shown grouped by number of times within each grade. The table also contains the numeric data of the out-of-home children represented in graphs 5 through 7. The definitions of the table column headings are found below the table.

Class	Enroll	Special Education		Discipline		Suspensions			FAY	% FAY
		Number	%	Number	%	1-5	6-10	>10		
PK	75	32	42.6						1	
K	94	23	24.4						8	
1	109	30	27.5	9	8.2	5			57	52
2	80	24	30.0	18	22.5	9	2	1	41	51
3	82	23	28.0	10	12.1	8			48	59
4	93	34	36.5	21	22.5	12	2	1	59	63
5	108	35	32.4	26	24.0	15	5	2	58	54
6	111	40	36.0	46	41.4	23	12	8	55	50
7	161	63	39.1	102	63.3	41	19	29	84	52
8	192	70	36.4	113	58.8	42	11	54	92	48
9	349	125	35.8	219	62.7	76	47	90	151	43
10	253	93	36.7	155	61.2	45	38	66	113	45
11	144	48	33.3	68	47.2	27	13	25	89	62
12	146	45	30.8	65	44.5	21	18	20	111	76
Total	1997	685	34.3	852	42.6	324	167	296	967	48

### Definitions

Class - Class in which the matched student was in during Fall 2004.

Enroll - Number of matches from the DHHR data set for that class.

SPED - Number enrolled in the given class with IEPs and the percent of those enrolled with IEPs

Discipline - Number of students in the reported class that had a discipline referral for any reason.

Suspensions - Number of students who had suspension infractions that resulted in days out of school.

FAY - Number of students who were enrolled in the same school for the full academic year.

## Summary of Data Analysis

From the data presented above, further study of comparable data from research and discussion, there is ample evidence that the West Virginia out-of-home student is clearly behind in education attainment and serious attention is needed to close the achievement gaps found. The following summary points to the most significant and discouraging findings from the data analysis:

- Whereas an average of 68% of all children taking the Department of Education's *WESTEST* in 2003-2004 met proficiency criteria in the area of Math, only 38.5% of children in out-of-home placements did so.
- Whereas an average of 77% of all children taking the *WESTEST* in 2003-2004 met proficiency criteria in the area of Reading, only 54.1% of children placed in out-of-home settings did so.
- Whereas an average of 82% of all children taking the *WESTEST* in 2003-2004 met proficiency criteria in Science, only 57.1% of children in out-of-home care did so.
- Whereas an average of 69% of all children taking the *WESTEST* in 2003-2004 met proficiency criteria in Social Studies, only 37.7% of children in out-of-home care did so.
- Only 48% of the 967 children in out of home care who were tested in April, 2004, attended the same school for the entire academic year.
- Of the total 1,997 children in the sample of children in out-of-home care, 296 were suspended more than 10 times in the school year, 167 were suspended between 6 and 10 times, and 324 were suspended between 1 and 5 times.
- 42.6% of the children in out-of-home care were referred for disciplinary action of some sort during the school year 2003-2004.
- Of the 1,997 children, 685, or 34.3%, were identified as children receiving or qualifying for Special Education services under IDEA.

## OVERALL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given all the detailed conclusions presented above, continued study and final discussions by Task Force members, a collection of important findings emerged. These findings are the vital drivers of the recommended actions that follow.

1. The No Child Left Behind requirements and the objective *WESTEST* data results clearly point to the **immediate need** for serious attention to closing the education achievement gap of each out-of-home care child in West Virginia. The Task Force stated unequivocally that the time is right, and now, for meaningful action. Although a number of agencies have responsibility, there appears little accountability presently for closing the education achievement gap at both the state and county levels.
2. No consistent standards setting educational attainment expectations and requirements are in place that apply to all out-of-home care children, regardless of where the child may reside or be placed.
3. Despite the good intentions of each agency or entity engaged in some aspect of working with the out-of-home care children, there appears a perpetual air of distrust, lack of communication and understanding among all parties. There was a sense among the Task Force that individual “islands” of success happen based mostly on personal relationships and commitment rather than joint policy and procedure. There have been little systematic process gains, no on-going accountability or governance structured integrated approach.
4. Although OIEP representation is now at the table for reviewing requests for new residential facilities (Certificate of Need), there is presently not a way to assure quality education processes will be required to be in place for newly established or recertified residential facilities (e.g., no standards).
5. A seamless continuum incorporating all aspects of care and education for out-of-home children presently **does not exist** in West Virginia at an integrated systems level. This directly creates inconsistencies, lack of common definitions and failure to have quality education for every child in out-of-home care. This is caused, in part, because agencies with different responsibilities and mandates are working mostly in silos- at both the state and local levels. Further, no single leadership (person or group) is given authority to take charge of addressing these problems/issues regarding educational attainment in a holistic and sustainable way.
6. The dynamics of the out-of-home care children who ‘move often and move far’ call for the highest level of collaborative work by a multitude of professionals willing to share resources, change systems, create innovative solutions and be accountable.
7. Each county Local Education Authority (LEA) serves the local student populations and has more autonomy than the DHHR structure that is more centralized with overall work with out-of-home care children. There appears to be inconsistent local decisions about whom and how counties serve out-of-home care children as to education. This appears to the Task Force to be counter to No Child Left Behind expectations.

