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 (APHSA, 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 (Scannapieco & 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.


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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Cahalane &amp; Sites</th>
<th>Dickinson &amp; Perry</th>
<th>Jones</th>
<th>Lewandowski</th>
<th>Olson &amp; Sutton</th>
<th>Rosenthal &amp; Waters</th>
<th>Scannapiecco &amp; Connell-Carrick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>KS</td>
<td>MN</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>TX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statewide Study</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published Study</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependent Variable</td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title IV-E recipients</td>
<td>MSW already agency employees</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>MSW new to child welfare agency to other hires</td>
<td>BSW and MSW</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>BSW &amp; MSW compared to all hires</td>
<td>BSW and MSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>80% of 260</td>
<td>64% of 235</td>
<td>100% of 266</td>
<td>100% of 182</td>
<td>57% of 44</td>
<td>99% of 841</td>
<td>64% of 128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Group</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Design and Analysis</td>
<td>Quantitative, Cross-sectional mail survey, Bivariate &amp; multivariate analyses</td>
<td>Quantitative, Cross-sectional mail survey, Bivariate &amp; multivariate analyses</td>
<td>Quantitative, retrospective, descriptive case record review, bivariate analysis</td>
<td>Quantitative, cross-sectional mail survey and archival record review, bivariate analysis</td>
<td>Quantitative, Retrospective, Archival Data, Multivariate Survival Analysis</td>
<td>Quantitative, Cross-sectional mail survey, Descriptive statistics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors Influencing Retention</td>
<td>Growth and advancement, organizational commitment, organizational climate, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, role conflict, depersonalization</td>
<td>Coworker &amp; supervisory support, quality of supervision, efficacy, burnout, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, salary</td>
<td>Personal characteristics (Bilingual, level of education [MSW])</td>
<td>BSW, previous agency employee</td>
<td>Commitment to children and families, salary and benefits, job assignment, burnout</td>
<td>Previous employment experience, education, gender, Title IV-E training, job classification</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**IASWR Research Brief – Child Welfare Workforce Series 2**

**INSTITUTE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH**
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.

References:


