



CHAPIN HALL

CENTER FOR CHILDREN
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**School Mobility and the Educational
Experiences of Children
in Out-of-Home Care: A Summary of the
Research**

December 2, 2008

Intersection of the Child Welfare and Education Systems

- About 610,000 school age children (4 to 17 year olds) are involved in a substantiated allegation of maltreatment each year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008).
This represents:
 - 70 percent of all official maltreatment victims and
 - 1 percent of the school aged population
- In CA, researchers found that 38 percent of all black children and 20 percent of all white children have contact with the child welfare system (including reports that are not substantiated) by the time they reach age 7 (Magruder and Shaw, in press).

Increased Demand for Accountability

Child and Family Service Reviews Well-Being
Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate
services to meet their educational needs.

- 2001-2004: Of the 50 states and D.C., 35 did not achieve substantial conformity

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“NCLB”)

- Students in the following subgroups must also meet the stated yearly goals: economically disadvantaged, racial/ethnic minority, disabled, or English-Second Language students

Chapin Hall Studies

- Academic Achievement, Mobility, Special Education
- Emotional Disturbance Classifications, Discipline Incidents
- School Engagement and Youth Who Run Away from Foster Care

Data Sources

- Chapin Hall Integrated Database on Child and Family Services
 - Illinois Department of Child and Family Services
 - Chicago Public Schools Student Information System
 - 2005 match: Records for approximately 80% of school-age children in out-of-home care in Chicago were located in the CPS system.
 - 3,679 Chicago Public Schools students in out-of-home care in September 2003; representing roughly 1% of school age children in Chicago and 1/3 of school age children in foster care in IL
- Interviews
 - 2004: 31 foster parents, caseworkers, and school staff in Chicago and two other metropolitan areas outside Chicago
 - 2004: 46 youth who had run away from foster care
 - 2005: 14 psychologists, probation officers, education liaisons, staff in the public guardian's office

Methodology

- Comparison Groups
 - Students in Care
 - Students with substantiated maltreatment but never in care
 - Students with no record of substantiated maltreatment
- Statistical Models
 - Hierarchical Linear modeling was used to control for demographic characteristics and school effects
- Mixed Methods Study
 - Interviews designed to increase our understanding of administrative data findings

Academic Achievement

How are they performing when they enter out-of-home care?

What is their trajectory during their stay in out-of-home care?

How are they faring with respect to Graduation & Dropout rates?

Not on Track from the Start

Approximately 400 children enrolled in the Chicago Public Schools entered out-of-home care during the 2002-2003 academic year.