8. That a high percentage of children (e.g., 50%) reported get sent back from public school on a regular basis to the residential facility or placement residence is one of the more troublesome findings of the Task Force.
9. Gaps and deficits in educational performance and/or abilities are a contributory factor in out-of-home placements, thus creating a cycle that continues to worsen the educational achievement of children.
10. Not all out-of-home care children are getting education within the West Virginia public school system that should be, based on reported information.
11. There is no set criteria as to which residential facilities in West Virginia need or get on-ground schools and which do not, nor is there a uniform process in place for addressing this issue statewide.
12. More than one education model or process for delivering education to the out-of-home care child than simply a 'school' may be workable in the state. There needs to be a way to look at innovative approaches including alternative education possibilities to fully address closing the achievement gap.
13. No monitoring is occurring as to the education of the out-of-home care students (Note: exception is that special education may be monitored for students with disabilities).
14. There clearly are concerns for what type of monitoring occurs in 'private' schools as to education - who is doing the monitoring?
15. Some facilities (e.g., shelters) are doing education as an attempt to fill 'gaps' of not having access to the public education system or having public education proactive with their programs. Furthermore, emergency shelters have their own set of education problems based on nature of the situation.
16. There continues to be significant concern that there is not enough knowledge and understanding (awareness, standards, expectations, educational strategies) across the agencies about the out-of-home care children population. This is manifested in reports of lack of communication and reported insensitivity to this population's needs, both perceived and real.
17. An example raised about not having a seamless system is that education is not having meaningful input at the table regarding the out-of-home care child's future. This can be seen in education, although now required, not always being at the Multidisciplinary Team meetings.
18. The out-of-home care child transferring from one school to another, or just entering school for the first time, has many barriers that are not being addressed. Some of these are process oriented, while others appear to be behavioral in nature. This leads to delays in learning, failure to get appropriate academic credit, and not having grades and other up-to-date education records readily available.
19. Although reported to have occur in some instances, there appears to be no formal, sustainable education advocate type program for the out-of-home care student population. Therefore, the chances of an out-of-home care student successfully transitioning into a public school setting are reduced based on having no one to

champion his or her presence and to assist in being integrated into the school environment.

20. A number of issues surfaced regarding funding the education of out-of-home care children. First and foremost, concern surfaced regarding state formula funding for education and how it may not provide the funding needed for the resource requirements of the out-of-home care student. In addition, the extensive cost required for the majority of this population is a consideration. Information is limited as to understanding how best to obtain adequate funding for this population. One example of this was the concern that surfaced as to whether the state was taking full advantage of Medicaid as to residential costs. Although Medicaid cannot pay for direct education costs, it might offer an opportunity to better leverage money. This is an area to explore, especially in investing in behavioral services that help improve the child's education.
21. Some 'free market' economy forces cause imbalances and differences in some education support commitments. Historically, there has been a political nature to some decisions regarding establishment of new residential facilities, requirements for on-grounds schools and overall education issues regarding out-of-home care children. Again, the Task Force found that lack of standards has led to inconsistencies and differences in education attainment opportunities for this population across the state.
22. Not enough attention is being paid to developing strategies and building processes to enhance early intervention strategies for 'at-risk of placement' children to prevent them from becoming out-of-home care children in the first place.
23. There is not enough attention or resources being allocated to aftercare and overall improvement of the aftercare processes, which are paramount in achieving success with this population.

From a summary process findings perspective, the Task Force agreed to the following:

- West Virginia is in the same boat as many other states regarding the educational attainment issues with out-of-home care children.
- There is significant work to be done in West Virginia across a number of fronts to address the challenges faced with the out-of-home care population and to close the educational achievement gap.
- To be successful and sustain meaningful results, it will take truly effective collaboration and sharing of responsibilities among state and local agencies, private providers and others.
- Those who come together to work on the issues will need to support and live the Task Force's Guiding Principles as delineated in this report.
- The investment to date in the Task Force work (e.g., time, resources, building working relationships, raising the knowledge level on issues) signals momentum to state leaders to 'stay the course' and make meaningful step-by-step improvements. The next steps hopefully are sooner rather than later.

## WORKING RECOMMENDATIONS

State agency leadership represented on the Task Force should use the Task Force's comprehensive work as a catalyst to institute vigorous action to address the issues and subsequent recommendations provided by the Task Force. Through the ground work laid by the Task Force, meaningful change can be expected, if the following priority recommendations are given the strong backing and support of the State Superintendent of Schools and the Secretaries of Health and Human Resources and Military Affairs and Public Safety. However, their ability to ensure change will be dramatically enhanced from the proactive support of the Governor and the West Virginia Legislature.

The Task Force recognized the critical importance of accountability across the entire system, for all agencies with responsibility for the out-of-home care child from his or her welfare to educational achievement. Accountability can not be taken lightly or assumed that other parties will be accountable. The Task Force's recommendations clearly require on-going monitoring by those in positions to ensure accountability is accepted, measured and that appropriate consequences are in place when there is a failure of accountability. However, there is hope by the Task Force members that 'unconditional' accountability will be the practice of all those invested with responsibility for the successful future of the out-of-home care child, because it is the right thing to do.

### *1. Close the education achievement gap for out-of-home care children.*

The West Virginia data clearly evidences a significant educational achievement gap for out-of-home care students. The overarching priority recommendation from the Task Force is to aggressively take actions that will close the gap. The other recommendations offer ways to help address closing the gap. However, without commitment from the highest level state leadership, the risk will be to continued practices that do not get at the heart of the changes needed. Through uniform educational systems (standards, consistency, support) there needs to be assurance that quality education is always available to the out-of-home care children in some form. The Task Force believes that policy changes will need to occur in both education and the child's welfare systems. These children are truly already behind and deserve the attention of local, state, and private leaders.

#### *Related Actions*

- a. All parties who can make a difference in addressing closing the achievement gap should be made aware of the salient findings in this report. Making a difference starts with creating an environment that raises the educational 'expectations' for the out-of-home care students. Based, in part, on the Task Force's work through discussion and background briefings, it became readily known that significant progress to improve the present findings would require more effective communication and new ways of cooperation among the agencies and others responsible for this population's success.
- b. Develop statewide **standards** for out-of-home care education regardless of the child placement or living arrangement. Standards must be placed in regulatory language

with oversight from a state agency, either educational or human service, or a multi-agency team representing those directly responsible for this population.

- c. Representatives from WVDE should work cooperatively with DHHR to develop operational standards for facilities that ensure that school age children are enrolled in developmentally and academically appropriate public or on-grounds educational or vocational programming.
- d. The funding for 'on-grounds' education and other out-of-home care education should be allocated outside the present formula through special improvement package submissions supported by all state agencies with vested interest in out-of-home care education. The need for greater resources for a wide variety of intervention strategies is paramount.
- e. Specific professional development work is needed for improving work with this population, from design of materials to integrating professional development into existing programs, attention to this area will go a long way. There is continued need to prevent this population from being 'labeled' or stigmatized. This includes education professionals to help foster understanding of the unique academic and behavioral challenges for the out-of-home care population. Training is also needed for case workers and those who care for out-of-home care children regardless of the physical setting.

## ***2. Every out-of-home care child should have seamless, transparent and full access to public education anytime, anywhere in West Virginia.***

The Task Force found extensive areas where process breakdowns, lack of attention to transition issues from school to school, and inconsistency of responsibility to look out for the educational welfare of out-of-home care children across the 'system'. The process of continuity of care from placement to placement and incorporating effective education is a critical aspect of improving the present situation and truly closing the achievement gap.

### ***Related Actions***

- a. The Task Force endorses and encourages the successful furthering of the OEIP Transitions Project that can serve as a model for many of the issues raised under this recommendation area.
- b. Through policy and statutory code, requiring interagency sharing and portability of educational records. This may be accomplished through exploring some form of health and educational 'passport' process to reduce delays in enrolling in school and accessing or sharing educational records. Examples can be found in other states.
- c. MDTs (Multi-Disciplinary Teams) should be active in all counties and educators need to be directly involved and fully engaged throughout the process.
- d. Local education authorities must be partner in planning for aftercare.
- e. SATs (Student Assistance Teams) and MDTs need to develop cooperative agreements
- f. Increase knowledge level of DHHR case workers involving educational standards

- g. Educational placement needs to be a consideration or criteria in general placement of out-of-home students (e.g., school calendar year).
- h. Look at ways to complete system integration that improves access, processes, and utilizes efficiency of out-of-home care education.

***3. An interdisciplinary team of practitioners and educators should be charged with investigation and assessment of the educational experience of out-of-home care students to ascertain the nature of and remedies for disparities in performance and quality outcomes by this population.***

As an immediate first phase outcome of the Task Force's work, a team should be established and charged to carry forth the actions in this report. Further, this group will continue to refine and design the data analysis and finalize the most appropriate sequence of actions to close the achievement gap and improve the system. This team should prepare specific policy, statutory and process recommendations for implementation across all areas.

