Educational Access Project Annual Report

July 1, 2019– June 30, 2020

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Case Study 1: Youth resumes education after missing a month

The education advisor got involved with Sierra, a kindergarten student, when the foster parent tried to enroll her in the neighborhood school and the school said she cannot start school due to her individualized education plan (IEP) was near expiration. Both schools are in the same school district. The school informed the foster parent that Sierra can be enrolled in the new school once the previous school updates her IEP. This foster parent had been trying to enroll Sierra since school had started in September and now it was the beginning of October.

The education advisor consulted with the foster parent to find out that the foster parent had contacted the school and followed all procedures as well as contacting the district office and to no avail Sierra still was not enrolled. The education advisor let the foster parent know that this was not appropriate and coordinated a time to meet the next day at the school to get Sierra enrolled. In the meantime, the education advisor submitted concerns in writing to the district representative and let her know that foster parent and the education advisor will be at the school in the morning to enroll Sierra.

The next morning the education advisor and foster parent met at the school. Upon arriving at the school, the principal wanted to meet with the education advisor to find out where the breakdown happened and to help with immediate enrollment. The clerk registered Sierra, provided free uniform, book bag, and supplies. Also, the case manager helped with the appropriate special education placement, introduced foster mom to the teacher, and explained where drop off in the AM and pick up at the end of the day would take place.

Within one day of contacting the education advisor, Sierra was enrolled in school and the appropriate special education placement.

Even though the foster parent knew that the school could not deny enrollment, foster parent was at a road block as what to do next. Missing classroom instruction puts youth behind academically, a month can result in significant setbacks. For youth to succeed educationally, they must be in school and must receive the resources and supports for academic success.

When these complex systems interface, people often lack the expertise to navigate the systems and advocate for best interest, even when they are able to parse out the factors and identify what is in the child's best interest. The locus of the work of NIU Center for Child Welfare and Education (CCWE) mitigates against delayed access, denied opportunities and dreams deferred.

NIU's CCWE is an Illinois Board of Higher Education center housed in the Division of Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development. The Center aims to produce greater equity in society by facilitating engagement between the university, state government, communities and families. CCWE advances better trajectories for people living in Illinois with vulnerable circumstances by developing policies and connecting residents with services designed to foster educational success and stable family structures. Furthermore, CCWE supports continuing professional development to improve competence and provides data and information that reveal the realities of the population and systems.

NIU started collaborating with Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in 1994, and produced the BH Education Taskforce Report published in 1995. Subsequently Center staff:

- Drafted Educational Procedures 314 (DCFS's first education regulations)
- Trained all DCFS and POS staff on this law to facilitate implementation
- Conducted educational wellbeing studies on youth in foster care
- Forged collaborations between DCFS and Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the district with the largest population of youth in care at that time
- Promoted data sharing agreements between DCFS and CPS as well as DCFS and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).

Under the auspices of the Center for Child Welfare and Education, the Educational Access Project (EAP) continues to promote educational wellbeing for youth in foster care. EAP is committed to building capacity for all youth in care to receive an education that is at least equitable to their peers who are not associated with the foster care system. As such, EAP staff continues to:

- Eliminate obstacles that prohibit educational access(example enrollment obstacles)

- Work with people and organizations in the community that influence the youth's education to address the educational disparities that youth face
- Build open and honest relationships through communication with students, foster care agencies, community providers, and schools
- Maintain a network of professionals that advocate for improved and equitable educational change
- Deliver effective services guided by expert knowledge and evidence based practices.

Comprehensive Narrative Describing Services

As previously stated, EAP is committed to the goal of youth in care receiving an education that is at least on par with their peers who are not in foster care. For youth to succeed educationally, they must be in school and must receive the resources and supports for academic success. Fostering educational well-being requires the ability to assess and problem solve school related issues, interpret documentation, and advocate across systems so that children and youth can gain access to programs and services.

This fiscal year, EAP continued to promote educational wellbeing for youth in foster care. For the first 6 months EAP staff provided education technical assistance to youth with all educational issues but this changed in January 2020. In January 2020, EAP staff addressed educational issues for Tier 3 youth. This was an initiative between DCFS and ISBE to obtain monthly lists of names of youth on Tier 3 (three or more combined D's or F's in subjects and/or ten percent unexcused absences in a month), and DCFS then sent the list to EAP for educational technical assistance. EAP received lists in January and February. EAP staff stopped addressing all other educational issues that youth in care experienced but focused on the Tier 3 youth. This report covers the timeframe from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020 and provides information about services delivered, clients served and their demographic information, outcome measures, data collection, and client satisfaction.

DCFS and other stakeholders involved in youth's education make referrals to CCWE staff for assistance when the education needs of youth in care are unmet, neglected, and/or otherwise out of compliance with Federal, State and Judicial requirements, DCFS policy, and BH Requirements. The services delivered include educational technical assistance, training and professional development, building capacity and fostering communication between systems, policy review and analysis, supporting DCFS education initiatives and serving on committees, developing.

Educational Technical Assistance

Educational technical assistance refers to applying educational expertise to address the educational needs of youth in care. EAP staff use best practice in using all knowledge to provide child centered educational technical assistance. This is gathering data, planning, assessing, and linking the youth to programs and services for positive educational outcomes. EAP staff provided technical assistance and built capacity to foster academic and social development. EAP staff participated in education planning in multiple school meetings, such as IEP meetings, disciplinary hearings, etc. to advocate for the best interest of youth in care. EAP Staff also contributed educational expertise in child and family team meetings, such as Clinical Intervention to Placement Preservation (CIPP) and Integrated Assessments.

DCFS and POS child welfare staff and administrators, caregivers, youth in care, school personnel, court personnel and others make referrals to EAP Education Advisors for technical assistance when youth in care encounter educational issues. Examples of the educational issues staff addressed include: enrollment obstacles, academic challenges, special education services, challenging behavior in school, school safety, school discipline (e.g. detention, suspension, expulsion), school record transfer, school fees and funding, transportation, General Education Development (GED) and postsecondary concerns.

EAP staff provided appropriate educational assessments, planning and linkages to programs and services for youth. They removed obstacles and created greater prospect for academic learning, social development, school engagement and school stability.

Educational Battles Youth in Care Face

The transitory nature of foster care, the trauma and abuse children face, and the complex sets of regulations and practices both in education and child welfare often contribute to educational challenges for children and youth in foster care. The result is that youth in care often receive educational services that fail to meet their needs as well as federal and state requirements.

Concern for meeting educational needs of children in foster care lies not only with educators; it also falls within the social services domain of child well-being. Educational well-being of youth in foster care requires continued services that address the problems they face. The following examples demonstrate educational neglect that was evident among the referrals received. They include:

- Violation of youth's rights under IDEA and Section 504 of the American with Disabilities Act
- Lack of appropriate educational services for youth in general education settings
- Lack of educational services for youth who experience prolonged illness and hospitalization, including mental illness
- Violation of youth's rights to attend school of origin when they moved
- Inadequate academic services to address youth's needs
- Failure to provide:
    - School record transfer in accordance with laws and best practice
    - Transportation to new school when youth changes school
    - Needed behavioral assessments and interventions
    - School fee waivers and funding as needed
    - School safety plans for youth who need them
    - Support to address attendance and the disciplinary issues in accordance with the law
- Youth left behind by the systemic shift from serving most vulnerable youth in care to Tier 3 during an academic year without adequate preparation to support most vulnerable population with issues not prioritized by the system
- COVID-19 Pandemic creating health risks, confusion, denial to educational services and supports, etc.
- Barriers to school engagement in a remote learning environment, including academic programming and support per the youth's needs and rights and participation in curricular online learning opportunities and requirements

- Academic risks and social emotional educational wellbeing challenges, as well as other family wellbeing concerns in the home that affect youth during the pandemic
- Lack of technology to participate remotely, including devices and high speed internet
- Weak internet signals which caused issues with work submission
- Foster parents who work not being able to find child care during COVID-19
- Lack of work completion by youth
- Some students that had educational problems prior to schools shifting to remote learning still have engagement issues during COVID-19
- Youth being moved during the pandemic and lack of communication between DCFS and school regarding moves
- Some on-ground schools affiliated with residential programs reported being unprepared to shift to remote learning

Issues are grouped in the frequency chart below, and the actual breakdown is listed following this. The groups of issues include:

- 30% -- School participation factors (enrollment, attendance, school records retrieval & school related transportation)
- 26% -- Academic challenges
- 22% -- Special education services, Section 504 and Early Intervention
- 10% -- School behavior challenges, school safety (e.g. bullying & elopement), and discipline (e.g. suspension, detention, expulsion)
- 10% -- Child and family team meetings for education planning (non-school e.g. CIPP)

- 2% -- Other (fees and funding, postsecondary, General Education Development and Adult Basic Education)

