

Department of Children and Families

Raise the Grade Pilot

Final Report

Introduction

Section 17a-64(c) of the Connecticut General Statutes requires that “at the conclusion of the pilot program the Department of Children and Families, in coordination with the Court Support Services division and the State Department of Education, shall report to the achievement gap task force the number and educational profile of children served by the program and the impact on their educational performance, including on (1) achievement, (2) absenteeism, and (3) adverse disciplinary measures.” In addition to the statutory requirements, this report will describe the progress made in the Pilot's implementation, the challenges encountered during the Pilot's implementation, and the solutions developed to address them.

Statutory Authority

Connecticut General Statutes §17a-64, mandating that the Department of Children and Families ("DCF"), in consultation with the state's Department of Education ("SDE"), establish the Raise the Grade ("RtG") pilot program ("Pilot") in Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven became law on June 19, 2013. The two-year pilot's purpose was "to increase the academic achievement of children and youth who live in the custody of the Department of Children and Families or who are being served by the Court Support Services Division in [these three cities.]" Conn. Gen. Stat. §17a-64. "Educational performance," as used in the statute, includes "(1) achievement, (2) absenteeism, and (3) adverse disciplinary measures."

The statute required that the Pilot use full time coordinators to help identify children or youth who are below grade level and are either (A) in state custody, or (B) under juvenile justice supervision. It also required that the coordinators develop plans to improve the child's academic performance. The Coordinators worked with the following individuals, if they are involved with the student - legal guardian, educational surrogate, or advocate. The coordinators must also " help facilitate the prompt transfer and review of educational records and report to the Department of Children and Families and the educational surrogate critical educational information, including, but not limited to, (i) progress

monitoring, (ii) absenteeism, and (iii) discipline.” The statute also requires that the coordinators help support educational stability for children as described in section 17a-16a. The legislature allocated one hundred thousand dollars per city for hiring a coordinator during each year of the pilot.

The RTG cohort included (a) children whose guardian or parent lives in any pilot city and is under an order of temporary custody or committed (either child protection or delinquent) or for whom the commissioner is currently the statutory parent; or (b) under the supervision of CSSD, living in a pilot city and referred to the coordinator by the Branch. This means that the cohort included outplaced students, in addition to students attending schools in the pilot cities’ school districts. The coordinators worked with the school district, the facility that discharged the student, the social worker, and the surrogate and/or parent if applicable, whenever the student was ready to return to their local public school.

Preliminary Work

The state entities responsible for the pilot’s implementation, i.e. CSSD, DCF, SDE, met shortly after the effective date of the law. The coordinators required by the statute were contractors to DCF, rather than state employees. The state entities determined that hiring the coordinators for the pilot sites through the RESC of which that pilot city is a member would be the most expedient because the RESCs a history of working with the public school districts and state agencies. DAS approved sole sourcing the contracts to the RESCs, negotiations began, and the contracts became effective on December 1, 2013. The contract with each RESC contained identical terms and was for the same prorated amount.

Each city’s coordinator worked in the DCF area office in the pilot city for which they were responsible; reported to Dr. Stephen Tracy, E.D., the Director of the DCF Education Division/Superintendent of USD#2; and provided monthly reports concerning progress towards the goals listed in the statute. DCF and the other state entities participated in the hiring process all entities reviewed resumes and participated in the interview process.

The statewide team believed that it was essential to have the participation of the local school district in the hiring process to ensure the districts' collaboration on and cooperation with the project, given that the statute was silent on the local districts' role. To encourage their participation, Dr. Tracy requested that the superintendents in the three pilot cities identify someone on their respective leadership team to be the school district's lead and liaison for their city's pilot. He also asked the DCF Regional Directors in whose jurisdiction one of the three pilots was located to identify individuals who would act as liaison to the project, including during the hiring process.

A team involving both the statewide entities having a role in implementing the statute, the local school district, and local DCF office reviewed the resumes and interviewed the applicants during January 2014. The first choice applicant of each team accepted the offer of the position. The three coordinators began working between mid-February and mid-March 2014. Each sat with the other members of the DCF education team in their respective DCF office.

Each coordinator was a certified educator. It was required that the person be an experienced certified educator because it was essential that the Raise the Grade Coordinator be able to review and understand education records, understand how school systems work and have that emblem of legitimacy when speaking with administrators and teachers about the educational needs of children.

