

## Adoption, Financial Incentives, and Child Achievement

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

*In this issue we were interested in understanding how in 2015, Minnesota equalized post-exit payment levels in adoption or kin guardianship up to the same level as payments in foster care for those aged six years and above. This study illuminates how the policy affected the length of the foster care episode, type of exit, foster re-entry probability, and children's later academic success. This payment reform increased the likelihood of children being adopted or placed into kin guardianship from foster care, decreased the time spent in foster care, and improved their academic outcomes three years after case start.*

### Discussion on Practice Implications

1. The study found that children experiencing foster care exited into adoption or kin guardianship faster and had higher academic achievement years later under a policy that continued monthly payments to families in permanency at levels closer to what foster parents are paid. Given the conversations you have with foster parents or potential adoptive parents and kin guardians, why do you think this might have happened?
2. Should such a policy change the conversations we have with families? In what ways? What are the potential risks and benefits of such a policy change?
3. One potential reason why academic achievement increased is because there was more money going to the adoptive parents and kin guardians. How might this additional money support children?

### Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. Before the reform, policymakers worried that lower payments in permanency than in foster care unintentionally discouraged foster parents from taking children into their families permanently, and that this extended foster care episodes. Does that concern you here? What have you seen that informs that perspective?
2. Under this kind of policy, the state provides similar financial payments to foster parents, adoptive parents, and kin guardians, especially for older children, without regard to family income. How about families of origin? Are there supports and resources that can be better offered to them to promote healthy reunification or prevention? Would a similar program for reunification support post-reunification stability and reduce the likelihood of foster care re-entry?
3. This policy equalizes foster care, adoption assistance, and guardianship assistance payments, but only for children who are adopted or enter a kin guardianship arrangement at age 6 or older. For children who are adopted or enter a kin guardianship arrangement under age 6, payments are half of what they would have received while in foster care, due to the preschool entry rate. Consider the possible impacts the preschool entry rate may have on the state's ability to recruit and retain prospective permanent caregivers from among a child's relatives and kin, especially if they are low income or are already parenting children. What barriers or challenges do you see? How might these barriers or challenges be overcome?