Ten Effective Ways to Infuse Child Welfare Topics into Educational Leadership Preparation Programs

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Abstract

Administering and supervising special education programs and personnel may be daunting tasks for school leaders. Students

and families who warrant the access to special education services present unique and complex needs that make administrative

decisions anything but universal and simplistic, especially in regards to foster care populations. The added stress of potential

due process litigations for poor decision-making may further challenge administrators, especially leaders without prior child

welfare/foster care experiences. Today's school administrators must ensure Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs)

include input from parents and guardians at all stages of the process, from pre-referral through implementation and evaluation,

while at the same time accounting for the various stakeholders in foster care students' lives. To do so requires additional

adherence to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) legislations. The

purpose of this presentation was to identify ten educational barriers that foster care youth often encounter and that have

appeared in the literature, and to propose preservice/graduate school activities that would expose aspirant school administrators

to the problems, each aligned with ELCC/ISLCC standards.

Infusing Child Welfare/Foster Care Topics into 10 Educational Leadership Preparation Courses

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Statement of Need
- More than 500,000 youth reside in the nation's foster care system.
- The emotional, behavioral, social, and academic well-being of foster care youth requires a systemic response from all essential stakeholders, including educators.
- The literature reports that educators often lack full awareness about foster care systems and the youth and families they serve, implying the need for administrative resolutions.

"Studies of maltreated children in foster care have shown higher rates of learning disabilities and achievement problems, as well as higher rates of special education placement, language disorders, grade retention, adaptive behavior deficits, and mild mental retardation"
(Sullivan & Knutson, 2000, p. 301).

Aligning the Need with ELCC/ISLLC Standards & Educational Administration Preservice Programs

Foster Care-Education Problem Identified in the Literature	Preservice / Inservice Administrative Solutions for the Identified Problem	The Solutions' Relationship to ELCC/ISLLC Standards	Examples of Preservice Educational Leadership Assignments & Activities
Teachers' high foster care caseloads and lack of inter- and intra-collaborative opportunities and support when advocating for foster care youth	Strategic human resource planning that maximizes teacher collaboration with foster care professionals Foster care professional development	*Standard 1:* Formulating initiatives to motivate staff Developing plans and processes for implementing the school's vision	*Human Resources Course:* As a superintendent, design a process of how you would recruit a team of teachers from the elementary, middle school, and high schools to form a "foster care advisory board." In doing so, identify how the board will function, especially in collaborating with other teachers and administrators, in addition to community partners. Conclude your plan with a professional development sequence to further the advisory board's knowledge about foster care services, service providers, and recipients within the local community.

Narrow scope of community resources (academic-related only) for foster care students Restrictive definition of family in collaboration with this system	Interdisciplinary collaboration (e.g., Bronstein, 2003) Active involvement with community stakeholders via guest speakers, field assignments, etc.	**_Standard 4:_** Bringing together the resources of family members and the community to positively affect student learning Collaborating with community agencies to integrate health, social, and other services	**_Community Relations Course:_** Interview a child welfare agency worker. Note the barriers related to his/her job in relation to school-agency collaboration. Create a strategic plan for your school that addresses these barriers. Using Bronstein's model, participate in a classroom simulation activity that invokes the necessity for community collaboration in addressing the needs of children and youth in the child welfare system.
IDEA's definition of a "foster parent" and related ambiguity about parental rights McKinney-Vento Homeless Act's somewhat inclusion of foster care youth	District-wide policy and procedure regarding the rights and responsibilities of foster parents Resource mapping IDEA and McKinney-Vento services to overcome redundancy, while also maximizing possibilities (e.g., transportation services)	**_Standards 2, 5, & 6:_** Demonstrating an understanding of how to apply legal principles to promote [foster care] students' educational equity Making and explaining decisions based upon ethical and legal principles Advocating for policies and programs that promote equitable learning for all students, regardless of individual characteristics	**_School Law Course:_** Write a district-wide "how to" policy and procedure manual for ensuring the appropriate and full extent of foster parents, birth parents, and caseworkers in special education matters, including IEPs. In addition to defining each stakeholder's role, write a template letter that you could provide each stakeholder. In a separate document, explain how your letters adhere to IDEA law.
Exclusion of child welfare in analyses of trends/patterns for new schools buildings	Portion of course on alternative school arrangements (one-stop-shop service centers, for e.g.) Expand view of "necessary inclusions for educational specifications" to include needs of child welfare consumers	**_Standards 2 & 3:_** Making recommendations regarding the design, implementation, and evaluation of a curriculum Deploying financial and human resources in ways that promote student achievement Applying and assessing current technologies for school management, business procedures, and scheduling	**_Educational Facilities Planning Course:_** Visit a school that has an alternative set-up (e.g., family clinic on site]. Write a reflection paper that addresses the pros and cons of this arrangement on curriculum/building management. Class discussion about philosophical issues related to facilities planning: How can the physical climate of the school building truly reflect and address the needs of those most vulnerable in the community? Should it have to do so?