All Youth Served - Educational Issues
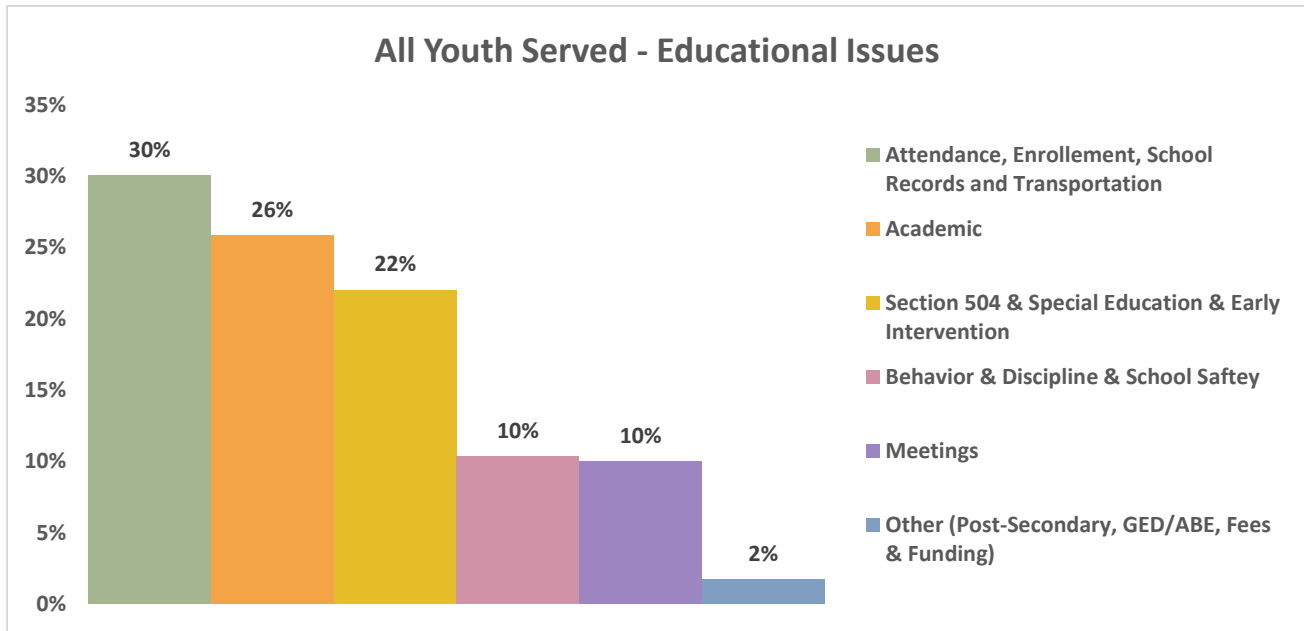
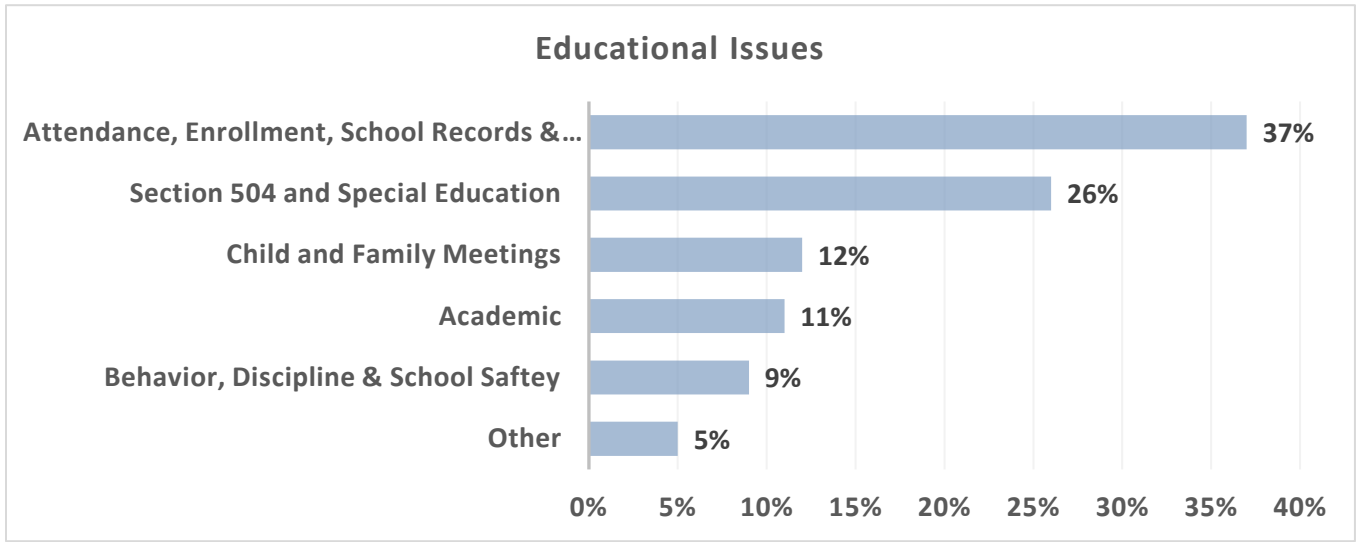Further frequency breakdown of educational issues addressed below:

- Academic – 398
- Special Education – 307
- Enrollment – 162
- Non-School child and family meetings – 154
- Attendance – 151
- Behavior – 115
- Transportation – 79
- School Records – 71
- Discipline – 31
- Section 504 – 27
- Fees/Funding – 13
- School Safety – 13
- Post-Secondary – 7
- GED/ABE – 6
- Early Intervention – 5

Educational Issues by Quarter

Quarter 1

Educational Issues

Category	Percentage
Attendance, Enrollment, School Records &…	37%
Section 504 and Special Education	26%
Child and Family Meetings	12%
Academic	11%
Behavior, Discipline & School Saftey	9%
Other	5%

Quarter 2

Educational Issues

Category	Percentage
Special Education & Section 504	26.0%
Academic	17.1%
Child & Family Meetings	14.0%
Behavior & Discipline	13.3%
Enrollment	12.4%
Transportation	5.6%
School Records	5.6%
Attendance & School Safety	4.5%
Other (Fees/Funding, GED, PSE)	1.5%

Quarter 3

Educational Issues

Issue	Percentage
Academic	35.0%
School Attendance	20.0%
Special Education & Section 504	16.0%
School Enrollement, Transportation & Records	13.0%
Behavior & Discipline	8.0%
Child and Family Meetings	7.0%
Other (School Saftey, PSE, & GED/ABE)	1.0%

0.0% 5.0% 10.0% 15.0% 20.0% 25.0% 30.0% 35.0% 40.0%

Quarter 4

Educational Issues

Issue	Percentage
Learning Engagement	76.0%
Special Education & Section 504	18.0%
Other (School Saftey, PSE, & GED/ABE)	6.0%

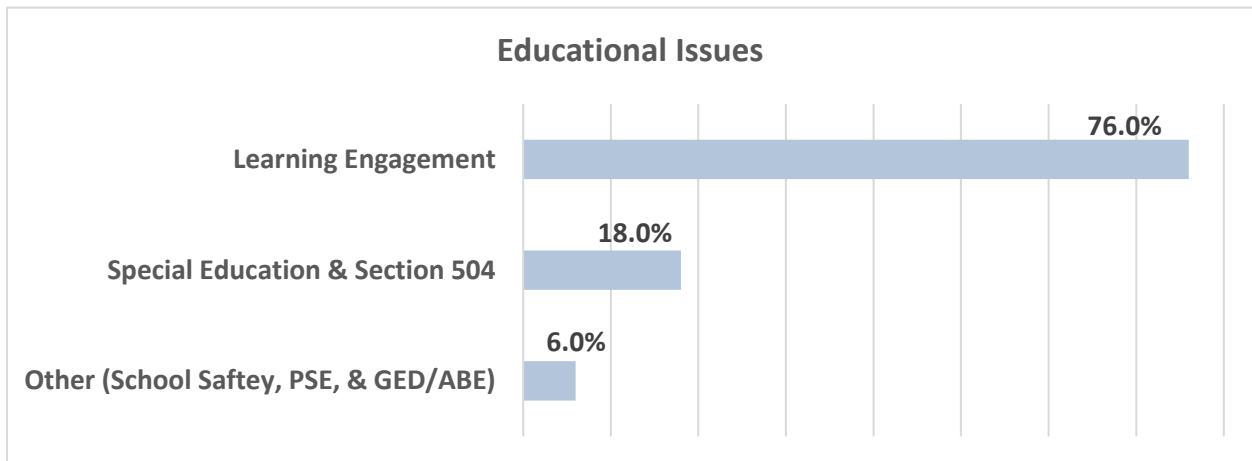**How CCWE addresses educational battles**

Case Study 2 "Youth engaged in learning despite COVID-19"

Sheila came to our Tier 3 list for poor academics and poor attendance. Sheila is a 7th grader with an individual education plan for specific learning disability. Her learning style is audio visual and had one on one from the school. The foster parent was depending on the school to address the needs of Sheila. Then COVID-19 happened. It was hard for Sheila to be engaged. Because of this the foster parent now had to learn the needs of Sheila and then provide the best support.