Beginning the Work in the Pilot Cities (February through March 2014)

As mentioned previously, the RtG coordinators worked with the DCF education specialist and education consultant for the regions in which they worked. The specialist and consultant are DCF employees. The three worked as a team, sharing information and providing support to each other, to achieve the goal of ensuring that every child in the care and custody of the Commissioner receives an appropriate education. The coordinators worked with all area office staff, including juvenile justice social workers, who had students enrolled or would return to the public school in the pilot city. This means that if a

child was in a residential placement, the coordinator still obtained and reviewed that child's education records and developed an educational plan for them after consulting with others involved in the child's life, i.e. social worker, juvenile justice social worker, surrogate parent and school personnel. In addition to reviewing the records received from the schools, the coordinators reviewed information concerning the children in LINK and CONDOIT, the DCF child information systems, so that the plan addressed each child's unique education needs. When the coordinators received referrals from CSSD, they spoke with the referring probation officer in addition to reviewing available education records.

Within the first two months after beginning their work, each coordinator met with leaders in their respective cities, including the interim superintendent and mayor in Bridgeport, the mayor's chief of staff in Hartford, and a variety of key personnel in New Haven Public Schools. In addition, the coordinators met with staff within the school districts, agreeing upon primary contacts for record requests and identifying, when possible, the instruments used for progress monitoring. The Coordinators also met with education staff from the DCF facilities, explaining their role and offering assistance in obtaining records concerning students for whom USD #2 was responsible and who would return to the three pilot cities. Additionally, the coordinators met with juvenile probation to learn about their systems, language, and procedures.

Between the time they began working and the end of the 2013-14 school year, the coordinators focused their efforts on obtaining and reviewing the records of high school students. This focus was cognizant of the fact that it was close to the end of the academic year and it would be best, if possible, to identify high school students in need of assistance prior to the end of the school year provide them remediation over the summer.

Coordinators' Efforts

In addition to the initial outreach meetings, monthly meetings with state and local stakeholders occurred in each pilot city. These meetings began in April 2014. Initially, they focused on developing a uniform process for DCF obtaining complete copies of the education record for students in DCF custody. Once the coordinators developed a process for requesting a physical copy of the complete education record, the focus turned to developing a method for securing updates to the records in a manner that was least burdensome to the pilot district. The goal was that this would occur through the development of a process to provide the information electronically through a secure file transfer. Additional topics addressed at the meetings included:

- Facilitating the entry of children in care into the magnet school lotteries in the Pilot districts;
- The process of registering students returning from placement and ensuring that students are placed in settings that support their growth and development,
- Providing opportunities for children returning from out of district placements to participate in the magnet school lottery,
- Children with juvenile justice involvement
- Children with mental health impairments

Identifying Children in the Cohort

Every month, the education team in each DCF region, regardless of whether they are part of the Pilot, received a report concerning children who were in placement on the first of every month. The report included CMT and CAPT scores for children tested in the last year of the tests' administration, i.e. spring 2013, and demographic and educational information concerning the children available in the Public School Information System ("PSIS"). For students in the RTG cohort, the coordinators:

- Determined the education records currently on file at DCF;

- Sent the DCF letter to the superintendent of schools requesting records;
- Followed up with the district's contact person if records were not received within 10 school days;
- Contacted individual schools to obtain complete records when only a partial copy of a student's education record was received;
- Consulted with the DCF worker, and surrogate parent if applicable, once all records are received and reviewed;
- Wrote an educational records summary and drafted education recommendations after discussing the child;
- Shared the summary and recommendations with the social worker, and surrogate parent when one was involved, soliciting feedback and offering clarification if needed; and
- Entered the education summary and recommendations in LINK, once finalized. The coordinator sent the surrogate parent a copy of the education summary.

The process of developing an educational record review and recommendations report varied based upon the amount of time it takes to acquire records, which may take from a week to over a month.

Once the coordinator receives a copy of a student's education record, the amount of time dedicated to review the record and draft the summary and recommendations varies from a few hours to a week, depending on the size of the education record and the complexity of the case.

In addition to reviewing and revising the recommendations as part of the ACR cycle, the coordinators encouraged the workers to contact them, or any other member of the education team responsible for that office, whenever the social worker encountered problems implementing the recommendations or if any unanticipated education problems arose concerning any student on their caseload. In particular, social workers were advised to contact any member of the regional education team if the student was missing school or class repeatedly, began to experience behavior problems in school, or if the student's grades decreased.

The coordinators attended community meetings to ensure that providers and other members of the Pilot Cities were aware of their role. Specifically, the coordinators attended community meetings including the LIST, Cooperatives, RACs, and meetings held by other local organizations. They used these meetings to identify resources that might meet the needs of the students with whom they worked. RTG

coordinators met once a month with the Director of Program Development and a consultant from SDE to discuss challenges, successes, modifications to the process, and troubleshoot.

