

STATE OF WISCONSIN
Department of Health and Family Services
Division of Children and Family Services

To: Area Administrators/Assistant Area Administrators
Bureau Directors
County Departments of Community Programs Directors
County Departments of Developmental Disabilities Services Directors
County Departments of Human Services Directors
County Departments of Social Services Directors
Section Chiefs/Licensing Chiefs
Tribal Chairpersons/Human Services Facilitators

From: Susan Dreyfus
Administrator

Re: High School Completion for Youth in Out-of-Home Care (OHC) Placements

Education is vital to successful functioning in the adult world; however, youths living in out-of-home care are completing high school at significantly lower rates than youths who were not placed outside of their homes. Education is a key target area of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Chafee Act). The Chafee Act provides funds to develop and provide independent living services and supports to youths and their families. To evaluate the success level of these efforts, the Division is participating in a multi-state evaluation being conducted by Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. This evaluation will not only produce important information about educational outcomes for youths, but also will help meet Federal reporting requirements of the Chafee Act.

The June 2000 report, *Independent Living for Children in Out-of-Home Care*, was instrumental in the development of the federal Chafee Act and in shaping Wisconsin's independent living services. The report finds that youths interviewed while living in out-of-home care were optimistic in their educational aspirations; 79% of youth indicated that they desired to enter college. However, at 12-18 months after leaving care, only 55% had completed high school and only 9% had entered college. With help, encouragement and better coordination between systems, we believe we can positively impact the educational achievements of our youth.

Our first priority is to ensure that youths in foster care receive their high school diploma while they are in out-of-home care. Out-of-home care placements can be extended until the youth is 19 years old if he or she is still in high school. However, for youths who are multiple grade levels behind and it becomes quite clear that high school graduation is not possible, several options are available in local school districts to help youth work on high school completion. The Division of Children and Family Services and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) are working together to help youth, their families, foster parents and child welfare professionals become aware of and utilize these options where appropriate. We recommend that youths, their caregiver(s), the child welfare system and appropriate school officials be involved in making the determination that high school graduation is not possible. **Please help with this important effort by identifying youth that are at risk of not completing high school and connecting them to the programs and people who can help them finish their high school education.**

The following lists describe several options for completing high school and provide resource and contact information. The DPI website offers many documents that can assist the school, the family and the youth to develop a plan for completing high school.

- Youth in foster care who are at high risk of not completing high school may be eligible for a waiver to take a high school equivalency test early. To request consideration for a situational waiver, individual

appeals must be submitted to DPI where the youth's eligibility for testing early will be determined. For more information, contact DPI staff listed at the end of this letter.

- For special education students the DPI Bulletin 01.02: High School graduation and Students with Disabilities is available at DPI.
- Accessing alternative education programs at the district level is also an option for students who are struggling. For information on alternative education programs a policy and information advisory is available from DPI .
- Sometimes students need or want to access programs at a technical college or community based organization. The student's school status drives the program they can access. A question and answer document, "Contracting with Technical Colleges and Other Ways to Complete High School," is available at DPI.
- Students who are in good academic standing may qualify for the Youth Options Program during their 11th and 12th grade years. Youth Options offers an opportunity for students to take classes at a technical college, private college, tribal college or through the UW-System for both high school and college credit. Information on youth options can be accessed at the high school or through DPI
- The best source of information for any of the programs mentioned above is the local high school. After checking with the school district, information may also be obtained through the appropriate DPI contacts:

GED/HSED: <http://dpi.wi.gov/ged>

Special Education
and Transition: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/topics/transition>

Alternative Education
Children at Risk and Youth Options <http://dpi.wi.gov/alternative-education>

DCFS Central Office Contact
Independent Living Coordinator 608-422-6990
Kinship Care Specialist: 608-422-6921

MEMO WEB SITE: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy>

Thank you for doing all you can to see that youths in out-of-home care are on the right track for their adult lives.