The education advisor reached out to the foster parent and conferenced with the caseworker as to the concerns of the foster parent and to come up with a plan on how to address this. They came up with plan that the foster parent's sister will come daily to for a few hours to help Sheila. This seemed to work for a few weeks. There was another meeting set up to see what other plan can be put in place.

Sheila was receiving an hour a day remote support from the special education teacher. Sometimes Sheila would be engaged with this teacher and other times it was a struggle. The special education teacher saw that Sheila was struggling and so she decided to meet Sheila in person one hour a day. This connection with the teacher changed the way Sheila was engaged and completing work. Sheila was getting her assignments in and was able to be promoted to the next grade.

With the support from the caregiver and the understanding of the specific needs Sheila needed to be addressed, Sheila was able to get the appropriate support and continue on the path of promotion. With the weekly check in with the education advisor, the family, school, and caseworker were kept abreast of the barriers and so that they could be addressed right away.

EAP provides consultation, assessments, linkages and recommendations that help youth in care engage in education programs and services that they need. EAP Education Advisors gather and examine information, review documents, communicate with parties involved including caseworkers, caregivers, schools, students, participating in staffing, provide consultation and advocate for appropriate educational planning, programs and services. EAP staff effectively connects people and systems; they are masterful at building networks of communication between and among caregivers, caseworkers, students, educators, providers and others that benefit the youth they serve.

EAP provides mechanisms and services to screen all youth referred to EAP to determine whether they are on Tier 3 List and serve them or redirect them to the appropriate person. EAP staff develop systems that provides educational technical assistance for youth on Tier 3 List to address chronic absenteeism and low academic performance as well as develop processes to address systemic issues that would otherwise diminish educational attainment.

During COVID-19 EAP staff addressed these educational battles:

- Develop processes to address systemic issues that would otherwise diminish educational attainment
- Ensuring school engagement in a remote learning environment, including academic programming and support per the youth's needs and rights and participation in curricular online learning opportunities and requirements
- Continued services to address issues, monitor youth and their families to assess and address obstacles faced during the school's shift to remote learning. These include child specific issues and wellness checks
- Recommendation for remote learning plans
- Assisting with access to equipment to address technology needs, e.g. loaner devices/coordinating pick up for devices; computer use for families with inadequate number of devices in their households with multiple children
- Assisting family to develop schedules that enhance learning engagement, e.g. study times, breaks, activities
- Connecting foster parent to Apps to stay connected to teacher, grades, and missing assignments
- Wellness check with foster parents about what they need in the home to promote wellness and learning; assisting families with locating food banks, light bill assistance, child care
- Listening to foster parents concerns, issues, and just being there to listen
- Asking school districts to be a part of their meetings for remote learning so youth in care needs can be addressed
- Asking school districts to be a part of their meetings for remote learning so youth in care needs can be addressed
- Connecting youth with disabilities and eligible for special education services with services to meet needs in the remote settings, e.g. helping youth with autism and other disabilities who were having a hard time participating in remote learning.
- Focusing technical assistance services to ensure grade promotion, and graduation

- Addressing youth access to remote learning (assignment completion and submission, live online classes, asynchronous learning opportunities, technology, equipment, reliable internet
- Work out schedules for use of home computer by multiple users for synchronous class or group participation
- Ensuring youth had access to school work completion packets in districts, schools and homes where needed
- Facilitating submission of assignments

Though the EAP contract requires technical assistance, when technical assistance is insufficient, CCWE's Education Advisors take steps to bring the education that individual youth in care receive into compliance. Our staff address non-compliance by applying well-established best practices within the field of education.

Outcomes on lead and lag measures

For youth to succeed educationally, they must be in school and must receive the resources and supports for academic success.

CCWE's staff substantially increased the educational services that youth in care received. The staff also continued to provide services to build capacity within the field for understanding and addressing the education needs of youth in care.

- Our staff increased the number of days that youth in care were able to participate in school (example case study 1 youth was out of school for a month, ed. Advisor got involved and youth was enrolled within one day)
- Our staff increased the number of educational services that support academic success for the youth in care they served this year
- Our staff provided educational services to an unduplicated count of 876* youth in care over the course of this year, of which 50% received services more than once
  - Staff reviewed about 6,200 educational records
  - Provided over 9,100 educational assessments
- Over 205 youth were restored to school
- Over 9,500 updates were applied to the educational records of the youth served
- In addition, the competence of stakeholders that support the education of youth in care was increased to about 950 on the job training sessions

- By helping the students, CCWE Education Advisors substantially decreased the number of days DCFS was out of compliance with various federal and state laws, their own policies and BH Consent Decree requirements for youth in care that received EAP services

The Pandemic Response

On March 9, 2020, the Governor of Illinois declared the state of Illinois as a disaster area, as a response to the outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019. On March 13, an Executive order 2020-05 was issued to order the closure of public and private schools (prekindergarten -12th). On March 20, the Governor of Illinois issued Executive Order 2020-10 for all schools to go to distance learning. School districts rapidly closed their schools and transitioned to a new way of teaching, which was remote learning. Remote learning occurred for the duration of the suspension of in-person instruction for the rest of the academic year. Districts had to develop instructional remote learning to allow for student engagement and continuity of instruction. Instructional remote learning differed from district to district. Districts were required to be flexible in the way that they addressed the educational needs of the students. Tasks were supposed to be age appropriate; and students were not required to master content and were not to be penalized for failure to master new content. Grades during remote learning were not to negatively affect a student's academic standing. In essence, teachers in partnership with families provided instructional remote learning to the students during these difficult times.

The COVID-19 Pandemic created health risks, confusion, and denial to educational services and supports. During our state and nation's most urgent need for immediate planning to reduce negative consequences from COVID-19 school closures, CCWE quickly developed and implemented ad-hoc processes. These processes were designed to: a) assess youth's educational involvement and needs; b) communicate with caregivers, caseworkers, schools and school districts; and c) take steps to enhance remote learning in the home environments. This was achieved by making sure each youth had an individualized remote plan and by reaching out to each district for their return back to school plan.

While adjusting to COVID, CCWE recognized that some students that had educational problems prior to schools shifting to remote learning still had engagement issues during COVID-19. Additionally, CCWE recognized that working foster parents were struggling to find adequate child care. The main goal of CCWE was to develop processes to ensure youth in care were not left behind in the school year following the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

CCWE established the means to ensure all youth in care had the needed access and support, and they were engaged in remote learning during COVID-19 school closures.

Clients Served and Demographics

The demographics in this section represent those youth who received services, whether on one occasion or multiple times. This section presents information and discussion on youth's age ranges, gender, race, placement and grades.

Age Range of youth served

Two in five (40%) of the youth were between ages 14 to 17. About one in three were ages 5 to 10 years (31%). One in five of the youth were between ages 11 and 13 years (18%). Youth under age 5 were 6% of the population served. About 5% of the youth were over 18 years old.

All Youth Served - Age Range

Age Range	Percentage
18+	5%
14-17	40%
11-13	18%
5-10	31%
0-4	6%
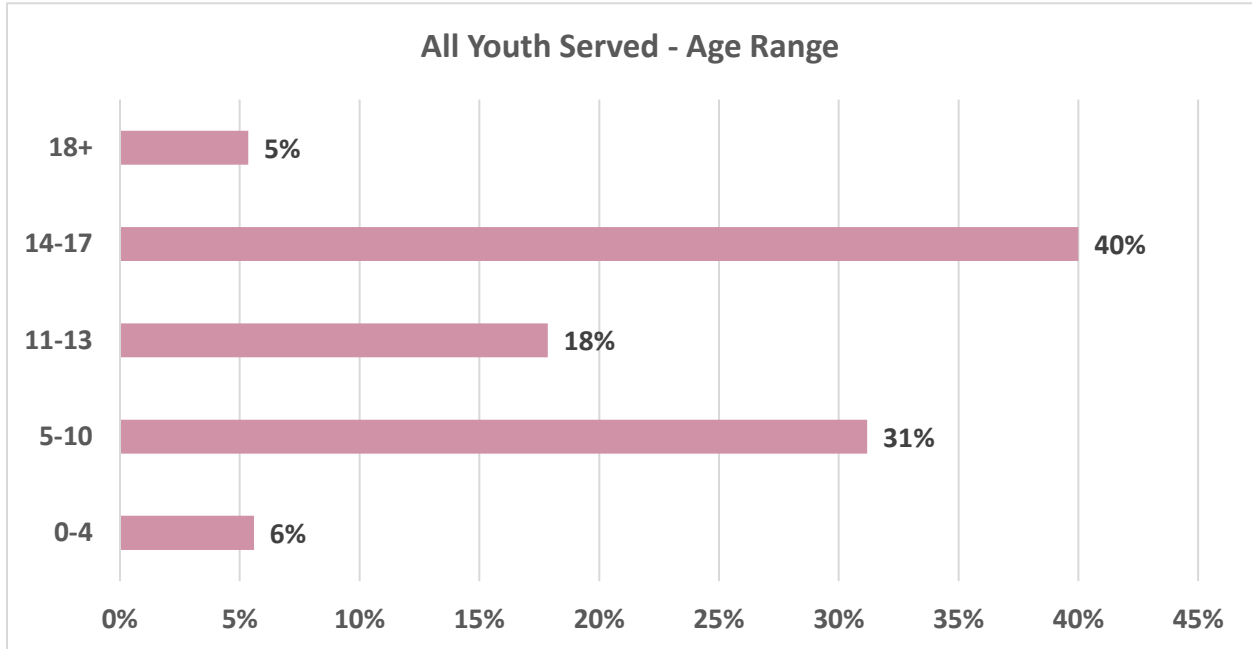
Gender of Youth Served

Of the youth served this year, 56% were male and 44% were female.