***Related Actions***

- a. The Task Force compiled a significant amount of recent material from studies to targeted research on the out-of-home care education issue. This material, available to this proposed team, has many recommendation lists that range from intervention strategies to specific innovative ways to improve the educational outcomes. This material should be used as a starting point for the proposed team.
- b. The Task Force's Guiding Principles suggest involving the out-of-home care students in helping to understand and determine viable strategies for improving various aspects centered on this population. This could be extended to involving all caretakers of this population who would have insights into the potential solutions for improvement. Although the Task Force did not carry through with original thoughts of focus groups with the out-of-home care students, it did review a number of such activities in other studies. One such summary finding based on focus groups with Foster parents is found at the end of this section.
- c. Further work on the data analysis of matches between the DHHR and WVDE databases should be done in a more controlled manner to ensure the tentative finding in this report are on target and additional deeper analysis can be done that provides additional insights into the issues and challenges. This could include, in part, demographics, economic status, placements tracking and movement in and out of DHHR custody.
- d. Continue to build the key components of a continuum of care for the out-of-home population. This includes more depth on programs such as the 'socially necessary services', new Foster Care federal regulations, state requirements within Individuals with Disability Education Act -I.D.E.A. 2004, advocate programs, etc.
- e. There should be efforts to determine the identifying characteristics of children at risk of out-of-home placement because of educational deficits or gaps in education functioning. This should result in interventions in the natural educational

environment both as to direct programs and in training initiatives. For example, exploring how to develop and fund school-based advocacy systems for children at risk of out-of-home placement is a longer-term goal to help close the education achievement gap.

- f. More specific work is needed regarding children in temporary situations or custody such as detention centers and emergency shelters. The presence of the Division of Juvenile Services on the Task Force helped bring some of the issues to the table.
- g. The suggested team should be charged with developing a comprehensive list of specifics to be researched further regarding the out-of-home care student and educational performance (e.g., identifying characteristics, benchmarking, best practice standards, factors having negative impact on children “at risk” of out-of-home placement). Those on the list not discovered in early improvement work should be prioritized based on the potential to make a difference in closing the educational achievement gap.

***4. A WV Collaborative Council on Out-of-Home Care Education should be established as a high-level, mandated body charged to help carry out the Task Force’s long term recommendations and be empowered to continuously improve the system and resolve issues.***

Historically, there have been challenges to jointly resolve problems among different state agencies affecting the integrated approach to education children and youth that are the state’s responsibility in out-of-home care. Rather than wait until situations become “out of hand”, it makes sense to have a dedicated group charged with high-level attention to improving both the on-going educational outcomes, process improvement, and other overall attention to this population. By forming a collaborative council on out-of-home care focused on the education of these children, the state can increase the probability of closing the achievement gap. This council should be required, through some oversight by the WV Legislature to provide yearly reports that reflect performance benchmarks and the “State of Out-of-Home Care Education in West Virginia”. This work can incorporate new policy recommendations for agencies or legislative code. Representatives should come from the Department of Juvenile Services, Department of Health and Human Services, West Virginia Department of Education and other appropriate agencies or organizations including private sector entities engaged in work with out-of-home care children.

***Related Actions***

- a. Institutionalize a high level joint collaborative council (DJS, DHHR, Department of Education) to develop policy/procedures monitoring strategies including: on-grounds development, admission/transition/reintegration, staff development, information-sharing/record transfer, etc.
- b. Ensure legislative oversight for the Council’s work

- c. Establish a formal issue resolution process to address concerns and surfacing situations at the on-set to prevent system failure or deterioration of working relationships
- d. Stay the course by continuing the work done by the Task Force by ensuring the most appropriate and knowledgeable people work the above recommendations, monitoring actions, and communicating progress.

#### Foster Parents' Perceptions of the Educational Achievement of Children in Foster Care

1. Children in foster care exhibit academic performance. Most children do not do well, particularly at the beginning of placement.
2. Academic performance improves when foster parents and teachers provide individual instruction to the children.
3. Academic performance is better when appropriate services and placement are provided.
4. Schools are too lenient on academic performance.
5. Schools are too harsh on behavior problems.
6. Educational alternatives are not available for children who have been suspended or expelled.
7. Transfers between schools are hard on children academically.
8. Children need to be assessed early to obtain appropriate services.
9. Traumatic experiences and emotional problems interfere with academic performance.
10. Children lack exposure to school environment and educational materials, such as books, which affects academic performance.

Source: *Children Left Behind, The Educational Status and Needs of Youth Living in Foster Care in Ohio* 2004. Knowledge Works Foundation.

## APPENDICES

“We found that foster children face roadblocks that other economically disadvantaged children do not face, roadblocks that can affect their academic performance. The children had concerns about maintaining ties with their biological parents and caring for siblings that often distracted them from schoolwork. Mandated court appearances and doctors’ appointments caused them to miss school frequently. Behavior problems—both aggression and withdrawing—which may be rooted in pre-placement trauma, kept them from focusing on school. And they often avoided social interactions with peers in order to keep their foster status hidden. Yet they blamed themselves—not foster care or the schools—for their poor academic achievement.”

