Education of Foster Group Home Children, Whose Responsibility Is It?

Study of the Educational Placement of Children Residing in Group Homes

Final Report

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Abstract

Children residing in group homes (or Licensed Children's Institutions—LCIs) are potentially the state's most vulnerable and "at risk" population. For these children, public education is a vital key to successful transition to adulthood. The limited research on outcomes for these children, however, suggests that as a nation we are doing a poor job of preparing them for adulthood. One major study showed that within two to four years after emancipation, 46 percent had not completed high school and 40 percent had been on public assistance or incarcerated. (Bernstein, 2000, p. 67)

In California, however, there are glimmers of hope in regard to reform. These include the passage of Senate Bill 933, the authorization to expand the Countywide Foster Youth Services Program statewide, and the formation of a Stakeholder Group to "revamp the entire child welfare system." These efforts have the potential to assist in assuring the provision of high quality and appropriate educational services to children residing in group homes

This report presents findings and recommendations for two related studies, mandated through the 1998 Budget Act (AB 1656, Section 6110-001-0001, Provision 21) by the California Legislature, regarding the education of children residing in group homes or licensed children's institutions (LCIs) in California. The requirements for this study were to determine a more clearly established count of children in group homes, the practices affecting their education placement, the degree of coordination between education and noneducation agencies, and the impact of these factors on educational outcomes for group home children.

The count of group home children, after matching for the first time two major state databases with information on them, was shown to be 18,416. Of this count, it is estimated that 47 percent are in special education and that 46 percent of these special education students are being educated in nonpublic schools (NPS).

The research methods used to gather information for this study included state data analysis, surveys of staff at involved agencies, site visits, and interviews with students, statewide policy makers, and other interested parties. Findings from all of these research methods suggest that despite some promising beginnings of change in California, a tremendous amount of additional work is needed to bolster education outcomes for children in group homes. One California Department of Education official lamented that educationally they have been treated as "throw away kids." As the state is investing up to $80,000 per year for a group home child, better education outcomes are imperative both for their well being and to ensure responsibility and accountability in the use of tax dollars.

Overall accountability and responsibility need to be more clearly established, interagency coordination and collaboration substantially improved, a viable state-level information system for group home children implemented, system capacity bolstered, and fiscal incentives for educational practices that are not in the best interests of group home children removed.

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Chapter 1. Overview

Introduction

Children in group homes (or Licensed Children's Institutions—LCIs) are potentially the state's most vulnerable and "at risk" population. For these children, public education is a vital key to successful transition to adulthood. Despite the obvious lifeline that schools and schooling services can provide, historically there has been relatively little attention to the educational services received by group home children. For example, an extensive literature search conducted in the mid-1980s failed to uncover a single book on foster children and education in the United States or Britain. (Jackson, 1994, p. 268)

Just over the past month, however, *Time* featured an investigative article entitled, "The Crisis of Foster Care," citing California as well as other states (November 13, 2000). They describe this population as "America's generation of lost children, forsaken and forgotten." (Roche, 2000, p. 73)

A recent article in *Education Week* (September 13, 2000, p. 12) is titled, "Academic Fate of Foster Children Gaining More Attention." However, Rudolph Crew, former superintendent of schools in New York City, is quoted in this article as saying that "The issue has not reached full maturity in terms of being part of the education agenda." Describing the lack of focus on the education received by this population in California, a high California Department of Education official, in an interview for this study, lamented that this population has been treated educationally as "throw away kids."

The limited research we do have on outcomes for children who grow up as wards of the state, suggests that as a nation we are doing a poor job of preparing them for adulthood. For example, one major study showed that within two and one-half to four years after emancipation,

- 46 percent had not completed high school,
- 51 percent were unemployed,
- 25 percent had been homeless for at least one night, and
- 40 percent had been on public assistance or incarcerated.

(Bernstein, 2000, p. 67)

In California, however, there are glimmers of hope in regard to reform. These include the passage of Senate Bill 933, the authorization to expand the Countywide Foster Youth Services Program statewide, and the formation of a Stakeholder Group to "revamp the entire child welfare system." These and other efforts have the potential to assist in assuring the provision of high quality and appropriate educational services to children residing in group homes. Another

indication that the State considers the education of group home children important is the legislative mandate for this study.

This report presents findings and recommendations for two related studies, mandated through the 1998 Budget Act (AB 1656, Section 6110-001-0001, Provision 21) by the California Legislature, regarding the education of children residing in group homes, or licensed children's institutions (LCIs), in California.

Study I was requested to address the following questions:

1. How many children residing in group homes are attending nonpublic schools (NPS) and how many of these children are and are not eligible for special education?

2. What practices and procedures currently influence the educational placement and provision of educational services to children residing in group homes?

3. What is the impact of these practices and procedures on educational outcomes for children residing in group homes?

4. What is the feasibility and cost of collecting information about the educational placement of children residing in group homes on an ongoing basis?

Study II, concurrent with Study I, focuses on additional, related questions:

5. What coordination occurs between educational and non-educational agencies as they provide services to children residing in group homes?

6. What are the factors that affect coordination?

7. What is the impact of current practices and procedures for interagency coordination on educational outcomes for children in group homes?

While promising beginnings to address this issue are found in California, as described above, we find there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done. This is evidenced by national statistics on educational outcomes for foster children, in the testimony provided by virtually everyone interviewed for this study, through our survey results, through the limited data available at the state level, in the student records we reviewed, by the voices of the group home youth themselves, and through interviews conducted for this study and through other studies recently conducted in the state.

Listen to their voices in regard to the potential hope and despair associated with education in the California group homes:

I have dealt with many terrible issues but have never gotten below a B average. (Bernstein, p. 5)

I got into the system because I had an alcoholic mother, who had lots of boyfriends. I basically took myself out of school after sixth grade, staying at home 24 hours a day watching TV, smoking pot, and never leaving the house (a group home). The sad thing is nobody noticed. (Bernstein, p. 59)

I was in nine different homes as a teenage. The one stable thing in my life was my high school. When I got moved to the children's shelter, school staff took turns picking me up to make sure that I got to school. In retrospect, I realize that it was the most powerful thing somebody could have ever done for me – made sure I got an education. (Bernstein, p. 81)

*During my six years in the system, I was designated as emotionally disturbed and bounced from home to home and from school to school. At emancipation, I had accumulated no high school credits and was homeless. (*Interviewee for this study, who is now a Senior in the UC System with a 3.9 GPA en route to law school.)

Overview of Findings from This Study

We collected information to inform this study through multiple methods. In the section below, we summarize some of the most salient findings from each of these approaches.

State Data Analysis

The major state database for foster children in California is the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) maintained in the Department of Social Services (DSS). This information system includes a set of data fields that DSS refers to as the Health and Education Passport. In theory, these data fields contain important education related information on every foster care child in California. In practice, these data fields are virtually never completed and consequently this potentially rich data source contains virtually no information regarding the education being received by foster care children, or on their educational outcomes.

The database containing the most information for a substantial subset of group home children, those in special education, is the California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS). CASEMIS contains extensive information on all special education students in California, and indicates which of those students reside in group homes. For the first time, we matched data from these two systems finding a surprisingly low level of agreement between them as to what children reside in a group home.

If fully implemented and matched, the potential of these two State databases to report information on education services for group home children is substantial. The major problems with these two systems pertain to implementation, matching, access, and purpose. Neither system, as it is currently designed, is well suited for the retrieval of information. Confidentiality of information

and interagency access to data are major hurdles to making full use of this information. However, these obstacles will have to be overcome for any database the state may develop regarding educational services and outcomes for group home children.

In addition to including some of the same children, CASEMIS and the CWS/CMS data systems also include different children in group homes. Children in CWS/CMS may be placed in group homes through the foster care system or through probation. All of these children, who are in special education should also be found in CASEMIS. In addition, however, CASEMIS will include children placed in Licensed Children's Institutions (LCIs) for other reasons, e.g. the direct placement by a school district of children who are not in foster care. Taking into account those identified in either data set as being in a group home or a Licensed Children's Institution (LCI) produces a count of group home children that is larger than prior estimates based on the CWS/CMS database alone. Counting all children identified as group home children across both of these systems yields an estimated total count of 18,416. Of this count, it is estimated that 47 percent are in special education and that 46 percent of these special education students are being educated in nonpublic schools (NPSs). From NPS and group home data, we estimate that the percentage of beds in group homes in the state with a direct NPS affiliation is about 35 percent. For children in the same disability group, the probability of attending a NPS if you reside in an LCI is much higher than if you do not reside in an LCI. For example, emotionally disturbed children residing in an LCI are nearly three times as likely to receive their education services in an NPS as compared to emotionally disturbed children who do not reside in an LCI.

Stakeholder Interviews

Themes emerging from telephone interviews with State officials and other stakeholders identified with a state-level perspective provided a primary source of information for the findings and recommendations included in this report. These themes included:

- Lack of clear lines of authority and oversight for NPS fiscal incentives favoring the placement of group home children in NPS, and conflicting definitions of key terms such as emotional disturbance, across agencies appear to drive children for whom special education eligibility is questionable into NPS, and also to preclude some children who may need NPS from accessing these services. (Note that throughout this report, the term "emotional disturbance" (ED) is used, which is the name given this disabling condition under revised federal special education law. In California, this population is still often referred to as "seriously emotionally disturbed" (SED.))

- A shortage of group homes in the state sometimes causes children to be placed in LCIs that are inappropriate to their residential needs. If these LCIs have affiliated NPSs, as we estimate to be the case for 35 percent of the LCI beds in the state, children may also end up receiving their schooling in these NPSs. This may violate the principle that they be placed in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their needs (required

under federal special education law) and may not be in their best interests from a social or educational perspective.

- Although examples of the interagency collaboration that is needed to ensure appropriate residential and educational services for group home children are found in the state, these appear to be more the exception than the rule. Interagency collaboration at the state level sometimes occurs to focus on more narrow questions or issues regarding these children, but has largely been lacking in regard to more comprehensive issues and obstacles facing the monitoring and provision of quality and appropriate education services for them.

Surveys

From the surveys, we learned that education records are typically delayed, unavailable, or incomplete. For example, over half of responding home operator and social service staff reported that record delays occur "frequently" or "almost always." These delays "frequently" or "almost always" compromise educational placements for group home children according to 68 percent of the responding group home operators. The average length of time needed to obtain records without a complete Health and Education Passport ranged from 40 to 82 days, depending on the category of respondent. Less than one-third of group home operators said that local schools were "usually" or "almost always" notified when a child is placed in a group home.

While 86 percent of group home operators saw placement agencies, school districts, and county offices of education working cooperatively, only about one-quarter of the respondents from these agencies, themselves saw such cooperation as occurring. While nearly half of the County Office of Education respondents saw their agency as "frequently" or "almost always" working closely and cooperatively with placement agencies and school districts to improve education outcomes for group home children, less than one-quarter of the other agency respondents saw such cooperation as occurring.

Between one-half and three-quarters of respondents (depending on the agency they represented) said funding considerations affected educational placement decisions "frequently" or "almost always." In addition, over two-thirds of the non-group-home respondents reported that group homes "frequently" or "almost always" relied on funding from affiliated NPS programs to cover costs associated with providing residential or other non-educational services.

Site Visits

Group home staff reported receiving little or no information from caseworkers. As a result, many group homes have had to hire staff to track down education records. Many reported that they often are unable to obtain transcripts from previous schools, even when multiple calls are made. Communication and cooperation between the group homes and the local schools were reported to be mixed. Of course, cooperation was much enhanced when the local school was an affiliated NPS.

Students reported frustration over being placed far away from their neighborhood schools. They said this excluded their parents from involvement and resulted in missing transcripts that caused them to repeat classes or lose credits. In regard to having their educational needs met, while some students reported that they received one-on-one attention for the first time, others angrily reported that their teachers did not teach and only passed out work packets every day. Only a handful of students said they felt comfortable talking to a teacher about their educational needs or future. In response to an inquiry regarding the overall appropriateness and quality of the education they were receiving, the most common concern was the effect of missing and/or lost transcripts on the quality of their education and on their ability to graduate from high school.

A third activity conducted at each case study group home and accompanying schools was a review of education records. The major finding in regard to this activity was the lack of information in these records. For example, of the sites we looked at, three did not collect or maintain education information in their residents' files. They showed no transcripts, progress reports, or any information forwarded by the placement worker. Across all of the group home student records we reviewed, only 27 percent had transcripts, and 25 percent had assessments, most of which were administered by the group home in support of placement in their nonpublic school.

The school records we reviewed were a little better in the sense that they would sometimes assess the children on site. Similar to group homes, however, they generally did not receive assessments or transcripts from prior schools. Of the school records we reviewed, 47 percent had transcripts on file and only 37 percent had education information at the time of enrollment. In addition, of the transcripts we did find, many were not current.

Overview of Findings from Other Relevant Studies

Almost everyone we talked to pointed out that education is by far the most powerful potential vehicle for making a long-term difference in these children's lives, but far too often education becomes secondary to more fundamental concerns about keeping them sheltered and safe. The title of this report, "Education of Group Home Children, Whose Responsibility Is It?"

was chosen because of the fundamental problem that there are no clear lines of responsibility and accountability for the education of group home children in California.

As found by Fletcher, Campbell and Hall (1990), and as confirmed by virtually all of the data collection activities associated with this study, education is often ignored as a factor in placing children in foster care. A 1985 study by Knapp, Bryson, and Lewis found that out of 265 objectives listed by social workers, only 16 related to education. In addition, even though it was determined that half of the children included in this study had school-related difficulties, educational improvement was listed as an objective only six times (Montoya, 2000). In California, a recent social worker caseload analysis conducted for the Department of Social Services (American Human Association, 2000) contains a listing of the activities for which social workers need more time, and education is not mentioned.

While shelter and safety are vital elements of the State's responsibility, they are not sufficient to meet the State's moral, legal, or fiscal responsibilities to group home children. Someone needs to be responsible and accountable for their education. Social workers say their job is to get the child in a bed and then to let the public school system take over in terms of education. A high official from the CDE argues that the Department has no unique responsibility for the education of group home children because responsibility to afford access to public education is clearly specified in law to reside with the local school system in which the child currently resides. However, responsibility and accountability for assuring that group home children are actually in school receiving appropriate education services is more elusive.

An intensive ten-week study of 31 group home children conducted in San Mateo County (Caywood, 2000), one of the wealthiest counties in the nation, found case records to be virtually useless in studying the education being received by this sample of foster care children. In this same study, after over 150 hours of investigative work into school records, and through personal and phone interviews, it could only be determined that 10 of these 31 children were having their educational needs met. The principal researcher for this study reports:

> After ten weeks of repeated efforts to interview all relevant professionals and foster parents for every subject, I was never able to get a response from seven social workers, six foster parents, and six teachers. Further, of the interviewees that were contacted, many said that they did not have enough contact with the children to know about any educational information.

If the child's social workers, foster parents, and teachers do not know about their education, who does? Perhaps the most shocking finding cited in this work is that of the 31 children extensively studied over this ten-week period, three had waited more than 20 days before entering school, **and ten children attended no school at all during the full ten-week study period.**

We do not have comparable data for other counties in the state, nor were we able to gather comparable data for our six case-study counties. Like the researcher in the San Mateo County

study, we encountered considerable obstacles to having any contact with group home children (which was partially overcome through our persistence and after considerable discussion and deliberation with State attorneys.) In regard to reviewing student records, even though we had an "agent of the state" letter of authorization (issued by the CDE), a number of the group homes we contacted were reluctant to let us review student records. The records we ultimately observed were largely devoid of any educationally relevant information. As noted, the researcher in the San Mateo County study spent over 150 hours attempting to obtain information about the educational status of 31 children, while working as an employee of the county, and still was only able to construct a complete education picture for 22 of the 31 cases.

Another intensive local study focusing on group home youth in a single California high school district (Montoya, 2000), reported similar difficulties in accessing this population of youth. Attempting to conduct an educational needs assessment of youth in this district, the author determined that 50 such children were enrolled. In attempting to conduct this education needs assessment, however, she stated:

> Due to a number of unforeseeable and uncontrollable circumstances, the sample population was reduced to a maximum of 18 students (from 50). One of the group homes was eliminated because it was a temporary emergency placement in which residents remained for only short periods of time, another residence closed unexpectedly, while in a third group home the director was uncomfortable with the residents participating in an education needs assessment.

Discussion

These kinds of practical and procedural obstacles to conducting an education needs assessment reflect the difficulties associated with actually providing group home children with high quality and appropriate educational services. One example of these obstacles, and of the difficulty of providing coherent educational services to children in these types of systems as currently configured, is that for the children for whom Montoya was able to conduct an assessment, the number of mid-year school changes averaged 4, with an extreme case of 10. With this many mid-year changes, the extended enrollment gaps that are generally associated with each change of school, and the course credits lost through these transfers, the national estimate that less than half of these children complete high school is not surprising.

The San Mateo County study, where one-third of the subject students were found not to be in school, took place in one of the most affluent counties in the state, with one of the best-funded child welfare systems. What would an examination under similar scrutiny show in less affluent counties? These data suggest fundamental system failures, and that simply pouring more money into a flawed system will not be enough. Without clearer lines of responsibility and accountability, which are specified, supported, and enforced at the state level; without an infrastructure for data

collection, retention, and retrieval; and without vastly improved interagency collaboration at state and local levels of governance; substantial education progress for group home children in the state is unlikely. The problems associated with this population of children are considerable and complex, with their needs reaching across multiple agencies. Ensuring that they have shelter and safety must be among our highest priorities. Adding appropriate and high quality educational services to this commitment adds considerably to the complexity of the services required.

We continue to ignore this fundamental need for this population at a very high cost. What are the costs to the State of producing a population of children, one-half of whom are unemployed and 40 percent of whom are incarcerated and on public assistance? Because many of these children have been exposed to terrible experiences in their lives, we may expect higher rates of unemployment, incarceration and public assistance for them as adults than for the public at large. On the other hand, there is little doubt that if the State finds their circumstances to be so dire as to require intervention and separation from parents, the State is assuming a moral and legal responsibility for these children, which must go beyond providing safe shelter and access to school.

As described in *A Rage To Do Better, (p 59),*

> If we are to justify as intrusive an act of government as taking a child from his parents and home, we must be able to improve more than marginally that child's prospects. If we have not managed to do so, we must share with him the responsibility.

Summary of Recommendations

This report presents findings and makes recommendations in five major areas:

1. *Responsibility and accountability* for assuring that group children are receiving appropriate education services need to be more clearly defined and accepted. While technical lines of responsibility and procedures are specified in law, serious gaps in the provision of appropriate educational services and in the realization of education outcomes for group children remain. When these children fail to receive needed educational services, the State is negligent in its role as surrogate parent, receives no immediate education return from its considerable investment in group home children, and is likely to incur many additional costs over time when these children fail to transition into productive adulthood. Systems of support for overseeing the education received by group home children need to be established at the state level, and counties need to be provided funding to carry out these responsibilities locally.

2. Improved *interagency coordination* across local education, social services, mental health, and probation agencies is vital to the provision of appropriate education services for group home children. To ensure that local interagency coordination occurs and to provide vital support through a statewide data management information system, state-

level collaboration is also essential. Interagency coordination can not occur, however, without clear lines of specified responsibility. Clear lines of responsibility for the development of systems to ensure appropriate education services for group home children must be established by the California Department of Education in conjunction with the Department of Social Services. Liaisons for this population of children also need to be formed in other relevant state-level agencies if state-level interagency coordination, planning, and communication is to occur. SB 933 provided an important start in these processes, but much more is needed.

3. A *statewide data system* that can be easily and quickly accessed by group home and education authorities across the state is essential. While two major state-level data systems (CWS/CMS in the Department of Social Services and CASEMIS in the Department of Education) have vital education information for group home children potentially already in place, CWS/CMS is virtually devoid of data in education-related fields and the data are nearly impossible to access in CASEMIS. As a result, despite the considerable investment the State is making in group home children (e.g. $80,000 per year is not unusual for a child residing in an LCI and attending a NPS), the State has little to no information about how many of these children attend school on a regular basis, graduate from high school, go on to college, or are gainfully employed. Education information for group home children that is accessible at the local level is needed. Due to the residential instability of this population, it is not unusual for them to change schools two, three, or more times during a year. Too often extended enrollment gaps occur as they change school districts due to the slow or nonexistent transfer of school records.

4. O*verall capacity needs to be bolstered* for the group home system. A broader range of residential options is needed for group home children that are clearly independent of where schooling services are provided to allow for more appropriate residential placements. In addition, social worker caseloads need to be lowered to reduce inappropriate residential placements that often lead to inappropriate education placements. More programs and supports for children residing in group homes enrolling in public schools need to be established.

5. *Fiscal provisions* creating incentives for group home children to be identified as requiring special education services and for their education to be provided in NPSs must be removed. Mandates to school districts regarding the provision and/or support of appropriate education services to group home children should be enforced and receive fiscal support. RCL rates should be reviewed regularly to ensure an ample supply of appropriate residential placements for group home children with accompanying appropriate education services. Current residential and education investments for group home children are generally producing very low levels of educational results. Supplemental funding for group home children to bolster the quality of their

> educational services should be accompanied by measure of accountability for student results.

As described above, the State has made some promising beginnings in regard to child welfare reform. SB 933 was a response to the severe interagency coordination and communication problems described in this report. Our purpose is not to demean or to undermine these important efforts at reform. Rather the purpose of this report is to acknowledge them and to illustrate as clearly as we can why we have concluded that it is vital to the well being of the state's children residing in group homes that these initiatives continue and be bolstered to ensure their future educational success.

For far too many group home children the situation is dire. In the words of a foster youth:

> *My recommendation would be for somebody to really do something about it….I go to all these meetings, testify, and I keep hearing the same thing, and it is frustrating because nothing changes.* (EMQ Children and Family Services, 1999, p.77)

The situation is also well summarized by a recent Little Hoover Commission Letter (November, 2000) describing the state's mental health policy. Although the letter does not specifically address the state's group home youth, nearly one-half (47 percent) of group home children are in special education and 41 percent of these group home special education children are designated as emotionally disturbed. In addition, the moral imperative and financial rationale described in this letter could easily be said to apply to all group home children.

> California's mental health policy lacks something fundamental: a clear commitment to provide mental health services to people who need assistance. The Commission also discovered that we spend billions of dollars dealing with the consequences of untreated mental illness – rather than spending that money wisely on adequate services.
>
> There is, of course, a moral imperative for caring for those who cannot care for themselves, and on that basis alone we should change our policies. But there is also a fiscal imperative to mental health reform. The public and private sectors share the costs of failed policies: lost productivity and business, lower property values and quality of life, and increased costs of criminal justice, public health and safety programs. To curb these uncontrolled costs we must develop policies that proactively help people maintain their functionality – to keep their jobs and homes, their ambition and independence.

Surely these statements are no less true for the state's most vulnerable children, for whom the state has assumed parental responsibility. Beyond our moral responsibility as a society to these children, we invest up to $80,000 a year for their residential and educational care. In addition to our moral responsibility, surely we have a fiscal responsibility to monitor the returns of this investment and to ensure that as many of these children as possible are brought into the mainstream of productive and successful adulthood. Although we are an affluent society, we can

not afford the short or long term costs of continued education failure for too many of these children.

Take the case of one interviewee for this study. She began living on the streets at the age of twelve as a result of a severely abusive father and a mentally ill mother. It was determined that she must have emotional problems almost from the outset of involvement with the child welfare system. Soon she was placed in special education and diagnosed as severely emotionally disturbed. In her own words, "once you are in a high RCL home, everything you do is perceived as bad." She was home schooled in some of her group homes, and by the time she was in ninth grade she was so far behind academically that school seemed hopeless. She missed from two to two-and-one-half months of school every time she changed home placements, which she estimated to be about ten times in her six years in group homes. By the time she was emancipated, she had reportedly missed two years of high school even though she attended school throughout her high school years. She was then emancipated and homeless with no high school credits and was advised to look for a permanent residential setting for the mentally ill. She reported "feeling spacey most of the time as I was given drugs to sleep and other drugs to wake up." Through the Job Corps, she got off drugs, got her high school diploma, is about to finish college, and is now applying to law school.

If someone as tenacious and bright as this can exit the child welfare system with zero high school credits, how can other children with lesser capabilities and personal inner strengths hope to navigate it? It is imperative that someone/some agency in the state be made clearly responsible and held accountable to ensure a quality and appropriate education for children in group homes.

One source of hope is found in the state's Foster Youth Services (FYS) programs, designed to provide advocacy, tutoring, instruction, and other support services to enhance foster children's school success. In 1988, the Legislature established uniform data collection for these programs requiring biennial reports on their effectiveness. A recent report to the Legislature (California Department of Education, 2000) shows results from these required effectiveness measures for the six counties in which these programs have been established since at least 1992. They present data on such measures as the number of group home children achieving academic growth, the number of students expelled for discipline, and student attendance.

The 1999 Budget Act provided funding to expand this program and by the Spring of 1999, the program had expanded to 32 counties, incorporating 89 percent of the foster youth who reside in group homes. According to this report (California Department of Education, 2000), the current goal is to expand the network of projects to all counties. If all counties are accountable for collecting and reporting the kinds of student outcome data shown in the 2000 CDE report, this could signal an important change in regard to the provision and governance of the educational services received by the state's group home children. For the first time, collecting, reporting, and monitoring such education outcome statistics for group home youth would signal an important step in beginning to establish accountability for the education received by these children. Of course these are modest beginnings, and other important outcome indicators could easily be added

to this list (e.g. average number of changes in school per year, percentage of children in NPS, percentage performing at grade level, and percentage graduating from high school).

San Mateo County reports a creative use of FYS grant funds. They have matched grant dollars with dollars of their own to hire to education consultants for group homes. These employees are hired by the County Department of Education, but housed with Social Services, to serve as liaisons between the county's group home and education systems.

As citizens of California, we have a moral and legal responsibility to provide for the health and safety of our most vulnerable children, as well as a responsibility to prepare them for an independent and productive adulthood. We also have a fiscal responsibility to ourselves as taxpayers to ensure that the considerable investment we are rightly making in this population is responsibly spent, well managed, and used to some productive end. (In the case of the child described above, who was in the system for six years, the state invested an estimated one-half million dollars in residential and educational services, and yet no one was held responsible to ensure a social return for this investment.) Given the education outcome statistics and findings cited in this report, it seems clear that social returns are not being realized from our public investments in group home children. It is essential that we ensure that much higher levels of educational outcomes be associated with these funds and that we do better by these children.

Conduct of the Study and Overview of the Report

The California Department of Education (CDE) contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and subcontractors SRA Associates, the Child Welfare Research Center of the University of California at Berkeley, and Lodestar Management to conduct these studies. Given the overlap across the study questions and the research methods employed, it was agreed that the findings and recommendations from these two studies would be combined in this final report.

A broad array of research methods was used to complete this study. These methods are listed and described in the second chapter. The instrumentation used in conjunction with this study (e.g. copies of surveys, interview protocols, record review forms) is included in a technical appendix, which has been submitted to the CDE under separate cover. Chapter three presents research findings by each of the individual research procedures described in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 presents a summary of these findings by the seven research questions posed for this study, as listed above. The concluding chapter discusses the recommendations summarized at the beginning of this introductory chapter in more detail.

Chapter 2. Research Methods

This chapter describes the various research methods used in this study. These include state data analysis; LCI phone interviews; mail surveys to social service, mental health, probation, and County Office of Education service providers, and to group home operators; stakeholder interviews; and case study site visitations, which included service provider interviews, resident interviews, and student record reviews at group home and school sites.

State Data Analysis

Data Background and Acquisition

Background data for this study were drawn from an integration of two independent, administrative data sources: The Department of Social Services' (DSS) Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS)—data that have been configured into a longitudinal format in the University of California at Berkeley's Children's Services Archive; and the California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS) collected by the California Department of Education (CDE). Each of these data sets contains child-specific, statewide information and is described below in more detail.

Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS)

Under a memorandum of understanding, data from CWS/CMS is shared with U.C. Berkeley where the information is put into a longitudinal format that permits researchers to track the out-of-home care careers of children from 1988 to the present time. CWS/CMS is a relational database consisting of child-specific information on all children in out-of-home care. The data are input directly via computer terminal by social workers or, in the case of probation-supervised children, the probation officer completes a paper form that is submitted to the county where it is keyed into the system. The information is stored in roughly 200 relational data sets on a secure server in Boulder, Colorado. Among the data sets that comprise the system, several data sets contain education information for children. These portions of the CWS/CMS database are collectively known as the "education passport." Part 1 of the data analysis for this study (described below in the "Data Matching and Analysis" section) examined the amount of information on children that is contained in the data sets that comprise the education passport.

Included in CWS/CMS are child-specific data for children in welfare-supervised or probation-supervised care. Examples of these data include age, ethnicity, gender, type of placement where a child resides (e.g., group care, kinship foster care, non-relative foster care, shelter care, etc. as well as placement histories for all children who have had an experience in out-of-home care from 1988 to the present. Each child is given a unique identification number that

can be used to identify repeated foster care placements. Regarding placement histories, repeated foster care placements and closing of a case for a given child are given the same unique identification number and updated in the database. The database is updated every three months with the latest information provided to U.C. Berkeley from DSS. At present there are records for over 500,00 children who have had an out-of-home care experience since 1988. To link data between the two data sources, data were drawn from the CWS/CMS database for the caseload of children in welfare or probation-supervised out-of-home care on December 1, 1999 (n=113,961).

California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS)

The Special Education Division of the California Department of Education developed this data system to assist special education local plan areas (SELPAs), school districts, county offices of education, and others that submit student-level data to the Department of Education. Both state law (California Education Code Section 56601(a) Part 30) and federal law (Section 1418 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) mandate the collection of statistical information on children in special education, and updated information is collected three times per year by the Special Education Division. The data system has been in operation since 1987 and currently has been implemented by all SELPAs in the state. The present study used all records of children in CASEMIS contained in the December 1, 1999 data release (n=646,191).

This study is the first large-scale attempt to merge the databases from CWS/CMS and CASEMIS. This unprecedented linkage of data sets was not an easy process—difficulties started with obtaining permission to use the data, followed by additional delays in gaining access to the data sets. For reasons of confidentiality as well as perhaps reluctance to release data due to past projects that have not used the information responsibly, obtaining permission to gain access to CASEMIS was a months-long process. The request was further complicated by the fact that we needed unique student identifiers to allow matching with the CWS/CMS data. After being granted permission to use the data, much additional time was spent attempting to have that authorization communicated from the upper levels of the department down to the specific personnel in charge of releasing the information. While it is understandable that protection of confidentiality is a critical concern when working with such sensitive information, it was the impression of the researchers that this protection was unnecessarily hermetic and nearly impenetrable, making it very difficult to carry out the current study. Considering the difficulties encountered during attempts to perform this legislatively mandated research, it is of little surprise that these data have not been linked at an earlier time, despite the valuable information made available in doing so.

Data Matching and Analysis

Records from the two data systems were linked using AUTOSTAN™ and AUTOMATCH™, probabilistic matching software. This software is a state-of-the-art means to match corresponding records from different data sources. The software enables a computer to

emulate the thought processes of a human being who would undertake the same task of comparing records from two different data sources to determine if they represented the same person.

One challenge study staff confronted in linking CASEMIS and CWS/CMS was matching records from CASEMIS' point-in-time system (in this case, the data release date of December 1, 1999) with records from CWS/CMS that have been configured longitudinally in the U.C. Berkeley Data Archive (1988 to present). In order to most accurately match the records of a child in one data system with his or her records in the other, it was decided that the CWS/CMS should reflect an out-of-home placement for December 1, 1999. This was important to more definitively match records between the two systems.

Once all records in the two data systems reflected an out-of-home placement for December 1, 1999, data were standardized. Corresponding fields in these two data sets were divided into the same number of sub-fields in order to facilitate matching. For example, regardless of how a name field was coded in either data set, "child name" was divided in both data sets into the sub-fields "first name," "middle name," "last name," and "other" designation (such as Jr.). Next, to determine matches between the two data sets, records were coded as a "match," "non-match," or "possible match." This matching process involved assigning records a composite score or "match weight" that reflected the degree of certainty of a match between a record from one data set compared to another.[1] Possible matches were screened manually for data entry errors and were given a final designation as either a match or non-match. The matching process yielded 15,183 records from the December 1, 1999 release of CASEMIS for which a corresponding record was linked in the CWS/CMS data system for the December 1, 1999 caseload.

Data Analysis

Analyses of the data from CWS/CMS and CASEMIS were carried out in two ways. First, educational information (data from the "educational passport" tables) contained within CWS/CMS was examined for the December 1, 1999 caseload to determine how many children in group care had any educational information that was recorded in the system. Second, an examination was made of the overlap of the records that were linked between the CASEMIS and CWS/CMS data systems (n=15,183). Results from these respective examinations of the data are discussed below in Chapter 3 of this report.

[1] A match weight is determined by a field-by-field comparison between two records. Because some fields have greater power to discriminate whether two records reflect the same person (e.g., social security number provides more reliable information as to whether two records match than, say gender), pairs of records which had greater overlap for such fields were given higher match weights. The matching process also took into consideration errors such as transposed numbers within a SSN and omissions such as the day of month missing from birth data. The matching process entailed several passes through the data sets in which composite match scores were used to determine whether pairs of records were coded as either a match, non-match, or possible match.

LCI Phone Interviews

Rates Bureau/Group Home Operator Interviews

In preparation of the selection of the 14 sites to be included in the case study component of the study, study staff met with and interviewed three staff members from the California Rates Bureau, including: (1) the Rates Bureau Manager, (2) the Rates Bureau Data Analyst, and (3) one of the Bureau's 10 rate consultants. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain information about group homes in California, how group home rates are set, and how the Bureau stores, maintains and updates group home-related data.

Located within the Foster Care Branch of the Department of Social Services, the Rates Bureau reviews and approves every application submitted in California to open a group home. The Rates Bureau maintains a Unisys relational database, created in 1989, that stores the following information on every group home in California:

- Program name and address
- Facility addresses
- Program number
- Rate (total amount of money received per month per child)
- Rate classification level (RCL)
- Effective date
- Rate type
- Sharing ratio (federal funding and non-federal funding)
- Assigned rate consultant
- Licensed capacity (total number of beds)

These data are updated on a daily basis, with changes in law and program revisions made at individual group home sites. Group homes may revise their individual program throughout the year. Revisions typically include changes in licensed capacity, rate classification level, and type(s) of resident population served. However, a comprehensive update of the entire database occurs only once per year and is based upon information obtained from mandatory financial reports submitted by all group homes annually to the Bureau. Following the annual update of the database, the Bureau prints out a summary of foster family agencies and group homes in California.

During the interviews with Rates Bureau staff, study staff requested and received the most recent (August 1999) printout of the database and extracted information for every group home listed in the six case study counties of Alameda, Fresno, Los Angeles, Riverside, Shasta and Sonoma. All of the extracted information was then entered into an Access database and 48 group

homes within the six case study counties were randomly selected for telephone interviews with group home operators.

Purpose of Group Home Operator Interviews

Following the identification of the 48 group homes, study staff contacted all of these group home sites via telephone and interviewed group home operators. (The Technical Appendix to this report contains a copy of the interview protocol.)

The purpose of these interviews was to obtain site-specific information about group homes within the six case study counties to assist study staff in the selection of the 14 case study sites. In addition, study staff sought to obtain a greater understanding of existing programs and operations in California.

During the 20-minute telephone interviews, study staff verified all of the information provided in the August 1999 Rates Bureau printout (as described in the previous section). Further, study staff requested a variety of additional group home and resident background information, including:

- Existence of resident council
- Type(s) of population served
- Affiliation with a non-public school
- Names of public schools residents attend
- Current number of residents
- Ages and grade levels of residents
- Percentage of non-emergency and emergency placements
- Percentage of placements attending non-public school
- Percentage of placements attending public school
- Out-of-county placements
- Percentage of surrogate parents
- Percentage of residents that arrive with current individual program plans
- Percentage of residents that arrive with current appraisals
- Percentage of residents that have complete education records at arrival (transcripts)

We also inquired about operators' willingness to participate in the case study component and were asked how they felt about study staff reviewing their residents' records and interviewing their residents face-to-face.

All data obtained during group home operator telephone interviews were entered into the Access database and later used to randomly select the 14 sites included in the case study component, discussed later in this chapter.

Surveys

In June 2000, study staff prepared and distributed questionnaires to placement workers and supervisors from county departments of social service, probation, and mental health; group home operators; and county offices of education throughout California. The purpose of these questionnaires was to gather information from individuals involved in group home placement, operation, and policy. Toward this end, questionnaires sought information regarding how placement workers and their agencies determine educational placements for foster youth in group homes, difficulties in obtaining adequate education records or information, levels of communication and coordination among key players, and formal and informal arrangements between agencies and other providers.

Survey respondents were identified through a series of telephone calls made to SB 933-mandated steering committees in all 58 counties. From these telephone calls, study staff obtained—where committees exist—committee members' names, addresses, and telephone and fax numbers. Group home operators were identified via the August 1999 Rates Bureau database printout and with the help of the California Alliance for Children and Family Services.

Response Rates

Seeking to receive one survey from each placing agency and each group home in all 58 counties, on July 7, 2000, questionnaires tailored for social services, probation, mental health and group home operators were distributed to all respondents. Below (Exhibit 2.1) is a list of the total number of surveys mailed, by survey group, along with the total number of surveys received and the total number of surveys received containing data (some respondents returned surveys blank reporting they or their agency did not have any group home placements).

Exhibit 2.1 Non-education Survey Response Rates

Respondent Group	Total Number of Surveys Distributed	Total Number of Surveys Received	Total Number of Surveys Received with Data
Social Service	**106**	**52**	**45**
Probation	**71**	**36**	**36**
Mental Health	**75**	**23**	**14**
Group Home Operator	**58**	**28**	**28**

Following telephone interviews with county office of education personnel, the questionnaire designed for county office of education personnel was revised and distributed on

August 3, 2000. Below (Exhibit 2.2) is a list of the total number of county office of education surveys mailed, along with the total number of surveys received, and the percentage received that contain data.

Exhibit 2.2 County Office of Education Survey Response Rates

Respondent Group	Total Number of Surveys Distributed	Total Number of Surveys Received	Total Number of Surveys Received with Data
County Office of Education	58	35	28

Follow Up

Study staff engaged in a number of follow up efforts geared towards all non-respondents in all survey groups. In total, all non-respondents were contacted three times via mail, fax and telephone. In addition, on November 1, 2000, 200 group home operators surveys were mailed to all current members of the California Alliance of Child and Family Services (CACFS) by the CACFS. (The Technical Appendix to this report contains a copy of the five surveys.)

Stakeholder Interviews

Project staff conducted interviews with a range of people across agencies and organizations that serve youth residing in group homes, with a focus on individuals with a state-level perspective on the issues (Exhibit 2.3). The purpose of this task was to gain a cross-agency, statewide perspective on the topics addressed by the study, in particular extant data, agency policies and procedures, perceived issues and concerns, and future plans to address them.

Interviewees' affiliation was primarily the CDE, the remainder being associated with the Department of Mental Health, DSS, or individuals from local bodies who have served on statewide committees, and advocacy organizations for group homes, nonpublic schools, and youth in foster care.

Exhibit 2.3 Stakeholder Interviewees
California Department of Education

Interviewee	Department / Affiliation
Jim Bellotti	NPS Unit Administrator
Sue Bennett	Administrator, Educational Options Office
Carol Bingham	School Fiscal Services
John Boivin	Project Monitor, Educational Options Office

Eloise Bradrick-Talk	Formerly with the Educational Options Office
Henry Der	Deputy Superintendent, Education Equity, Access and Support Branch
Paul Hinkle	Consultant, Special Education Division
Mary Hudler	Administrator, Special Education Division
Greg Hudson	School Fiscal Services
Vince Madden	Former Administrator of the NPS Unit
Janet Rudnick	Consultant with the NPS Unit

Other State Government Interviewees:

Interviewee	Department/Affiliation
Sue Hance	CDSS—Independent Living Program
Dave Neilsen	California Department of Mental Health

Interviewees from Statewide Organizations

Interviewee	Department/Affiliation
Ellen Bucci	County Welfare Director's Association/San Mateo County
Doug Johnson	California Alliance for Children and Family Services
Sarge Kennedy	Director of Special Education, Tehama County
Bob Ketch	Executive Director, 5 Acres
Janet Knipe	Executive Director, California Youth Connection
Wayne Miyamoto	Director of Public & Governmental Affairs, CAPSES
John Sayler	Director of Special Education, San Juan USD

Case Study Site Visitations

This section addresses the case study site visit component of the study, including a description of preliminary research tasks conducted in preparation of field work, background to the site visits, and summaries of the site visit approach, case study procedures, and stakeholder interviews and activities.

Background to the Site Visits

Fourteen group home sites in the six case study counties[2] of Alameda, Fresno, Los Angeles, Riverside, Shasta and Sonoma were randomly selected for in-depth site visits to gain first-

[2] The six case study counties were selected based on the following criteria: size, urbanicity, region, and existence of non-public

hand knowledge about existing program operations and procedures. At each group home site visited, study staff spent one to two days interviewing the following individuals at both group home and school sites either face-to-face or by telephone:

1. Group Home Site – Administrators, operators/facility managers, in-take staff, and anonymous and voluntary resident interviews
2. Non-Public School – School director, special education staff and teaching staff
3. Public School – Principal, special education staff and teaching staff
4. Placement Workers – Probation, social service and mental health case workers identified during interviews with group home staff members

In addition to interviews, study staff randomly selected and reviewed six to ten group home resident records for the purpose of assessing and recording education-related information. The selected resident records were then tracked to school sites that residents attend where contents of school records were reviewed and recorded for comparison purposes.

Of the original 14 group home sites selected for inclusion in the case study component, three group home sites declined to participate in the study due to time-constraints. Thus, three replacement sites were randomly selected, contacted and asked to participate. Of the three sites contacted, only two of the three sites participated in the study. While the third site initially agreed to participate in the study, after six weeks of telephone contact, it was determined that the site could not participate due to limited staff and scheduling constraints. As a result, 13 out of 14 group homes sites were included in the case study site visit component.

It should also be noted that while 13 sites participated in the case study site visits, due to confidentiality concerns, two sites did not allow study staff to interview their residents and three sites denied access to their resident records. In addition, one more group home site declined to participate in the resident interview activity due to the fact they had only one resident over the age of twelve. At two more sites, no resident record data were obtained because the group homes do not collect any education-related information. A summary of interviews completed in each case study county by group home site is provided in Exhibit 2.4

schools. By including one large county (Los Angeles) as well as large, mid-size and small counties, study staff sought to sufficiently approximate the breadth of variation across counties while allowing the in-depth investigation and inquiry needed to fully address the study questions (please see chapter one).