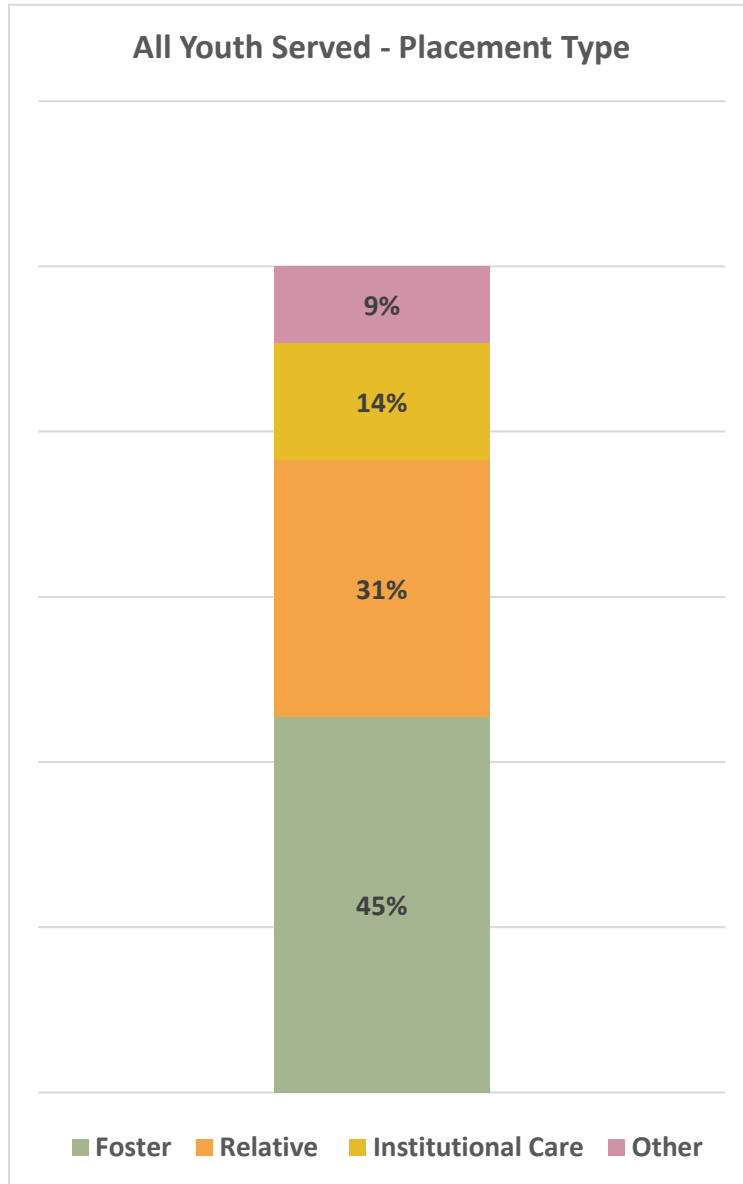**All Youth Served - Gender**

44%

56%

Male   Female
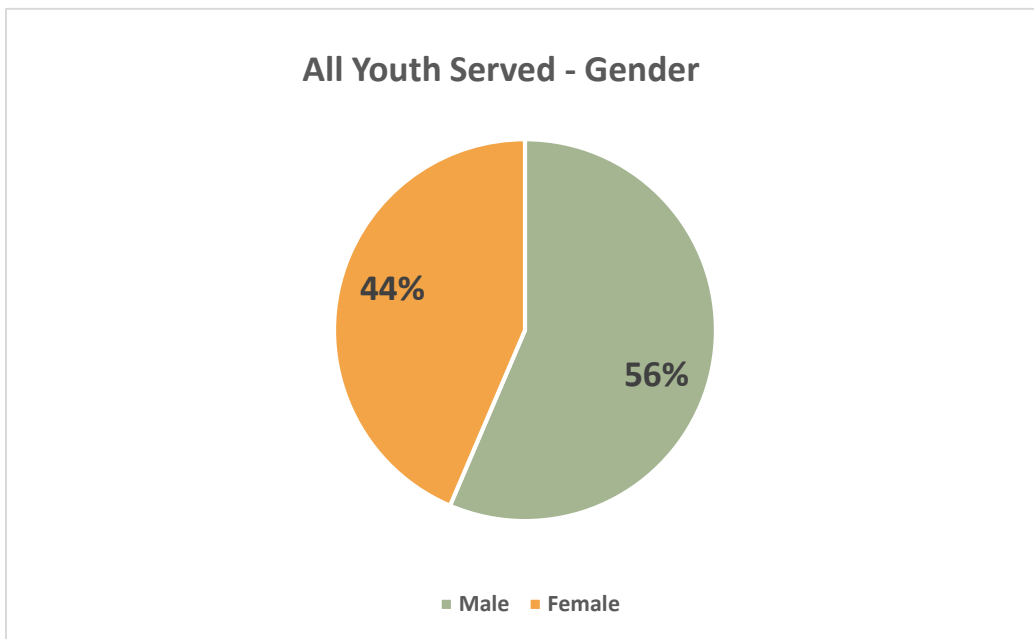
Race

Of all youth served, about half were African American (52%), more than two in five youth were Caucasian (44%), 4% were Hispanic and 1% were of other race.
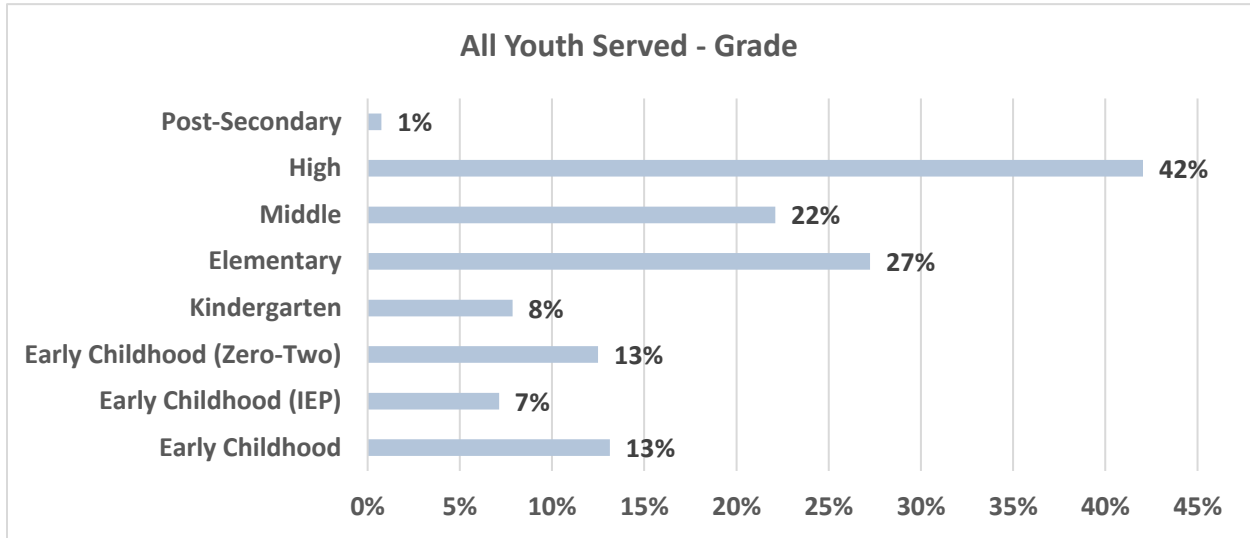
All Youth Served - Race

4%   1%

44%

52%

African American   Caucasion   Hispanic   Other
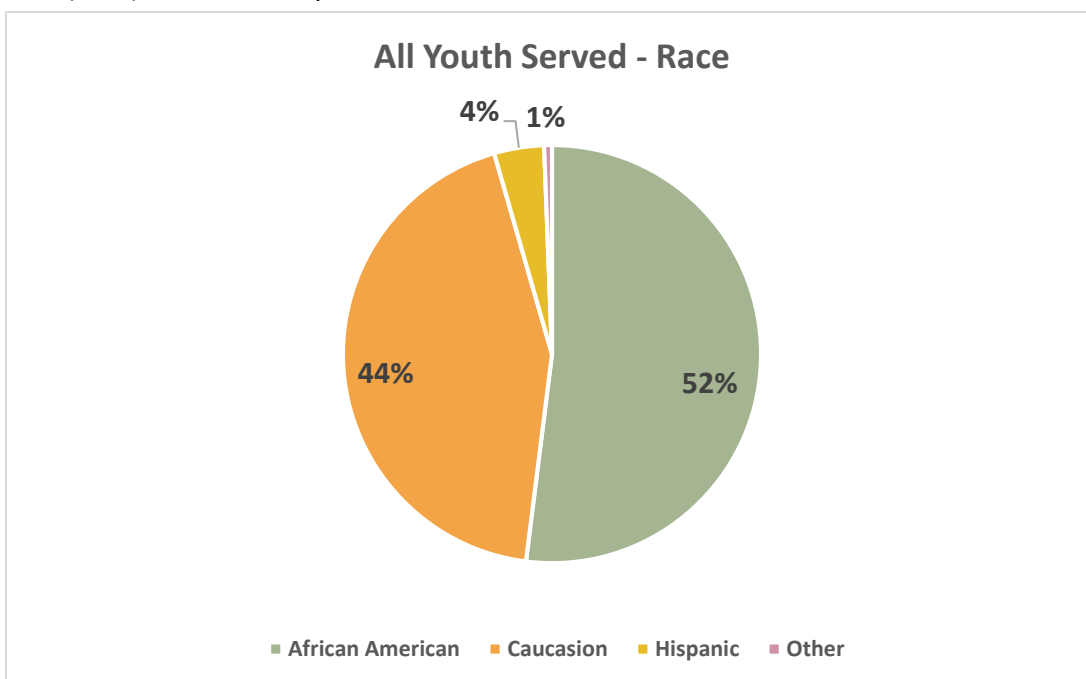
Living Arrangement

Almost half of the youth population served this year were in traditional foster care (45%). About one out three youth served were in relative homes (31%). Fourteen percent (14%) of the youth served were in institutional care and the remaining 9% of youth had a variety of other placement codes at the time of service, including hospitalization.

All Youth Served - Placement Type

Placement Type	Percentage
Other	9%
Institutional Care	14%
Relative	31%
Foster	45%

Legend: Foster, Relative, Institutional Care, Other

Youth Grade

Their grades ranged from preschool to postsecondary with 91% of the youth in Elementary through 12th grade. Youth in high school were the highest number of youth served (42%). About 1 in 4 youth were in Elementary school and about 1 in 5 youth were in middle school. Eight percent (8%) of the youth served were in kindergarten or lower. The remaining 1% of youth served were post-secondary.

All Youth Served - Grade

Grade	Percent
Post-Secondary	1%
High	42%
Middle	22%
Elementary	27%
Kindergarten	8%
Early Childhood (Zero-Two)	13%
Early Childhood (IEP)	7%
Early Childhood	13%

Data from the graph entitled "Youth in Care in ISBE Schools by grade" was received via email through DCFS from ISBE (M. Uhe, personal communication, March 2020). The total number of youth represented below was about 8,900 from grades Kindergarten through 12th grade. It shows that almost one out two youth in care are in ISBE schools are in primary grades (K-5th grade). The proportion of youth in high school is 26%

Youth In Care in ISBE Schools by Grade

Grade	Percent
Post-Secondary	0%
High	26%
Middle	21%
Elementary	42%
Kindergarten	11%
PreK	50%
B3	4%
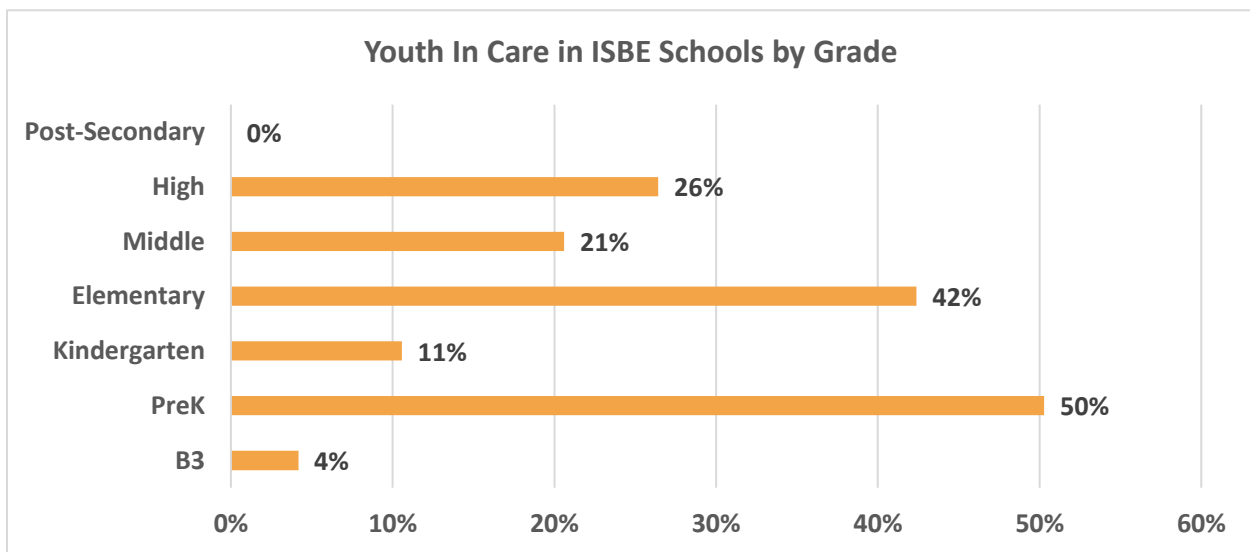
EAP has less than eight full time equivalent education advisors that serve the children and families in the state. This year they provided over 4,200 technical assistance services for youth to access appropriate services and to build capacity of professionals. The tables below show the number of technical assistance services and the number of youth served each month of the year.

Table of Technical Assistance (TA) Services by Month:

Month	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	All
TA	172	293	287	362	323	255	379	493	366	464	410	483	**4287***

Table of Unduplicated Clients by Month:

Month	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	All
Youth	76	132	161	178	155	140	237	275	205	214	203	194	**2170***

Youth Served and Technical Assistances by Quarter

Quarter 1

Unduplicated Youth per Month July 01, 2019 – September 30, 2019	North	Central	South	Cook	Statewide Total
Total	36	90	43	198	367

Technical Assistance Services Total July 01, 2019 – September 30, 2019	North	Central	South	Cook	Statewide Total
Total	88	184	93	489	854

Quarter 2

Unduplicated Youth per Month October 01, 2019 – December 31, 2019	North	Central	South	Cook	Statewide Total
Total	81	96	90	247	514

Technical Assistance Services Total October 01, 2019 – December 31, 2019	North	Central	South	Cook	Statewide Total
Total	166	160	167	537	1,030

Quarter 3

Unduplicated Youth per Month January 01, 2020 – March 31, 2020	North	Central	South	Cook	Statewide Total
Total	165	194	71	188	618

Technical Assistance Services Total January 01, 2020 – March 31, 2020	North	Central	South	Cook	Statewide Total
Total	328	364	153	388	1233

Quarter 4

Unduplicated Youth per Month April 01, 2020 – June 30, 2020	North	Central	South	Cook	Statewide Total
Total	175	141	81	214	611

Technical Assistance Services Total April 01, 2020 – June 30, 2020	North	Central	South	Cook	Statewide Total
Total	402	424	200	371	1379

Tier 3 Youth

In January 2020 EAP received lists from DCFS for youth that were on Tier 3. This was an initiative between DCFS and ISBE to obtain monthly lists of names of youth on Tier 3 (three or more combined D's or F's in subjects and/or ten percent unexcused absences in a month), and DCFS then sent the list to EAP for educational technical assistance. EAP received lists in January and February. COVID-19 happened in March 2020 and so no more lists were received from the school districts.

There are 852 school districts in Illinois. The monthly lists of youth on the Tier 3 lists came from 55 school districts. These school districts were out of the southern, central, and northern part of Illinois. Here is the breakdown of youth in care in the school districts from kindergarten through 12th grade. "Youth in Care in ISBE Schools by grade" was received via email through DCFS from ISBE (M. Uhe, personal communication, March 2020).

