

### An Evaluation of the Northwest County Collaborative: Our Children Succeed Initiative

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the associated effect of Minnesota's Northwest Counties' Our Children Succeed Initiative (OSCI) as it relates to children's educational outcomes and out-of-home placement experiences..

#### METHODS

Through Minn-LInK, children's education records (MDE Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System [MARSS] and Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment [MCA-II]) were linked to human service records (DHS Social Service Information System [SSIS]), and OCSI records to create five groups for the purposes of this study (See Figure 1):

**Group 1:** NW Counties' children's mental health (CMH, n=767)

**Group 2:** NW Counties' out-of-home placement (OHP, n=339)

**Group 3:** NW Counties' OHP & CMH (n=78)

**Group 4:** Our Children Succeed Initiative (n=67)

**Group 5:** OCSI Comparison (n=67)

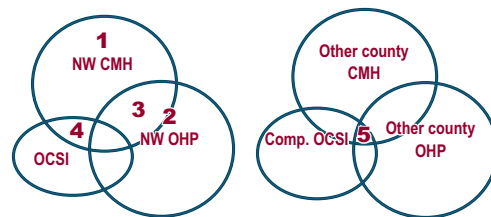
#### OUR CHILDREN SUCCEED INITIATIVE

Out-of-home placement (OHP) affects many children and is a serious and complex issue for families and systems that serve them. Children in OHP and their families often deal with multiple issues and are engaged in multiple systems (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, disability). Compounded challenges and lack of coordinated efforts across systems put children in OHP at risk for poor mental health, education and other well-being outcomes.

A system of care framework is one approach to help youth and their families with co-occurring issues. In 2006, the Our Children Succeed Initiative (OCSI) was implemented in a collaborative of six counties in Northwest Minnesota. OCSI parallels identified goals of the system of care model, which are to increase coordinated and comprehensive delivery of children's mental health services in a family-driven, youth-focused and culturally competent way. OCSI is a partnership children, youth, parents and caregivers who promote competent and coordinated services designed to enhance access to, and the effectiveness of, services for children and youth with social, emotional and behavioral concerns and their families in Northwestern Minnesota (Northwest Counties Council of Collaboratives, 2012).

To examine OSCI's impact on educational outcomes and children's out-of-home placement experiences, educational outcomes (e.g., attendance, drop out, special education) and OHP experiences (e.g., number of placement episodes, placement settings, length of placement) were compared across five groups (Figure 1). Chi square and ANOVA tests were used to investigate group differences.

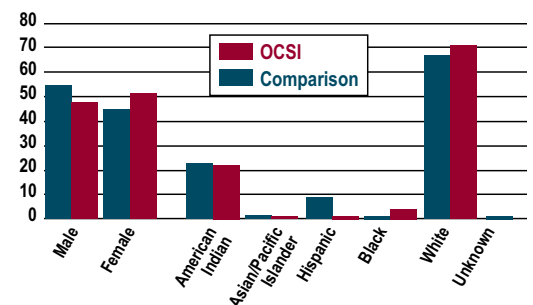
Figure 1: Group membership



#### FINDINGS

**Youth characteristics.** Although there were slight differences in demographic characteristics, the OCSI and comparison group were generally comparable to one another (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Youth characteristics



**Education outcomes.** Over time, there was a decrease in educational outcomes for children in both the OCSI and Comparison groups; attendance and MCA-II proficiency rates decreased while mobility increased (see Figures 3 and 4). Comparison group children attended school at significantly higher rates than OCSI children, but other group differences were non-significant. Trends revealed that (in general) children who experienced out-of-home placement appeared to be more likely to experience school mobility and lower MCA-II proficiency. Utilization of special education services was very high for the OCSI (69%) and Comparison (58%) groups; however, utilization rates were highest for children who experienced out-of-home placement (81% and 60% for OCSI and Comparison groups, respectively).

**Out-of-home placements.** Children in the OCSI group experienced the fewest placement episodes, shortest lengths of placement, and highest placement instability than children in other groups. OCSI children also tended to be placed in more restrictive placements than children in other groups. Children in the Comparison group experienced less restrictiveness in regard to placement settings than the OCSI group, but had longer and more placements than the OCSI group. Children in the OHP group experienced moderate placement

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- High rates of school mobility and placement disruptions coupled with declining attendance suggest a need for providing coordinated care, with high levels of efficient and effective communication across the range of multiple systems engaging children and their families. This is especially important within children's educational systems as children who move between schools may experience instability and disruption in their learning. Coordinated services and effective communication could be helpful in ensuring a continuity of educational services and in improving academic achievement.
- To ensure effective collaboration and coordinated service delivery, increased training and cross-training of systems must continue to be a top priority.
- To be able to fully comprehend the complex issues research is needed to analyze the relationship between system level variables such as quality of schools where children are attending and children's educational well-being. There is a need for special policies for supporting students who experience out-of-home placements. To minimize disruption in their learning, schools must ensure timeliness in enrollment and transfer of credits and records.
- Multi-level (school, families, communities, other systems) support systems should be established to help students perform well academically.