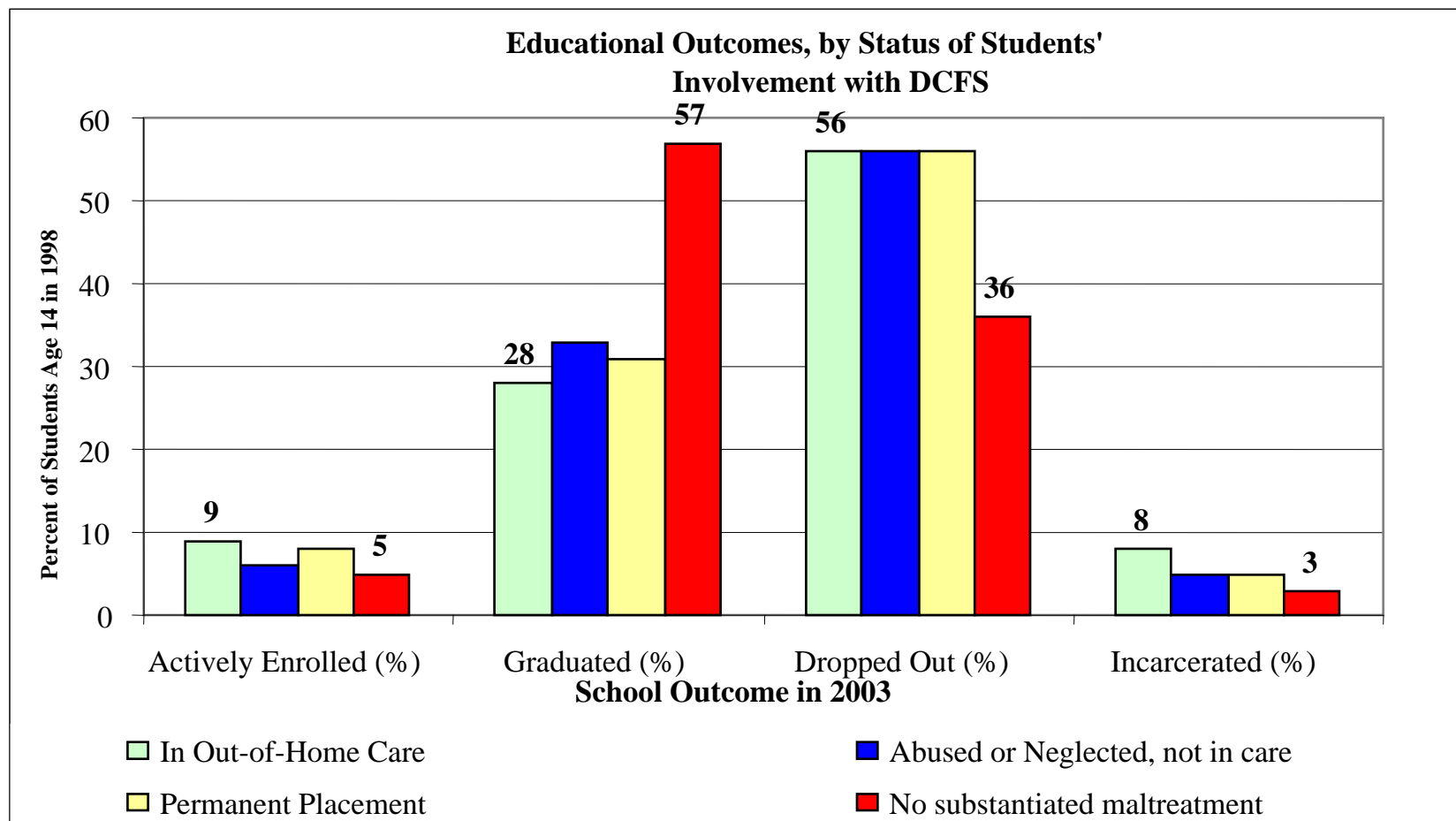
- 35% of 1st through 8th graders were already old for grade when they entered care, compared to 18% of other CPS students.
- Almost 10% were retained in the same grade the year after they entered care.

Slower Growth in Reading Achievement

At age 8 students who transitioned from their family into out-of-home care were performing about 9/10 of a year behind other students.

Those who remained in care from age 8 through age 13 (8th grade) had reading performance growth rates that were about 4% slower than other CPS students.