Overview of Judicial Branch Responsibilities for Client's Education

The Judicial Branch, through the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) and its Juvenile Probation and Juvenile Residential Services Units, provides supervision and care and custody, respectively, of children and youth¹ referred to the Superior Court – Juvenile Matters for delinquency² or status offenses.

Connecticut General Statutes § 46b-120 through § 46b-150 and Connecticut Practice Book, chapters 26 through 31a, pertain to the administration of the state's juvenile justice system. Children and youth are placed under the supervision of the Juvenile Probation Department by means of a court order issued by a superior court judge when the child or youth is adjudicated or has signed a statement of responsibility and supervision is warranted, or under an order of detention or suspended detention order when probable cause and grounds for detention are found. Whether under supervision or in care and custody of the Judicial Branch, the legal guardian (e.g., biological parent, other caregiver, DCF) maintains guardianship of the child or youth and all educational rights. Authorized employees and contractors of the Judicial Branch (e.g., probation officer, classification and program officer, clinical coordinator, case manager) must obtain consent to access educational records or intervene educationally on a child or youth's behalf.

¹ CGS § 46b-120(1). "Child" means any person under eighteen years of age who has not been legally emancipated, except that (A) for purposes of delinquency matters and proceedings, "child" means any person who (i) is at least seven years of age at the time of the alleged commission of a delinquent act and who is (1) under eighteen years of age and has not been legally emancipated. (2) "Youth" means any person sixteen or seventeen years of age who has not been legally emancipated.

² (2) CGS § 46b-120(4)(A). A child may be convicted as "delinquent" who has, while under sixteen years of age, (i) violated any federal or state law, except section 53a-172, 53a-173, 53a-222, 53a-222a, 53a-223 or 53a-223a, or violated a municipal or local ordinance, except an ordinance regulating behavior of a child in a family with service needs.

There are two (2) categories of facilities or programs that the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division provides to implement the orders of the judges of the Superior Court. The first category is pre-trial detention and alternative programs, where children and youth may be detained by an order of a judge. The second category is short-term residential treatment programs used to divert children from commitment to the Department of Children and Families as either a Delinquent or a child or youth from a Family with Service Needs³. Regardless of which category a facility or program belongs, the education programs are subject to funding and oversight by the responsible local education agency (LEA) and by the State Department of Education Bureau of Special Education. The Judicial Branch cannot fund or contract for the education of children and youth in its care and custody

Decision of Who to Refer to RTG Coordinator and Why

CSSD management began reviewing its obligations under the Raise the Grade legislation and the legislation's impact on operations as soon as it passed. CSSD began by reviewing its educational screening process, its case planning process, the automated case management system, and policies. CSSD established workgroups of field staff to think through the impact on Juvenile Probation operations and Juvenile Detention/Residential education services. CSSD made a decision to apply the Raise the Grade expectations and requirements to all juveniles, not just those in custody or living in Bridgeport, Hartford or New Haven. While only students living in those three cities were eligible for referral to the

³ "Family with service needs" means a family that includes a child who is at least seven years of age and is under eighteen years of age who (A) has without just cause run away from the parental home or other properly authorized and lawful place of abode, (B) is beyond the control of the child's or youth's parent, parents, guardian or other custodian, (C) has engaged in indecent or immoral conduct, (D) is a truant or habitual truant or who, while in school, has been continuously and overtly defiant of school rules and regulations, or (E) is thirteen years of age or older and has engaged in sexual intercourse with another person and such other person is thirteen years of age or older and not more than two years older or younger than such child or youth.

RTG Coordinator, all students, regardless of town of residence, receive an educational screening and an education case plan, if needed.

CSSD modified its Case Management Information System (CMIS) to capture reported academic performance, attendance, and discipline data. It also revised the Juvenile Probation Quality Contact Guide to include a more detailed focus on the educational needs of court involved students. CSSD also developed a checklist for Juvenile Probation Officers to flag student needs and match for appropriate services and supports.

Training of Juvenile Probation Officers and Other Personnel

CSSD staff (Juvenile Probation and Detention) and contracted providers (residential treatment and community-based educational supports) were trained in August 2014 to coincide with the beginning of the school year. Topics included:

- ❖ Philosophy and Commitment to Education of the Judicial Branch and the Court Support Services Division
- ❖ Role of the Juvenile Probation Officer, Detention Classification and Program Officer, Detention and Residential Educators, and Contracted Education Support Personnel (education case managers, educational advocates, special education attorneys); emphasis on taking an interest in a student's educational success; reinforcing student's efforts through motivational interviewing; and focusing parent's attention on education (attendance, grades and behavior).
- ❖ Overview of the Raise the Grade legislation and the role of the Raise the Grade Coordinator
- ❖ Introduction to RTG Coordinator, Raise the Grade Protocol, and Triaging for Services
 - CSSD Target Population determined as:
 - Juveniles performing or suspected of performing below grade level
 - Priority given to juveniles in detention, or under a detention order, and remanded beyond two (2) weeks
 - Attending or returning to school in Bridgeport, Hartford or New Haven under supervision
 - Other juveniles under supervision may be referred if resources are not available or appropriate (e.g., special education attorney, educational advocate, education consultant)
 - Exclusionary Criteria:
 - Not attending or returning to school in Bridgeport, Hartford or New Haven
 - Not under CSSD Supervision
 - Performing on or above grade level
 - Involved with CSSD contracted special education attorney, educational advocate or educational consultant
 - Referral Process:

- If the juvenile is in detention/residential, under CSSD supervision, and meets criteria, the Probation Officer will make the referral to the RTG Coordinator and copy the Detention Classification and Program Officer (CPO) or Residential Case Manager (RCM). The CPO/RCM will notify the Detention/Residential education provider of the referral.
- If the juvenile is in detention/residential, not under CSSD supervision, and meets criteria, the Detention/Residential education provider will make the referral and copy the CPO/RCM. The CPO/RCM will notify the JPO of the referral. Once the juvenile is released on suspended orders or adjudicated/signed a Statement of Responsibility, the JPO will contact the RTG Coordinator to follow up.
- JPOs may refer other juveniles not in detention/residential if they meet criteria.
- ❖ Process and tips for obtaining educational records and what records to get (e.g., attendance, achievement scores, discipline, special education, evaluations)
- ❖ Modification of the CSSD Case Management Information System (CMIS) to capture more educational information (e.g., academic performance, attendance, discipline and supports)
- ❖ Available services: mentors, educational advocates and consultants, special education attorneys and flex funds for tutoring
- ❖ CSSD Policy Revisions:
 - Raise the Grade target population, RTG coordinator role, referral process, menu of services
 - Additions to Juvenile Probation Policy 7.6 (Pre-dispositional Study) release of information and education supplemental section
 - Additions to Juvenile Probation Policy 7.38 (Case Plan) education section
 - Demonstration of the Automated Case Plan Education Section: Educational Needs, Goals and Activities/Referrals related to Attendance, Achievement and Discipline

Data

The goal of the Raise the Grade Pilot is to improve educational outcomes for students in the care of or under the supervision of CSSD or DCF. Three areas are required to be measured - achievement, discipline and attendance. Between the passage of the legislation and the hiring of the coordinators, the statewide testing landscape changed from CMT and CAPT to SBAC. This means that the last statewide testing uniformly administered to all students occurred in the spring of 2013. The Connecticut State Department of Education noted that CMT, CAPT, and SBAC scores are not comparable because they measure progress on different learning objectives. As part of the transition to SBAC, the 2014 test administration was a pilot year, meaning that participation was voluntary and not published by SDE.

In an effort to determine whether district level testing could be used to measure the impact of the pilot on academic achievement, the three districts were asked whether they had changed their progress

monitoring testing between the 2012 -2013 school year (baseline) and 2014-2015 school year. Hartford Public Schools progress monitoring tools changed for kindergarten through third grade between the 2012-13 and 2014-15 school years. In 2012-13, they were using the DRA2 and this year they will use the DIBELS. Another change that occurred in Hartford is that they were using the NWEA MAP from first through eleventh grade and this year they dropped the eleventh grade and added kindergarten. In Bridgeport, for reading during 2012-13 they used a variety of tests, including AIMs Web in K-8, for reading. During the 2014-15 school year, they used AIMs Web for K-9. For Mathematics, Bridgeport used MAP during the baseline year and, during the 2014-15 school year, they used the test of early numeracy for kindergarten and math concepts and applications for other grades. New Haven public schools used a variety of reading assessments during 2012-13. They used DRA for first and second grade and SRA lexiles and DRP for third through eighth grade. For mathematics, New Haven used the math skill assessment for third through eighth grade. The school year 2013-14 New Haven used CAP, LI, OL, and PSF for English language arts assessments in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, OL, PSF, and ORF in first grade, ORF for second and third grade, and DRP, SRI and CCSS in third through eighth grade. To assess students' progress in mathematics, New Haven used skills assessments in kindergarten and first grade, grade level fluency assessments in first through seventh grade, and math mastery assessments in second through eighth grade

Because neither the districts nor the state has had a consistent testing protocol during the two years of the pilot, it is not possible to measure whether there has been change in the academic achievement.

