



Foster Care Transportation Pilot

Report to the Legislature

As required by Minnesota Statutes, **Laws of Minnesota 2017, 1st Spec. Sess. chapter 5, article 2, section 54, subd. 4**

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As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197: This report cost approximately \$400 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

Upon request, this material will be made available in an alternative format such as large print, braille or audio recording. Printed on recycled paper.

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Legislative Charge

By February 1, 2018, the commissioner of education shall report on the pilot project to the legislative committees with jurisdiction over early childhood through grade 12 education. The report must include, at a minimum, the number of local agreements entered into for this project along with the number of school districts and counties participating in the agreements, baseline data showing the number of foster care students who were able to remain in their school of origin and the changes in the ratio over the time of the pilot project, data on expenditures for school stability transportation and federal reimbursements received for the pilot project with a midyear projection of end-of-year costs and revenues, and projected costs for statewide implementation of the program.

An extension to submit the report was requested.

Introduction

Children and youth in foster care are one of the most vulnerable student groups both nationally and in Minnesota. The disruption of education placement when a student changes schools once or multiple times, due to being placed in foster care, results in lower rates of attendance, lower levels of educational attainment across a variety of indicators, lower rates of entering post-secondary education, and more (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2014). In order to address the education stability of students in foster care, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 required child welfare agencies to ensure educational stability of foster care children in case plans for each child (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, 2013).

To further strengthen and enhance the efforts to ensure education stability for students in foster care, on December 10, 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act, reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, was signed in to law. A key component of this legislation is the requirement that school districts collaborate with their respective child welfare agencies to create transportation plans for transporting students in foster care to their school of origin when the student is placed in a foster care placement outside of the school boundary of the school the student is attending at the time they enter foster care. The legislation affirms that it is best to limit the education disruption of students in foster care and requires that foster care students remain in their school of origin unless it is determined that it is not in the best interest of the student to do so. The legislation also stipulates that the cost of providing transportation for a student in foster care must not be taken into consideration when making a best interest determination (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

The 2017 Minnesota legislative session resulted in an appropriation of \$1 million to establish a pilot project to provide incentives for school districts and county/tribal child welfare agencies to develop and implement transportation agreement plans. [Laws of Minnesota 2017, 1st Spec. Session chapter 5, article 2, section 54]

The pilot project will be comprised of two separate years of funding; the 2017-2018 school year and the 2018-2019 school year. The funds will be split evenly between the years and allow for school district/child welfare

agency partnerships to submit a request for reimbursement for qualifying transportation expenses. Transportation costs that qualify for reimbursement under the pilot program are those expenses directly incurred for providing transportation to and from the school of origin for a student in foster care, when the student:

- Is in out-of-home placement outside of the school boundaries of their school of origin.
- Has no other source of transportation funding available to cover the expense including, but not limited to:
 - Shelter care/awaiting placement (MARSS transportation code 07).
 - An Individualized Education Program that includes transportation.
 - McKinney-Vento/Homeless (student designated as homeless before entering foster care).
 - Desegregation funding.

Transportation reimbursement requests will be submitted and reconciled at the end of each school year.

Analysis

- ❖ Number of district/child welfare agency partnerships participating: 68
 - This includes:
 - 59 school districts
 - 23 county child welfare agencies
- ❖ Baseline data showing the number of foster care students able to remain in their school of origin and changes in ratio over time of the pilot is currently unavailable.
- ❖ Data on expenditures for school stability transportation and federal reimbursements received for the pilot project with a midyear projection of the end-of-year costs and revenues is currently unavailable. The reconciliation process for reimbursement claims takes place at the end of the school year (by September 30).
 - To provide some preliminary data, the following districts have calculated their spending to date (April 15):
 - Minneapolis Public Schools: Estimates of spending so far this year: 90 students on average per month, for the 2017 **calendar** year (not school year): \$635,354. This is not inclusive of invoices they will receive from school districts that Hennepin County has “hybrid” contracts with, which could result in an additional \$298,000 in spending.
 - St. Paul Public Schools: 65 students for an average of 56 days of transportation per child; cost so far this school year: \$275,000. SPPS has also transported 47 additional students at no additional cost.
 - St. Cloud Public Schools: 46 students, \$51,445 expended so far this school year; expected total for 2017-2018: \$60,000.
 - Rochester Public Schools: 9 students, \$26,000 expended so far this school year; expected total for 2017-2018: \$30,000.
 - Olmstead County: 9 students, \$26,000 expended so far this school year; expected total for 2017-2018: \$35,000.

- Anoka-Hennepin School District: 30 students, \$30,000 expended so far this school year; expected total for 2017-2018: \$50,000. Anoka-Hennepin has transported approximately an additional 100 students at additional cost. The district estimates increased spending of 25-30 percent next year.

- ❖ Projected costs for statewide implementation of this program: the costs for the transportation of students in foster care in out-of-home placement outside of their boundaries of their school of origin has not been previously tracked by school or child welfare agencies, local or state. The Minnesota Departments of Education and Human Services do not have baseline data to estimate the total cost of transporting foster care students at this time. As data is collected from participants in the pilot project, a projected cost estimate will be made.

Conclusion

Research indicates that providing a stable educational setting for foster care students is crucial to the students education attainment and success. One key way that education stability is achieved is through providing transportation to students placed in out-of-home placement outside of the school area of origin. The Every Student Succeeds Act requires school districts to have foster care transportation plans in place with their respective child welfare agencies. However, this requirement does not provide an immediate source of funding. The Foster Care Transportation Pilot Project, a result of an appropriation from the 2017 Minnesota State Legislature, will provide reimbursement to district/child welfare agency partnerships for the costs incurred to provide transportation to these foster care students. The data regarding the number of students, the costs to transport the students, and the impact on the education stability for these vulnerable students, will provide local and state child welfare and education agencies the opportunity to better understand the impact of ensuring education stability for foster care students.

Bibliography

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