MINN∞LINK

Minnesota-Linking Information for Kids

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MINN-LINK BRIEF #20

The Achievement Gap and Students in Child Protection: Are Open Enrollment Policies the Answer?

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LInK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue, we assessed the utilization of Minnesota's Open Enrollment policy by students with child protection involvement and measured the associated effect of Open Enrollment on math and reading achievement. We were interested in the ways CPS-involved students utilized Open Enrollment and whether it improved academic outcomes for these students. Findings indicated that Open Enrollment was utilized by a small proportion of students, but CPS-involved students were more likely than their non-CPS-involved peers to utilize Open Enrollment. CPS-involved students were more likely to move to schools with characteristics associated with less diversity, newer teachers, and higher academic achievement, but use of Open Enrollment was not significantly related to students' math or reading achievement.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. Open Enrollment policies were developed to provide students with access to a variety of educational settings that may not be available in the neighborhoods in which students live. What is your experience with students and families utilizing Open Enrollment in practice? In what ways can you support families as they make decisions about the schools their children attend?

2. Research demonstrates that children involved in child protection attain lower levels of academic achievement, and often attend schools with limited resources to meet their individual needs. What are some of the benefits children involved in child protection may experience from Open Enrollment? What are some of the challenges children involved in child protection may face when open enrolling into a school? How can we overcome these barriers or challenges? What is your role?

3. Students involved in child protection and students of color were more likely to utilize Open Enrollment than their white peers. When Open Enrollment was utilized, students tended to move to schools with fewer students of color, low-income students, limited English proficient students, and students receiving special education services. Can Open Enrollment policies potentially be harmful to school climate and diversity? How and when should Open Enrollment be used in child protection?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. This study's findings indicated that only a small proportion of students utilized Open Enrollment to change schools. A number of different factors may impact a family's decision to enroll their child in a new school. What are some of the existing systemic-level barriers that prevent families from utilizing Open Enrollment more frequently? How can you support children and families enrolling in new schools when it may be beneficial?

2. Students involved in child protection were significantly more likely to utilize Open Enrollment than their peers. In what ways does your agency or system support (or not support) the Open Enrollment of youth involved in child protection? To what extent are families knowledgeable about Open Enrollment policies? What tools are available to help you determine whether Open Enrollment may be beneficial to the children and families on your caseload?

3. A number of characteristics may impact the utilization of Open Enrollment (e.g., family awareness of Open Enrollment, transportation issues, satisfaction with the residential district). In addition, local school policies may dictate how Open Enrollment is applied. How do schools support (or not support) the Open Enrollment of students, particularly those with child protection involvement? How can child welfare and education systems collaborate to facilitate the Open Enrollment of students involved in child protection?