Exhibit 2.4 Interviews Completed by Case Study Site and County

Case Study County/Site Information	Group Home Interviewee(s)	School Site(s) Interviewee(s)	Total Resident Interviews/Total Resident and School Record Reviews	Interviewee(s) Placement Worker
Alameda County	• Group home • CEO/director	At NPS: • Director • Education director • In-take/IEP	• Resident interviews (0) • Resident records (0) • School records (0)	• Mental health (2)
Alameda County	***Assured to participate in study, but then declined too late to replace***			
Fresno County	• Group home facility manager • In-take person	At Continuation School: • Principal • Teacher • Special education	• Resident interviews (3) • Resident (3) records • School records (0)	• No relationship with anyone at public school • Probation (1)
Fresno County	• Liaison between placing agency and group home • Intake/placing director • CEO • Group home facility manager • Psychologist	At Community School: • Principal • Psychologist • Teachers (3) At Public High School: • Principal • Vice principal • Counselor At Opportunity School: • Principal • Teacher	• Resident interviews (3) • Resident records (6) • School records (6)	• In-take person at office of education • Probation (2) • Ventura FYS (regarding the Health and Education Passport information sent about recent placement. First time Fresno has seen Health and Education Passport Information) • Juvenile Hall, special education person and director • Unified school district computer person (developing comprehensive program to track all group home kids)
Los Angeles County	• Associate director • In-take coordinator	At NPS: • Director of education	• Resident interviews (2) • Resident records (8) • School records (9)	• Probation (3)
Los Angeles County	• Executive director/owner • Facility manager • Child care worker/educational placement (2)	At NPS: • Director At Public School: • Assistant principal, counseling services • Vice principal, attendance	• Resident interviews (2) • Resident records (5) • School records (6)	
Los Angeles County	• Agency executive director/group home director	At NPS: • Director At Public School: • Assistant principal, counseling services • Vice principal, attendance	• Resident interviews (4) • Resident records (9) • School records (6)	• DCFS caseworkers (6)

Exhibit 2.4 Interviews Completed by Case Study Site and County (continued)

County/ Group Home Name	Group Home Interviewee(s)	School Site(s) Interviewee(s)	Total Resident / Total Resident and School Record Reviews	Interviewee(s) Placement Worker
Riverside County	• Educational coordinator • Group home director • Group home facility manager	At Community School: • Lead teacher • Intake administrative assistant	• Resident interviews (3) • Resident records (2) • School records (3)	• Probation (1)
Riverside County	• Agency executive director • Group home director	At Community School: • Lead teacher	• Resident interviews (6) • Resident records (0) *No educational records maintained at group home • School records (8)	• Probation (2)
Riverside County	• Group home director • Group home case worker (2) • In-take coordinator	At Public School: • Lead counselor	• Resident interviews (0) *Group home denied resident interviews. • Resident records (8) • School records (4)	• Social service (2)
Shasta County	• Administrative director • Intake assessment • Intake decision maker • Surrogate/education advocacy for all placements • Psychologist (MFT) • House facility manager • House relief staff	At Court School: • Psychologist • Teacher • Principal • SARB (FYS grant writer) • In-take administrator	• Resident interviews (4) • Resident records (6) • School records (6)	• CCLD Contact • Probation
Shasta County	• Group home director/owner • In-take director • Record collector	At Home School/Charter School: • Head teacher • Principal	• Resident interviews (6) • Resident records (0) *No education records maintained at group home • School records (6)	• Probation (2) • Shasta Crystal Bay Probation Camp
Sonoma County	• Executive director • In-take administrator • Director of education services • Recent former residents (2)	At NPS: • Principal • Teacher At Public School: • Vice principal	• Resident interviews (4) • Resident records (0) • School records (0) *Due to federal confidentiality laws, no resident or school record reviews were permitted.	• Probation (4) • Office of education (1)
Sonoma County	• Group home operator	At Public School: • Principal • Teacher	• Resident interviews (0) *No resident over 12 years • Resident records (0) • School records (0)	• Sonoma County Department Head of Child Welfare

Approach

In preparation of site visits, study staff conducted a variety of background research tasks, including:

County-level focus groups

Focus groups were convened in the six case study counties. Participants included special education local planning area (SELPA) governing board and/or community advisory board members, representatives from provider and placement agencies, group home administrators and staff, county office of education staff, educators from public schools, community schools, nonpublic schools, private schools, and student representatives residing in group homes. The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain a broad stakeholder perspective to provide an overview of the major issues to be addressed during site visit interviews.

Initial site visits

The purpose of the initial site visits was to gain knowledge of group home operations and processes. Exploratory site visits were conducted at two sites in Orange County, two sites in Alameda County, and one site in Sonoma County. During these site visits staff toured facilities, met with staff and administrators of group homes and non-public schools, and spoke with representatives from various county and local agencies involved in the placement process and reviewed resident and school records. Information gathered through record reviews and interviews with staff was used in preparation site visit structure and to refine respondent questions.

Review of records from SELPA and Foster Youth Services programs

To provide an overview of existing programs and services, project staff collected and analyzed special education local planning area (SELPA) county plans and related information from SELPAs statewide. Specifically, staff were interested in:

- governing structures;
- interagency agreements;
- overview of the service delivery system;
- the number of referrals made to private schools, including the number of those referred identified as needing special education services and the number who actually receive services;
- Individual Education Plan (IEP) review and assessment frequency; and
- other agencies listed as assisting with IEPs.

SELPA records were important to review due to the fact that approximately one-half of all children residing in group homes receive special education services.

In addition to the assessment of SELPA county plans, project staff reviewed and analyzed CDE files pertaining to the countywide Foster Youth Service (FYS) Program. Staff collected all 32 funded counties' spring 1999 FYS grants and extracted information regarding:

- county-specific information regarding the profile of foster youth;
- the number of group homes and nonpublic schools in the county;
- existing programs' strengths and weaknesses; and
- local efforts to facilitate the school enrollment process and inter-agency data collection concerning children residing in group homes.

Site visit materials

Through the many interviews described above, study staff were made aware of the many confidentiality issues faced by group home staff, and residents and placing agency staff. Thus, staff were greatly concerned about preserving the confidentiality of all individuals participating in the case study site visits, especially the residents, and produced a variety of materials for both study staff and case study group home site interviewees. Hence, following completion of the site visit methodology, staff engaged in a comprehensive human subjects review (conducted by a committee specified for this purpose at AIR) where it was determined that resident interviews would be strictly anonymous and voluntary, with a social worker present to serve as a neutral observer. In addition, resident identifier information (resident name) obtained during group home resident record reviews were deleted as soon as the resident's record was tracked to the school site.

To guide study staff during case study interviews, a site visit manual tailored for study staff involved in field work was prepared. The manual provided staff with an overview of site visit confidentiality safeguards, interview structures and questions to be asked during interviews. In addition, all of the 14 selected group home operators and school staff were mailed a packet that contained a copy of the letter granting study staff Agent of the State status to review records, background to the study, California Department of Education and study staff contact information, site visit structure, an invitation to group home residents to attend voluntary interview sessions, issues to be explored during resident interviews, and a sample of information sought during resident/school record reviews. Copies of the site visitation packets for group homes and school sites are located in the Technical Appendix to this report.

Site Visit Overview

The purpose of the site visits in this study was to be able to interview and interact with local respondents on site, to gain first-hand observation of specific group home site operations and

processes, and to review a sample of resident/student educational records at both group home and school sites. Our initial assumption was that at the operational level, each group home is unique. Given that group homes are funded under the same regulations, however, common structural and programmatic features existed. Likewise, we found variance in group home residents, types of resources; educational, behavioral, health and psychological services; delivery methodology; and structure or sophistication among various sizes of group homes.

While this final report does not identify individual group homes or interviewees, the report identifies similarities and differences among group home sites, placement workers, school staff, and residents' educational records that are influenced by such factors as:

- Geographical location of group home
- Rate classification level (RCL)
- Rate amount
- NPS affiliation/relationship
- Public school/affiliation and relationship
- Foster Youth Service county
- Health and Education Passport
- Administrative environment
- Resident population (referrals/demographics)
- Student in-take assessments
- Discharge procedures
- How student success is defined
- Fiscal environment
- Formal and informal arrangements
- Service delivery and style
- Multidisciplinary relationship
- Surrogate parents
- Training
- Group home/school (prior and current) relationship
- Projected goals/actual outcomes
- Relationship/support with placement agencies

Factors Considered During Record Reviews:

- Average number of prior placements
- Information most often missing
- Types of educational information
- Content of education records
- Information most urgently needed
- IEPs (active, complete, legible)

Group Home Site Stakeholder Interviews and Activities

Study staff met with and interviewed group home operators and in-take administrators (where available). Group home assessments included site features such as: (1) group home background, (2) background qualifications and activities of site personnel, (3) administrative and organizational structures, (4) location of the site, (5) description of service delivery methods, (6) origin of residents, (7) in-take and discharge assessments of residents, (8) quality of education records, (9) relationship with school student was transferred from; (10) student placements following stay at the group home, (11) tracking capabilities of student upon their exit from the

group home, (12) the degree to which group homes and their residents interact with placement workers, and (13) coordination between educational and non-educational agencies that provide services to group home residents. These interviews also sought local perspectives on ways to improve the effectiveness of the educational component of the state's foster care system, data and oversight requirements, and common issues and needs. Please see the Technical Appendix for a list of issues and questions covered during interviews with group home operators and in-take staff.

Resident Interviews

The purpose of the resident interviews was to hear from residents—in their words—their feelings, experiences and suggestions about the education of children residing in group homes. A total of 37 group home residents between the ages of 12 and 19 years were interviewed by one study staff member and a licensed social worker at 10 of the 13 case study group homes sites. Interviews with residents were not conducted at three sites due to the following two reasons: 1) one site had no current residents over the age of 12 years, and 2) the second site did not feel comfortable due to reasons of confidentiality.

The study team considered resident interviews to be an integral component of the study, (i.e., to hear from the children, themselves, regarding the education they were receiving, or in too many cases not receiving). The advisory group concurred with this. Despite the importance of providing direct client voice to these types of studies, we found the CDE and many group home providers to be reluctant to allow this access. The CDE, for example, after numerous and lengthy interactions with their legal department, decided they would not support resident interviews but would also not actively block them. It was essential that we took considerable steps to protect residents who wanted to talk with us. At the same time, children in the system have a great deal to add to studies like these. In the future, we recommend that the CDE develop standard protocol and procedures to allow access to these residents. In the absence of this, we seem much more interested in ensuring their confidentiality (and isolation) than in ensuring that they receive high quality and appropriate educational services.

Weeks prior to the resident interviews, group home staff posted an invitation to their residents which invited them to attend a 15-30-minute voluntary, anonymous interview session to discuss their educational experiences. With the help of group home staff, interviews were held in a private room away from other group home residents and staff members.

At the beginning of every resident interview, the attending social worker informed the resident about the purpose of both the interview and the study, and reminded the resident they could leave the room or choose not to answer any question at any time. At this time, the social worker also informed the resident that study staff would not ask them their name and that anything said with regard to the topic of education would be kept confidential.

Please refer to the Technical Appendix for these resident interview materials, including a list of issues and questions covered during the interviews.

Student Record Reviews

A total of 56 school records and 47 group home records were collected and assessed at eight of the 13 group home sites. Two group homes did not maintain any education-related information in their files; three group homes declined to share their records due to confidentiality reasons.

Six to ten resident records were reviewed at each of the eight sites. Records were randomly selected by study staff from file drawers based on the number of residents residing in the group home. For example, at group homes with a total of 30 residents, staff selected every third record to be reviewed. During record reviews at the group home site, staff wrote the child's name down on a page that was later removed and discarded once the child's record was located at the school site.

The purpose of the record reviews was to obtain an inventory of education-related information kept in files at group home and school sites. At the group home site, study staff were interested in the types of information placement workers provide to group home staff, the existence of education-related information (previous and current progress reports or report cards), discharge plans, appraisals and individual program plans, and group home assessment procedures. At the school site, study staff were interested in assessments, existence and quality of student cumulative files, efforts to obtain education information from previous school, communication with group home staff, and delivery of services. Please see the Technical Appendix for checklists completed as staff examined records and recorded education data at both group home and school sites.

Placement Worker Interviews

Study staff interviewed placement workers from county offices of education and county probation, mental health and social services departments. These interviews were primarily conducted by telephone due to the busy schedules of these individuals.

Issues covered during interviews with placement workers included: (1) background of group home placements, (2) factors considered in determination of group home selection, (3) familiarity with the Health and Education Passport system, (4) types of education-related information provided to prospective group homes, (5) existence of educational surrogates, (6) modification of IEPs, (7) quantity and quality of contact with placements, (8) education record collection process, and (9) agency training. Please refer to the Technical Appendix for a complete list of questions and issues covered during interviews with placement workers.

School Site Interviews

Study staff interviewed staff members at both the non-public schools and public schools residents attend. At the non-public school, staff arranged to meet with the director and special education director. At the public school, staff coordinated interviews with the special education director and principal.

Please see the Technical Appendix for questions covered with staff at public schools. The Technical Appendix also contains questions and issues covered at non-public school sites.

Chapter 3. Findings by Research Component

The purpose of this chapter is to present detailed findings from each of the five primary sets of research procedures used in this study, i.e., state data analysis, LCI phone interviews, surveys, stakeholder interviews, and case study site visitations. Note that some of the five research components are more substantial than others. For example, a major purpose of the LCI phone interviews was to assist in case study sample selection. Consequently, the additional information added to this study from this research component is somewhat limited. The case study component, on the other hand, contains many subcomponents and provides more extensive findings.

State Data Analysis

Education Information in CWS/CMS

The first analysis of data examined educational information (from the "educational passport"—i.e., the education enrollment, education record, and education provider data sets) in the CWS/CMS as of December 1, 1999. The purpose was to determine how many children in group care (n=12,978) had any educational information at all that was recorded in the system. Results found that statewide little to no information is currently being entered into the educational passport data sets. Overall, about 20 percent of children in group care in the December 1, 1999 caseload had any information in the education passport—and there were considerable differences by county (See Exhibit 3.1 and Exhibit 3.2). For educationally relevant information, this number was much lower, but virtually none of the cases statewide had information in the education data fields other than the county identification.

Exhibit 3.1. CWS/CMS: Proportion of Group Care Children on December 1, 1999 with Any Education Passport Information (usually only the county identifier)

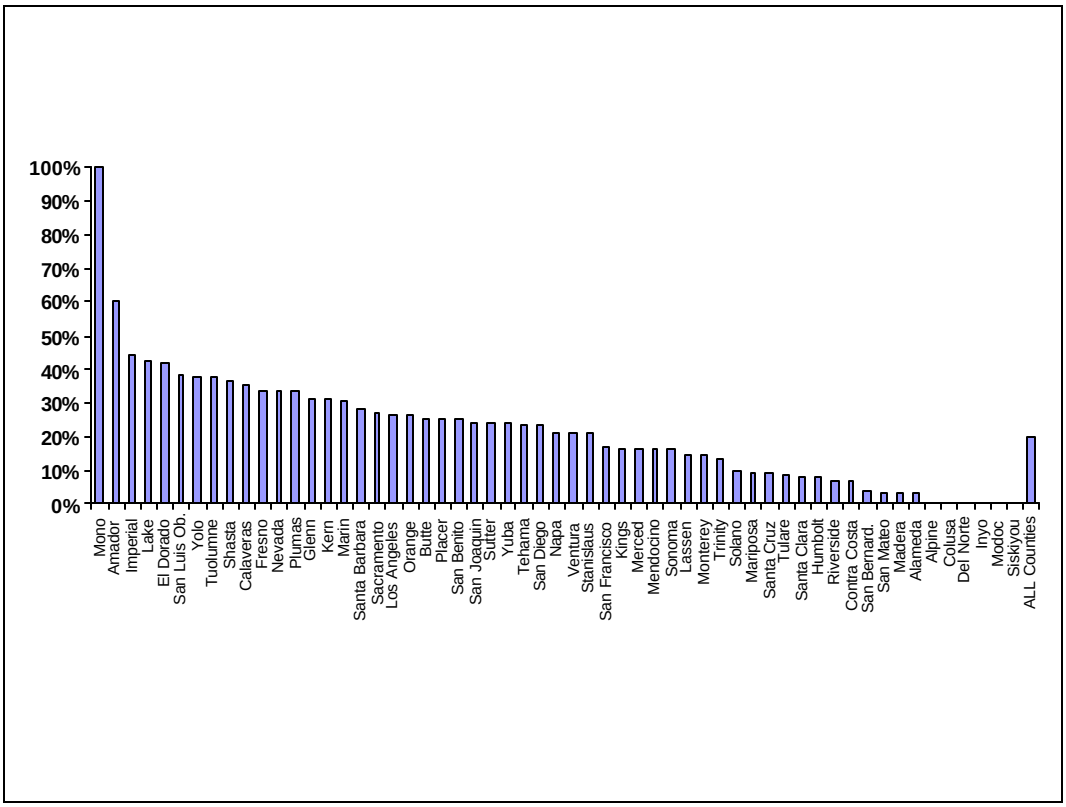


Exhibit 3.2. Education Passport Information for Dec. 1, 1999 Group Home Caseload

COUNTY	Children in CASELOAD	Children with any Ed. Passport Info	Percentage with any Ed. Passport info
Alameda	1,019	31	3.0%
Alpine	1	0	0.0%
Amador	5	3	60.0%
Butte	76	19	25.0%
Calaveras	17	6	35.3%
Colusa	6	0	0.0%
Contra Costa	411	28	6.8%
Del Norte	18	0	0.0%
El Dorado	43	18	41.9%
Fresno	336	113	33.6%
Glenn	16	5	31.3%
Humbolt	37	3	8.1%
Imperial	84	37	44.0%
Inyo	9	0	0.0%
Kern	232	72	31.0%
Kings	18	3	16.7%
Lake	26	11	42.3%
Lassen	21	3	14.3%
Los Angeles	3,903	1,031	26.4%
Madera	29	1	3.4%
Marin	49	15	30.6%
Mariposa	11	1	9.1%
Mendocino	55	9	16.4%
Merced	85	14	16.5%
Modoc	10	0	0.0%
Mono	1	1	100.0%
Monterey	126	18	14.3%
Napa	33	7	21.2%
Nevada	18	6	33.3%
Orange	1,025	270	26.3%
Placer	72	18	25.0%
Plumas	9	3	33.3%
Riverside	705	49	7.0%
Sacramento	619	170	27.5%
San Benito	12	3	25.0%
San Bernardino	747	28	3.7%
San Diego	878	205	23.3%
San Francisco	276	47	17.0%
San Joaquin	116	28	24.1%
San Luis Obispo	92	35	38.0%
San Mateo	164	6	3.7%
Santa Barbara	99	28	28.3%
Santa Clara	454	37	8.1%
Santa Cruz	78	7	9.0%
Shasta	41	15	36.6%
Siskiyou	33	0	0.0%
Solano	83	8	9.6%
Sonoma	155	25	16.1%
Stanislaus	92	19	20.7%
Sutter	25	6	24.0%
Tehama	17	4	23.5%
Trinity	15	2	13.3%
Tulare	204	18	8.8%
Tuolumne	8	3	37.5%
Ventura	139	29	20.9%
Yolo	74	28	37.8%
Yuba	50	12	24.0%
ALL Counties	12,977	2,558	19.7%
Missing	1	10,420	

As Exhibit 3.1 shows, small counties such as Mono and Amador had a high proportion of their group care caseload with some information in the education passport; however, these counties had group care caseloads of 1 and 5, respectively. Other counties with larger group care caseloads ranged from low proportions (e.g., Los Angeles had 1,031 out of 3,903 children; Orange

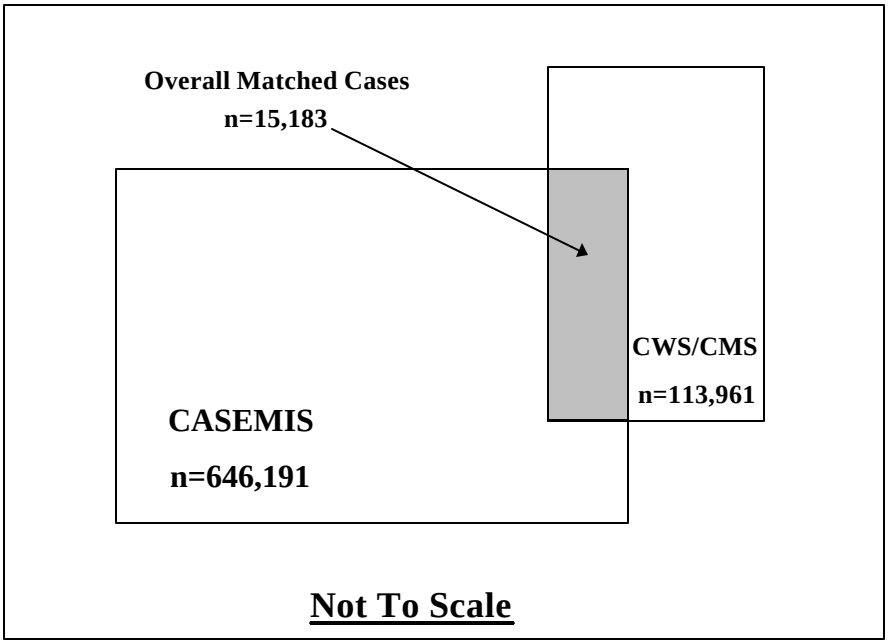
had 270 out of 1,025 children) to very low proportions (e.g., Alameda had 31 out of 1,019 children; Contra Costa had 28 out of 411 children) with information in the education passport.

Unfortunately, these small proportions vastly over-represent the degree of *useful* information that exists currently in the education passport tables. That is, Exhibit 3.1 and Exhibit 3.2 display the proportion of county caseload for which *any information at all* (i.e., a county identifier) could be found. When important education outcome fields (e.g., education grade level, performance grade level, enrollment termination reason) for the group care caseload were examined, virtually no information had currently been entered for these children.

Overlap of Information Between CASEMIS and CWS/CMS

The second analysis undertaken for this study was an examination of the overlap of records resulting from the data match between the CASEMIS and CWS/CMS data systems. Overall, the records that were matched (n=15,183) between the data sources represented 2.3 percent of the CASEMIS caseload, and 13.3 percent of the CWS/CMS caseload for December 1, 1999. This overlap is shown in Exhibit 3.3.

