

### REPORT BRIEF

## Educational Outcomes of Children in Families Receiving Assistance from the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

*To explore the status of children from families with varying levels of TANF participation by examining a set of educational outcomes that have been shown to be important indicators of child well-being.*

### BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 changed the historical orientation of poverty policies in the United States. PRWORA was philosophically oriented towards work and set forth requirements that involved lifetime program receipt time limits and sanctions for non-adherence. It also allowed states to design their own programs and regulations.

In Minnesota, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) is administered via the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) which mirrors the national TANF policy goal of getting participant families on the road to unsubsidized employment and departure from the program (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2012). MFIP provides limited (60 months or less) cash and food assistance to families with children and to pregnant women and their spouses.

.....  
**WHILE CAREGIVER AND FAMILY OUTCOMES DEMAND ATTENTION, THE EXAMINATION OF CHILD WELL-BEING IS A CRITICAL ASPECT IN UNDERSTANDING TANF'S POTENTIAL TO AMELIORATE GENERATIONAL POVERTY.**  
.....

Much attention has been devoted to understanding the impact of TANF on caregiver and family outcomes (i.e., Cancian, Havenman, Meyer & Wolfe, 2002; Dworky & Courtney, 2007; Lee, 2009; London, Scott, Edin & Hunter, 2004); less attention has been given to understanding the well-being of children. While caregiver and family outcomes demand attention, the examination of child well-being is a critical

aspect in understanding TANF's potential to ameliorate generational poverty. The aim of this study was to explore the status of children from families with varying lengths of TANF participation by examining a set of educational outcomes that are important indicators of child well-being. This study addressed the following questions:

- 1) Do children whose families have received MFIP for varying lengths of time have differential educational outcomes?*
- 2) Are children whose families have received MFIP for varying lengths of time differentially involved in special education?*
- 3) Do children whose families received MFIP have different levels of academic achievement than comparable children who are not on assistance? If so, what factors are associated with these outcomes?*



## METHODS

To compare the educational well-being of children whose families' received varying lengths of MFIP support to children whose families did not receive MFIP, children's education records were linked to their human service records. Four groups were created: **Grade 3 MFIP, Grade 8 MFIP, Grade 3 Non-MFIP, and Grade 8 Non-MFIP.** Groups were combined to make comparisons regarding the length of MFIP receipt.

Through Minn-LInK, the Minnesota Department of Human Service (DHS) Social Service Information System (SSIS) data, containing information on MFIP and child welfare service receipt, were linked to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS) and Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment II (MCA II) data. Four groups were created for this study. MFIP cohort groups consisted of children in grades 3 or 8, respectively, during the 2005-06 academic year. (See Table 1.) Propensity score matching was used to produce comparison groups of children whose families did not receive MFIP assistance but whose characteristics were similar to those in the MFIP groups (based on school, grade, child race/ethnicity, gender, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) status, free/reduced lunch eligibility, and 2005-2006 special education receipt and academic achievement levels). Outcome measures included school attendance (> 90% annual attendance rate), school mobility (changing schools in an academic year), IEP/special education service receipt, dropout, and reading and math achievement (proficiency on MCA-II assessments). Other indicators used in analysis included length of MFIP receipt (none, 1-24 months, 25-47 months, 48 or more), total cash assistance since 1992 (months), caregiver race/ethnicity, number of caregivers, and experiencing determined maltreatment or out-of-home placement. Forward stepwise logistic regression was used to analyze relationships among indicators and outcome measures.

**Table 1: MFIP cohort demographic characteristics**

		Grade 3		Grade 8	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Gender	Male	1415	49.1	1389	48.5
	Female	1467	50.9	1475	51.5
	Total	2882	100.0	2864	100.0
Months on MFIP	1-24	1261	43.8	1327	46.3
	25-47	653	22.7	621	21.7
	48 or more	968	33.6	916	32.0
Cash assistance since 1992	0-18	1103	38.3	1177	41.1
	19-42	636	22.1	632	22.1
	43-85	1142	39.6	1054	36.8
	86 or more	1	0.0	1	0.0
Child only MFIP	No	1886	65.4	1580	55.2
	Yes	996	34.6	1284	44.8