Low Graduation Rates



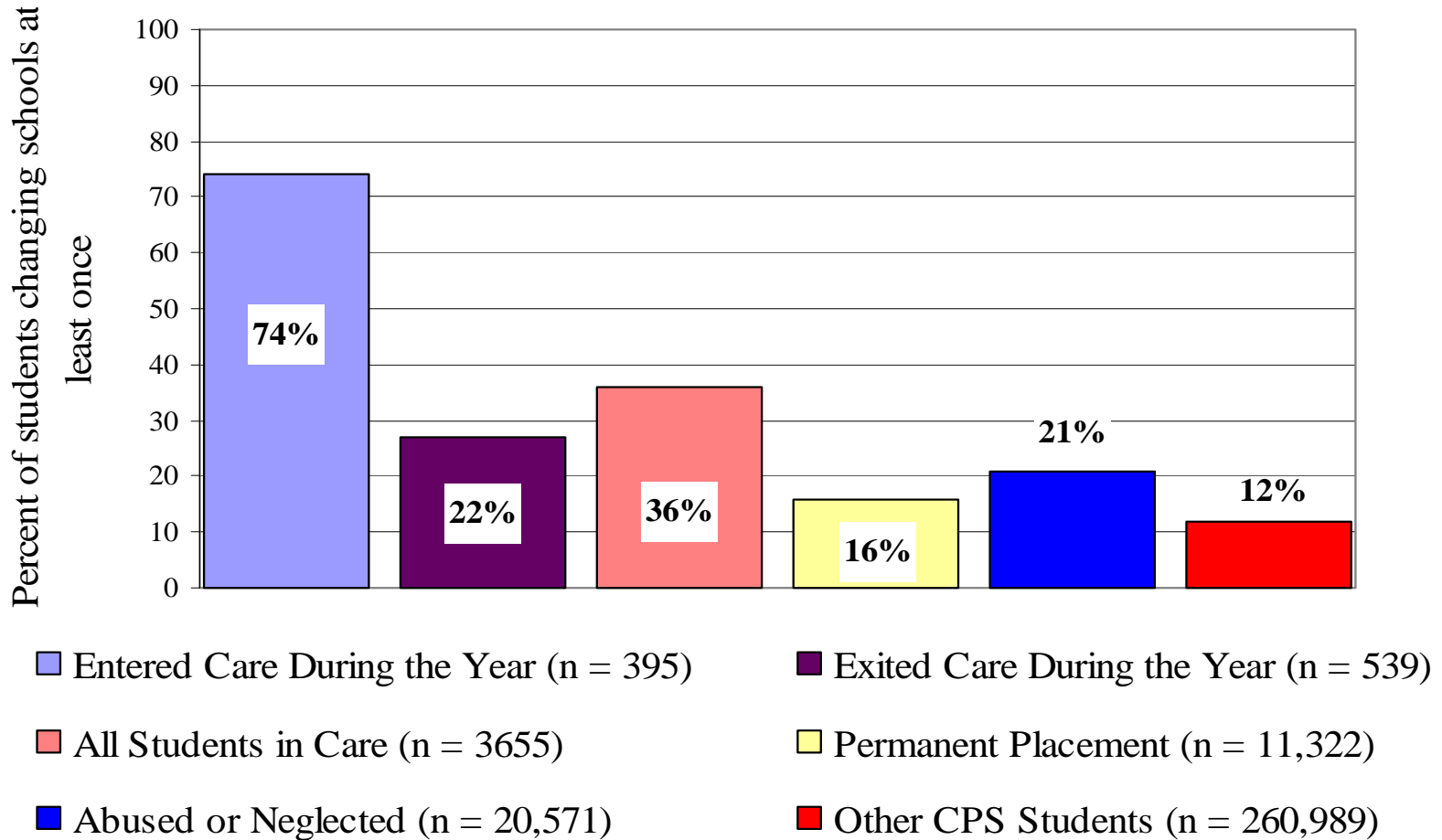
School Mobility

Who's changing schools and when?