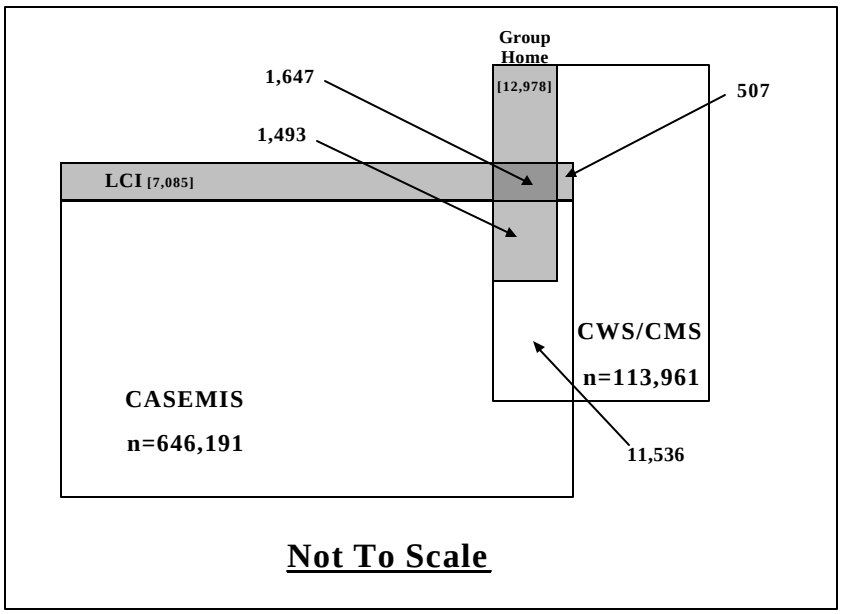
Exhibit 3.3 CASEMIS-CWS/CMS Overlap for December 1, 1999



The study then looked more specifically at these 15,183 records in terms of the degree of overlap for children identified as being in licensed care institutions (LCIs) in CASEMIS and

children identified as being in a group home in CWS/CMS. This overlap is illustrated in Exhibit 3.4.

Exhibit 3.4 CASEMIS-CWS/CMS Overlap for December 1, 1999



As Exhibit 3.4 demonstrates, there was not a great deal of agreement between CASEMIS and CWS/CMS in terms of linked records that showed children being coded as both in an LCI and in a group home. On the other hand, perfect agreement between the two systems would not be expected as special education children can be placed in LCIs without being a part of the care system. For those records that were linked between the two systems, there were 1,647 children who were coded both as in an LCI in CASEMIS and as in a group home in CWS/CMS. In addition, 507 children were coded as in an LCI in CASEMIS but were not coded as in a group home in CWS/CMS and 1,493 children who were not coded as in an LCI in CASEMIS but were coded as in a group home in CWS/CMS. For these two sets of children agreement regarding their residing in a group home would be expected. There are also 11,536 children in the match who were neither coded as in an LCI in CASEMIS nor as in a group home in CWS/CMS.

There were 4,931 children residing in LCIs (69.6% of children in CASEMIS designated as living in LCIs) for whom a match was not found in CWS/CMS. These may be the children placed in LCIs, who are not part of the foster care or probation systems. In addition, however, there are several other possible explanations for why these records did not match: (1) due to the conservative parameters used during the matching process—such as confining the match to the specific day of December 1, 1999—it is possible that some of these children had been in group care at some point but were between episodes of being in the out-of-home care system (e.g., they

had been reunified, or had run away) on December 1, 1999; (2) the children were in an LCI but were not actually in out-of-home care (e.g., were placed privately by their parents in a congregate care facility, or were placed by the Education system per AB3632 but were not dependents of the court); (3) the children actually were dependents or wards of the court and were living in a group care facility, but were not successfully linked between CASEMIS and CWS/CMS due to insufficient or erroneous identifying information, or due to information that had not yet been updated at the time the data were queried.

How Many Group Home Children Are in California?

After comparing data across the CWS/CMS and CASEMIS data sets, this question appears more elusive than perhaps first believed. If we only look to CWS/CMS as the source of data to answer this question, we come up with 12,978 students residing in group homes, which is very close to the 13,107 children shown residing in group homes in Appendix A to the request for proposals for this project. From CASEMIS, for this same point in time (December 1, 1999), we see a count of 7,085 children residing in group homes (referred to in CASEMIS as Licensed Childrens' Institutions or LCIs).

Exhibit 3.5 Count of Group Home or Licensed Children's Institution (LCI) Residents and the Percent of these Children in Special Education

4,931	LCI in CASEMIS but not in CWS/CMS
1,647	LCI in CASEMIS and group home in CWS/CMS
507	LCI in CASEMIS in CWS/CMS but not as group home
7,085	Total children specified as residing in an LCI in CASEMIS
1,493	Non-LCI in CASEMIS and group home in CWS/CMS
8,578	Total count of special education students residing in an LCI or group home
9,838	Group home children not in special education
18,416	Total count of LCI or group home children
47%	Estimated percentage of LCI or group home children in special education

Assuming that both of these databases contain reasonably accurate, but different, information about what children are in group homes (LCIs), our best estimate of the total count of children in California residing in group homes (LCIs) is shown in Exhibit 3.5. In addition to the 7,085 LCI students listed in CASEMIS (all of whom, of course, are in special education), an additional 1,493 children, shown in the CWS/CMS system as group home, find matches in CASEMIS. This means they are in special education but not known to CASEMIS as group home.

Counting children shown as group home (LCI) in one or both of the two systems yields a total estimated count of group home (LCI) children in special education as 8,578. From CWS/CMS we find an additional 9,838 children for whom we do not find a match in CASEMIS,

and therefore conclude that they are not in special education. This yields a total estimated count of group home/LCI children in California of 18,416, and an estimate that 47 percent of these children are in special education. When we take into account group home (LCI) children from both of these data sets, the statewide count is more than 40 percent greater than that produced by just looking at CWS/CMS data alone.

To what categories of disability are group home children in special education assigned?

Exhibit 3.6 shows the distribution of these 8,578 group home (LCI) children in special education by category of disability. While there are differences in the distribution of students by categories of disability across the first two groups of children shown, i.e. the vast majority of special education students who are not in foster care or in group homes (column a) and those children who are in foster care but not in group homes (column b), vast differences in the distribution of students by disability are shown for the third category, group home children (column c). Although foster care children who do not reside in group homes (b), are more likely to be designated as emotionally disturbed and less likely to be speech and language impaired than those shown in column a, the vast majority of these two sets of students are designated as learning disabled. For group home children (column c), a very different pattern emerges. By far the most prevalent diagnosis is emotional disturbance, with learning disability being second, and mental retardation third.

Exhibit 3.6 Percentages of Students by Category of Disability and Residential Status

	Not Foster Care, Not Group Home (a)	*Foster Care, Not Group Home (b)*	*Group Home (LCI) (c)*
Total Count	626,077	11,536	8,578
Emotional Disturbance	3%	9%	41%
Learning Disability	55%	56%	28%
Mental Retardation	6%	8%	11%
Speech Lang. Imp.	26%	17%	3%
Other Disability	11%	10%	17%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

What percentage of group home children are educated in nonpublic schools (NPS) compared to other children in special education?

A major concern regarding the appropriateness of the education received by group home children is the considerable fiscal incentive to place any group home children needing supplemental services of any kind, e.g. counseling, in special education and to have them educated in a nonpublic school. These issues are discussed in greater detail in other sections of this report, but districts receive no supplemental funds for serving foster care children other than the general education allocation received for any other child unless they are placed in a nonpublic school. When this occurs, districts are reimbursed for the full cost of this placement. Thus, while there is no fiscal incentive to the district to place group home children who do not need any supplemental attention or services in an NPS, the fiscal incentive to place in an NPS can be considerable for special education children who need supplemental services by definition.

In addition, considerable concern has been expressed about group homes with affiliated NPSs who require enrollment in their NPS as a condition of residential placement. From nonpublic school and group home data, we estimate that the percentage of beds in group homes in the state with a direct nonpublic school affiliation is about 35%. If there are pressures from some group homes to enroll their residents in affiliated NPSs, this adds to the public school incentive to place group home children in NPSs. What do the data show in regard to placement patterns of group home children in NPS, as compared to all children in foster care and to all special education students?

Exhibit 3.7 shows the percentage of special education students across these three categories who are placed in NPSs to receive their educational services. Overall, while 1 percent of non foster care, non group home students (column a) are placed in NPSs, the number jumps to 4% for foster care children who are not in group homes (column b), and to 46 percent for group home children. However, as shown above, these three populations of special education students differ considerably in regard to their primary disabilities. NPSs in California predominantly serve students with emotional disturbance (62% of NPS enrollments). Thus, it is important to hold disability constant when comparing placements to NPSs for group home children as compared to other categories of children in special education. However, even when disability is held constant, the degree to which group home children are assigned to NPSs as compared to non group home children is striking. For example, a child within the disability category, emotional disturbance, is nearly three times as likely to be assigned to an NPS when that child resides in a group home as compared to a child with emotional disturbance who does not reside in an group home.

Exhibit 3.7 Percentage of Special Education Students Attending Nonpublic Schools By Residential Status and Category of Disability

	Not Foster Care, Not Group Home (a)	*Foster Care, Not Group Home (b)*	*Group Home (LCI) (c)*
All Special Education Students:			
Total Count	626,077	11,536	8,578
Students Enrolled in Nonpublic Schools	8,208	444	3,975
Percentage of Students in Nonpublic Schools	1%	4%	46%
Percent Students to NPS by Category of Disability:			
Emotional Disturbance	25%	28%	77%
Learning Disability	1%	2%	30%
Mental Retardation	1%	3%	22%
Speech Lang. Imp.	0%	0%	12%
Other Disability	2%	3%	21%
Total Percent	1%	4%	46%

While some may argue that this relationship is not causal, i.e. that being a resident of a group home is correlated with placement in an NPS but is not a cause of that placement, these data are sufficiently disconcerting to underscore the need for two changes in policy. First, the strong fiscal incentive favoring the placement of group home children in NPSs must be made neutral. Second, the conditions that allow group homes to continue to insist on placement in their NPS as a requirement for residency must be removed and existing laws against these conditions and against interested parties of this type serving as surrogate parents for group home children must be enforced. However, if parties with conflicts of interest are removed as education advocates for these children, as they should be, it is also imperative that someone else be designated to take their place. This system of child advocacy should not rely on volunteerism, but should be someone who knows what education options are appropriate for children and who can hold education entities responsible and accountable for providing them.

Are group home children distributed evenly across the state?

This question is important because, as described above, public schools receive no supplemental support (beyond that received for any student) for group home children unless they are placed in nonpublic schools. The provision that nonpublic school costs for group home children are fully reimbursed by the state is in recognition of the supplemental costs that can be associated with the supplemental educational needs they may have. What is particularly curious about these provisions is that they only recognize these supplemental needs when they are met through nonpublic school provision. A strong recommendation is to remove the fiscal incentive this produces. Supplemental education aid for group children should be made available to districts regardless of whether the additional services needed are provided by public or private providers.

In addition, however, other costs are associated with group home children. Public schools are responsible for forwarding and acquiring their records, for assessing them, and for ensuring that the education they receive is appropriate to their needs whether provided in public or private settings. Because a clear cost impact results from the placement of a group home within school district and county boundaries without supplemental aid to offset this, it raises the question of an unfunded mandate on the part of the state. It may also provide one of the reasons why many school districts seem reluctant to serve group home children.

On the other hand, it is argued that schools receive considerable revenues from the state and that they receive a large lump sum of money for special education (based largely on the overall size of the district) such that the needs of group home children can just be included with those of all of the other children they serve. It seems, however, that the strength of this argument rests on a relatively equal distribution of group home children across the state. Only if all counties are impacted in a similar way in terms of where group homes are placed, will this argument hold.

Exhibit 3.8 Distribution and Special Education Identification Patterns of LCI/Group Home Children by County

County	*County School-age Population (A)*	*Total LCI Group Home Children (B)*	*Special Education Group Home Children (C)*	*Group Home Children in NPSs (D)*	*Group Home Children SED (E)*	*LCI Group Home/ 100,000 Population (F)*	*Percent Special Education (G)*	*Percent of Special Education in NPSs (H)*	*Percent of Special Education SED (I)*
Los Angeles	2,971,765	5,435	2,763	1,436	1,320	18.3	51%	52%	48%
San Diego	833,935	1,219	595	225	256	14.6	9%	38%	43%
Orange	821,590	1,351	507	138	128	16.4	38%	27%	25%
San Bernardino	574,474	1,084	486	212	191	18.9	45%	44%	39%
Riverside	475,486	1,205	650	375	297	25.3	54%	58%	46%
Santa Clara	472,895	632	271	113	75	13.4	43%	42%	28%
Alameda	398,205	1,203	392	211	188	30.2	33%	54%	48%
Sacramento	349,955	771	282	152	131	22.0	37%	54%	46%
Fresno	272,202	459	182	9	37	16.9	40%	5%	20%
Contra Costa	247,810	610	292	138	79	24.6	48%	47%	27%
Kern	221,422	281	81	11	17	12.7	29%	14%	21%
Ventura	218,588	206	96	42	51	9.4	47%	44%	53%
San Mateo	188,570	201	70	28	34	10.7	35%	40%	49%
San Juaquin	179,608	340	251	75	66	18.9	74%	30%	26%
San Francisco	158,190	415	198	139	113	26.2	48%	70%	57%
Stanislaus	144,357	161	88	43	50	11.2	55%	49%	57%
Tulare	129,652	249	75	6	7	19.2	30%	8%	9%
Monterey	125,085	133	29	7	12	10.6	22%	24%	41%
Solano	118,705	108	45	27	18	9.1	42%	60%	40%
Sonoma	117,170	279	177	121	90	23.8	63%	68%	51%
Santa Barbara	112,304	208	116	58	29	18.5	56%	50%	25%
Merced	75,554	102	31	8	10	13.5	30%	26%	32%
Santa Cruz	68,469	105	42	9	4	15.3	40%	21%	10%
Placer	64,832	108	55	28	26	16.7	51%	51%	47%
San Luis Obispo	59,895	133	60	8	20	22.2	45%	13%	33%
Marin	53,437	125	86	58	59	23.4	69%	67%	69%
Butte	52,742	126	67	6	17	23.9	53%	9%	25%
Imperial	51,025	96	21	3	1	18.8	22%	14%	5%
Shasta	46,839	96	74	40	36	20.5	77%	54%	49%
Yolo	44,916	105	51	35	34	23.4	49%	69%	67%
El Dorado	41,409	52	20	13	9	12.6	38%	65%	45%
Kings	39,964	20	4	1	2	5.0	20%	25%	50%
Madera	37,318	56	28			15.0	50%	0%	0%
Humboldt	33,147	46	15	4	3	13.9	33%	27%	20%
Napa	30,902	202	180	69	39	65.4	89%	38%	22%
Mendocino	23,875	115	77	71	52	48.2	67%	92%	68%
Sutter	23,780	28	10	4	3	11.8	36%	40%	30%
Yuba	22,104	57	22	13	12	25.8	39%	59%	55%
Nevada	21,665	19	5	4	2	8.8	26%	80%	40%
San Benito	15,456	13	1			8.4	8%	0%	0%
Tehama	15,142	21	7	6	5	13.9	33%	86%	71%
Lake	14,579	38	20	7	11	26.1	53%	35%	55%
Tuolumne	11,581	8	2			6.9	25%	0%	0%
Siskiyou	11,088	35	8	5	4	31.6	23%	63%	50%
Calaveras	9,747	27	12	2	1	27.7	44%	17%	8%
Glenn	8,979	16	5	3	2	17.8	31%	60%	40%
Lassen	7,761	22	2	1	1	28.3	9%	50%	50%
Del Norte	7,724	18	6	5	3	23.3	33%	83%	50%
Amador	6,865	6	2			8.7	33%	0%	0%
Colusa	6,278	6	-			9.6	0%	-	-
Inyo	4,607	11	2	1		23.9	18%	50%	0%
Plumas	4,605	9	2	1		19.5	22%	50%	0%
Mariposa	3,712	11	4	2	1	29.6	36%	50%	25%
Trinity	3,163	15	1	1	1	47.4	7%	100%	100%
Mono	2,772	1	-			3.6	0%	-	-
Modoc	2,567	13	7			50.6	54%	0%	0%
Sierra	731	-	-			-		-	-
Alpine	241	1	-			41.5	0%	-	-
Co Unknown		4	3						-
TOTAL	**10,061,439**	**18,416**	**8,578**	**3,974**	**3,547**	**18.3**	**47%**	**46%**	**41%**

Exhibit 3.8 shows the distribution of group home (LCI) children, as derived from the CWS/CMS match conducted for this study, across counties. Column F shows the number of group home students per 100,000 school age children in the county. Perhaps it is not surprising that because Los Angeles County is so large in relation to the rest of the state that the Los Angeles average of 18.3 group home children per 100,000 school age children also holds for the state. However, the remaining counties of the state show considerable variation in regard to the educational impact of group home placements. The exhibit is sorted by county size. Of the large counties, i.e. those with 100,000 school age children or more, Alameda shows a 65 percent higher rate of placement for group home children than the state as a whole, while two of these counties, Solano and Ventura, show placement rates that are about one-half the state rate. Across all counties, while Napa has 65.4 group home children per 100,000 school age children, Mono County shows less than four. In addition, much of these supplemental costs apply at the school district level, and not at the county level. If comparable analyses were done for individual school districts, it is anticipated that the variation shown in the exhibit would be considerably greater.

Column G of the exhibit shows that there is also considerable variation in county practices in regard to assigning group home children to special education. Among the larger counties, while San Joaquin finds 74 percent of its group home children eligible for special education, only 22 percent of group home children are found eligible in Monterey County.

Of the group home children found eligible for special education, considerable variation is also seen across counties regarding the likelihood that these children will receive their education in NPSs (Column H). Among counties with 100 or more group home children in special education, the percentage of these children receiving their education in an NPS varies from 5 percent in Fresno to 70 percent in San Francisco. In Los Angeles, over one-half of group home children in special education receive their education in an NPS, which is close to the state average. This high degree of variation across counties raises questions as to the degree to which group home children are educated in NPSs to best meet their educational needs, as opposed to factors such as the availability of NPS services.

These numbers show considerable variation in the distribution of group home children across the state, in the extent to which they are found eligible for special education, and are placed in NPSs to receive their education. Counties and school districts should receive supplemental funding to assist them in ensuring appropriate and high quality education for group home children, and then they should be held accountable for assuring that this occurs.

LCI Phone Interviews

As described in Chapter 2, staff engaged in a series of telephone interviews with group home operators and staff members at 39 randomly selected group homes within the six case study counties. The purpose of these interviews was three-fold: 1) to obtain general information about

existing programs and operations, 2) to verify information as provided by the Rates Bureau, and 3) to discuss group home staffs' feelings and concerns regarding possible inclusion in the case study site component. Sites were not included or excluded from the study, however, based on their willingness to allow certain elements that would bias our sample.

Below is a table that provides operators' responses in aggregate form, followed by a brief description of some of our findings. Please see the Technical Appendix for a complete list of interview questions.

Exhibit 3.9 Characteristics/Descriptive Information of Group Home Sites in Sample

Average RCL	10
Average Capacity	17.5 (range=6-99)* (some multiple sites)
Does group home have a Resident Council?	69%
Member of the California Association of Child and Family Services?	28%
Specialized Services	78%
Average length of stay in group home for emergency placements	2.2 Months
Average length of stay in group home for non-emergency placements?	14.9 Months
Average number of residents	20* (some multiple sites)
Average number of prior group home placements for residents?	3.3 placements
Percentage affiliated with a public school	85%
Percent with an affiliated NPS	59 %
Percentage of students attending NPSs	48%
Residents at group home attend the same nonpublic school?	65%
Percentage of students at public school	49%
Percentage emergency placements	8%
Percentage of residents placed in this group home primarily due to lack of group home space availability elsewhere?	8%
Accepted out-of-county placements	82%
Percentage of current residents who are out-of-county placements?	45%
From approximately how many counties does your group home accept placements?	Average 15
Percentage of your residents who require education surrogate parents?	15%
Percentage of residents assigned education surrogate parents?	23%
Percent with education surrogate parents	15%
For residents that have education surrogates, percent with ongoing communication between surrogates and residents' legal guardians?	37%
Percent with current IEP on arrival	
Emergency placements with IEP	11%
Non-emergency placements with IEP	49%
For new residents without active IEPs, average time to update an IEP?	69 days – average
Percent with current appraisals	31%
Percentage with complete records	25%
Percentages of residents are eligible for special education services?	65%
Does group home have formal discharge procedures?	93%
Do discharge procedures include education information?	82%

Exhibit 3.9 Characteristics/Descriptive Information of Group Home Sites in Sample (continued)

Difficulty to identify a resident as being eligible for special education services?	
Not difficult	48%
Somewhat difficult	16%
Very difficult	36%
Percentage residents having complete Health and Education Passports upon entrance?	21%
For new placements without complete Health and Education Passports, time to obtain all health and education information?	40 days –
Percentage of new residents that receive their education records within 10 days of request?	32%
For non-emergency placements, estimated average number of days per child, staff spends researching/locating education records for newly placed residents?	18 days – average
For new residents with missing/out-of-date education records, approximately how long does it take staff to obtain current records?	31 days – average

Exhibit 3.10 Percentage Placements by Agency

Indicated placements through the following agencies:	
DSS	66%
Probation	44%
Mental Health	18%
County Office of Education	13%
Private Placements	8%
Out-of-County	4%

Summary of Findings

Programs

On average, group homes' average capacity (number of residents a home may serve) is 17.5. While some group homes interviewed have more than one site, the average number of residents served is 20.

Almost all (82%) of the group homes interviewed accept out-of-county placements. This is an interesting phenomenon in that out-of-county placements are more susceptible to delays in record transfers and delays in school enrollment. Legally, the referring county is responsible to provide the receiving county with health and education records, to pay for the referred resident's services, and is required to visit their placement once per month—regardless of the distance

between them and their placement. Out-of-county placements are typically due to a shortage of programs or available beds within a resident's county of residence.

Of the group homes that reported they do not accept out-of-county placements, these group homes conveyed the following reasons for accepting only in-county referrals: 1) placement workers do not forward education or health information, 2) placement workers do not visit their placements, 3) referring counties do not monitor or pay for residents' services, and, 4) placement workers do not forward fundamental information such as the reason for placement, emotional well-being of the child or any parental information.

