

**THE SCHOOL BOARD OF BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT**

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January 29, 2003

TO: School Board Members

FROM: Katherine Blasik, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent
Office of Research and Evaluation

VIA: Frank Till
Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: FOSTER CARE RESEARCH BRIEF

Research Services has completed an exploratory study of characteristics of students who had been placed in foster care. Data analyses included examination of demographic characteristics, twentieth day enrollment, promotion, and academic achievement as indicated by performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

Findings indicated that Black students were most likely to be placed in foster care. Foster care students were more likely to be classified for Exceptional Student Education and eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. They were less likely to be identified as Limited English Proficient. Foster care students began the school year late. In terms of academic achievement, foster care students were more likely to be retained within grade at the end of the previous school year. Foster care students also registered lower scores on standardized achievement tests when compared to non-foster care students.

The analyses described in the attached research brief were limited by the information that was available for identifying foster care students. The available data was insufficient to track students as they entered and exited foster care. Therefore, analyses were restricted to a description of present foster care participants.

Questions or comments concerning the contents of this research brief should be addressed to me at 954 760-7343 or Dr. Cary Sutton, Director, Research Services, 954 765-6750.

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Attachment

Cc: Senior Management
Area Directors



Research Brief

Number 67

Report from the Office of the Superintendent

January 2003

An Examination of Students Participating in the Foster Care Program

When the home environment fails a child and long-term situations arise that are likely to negatively affect their development or safety, the child may be placed in foster care. The child identified for foster care is removed from their home and placed under the care of state-appointed guardians. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the government agency responsible for ensuring the welfare of children in foster care and placing them appropriately as needed. This disruption in the child's life may impact their academic endeavors. An examination of Broward County Public School (BCPS) students identified as foster care recipients was conducted in order to determine their demographics and academic achievement as compared to the districtwide complement of students. Of concern was the possibility that children in foster care do not achieve the same levels of academic success as non-foster care students.

The analyses described herein focus on the students identified as participating in foster care during the 2002-03 school year and for whom student data was available. Demographic and twentieth day enrollment data were provided for all students. Academic achievement as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) during the 2000-01 and 2001-02 school years, and promotion rates following the 2001-02 school year are also provided. Although data were limited to the school year 2002-03 foster care students, these students may or may not have participated in foster care during either 2001 or 2002. Without access to historical data files, verification of foster care participation in those years was not possible.

Method

The Department of Children and Families provided an electronic data file to BCPS via Educational Technology Services (ETS) that identified students participating in DCF programs. A preliminary examination of data available in the Data Warehouse revealed limitations of the available data. The existing data did not accurately identify when students entered or left foster care, nor did these data distinguish foster care participants from participants in other DCF programs. Actions were taken to rectify this situation. Personnel from ETS and DCF cooperated to create an electronic roster of foster care participants during the 2003 school year. This file was forwarded to Research Services

for data analysis purposes. This electronic roster identified a total of 1,030 individuals who participated in foster care. However, upon examination, it was discovered that no recent enrollment data was found for 118 of these individuals. These 118 students may not have been listed in BCPS data warehouse due to attendance at private school, a public school in an adjacent school district, Broward Community College, or they were over the age of 16 and refusing to attend school. Historical data files detailing foster care participation during the 2001 and 2002 school years were also to be provided. However, these anticipated data files were not available at the time this research brief was prepared.

Data for the remaining 912 students identified as being in foster care were extracted from the BCPS Data Warehouse. Data for these students were compared with data describing the total complement of BCPS students enrolled in grades pre-kindergarten through 12 during the 2003 school year.

Results

Demographics

Table 1 displays 2002-03 enrollment data by grade level. Foster care students were uniformly enrolled across all grade levels with variation within a range of .2% to .6% at each grade level.

