

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Child Abuse & Neglect

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/chiabuneg

“Every child that is a foster child is marked from the beginning”: The home-school communication experiences of foster parents of children with disabilities

Carolyn B. Mires^{a,*}, David L. Lee^b, David McNaughton^c

^a Department of Special Education, Bridgewater State University, Hart Hall, Room 220, 90 Burrill Avenue, Bridgewater, MA 02325, United States

^b The Pennsylvania State University, 215 CEDAR Building, University Park, PA 16802-3109, United States

^c 227A CEDAR Building, Department of Educational and School Psychology and Special Education, and Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, 16802, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Foster care
Education
Disabilities
Adolescents
Family

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the perceptions of foster parents of children with disabilities concerning their interactions with school personnel. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 7 foster parents of 6 children with disabilities (age range = 5–16). A qualitative analysis of the interviews resulted in the identification of five thematic areas, including foster parent perceptions of: (a) the role of the foster parent, (b) the efficacy of the foster parent in helping the child learn, (c) invitations to involvement from the school (d) invitations to involvement from the child, and (e) foster child experiences in the school system. Marked differences were found in the perceptions of the perceptions in foster parents of elementary and secondary age students.

It is clear that foster parents who take on an active role in their child's education experienced positive relationships with their child's school. Foster parents who take a passive role in their partnerships with the schools experienced increased difficulty maintaining motivation to continue in their efforts to increase collaboration and involvement with the schools. They indicated a sense of anger, distrust, and even hostility towards the schools. Based on the findings, recommendations are provided for improving home-school relationships, and addressing obstacles to successful school partnerships with foster families.

In 2012, an estimated 400, 000 children received foster care services in the United States (AFCARS Report, 2013). Most children (approximately 61%) enter foster care because of neglect or child abuse by their birth parents. The number of children placed in foster care in the United States has increased rapidly over the past 15 years (AFCARS Report, 2013) and results in spending of seven billion dollars annually (Smith, Leve, & Chamberlain, 2011).

Many children in foster care not only have experienced trauma in their original home, but they also frequently experience challenges in school. On average, foster children have lower GPAs than peers, earn fewer credits towards graduation, have lower scores on state testing, and experience more restrictive special education placements (Geenen & Powers, 2006). They also have higher school dropout rates than their peers (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006), and are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled due to negative behaviors (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2006). In part as a result of these negative experiences during critical years of development, foster children frequently enter adult life with limited financial resources, poor community connections, and minimal help from their foster family (Care, 1999; Carroll & Bishop, 2002;

* Corresponding author at: Bridgewater State University, Department of Special Education, 225 Hart Hall, 90 Burrill Avenue, Bridgewater, MA 02325, United States.
E-mail addresses: CarolynMires@gmail.com (C.B. Mires), davidlee@psu.edu (D.L. Lee), Dbm2@psu.edu (D. McNaughton).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.07.023>

Received 2 January 2017; Received in revised form 27 July 2017; Accepted 28 July 2017

0145-2134/© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Gennan & Powers, 2006). A national study of former foster children, ages 18–24, found that 2.5–4 years after leaving care, 30% were receiving public assistance, 50% had used illegal drugs, and 25% were homeless (Westat, 1991).

1. Foster caregivers and education

Research has shown the positive impact of home-school partnerships on children achieving successful adult outcomes (Mapp, 2002). Teacher-family relationships are at risk for foster families, however, for four major reasons: (a) high rates of school mobility; (b) lack of important historical knowledge about the child (for both the foster parent and the school); (c) inconsistent advocacy and oversight of the child's education; and (d) poor communication between parents and teachers (Walker & Smithgall, 2009).

The limited research to date provides some evidence that foster parents often struggle with the many challenges associated with being a foster parent. Foster parents are less likely to be involved in the child's education compared with parents raising their biological children (Blome, 1997; Mantilla, 2012), and are often more concerned with the management of behavioral issues than the provision of educational support (Coulling, 2000; Finkelstein, Wamsley, & Miranda, 2002; Mantilla, 2012; Palladino, 2006).