Administrators' lack of awareness about child welfare organizational structures, functions, and processes Misconceptions about foster care caseworker involvement and physical presence in school matters (e.g., IEPs)	Increase awareness about caseworkers' job descriptions and judiciary responsibilities Design realistic and beneficial means of caseworkers' engagement in school matters	*Standard 3:* Involving stakeholders in aligning resources and priorities to maximize ownership and accountability Developing plans to promote and support community collaboration among district personnel	*Organizational Theory Course:* Interview an administrator of a local foster care agency and determine the organization's infrastructure. Illustrate the organizational "chain of command" and compare/contrast it with your school organizational chart. Note similarities and differences between comparable professionals (e.g., teachers and caseworkers; supervisors and principals). Explain how this experience changed or reinforced your perception of caseworkers' involvement in school matters for the foster care children on their caseloads. How will your insights influence your administrative career?
Exclusively selecting/teaching theoretical leadership responses from a dominant cultural lens in regards to foster care students	Acknowledge the disconnect between leadership theory and "real-life" concerns of foster care youth Grapple with ethical theory as it relates to values, biases, and personal ideologies of child welfare	*Standards 1, 5, & 6:* Developing a vision of learning for a school based on relevant knowledge and theories. Making and explaining decisions based on ethical and legal principles Acting as informed consumers of educational theory and concepts appropriate to school context	*Instructional Leadership Course:* Stage class debates around ethical dilemmas related to instructional leadership of schools and responsibilities to child welfare settings. Write a critical analysis of traditional leadership theory and its reliance on dominant culture as a way of understanding the organization and administration of K-12 schools.
Bound perception of children as students only Administrators' lack of exposure to non-educational settings (e.g., foster care agencies) involved in school-community relations	Partial completion of internship hours in child welfare agencies Partial completion of internship hours in judicial settings (e.g., foster care courtrooms)	*Standard 7:* Participating in planned intern activities during an entire EDAD preparation program Engaging in multiple settings Working with appropriate community organizations, such as social services groups and local businesses	*Administrative Internship:* Contact the local juvenile courts and arrange to spend 20 hours observing parental-termination hearings. As you do so, write down the "facts" presented in each case to warrant a child's permanent severance from his/her birth parent(s). Next, predict how the children might or might not have immediate and/or long-term emotional problems when returning to school. What are the implications for administrators and teachers in responding to these potential emotional needs? Should administrators consider Section 504 services as a response?

No collaboration with child welfare when planning school budgets Lack of understanding of how the public policy of school finance is connected to other systems (e.g., child welfare)	Acknowledgement of the role of planning in the allocation of all financial resources of the community Critical analysis of funding priorities of the child welfare system as they explicitly and implicitly impact K-12 educational settings	*Standards 3 & 5:* Developing plans of action for focusing an effective organization and management of fiscal, human, and material resources Demonstrating an understanding of ways to appropriately and effectively use public resources/funds and providing new resources to address emerging student problems	*Economics of Public Education Course:* Conduct an environmental scan of a community with an emphasis on the apportionment of financial resources; determine how much and in what ways school budgets take into consideration the material needs of students in the child welfare system. Interview a public policy maker from the state legislature (e.g., finance committee member). Identify his/her determinants of decisions about the state's education budget.
Excluding child welfare theories in research methods Possible avoidance of systemic issues (e.g., Post-traumatic Stress Disorder; domestic violence) that impede foster care students' success	Teaching research methods (qualitative and quantitative) using foster care statistics and/or participants (e.g., foster parents)	*Standard 1:* Basing visions of learning on relevant theories, including an understanding of schools as interactive social and cultural systems Designing or adopting a system for using data-based research strategies to regularly monitor, evaluate, and revise the vision	*Educational Research Course:* Go to the Michigan website of foster care youth awaiting adoption: www.mare.org (a public website). Using standards of random selection, identify 50 children in the database and read their profiles. Using the appropriate statistical test, determine the significance ($p < .05$) of special education disability labels among this population. Interview three foster parents according to the standards of multiple case study methodology. Create an interview protocol and data analysis procedure to understand the parents' perceptions of school services for the youth in their care. Report your results according to a qualitative format.
Supervision structure not taking into account discipline and training (administrators supervising school social workers, for example) Lack of understanding of real-world exigencies that face students in child welfare and their impact on teachers	Deemphasis of supervision in a silo: Knowledge of duties, challenges, and strengths of school personnel other than teachers (counselors, social workers, etc.)	*Standards 2 & 3:* Demonstrating the ability to assist school personnel in understanding and applying best practices for student learning Demonstrating the ability to involve staff in conducting operations and setting priorities	*Supervision Course:* Interview school social workers, counselors, and other resource personnel about the challenges of serving children and families in the child welfare system. Consider: How can administrators best be a support for these personnel? How can they access supports for these individuals in the district and in the community? How can they help teachers work collaboratively with school social workers and counselors?