—*Vera Institute of Justice*

*“What Keeps Children in Foster Care from Succeeding in School?  
Views of Early Adolescents and the Adults in Their Lives”*

# APPENDIX A

## OUT-OF-HOME EDUCATION TASK FORCE

### CHARTER

**Membership** – See Task Force membership list.

**Administrative Support** – Office of Institutional Education Programs, WV Department of Education

**Timeframe** – Complete work based on workload and need for information. Implement agreed upon changes that may be done during the Task Force’s existence.

**Focus** – The education of children (up to 21 years of age) in out-of-home care and in custody of the state of West Virginia.

#### **Background**

In West Virginia it is estimated that over 3000 children are placed in out-of-home care. Many other children at any given time are in custody of the state of West Virginia. Although these “foster” children have experienced significant hardships and uncertainty, there is an expectation for each to participate and advance in school in West Virginia. The responsibility for the general well-being, safety and successful education of these children rests with a number of different entities from state agencies to private service providers. From appropriate placement to quality education programs, there are many dynamic and complex issues surrounding the important work with foster children. In general, there are a number of central issues that have been raised over the years regarding those children considered to be in foster care situations, be it in public school settings or in some type of shelter.

From funding to policy, from standardization to consistency, collaborative study and action to improve the present approaches and outcomes of out-of-home care and in custody education is needed. There appears merit in using a future oriented, problem-solving approach involving key leadership to identify issues, analyze them and offer possible solutions in a set of priority recommendations.

Further, the value of establishing effective working relationships that clearly delineate the expectations of all parties and fosters an environment of continuous improvement is critical for both organizations and programs within them. From time to time, an imbalance between the completion of tasks and effective relationships can occur. In these times, it is a good practice to gather a working group to assess what is working well and what areas may need attention. This is done to ensure the best programs and services are being deployed in an effective and efficient manner. Organizations who take this approach usually find better results at the implementation level, especially for those ultimately served by multiple agencies.

#### **Premise**

The Task Force is brought together to address ways to ensure that all students, no matter the setting in which they may be placed or their learning environment, will achieve a high-quality education program. These out-of-home youth are our children, children in the State of West Virginia and are entitled to the same educational rights and privileges as any other youth in the public school system. Examples of these rights and privileges would be adhering to the requirements of state and federal

laws and regulations (e.g., No Child Left Behind, IDEa). Inherent in this premise are such aspects as graduate requirements, curriculum standards, qualified teaching staff, full instructional day, appropriate calendar based upon need, materials supplies and equipment, and appropriate facilities. Consideration must also be in place for offering the appropriate remedial education programs to close identified achievement gaps.

### **Focus Tasks**

The Task Force is being formed as a multi-agency working group to serve as the catalyst for assessing the current situation in matters regarding education of out-of-home care children and then making recommendations. The Task Force, through a strategic approach, will incorporate effective principles and techniques for working together and being productive in its outcomes. The following are suggested tasks for the Task Force.

1. Establish a set of guiding principles to assist the Task Force in carrying out its work.
2. Undertake, as needed, targeted assessments that will provide insights and data needed for the Task Force to successfully carry out its work.
3. Reach common understanding of current practices in out-of-home care and in custody education in West Virginia.
4. In all areas identify what is working well, including areas that could be considered promising or best practices.
5. Specifically identify and verify, through objective data, weaknesses or development needs centered on out-of-home care and in custody education in West Virginia.
6. Develop a specific list of barriers or challenges in the current system(s) that hamper effective education to the foster children population.
7. Review pertinent background research and other references already completed or in progress that provide information to the Task Force members.
8. If of value to the Task Force, benchmark successful models or promising practices working in other states.
9. Make specific priority recommendations for improvements in policy, process, working relationships and other areas, as warranted. These may be both short-term and long-term in nature.
10. Design a process to ensure an effective and on-going working relationship is in place to foster effective collaboration and address emerging issues in a timely and appropriate manner by those agencies represented on the Task Force.

# APPENDIX B

## TERMINOLOGY

### **Agency Emergency Shelter Care**

Provides short-term placement during a crisis situation. The purpose is to provide a supportive environment designed to minimize stress and emotional instability.

### **DHHR Adoptive Home**

Homes that the West Virginia Office of Social Services recruited, trained and certified as potential adoptive placements. These homes serve children who are in the custody of the department and whose parental rights have been terminated.

### **DHHR Foster Care**

DHHR Foster Care: A family placement designed for children with few problems who can best be served in a family setting pending the development of a permanent living arrangement.

### **Family Emergency Shelter**

Provides short-term placement during a crisis situation in a family setting. The purpose is to provide a supportive environment designed to minimize stress and emotional instability.