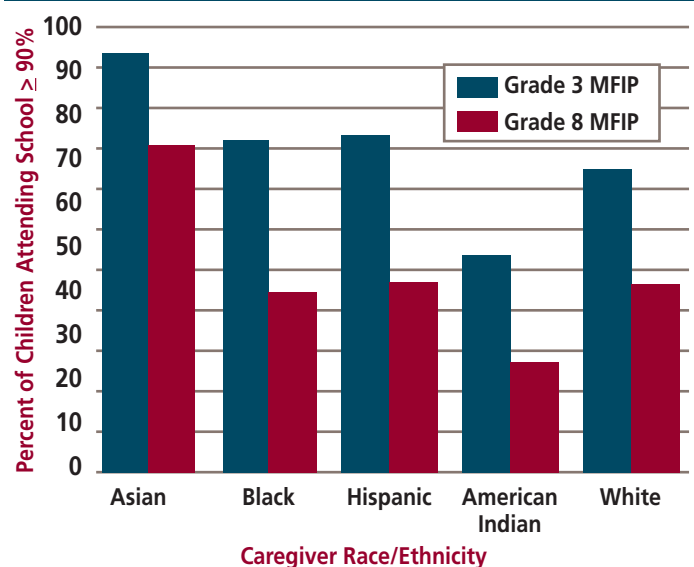
## FINDINGS

Overall, findings do not demonstrate consistent, differential relationships between receiving MFIP for varying lengths of time and children's educational well-being. Associations between varying lengths of MFIP receipt and children's educational outcomes (including attendance, school mobility, and dropout) were non-significant. However, receiving MFIP for varying lengths of time was significant in predicting young children's proficiency on math and reading tests.

Findings below summarize a complex set of analyses. Full results of analyses can be found in the **MFIP Supplementary Table** (available at <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/research/minnlink/minnlinkpublications.asp>). Further detail is presented in the MFIP manuscript referenced at the end of this brief.

**Attendance:** Length of MFIP receipt was not a significant predictor of attendance. However, grade, caregiver's race/ethnicity and child attendance in 2006 significantly contributed to predicting attendance in 2009. Older children (i.e., grade 8 in 2006) were 1.2 times less likely than children in the younger cohort to attend school at least 90% of the time in 2009. Children who attended school more than 90% of the time in 2006 were more likely to attend school at or above the 90% rate in 2009. Children with Black, Hispanic, or American Indian caregivers were 1.4, 1.4, and 1.6 times, respectively, less likely to attend school at or above the 90% rate in 2009 than children with White caregivers. (See Figure 1.)

**Figure 1. Caregiver Race/Ethnicity and Average Attendance in 2009**



**Mobility:** Length of MFIP receipt was not a significant predictor of mobility. However, grade, caregiver race/ethnicity, out-of-home placement, and school mobility in 2006 were significantly associated with school mobility in 2009. Older children were less likely to experience mobility compared to their grade 3 peers. Children with an Asian/Pacific Islander caregiver were 3.6 times less likely to experience school mobility than children with a White caregiver. Children who experienced out-of-home placement and those who experienced mobility in 2006 were 2.4 and 2.0 times more likely to experience school mobility in 2009 (Figure 2).

**Dropout:** Length of MFIP receipt was not a significant predictor of dropout. However, children who were older, children who experienced out-of-home placement, and children who experienced school mobility in 2009 were 2.1, 2.1, and 4.2 times, respectively, more likely to drop out of school in 2009. 2.3% of all 8th graders who did not experience out-of-home placement dropped out by the time they were in 11th grade whereas 6.6% of their same age peers who experienced out-of-home placement dropped out by 11th grade. Also, children who attended school more than 90% of the time in 2009 were 4.8 times less likely to drop out of school in 2009.

**Special Education Utilization:** Children whose families received MFIP were compared with their same-aged peers who were not receiving MFIP. The proportion of children receiving special education services was higher for children whose families received MFIP than children whose families did not

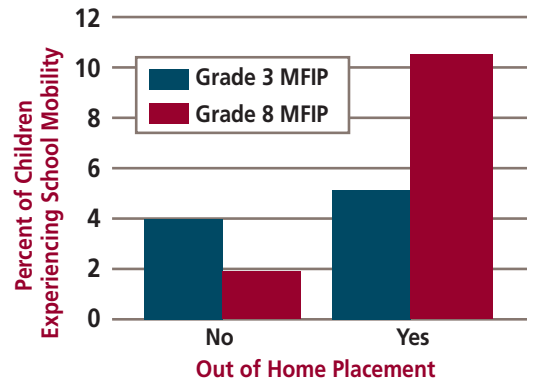
receive MFIP across time points (see Figure 3). As can be seen in Figure 4, the number of children receiving special education increased in 2009 for both cohorts of children whose families received MFIP. However, the increase in the proportion of children receiving special education was much larger for young children whose families received MFIP than for older children whose families received MFIP assistance, as well as compared to those children whose families did not receive MFIP assistance.