Specialized Group Homes

Most (78.5%) group homes serve a specific resident population or provide specialized services to their residents. Said another way, many group homes accept only probation or social service referrals, and as a result, tailor their day-to-day activities around these residents' specific needs. For example, many of the group homes interviewed accept only probation referrals, children with a history of drug and/or sexual offenses. These group homes, in addition to providing general therapeutic services (as provided by all group homes interviewed), have a specialized program and provide counseling services geared at rehabilitating offenders.[1]

Non-emergency and Emergency Placements

On average, non-emergency placements remained at a particular group home a little over one year (14.9 months). As reported by many group homes, the programs they offer are one to two years in length, and upon completion, residents are either transferred out of the group home system or to a lower RCL group home. Conversely, non-emergency placements, defined as short-term placements, ideally seven days in length, remained at a particular group home a little over two months (2.2 months). This finding is alarming as it was discovered during site visits, many times, these children are not enrolled in school because, legally, placement workers do not have to provide group home staff appraisals, health or education records for emergency placements. Typically, children identified as "emergency placements" are placed in group homes that do not meet their needs or profile, and are only placed until there is an available bed at a group home that meets their needs. However, as evidenced by the average length of placement for emergency placements, group homes need background information and records as these children need to be enrolled in school.

Resident Councils

Many (69%) group homes reported they have a working resident council. Resident councils allow residents to meet privately (in absence on group home staff) to discuss issues they are facing

[1] For many probation-referred kids, a group home is the last stop before being sent to the California Youth Authority.

personally and as a group. All group homes in California are legally required (see group home regulations) to allow residents to meet on a regular basis within the group home away from staff to privately discuss issues they face as group home residents. Resident councils are important, as staff discovered during site visits, because they afford residents an outlet for communication. In addition, staff found that for many residents, without any educational advocacy, often times residents are in charge of their own education. Resident councils allow resident to learn from one another and seek advice regarding completion of their education, or how to handle daily homework or school-related problems.

School Enrollment

Fifty-nine percent of the group homes interviewed have an affiliated nonpublic school. The relationship between group homes and nonpublic schools was an issue explored due to possible fiscal incentives and because group homes may not mandate placements attend their affiliated nonpublic school as a condition of placement (per Education Code 48854).

Group homes reported that 49 percent of their residents attend public school. Public schools are defined as traditional public schools, court schools and community schools. By and large, study staff found that most residents attending "public school" attend court or community schools.

Surveys

Representatives from a wide variety of local agencies charged with providing, monitoring and or coordinating services to youth in the group home system were surveyed. This included case workers and administrators from agencies including county probation, mental health, social services and the County Offices of Education, along with a sample of group home operators. Of particular concern were factors relating to the availability and adequacy of student records, the level of coordination of services between agencies, and the perceived impact of various factors upon the adequacy and appropriateness of educational placement and services. Respondents from all agencies were asked questions with regard to the availability and adequacy of student records and coordination. Other questions determining specific agency functions or policies, however, were asked only of representatives from agencies specifically charged with providing these services.

Adequacy of Student Records

Two critical findings regarding the adequacy of student records emerge from survey responses. First, there is a general agreement that educational records are frequently delayed, unavailable or incomplete. Second, a significant proportion of respondents see educational placements as being compromised by a lack of complete records. In general, group home operators and probation office caseworkers see these problems as most severe. Mental health and social

service agency respondents appeared to be less concerned about the adequacy of educational records or its impact upon group home residents.

Educational records are typically delayed, unavailable or incomplete

- Three quarters of group home operators and almost half (48%) of probation office respondents report that the educational records for group home children are "frequently" or "almost always" incomplete. Social service case workers (38%) and mental health staff (25%) were less likely to see a severe problem with the incompleteness of student records.

- Delays in the transfer of educational records are seen as a problem by representatives from all agencies. Almost two-thirds (65%) of probation officers and 63 percent of mental health caseworkers report that educational records are "frequently" or "almost always" delayed when a youth changes schools or group home placements. Similar high proportions of group home operators (60%) and social service staff (50%) report that delays occur "frequently" or "almost always."

- Agency staff are significantly less likely than group home operators to report that educational records are simply lost when a child changes their residential placement. While actual loss of records was seen as relatively rare by mental health and probation personnel, almost one quarter of social workers reported student records were lost "frequently" or "almost always." Among group home operators, however, more than three-quarters saw this as a common problem.

A significant proportion of educational placements appear to be compromised by a lack of complete records.

- Group home operators are more likely than agency representatives to report that a child's educational placement is "compromised" due to a lack of complete records. More than two-thirds (68%) reported that educational placement decisions were "frequently" or "almost always" compromised by a lack of educational information. Among probation officers, 43 percent felt that the unavailability of students records "frequently" or "almost always" compromised educational adequacy and appropriateness. Social service (30%) and mental health (14%) personnel saw less likelihood that a lack of educational information would "compromise" placement decisions.

Exhibit 3.11 Survey Data - Educational Placement Practices

	Percentage Reporting Occurrence as "Frequently" or "Almost Always"			
Frequency with which the following occurs:	***Social Worker***	***Mental Health***	***Probation Officers***	***Group Home Operators***
Education records for foster youth are incomplete.	38%	25%	48%	75%
The transfer of education records is delayed when a foster youth changes schools or group home placement.	50%	63%	65%	60%
Due to placement or changes in placement, education records for foster youth are lost.	22%	0%	7%	76%
Education placement decisions are compromised due to delays in obtaining foster youth's education records.	30%	14%	43%	68%
Recently placed group home youth experience long delays when attempting to enroll in public schools.	24%	0%	22%	75%
When foster youth have incomplete course work credits, youth typically repeat the class for full credit.	19%	25%	33%	61%
Due to delays in the transfer of records, duplication of educational assessments occurs.	16%	0%	13%	52%
Average reported length of time to obtain records for placements without complete Health and Education Passports.	67 days	78 days	82 days	40 days
Respondents	45	14	36	28

- Group home operators report the greatest impact regarding delayed or missing educational information. Between half and three-quarters report that their residents "frequently" or "almost always" have incomplete course credit records, are required to take courses they have taken previously, and experience long delays in enrollment in public schools.

- Between roughly one-quarter and one-half of probation officers also report "frequent" problems regarding educational records and placement delays. With some exceptions, both social and mental health personnel saw the problem as slightly less severe.
- The average reported elapsed time required to obtain educational records for placements without complete Health and Education Passports ranged from 40 to 82 days.

- Group home operators, who reported an average time of 40 days to obtain records, also reported that their staff spend approximately 18 days per child to research and locate records for non-emergency placements.

- Group home staff time to obtain records for new residents arriving with incomplete or out-of-date educational records, require a reported 31 days of staff attention.

Impact of Lack of Adequate, Delayed or Lost Records on Educational Services Received

The widespread perception regarding the inadequacy of student records is paralleled by even stronger perceptions concerning the negative impact of the situation.

- Between half and more than three-quarters of all respondents feel that there is an "important" or "very important" impact on the educational outcomes of group home residents when educational records are delayed or incomplete.

- The most significant educational impact reported by agency and group home staff is caused by the delay of records when group home children change their school or group home placements. At least two thirds, and as many as 83 percent of these respondents see the negative consequences of this delay as being "important" or "very important" in affecting a child's educational placement.

Exhibit 3.12 Survey Data - Quality of Educational Services

	Percentage Reporting Impact on Services As Important or Very Important			
	Social Worker	***Mental Health***	***Probation Officers***	***Group Home Operators***
Incomplete education records.	73%	67%	70%	77%
The transfer of education records being delayed when a foster youth changes school or group home placements.	68%	83%	78%	69%
Education placement decisions being compromised due to delays in obtaining education records.	73%	57%	71%	55%

Service Availability and Completion of Educational Passports

In general, agency staff and group home operators agree that a wide variety of educational services are available for group home residents. With the exception of social service agency staff, however, Health and Educational Passports that are intended to overcome problems in record transfer are completed or available on a regular basis in only a minority of cases.

- Multiple educational options for group home children are reported to be available "frequently" or "almost always" by half of social workers and 57 percent of mental health professionals and more than three quarters (78%) of probation caseworkers. This figure rises to 83 percent among group home operators.

- Almost two-thirds (66%) of social workers report that their agency "frequently" or "almost always" completes a Health and Educational Passport for the youth they serve.

Familiarity of agency staff with the health and education passports varies widely. Social service agency respondents estimated that 86 percent of their colleagues were familiar with the passport system. In contrast, only one-quarter of probation staff members were seen by their colleagues as being familiar. Estimates among mental health respondents were even lower – no respondent reported any familiarity of their colleagues with the Health and Education Passport system.

Exhibit 3.13 Survey Data - Educational Service Options and Practices

	Percentage Reporting Occurrences as Frequently or Almost Always			
	Social Worker	***Mental Health***	***Probation Officers***	***Group Home Operators***
Multiple education options are available to foster youth residing in group homes.	50%	57%	78%	83%
Our agency completes the Health and Education Passport for every group home placement.	66%	0%	13%	Not asked
Percentage of agency staff reported familiar with Health and Education Passports	86%	0%	24%	Not asked

Notification and Interagency Coordination

Significant problems appear to exist both in terms of notification of local school districts when a child is placed in a group home, and in coordination among service provider agencies.

Local schools do not appear to be notified at the time a youth is placed in a group home.

- Slightly less than one-third of group home operators (30%) and probation officers (33%) report that local schools were "usually" or "almost always" notified when a youth is placed in a group home.
- Approximately half (54%) of social workers report that their agency "always" or "frequently" notifies local schools when their agency has made a group home placement.
- Probably because of the type of placements handled by mental health agencies, the percentage of staff from these agencies reporting notification is considerably higher – over 83 percent.

Exhibit 3.14 Survey Data - Notification and Coordination of Services

	Percentage Reporting Occurrences as Frequently or Almost Always			
	Social Worker	***Mental Health***	***Probation Officers***	***Group Home Operators***
Placement agencies provide notification to local schools at the time the foster youth is placed in a group home.	54%	83%	33%	30%
Our agency has had a great deal of cooperation from school districts and the county office of education to ensure health and education information is transferred.	33%	38%	44%	90%
Collaboration between parents, county agencies SELPAs, school districts and other providers, is evident in the planning of individualized services for foster youth.	25%	29%	30%	91%
Placement agencies, school districts and county offices of education, work cooperatively to improve educational outcomes for group home placements.	25%	29%	18%	86%
Group homes in our area work closely with the local school district and/or county office of education to insure proper education placements and services for group home youth.	84%	100%	90%	77%
In our area, there is a committee/group that meets regularly to discuss foster youth placement issues.	55%	86%	63%	71%

Local agency collaboration and coordination are seen as mixed

- Slightly over one-third of social welfare (33%) and mental health agency (38%) respondents report high levels of cooperation with school districts and county agencies in ensuring the transfer of residents' educational records. Among probation officers, this figure rises to 44 percent.

- Group home operators are roughly three-times more likely to see high levels of coordination. Approximately 90 percent report that schools "frequently" or "almost always" cooperate to ensure health and education information are transferred.

- Similar differences were reported in perceived levels of collaboration between parents, county agencies, SELPAs, and school districts. Only slightly over one-quarter of social service (25%), mental health (29%) and probation officers (30%) saw high levels of collaboration as "evident in the planning of individualized services" needed by group home youth. Surprisingly, 91 percent of group home respondents saw such collaboration as occurring "regularly" or "almost all the time."

- Varying perception also exists regarding levels of interagency cooperation. Only 18 percent of probation officers, 25 percent of social service caseworkers, and 29 percent of mental health personnel report high levels of inter-agency coordination. Among group home operators, however, 86 percent saw placement agencies, school districts, and county offices of education, as working cooperatively to improve educational outcomes for group home placements.

- Group home operators were generally seen by all respondents as working closely with the local school district and/or county office of education staff to insure proper education placements and services for group home youth.

- A majority of respondents from all agencies report the existence of an inter-agency coordinating council or group that meets "regularly" to discuss group home placement issues. In all, 55 percent of respondents from social service agencies reported that a coordinating group meets "frequently" or "almost always," compared to 63 percent of respondents from probation and 86 percent from mental health agencies.

Despite relatively low levels of reported coordination, respondents attach a high level of importance to service coordination and cooperative planning.

- An overwhelming majority – between two-thirds and 100 percent of respondents – see collaboration between parents, county agencies, SELPAs, school districts and other providers in the planning of individualized services for group home youth as being "important" or "very important" in impacting the quality of educational services provided to group home residents.

- Cooperation between placement agencies, school districts and county offices of education is seen as "important" or "very important" in its impact on educational outcomes by a similar high proportion of respondents. Roughly two-thirds of group home operators see cooperation as having an "important" or "very important" impact. Among other groups this percentage increases further; to 76 percent among probation officers, 83 percent among social workers, and 100 percent among mental health case workers.

Exhibit 3.15 Survey Data - Impact on the Quality of Educational Services

	Percentage Reporting Impact on Services as Important or Very Important			
	Social Worker	***Mental Health***	***Probation Officers***	***Group Home Operators***
Collaboration between parents, county agency SELPAs, school districts and other providers in the planning of individualized services for foster youth.	88%	100%	74%	63%
Placement agencies, school districts and county offices of education working cooperatively to improve educational outcomes for group home placements.	83%	100%	76%	63%
Group homes working closely with the local school district and/or county office of education to insure proper education placements and services.	84%	100%	90%	77%

Fiscal considerations were seen as likely to affect both educational placement decisions and the need for group homes to rely upon NPS funding to create a viable program-funding base.

- Between approximately half and three-quarters of all respondents say funding considerations affected educational placement decisions “frequently” or “almost always.”

- An even higher percentage – between two-thirds and 83 percent reported that group homes “frequently” or “almost always” relied on funding from affiliated NPS programs to cover costs associated with providing residential or other non-educational services.

Exhibit 3.16 Survey Data - Impact of Fiscal Incentives

	Percentage Responding Frequently or Almost Always			
	Social Worker	***Mental Health***	***Probation Officers***	***Group Home Operators***
In my view, fiscal incentives affect educational placement decisions.	47%	57%	74%	70%
Group homes with affiliated nonpublic schools seem to rely on their nonpublic school funding to create a comprehensive, viable funding strategy.	73%	83%	63%	NA

In contrast to group home and other agency staff, County Office of Education (COE) staff report relatively high levels of information sharing and cooperation.

- More than two-thirds (69%) of COE respondents report that it is generally not difficult for parents or legal guardians with group home youth residing in group homes to learn about available educational alternatives.

- More than half (58%) of the respondents from County Offices of Education reported that COE staff "frequently" or "almost always" work closely with group home staff to inform them about services available for students, including special education services.

- Similar questions asked of social service and mental health staffs show a significantly lower level of reported cooperation. Only one-third of social service and 14 percent of mental health staff report high levels of cooperation. Staff from probation agencies (57%), however, report roughly similar levels of cooperation.

- Approximately half (48%) of the respondents from County Offices of Education report that COE staff "frequently" or "almost always" work closely and cooperatively with placement agencies and school districts to improve educational outcomes for group home placements.

- Similar questions asked of social service, mental health and probation agency staffs show a significantly lower level of reported cooperation. Less than one-quarter (23%) of social service, 29 percent of mental health staff, and only 14 percent of probation agency staff report high levels of cooperation.

- A strong majority (56%) of respondents from County Offices of Education report that there is "frequently" or "almost always" a shortage of surrogate parents who are available to group home youth.

- For youth having educational surrogates, only 44 percent of the respondents from County Offices of Education reported that surrogate parents meet "frequently" or "almost always" with the youth they represent.

Exhibit 3.17 Survey Data - County Office of Education Staff Concerns Regarding Foster Youth Services

	Percentage Reporting Occurrences as Frequently or Almost Always	*Percentage Reporting "Important" or "Very Important" Impact on Quality of Services Provided*
Parents or legal guardians with foster youth residing in group homes tell us it is difficult to learn about available educational alternatives.	31%	67%
The county office of education staff works with group home staff and informs them about services and supports, including special education services.	58%	83%
Placement agencies, school districts and this County office of education work cooperatively to improve educational outcomes for group home placements.	48%	76%
In our county, we have a shortage of educational surrogate parents.	56%	58%
Representatives or educational surrogate parents meet with the foster youth they represent.	44%	56%

Stakeholder Interviews

Findings from the state-level interviews described in Chapter 2 are presented below. They are organized in relation to the seven research questions posed for this study. Each research question is stated in bold, followed by a summary analysis of the stakeholder interview responses to each of these questions. These summaries are followed by italicized quotes lifted directly from these interviews. Individual respondents are not named to protect confidentiality.

1. **How many children in group homes are attending nonpublic schools and how many of these children are and are not eligible for special education?** Lack of clear lines of authority and responsibility, as well as substantial fiscal incentives, appear to result in children being placed in NPSs who are not eligible for special education, or for whom eligibility is debatable. Considerable concern was expressed about children found eligible

for special education who would not be if appropriate education advocacy and clear lines of responsibility were in place, as well as a second group of children who are appropriately found eligible for special education but who are inappropriately placed in nonpublic schools in violation of the requirement that they be served in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their needs. A third group of children, that appear to require the kind of 24 hour service that a combined LCI and NPS can provide, are said to sometimes be found ineligible for special education and therefore NPS. These are children who may have severe mental health problems, but who are still able to perform academically up to grade level.

One of the largest problems is having children placed in NPSs "through the proper door," i.e. rather than just being placed in LCIs with NPSs.

One problem in relation to this is the mobility of the population. Court orders often say that they not only must go to an LCI, but that they must have 24 hour supervision including on site schooling.

Many of these kids have acting out behaviors and there is a temptation to classify them as special education, emotionally disturbed so they can get placed in a level 14 facility.

A lot of kids in group homes tend to be in special education just because they are in a group home.

Sometimes our LCI/NPS will disagree with the district, who will find one of our placements ineligible for special education. For example, take a kid who is being raped by his father but who is two years ahead in reading. In good consciousness we can not send them to a local public school without support if we feel they are not emotionally ready, therefore we serve them for free.

2. **What practices and procedures currently influence the educational placement and provision of educational services to children residing in group homes?** A substantial shortage of foster homes in the state (especially for teenagers, and even more so for teenagers of color) was reported, resulting in students being placed in group homes. Many of these homes have NPSs associated with them. Once children are assigned to an LCI with an NPS, it is reportedly very difficult to separate placement in the NPS from placement in the LCI. Appropriate education advocates for these children, as required by federal special education law, were reported to be seldom in place. Strong fiscal incentives exist for districts to relegate the schooling of group home children to NPSs. Districts only receive supplemental funding for group home children when they are found eligible for special education and when they are placed in an NPS. Local schools are supposed to continue to track and monitor these children, but receive to support from the state to do so, which may constitute an unfunded mandate. As a result, it was reported that public schools are sometimes reluctant to serve group home children. It was also reported that group home parents and social workers often favor NPS placements for their children because of the more comprehensive nature of the services they provide. County Offices of

Education, who have responsibility for the education of these children (unless there is a local agreement to the contrary), generally do not actively carry out this responsibility. Courts may specify NPS placements for children, largely usurping the authority of local school districts. When a child needs 24 hour services, a joint LCI/NPS placement may be a good thing. If not, these NPS placements may be of substantial detriment to the child in regard to their developmental, social, and educational growth. It is not clear what agency is responsible for seeing that all group home children are receiving education services appropriate to their needs. Direct "hands on" authority for the oversight and monitoring of NPSs within the CDE has not been clearly delineated and has largely been lacking, especially over the past few years.

The CDE is currently understaffed. They need positions and people who can be used to better oversee LCI and NPS placements. The question from our perspective is whether it should even be a state responsibility or perhaps a county responsibility to monitor the NPSs in alignment with the state. There needs to be more intensive and intrusive monitoring in this area. This is an area that is seriously understaffed.

The NPSs are very excited that the CDE is starting to hold public schools out of compliance for being nonresponsive for their children. SELPAs are different from working with the counties, who have less clout.

NPSs are only required to have one credentialed teacher for the whole school, regardless of the size of the school.

In the absence of a local agreement to the contrary, the County Office of Education is responsible for the education of all children in the county in group homes of six or more. SB 933, for the first time, pins down somebody's responsibility for this.

As a social worker, you always felt real good when kids went to NPSs because you knew that the kids needs were being fully met. There was another level of structure for the child.

The main issue the prior LCI work group ended up discussing was the issue of records transfer and that group home placement was made without considering the child's schooling needs.

When a child is placed by a social worker, it becomes the responsibility of the LEA to make sure that the child is placed appropriately educationally.

Prior to a kid being placed in a group home, the social worker must enroll the kid in the school district in which the group home is located, but they never do this.

The biggest problem is that they are always in some crisis situation, and as a result education is largely ignored.

It has been musical chairs in regard to NPS staff. The person who is most knowledgeable is a step above a secretary and a step below a consultant.
Educational advocacy is not that effective because it is often not clear who has the rights and in many instances the LCIs end up advocating for the kids, which is not effective (and not legal).

Fiscal incentives discourage the improvement of services at NPSs, e.g. incurring any costs in local monitoring.

There is little/no clarity in law that these children must be appointed an education surrogate and/or an advocate. This is a major omission for these kids.

The only people advocating for the kid were those with a financial interest in a particular kind of education placement.

The main problem is the system. There is no structure for monitoring group homes, and because of the rate structure that was set, LCIs have to run an NPS to get the revenues they needed to do what probably should have been done within RCL rates.

The CDE only shuffles paper in regard to NPSs. The only time you got out of the paper shuffling mode is when you have a complaint about a school and you went out to investigate. When you got there, you could suspend certification, but there were appeal processes, attorneys got involved, and it was virtually impossible. The system is not geared to affect change. No matter how bad it was, nobody wanted 40 kids to suddenly be out on the street.

Other states assume leadership and responsibility for this. No one in California is providing oversight. Many of these kids are out of sight and out of mind. The county has no authority over them and no standards on which to do this.

Maybe these kids are our district's responsibility, but they are 100 % funded by the state and in a sense this makes it not our concern.

