

IASWR Research Brief 2

Child Welfare Workforce Series



EDUCATION ■ POLICY

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For the full report *Factors Influencing Retention of Child Welfare Staff: A Systematic Review of Research* visit www.iaswresearch.org

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PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION FOR CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE: IMPROVING RETENTION IN PUBLIC CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES

Social work education programs partner with state and local public child welfare agencies to educate and train child welfare workers and to carry-out research evaluation and program development strategies. A recent systematic review of research and outcome studies was undertaken by the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (IASWR) in collaboration with the University of Maryland School of Social Work to answer the question: *What conditions (personal and organizational factors) and strategies influence the retention of staff in public child welfare agencies?*

Of the 154 studies and reports found, 25 research studies specifically focused on child welfare populations and examined retention as the dependent variable. Of those research reports, seven focused on a specific strategy – *Title IV-E Education for Child Welfare Practice* — in examining retention outcomes. This *Brief* provides information about the Title IV-E *Education for Child Welfare Practice* program and examines the findings of those seven studies. This can both inform the field about the outcomes of Title IV-E supported educational opportunities as well as effective retention strategies.

What are Title IV-E Education for Child Welfare Practice programs?

Title IV-E Education for Child Welfare Practice partnership programs are collaborations between public child welfare agencies and universities, usually BSW and/or MSW social work education programs, to provide support for current agency workers to return to school to acquire a degree, usually an MSW degree, or to attract BSW and/or MSW students to child welfare careers. This federal funding, created as a provision of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272), provides a 75% enhanced federal match, that states can use for short- or long-term training of “*personnel employed or preparing for employment by the State agency or by the local agency administering the (Title IV-E) plan*” (Section 474A, P.L. 96-272). More than 30 states have partnerships with universities, most frequently supported by Title IV-E, to recruit and retain child welfare staff (APHA, 2005; IV-E Child Welfare Agency University Partnerships, 2005, Zlotnik & Cornelius, 2000).

Although created in 1980, it was not until the 1990s, as a result of targeted technical assistance and innovation diffusion efforts, that many state child welfare administrators worked together with individual social work education programs and consortia of BSW and MSW programs to use Title IV-E funding to provide degree education for current child welfare staff, to prepare new students for child welfare careers and to provide enhanced pre-service and in-service training to child welfare staff (Zlotnik, 2003).

There are an array of Title IV- E partnership models including consortia of several social work education programs providing similar curricula (e.g., Kentucky); regional collaborations between certain districts and certain universities (Los Angeles County, Texas, Florida, Louisiana); and coordinated administration of both IV-E degree education and the state's child welfare training program (e.g., University of Pittsburgh). Several states focus on preparing BSWs for child welfare practice, other states target MSW education, especially providing opportunities for current workers to obtain MSW degrees, and some states educate both BSWs and MSWs with Title IV-E funds. For those whose education is supported by the Title IV-E program, there is a required payback. There are variations in how states develop educational partnerships. Variations exist in the amount of stipend paid, what level of staff are targeted, the length of payback requirement, the structure of the educational program and the follow-up strategy and evaluation mechanisms used (Cheung & Taylor, 2005; Zlotnik, 2003). Despite these IV-E partnerships, however, few if any states are able to educate a sufficient number of social workers to meet the entire child welfare hiring demand, requiring that child welfare agencies use other strategies to hire and train workers as well.

Retention and Title IV-E Supported Education

Of the 25 retention studies identified in *Factors Influencing Retention of Child Welfare Staff: A Systematic Review of Research* (Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining & Lane, 2005), seven specifically addressed issues of retention of those child welfare workers who had been specially educated through focused *Title IV-E Education for Child Welfare Practice* partnerships. These studies took place in California (Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Jones, 2002); Kansas (Lewandowski, 1998); Minnesota (Olson & Sutton, 2003); Oklahoma (Rosenthal & Waters, 2004); Pennsylvania (Cahalane & Sites, 2004); and Texas (Scannapiecco & Connell-Carrick, 2002). The following provides the citations for the studies followed by a chart providing comparison of the studies, the sample and methods used and the findings.

Cahalane, H., & Sites, E. W. (2004). *Is it hot or cold? The climate of child welfare employee retention*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Pittsburgh.

Dickinson, N. S., & Perry, R. E. (2002). Factors influencing the retention of specially educated public child welfare workers. *Evaluation Research in Child Welfare*, 15 (3/4), 89–103.

Jones, L. (2002). A follow-up of a Title IV-E program's graduates' retention rates in a public child welfare agency. *Evaluation Research in Child Welfare*, 15(3/4), 39–51.

Lewandowski, C. A. (1998). Retention outcomes of a public child welfare long-term training program. *Professional Development*, 1(2), 38–46.

Olson, B. L., & Sutton, L. J. (2003). *An evaluation of the University of Minnesota–Duluth's Title IV-E program: Securing and retaining workers in the field of child welfare*. Plan B Paper. Duluth, MN: University of Minnesota-Duluth Social Work Program.

Rosenthal, J. A., & Waters, E. (2004, July). *Retention and performance in public child welfare in Oklahoma: Focus on the Child Welfare Professional Enhancement Program graduates*. Paper presented at Weaving Resources for Better Child Welfare Outcomes Conference, Sante Fe, NM.