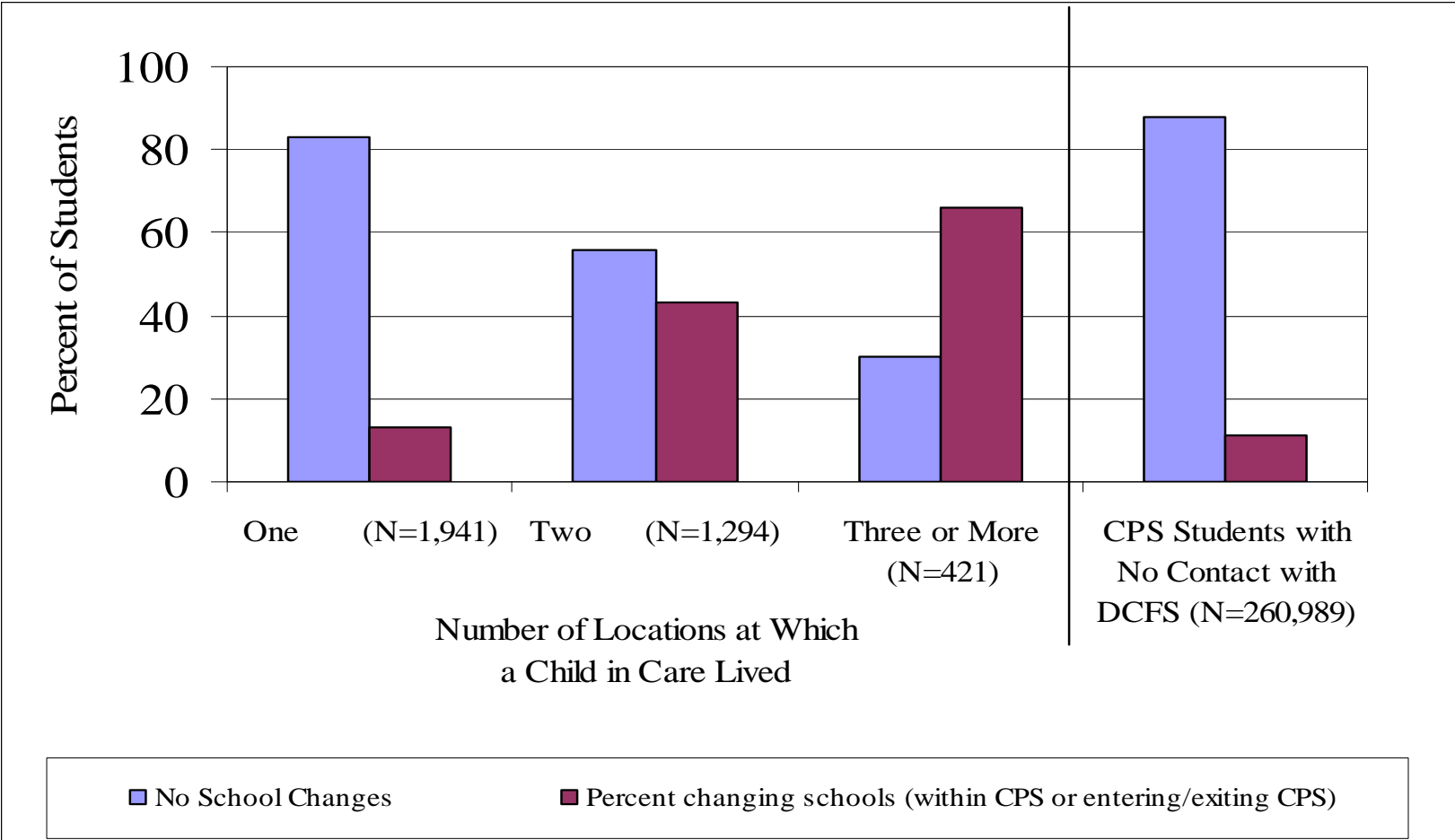
What happens during the transition?

How does it affect the children?