Just think about the caseloads that social workers have. If you were a parent with 60 children, would you have the time to do this (worry about the appropriateness of the education placement)?

The shortage of LCIs is largely from low funding. They had no real increases from 1990 to 1998. They have trouble retaining staff. The adequacy of pay for staff, especially including benefits, is much better in the public sector. Operators are desperate for revenues and counties are desperate for placements. Money will help, but will not totally solve the problem. Students are not coming out of training programs at a fast enough rate to meet the demand.

Even when there were health and safety issues in the LCIs and NPSs it was difficult, when it came to education they didn't even think it was appropriate to worry about it.
All of the incentives are there to make these children someone else's problem – to isolate them and not make them a part of the public school system.

When children arrive at our group home, the decision as to whether to send them to a public school or an NPS is very simple. If they have an IEP (an individualized education plan, as received through special education designation), we send them to an NPS, if not, we send them to the public school.

3. **What is the impact of these practices and procedures on educational outcomes for children residing in group homes?** There are children receiving education in NPSs who should not be placed there and others, who need the kind of intensive services an NPS can provide, but who can not be found eligible. The lack of appropriate education advocates exacerbates both of these problems, as well as the conflicting definitions of emotional disturbance between education and mental health agencies. NPSs are much less able to offer the education diversity of public schools and they result in social isolation for children who might otherwise be mainstreamed into neighborhood schools. Federal law clearly specifies that special education children must be served in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their needs. At the same time, education outcomes may be substantially enhanced for children who are appropriately placed in NPSs. For example, for children who are emotionally disturbed, NPSs may provide the kinds of 24 hour services and the mix of educational programming and counseling services needed to remain in school. Even for these children, however, the NPS should be seen as transitional services that prepare children to return to public schooling as soon as possible. For children who are not emotionally disturbed, or who do not have some other disability necessitating NPS services, inappropriate placement in an NPS is likely to stifle the child educationally, to harm the child's social development, and possibly their mental health.

When a kid becomes 18 and has only been with emotionally disturbed kids and is suddenly emancipated, huge issues can result.

I am now a student at the University of Michigan, but was placed in NPS several different times throughout my public schooling. We did nothing but dittos all day, and they put all of the children between grades 8 and 12 in the same classroom. It wasn't until I got to a public high school that they really tailored to my needs. There were a lot of children in that NPS that could/should have gone on, but who received no encouragement. In NPSs, college preparation courses do not exist.

I was placed in the foster care system as a teenager and due to lack of appropriate placements found myself in a group home and accompanying NPS for sexual offenders, even though I had nothing of that nature in my past.

We have concerns about the NPS in our area. In one instance, we went to visit the school and could not even find it – it was all boarded up.

We are very concerned about the quality of education for kids in group homes and the fact that once they get into group homes in no time they are referred to special education. There is now a whole cottage industry around this. I feel somewhat helpless. There have been a number of times when we have said that our school district can meet the kid's educational needs, but then the home says they can not allow the kid to live there.

CYC youth were very articulate about not wanting to be isolated. They didn't want to be in these "dog pounds." The NPSs are oriented to the level of learning for the lowest child. They said the public schools have a much broader range of education options from remedial to gifted. NPS are much smaller and are one track systems.

Some kids need the 24 hour service mode an LCI/NPS combination can provide. However, it is tough to find the balance between this need and the need to transition back to the community as quickly as possible.

Regarding education placement, it is really the luck of the draw. If the child gets placed into a group home with a good education plan, they lucked out, and if not they may be out of luck.

How many of these kids end up in the system because they were abused and neglected, go to a foster placement, and then end up in an LCI with a related NPS. How many of these children end up mentally ill as a result of the system?

For kids in group homes, it was very rare that you found a kid who was mainstreamed in high school, doing normal types of activities. With older kids, there may be a few foster parents willing to take on teenagers, who then end up in group homes. Issues of race may also play a part in this. Because we don't have many foster homes of color, recruitment of foster homes for minority children is more difficult.

NPS children are forgotten and their parents are forgotten as well. Once the kid gets into an NPS, the district tends to disappear.

If we could stabilize placement, and give them something they could depend on and be comfortable with, we could take a big step toward remediating their situation.

If they have to stay in the group home and have the teacher come to them, they are not developing the social skills needed in the larger group.

The quality of academics for kids in NPSs can be poor, especially in relation to college preparatory courses.

4. **What is the feasibility and cost of collecting information about the educational placement of children residing in group homes on an ongoing basis?** It is not only feasible, but already in place in disparate places within and across agencies. The biggest problems relate to design, access, and willingness to collaborate within and across agencies.

   The education passport problem (the completion of data for a student) is a time thing. Our caseloads are more like 30 and we do not have time. The state just did a study on caseworkers, which concluded that to do everything they would need to double the number of caseworkers statewide.

   The study committee wanted to know what kinds of data are out there. What information exists, what might be developed?

   Health and education passports (student data systems) exist in smaller counties, but are not feasible in many counties. It also means something different from county to county. I am even backing down from using this term in talking with people because it conjures up some kind of complex animal that crumbles of its own weight.

   We are overwhelmed by limited staff, insufficient information, paucity of beds. If we can catch up with McDonald's Restaurant in regard to matching needs with availability, we would be in much better shape. We need a technology supported solution.

5. **What coordination occurs between educational and non-educational agencies as they provide services to children residing in group homes?** At the local level, coordination seems to vary considerably, but a strong record of coordination and collaboration across agencies appears to be the exception rather than the rule. At the state level, the lack of coordination between education and non-education agencies is a serious problem. There is not only very little precedent for this type of coordination, but also some serious questions as to who would coordinate with whom, as clear lines of responsibility for LCIs and NPSs in agencies seem tenuous to non-existent. As reported by staff participating in cross agency discussions in regard to this population of children, while there are sometimes work groups around specific issues, "big picture" coordination for this population of children across agencies at the state level has been virtually nonexistent.

   It was a nightmare getting records. When I tried to get education records, the schools often were not responsive to me or to the foster parents. The child could not get into school. District A will not send records, and District B will not take the child without records. I felt like an outsider to the education system. For example, without an immunization record, the district will turn the child down – this happens to foster kids a lot.

   We have a child in our shelter whose mother abandoned him and who has been diagnosed as depressed. However, he can do well in school and therefore is deemed ineligible for special education and the mental health and education support services this might provide.

The early expectation was that the welfare worker would pick up the child at school, do a check out, and carry the records to the next school. This does not work out because the caseload is too great. The whole system is in crisis. The social worker just feels they need to get the child in a bed.

When I worked with these kids, trying to get the local school system to accept responsibility for the education of these kids was like "spitting in the wind."

Education tends not to talk to other agencies.

I have called the superintendent of the school district providing home tutoring to one of our students, but who will not enroll him full time at the local school, 6 times and have received no return calls.

The simple answer is to have a regional planning effort when you talk about kids, so that each agency can have some input.

Where it works well at the local level, it is based on unique local circumstances. The system is not in a place where it works well by itself.

This is clearly a multi-agency responsibility, which becomes very problematic without clear lines of authority.

In my prior role in the CDE, I tried reaching out to the Department of Social Services and got the brush off from their upper management. As often as I tried to make linkages I could not do it through upper management or through the case workers. Their focus is on health and safety, with education seen as a secondary need.

6. **What are the factors that affect coordination?** Varying definitions, (e.g. of emotional disturbance), lack of clear lines of responsibility and authority within agencies, concerns about protecting information internal to each agency (e.g. student data), the lack of leadership, and the lack of a genuine commitment to this population of children appear to be some of the most substantial barriers to better coordination.

The districts do not want LCI children. These are the kids who need more, not less, yet the agencies that should focus on them lack coordination. Supposedly there are interagency agreements that specify how these services are provided, but they are often only on paper and not fully implemented as they should be.

There used to be one person in the CDE who worked with Foster Youth Services as an overload. It was not part of her assignment, just something she cared about.

Whenever we make decisions about this, there should be someone from special education there.

The mobility issue exacerbates the problem considerably – when the courts get involved it is a three-headed monster.

There are not enough people in positions of authority with a passion about this.

We need foresight and planning, otherwise we are always in a crisis mode. This requires a lot of effort and a real commitment to carry this out. People are not always willing to let go. It can be done, but it will take special people and a special commitment.

The ideal caseload is 25 to 30 kids. As a caseworker, I had a caseload of 100. When a child blew out of a placement, I found whatever bed was available for them. Education was a secondary consideration. I felt my job was done when a child was placed and that wherever he was placed would take care of the child's education. I did not interact much with the public schools.

Caseworker turnover was incredible. You would bring someone on staff and they would leave.

7. **What is the impact of current practices and procedures for interagency coordination on educational outcomes for children in group homes?** The lack of coordination and cooperation across agencies clearly seems to exacerbate the already considerable disruption in the educational lives of group home children. Social services are appropriately most concerned with the health and safety of the children within their charge. They see education as the responsibility of state and county departments of education and local school districts. However, it is not clear that the CDE sees this as their responsibility and no CDE staff person with a direct charge to concern themselves with the education of group home children can be found. State law specifies that County Offices of Education are responsible for this population, but many of these agencies reported that they do not play an active role in overseeing the education of this population. Bottom line authority is also said to reside with the LEAs, but they sometimes report feeling powerless to placements in LCIs with adjoining NPSs that may be made by other agencies. Even when accepting responsibility, it was often reported that they do not do so in a proactive sense. Children were reported to be languishing in group home placements while futile attempts were made to secure all the records needed to allow a LCI child to be enrolled in the local public school. It is also unclear what agency is supposed to ensure the education support and advocacy for group home children, at least those who are in special education, that is required by federal law. These forces lead to concerns about inappropriate education placements. These factors, as well as the general lack of stability for these children both educationally and residentially, seems likely to result in these children failing to receive an appropriate education. A solid education program could be one of the stabilizing factors in these children's lives and their greatest prospective link to a brighter future. Rather, too often, education appears to be one of their largest sources of frustration.

From our experience, when probation has a child who they do not want to place with the California Youth Authority, they will come to the district and ask that they be assigned emotionally disturbed (ED). The LCI does not want the kid if they cannot be paid at the highest rate, which means they have to be labeled ED.

Our experience has been that the higher the LCI level, the more often the child is going to be found ED. The requirement in law that schools be notified in advance that these kids are coming is not enforced in any way.

Without systematic data collection and reporting, foster kids often get stuck within the system. We have a child who has been to 12 different schools throughout his life. Once the IEP meeting was finally convened, they refused to carry it out because the case worker lacked paper work from 2 of these 12 prior placements.

They have no advocates, no articulation between agencies, no records, etc. As a result, they have become "throw away kids."

As an example, we have a child who has been kicked out of three placements because of behavior, primarily in school. However, the child's district of residence refuses to give him a special education designation (even though their psychologist concurs that this is appropriate). They say his problems are related to behavior and not to school performance. (In fact, he does fine academically because he is bright.) We can only find one school, in northern California, that will take him without a special education designation and he does not want to go there (too far away.) As a result of this impasse, he has been languishing at the shelter for over 3 months with just 3 hours a week of home tutoring. The best solution I can think of is to appeal the district's refusal or to make the child's life so miserable that he will to up north for an education.

Group home kids nearly always have gaps in their education because they are moved around so much.

Case Study Site Visitations

This section presents findings from the case study interviews with group home staff, school site staff, group home residents and placement workers, and describes the types of education-related information obtained during assessments of residents' group home and school site records.

Site Visit Staff Interview Responses

As detailed in section two, 13 out of the 14 selected case study group home sites were visited. At each group home site, staff sought face-to-face interviews with group home administration (defined as owners, presidents and chief executive officers) and site staff (consisting of group home operators/managers, in-take staff and relief staff), group home residents, and placement workers that have placed children in the selected group home. In addition, staff, where allowed, selected and reviewed six to 10 resident records and recorded education-related information that was later compared with the resident's cumulative file at their school site. In total, staff met with and interviewed eight group home administrators, seven group home operators/facility managers, two relief staff, 10 group home in-take staff members and 37 residents.

Following interviews at the group home site, study staff tracked and assessed residents' records at their school site. Also at this time, interviews with school site staff, including principals, directors, special education staff, in-take staff and teachers, were conducted. Staff interviewed staff members at both nonpublic and public schools. At the public school sites, a total of 10 principals, five special education staff members, two in-take staff and 10 teachers were interviewed. At the nonpublic school sites, staff met with 3 school directors, one in-take staff, one education director, and two teachers.

Interviews with the individuals described above were important to the study as they provided an overview of existing practices and procedures with regard to resident referral processes to both group homes and schools. In addition, the individuals were able to share their experiences, from their perspective in their own words, and their thoughts about the quality of education for the group home youth they represent and know personally. Overall, the interviewees were candid and knowledgeable and provided study staff with a wealth of county- and group home-specific information.

Study staff were particularly interested in developing an understanding of the education process—assessments, appropriateness of placements and monitoring—at the group home level, and the existence and quality of collaborative efforts within the community to serve group home children's educational needs. In this vessel, staff focused heavily on questions that revealed how and by whom students were placed in group homes, the types of education-related information forwarded by placement workers to group homes and schools, the types of education information most needed at the time of placement, the frequency of communication between placement workers and staff from group homes and schools, the types of services provided to group home youth by non-educational agencies, and the existence of formal interagency groups of individuals convened to discuss the needs of group home children. Staff also requested recommendations from all individuals interviewed as to how the state could improve the education of children residing in group homes.

Following are a sample of the questions presented to staff members at group homes, schools and placing agencies, followed by study staffs' overall impressions of their responses, and a sample of actual responses made by interviewees to each of the questions. Please the Technical Appendix to this report for a list of questions asked during all interviews with staff from group homes and school sites.

Educational Records/Assessments

- **What types of education information does your group home typically receive from caseworkers at the child's entry?**

Overall, group home staff reported they receive little or no educational information from caseworkers either at the child's entry or throughout the child's placement. All group home staff are reportedly aware that caseworkers legally must provide health and education information for each new placement; however, most group home staff reported that caseworkers are simply too busy to collect and/or provide the information. As a result, group homes have had to hire in-take staff members to track down the child's records, or work closely with school staff to track down education records. Many group home staff members interviewed expressed anger over not only missing educational and health records, but over a lack of general information about the child, including the parents' names and their place of residence.

> *. . .we get nothing from placement workers. . .we don't even try. We hired XXX and he tracks down every kid's health and education records.*

> *. . .most of our kids' workers are too far away and when you call them for stuff, they are either out in the field or they have changed departments. . .if they are still there.*

> *. . .we wish getting education records was the first order of business. . .in most cases, we have to start with the phone book to try and find out where these kids' parents are—in the hopes they will know something.*

> *. . .we immediately sit the kids down and ask them how old they are and try and assess where they are academically—especially to determine if they are special education.*

> *. . .during the in-take meeting, the placement worker must be there and we make it perfectly clear prior to the meeting we will not accept their placement if we don't have all of their health and education records present.*

> *. . .placement workers provide kids' rap sheets. . .we are lucky if they include a parent's name.*

> *. . .sometimes the placement worker will know the name of the last school the child attended, or if the child has or had an IEP.*

. . .if a child has been placed multiple times, it's sad, but it's easier, because there is a track record.

. . . sometimes school records.

- **In your opinion, what types of educational information do you need in order to place a group home resident appropriately in classes?**

Group home and school staff overwhelmingly stated they need transcripts and must know if a child has an active IEP. In many cases, schools and group homes administer their own academic tests to determine where the child is at academically; however, these tests do nothing to address the issue of incomplete course work or help prevent the repeating of course work. In some cases, group home and school staff reported they never receive transcripts from previous schools—even when multiple telephone and mail requests have been made. For many, determining the need for special education was the highest priority.

. . .we immediately ask the child the name of their previous school and then we send the school an official request for transcripts with the law highlighted to remind them they must honor our request. . .it still can take months.

. . .we assess all new placements ourselves. . .this way, we find out not only where they are at academically, but emotionally.

. . .you can never get course work from juvenile hall, and most of our kids have been in the hall multiple times. . .this is where kids really lose credits—or repeat classes.

. . .we have to know if a child is special education right away so we have a psychologist come in and test them.

. . .we refuse to let any of our new placements sit around the group home waiting for their education records to show up, so we test them and get them in school within two days. We may not know exactly where they are at, but it's better than having them sit around watching tv for weeks.

. . .we have to know if they have an IEP so we can determine if we can provide an appropriate placement for them. . .we don't have an NPS in the county.

- **When you are missing educational information for a group home student/resident, what is the protocol for collection?**

Group home and school staff reported that, in most cases, they automatically test new residents at arrival. Some group home staff reported that they never try to obtain information from the placement worker. On the other hand, some group homes reported they will only contact the placement worker for records; as a result children end up sitting at the group home until their

records arrive. Public school staff do not contact placement workers for education information. Interestingly, group home and public school staff reported there is little to no communication between them. For group homes with an affiliated nonpublic school, communication and collaboration between group home and school staff was evident.

> *. . .every kid takes the BSI the first day they are here. . .*
>
> *. . .I call the placement worker and request the information. . . they know us, so the turn around is pretty quick.*
>
> *. . .if we don't have the information we need, we don't accept the child.*
>
> *. . .we have a full-time school secretary who tracks down kids' transcripts. . . she has been doing it for years and gets the records. It takes time, but she is pretty successful.*
>
> *. . .our teacher interviews each new resident and determines where they are at academically. From this interview, the teacher makes up a curriculum for each child and sends a copy over to XXX, our in-take person.*
>
> *. . .he used to be a teacher and knows everyone at the district. Since all of our kids attend the same school, he marches right over there, makes sure they are tested and in classes immediately. Every group home needs someone like him…I don't know how they get their information otherwise.*

Communication around Educational Issues

- **Describe the extent of communication between you and placement workers for group home youth?**

With the exception of trying to contact placement workers, in general, group home staff reported there is little communication between group home staff and placement workers. However, legally, placement workers must contact their placements once per month, and in some cases, group home staff maintain detailed logs of these monthly visits. Monthly visits also afford group home staff the opportunity to share with placement workers any needs or questions they have regarding their placements. School staff, overall, reported no contact with placement workers.

> *. . .the only time we call placement workers is if they fail to show up for their monthly visit with the resident.*
>
> *. . .I keep a log every month that details when the caseworkers come.*

. . .it really depends upon the commitment of the placement worker. We have some regular workers and they really care about the kids, so we know we can call them with health or education questions, or for advice if the resident is acting strange.

. . .communication with placement workers? Ha, they barely communicate with their placements. . .we have some placements that don't even know their DPOs name.

. . .our administrator has an existing relationship with many of our placement workers, so we usually get what we need.

. . .we really try to work with the caseworkers, so they return our calls and get us the information we need.

Educational Advocacy

- **In your opinion, who should be the person in charge of making sure youth residing in group homes get what they need educationally?**

Responses to this question were mixed. Some school and group home staff reported that kids need active educational oversight at school—not just discipline. Others reported that parents need to be included more in their child's education. Many group home and school staff reported that teachers need to be trained to effectively educate and understand the needs of group home youth. In some cases, group homes reported they should be the responsible party for making sure their residents get what they need.

. . .at the in-take process, we ask the parents to sign over the educational rights of their kids to us…we can best determine what the child needs. We don't exclude them, we just want to be able to make the choices without having to track them down.

. . .teachers need to teach…the school our residents attend is just terrible. . .I don't even think the kids are learning anything there—just racking up credits.

. . . Parents could and should be included. . .the system seems to exclude them and for obvious reasons—in many cases they are hours away.

. . .teachers don't understand how far behind these kids are both academically and emotionally. .

. . .we try and include the parents, but most don't want to participate.

. . .we never try to assume the educational rights of the kids…you can't, it's illegal…not to mention, we want to reunify these families.

. . .in this system, realistically, the kids need to take control of their education. But when they think we don't care, they think no one cares.

. . .surrogates are simply too hard to gage. . .it's hit or miss. . .sometimes they show up only to sign the IEP, other times they call to check in with the kid and group home staff on his or her progress.

Recommendations

- **What suggestions can you offer for reforms for ensuring needed educational services for group home children? (Please consider legislative, public school system, child welfare system, etc.)**

Of all of the questions asked, responses were most varied when it came to recommending possible reforms. The only constant among interviewees was that reform is desperately needed because group home kids are years behind their peers academically. It should be said that responses varied by county and agency, as each county and agency have varying levels of resources and politics.

. . .would like to see more kids dually enrolled in our school and public school to enhance a successful transition back to the real world.

. . .teachers who are trained and equipped to deal with the need of this crop of students.

. . .reduced caseloads for placement workers.

. . .increase accountability for these kids. . .the current system allows for abuses.

. . .schools should have consequences for not releasing records—it's the law and no one, and I mean no one is enforcing it.

. . .we could use an NPS…we don't have one in this county.

. . .that no child is forced to sit around waiting to get into school.

. . .the state should have someone who monitors foster youth. . .in our county, we have a district person who maintains a database that tracks every group home kid that comes into this county.

. . .communication among those involved in placing kids. . .we have a committee, but no one shows up.

. . .placement needs to be about more than just an open bed.

Resident Interviews

During site visit preparation activities, staff quickly learned there is very little research regarding the education status, needs and services of group home children—and even less that includes perspectives of children in the group home system. As a result, staff refined the study's design and included resident interviews as part of the case study site visit component. Staff explained to group home staff members, the advisory committee and oversight staff at the CDE that the study would be incomplete if residents were not allowed to participate anonymously and confidentially to share their personal educational experiences and needs, and, most importantly, their suggestions for reforms.

Resident interviews lasted 20 minutes to one hour in length and focused solely on the topic of education. Staff asked residents their current grade, their feelings about completing high school, who they turn to for help when they have questions about their education status or school-related problems, and what would make changing schools easier for group home youth.

Below are tables that provide aggregate findings for questions asked during interviews.