### **Group Residential Care**

A structured 24-hour group care setting that targets youth with needs that range from adjustment difficulties in school, home, and/or community in a community-based setting to those in need of a highly structured program with formalized behavioral programs and therapeutic interventions. These types of settings are referred to in West Virginia as Level I, Level II and Level III Group Residential Care. Where Level I serves children with mild, Level II serves children with moderate and Level III serves children with severe behavioral and mental health issues.

### **ICF-MR**

Intermediate Care Facility for the Mentally Retarded/Developmentally Disabled. The primary focus of the institution (of 4 or more beds), is to provide health or rehabilitative services for mentally retarded individuals or person with related conditions. Residents receive active treatment as defined in federal code (483.440).

### **Medley**

24-hour, day-to-day care, support, training and supervision of individuals of all ages, including children, with developmental disabilities in a family setting. The focus of Specialized Foster Care is long-term placement so careful matching occurs before placement.

### **MR/DD**

Mentally Retarded/Developmentally Disabled. Mental retardation is defined as a condition of intellectual functioning (problem solving) and adaptive skills (2 or more of 11 areas...per Amer. Assoc. on Mental Retardation) that are markedly below average for a person's age and culture. The condition must originate before age 18. Developmental disabilities are conditions (attributed to a mental or physical impairment or a combination of the two) that result in substantial functional deficits in at least 3 of 7 areas of "major life activities". These conditions must originate before the age of 22.

### **Psychiatric Facility (Long Term)**

Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs) provide to children and adolescents under the age of 21 a medically supervised inter-disciplinary program of behavioral health treatment which addresses the psychiatric needs of each individual and his/her family.

### **Psychiatric Hospital (Short Term)**

Acute Psychiatric Inpatient hospitalization provides intensive, 24-hour psychiatric care, including crisis stabilization and diagnostic assessment, in a hospital setting for 30 days or less.

### **Therapeutic Foster Care**

A family placement designed for children with significant treatment needs because of emotional and/or physical problems. The foster parents are professionally trained and supported to help the children overcome their problems for their return home or to a less intensive out-of-home setting.

### **Transitional Living Client**

TL clients are older youth (17-20 years of age) who are provided assistance in moving from a foster home or group/residential setting to their own community where they establish a household and continue their educational and vocational goals or enter the workforce. A private agency that DHHR enters into an agreement with, provides assistance with career planning and in developing employment and job maintenance skills, frequent face-to-face contact and social casework services.

## APPENDIX C

# OUT-OF-HOME CARE EDUCATION TASK FORCE

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

There are a number of success stories when it comes to out-of-home education in West Virginia today; nevertheless, matters before the Task Force are significant, and many have no simple solution. Different viewpoints, approaches, and priorities undoubtedly exist among the task force members, both as individuals and as representatives of the diverse organizations involved; these organizations have set missions, differing legal requirements, and performance expectations that may not always align with others. Within this context and ever changing dynamics, the Task Force members recognize the value of collaborative, positive working relationships and have agreed to embrace the following guidelines as a foundation for the Task Force's work.

### *We will....*

1. do our work with a spirit of trust, honesty, and mutual respect to build upon our individual and combined strengths.
2. focus on the "children in the center of the room" and put the child's education first and foremost.
3. endorse the same educational right so as to meet individual needs and ensure progress for every youth because all are entitled to a quality education regardless of age, life experiences, or custodial circumstances.
4. embrace that education is part of the treatment and work through the entire process (from education to transition) with consistency.
5. understand and know the contribution of each involved agencies' roles and responsibilities on the continuum of youth needs and ultimate outcomes, and find the synergy along this continuum.
6. strive for true buy-in and a united front, so that consensus does happen to make our work action oriented, with actual follow through assignments and results documented.
7. be open-minded to new landscapes for solutions and set aside what has happened in the past.
8. stay focused on our task at hand as defined in our charter and leave other agendas (small and large) elsewhere.
9. redefine the focus by dropping turf issues to get beyond ourselves and fight for the children.
10. not lose sight of, or ignore, the challenges and tough issues; rather, we will face each one and find a solution.
11. include students in the process as we protect their rights, privileges, and restrictions placed on them (by courts).
12. agree that the child's family needs to be a partner in our work; therefore, we will be involved and deal with family issues.
13. be open to dream, but stay awake to the reality of budgets, timelines, priorities, external influences, etc.
14. recognize that additional resources are not the only solutions by studying how we can use what we already have (not just shifting resources).
15. strive to find the strategies/methods to change the system-not just regulations and policy-work in the trenches.
16. take small steps to make progress and improvements, while working on the bigger system changes required.