Figure 3: Attendance rates and school mobility

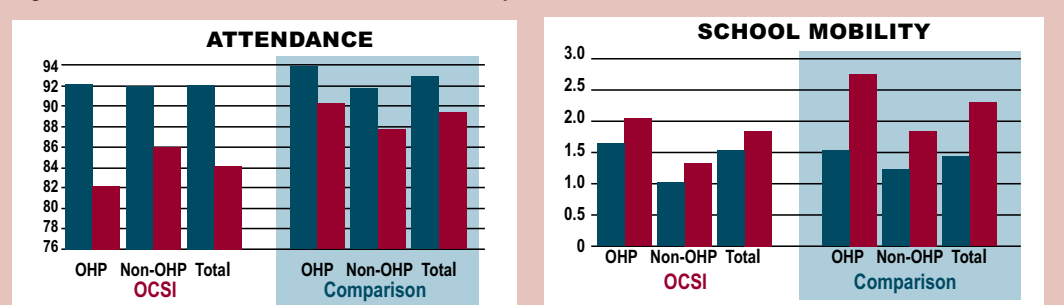


Figure 4: Reading and math scores

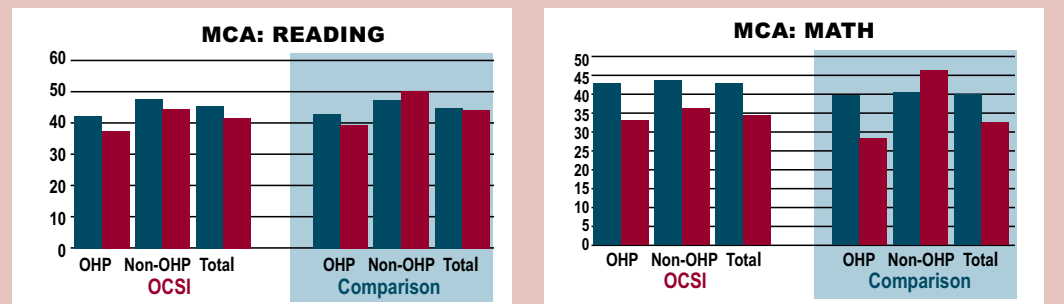


Table 1: Out-of-home placement experience

Indicator	OHP	OHP & CMH	OCSI	Comparison
Avg. # Placement Episodes per Person	1.8	1.5	1.4	1.8
Avg. # Days per Placement Episode	408.7	425.3	340.0	613.9
Avg # Placement Settings per Placement Episode	2.2	2.7	3.5	2.8
Avg. # days per Placement Setting (Overall)	181.9	58.8	97.6	220.6
Placement Setting Type**				
Pre-adoptive home - relative and non-relative	9.8%	0.8%	0.2%	0.0%
Foster family home - relative, non-relative and corporate/shift staff	69.8%	63.1%	59.4%	91.4%
Group home	5.5%	6.8%	6.2%	7.1%
Residential treatment center	6.9%	13.2%	10.8%	1.2%
Supervised independent living	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Juvenile correctional facility	7.8%	16.0%	23.4%	0.2%

stability and the least restrictive placements of any other groups. Children in the OHP & CMH group also experienced moderate levels of out-of-home indicators; this group was most similar to the OCSI group (see Table 1).

### LIMITATIONS

This study relied on administrative data which limits the type and availability of data. The data used was at the child level, limiting the ability to look at associations with parent level, as well as system level variables. Lack of juvenile justice

data for the children and youth in the OCSI and when creating the comparison group further limits the analysis due to high levels of juvenile justice participation for the children and youth served by OCSI.

For the original full report and complete list of references, visit the CASCW web site at <http://cascw.umn.edu> and follow the link to Minn-LInK.

The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) is a resource for child welfare professionals, students, faculty, policy-makers, and other key stakeholders concerned about child welfare in Minnesota. Minn-LInK is a unique collaborative, university-based research environment with the express purpose of studying child and family well being in Minnesota using state administrative data from multiple agencies.

For more information, contact Kristine Piescher at 612-625-8169 or email at [kpiesche@umn.edu](mailto:kpiesche@umn.edu)