Exhibit 3.18 Resident information (n=37)

Gender	Male	55%
	Female	45%
Grade level	7th	13%
	8th	6%
	9th	19%
	10th	23%
	11th	16%
	12th	23%
Average age of residents:		16.1 years
Age of resident	12 years	6%
	13 years	10%
	14 years	10%
	15 years	23%
	16 years	16%
	17 years	19%
	18 years	16%
Previous group home placement(s)		Yes 52%
Previous out-of-county group home placement(s)		Yes 16% Current placement is first group home placement: 52%
Average total number of times placed in out-of-county group homes		1.5 times
Changed schools due to change in group home placement	Yes	74%
	No	6%
	First group home placement	19%

Exhibit 3.19 Communication (n=37)

Person(s) resident talks to about education issues	Placement worker	13%
	Group home staff	39%
	Teacher	23%
	Counselor	3%
	Parent/guardian	9%
	Friends	3%
	No one	16%
*Total percentage higher than 100 as some residents discuss education issues with more than one person.		
How often resident talks to person about education issues	Daily	3%
	Once per week	16%
	As needed	6%
	N/A or no response	74%

Exhibit 3.20 Assessments (n=37)

Received education tests to evaluate education needs/status at each new school	Yes	80%
	No	10%
	Not sure	10%
Types of tests/assessments taken	School- or group home-based test	42%
	KTEA	10%
	IQ	3%
	TABE	3%
Typically receive education services respondent needs and deserves	Yes	52%
	No	19%
	N/A or respondent did not answer	29%

Open-ended Resident Interview Responses

In addition to eight closed-ended questions, residents were asked four open-ended questions pertaining to their personal education experiences and their opinions about the education of children residing in group homes. Presented below are the four open-ended questions asked of each resident, followed by interviewers' overall impressions of residents' responses, and a sample of actual resident responses made to each of the four questions.

- **What would make changing schools easier for you and other group home residents?**

In the six case study counties where residents were interviewed, interviewers learned that many of the residents interviewed were placed in group homes outside of their county of origin. In most cases, residents were removed from public schools and placed in community, court, continuation, nonpublic, or home schools hours away from their families. Residents expressed great concern over the geographical distance between their current group home placements and their families, and confusion over the need to be removed from their county of origin. As a result, residents reported that their parents are excluded from involvement and monitoring of their education and that their placement workers, who also reside in their county of origin, are too far away to care about the quality of their current educational placements. As a result, residents conveyed anger over lost and missing transcripts, having to repeat courses they feel they completed prior to placement, and, most importantly, for being placed in classes that are either too difficult or too easy. In addition, residents reported that their current educational placements do not offer the same types of educational services or classes they received at the public schools they attended prior to placement, and felt that current schools care more about discipline rather than education. In general, residents repeatedly commented that having transcripts and someone willing to read them at the school would make changing schools easier.

> *. . .look at transcripts. No one looks or pays attention to my transcripts.*

> *. . .changing schools was difficult because I was taken away from my friends and family. . .*

> *. . . my DPO didn't even call my mom to tell her I was sent all the way here.*

> *. . .ask more than just how old you are. . . I got placed with other kids my age, but I am way behind them.*

> *. . .schools should have someone who knows what they're doing chase down my records.*

- **To what extent does your current school meet your education needs?**

Overall, responses to this question were mixed. At some school sites, residents reported they are receiving one-on-one attention for the first time in their education careers. Other residents reported current schools are not large enough and teachers are not experienced enough to offer classes they were previously enrolled in at public schools. In addition, at two schools, residents angrily reported that teachers do not teach; they only pass out daily packets of work for residents to complete. However, at the school sites interviewers attended (visited prior to resident interviews), there appeared to be a common philosophy to assist residents in accumulating enough credits to either graduate from their school or to successfully pass the GED test. Almost all residents interviewed expressed excitement over the possibility of graduating from high school and/or taking the GED test; however, most residents reported that if they request or inquire about

educational classes or services other than the accumulation of credits, no school staff member will listen to them. In terms of education advocacy at the school site, only a handful of residents stated they would or felt comfortable talking to a teacher about their educational futures, needs or questions.

> *. . . are helping me get my GED on the computer.*
>
> *. . . this school gives me packets of work that are at my level. . .*
>
> *. . .teachers automatically think probation kids are stupid. . .*
>
> *. . . teachers here don't teach: they just think they are there to babysit bad kids.*
>
> *. . .staff don't teach and always threaten to call our DPOs. . .*
>
> *. . .no one listens to me and what I want or need.*
>
> *. . .this school is too small and doesn't offer me the classes I want to take.*
>
> *. . .here I get one-on-one attention for the first time.*

- **What services do you think you need or are missing?**

Many residents expressed concern over schools' lack of resources, including books, computers, and pens and paper, and the quality and duties of teachers. Resource quality varied by school, as did teachers' backgrounds, experience with group home youth and protocols for teaching. Once again, many residents expressed confusion over the lack of classes available (as compared to classes offered at public schools) at their current school. At two of the school sites visited, residents receive one-on-one attention and teachers are actively involved in residents' educational outcomes. One-on-one attention at these two school sites allows teachers to specialize residents' education needs, incorporating cooking lessons into one resident's curriculum, creative writing assignments into another resident's curriculum and the time and materials needed to teach a 15-year-old how to read. In general, however, school resources appeared limited, and most residents are given only packets of work to complete, with teachers only available to answer questions.

> *. . . homework. . . my school doesn't even assign homework. I used to get homework assignments at the public school I went to.*
>
> *. . .we can't even take our books home at night.*
>
> *. . .get some teachers who want to teach.*

. . .they don't care about our education here. . .it's crowd control.

. . .this school is so small I don't get to take the classes I had at my public school, like art and drama.

- **Would you like to say anything else about the appropriateness and quality of your education?**

Responses to this final question were the most heartfelt and emotional in tone. Residents demanded that their transcripts be updated and sent to their current schools and discussed the impact of missing and/or lost transcripts upon the quality of their education and ability to graduate from high school. According to residents, the state should make all schools forward all transcripts immediately, and they should mandate that someone in every school know how to deal with group home children's transcripts. For example, many of the residents interviewed had spent time in juvenile hall and most swore that their current school has never received their transcripts, though requests have been made repeatedly by both group home staff and their placement workers. In general, residents reported that no one cares about their education and if placement workers and/or group home staff do not care, residents will end up sitting at the group home when they should be in school. In the view of almost every resident interviewed, parents are either excluded from or do not care about their education status. In terms of placement workers' roles in residents' education, residents reported that most placement workers care only about finding a home and/or a bed for kids and they are either too far away to be involved in their education, or simply do not care. Residents that expressed excitement over graduating from high school or passing the GED test, repeatedly commented that education was their only chance to make it in the real world, and being in the system, in their opinion, automatically puts them behind in credits. Many residents commented, "when you have poor teachers and no parent, school staff member or placement worker support, why should I care when no one else does?"

. . . this is my second time at this group home and I have been sitting here for three weeks watching television waiting to get into continuation school.

. . .schools should not make kids wait to get into school.

. . .want better teachers, with better attitudes.

. . .get my juvenile hall transcripts.

. . . juvenile hall gives credits for doing nothing.

. . . placement worker should be more involved in my education. . .they don't care about our education at all.

. . .now, because I can't get my transcripts, I am 20 credits behind.

. . .there should be one person somewhere who knows what they are doing and can get group home kids' transcripts. No one knows no one cares.

Resident Record Reviews

As detailed in Chapter 2, staff conducted reviews of residents' records at both the group home site and the school site at 7 of the 13 group homes visited. Records were selected randomly with an average of six to 10 records per group home and school site being viewed by staff. Records were assigned an internal student identification number used by study staff for the purpose of record tracking and comparison between the group home and school sites. Following the completion of the record reviews at both sites, all student identifiers were dropped and no data obtained are reported in a manner that may identify students, group homes, schools or counties. The purpose of record reviews was for study staff to record any and all education related information contained in the records. The objective was to determine what information was currently available with regard to an individual students' present educational experience, what information if any was present or available upon the students' arrival at either the school site or the group home site, and to what extent there was any up-to-date information referencing the services needed by an individual student at the time of the record review.

Group Home Site Record Reviews

Information Contained in Records

Study staff reviewed a total of 56 records at 13 group home sites. Exhibit 3.21, located on the following page, details the information that was contained in the group home resident records, with regard to education at the time of the record review. Also indicated are the averages and ranges for some specific characteristics of group home residents.

Exhibit 3.21 Education Information Found in Group Home Records

	Percentage of Records Containing Information	*Average*	*Range*
Transcripts/Evidence of past course work	27%	___	___
Current Educational Assessment	25%	___	___
Date of Enrollment in Current School	23%	___	___
Needs and Services Plan	55%	___	___
Current IEP Information	29%	___	___
Evidence of Special Education Services	27%	___	___
Date Child Entered School System	0.2%	___	___
Date Child Entered Foster Care System	16%	___	___
Date Child Entered Current LCI Placement	77%	___	___
Discharge Plan	43%	___	___
Prior Group Home Assessment	13%	___	___
Current Group Home Assessment	54%		
Resident Characteristics			
Age	___	15	12-18
Grade Level	___	10	6-12
Total Length of Time in Foster Care	___	56 months	7-148 months
Total Length of Time at Current School	___	12 months	2.5-29 months
Number of Prior Group Home Placements	___		1-5
Number of Previous Schools Attended	___	2.2	0-4

Assessment and Communication

As is evident in the numbers reflected in the above table, many of the resident records reviewed did not contain a substantial amount of information with regard to educational services and needs of residents. Some were more complete than others, while yet others contained no evidence of educational services. While most group home operators did have some sense of residents' current school experiences, prior school placements and records containing information were not often found in the records kept at the group home site.

Even though there was not much evidence with regard to current and past educational experiences in the group home records, there were some records that contained educational assessments from placing agencies. These assessments were most often contained in a Probation, Mental Health, or Social Worker's report outlining the last school an individual resident attended, what his or her academic performance had been, whether or not the resident had been habitually truant, and an assessment of his or her behavioral conduct. Again, there is an inconsistency in the contents across records with some records displaying thorough data while others were lacking very essential information.

In the entire sample of group home records that staff reviewed, there was no documentation evidencing any communication with a resident's previous group home. Evidence

of communication with placement workers appeared at a rate of 59 percent, of which 47 percent indicated that the placement worker contact occurred only via telephone. Only 55 percent of the records reviewed showed any contact with the school attended by residents. This was usually in the form of progress reports, report cards, letters addressed to "parent or guardian" detailing behavior problems, or letters indicating the intent of the school to suspend or expel a student. Of the records reviewed, 21 percent had only a court record on file.

School Site Record Reviews

Information Contained in Records

Study staff reviewed a total of 47 student records at nine school sites including two nonpublic schools, one court school, three community schools, one public school, and one charter school. Exhibit 3.22 below details the types of information available in the students' records at the school sites. Also indicated are the averages and ranges for some specific characteristics of this sample of students.

Exhibit 3.22 Education Information Found in School Records

Information at Time of Placement	*Percentage of Records Containing Information*	*Percentage of Information Not available*	*Average*	*Range*
Transcripts/Evidence of past course work	47%	53%	___	___
Incomplete	0.9%	N/A	___	___
Illegible	0.2%	N/A	___	___
Progress Reports	53%	47%	___	___
Psychological or Related Assessment	45%	55%	___	___
Educational Records Available at Enrollment	38%	62%	___	___
Date of Entry into Current School	91%	0.9%	___	___
Number of Previous Schools Attended	64%	36%	___	___
Designation of IEP Services	96%	0.4%	___	___
	___	___	___	___
Student Characteristics				
Age			15	12-18
Grade Level	___	___	10	7-12
Length of Time in Foster Care	___	___	18.4 mos.	4-50 mos.
Length of Time at Current School	___	___	11 mos.	2-102 mos.
Number of Previous Schools Attended	___	___	3.5	1-9
Time Between the Request and Arrival of Records	___	___	24 days	1-150 days

Assessment and Communication

Possibly the most crucial aspect of a student's educational file that would be needed upon entry into a new school is evidence of past course work, or transcripts. As is evident in the numbers listed above, this information was not always available to the receiving school for these students. In most cases, it was reported verbally to study staff that assessments were given to students regardless of whether their prior school's records had arrived or not. This aided in the intake process but did not allow school staff to tally an accurate count of a student's earned credits. In addition, for those students attending public school, the non-transfer of records interfered with timely enrollment.

In some cases, the incompleteness of student records indicated that some students were not getting the services they needed. In some records there was evidence of an existing IEP but no evidence that it had ever been completed. In addition, many were missing parent signatures. Across all of the records reviewed, however, the most commonly found occurrence was the inconsistency with which these records are kept. A student's educational record might have gaps in it or simply be blank altogether. For this population, who might have numerous school placements in a short amount of time, these gaps seem likely due to the lack of communication between school sites, placement worker and group homes.

Evidence of communication between school sites and placement workers was found in only 10 percent of the files reviewed, and not evident in 90 percent. Of the 10 percent that had indications of communication, this evidence consisted of signatures of placement workers on enrollment and placement forms. In terms of evidence of communication between school sites and group home sites this was found in 43 percent of the records reviewed. This mainly consisted of progress reports, report cards, letters addressed to "parent or guardian" detailing behavior problems, or letters indicating the intent of the school to suspend or expel a student.

Chapter 4. Summary of Findings by Research Question

This chapter summarizes findings across all of the methodological approaches presented in Chapters 2 and 3 by the individual research questions specified for this project in the Request for Proposals and as listed in Chapter 1.

How many children in group homes are attending nonpublic schools and how many of these children are and are not eligible for special education?

From the state data analyses, looking only at CWS/CMS data, we find 12,978 students residing in group homes. This is very close to the 13,107 children shown residing in group homes in Appendix A to the request for proposals for this project. From CASEMIS, for this same point in time (December 1, 1999), we see a count of 7,085 children residing in group homes (referred to in CASEMIS as Licensed Children's' Institutions or LCIs). As shown in Exhibit 3.4, a relatively small degree of overlap was found between the children counted as Group Home in the CWS/CMS data base and those designated as LCI in CASEMIS.

Counting children shown as group home or LCI in one or both of the two systems yields a total estimated count of group home (LCI) children in special education of 8,578. From CWS/CMS, we find an additional 9,838 children for whom we do not find a match in CASEMIS, and therefore conclude that they are not in special education. This yields a total estimated count of group home/LCI children in California of 18,416, and an estimate that 47 percent of these children are in special education.

Exhibit 3.6 showed the percentage of special education students placed in NPSs to receive their educational services. Overall, while 1 percent of the 626,077 non-foster-care, non-group-home special education students are placed in NPSs, the number jumps to 4% of the 11,536 special education foster care children who are not in group homes (column b), and to 46 percent of the 8,578 group home children. Although it is expected that a higher percentage of group home children would be served in NPS, even when type of disability is held constant, a much higher percentage of group home children receive their education in an NPS. For example, a child within the disability category, emotional disturbance, is nearly three times as likely to be assigned to an NPS when that child resides in a group home as compared to a child with emotional disturbance who does not reside in an group home. In addition, based on state data, we estimate that 35 percent of all group home beds are in facilities with affiliated NPSs.

From the stakeholder interviews, we found that a lack of clear lines of authority and responsibility, as well as substantial fiscal incentives, appear to result in children being placed in NPSs who are not eligible for special education, or for whom eligibility is debatable. Considerable concern was expressed about children found eligible for special education who would not be if

appropriate education advocacy and clear lines of responsibility were in place, as well as a second group of children who are appropriately found eligible for special education but who are inappropriately placed in nonpublic schools in violation of the requirement that they be served in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their needs. A third group of children, that appear to require the kind of 24-hour service that a combined LCI and NPS can provide, are said to sometimes be found ineligible for special education and therefore NPS. These are children who may have severe mental health problems, but who are still able to perform academically up to grade level.

What practices and procedures currently influence the educational placement and provision of educational services to children residing in group homes?

Of the student records reviewed for this study, only 55 percent showed any contact with the school attended by residents. This was usually in the form of progress reports, report cards, letters addressed to "parent or guardian" detailing behavior problems, or letters indicating the intent of the school to suspend or expel a student. Of the records reviewed, 21 percent had only a court record on file. This raises critical questions as to who is serving as a surrogate for these children around such critical issues as identification, evaluation, and educational placement, especially given the concerns expressed for this population in regard to placement in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their needs.

According to California law (EdC56050), the public agency may select a surrogate parent in any way permitted under state law, except that they may not be "an employee of the State Education Agency (SEA), the local education agency (LEA), or any other agency involved in the education or care of the child. It can also not be anyone who has an "interest that conflicts with the interest of the child he or she represents." Given these criteria, it is not surprising that so few group home children are receiving the advocacy required for them by law. These same group home operators who indicate that 15 percent of their children have education surrogates also report that 65 percent of their children are eligible for special education services. While their parents may represent the needs of some of these children, many of them have become wards of the state because their parents are unable, unwilling, or unavailable to serve in this role. Who is ensuring proper educational placement for these children, as is required by law?

In addition, the requirement for education surrogates for group home children only applies to those children in special education. Given the education outcome statistics cited for all group home children, can there be any doubt that much greater independent education advocacy is needed for all of these children, whether they are in special education or not.

The stakeholder interviews described a substantial shortage of group homes in the state (especially for teenagers, and even more so for teenagers of color), resulting in students being placed in group homes. Many of these homes have NPSs associated with them. Once children are

assigned to an LCI with an NPS, it is reportedly very difficult to separate placement in the NPS from placement in the LCI. Appropriate education advocates for these children, as required by federal special education law, were reported to be seldom in place.

It was also reported that group home foster parents and social workers often favor NPS placements for their children because of the more comprehensive nature of the services they provide. County Offices of Education, who have responsibility for the education of these children (unless there is a local agreement to the contrary), generally do not actively carry out this responsibility. Courts may specify NPS placements for children, largely usurping the authority of local school districts. When a child needs 24 hour services, a joint LCI/NPS placement may be a good thing. If not, these NPS placements may be detrimental to the child in regard to their developmental, social, and educational growth. It is not clear what agency is responsible for seeing that all group home children are receiving education services appropriate to their needs. Direct "hands on" authority for the oversight and monitoring of NPSs within the CDE has not been clearly delineated and largely has been lacking, especially over the past few years.

Stakeholders also expressed concerns about fiscal incentives for districts to relegate the schooling of group home children to NPS. Districts only receive supplemental funding for group home children when they are found eligible for special education and when they are placed in an NPS. Local schools are supposed to continue to track and monitor these children, but receive no support from the state to do so. As a result, it was reported that public schools are sometimes reluctant to serve group children.

In addition, considerable concern has been expressed about group homes with affiliated NPSs who require enrollment in their NPS as a condition of residential placement. From nonpublic school and group home data, we estimate that the percentage of beds in group homes in the state with a direct nonpublic school affiliation is about 35%. If there are pressures from some group homes to enroll their residents in affiliated NPSs, this adds to the public school incentive to place group home children in NPSs.

Strong unanimity also appeared in regard to concerns about fiscal incentives affecting educational placement decisions for group home children across the survey respondents for this study. Social workers (47 percent), mental health workers (57%), probation officers (74%), and group home operators (70 percent) indicated the belief that fiscal incentives affect educational placement decisions for group home children. One specific expression of this general concern of fiscal incentives in this regard, was that "group homes with affiliated non-public schools seem to rely on their non-public school funding to create a comprehensive, viable funding strategy." Social workers (73 percent), mental health workers (83 percent), and probation officers (63 percent) indicated agreement with this statement.

Incentives can also work to keep children who may profit from NPS services from receiving them. If the group home or emergency shelter is located in the district in which the

child's family resides, the district may be reluctant to specify nonpublic school services for the child, even though the state will pay 100 percent as long as the child is in the group home. Especially in the case of an emergency shelter, which is designed to be short-term, districts have been reported as unwilling to make such a designation.

One emergency shelter respondent described it as follows: "The district is unwilling to designate the child as eligible for a nonpublic school because they know that if the child ever returns to the family with this designation the district will have to foot the bill for the NPS. Our only option for this child is to wait for one of the few NPSs in the state that will accept a child without a special education designation and that will carry the child out of their own funds. They do this until they can get the child designated as special education and NPS eligible in the district where this new NPS is located." Presumably, this new local district is less likely to have a problem with the NPS designation of the child because they know that if the child is returned to his family, who resides in another district, it will not be their problem.

What is the impact of these practices and procedures on educational outcomes for children residing in group homes?

As described in Chapter 1, the limited research we have on outcomes for children who grow up as wards of the state suggests that current systems of placement and monitoring do a poor job of preparing them for adulthood. One major study showed that within two and one-half to four years after emancipation, 46 percent had not completed high school, 51 percent were unemployed, and 25 percent had been homeless for at least one night, and 40 percent had been on public assistance or incarcerated. The data above come from a national study of group home youth. In California, data on educational outcomes for this population is virtually non existent. Although fields in the CWS/CMS data system pertain to education progress, e.g. child is learning at grade level, because less than one percent of group home records have data in these fields, virtually nothing is systematically known.

The stakeholders interviewed for this study report that there are children receiving education in NPSs who should not be placed there and others, who need the kind of intensive services an NPS can provide, but who can not be found eligible. The lack of appropriate education advocates exacerbates both of these problems, as well as the conflicting definitions of emotional disturbance between education and mental health agencies. NPSs are much less able to offer the education diversity of public schools and they result in social isolation for children who might otherwise be mainstreamed into neighborhood schools.

Federal law clearly specifies that special education children must be served in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their needs. At the same time, education outcomes may be substantially enhanced for children who are appropriately placed in NPSs. For example, for children who are emotionally disturbed, NPSs may provide the kinds of 24 hour services and the

mix of educational programming and counseling services needed to remain in school. Even for these children, however, the NPSs should be seen as transitional services that prepare children to return to public schooling as soon as possible. For children who are not emotionally disturbed, or who do not have some other disability necessitating NPS services, inappropriate placement in an NPS is likely to stifle the child educationally, to harm the child's social development, and possibly their mental health.