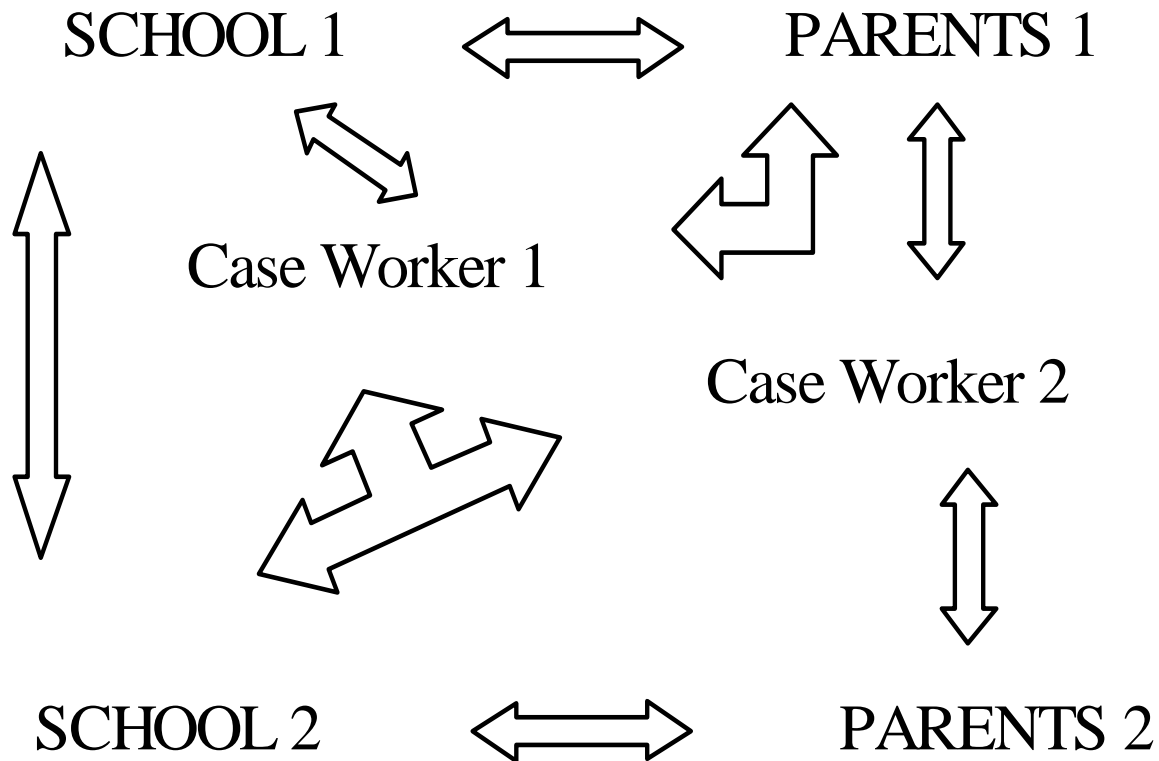
School Mobility is Highest When Entering Care



Placement and School Mobility



Who is communicating with whom?



Worker – School Connections

- On average...
 - for every 10 CPS students on their caseload over the course of the school year, workers interacted with 8 different schools
 - for every 10 students in out-of-home care, schools interacted with about 12 different caseworkers
- In 2002-2003, 42% of children in care the full academic year had 2 or more different caseworkers during that same timeframe.

Problems Transferring Information

...[the student] entered Chicago Public Schools 3 years ago and ...she had no credits for 3 years.

...We contacted the suburban school district and sure enough they found records of her evaluation and her actually being eligible for special ed services and receiving special ed services. And those services never transferred to Chicago.

[School Staff]

What Happens to the Students?

[The kids] wanted to know why they couldn't stay at the school that they were at. The 13-year-old was in the 7th grade. I pulled him out of there and I'm sure he wanted to be with his class ... and graduate from eighth grade out there but that was too far south. ... Even though he can do the work, his grades are not there because of what he's dealing with at this new school.
[foster parent]

Every time you go to a new school, you know what it's like to be the new kid, it sets you back. They need a transition time and usually the counseling services don't start until months after or until the complaints start. Why must we have a complaint before we do something? [caseworker]



Youth Perspectives

It affected my schooling. I wasn't able to have the same friends, I wasn't able to have the same teacher, where they know me, where I could play a sport at and be known throughout my whole 4 years of high school, I wasn't able to do that. I was at a different high school my freshmen and sophomore and my junior year.