Outcomes

Improved communication and collaboration between the agencies, i.e. CSSD, DCF, and LEAs, and community providers responsible for serving this population should facilitate achieving the goal of Pilot Project. The monthly meetings in each of the three pilot cities addressed those issues inhibiting the

educational success of groups of children within the district. The first goal was to develop a seamless method of ensuring DCF receives a complete copy of the education record for every child that fell under the exception to the Family Education and Privacy Rights Act created by the Uninterrupted Scholars Act of 2013. The coordinators sent record requests to their respective school districts for every child having nexus with that district that were the responsibility of the DCF area office in the pilot city. They tracked the process of obtaining records, reviewing them, and writing summaries and recommendations in a spreadsheet, noting when they received a complete set of records for a child and when they made more than one request for records on a particular child. Before sending a request for records, the coordinator had to determine which children in the particular office in which they sat were in the cohort. Many were not due to their age, where they lived, where their parents lived, etc. Each of the coordinators reviewed approximately 400 LINK records prior to sending letters requesting records to the school districts. The results of these requests, as of June 2015, follow.

Bridgeport	Number
Records Requested	129
Records Obtained	97
Records requested but not received	30
Summaries and recommendations completed	21

New Haven	Number
Records Requested from New Haven Public Schools	154
Records Obtained	154
Summaries and recommendations completed	150

Hartford	Number
Records Requested	254
Records Obtained	78
Summaries and recommendations completed	37
Records never received while child in care	32

The charts indicate the differences in the ability of the districts to supply records to DCF. One hurdle that each district experienced was the lack of staff to make copies of student records. New Haven’s ability to provide records stems from it having begun to keep electronic copies of its students’ records many years before the other districts. Bridgeport sent updated data of its students directly to the coordinator electronically.

Examples of Impact on Student Outcomes

Though the Raise the Grade Pilot was too short to measure long-term outcomes, the coordinators did have an impact on the educational experiences of students in each of the three districts. The following are descriptions of students who personally experienced their impact.

New Haven:

PD is a student who transferred to the New Haven public school system in the middle of her 11th grade year. Previously, she attended a technical high school where the graduation requirements differed from those at Wilbur Cross, the school she now attends. Toward the end of the school year, she accumulated tardies and did poorly in her classes. The coordinator spoke at length with her guidance counselor, and met to discuss the best way to help her. Through discussion, they learned that she was tardy because the transportation company who brought her from her foster home 20 miles away was late on a nearly daily basis. This issue was resolved through the intervention of the social worker and, because she was

no longer missing instructional time, her grades improved and she was able to pass all but one class. Discussions with the guidance counselor also revealed that she needed specific classes to graduate and that she had never taken a foreign language. Together, the guidance counselor and coordinator created her 12th grade schedule to ensure that she would earn all the needed credits. When the pilot ended, she was doing well in her senior year and on track to graduate in June 2015.

ZW is a 12th grade student who has struggled in school since kindergarten, which she only attended for three months. She repeated the second grade twice as well as the third grade, and was socially promoted from third to sixth grade and then again from seventh to ninth. The planning and placement team determined that she was ineligible for special education services in 2006 and instead identified her as a 'slow learner.' She has repeatedly scored Basic or Below Basic on both district benchmark testing and state standardized testing. When the coordinator became involved in her case, she was an 11th grader who was passing all her classes but was clearly not receiving the services she required. Together with her social worker, they were able to have a surrogate parent appointed and an initial PPT held. At the PPT, the coordinator was able to convince NHPS to not only retest her, but to do so during the summer so the PPT could reconvene before the 2014-2015 school year began. The PPT met in August, and the evaluations supported finding ZW eligible for special education. Since ZW was eighteen years old, she had to accept the services and the surrogate herself, which she did. ZW is now in final year of high school and is considering college, something she never before thought possible.

DC was an eighth grade student who has had a difficult educational career. He struggled particularly with reading and math. His academic career included two retentions and promotion to eighth grade even though he did not pass all his classes while in seventh grade. In the past, the school determined that he was ineligible for special education. His surrogate parent requested an outside evaluation, which did not change the PPT's determination. However, his social worker and the coordinator were able to get the school to agree to create a 504 plan for him. This 504 is very specific and targets needs

that were not only crucial in his 8th grade year but also into high school. DC is currently failing two courses because he is not completing his homework. To this end, we met with his foster father and stressed the importance of completing homework. We are also working on setting up a tutor for him in math. In addition, we are currently exploring high school ideas with DC so that he makes the best choice for the next 4 years of his life.