Inappropriate placement is debatable and difficult to determine. However, given the fiscal and other incentives described above encouraging the placement in group home children into NPSs, the data shown in Exhibit 3.6 seem troubling. It was shown that while only 1 percent of non foster care, non group home students were placed in NPSs, the number jumped to 4% for foster care children who are not in group homes, and to 46 percent for group home children. Even holding disability constant when comparing placements to NPSs for group home children, the degree to which group home children are assigned to NPSs as compared to non-group-home children is striking. For example, a child within the disability category, emotional disturbance, is nearly three times as likely to be assigned to an NPS when that child resides in a group home as compared to a child with emotional disturbance who does not reside in an group home.

The kinds of complex funding arrangements found in California in regard to paying for education serves for group home children often fail to meet the needs of the children they are designed to serve. Of the group home residents interviewed for this study, only about 50 percent felt they were getting their educational needs met. Based on the resident interviews conducted for this study, while some residents reported they are receiving one-on-one attention for the first time, others reported that their schools were not large enough and teachers not experienced enough to offer classes they were previously enrolled in at public schools. In addition, at two schools, residents angrily reported that teachers do not teach; they only pass out daily packets of work for residents to complete. Almost all residents interviewed expressed excitement over the possibility of graduating from high school and/or taking the GED test; however, most residents reported that if they request or inquire about educational classes or services other than the accumulation of credits, no school staff member will listen to them. In terms of education advocacy at the school site, only a handful of residents stated they felt comfortable talking to their teacher about their educational futures, needs or questions.

What is the feasibility and cost of collecting information about the educational placement of children residing in group homes on an ongoing basis?

Data collection is not only feasible, but already in place in disparate places within and across agencies. The biggest problems relate to design, access, and willingness to collaborate within and across agencies. As described in Chapter 1, the major state databases for education information on foster children in California is the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) maintained in the Department of Social Services and the California Special

Education Management Information System (CASEMIS). CASEMIS contains extensive information on all special education students in California and indicates which of those students reside in group homes.

If fully implemented and matched, the potential of these two state databases to report information on education services for group home children is substantial. The major problems with these systems pertain to implementation, matching, access, and purpose. Neither system, as it is currently designed, is well suited to the retrieval of information at the state level, let alone for retrieving information about individual students at the local level. Confidentiality of information and interagency access to data are major hurdles to making full use of this information. However, these obstacles will have to be overcome for any database the state may develop regarding educational services and outcomes for group home children.

The cost of collecting information about the educational placement of group home children on an ongoing basis is impossible to determine at this point. Because the state has considerable data capacity in regard to these children already that it does not use, more fundamental than cost is a single state plan for developing an information system for group home children. There is little doubt that such a system is needed and recommendations in this regard are found in Chapters 1 and 5. Findings, however, show that such a system has already been designed and put into place in the Department of Social Services. This suggests that financial commitment to develop such a system is not enough. Despite adopting the title, "Health and Education Passport," for a part of the very complex and elaborate CWS/CMS system, to date these fields contain important education information in less than one percent of the cases. Based on this and the questionable capacity of CWS/CMS to be of much use for local service providers who need to quickly and easily download a child's educational history and records, it suggests that a massive investment in system capacity is not enough.

Group home operators were found to be most directly involved in the day-to-day struggle of getting their residents enrolled in school. They say (75 percent) that education records for their residents are frequently or almost always incomplete. They say these lost record result in long delays when attempting to enroll their residents in school, and social workers, mental health workers, probation officers, and group home operators alike all agree that these delays average between about 40 to 80 days. In our phone interviews with group home operators, they indicated an average of 69 days to update an inactive special education plan.

The cost of the resulting gaps in education received by group home students from these record delays is reflected in the very poor national education outcome data shown for group home children. We do not know whether these outcomes are better for group home children in California because the education component of the database we have to inform these types of questions (CWS/CMS) has not been implemented. Furthermore, it is not clear that education passport component of the CWS/CMS ever will be implemented. The education passport generally means something very different to local and state education staff. Many counties are working to develop

passport type education information systems on their own, often through Foster Youth Services Grants from the California Department of Education. Despite what the state is trying to do in regard to a "health and education passport" and the various and disparate information systems being developed at the local level with this type of title, the group home operators surveyed by telephone for this study indicated that only 21 percent of their residents arrived with complete data of this type.

Currently, education data for group home children in California are lacking both at the state level and in local records. While some counties are starting to develop systems independent of one another that may work within their local context, without some larger form of master plan at the state level these will remain disjointed and irregular local systems. In this way they are not likely to be very effective in meeting the needs of group home children, 45 percent of whom, according to our group home telephone interviews, are placed outside of the county they live. As we know this is a very itinerant system, a statewide system of some type is imperative. The cost of such a system is based on the willingness of the state to build on systems already in place to meet the needs of state reporting as well as being able to locally account for and track students.

What coordination occurs between educational and non-educational agencies as they provide services to children residing in group homes?

Despite the provisions of SB 933, which was intended to substantially bolster interagency collaboration for group home children, the picture that emerges from this study suggests that there is still a great deal of work to be done. At the local level, coordination at the local level seems to vary considerably, but a strong record of coordination and collaboration across agencies appears to be the exception rather than the rule. At the state level, the lack of coordination between education and non-education agencies is a serious problem. There is not only very little precedent for this type of coordination, but also some serious questions as to who would coordinate with whom, as clear lines of responsibility for LCIs and NPSs in agencies seem tenuous to non-existent. As reported by staff participating in cross-agency discussions in regard to this population of children, while there are sometimes work groups around specific issues, "big picture" coordination for this population of children across agencies at the state level has been virtually nonexistent.

From the surveys, we found that only about one-half of respondent social workers said that placement agencies provide notification to local schools at the time a child is placed in a group home. Group home operators saw this percentage as 30 percent. While group home operators indicated "a great deal of cooperation" from school districts and county offices of education, less than one-half of the social worker, mental health, and probation officer respondents indicated this.

What are the factors that affect coordination?

Varying definitions, (e.g. of emotional disturbance), lack of clear lines of responsibility and authority within agencies, concerns about protecting information internal to each agency (e.g. student data), the lack of leadership, and the lack of a genuine commitment to this population of children appear to be some of the most substantial barriers to better coordination.

Where coordination was working well, it seemed to be due to a local commitment to make this happen. The foster youth grant funds also seemed to be an important ingredient in fostering cooperation at the local level.

What is the impact of current practices and procedures for interagency coordination on educational outcomes for children in group homes?

The lack of coordination and cooperation across agencies clearly seems to exacerbate the already considerable disruption in the educational lives of group home children. Social services are appropriately most concerned with the health and safety of the children within their charge. They see education as the responsibility of state and county departments of education and local school districts. However, it is not clear that the CDE sees this as its responsibility and no CDE staff person with a direct charge to concern themselves with the education of group home children can be found.

State law specifies that County Offices of Education are responsible for this population, but many of these agencies reported that they do not play an active role in overseeing the education of this population. Bottom line authority is also said to reside with the LEAs, but they sometimes report feeling powerless to placements in LCIs with adjoining NPSs that may be made by other agencies.

Even when accepting responsibility, it was often reported that the LEAs do not do so in a proactive sense. Children were reported to be languishing in group home placements while futile attempts were made to secure all the records needed to allow a LCI child to be enrolled in the local public school. It is also unclear what agency is supposed to ensure the education support and advocacy for all group home children, and especially those who are in special education, as is required by federal and state law. These forces lead to concerns about inappropriate education placements. These factors, as well as the general lack of stability for these children both educationally and residentially, seems likely to result in these children failing to receive an appropriate education. A solid education program could be one of the stabilizing factors in these children's lives and their greatest prospective link to a brighter future. Rather, too often, education appears to be one of their largest sources of frustration.

Chapter 5. Recommendations

This chapter adds to the summary recommendations found in Chapter 1. All of these recommendations are restated and most are elaborated.

Responsibility and accountability for assuring that group home children are receiving appropriate education services need to be more clearly defined and accepted.

While technical lines of responsibility and procedures are specified in law, serious gaps in the provision of appropriate educational services and in the realization of education outcomes for group home children remain. When group home children fail to receive needed educational services, the state is negligent in its role as surrogate parent, receives no immediate education return from its considerable investment in group home children, and is likely to incur many additional costs in the future when these children fail to transition into productive adulthood. Systems of support for overseeing the education received by group home children need to be established at the state level, and counties need to be provided funding to carry out these responsibilities locally.

One model for bolstering educational accountability for group home children and for facilitating communication and cooperation across agencies is found in San Mateo County. Using Foster Youth Services grant funds as well as their own funds, they have hired education group home consultants. These employees are hired by the County Department of Education, but housed with Social Services, to serve as liaisons between the county's group home and education systems.

Such liaisons can be instrumental in facilitating the transfer of needed records across agencies. Hopefully, because they have official ties with two agencies, they can access educationally relevant information from both.

While such measures constitute promising first steps, it is probably not enough to provide full responsibility and accountability for the education of group home children. For example, while waiting for these records to arrive, who is responsible for making sure that the child is attending school? It seems that stronger provisions are needed to ensure that children in group homes are not deprived of schooling because responsible agencies can not keep track of their records. Collaborative arrangements and clear lines of responsibility must be established between education, social service, and probation agencies to ensure considerable closure to the average 40-to-80 day gap that has been reported when group home children enroll in a new school.

A promising model for heightened accountability is found in provisions of the FYS grant program that require that data on the educational outcomes of group home children in participating counties be tracked and reported. While this is a good start, questions still remain as

to whose responsibility it is when children are not in school or when educational progress is not being made.

Improved interagency coordination across local education, social services, mental health, and probation agencies is vital to the provision of appropriate education services for group home children.

To ensure that local interagency coordination occurs and to provide vital support through a statewide data management information system, state-level collaboration is essential. Interagency coordination can not occur, however, without clear lines of specified responsibility. Clear lines of responsibility for the development of systems to ensure appropriate education services for group home children must be established by the California Department of Education in conjunction with the Department of Social Services. Liaisons for this population of children need to be formed in other relevant state-level agencies if state-level interagency coordination, planning, and communication is to occur. SB 933 and the FYS grant programs provide an important start in these processes, but much more is needed.

A statewide data system that can be easily and quickly accessed by group home and education authorities across the state is essential.

While two major state-level data systems (CWS/CMS in the Department of Social Services and CASEMIS in the Department of Education) have vital education information for group home children potentially already in place, they are virtually devoid of data in education related fields in CWS/CMS and nearly impossible to access in CASEMIS. As a result, despite the considerable investment the State is making in group home children (e.g. $80,000 per year is not unusual for a child residing in an LCI and attending an NPS), the State has little to no information about how many of these children attend school on a regular basis, graduate from high school, go on to college, or are gainfully employed. Education information for group home children that is accessible at the local level is needed. Due to the residential instability of this population, it is not unusual for them to change schools two, three, or more times during a year. Too often extended enrollment gaps occur as they change school districts due to the slow or nonexistent transfer of school records.

Better data are needed because in their current state, existing data are not sufficient to answer fundamental and critical baseline questions pertaining to the education of children in group homes (e.g., how many children in group care are receiving special education services, how many of these children are in non-public schools, how many of them graduate each year). Beyond providing essential background information, more complete administrative data would also enable the identification of crucial trends (e.g., recognizing how different child characteristics impact the

likelihood of outcomes such as graduating, or moving from a group home to a more less restrictive environment) which could assist decision makers in both the education and social service systems in distributing resources and targeting reform. It is thus imperative to more fully utilize and potentially modify the statewide data tracking systems that are in place in order to better realize their respective capabilities as well as to facilitate integrating information between the two systems.

Essential background information on child characteristics and educational outcomes for children in group care could be achieved by taking advantage of existing data infrastructure. Statewide data tracking systems are already in place for the Departments of Education and Social Services—thus answering basic questions would be facilitated by utilizing the existing educational information fields of CWS/CMS, and implementing some means to simplify integrating information between CASEMIS and CWS/CMS.

Results from this study found that proportion of children with useful educational information in these tables (e.g., education grade level, performance grade level, enrollment termination reason) was virtually zero—in spite of the fact that much of this information (e.g., the educational enrollment table) is supposedly mandatory for all children in out-of-home care. Therefore, merely increasing county compliance with entering data into the educational passport tables would make large inroads to providing critical baseline information (e.g., knowing how many children graduate or drop out of school).

Who should ensure that information is kept up-to-date is a key question. It is currently the responsibility of a child's caseworker. Admittedly, ensuring the timeliness of this information is not a simple task, and requires that a child's case worker regularly follow up with the child's school progress by coordinating with school teachers or counselors. At present only staff from the Department of Social Services have access to entering data into CWS/CMS, and it is not unreasonable to assume that this will continue to be the case for confidentiality reasons. Thus it is likely that updating information in the education passport data sets will remain another task added to already over-burdened social workers.

Since this information is essential in order to track education trends for children in group care, it is important that the information is updated. In addition to more diligent oversight by caseworkers on the social service side, other ways this process could be helped could be to: (1) introduce a mechanism (e.g., a standardized form for all children in out-of-home care that would be faxed at regular intervals to the Department of Social Services) on the education side whereby a teacher or school counselor would inform child caseworkers of a student's performance grade level and enrollment status; or (2) create a separate "Education of Children in Out-of-Home Care" unit in the Department of Social Services whose charge it would be to follow children's education status and ensure that the information was regularly updated in the CWS/CMS system.

Future tracking of educational outcomes of children in group care would be facilitated by creating a means to easily link data from CASEMIS to CWS/CMS. Using probabilistic matching to create the linkage between the two data systems for this study was a difficult, time-consuming process fraught with important issues (e.g., determining how to match data from a point-in-time data source with a longitudinal data source). A common identifier between CASEMIS and CWS/CMS is one possible solution to forging an ongoing link between the two data systems. This would be accomplished by introducing either the "student identifer" from CASEMIS into CWS/CMS, introducing the "client identifier" from CWS/CMS into CASEMIS, or both. Assuming that such a field were added to the respective data systems, again, a high degree of case oversight and coordination between a child's case worker and his/her school teachers or counselors would be necessary to ensure that this child identifier information was properly entered into the system.

In summary, there is a critical need for, at a minimum, statewide tracking of essential, baseline education information for children residing in group care (and all forms of out-of-home care, including foster, relative, and other placements). Any steps taken to better provide for the needs of this population cannot proceed without first knowing fundamental, system-wide population and trend information (e.g., how many children in group care are receiving special education services, how many of these children are in non-public schools, or how many of them graduate each year). Without this basic yet crucial baseline information, there are little grounds beyond isolated, anecdotal, and therefore inherently biased pieces of information for decision makers to call on when targeting needed services or implementing necessary reforms.

Fortunately, despite the virtual absence of education information currently entered in CWS/CMS and the lack of overlap between CASEMIS and CWS/CMS, there is at least some basis to improve the data situation. On the positive side, infrastructure is already in place to answer basic questions at the statewide level; and we have heard anecdotally that at the county level some data systems appear to be having success in keeping track of detailed student information. Though they currently do not integrate easily, the statewide data tracking systems are currently in place for both Education and Social Services. Steps such as those discussed could help toward improving the completeness of data within CWS/CMS as well as easier integration of CASEMIS and CWS/CMS. Complete and integrated data from these two systems would provide decision makers from both education and social services with indispensable baseline information education trends for children in group care. Other data systems (e.g., county educational databases such as are being collected in Orange, Riverside, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz) could also potentially be used to augment more detailed information such as children's attendance, test scores, etc.

Finally, it must be recognized that workers in both education and social services are already called upon to do an enormous amount of work. It is not the intent of this report to minimize the amount of work these persons do or blame them for the current lack of useful background data currently in the data system. Rather, our hope is to point out the need for improved utilization of existing data collection, and propose possible avenues that might enable such positive reform.

A final small, but relatively easy to implement and important recommendation in regard to data, is the use of uniform coding for non public schools in CASEMIS. An important data field in CASEMIS is the school code, which indicates the school in which the child is enrolled. However, when a child is enrolled in an NPS, the coding used is not uniform across the state. If uniform methods for completing the school code information on CASEMIS were adopted and enforced, it would be possible to obtain a broad range of information on the NPSs from CASEMIS. Right now we have very little data on the NPSs of the state, even though they are serving the state's most difficult to educate students. What data we do have on NPSs is often not in electronic form. Uniform school codes on NPSs in CASEMIS would yield considerable information that could be extremely useful in analyzing what schools there are in the state, what characteristics of students they serve by category of disability, age, sex, race, etc. If these fields were completed for NPS children, we could also find out how many and what type of related services they are receiving. In short, we are unable to access a vast array of very useful information regarding the NPSs that is already in CASEMIS simply because no standardization in regard to NPS school codes, for use in CASEMIS, has been adopted.

It is extremely cost-ineffective to collect all of this information on individual students enrolled in NPSs across the state and then not be able to analyze it because a simple reporting convention has not been adopted or enforced. This is low cost and low effort remedy would substantially increase the information available to policy makers, program monitors, evaluators, and researchers regarding NPSs in California. This is even more important because there is probably no school population in California who is more at risk, where the cost of education is so high, whose schools are under greater scrutiny, and about whom we know so little as the state's NPSs. This recommendation was also made in a prior study submitted to the state (Parrish et al, 1998).

Overall capacity needs to be bolstered for the group home system.

A broader range of residential options is needed for group home children that are clearly independent of where schooling services are provided to allow for more appropriate residential placements. In addition, social worker caseloads need to be lowered to reduce inappropriate residential placements that often lead to inappropriate education placements. More programs and supports for group home children in public schools need to be established.

Fiscal provisions creating incentives for group home children to be identified as requiring special education services and for their education to be provided in NPSs must be removed.

Mandates to school districts regarding the provision and/or support of appropriate education services to group home children should be enforced and receive fiscal support. RCL rates should be reviewed regularly to ensure an ample supply of appropriate residential placements for group home children with accompanying appropriate education services. Current residential and education investments for group home children are generally producing very low levels of educational results. Supplemental funding for group home children to bolster the quality of their educational services should be accompanied by measures of accountability for student results.

This chapter will conclude with some fiscal and other recommendations related to NPS governance, especially as it pertains to children in group homes, submitted by the lead author of this report in a prior study of NPSs completed on September 30, 1998. This study, and these findings, were submitted to the Office of the Legislative Analyst, the California Department of Education, and the California Department of Finance. We believe he recommendations from this prior study stated below, have been borne out by the current study and bear repeating.

- The state's relatively new special education funding law in place, the fiscal incentive to place students residing in LCIs into NPSs becomes even more pronounced. All fiscal incentives to identify certain types of LCI students as needing special education and for placing them in NPSs should be removed. These recommendations are described in more detail in Chapter 5 of this report.

- It was reported that pressure is sometimes created by some LCIs to place students in NPSs owned by the same organization that runs the LCI. Provisions should be developed and enforced to clearly separate decisions regarding the most appropriate residential placement from the most appropriate educational placement for LCI students.

- It was reported that group homes and LCIs sometimes solicit/accept educational rights from parents, which may result in a conflict of interest regarding the most appropriate placement of the child. We recommend that employees of group homes or LCIs not be allowed to accept educational rights from the students they serve. The state should develop a system of third party representation for students without parents willing or able to participate in this process.

- SELPA directors expressed concerns that they are not always immediately informed when NPS/LCI students are placed in their districts. Although this is required under IDEA '97, and a formal mechanism by which complaints can be made and appropriate remedies enacted is already in place, it appears that proper enforcement often does not occur. We recommend that existing regulations be reviewed and bolstered.

- SELPAs report that they find it difficult to obtain records for some NPS and LCI students, especially those who frequently move from school to school. When student transfers occur, academic records should be immediately provided to SELPAs to support continued appropriate placements. When students arrive in a new SELPA without any records, the new

district must initiate a new IEP, which can be both inefficient and frustrating. A more efficient system needs to be enacted to foster better placement practices. Student records should be provided to SELPAs, NPSs, and LCIs by the placing agency immediately after NPS and LCI students arrive in their districts. The state may wish to consider an electronic database for all NPS students, perhaps through the enhancement of CDE's California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS) or through a separately constructed data system. For any of these systems to substantively alleviate this problem, unique student identifiers will need to be included. A more systematic coding structure for NPS identifiers is also needed on CASEMIS.

- It was reported that too little emphasis has been placed on the transition back to public schools, especially for LCI students. There is no fiscal incentive to move LCI students back and no administrative funds available to SELPAs to support follow-up for these students. To address these problems, all fiscal incentives for NPS placement need to be removed. SELPAs also should continue to be held directly responsible for the ongoing monitoring of all NPS students. SELPAs should determine when a student is ready for a less restrictive placement and for enduring the most appropriate placement on an ongoing basis. Lastly, SELPAs should be provided with the fiscal resources needed to support these kinds of ongoing monitoring and support activities.

- An issue that emerged from the interviews and our advisory committee was that outside agencies sometimes come to IEP meetings with prediagnoses that call for certain placements and programs that districts may consider more costly and restrictive than is appropriate to meet the needs of the child. To avoid these situations, it must be clearly communicated that the criteria for eligibility of service used by special education, mental health, CCS, probation, and other agencies are not the same. For this reason, it is essential that the various agencies refrain from attempting to prescribe services or make recommendations for services to be provided by other agencies.

- It was argued that the state sometimes certifies NPSs that are too small or unable to meet appropriate facility, curriculum, instruction, or credentialing requirements. We recommend a review of current certification and monitoring procedures for NPSs to ensure the provision of high quality service for NPS students.

It is not clear what progress has been made since these recommendations from a prior study of non public school services. The issues pertaining to education quality for group home children are more complex and diverse than non public school issues alone. But there is considerable overlap in the issues confronting this study, as well as the prior study on non public schools.

There is also considerable work to be done if the state is to substantially improve educational outcomes for group home children. In summary, overall accountability and

responsibility needs to be more clearly established, interagency coordination and collaboration substantially improved, a viable state-level information system for children in group homes implemented, system capacity bolstered, and fiscal disincentives to educational practices that are in the best interests of group home children removed.

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