



Analysis Provides Evidence for Need of Partnerships between Education and Human Services Systems

More than half of the students in Pittsburgh Public Schools classrooms throughout the city share a revealing characteristic – each, at some point in their young lives, has been in need of human services ranging from child welfare protection to behavioral health treatment.

A novel data-sharing agreement between the Pittsburgh Public Schools and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) enabled integrated student data from the schools, DHS, juvenile justice and state sources to be analyzed for the first time in 2010. The result was the most comprehensive, detailed statistical profile to date of a significant population of city public school students who are involved in human services or had been involved in years past.

The findings underscore the importance of the data-sharing partnership built between the city public schools and DHS in more fully understanding those students, their circumstances and challenges and collaborating on new strategies to improve their outcomes.

Overall, 14,450 students – 53 percent of district enrollment – had prior involvement in at least one of the 16 service programs included in the analysis and 36 percent of students received services within the last academic year.

Significant numbers of children with needs sufficient to involve them in human services are found across all grades and city public school programs. The highest concentration of those students are found in the district's Special Education schools, where 87 percent had received services in prior years and 77 percent as recently as the last academic year. The lowest rate is found in the district's early childhood programs. Even then, 41 percent of the children enrolled had prior human service involvement and 28 percent received services within the last year.

The data also help to define the scope of the challenges the students face. Many experience the child welfare system. In fact, more students have been involved in Children, Youth and Families (CYF) services than in any other DHS program. Some 30 percent of city public schools students have past experience with CYF and, for one-fifth of those children, the abuse or neglect led to out-of-home placement.

CYF services may include referrals to community service providers in order to strengthen and preserve families while protecting children from abuse and neglect, placement and reunification services, services that address mental health needs and addiction, independent living services for dependent youth and other supports.

Behavioral health is another significant issue for students. For example, 23 percent of students have received mental health services. The data also show that high numbers of students have received supportive services. The supportive service with the highest involvement is the Department of Welfare's food stamp program which has served 29 percent of students in the past and 24 percent within the last year.

A considerable number of students have also been involved in the juvenile justice system. Among students over the age of 10 years, more than 1,766, or 10 percent, had prior juvenile justice involvement, 3 percent experienced court ordered out-of-home juvenile justice placement and 6 percent were in the juvenile justice system as recently as the last academic year.

Finally, thousands of students confront challenges beyond the classroom that require several kinds of services to address. Looking just at services administered through DHS and JPO, more than 2,000 Pittsburgh Public Schools students – 8 percent of those enrolled – have had past involvement in three or more types of services, the most common being child welfare, mental health, early intervention and family support centers. As recently as the last academic year, more than 1,800 students faced circumstances that required more than one DHS service to address.