Hartford

A. is a 12 year old Hispanic female currently enrolled in 6th grade at Eleanor B. Kennelly Elementary School. Data gathered from report cards as well as state and benchmark assessments indicated that A. has performed below grade level in all content areas throughout her educational career. Her teacher referred A to the Student Assistance Team or Response to Intervention (“RtI”) process for additional supports in 2009, while she attended Parkville Community School and in 2014 at Kennelly School. There was no evidence however, of A. having recently received tiered interventions or special education services based on the records reviewed. Recommendations to the worker included requesting that the school provide research based academic interventions and supports, document the effectiveness of these interventions and monitor student progress. In addition, in the event that A. did not demonstrate sufficient progress with implemented interventions, the social worker should ask the school to conduct cognitive and academic evaluations in order to assess and better meet the needs of the student. Based on the coordinator’s recommendations, the social worker requested a meeting with the school. The team discussed the ineffectiveness of the reading interventions. As a result, the team decided to move forward with an initial planning and placement team meeting, and complete cognitive and academic evaluations.

J. is a ten year old Hispanic male currently enrolled in 5th grade at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in Waterbury, CT. Evaluations in his record suggest that J's cognitive ability is within the Average range

of intellectual functioning. The student has had a history of behavioral challenges in the school setting and is receiving special education services under the exceptionality of OHI-ADD/ADHD. According to records reviewed, J. made significant progress academically and behaviorally during the 2013-2014 school year while enrolled at Woodrow Wilson Elementary. The school and J.'s social worker reported escalating unsafe and disruptive behaviors since the start of the 2014-15 school year. After an initial consult with the worker, the worker requested a PPT to review J's current plan. The coordinator had the opportunity to attend the PPT with the worker and advocated for the student to remain in the current setting with 1:1 adult support since the BIP that was in place had been developed in a different school and was no longer effective. With the addition of the 1:1 adult support, the school will gather data to update J's BIP and implement needed supports without removing him from the setting that has proven to make a difference in his academic and behavioral performance.

Pre-K enrollment:

At the beginning of the summer of 2014, the New Haven Raise the Grade Coordinator met with a Program Manager in the DCF Office and discussed ways to ensure that all children aged 2.9 through 5 were enrolled in an educational program. She then looked at the CIP list on DCF's internal website to identify children aged 2.9 through 5, and checked in LINK to see if the identified children were in or planning to enroll in a preschool or kindergarten program. The coordinator provided the program manager with a list of those children who showed no evidence of enrollment in a pre-school program. The program manager spoke with supervisors and social workers to ensure that the identified children participated in preschool by August. From that point until the end of the pilot, she worked with social workers who initially enrolled students in a daycare setting encouraging them to place the children into Head Start programs.

Lessons Learned

The Raise the Grade Pilot lasted two years, from July 2013 through June 2015. Though DCF was the agency responsible for hiring the coordinators and providing them workspace in the area offices located in the pilot cities, it was required to work with the State Department of Education, the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch and the cities and school districts who were the target of the legislation in order to be successful. Because of the change in state education testing, and the fluid nature of the cohort, it was not possible to measure the overall impact of the pilot. However, the following observations can be made.

1. Knowing the complete educational history of a struggling student, either academically or emotionally, is important in order to ensure the provision of appropriate supports.
2. The RTG Coordinator position was a beneficial resource to CSSD, given the coordinators' level of expertise and education system knowledge. The challenge of getting records from districts in a timely manner was not due to a lack of effort; however, the slow turnaround time is especially problematic given the short average length of time clients are on probation (6-9 months)
3. While obtaining a hard copy of a child's record is not essential for every child, it is essential that DCF receive electronically and timely, i.e. on a monthly basis from the districts that have students in DCF's care – attendance, discipline, and achievement data.
4. Schools sometimes fail to tell the DCF social worker, in the same way that a parent is informed, of a child's progress in school. This frequently occurs through inadvertence. It is essential for school districts to ensure that social workers, as well as the individual providing the daily care for a child and the surrogate parent, receive notice of disciplinary incidents, conferences, and meetings.
5. For children in the care and custody of DCF, it is particularly important to be aware of the schools a child has attended when that student is in high school so that we can ensure that the student receives credit for all of the high school work they have completed.

