

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Recommendations to Improve the Educational Stability of Children and Youth in State Custody Is The Focus of a New Report**

Today the Maine Children's Alliance (MCA) released a new report on the educational stability of children in state custody. The report, "Fostering Connections and Educational Stability," identifies ways the Departments of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Education can collaborate more effectively to improve implementation of recent federal and state laws.

When children/youth are placed into state custody, they experience multiple losses of not only their family, and community, but also of pets, belongings, connections to family traditions and a host of other important aspects of their former lives. Children/youth in the foster care system who have had multiple moves within the system often suffer the greatest disruption in their academic experience.

As Dean Crocker, MCA President, explains, "Each school move, for any child, can result in an average of six months loss of academic stability, and can affect their graduation dates, and even in the long run, their motivation to graduate at all." Youth in DHHS custody often point to stability in their school placement as one of the most important things in their lives.

In 2008, federal and state legislation was passed that requires DHHS to decide on the educational placement of a child who is in state custody based on the "best interest" of the child. If it is in the child's best interest to remain in their current school, DHHS and school administrators must work together to make sure that the child is able to do so seamlessly.

While commending the state agencies for their initial work on implementation of the new laws, the report notes a serious gap for children placed voluntarily through DHHS. It makes recommendations to the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services to clarify how local schools will respond to the educational needs of these children.

Crocker summarized by saying, "For many children in custody, the process works well; but of others there are still challenges. Finding the best school placement for children/youth in custody does not usually present insurmountable challenges. However, we continue to have specific concerns about this process. Communication between DHHS and MDOE must improve. Improvements should include clearer protocols and cross-departmental trainings so that all parties (caseworkers, school personnel, resource parents and kinship families) are working from the same understanding of the legislation. Best-practice strategies should

be developed so that collaboration and timely information-sharing are a part of the decision-making process for children and youth in child welfare and education systems.

The report was developed with the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and with the participation of the State Departments of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Education.

*The Maine Children's Alliance (MCA) is a statewide, non-partisan advocacy organization committed to improving the lives of all Maine children, youth, and families. By collecting and analyzing data on children and their health, economic and demographic status, MCA seeks to link research to practice and public policy. To view the report please visit [http://mainechildrensalliance.org/assets/files/fostering%20connections/Fostering%20Connections\\_final\\_web\[1\].pdf](http://mainechildrensalliance.org/assets/files/fostering%20connections/Fostering%20Connections_final_web[1].pdf). For a print copy, call 623-1868, ext. 202.*

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