.....  
**PROFICIENCY ON THE MCA TEST DECREASED FOR ALL GROUPS OVER TIME. HOWEVER, SIGNIFICANTLY MORE CHILDREN WHOSE FAMILIES DID NOT RECEIVE MFIP WERE PROFICIENT THAN CHILDREN WHOSE FAMILIES RECEIVED MFIP, ESPECIALLY WHEN COMPARED TO CHILDREN WHOSE FAMILIES RECEIVED 48 MONTHS OR MORE OF MFIP.**  
 .....

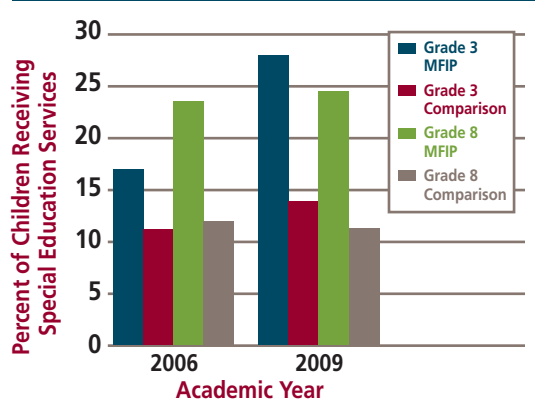
**Academic achievement:** Proficiency on the MCA test decreased for all groups over time. However, significantly more children whose families did not receive MFIP were proficient than children whose families received MFIP, especially when compared to children whose families received 48 months or more of MFIP. Proficiency levels of children whose families received MFIP for less than 24 months or 25-47 months were similar (Figure 4). Proficiency in 2006 and attendance in 2006 promoted proficiency in 2009. However children who experienced mobility were less likely to be proficient in reading and math in 2009.

Overall, findings do not demonstrate consistent, differential relationships between receiving MFIP for varying lengths of time and children's educational well-being. Associations between varying lengths of MFIP receipt and children's educational outcomes (including attendance, school mobility, and dropout) were non-significant. However, receiving MFIP for varying lengths of time was significant in predicting young children's proficiency on math and reading tests.

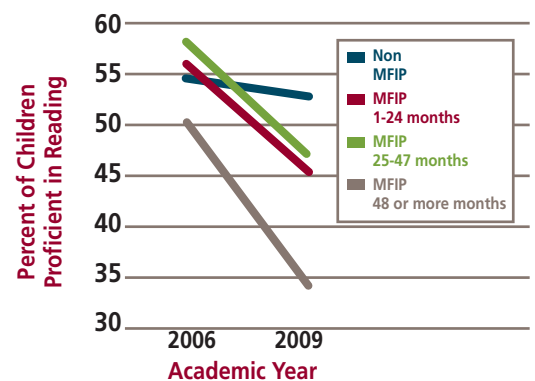
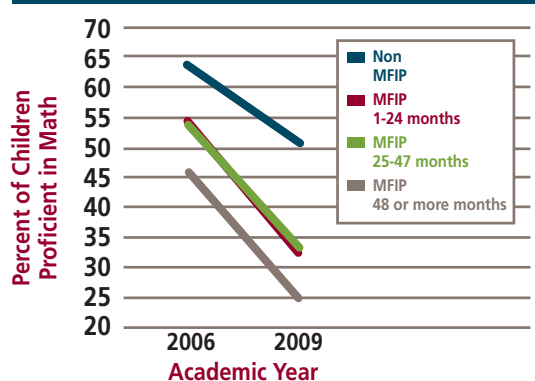
**Figure 2. Out-Of-Home Placement and 2009 School Mobility**