## APPENDIX D

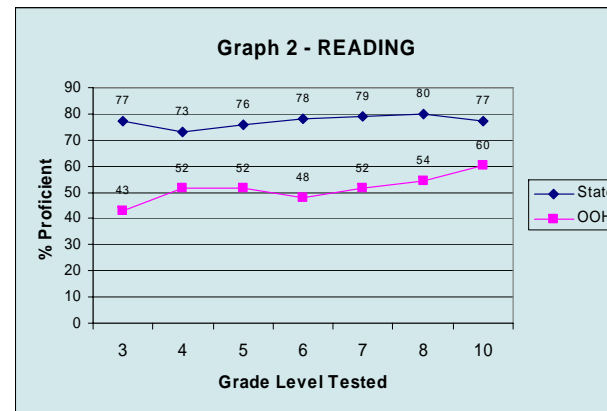
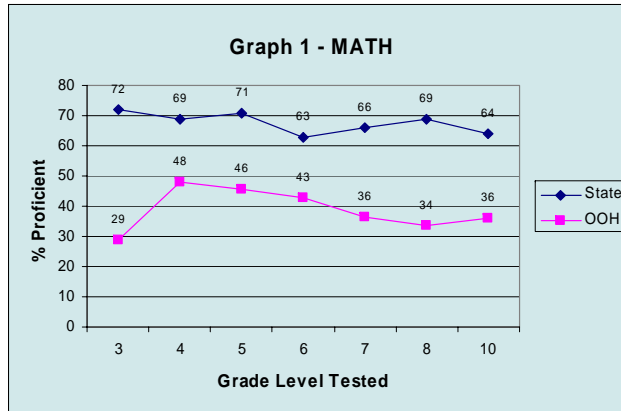
### VISIONING THE IDEAL SYSTEM

Before approaching issues from a problem solving stance, the Task Force spent time defining what the ideal system for ensuring educational attainment of out-of-home and children would look like in West Virginia. This visioning was an approach to see what Task Force members thought most important in the system. That is, what is the ideal system if we could build it our way? The following statements were voiced as to what would be attributes or processes of the ideal system (note- the items are numbered for reference not priority):

1. Coordinated transition systems both within the system and in and out of the system!
2. A contact person in larger schools. A transition person in place (this was a model at one time in parts of the state).
3. A process for effective transition exists and is known— roles and responsibilities are in place.
4. Trained/aware public school administrators/leadership and counselors of the dynamics, process with these populations and processes.
5. SAT (Student Assistance Teams) in place. There is not much referrals going on with SATs. Need to improve referral process. SATs can be of help when a student comes to the school, they can help normalize the student's entry to the school.
6. A process for natural helpers exists (mentors)
7. Students are assigned teacher mentor.
8. An advisor/advisee program is in place.
9. An 'educational' advocate is identified to advocate for the child in the education process. This may be an agency contact or advocate outside the school system. To help make this work, the DHHR case manager contacts need interagency training regarding the 'world of education' (the educational system). There is a strong need for an advocacy role by someone on behalf of each student.
10. There exists a trained cadre of volunteers who are trained to advocate for the children.
11. Every student has a contact person who they can go to or who is watching out for them.
12. Records are shared and access to key information across agencies is common practice.
13. True collaboration occurs among the agencies. There is a seamless process that includes treatment & education.
14. The system is proactive up front to build the foundation early (e.g., student needs, potential issues, advocating, records in place). Concerted effort up front to address issues and get as much set up and addressed early, before problems arise or intervention may be needed.
15. Every child's education records moves around in the system with the child.
16. An intervention process that addresses issues earlier is documented and used. The cornerstone is an effective problem solving plan that is in place by the various agencies (collaborative process or working relationship on addressing issues)— when problems occur it naturally "kicks in".
17. All on-ground schools have same standards (content/records, etc.) regardless of who operates.

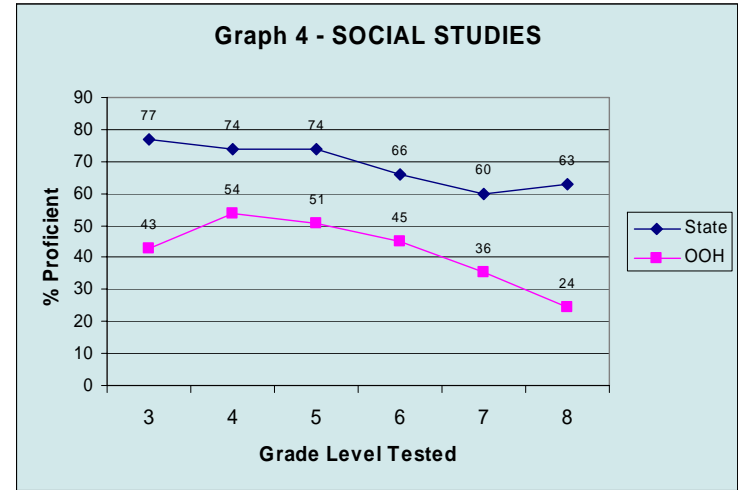
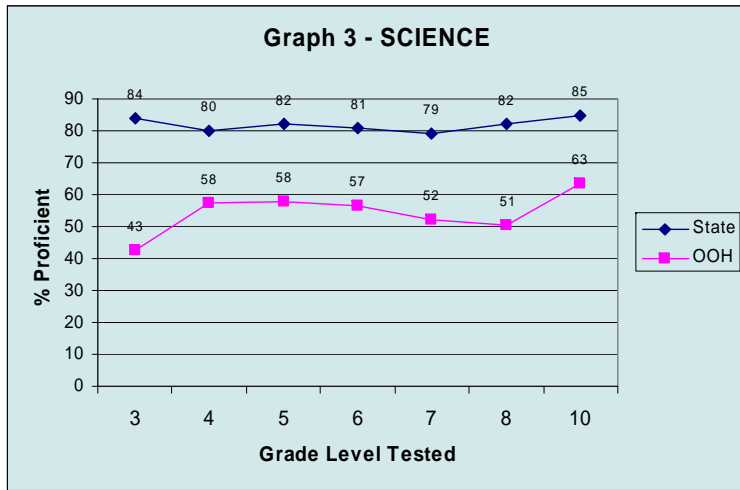
18. Agreed upon criteria are in place for determining need for on-ground school (Could be modification of on-ground school).
19. Islands of excellence are recognized and replicated across the state. Highlight these as best practices.
20. The ideal system fully demonstrates efficient use of resources. Remove/reduce duplication. Simple – restore list of who does what.
21. The state has solved the problem of who will fund new needs. (i.e., Kentucky has policy).
22. Local school district involved up front in planning with the service providers and DHHR.
23. Policy and procedures with DE and DHHR are clear cut. Who is responsible / pays for this.
24. The system has monitoring and evaluation and process to make changes when problems/non-standards are found.
  - a. performance
  - b. what is working; what is not
  - c. consistency

## APPENDIX E DATA ANALYSIS TABLES & GRAPHS



West Virginia Department of Education State Assessment Results					
Class	Enroll	Math		Reading	
		Tested	Prof %	Tested	Prof %
PK					
K					
1					
2					
3	20,443	20,411	72	20,410	77
4	20,564	20,520	69	20,511	73
5	20,901	20,848	71	20,844	76
6	21,773	21,650	63	21,665	78
7	22,524	22,371	66	22,367	79
8	21,910	21,698	69	21,691	80
9					
10	19,288	18,985	64	18,970	77
11					
12					
Total	147,403	146,483	68	146,458	77

West Virginia Department of Education Out-of-Home Care Children									
Class	Enroll	Math				Reading			
		Tested	%	Prof	%	Tested	%	Prof	%
PK	75								
K	94								
1	109								
2	80								
3	82	7	8.5	2	28.5	7	8.5	3	42.8
4	93	83	89.2	40	48.1	83	89.2	43	51.8
5	108	94	87.0	43	45.7	93	86.1	48	51.6
6	111	93	83.7	40	43.0	94	84.6	45	47.8
7	161	140	86.9	51	36.4	141	87.5	73	51.7
8	192	143	74.4	48	33.5	142	73.9	77	54.2
9	349	192	55.0	72	37.5	193	55.3	115	59.5
10	253	42	16.6	11	36.1	43	16.9	26	60.4
11	144	110	76.3	39	35.4	111	77.0	58	52.2
12	146	10	6.8	6	60.0	10	6.8	9	90.0
Total	1997	914	55.7	352	38.5	917	55.9	497	54.1



West Virginia Dept. of Education State Assessments					
		Science		Social Studies	
Class	Enroll	Tested	Prof %	Tested	Prof %
PK					
K					
1					
2					
3	20,443	20,356	84	20,370	77
4	20,564	20,456	80	20,477	74
5	20,901	20,776	82	20,795	74
6	21,773	21,555	81	21,580	66
7	22,524	22,231	79	22,247	60
8	21,910	21,910	82	21,585	63
9					
10	19,288	19,288	85		
11					
12					
Total		145,771	82	127,054	69

West Virginia Department of Education Out-of-Home Care Children									
		Science				Social Std			
Class	Enroll	Tested	%	Prof	%	Tested	%	Prof	%
PK	75								
K	94								
1	109								
2	80								
3	82	7	8.5	3	42.8	7	8.5	3	42.8
4	93	80	89.2	46	57.5	82	88.1	44	53.6
5	108	95	86.1	55	57.8	95	87.9	48	50.5
6	111	90	84.6	51	56.6	91	81.9	41	45.0
7	161	138	87.5	72	52.1	135	83.8	48	35.5
8	192	144	73.9	73	50.6	143	74.4	35	24.4
9	349	191	55.3	112	58.6	190	54.4	58	30.5
10	253	41	16.9	26	63.4	5	1.9	5	100.0
11	144	109	77.0	71	65.1		0.0		0.0
12	146	10	6.8	8	80.0		0.0		0.0
Total	1997	905	55.9	517	57.1	748	45.6	282	37.7

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