Table 1
2002-03 Foster Care Students by Grade Level

Grade	Non-Foster Care		Foster Care		Total
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
PK	6,590	99.4	43	0.6	6,633
KG	19,958	99.8	40	0.2	19,998
1	20,907	99.8	46	0.2	20,953
2	20,957	99.8	49	0.2	21,006
3	21,282	99.7	54	0.3	21,336
4	21,440	99.7	67	0.3	21,507
5	21,493	99.7	67	0.3	21,560
6	22,217	99.7	70	0.3	22,287
7	22,253	99.6	80	0.4	22,333
8	21,639	99.6	79	0.4	21,718
9	27,370	99.5	145	0.5	27,515
10	16,721	99.6	70	0.4	16,791
11	17,263	99.8	41	0.2	17,304
12	15,285	99.8	32	0.2	15,317
Adult	*	*	29	100.0	29
Total	275,375	99.7	912	0.3	276,287

*Non-Foster Adult Students were not tracked for this brief as the key academic progress criteria were not applicable to adult students.

Table 2 shows the number and percentage of foster care students by ethnicity, as compared to the number and percentage of total students in district. Black students were over represented in foster care, as they comprised 61.5% of all students in foster care, while they represented only 36% of

all students in the district. This pattern indicated that Black students were more likely to be placed in foster care than were students of any other ethnic group. The table also shows that the percentage of Asian, Hispanic, and White participants in the foster care program were disproportionately low as compared to their percentages in the district. Percentages of Multi-ethnic and Native American students in foster care were similar to enrollments within the district.

Table 3 shows the distribution of foster care students by gender. The gender composition of foster care students was similar to the composition of students overall at the district level.

Table 4 details the number and percent of foster care and district students classified as Exceptional Student Education (ESE), Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL), and Limited English Proficient (LEP). The percentage of students participating in foster care who were classified as ESE was 45.9%, over three times greater than the district student population. This demonstrated that a larger proportion of foster care

students were identified as having special educational needs. The percentage of foster care students who were classified for FRL was 73.1%, nearly twice the proportion of the district student population. However, this figure cannot be interpreted as indicating that

Table 2
Foster Care Students by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Foster Care		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Asian	2	0.2	8,059	2.9
Black	561	61.5	99,354	36.0
Hispanic	58	6.4	61,177	22.1
Multi-ethnic	18	2.0	5,149	1.9
Native American	2	0.2	827	0.3
White	271	29.7	101,721	36.8

Table 3
Foster Care Students by Gender

Gender	Foster Care		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Female	429	47.0	133,060	48.2
Male	483	53.0	143,227	51.8

Table 4
Foster Care Student Special Program Status

Status	Foster Care		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
NonESE	493	54.1	238,255	86.2
ESE	419	45.9	38,032	13.8
NonFRL	245	26.9	168,522	61.0
FRL	667	73.1	107,765	39.0
NonLEP	882	96.7	244,979	88.7
LEP	30	3.3	31,308	11.3

foster care students originate from low socioeconomic families due to the fact that foster care students automatically qualify for FRL status. However, the percentage of foster care participants who were identified as LEP was less (3.3%) than the proportion of LEP students in the general population (11.3%). This indicated that students who were not proficient or fluent English speakers were less likely to be placed into a foster care program. The ESE and FRL data suggested that foster care students may face greater educational and financial hardships than their non-foster care classmates.

Table 5 shows the number of foster care students versus all students enrolled by the twentieth day of the school year. The data indicated that foster care students were three times more likely to not be enrolled by the twentieth day.

Table 5
Foster Care Student Twentieth Day Enrollment for 2002-03

Status	Foster Care		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Not Present	113	12.4	10,205	3.7
Present	799	87.6	266,082	96.3

Table 6 details the promotion and retention rates for students transitioning from the 2001-02 to the 2002-03 school year. These rates were calculated by examining actual grade placement in school year 2002-03 versus grade placement in the preceding year. Only students enrolled in BCPS during both school years were included in this analysis. The data indicated that foster care students were more likely to be retained than non-foster care students. The foster care retention rate was three times higher than for non-foster care students.