[Adolescent in foster care]

...[Y]ou know that's why a lot of kids don't be in school because they going from place to place to place. It's hard to focus while you study, or get a place, here and there and everywhere. I have been to so many grammar schools; it's hard to remember them all. That's why I am trying to get my GED now. . . .I am older now. Ain't nobody is holding me back . . . But that was the biggest problem as far as school when I was growing up.... just getting placed here and there.

[Adolescent in foster care]

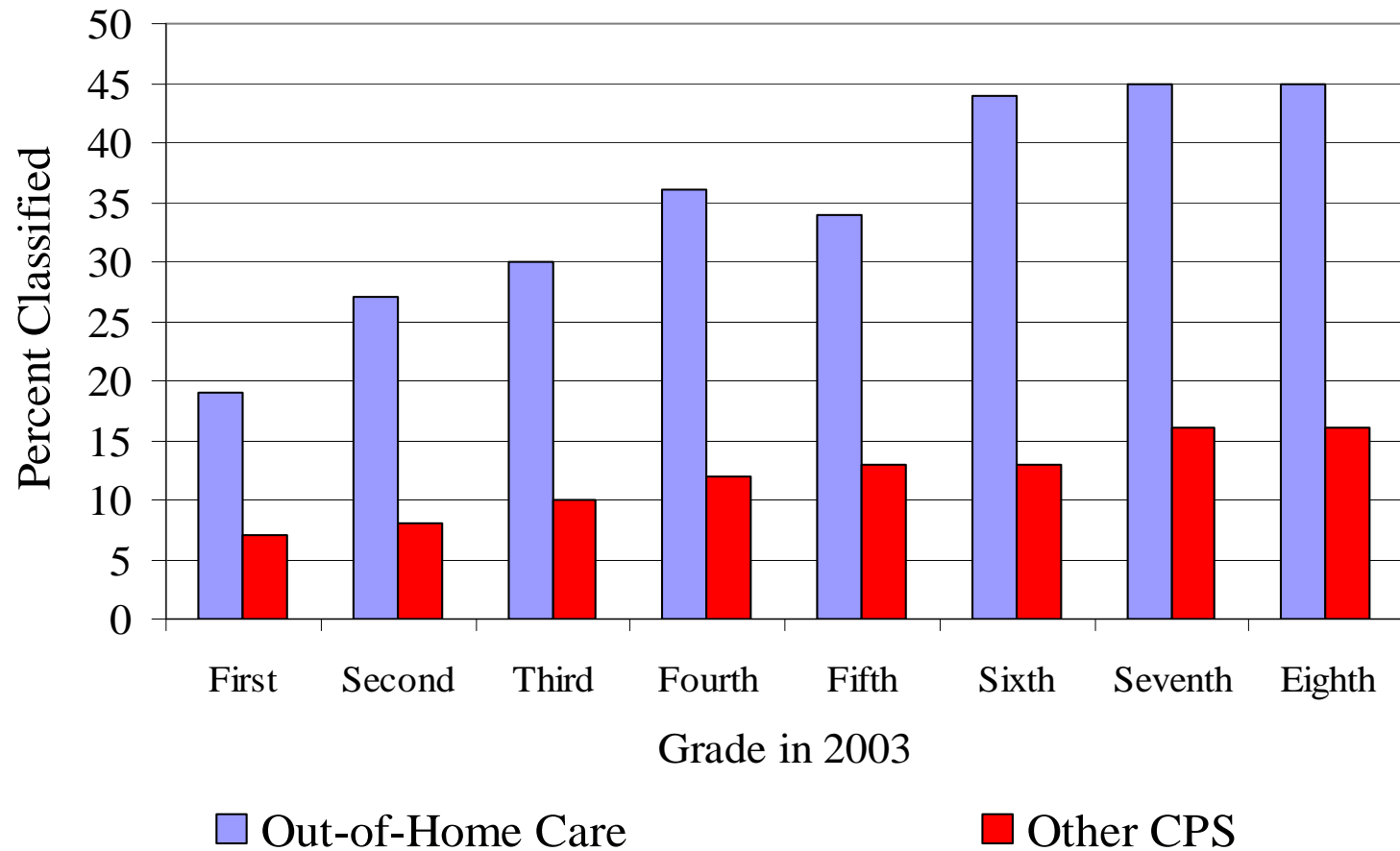


Special Education Evaluations & Services

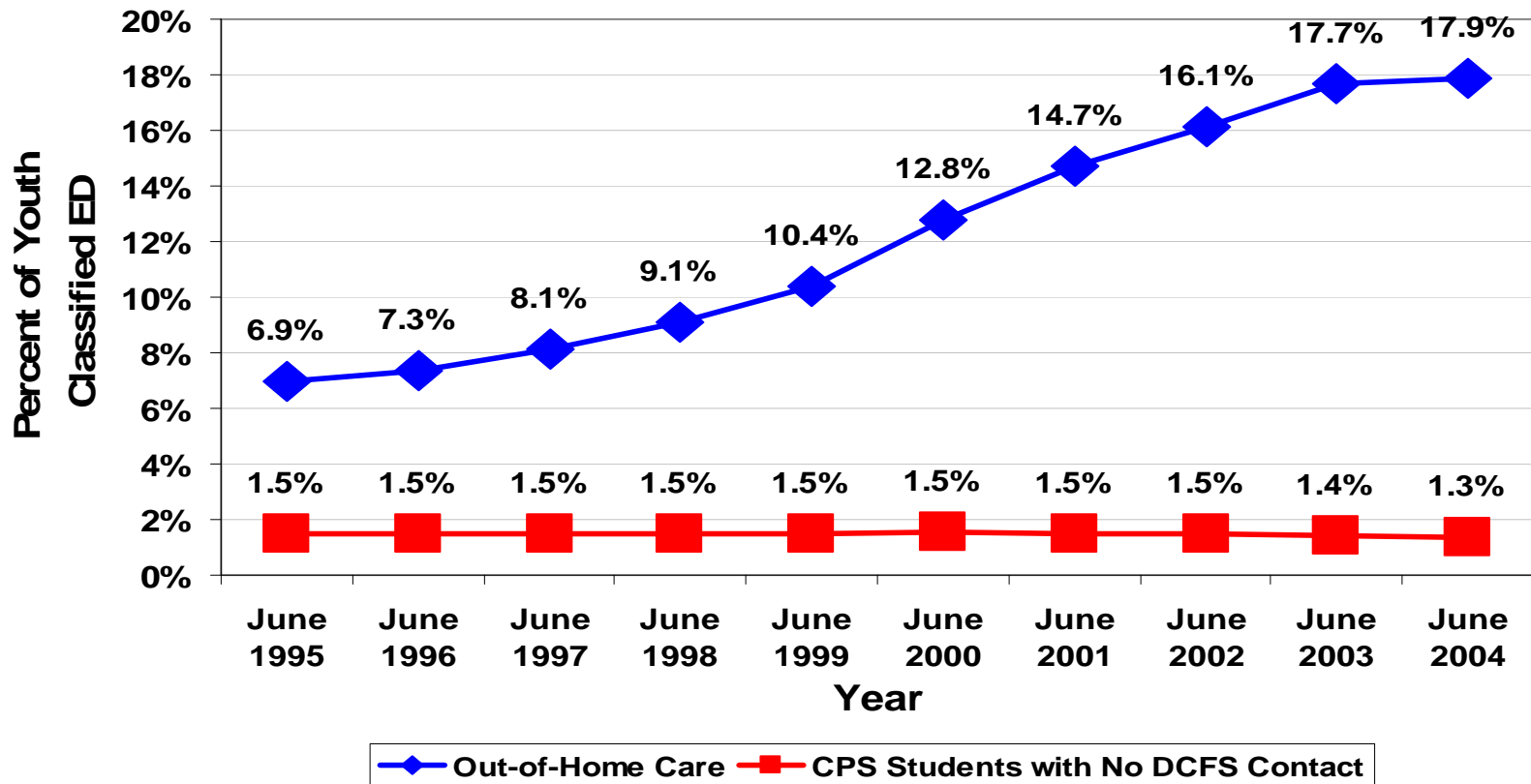
Classifications Are Disproportionately High among
Children in Care

What happens after the classification?