Youth in Care in ISBE Schools by Grade

- 19% school districts with no youth in care
- 71% school districts with 20 or less youth in care
- 8% school districts over 20 but less than 85
- School districts with the highest number of youth in care
    - Chicago Public Schools has 1686 youth in care
    - Peoria District 150 has 253 youth in care
    - Rockford District 205 has 244 youth in care
    - Decatur SD 61 has 189 youth in care
    - Springfield SD 186 has 177 youth in care
    - Quincy SD 172 has 107 youth in care
    - Granite City CUSD 9 has 92 youth in care
    - Champaigne CUSD4 has 90 youth in care
    - East St. Louis SD 189 has 85 youth in care

Tier 3 Education Issues

Issues are grouped in the frequency chart below, and the actual breakdown is listed following this. The groups of issues include:

- 48% - Grades
- 26% - Attendance
- 17% - Attendance and Grades
- 9% - Special Education Services

Tier 3 - Education Issues
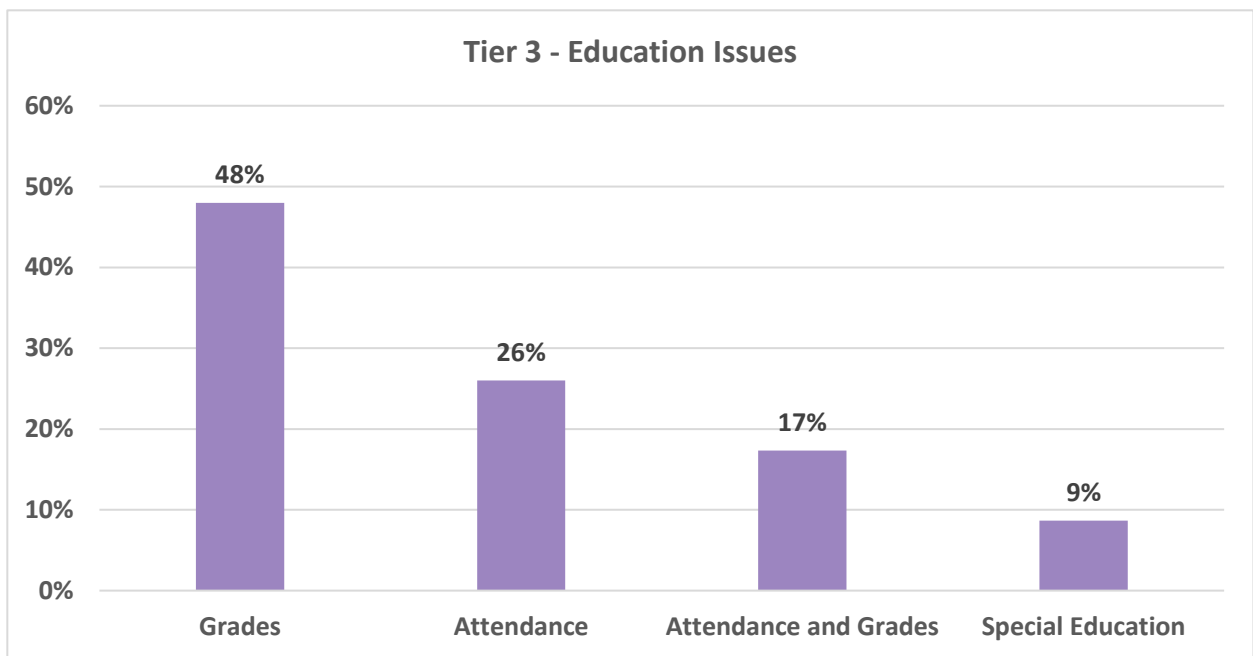
Tier 3 Youth Demographics

The demographics in this section represent those youth who Tier 3 received services, whether on one occasion or multiple times. This section presents information and discussion on youth's age ranges, gender, race, placement and grades.

Age Range of Tier 3 Youth Served

About two in five (37%) of the youth were between ages 14 to 17. About one in three were ages 5 to 10 years (35%). About one quarter of the youth were between ages 11 and 13 years (23%). Youth under age 5 were 0% of the population served. About 5% of the youth were over 18 years old.

Tier 3 - Age Range

Age Range	Percentage
18+	5%
14-17	37%
11-13	23%
5-10	35%
0-4	0%
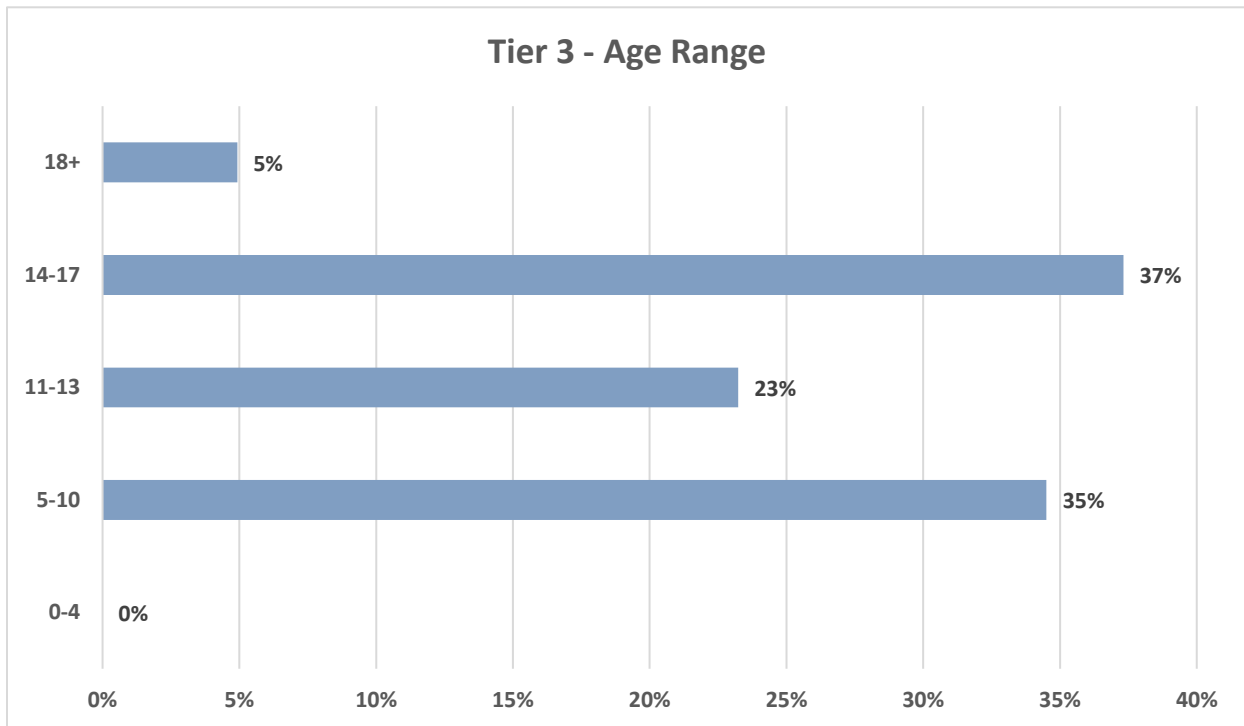
Gender of Tier 3 Youth Served

Of the youth served this year, 59% were male and 41% were female.