Table 6
Foster Care Student Promotion/Retention Rates Following School Year 2001-02

Status	Foster Care		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Retained	152	20.6	14,898	7.0
Promoted	585	79.4	199,224	93.0

Table 7 details student performance on the 2001 and 2002 administrations of the FCAT Sunshine State Standards Test in mathematics and reading. The 2003 administration of the FCAT had not occurred as of the time these analyses were conducted. The results indicated that a higher percentage of students identified as being in foster care in 2003 scored at the lower achievement levels than did non-foster care students on both the mathematics and reading sections of the test in each of the years examined. Foster care students were more likely to register scores in achievement level 1 than in any other achievement level. Whereas more than half of the foster care students scored in achievement level 1 (54.3% - 59.9%), non-foster care students registered a more uniform distribution of scores from achievement levels 1 through 4. However, historical data regarding foster care enrollment were not available; therefore, it was not known whether these students were in foster care at the time of testing.

Table 7
Foster Care Student Performance on the FCAT-SSS

		Achievement Level					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Mathematics 2002							
Non-Foster	<i>n</i>	35,180	32,595	41,951	28,114	12,808	150,648
	%	23.4	21.6	27.8	18.7	8.5	100.0
Foster	<i>n</i>	254	122	67	22	3	468
	%	54.3	26.1	14.3	4.7	0.6	100.0
Mathematics 2001							
Non-Foster	<i>n</i>	32,971	28,043	35,029	23,393	10,568	130,004
	%	25.4	21.6	26.9	18.0	8.1	100.0
Foster	<i>n</i>	252	89	59	20	1	421
	%	59.9	21.1	14.0	4.8	0.2	100.0
Reading 2002							
Non-Foster	<i>n</i>	43,933	32,815	41,811	24,815	7,574	150,948
	%	29.1	21.7	27.7	16.4	5.0	100.0
Foster	<i>n</i>	268	111	82	13	2	476
	%	56.3	23.3	17.2	2.7	0.4	100.0
Reading 2001							
Non-Foster	<i>n</i>	39,232	28,233	35,441	20,220	7,053	130,179
	%	30.1	21.7	27.2	15.5	5.4	100.0
Foster	<i>n</i>	244	87	72	13	6	422
	%	57.8	20.6	17.1	3.1	1.4	100.0

Table 8 summarizes student performance on the 2001 and 2002 administrations of the FCAT Norm-Referenced Test as mean normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores. The 2003 administration of the FCAT had not occurred as of the time these analyses were conducted. As shown in the table, foster care students registered lower scores than did non-foster care students on both the mathematics and reading sections of these tests. These results were consistent across all grade levels in both years.

Table 8
Foster Care Student Performance on the FCAT NRT

Year	Test	Foster Care		Total	
		<i>n</i>	Mean NCE	<i>n</i>	Mean NCE
2002	Mathematics	549	43.4	185,318	59.2
	Reading	549	41.2	185,155	53.8
2001	Mathematics	523	40.4	164,401	58.3
	Reading	520	40.2	163,886	53.9

Discussion

Data provided by DCF limited the scope of possible analyses for the present study. Only students who were participants in foster care during the first semester of the 2002-03 school year were included in these analyses. Students who had entered or left the foster care program since the creation of the electronic roster were not reflected in the present analyses. Foster care participation status during the prior school year could not be discerned from the existent data files. Despite these limitations, descriptive information for current foster care students was examined.

The majority of students who participated in foster care were Black (61.5%). Foster care students were also more likely to be classified as ESE and eligible for FRL when compared with the general population of BCPS students. However, they were less likely to be classified as LEP.

Foster care programs serve students from problematic home environments. Students from such environments are likely to exhibit other problems related to education, such as enrolling in school late and lower test scores. In the current analyses, foster care students were more likely to have enrolled in school after the twentieth day. Additionally, they registered lower standardized test scores than their non-foster counterparts. They were also less likely to be promoted to the next grade level.

The described relationships of foster care placement with demographic and academic factors do not indicate whether any of these conditions have contributed to, or have arisen from, the foster care placement. Yet, this preliminary investigation indicates that foster care students display characteristics of struggling or at-risk students. Should accurate historical data files detailing foster care enrollment in previous years become available, additional detailed study of demographic and academic information may prove useful to identifying special needs for the education of these students.

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