**Figure 3. Proportion of Children Receiving Special Education Services Over Time**



**Figure 4. Proportion of 3rd Grade Children Proficient in Reading and Math Over Time**



## Conclusion

This exploratory study sought to examine the relationship between the length of a family's MFIP receipt and children's educational well-being. Consistent, differential relationships between receiving MFIP for varying lengths of time and children's educational well-being were not found. Receipt of MFIP for varying lengths of time was not significant in predicting older children's math proficiency or attendance, school mobility, and dropout but was significant in predicting young children's reading and math proficiency. Specifically, children whose families received MFIP for shorter periods of time were more likely to be proficient on the MCA II reading test than children whose families received MFIP for 48 months or more. Differences in special education utilization for children whose families received MFIP were also found. The proportion of children receiving special

.....  
**THE UNDERLYING ASSUMPTION BEHIND THIS STUDY IS THAT FAMILIES WHO RECEIVE MFIP ASSISTANCE FOR LONG PERIODS OF TIME ARE LIKELY FACING DIFFERENT CHALLENGES AND HAVE DIFFERENT NEEDS THAN FAMILIES WHO RECEIVE MFIP ASSISTANCE FOR SHORTER PERIODS OF TIME AND THAT THESE DIFFERENCES MAY INFLUENCE CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES.**  
.....

education services was higher for children whose families received MFIP than children whose families did not receive MFIP across time points, and young children whose families received MFIP experienced a greater increase in special education utilization over time than any other group. Other important predictors of child educational well-being found in this study include both parent and child factors. Child age and out-of-home placement experience were predictive of children's educational outcomes, as was caregiver race/ethnicity and prior educational experiences (such as prior attendance levels, achievement, etc.).

The current study is not meant to be interpreted as causal (i.e., the effect of MFIP receipt on children's educational outcomes) but rather exploratory in nature. The underlying assumption

behind this study is that families who receive MFIP assistance for long periods of time are likely facing different challenges and have different needs than families who receive MFIP assistance for shorter periods of time and that these differences may influence children's educational outcomes. This study's findings do not imply that cutting families from MFIP or decreasing the time limits is the solution to the problem of children's lower educational outcomes. Rather, findings show that children and families who exhibit the most critical and longstanding issues, as evidenced by longer uses of MFIP support, are (as would be expected) at increased risk for lower academic success. The findings of this study suggest that based on their poor educational outcomes, children whose families receive MFIP would benefit from additional attention. Therefore, more concentrated and focused attention must be given to these children, the challenges they face, and the opportunities to address them as well as the children whose educational outcome resilience defies statistical norms. Cross-agency collaboration and development of a shared, long-term research agenda would facilitate this extra attention.

### LIMITATIONS

*MFIP counted months rather than actual months were used to measure length of MFIP receipt; months in which families remained "active" on MFIP but did not receive full cash benefits (e.g., received food assistance only) were not counted. Second, variables in this study were not an exhaustive list of the complex factors that could impact children's educational outcomes. Third, this study was a point in time, retrospective study which limited the study's ability to assess causal inference.*

## References

- Cancian, M., Haveman, R. H., Meyer, D. R., & Wolfe, B. (2002). Women leaving welfare. *Social Service Review*, December, 603-641.
- Dworsky, A. & Courtney, M. (2007). Barriers to employment among TANF applicants and the consequences for self-sufficiency. *Families in Society*, 88(3), 379-389.
- Lee, K. (2009). Impact of the 1996 welfare reform on child and family well-being. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 37(5), 602-617.
- London, A. S., Scott, E. K., Edin, K. & Hunter, V. (2004). Welfare reform, work-family tradeoffs, and child well-being. *Family Relations*, 53(2), 148-158.
- Minnesota Department of Human Services (2012). MFIP Extensions. Retrieved from [http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county\\_access/documents/pub/dhs16\\_163820.pdf](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county_access/documents/pub/dhs16_163820.pdf)

**Suggested citation:** Piescher, K., Hong, S., LaLiberte, T., & Carlson, J. (2013). *Educational outcomes of children in families receiving assistance from the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)* (Minn-LInK Brief No. 16). Available at: <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/research/minnlink/minnlinkpublications.asp>

**Manuscript in preparation:** Piescher, K., Hong, S., LaLiberte, T., & Carlson, J. (2013). *An examination of child well-being following welfare reform.*

**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)