Scannapiecco, M., & Connell-Carrick, K. (2003). Do collaborations with schools of social work make a difference for the field of child welfare? Practice, retention and curriculum. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 7(1/2), 35–51.

RESEARCH STUDIES EXAMINING LINKS BETWEEN TITLE IV-E EDUCATION FOR CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE & RETENTION

	Cahalane & Sites	Dickinson & Perry	Jones	Lewandowski	Olson & Sutton	Rosenthal & Waters	Scannapiecco & Connell-Carrick
Date	2004	2002	2002	1998	2003	2004	2003
State	PA	CA	CA	KS	MN	OK	TX
Statewide Study	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Published Study	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Dependent Variable	Retention	Retention	Retention	Retention	Retention	Retention	Retention
Title IV-E recipients	MSW already agency employees	MSW	MSW new to child welfare agency to other hires	BSW and MSW	MSW	BSW & MSW compared to all hires	BSW and MSW
Response rate	80% of 260	64% of 235	100% of 266	100% of 182	57% of 44	99% of 841	64% of 128
Comparison Group	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Workers who returned to school for MSW post payback – compare those who stayed to leavers	MSW Title IV-E graduates post payback – compared those who stayed to those who left or intend to leave	MSW Title IV-E grads new to child welfare, comparing all child welfare exiters to these specially educated workers.	Compared BSW and MSW IV-E recipients and those who already employed to those new to child welfare that received IV-E stipends.		Survival analysis of new workers between 1999 and 2003, comparing IV-E recipients to non-IV-E.	
Study Design and Analysis	Quantitative, Cross-sectional mail survey, Bivariate & multivariate analyses	Quantitative, Cross-sectional mail survey, Bivariate & multivariate analyses	Quantitative, retrospective, descriptive case record review, bivariate analysis	Quantitative, cross-sectional mail survey and archival record review, bivariate analysis	Quantitative, cross-sectional mail survey, Qualitative coded responses, bivariate analysis	Quantitative, Retrospective, Archival Data, Multivariate Survival Analysis	Quantitative, Cross-sectional mail survey, Descriptive statistics
Factors Influencing Retention	Growth and advancement, organizational commitment, organizational climate, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, role conflict, depersonalization	Coworker & supervisory support, quality of supervision, efficacy, burnout, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, salary	Personal characteristics (Bilingual, level of education (MSW))	BSW, previous agency employee	Commitment to children and families, salary and benefits, job assignment, burnout	Previous employment experience, education, gender, Title IV-E training, job classification	Workload, salary, professional commitment

Of these seven studies, five only examined retention for those IV-E educated child welfare staff (Cahalane & Sites, 2004; Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Lewandowski, 1998; Olson & Sutton, 2003; Scannapiecco & Connell-Carrick, 2003), while two examined Title IV-E educated workers in the context of the overall workforce (Jones, 2002; Rosenthal & Waters, 2004). Furthermore, some of those studies looked at actual job exiters, while others examined factors that influence intent to remain. Despite these differences, the findings strengthen our understanding of the benefits provided through the Title IV-E program to improve recruitment and retention.

Title IV-E preparation serves as a “value-added” for retention strategies since IV-E initiatives reinforce the personal factors that support retention by recruiting participants who are committed to the profession and to serving children and families. The Title IV-E participants in the studies often already had experience in the agency, had prerequisite education (through acquisition of a BSW or MSW degree) and demonstrated efficacy. In addition, by offering this educational enhancement opportunity, the agency is demonstrating that it supports and values its employees by providing the incentive to obtain an advanced degree, which may also open up new opportunities for promotion and increased salary.

In the recent study by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA, 2005) to ascertain how states are addressing recruitment and retention programs, university-agency partnerships were perceived to be somewhat effective or highly effective by 97% of the 30 states that reported they had implemented such partnerships to address recruitment in the past five years.

Despite the great opportunity provided through Title IV-E training funds, few if any states are able to prepare enough child welfare workers through this mechanism for it to be the only recruitment and retention strategy used. In addition, the great variation across IV-E partnership models, and the fact that the programs change and evolve or devolve as state administrations change, makes it difficult to obtain a complete picture of what is happening nationally. Furthermore, as we see from these seven studies, there is great variation in how the studies were designed and implemented. There is also diversity in the populations examined and there are differences in how the states structure their child welfare service delivery as well as differing minimum qualifications for child welfare

staff positions. This all impacts how the findings of these studies can be both interpreted and compared.

The Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research recommends:

- Develop a process to rigorously and regularly evaluate retention strategies being implemented by state and local public and private child welfare agencies.
- Encouraging Title IV-E “Education for Child Welfare Practice” efforts to use similar measures, methods, and instruments in undertaking evaluation and research efforts in order to determine larger-scale retention outcomes for Title IV-E graduates as well as the key factors that will enhance retention.
- Develop multi-site, multi-year initiatives to test intervention strategies across agencies and settings.
- Create research efforts to develop, pilot, and validate instruments and measures that test recruitment and retention outcomes.
- Create a “clearinghouse” to regularly gather, track, and analyze studies that examine recruitment and retention issues in child welfare.

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