6. Referrals from Probation trickled in due to three primary reasons:
 - a. There were not enough coordinators to meet the demand so CSSD triaged cases to ensure the proper and efficient use of all available resources.
 - b. In order not to overwhelm the RTG coordinators with referrals, CSSD limited referral eligibility to clients in detention because they are the most in need.
 - c. The timeframes in which RTG coordinators received records from districts did not align with CSSD's needs. JPOs need records within two (2) weeks in order to inform court ordered studies and case planning.
7. CSSD found the RTG Coordinator position a beneficial resource given the coordinators' level of expertise and education system knowledge. The challenge of getting records from districts in a timely manner was not due to a lack of effort; however, the slow turnaround time is especially problematic given the short average length of time clients are on probation (6-9 months).
8. Both Probation, within CSSD, and social workers, within DCF, are not familiar with the educational milestones children should achieve by certain grades and ages. They need to have individuals knowledgeable in the area as a resource with whom they can consult. In addition, because of this, individuals who are knowledgeable in this area within the agency need to review the educational progress of students regularly so that children can experience educational success.
9. Regular discussions amongst the agencies responsible for the cohort, in each of the three cities, were essential to working collaboratively.

Remaining Barriers to Education

The biggest barriers to educational success for court-involved students include arrests at school for minor behavior problems that s without court intervention. School-based arrests make up close to 20% of all juvenile court referrals. Re-entry from detention and residential programs also challenges students, families, DCF and CSSD. A smooth transition process is needed for returning students to successfully re-enter and remain in their schools and communities. OPM

received an OJJDP grant to develop a strategic plan for re-entering youth in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, and Waterbury that should provide protocols and supports for this purpose (e.g., timely return to school, timely record exchange, confirmation of credit, transition supports). The most challenged students involved with CSSD are under credit which contributes to or is the product of school disengagement and truancy, and leads to eventual drop-out. Most of these students (over 70%) come from Alliance Districts that should have programming available to address these students' needs. Juvenile Probation Officers and families do not know how to access these services and opportunities (e.g., tutoring, credit recovery, alternative education) without the fear of the student made to feel unwanted in school.

Moving Forward

Court Support Services Division

CSSD is focusing its attention on the continuous quality improvement of practices and processes related to the educational needs of court-involved students. This includes continuing work with CSSD central office consultant, School and College Placement Services, Inc. (SCPS), to review its obligations, particularly implementing the recommendations from the ***Raise the Grade Facilities and Programs Plan*** submitted to the Legislature in July 2014. SCPS is reviewing the delivery of education in all CSSD residential programs (detention, alternatives to detention, residential treatment), and is working with educators to adopt a common assessment tool, education case plan format, and tracking system for Child Find. Continuous quality improvement also includes having educators in Detention participate in weekly Medical/Mental

Health meetings and assuring that education is part of the Continuity of Care Discharge Plan and to provide training opportunities to educators teaching in CSSD facilities and programs (e.g., trauma, PBIS). CSSD adopted standard request for proposal (RFP) and contract language for detention and residential programs that outlines educational responsibilities and expectations of service providers, including the hiring of an educational case manager to work with the student, parent/legal guardian, JPO and local school district to prepare for the student's eventual return home and back to school.

CSSD is following in the footsteps of DCF by developing a real time data exchange system with SDE to provide historical educational information for juveniles who are in detention or under CSSD supervision. As mentioned earlier, unlike DCF, JPO's do not have an exception under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act⁴, so they must have the consent of the parent or guardian in order to obtain access to a student's education record. The SDE-Judicial Data Exchange MOA (June 2015) is being amended to allow for an annual report providing the characteristics, achievement, and needs of court-involved students (March 2016).

Probation continues to meet with school district representatives to strengthen relationships to support timely record exchange, cross-system training opportunities, and student re-entry.

CSSD is developing an automated system to ensure adherence to Raise the Grade screening, case planning, and service referral requirements. In a continuing effort to reduce school based

⁴ FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY Act of 1974 codified at 20 U.S.C. 1232g(b) was modified in 2013 to add an exception that permitted districts to provide child welfare agencies copies of a student's record when that student was in the custody of the child welfare agency.

arrests, suspensions and expulsions, CSSD continues its work expanding the School-based Diversion Initiative (SBDI).

Department of Children and Families

Both the Pilot and the tenure of Dr. Tracy ended in June 2015; the legislature did not extend the Pilot and Dr. Tracy retired. In August, Mr. Christopher Leone became the educational leader within DCF. The SDE provided SBAC data for those children in DCF’s custody during the fall of 2015. The statewide comparison of children in DCF’s care and custody to all other children is in the following chart.