Special Education Classifications (1st - 8th)



Emotional Disturbance Classifications Increased Substantially (June 1995 - June 2004)



Perspectives on special education: *Under-identification*

A lot of our DCFS wards need special ed and it takes a lot of advocating on the part of workers and it takes a lot of advocating on the part of foster parents of people that care for them to do it. [Child Welfare Caseworker]

“Despite their desperate need for the boost provided by early provided by early intervention, pre-school programs, appropriate public school education, and other special services to which they are entitled, the educational needs of children in foster care often go unmet because of the rigorous documentation required and the substantial amount of parent participation and advocacy required.” (NY Project Achieve Executive Summary)



Perspectives on special education: Over-identification

“You get the fear, you get the anxiety, and they deal with that...and those kids bring all of that into the schools and then we're getting these kids labeled, behavior disorder, emotional and learning disability. Half the time they can learn, it's just that we have these other circumstances that is impeding their learning.” [Child Welfare Caseworker]

“... I bet you I can test every DCFS child who has suffered some trauma and come out with them being disabled in some capacity be it in reading or math. ...so do we really need to evaluate? Is that the word they really want to use or do they really want to work on interventions.” [School Staff]

Perspectives on special education :

Over-identification (continued)

“Children in foster care entering the school system, should be presumed to be in need of supportive services, but not necessarily special education services. Although there is an increased prevalence of disability among children in foster care... a disproportionate number of foster children are misidentified as having a disability and are inappropriately educated in restrictive settings. Many foster children are mislabeled "emotionally disturbed" when they are, in fact, exhibiting natural reactions to trauma. Therefore, although we need to make sure these children are identified and receive their rights under IDEA, it is also important that these children are not overidentified.”

Association of University Centers on Disabilities , June 2002



What Happens after the Classification?

A recent Chicago report on grade retention found that the reading achievement of retained 3rd through 6th graders subsequently placed in special education deteriorated relative to their own test score trajectory before their placement (Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004).

Outcomes among Students with Emotional Disturbance Classifications

- ALL students with ED Classifications are more likely to be involved in disciplinary incidents
- Approximately 1/3 of older children in care with ED experienced a disruptive event (ran away, hospitalized, detention) during one academic year
- Less than 20% of students with ED graduated & almost as many students were coded as having left school due to incarceration

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Weaker academic performance of school-age students at the time they enter out-of-home care
- Slower reading achievement growth rates while in care
- High levels of school mobility, particularly during the year they enter out-of-home care
- Significantly greater likelihood of special education classification
 - Higher rates for both LD and ED classifications
 - Very poor outcomes among students with ED

Attachment & A Sense of Security

“Rituals around the start of the school day, a regular familiar greeting from the teacher, consistent management of the classroom space, regular patterns around break time and so on can also help to preserve or restore predictability in the child’s life, and promote a sense of attachment or secure base. ...They can help give a child a sense of order in a life which may have been dominated by disorder.”

Gilligan (2000)

Research  **Practice & Policy**

Targets for Change

- Reduce School mobility
 - Minimize the number of moves when possible/desirable
 - Pay attention to the timing of the change
 - Facilitate the enrollment process
- Clarify & articulate the expected roles for both caseworkers and foster parents
- Provide cross-system trainings on special education
- Monitor important educational indicators on an ongoing basis

For more information...

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