

# Training **MATTERS**



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## **We Want To Hear from You!**

If you have questions or would like to comment about something that appears in *Training Matters*, please contact Teresa Turner, Program Administrator, Family Support and Child Welfare Services Staff Development, N.C. Division of Social Services, 2412 Mail Service Center, 325 N. Salisbury Street, Suite 735, Raleigh, NC 27699-2412, State Courier: 56-20-25, E-mail: Teresa.Turner@ncmail.net, Tel: 919/733-7672.

## **Visit Our Website**

Go to <[www.trainingmatters-nc.org](http://www.trainingmatters-nc.org)>.

This issue of *Training Matters* was produced by John McMahon of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

References for this issue can be found at <[www.trainingmatters-nc.org](http://www.trainingmatters-nc.org)>

## **Promoting School Success: Resources for Child Welfare Workers and Families**

by Tamara Norris, MSSW, MPA, Family Support Network of North Carolina

This article describes resources child welfare workers can use to create a bridge between children, parents, and schools to develop plans that support school success.

### **First Steps**

As soon as a child is placed in foster care, foster parents and social workers should meet with school personnel to discuss the child's needs. If the child is identified as having an educational need, North Carolina child welfare policy requires that the child be referred for educational assessment within one week.

If the assessment determines that the child could benefit from special education services, or if the child is

already receiving special education services when she enters foster care, foster parents and the social worker should work with the school to develop or update the child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

### **The IEP**

Many children in foster care in North Carolina have an IEP. As discussed in the current issue of *Practice Notes* (vol. 11, no. 4), at least 30% to 41% of the children and youth in foster care in the U.S. receive special education services (Yu, 2003).

The IEP, developed jointly by the school and parents, describes the child's needs and lists the services she will receive. During IEP *continued* →

## **NC's Educational Training Voucher**

All North Carolina's child welfare workers and foster and adoptive parents should know about our state's Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program. This program offers grants to foster youth and former foster youth to attend colleges, universities, and vocational training institutions. Students may receive up to \$5,000 a year for four years as they pursue higher education. The funds may be used for tuition, books, or qualified living expenses related to post-secondary education. To be eligible to receive assistance through this program students must:

- Have aged out of foster care at age 18 or been adopted from foster care with adoption finalization after their 16th birthday
- Be under age 21 to enter the program
- Be enrolled in or have been accepted into an accredited college or vocational training program

Additional program information and an online application can be found at <[www.statevoucher.org](http://www.statevoucher.org)>. If you have questions about this program please send an e-mail to [etv@statevoucher.org](mailto:etv@statevoucher.org). This program is administered by the Orphan Foundation of America (800/950-4673).



# Promoting School Success: Resources for Child Welfare Workers and Families

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meetings foster parents are the ones empowered by law to make decisions on the child's behalf and sign IEP documents. Even though child welfare workers are forbidden by federal law from making special education decisions for children in their agency's custody (McNaught, 2005), they do have an important role to play. Their job is to help families understand the IEP process and advocate with school personnel for educational and supportive services.

In North Carolina, an important resource for families is the **Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC)**. A resource center for families with children who have disabilities, ECAC provides parents with information about educational advocacy, their rights, and how to advocate for their child (see below).

## Empowering Foster Parents

Of course, school advocacy on behalf of children in foster care is not limited to IEP meetings. Child welfare workers should empower foster par-

ents to advocate within the school and the community to obtain all of the services a child needs. (A surrogate parent also may advocate for a child, an important option for children in group home settings.)

Child welfare workers also can help foster families feel comfortable getting involved in their foster child's educational experience. Parental involvement is a strong motivator to children and is related to long-term success in school. Foster parents can also help teachers better understand the circumstances of children in foster care so the school can provide classroom accommodations if needed.

Children in DSS custody or in foster care often bring special concerns to school. These issues may include behavioral or emotional challenges, such as problems relating to attachment and transition, other mental health conditions, or child abuse or neglect. Social workers can help schools and families locate resources to support the child and the family.

## The CDR

In North Carolina, families and service providers can find services through the Central Directory of Resources (CDR) at the Family Support Network of North Carolina.

The CDR provides information and referral for families with children who have special needs and their service providers. Through a toll-free phone line (800/852-0042), referrals are made to service agencies, parent programs, support groups, and disability organizations on a local, state, and national level. Agency referral information and Family Support Network local affiliate program listings are also available on the Internet at <[www.fsnn.org](http://www.fsnn.org)>.

Additional sources of information and resources to enhance the educational experiences of children involved with the child welfare system are described in the box below.

*Fern Gardner, Family Support Network of North Carolina, and Andi Ives, Family Support Network of Central Carolina, contributed to this article*

## North Carolina Resources to Enhance the Educational Experiences of Children Involved with Child Welfare

### NC Dept. of Public Instruction (DPI)

T: 919/807-3300, Web: [www.ncpublicschools.org](http://www.ncpublicschools.org)  
DPI oversees K-12 public schools in North Carolina. Information about policies, guidelines, and services can be found on their website.

### Exceptional Children Division, DPI

T: 919/807-3969, Web: [www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/)  
The DPI's Exceptional Children Division provides leadership and services to educators and the general public on the education of students with disabilities and students who are academically or intellectually gifted. Parents' Rights and Due Process consultants in this office are available to answer questions about special education policy, mediation, or dispute resolution. Each local school system has a Preschool Coordinator for special education services for children ages 3-5 and a Director of Exceptional Children for children ages 5-21. For contact information go to <[www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/directory/district](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/directory/district)>.

### Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC)

T: 800/962-6817, Web: [www.ecac-parentcenter.org](http://www.ecac-parentcenter.org)  
The ECAC is North Carolina's Parent Training and Information Center, a resource center for families of children with disabilities that provides information about educational advocacy and parents' rights. Parent Educators are available during business hours to provide families with individual

assistance with IEP issues and advocating for their child with the school system. Free information packets are available for families in North Carolina.

### Communities In Schools State Office

T: 800/849-8881 or 919/832-2700  
Web: [www.cisnc.org](http://www.cisnc.org)  
This statewide program provides mentoring, tutoring, and parent involvement programs to support at-risk children to help them stay in school and/or prevent school dropout. CIS programs can be found in many locations throughout the state.

### The Center for the Prevention of School Violence

T: 800/299-6054, Web: [www.ncdjjdp.org](http://www.ncdjjdp.org)  
Sponsored by the Dept. of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, this center provides information about issues such as substance abuse, sexual abuse, pregnancy, life skills, etc. and a guidebook for parents and youth in English and Spanish.

### Nat'l Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities

T: 800/695-0285, Web: [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)  
This center provides printed information about special education advocacy, specific disabilities, related issue, and information about programs and services for infants, children, and youth with disabilities in each state.