READING SBAC (DCF v. CSDE) – May 2015

Grade	Level 4			Level 3			Level 2			Level 1		
	DCF %	SDE%	GAP	DCF %	SDE%	GAP	DCF %	SDE%	GAP	DCF %	SDE%	GAP
3	8.77%	29.69%	-20.92%	16.67%	23.94%	-7.27%	28.07%	23.34%	4.73%	46.49%	23.03%	23.46%
4	5.26%	30.70%	-25.43%	7.37%	24.27%	-16.90%	21.05%	19.29%	1.76%	66.32%	25.74%	40.58%
5	4.81%	25.84%	-21.03%	12.50%	32.70%	-20.20%	21.15%	18.92%	2.24%	61.54%	22.54%	39.00%
6	3.26%	20.53%	-17.27%	20.65%	35.05%	-14.40%	16.30%	25.10%	-8.79%	59.78%	19.32%	40.46%
7	1.90%	18.30%	-16.39%	18.10%	38.85%	-20.75%	19.05%	21.80%	-2.75%	60.95%	21.06%	39.90%
8	1.91%	16.96%	-15.05%	15.92%	37.05%	-21.13%	27.39%	26.13%	1.26%	54.78%	19.86%	34.92%
11	5.00%	21.12%	-16.12%	17.86%	32.30%	-14.45%	20.00%	24.52%	-4.52%	57.14%	22.06%	35.09%

Key	Gap	Level	Definition
	> 15%	4	Exceed the Achievement Level
	>10%	3	Meet the Achievement Level
	>5%	2	Approaching the Achievement Level
	0-5%	1	Does Not Meet the Achievement Level

Over 800 DCF youth assessed – 79.9% failed to meet SBAC achievement level.

MATH SBAC (DCF v. CSDE) – May 2015

Grade	Level 4			Level 3			Level 2			Level 1		
	DCF %	SDE%	GAP	DCF %	SDE%	GAP	DCF %	SDE%	GAP	DCF %	SDE%	GAP
3	3.54%	18.27%	-14.73%	16.81%	29.75%	-12.93%	30.09%	24.96%	5.13%	49.56%	27.02%	22.54%
4	1.05%	16.75%	-15.70%	11.58%	27.44%	-15.86%	31.58%	32.94%	-1.36%	55.79%	22.87%	32.92%
5	3.88%	17.65%	-13.77%	4.85%	19.24%	-14.39%	19.42%	30.05%	-10.63%	71.84%	33.05%	38.79%
6	4.26%	16.27%	-12.01%	3.19%	21.07%	-17.88%	22.34%	31.37%	-9.03%	70.21%	31.29%	38.93%
7	0.00%	16.72%	-16.72%	9.52%	22.07%	-12.55%	20.95%	29.75%	-8.80%	69.52%	31.45%	38.07%
8	0.64%	17.96%	-17.32%	5.77%	18.85%	-13.08%	17.95%	26.05%	-8.10%	75.64%	37.14%	38.50%
11	0.72%	11.65%	-10.93%	0.72%	18.91%	-18.19%	10.79%	23.19%	-12.40%	87.77%	46.25%	41.52%

Key	Gap	Level	Definition
	> 15%	4	Exceed the Achievement Level
	>10%	3	Meet the Achievement Level
	>5%	2	Approaching the Achievement Level
	0-5%	1	Does Not Meet the Achievement Level

Over 800 youth assessed – 90.9% failed to meet achievement level.

This overview of how poorly children in the care and custody of DCF perform on the state standardized assessment was shared with state and regional leadership within the agency. The above information was broken out by region and shared with the local education agencies' ("LEA") leadership in each region, providing the LEA's with their specific data subsequent to the meeting. Education has been included in DCF's performance expectations developed within the Results Based Accountability rubric. The expectation concerning education states that DCF will ensure children in the care and custody of the Commissioner receive a quality education and support services that lead to educational success. DCF will measure how well it meets this expectation in three ways. By examining 1) the percent of children who are performing at "proficient or better" based on state standardized test results; 2) the on-time graduation rate; and 3) the percent of adolescents aging out of care participating in postsecondary education, including vocational education, or working full time

Recognizing that it is essential that DCF social workers have timely educational information about the children on their caseload, DCF is working with the local school districts that serve the majority of children in care to obtain progress monitoring, attendance and behavior information electronically on a monthly basis. Mr. Leone has also sent a request to all superintendents that they notify DCF whenever a district suspends a student for a total of ten days or recommends expulsion by email to a central office education mailbox.

In an effort to help students fill the gaps in their education so that they can achieve a high school diploma, the Education Division has implemented a Virtual Academy. This is for students who are juvenile justice involved and other students for whom DCF is responsible who are not experiencing educational success in their current placement. The Virtual Academy is an additional school established under the authority of section 17a-37 of the Connecticut General Statutes. This online school provides direct support to the students with certified teachers who volunteered to work in the regions. DCF created the Virtual Academy without any additional cost.

Respectfully submitted,

Joette Katz, Commissioner
Department of Children and Families