2. Foster children with disabilities

The development of strong home school relationships is especially important for foster children because they frequently require specialized services. It has been estimated that 30%–40% of foster care children receive special education services, and these children demonstrated significantly poorer academic and social outcomes than their peers in foster care who did not have disabilities (Geenen & Powers, 2006). Despite the large number of children in foster care with disabilities receiving services, little is known about how best to address their needs within the special education system (Geenen & Powers, 2006). Incomplete reporting of student records, inadequate research on specific academic skill sets, and limited numbers of studies reporting school behavior limit understanding of the challenges of providing services for this population, and further hinder the development of targeted intervention programs (Trout et al., 2008).

One special area of potential concern for children with disabilities in foster care is continuity of service delivery (White, Carrington, & Freeman, 1990). Smooth coordination of service delivery, which requires communication between caregivers and the children's schools, is a key component of educational programs for students with disabilities (White et al., 1990). Children within the foster care system, however, frequently move between schools and school districts, creating potential disruptions for service delivery (White et al., 1990). Research results indicate that although 39% of youth in foster care had individualized education plans (IEPs), only 16% actually received the mandated special education services (White et al., 1990).

One potential reason for the lack of school service may be that students in foster care often lack effective parental advocacy (Geenen & Powers, 2006). Educating a child with a disability requires teamwork between the family and the school. For the protections in the law to work effectively, every child with a disability or who is thought to have a disability must have a “parent” who can act on her behalf. It is the “parent” to whom the school must send notice of meetings and proposals; who attends meetings and makes decisions about what is best for the child; and who can use mediation or the special education hearing system to resolve problems. Different states have varying processes for identifying whether the foster parent can fill this roll, or if the rights to make educational decisions remain with the birth parent. In Pennsylvania, where this study was conducted, when a child is in foster care, the birth parents make special education decisions for their child in foster care – but only if the birth parent is active in the process. If the birth parent is not responding to notices from the school, is not attending special education meetings, or tells the child welfare agency that she is not interested in playing this role, the foster parent can step in and perform the job. The foster parent is also the “parent” if no one knows where the birth family is living, a court has terminated the parents' rights, or the birth or adoptive parents have died.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 101–476) requires that an educational advocate, or surrogate parent, must be chosen in a timely fashion when a biological parent isn't available. However, a consistently involved advocate for foster children in special education often does not exist (Geenen & Powers, 2006). Although foster parents should serve as the educational advocates, 90% of foster parents reported that they had no involvement in the special education process (Advocates for Children of New York, 2000; Geenen & Powers, 2006). Without parental advocacy, the implementation of IDEA in the educational process of foster children is at risk (Ferguson, Grant, Horwood, & Ridder, 2006; Luetke-Stahlman & Hayes, 1994; Rice, 2006).

Supporting effective biological or foster parent involvement is a multi-faceted challenge. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) suggested that parent involvement is based on four major factors: (a) Parental *role construction* for involvement (Do parents believe they *should* be involved?), (b) Parental *efficacy* for helping the child learn (Do parents believe that their involvement *will make a difference*?), (c) Parental perception of *invitations* to involvement from the school (Do parents believe that the school *wants* their involvement?) and (d) Parental perceptions of *invitations* to involvement from the child (Do parents believe that the child *want or needs* their involvement?) (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005).

Role Construction Theory suggests that these four key parent beliefs function as a motivator of parental involvement, because they enable the parent to imagine, anticipate, plan, and behave in relation to a host of activities potentially relevant to the child's educational success. An understanding of parent opinions on these issues is important because they define the range of activities that parents construe as important, necessary, and permissible for their own engagement in their children's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Researchers have suggested that these beliefs will ultimately will guide parent behavior (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6832129>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6832129>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)