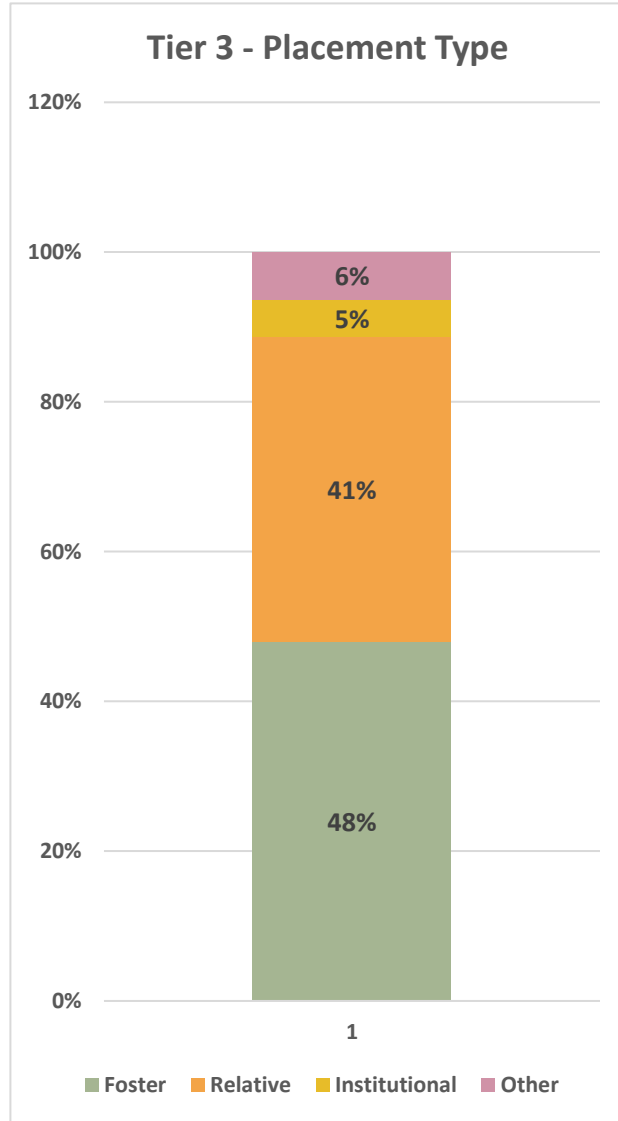**Tier 3 - Gender**

41%

59%

■ Male ■ Female
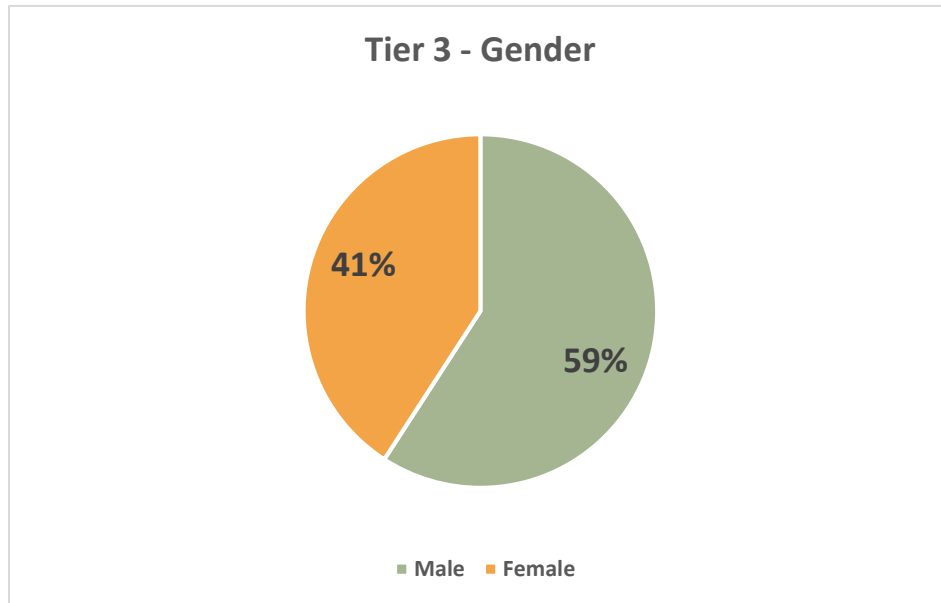
Race of Tier 3 Youth Served

Of all youth served, about three out of four were Caucasian (74%), about one in four were African American (24%), and 2% were Hispanic.

Tier 3 - Race

2%

0%

24%

74%

■ African American ■ Caucasion ■ Hispanic ■ Other
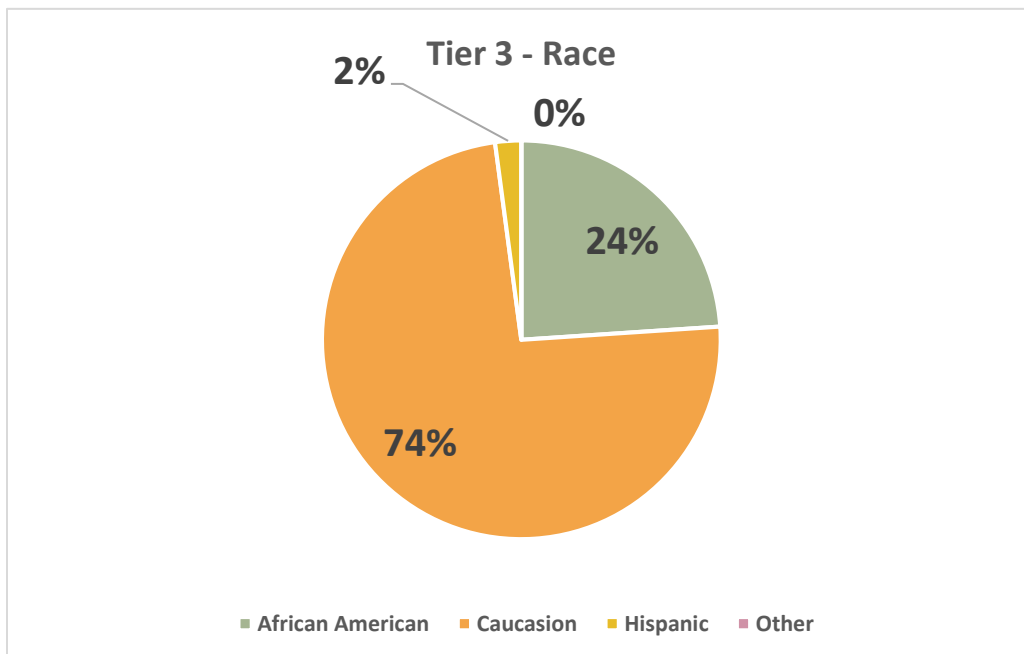
Living Arrangement of Tier 3 Youth Served

Almost half of the youth population served this year were in traditional foster care (48%). About two out five youth served were in relative homes (41%). Five percent (5%) of the youth served were in institutional care and the remaining 6% of youth had a variety of other placement codes at the time of service, including hospitalization.

Tier 3 - Placement Type

Legend: Foster, Relative, Institutional, Other

Values shown on chart: 6%, 5%, 41%, 48%

Grade of Tier 3 Youth Served

Tier 3 - Grade

Grade	Percentage
Post-Secondary	0%
High	38%
Middle	25%
Elementary	31%
Kindergarten	6%
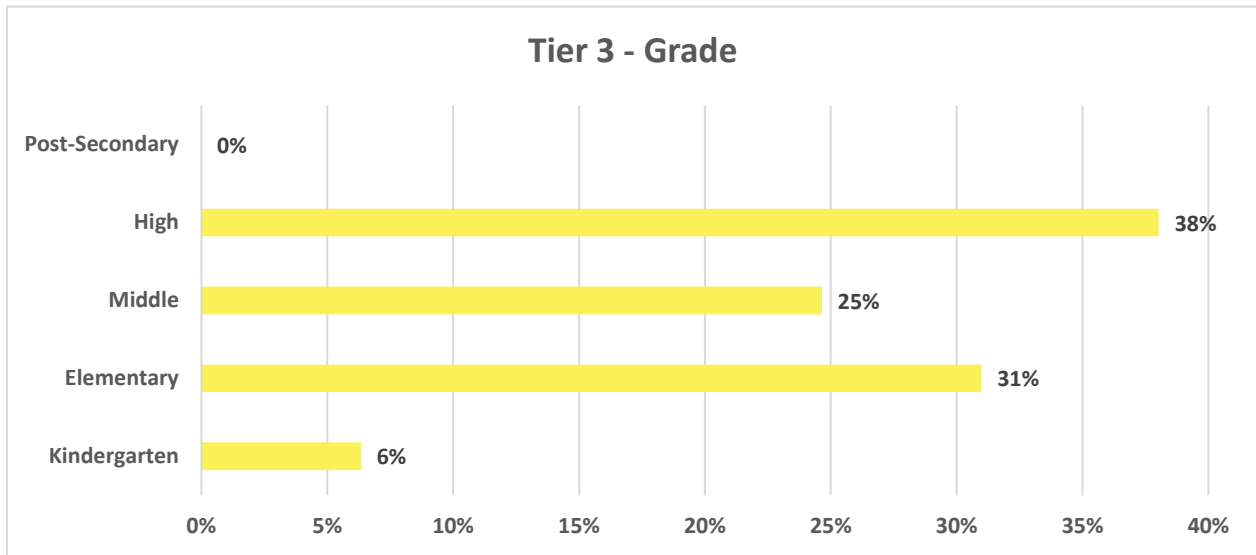
Their grades ranged from kindergarten to high school with 38% of the youth in high school. Middle school accounted for ¼ of the tier 3 youth served. About 1 in 3 (30%) of tier 3 youth were elementary. The remaining 6% of youth were in kindergarten.

Outcomes and metrics

- 98.8% of youth gained access to needed student centered planning, programs, services, evaluation and/or assessment.
- 100% of youth gained access to needed financial support or waivers or assistance applying.
- 100% of training participants reported an increase in their knowledge through their participation in the training sessions.
- 100% client satisfaction survey respondents reported they were satisfied with the services.

In addition to educational technical assistance services, EAP provides services geared to increase the knowledge of caregivers and professionals and build capacity to serve youth in care. They engage in policy review and analysis, support DCFS education initiatives, develop collaborations and support DCFS postsecondary programs.
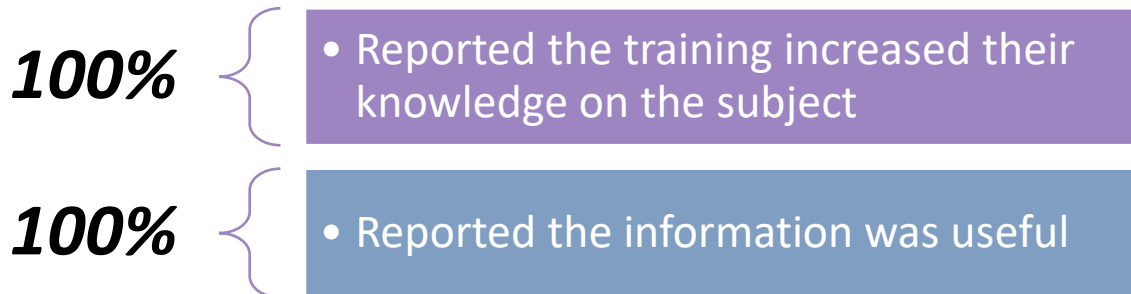
Training and Professional Development

EAP developed curricula on subject matter relevant to youth's educational needs and rights, federal and state education laws, education policies and related strategies.

EAP continued to provide professional development opportunities to improve competence and build capacity of professionals across different disciplines who interface with the education of youth in care. EAP also provides training for caregivers, youth, and community stakeholders.

The webinars this fiscal year were:

- *Advocating for Positive Educational Outcomes for Youth in Care*
- *Academic & Social Emotional Intervention Supports: Implementing Multi-Tiered System of Support*

EAP advertised each webinar through D-NET announcements, emails, flyers and word of mouth. Staff also emailed announcements to Purchase of Service (POS) Education Liaisons, DCFS staff, school personnel and community stakeholders. A total audience of 37 people from different disciplines participated. These include DCFS and POS Caseworkers, child welfare administrators, caregivers, community providers, school personnel, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), etc. Participants completed evaluations at the conclusion of the webinars.

100% {
- Reported the training increased their knowledge on the subject

100% {
- Reported the information was useful

Their general comment also confirmed they valued the training. Below are some excerpts from their comments.

"Very informative webinar. Looking forward to more in the future. Thank you." (Participant, September 2019)

"Great job, your Webinar was clear and well presented." - (Participant, September 2019)

"Great training and handouts- very helpful." - (Participant, December 2019)

"Great examples connecting info to youth in care." - (Participant, September 2019)

Building Capacity and Fostering Communication between Systems

The complexity of the primary systems that interface to educate youth in care as well as the variation in terminology, regulations and practices present challenges in accessing appropriate education services. EAP staff work to build communication lines between the systems and expand the capacity of caregivers and professionals to overcome some of these barriers.

EAP staff fostered communication between schools, caregivers, DCFS, and POS child welfare agencies to benefit the youth they served. They also developed and facilitated collaboration with schools, districts, caseworkers, and others to identify and address systemic issues and avert further educational obstacles for youth in care.

Furthermore, EAP staff worked to build the capacity of caregivers, and professionals. They provided information and shared resources to equip caseworkers, caregivers, youth, and POS Education Liaisons with knowledge and skills to address educational issues while using their expertise and connections to deliver individual intervention services that address problems. By doing so, EAP helped build capacity within the field for identification and resolution of education obstacles youth in care face.

Policy Review and Analysis

EAP provided consultation on current Federal and State laws and education policies. EAP staff provided on-going consultation to DCFS, schools and school districts, homeless liaisons and caregivers on Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), its interpretation and application to youth in care. This included guidance and advice to clarify ESSA concerns regarding best interest, school of origin, school transportation, etc. Also, with remote learning EAP provided support and guidance in clarifying what schools can and cannot do as well as what is expected educationally for the student.

Supporting DCFS Education Initiatives and Serving on Committees

EAP staff supported DCFS education initiatives, served on education related committees and participated in workgroups to help improve the educational wellbeing of DCFS involved youth. Some of the committees have a statewide impact and others were region specific. Committees in which staff participated include DCFS/CPS Collaborative with Residential and Group Homes, DCFS Foster Parent Advisory Boards, and DCFS Youth Advisory Boards.

Developing and maintaining collaboration

Collaboration and shared decision-making between systems to promote educational wellbeing is another effective strategy in addressing education needs. EAP staff fostered communication between school, home and child welfare on behalf of youth in care, collaborated with school districts and court representatives to increase understanding of children's educational rights, DCFS Educational Procedures 314, etc.   In addition, EAP staff provided expertise in helping youth that were transitioning from DJJ/DOC back into the community and our LGBTQI youth who needed more educational support.

Data

The primary data used in this annual report comes from the NIU secure web-based database in which staff document services, and which houses the online client satisfaction survey. Data from this source was aggregated. The report also contains information from documentation maintained by EAP postsecondary specialists related to that program. The DCFS website is the source used for numbers that reflect total youth in care demographics.

Client Satisfaction

EAP provides an online survey to measure client satisfaction with EAP services. Clients are encouraged to rate their level of satisfaction and comment on their overall experience with EAP. This section of the report aggregates data obtained from the online client satisfaction feedback for the period.

The clients reported a high level of satisfaction both with the services and staff. 100% said the service was helpful, 100% rated the staff as helpful and professional and 100% said they would seek help from EAP staff was in the future.

The population of clients who rated services include: DCFS and POS caseworkers and administrators, and caregivers. Below is a chart showing the percentage of each group of clients who completed the survey.

91%
- **Child Welfare Workers (DCFS, POS caseworkers and administrators)**

9%
- **Caregivers**
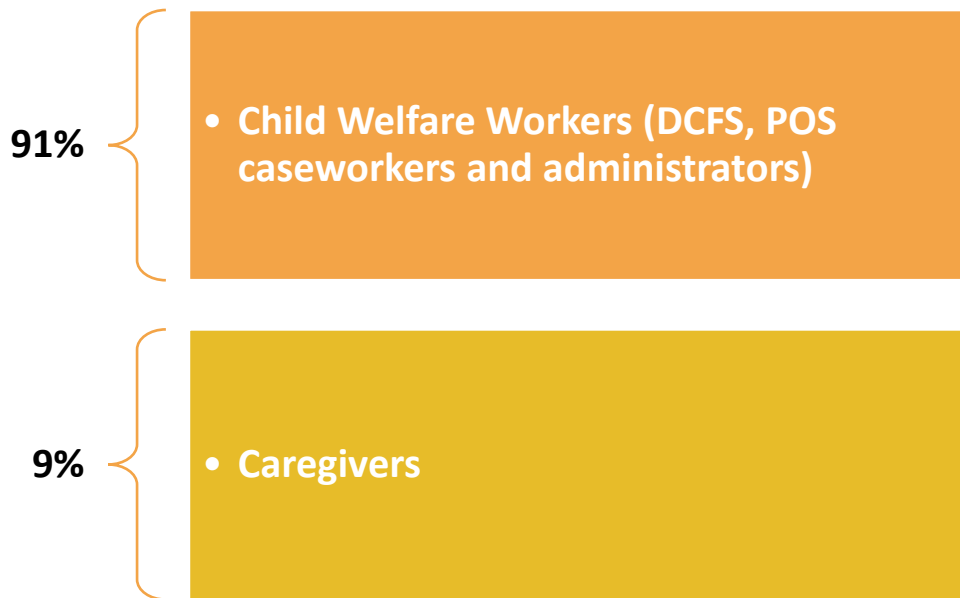
The following are client satisfaction quotes about EAP Services:

"EAP staff is really great to work with and extremely helpful!" -- (Caseworker, personal communication, January 8, 2020)

"I was able to receive exactly what I needed within a very short period of time. Normally it would have taken weeks/months to do on my own, to obtain what I was able to obtain from the EAP in a matter of hours." -- (Other, personal communication, November 5, 2019)

"EAP staff were very encouraging and involved with my child's counseling on entry requirements for college. EAP staff appeared in person at his revised IEP psychological evaluation and was very supportive. EAP staff was very knowledgeable of the process. Thank you." -- (Caregiver, personal communication, August 2, 2019)

"I felt I would not have completed the needed service for the youth without EAP staff assistance." (Caseworker, personal communication, January 8, 2020)

Conclusion

The Center for Child Welfare and Education, at Northern Illinois University continues to provide educational expertise and facilitate best practice to improve the educational situation of youth involved with the Illinois child welfare system, through the Educational Access Project.

The eight education advisors located in DCFS offices where they are readily accessible to caseworkers and to youth, families and schools. The education advisors:

- Apply educational best practice to the youth in care they serve
- Review educational records
- Assess academic and educational needs of youth in care
- Provide educational assessment, linkage, and consultation that support the academic success of youth in care whose education was otherwise neglected
- Link youth to services that increase their attention and time on educational tasks
- Provide on the job training to professionals to build capacity for youths' educational support

Thus, CCWE staff create sustainable, effective linkages for students to access appropriate resources and services that address their educational needs and help improve their opportunity for academic success.

Furthermore, they help build capacity for caregivers and professionals involved with the youth in care to support their education.

Moreover, CCWE staff enhances communication between caregivers and schools; caseworkers and schools; youth and schools; and caregivers and caseworkers about youth's education. EAP continues to be committed to advancing academic access to appropriate educational services as youth forge pathways toward successful adulthood.

CCWE is committed to the goal of educational equity for all youth in care!!