



## Foster Care Students in Special Education

The population of students in foster care is defined as children and youth who experience an out-of-home placement<sup>i</sup> and are enrolled in a Colorado public school during the same year.

Approximately one-third of students in foster care receive special education services during the same year they experience an out-of-home placement. During the 2013-14 academic year, 1,527 students in foster care received special education services. The services were most often for Serious Emotional Disability / Emotional Disability (12.6%) or Specific Learning Disability (8.3%)<sup>ii</sup>

## Purpose of Summary

In 2014, the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Human Services adopted the American Bar Association's *Blueprint for Change: Education Success for Children in Foster Care*. The Blueprint is being used as a framework for a state-level action plan to improve educational outcomes for students in foster care.

The purpose of this brief report is to summarize aspects of school mobility from the *Colorado Study of Students in Foster Care* to inform the implementation of Blueprint Goal 1, Benchmark 1-C. The target audience for this report is special education Administrative Units (e.g., a district or BOCES) and leaders.

*When in their best interests, youth have a legal right to remain in their same school (school of origin) even when they move outside the district, and schools that retain children are not financially penalized. –Benchmark 1-C*

The *Colorado Study of Students in Foster Care* is a longitudinal dataset developed out of a data-sharing agreement between the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Department of Education. The sample is students in foster also identified with a special education need during the 2011-12, 2012-13, or 2013-14 school years ( $n = 4,103$ ).<sup>iii</sup>

## Key Findings

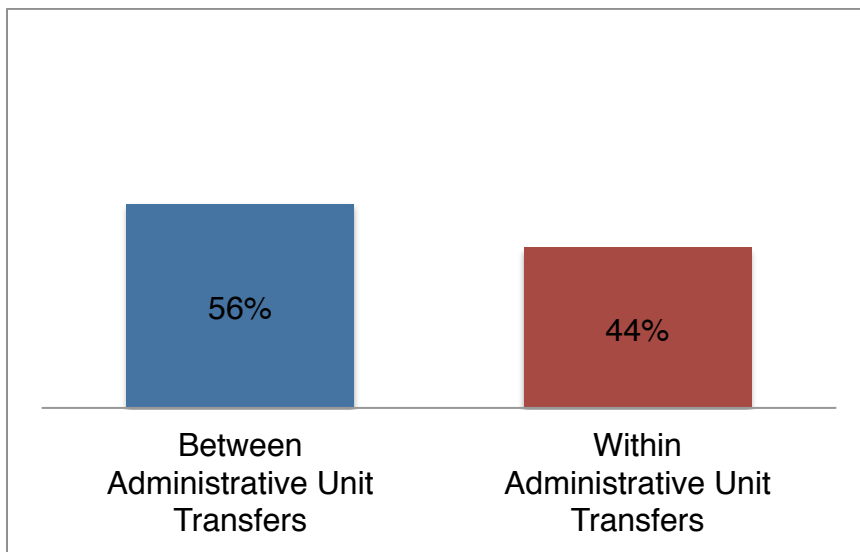
- A similar number of Colorado’s foster care students in special education transfer into and out of each Administrative Unit.
- The majority of school transfers were concentrated in Administrative Units that serve relatively large numbers of students with special education needs.
- Facility schools gain foster care students in special education each year. More foster care students in special education enter facility schools centers from a traditional public school than exit from a facility school to a traditional public school each year.

## School Transfers

School transfers are defined as changing from one public school to another public school after the initial enrollment for the year<sup>iv</sup>. School transfers do not include transitions to or from facility schools or juvenile detention centers. School transfers refer to the transitions among more traditional school environments.

More school transfers occurred between Administrative Units (AU) than within them. This is typical for the foster care population as a whole, not just the subpopulation of foster care students in special education.

Figure 1. More transfers occur between AUs than within them.



Data Source: Colorado Department of Education

## Location of Transfers: Typically larger AUs

School transfers of foster care students with special education needs are concentrated in AUs that serve a relatively large number of students in special education.

The AUs with an average of 16 or more transfer incidents per year are included in Table 2. The first three columns refer to the average number of foster care students in special education transfers. The fourth column, number of SPED students served, refers to the average number of all students in special education who received services in a given AU (not just students who were also in foster care). Thus, the average number of all SPED students served in a given AU contextualizes the average number of foster care students in special education transfers.

Table 1. Administrative Units that typically have 16 or more foster care students in special education with transfers per year.

	Foster Care & SPED Transfers Into AU	Foster Care & SPED Transfers Out of AU	Foster Care & SPED Transfers Within AU	Number of SPED Students Served
<b>Adams 12</b>	18	19	<16	3566
<b>Adams-Arapahoe 28J</b>	30	25	<16	3688
<b>Cherry Creek 5</b>	29	29	<16	5049
<b>Colorado Springs 11</b>	21	25	26	2097
<b>Denver County 1</b>	54	53	139	8167
<b>Greeley 6</b>	19	16	<16	1751
<b>Jefferson County R-1</b>	39	40	24	6712
<b>Mesa County Valley 51</b>	<16	<16	21	2219
<b>Pueblo City 60</b>	17	<16	19	1837

Number of students with SPED needs served includes those ages 6 to 21 and excludes youth receiving services in hospitals, residential facilities, correctional facilities, or through homebound instruction: [http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdespedfin/sped\\_datareports-4](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdespedfin/sped_datareports-4). *Data Source:* Colorado Department of Education.

## Net Change in Enrollment Associated with School Transfers

A similar number of foster care students in special education transferred into and out of each Administrative Unit.

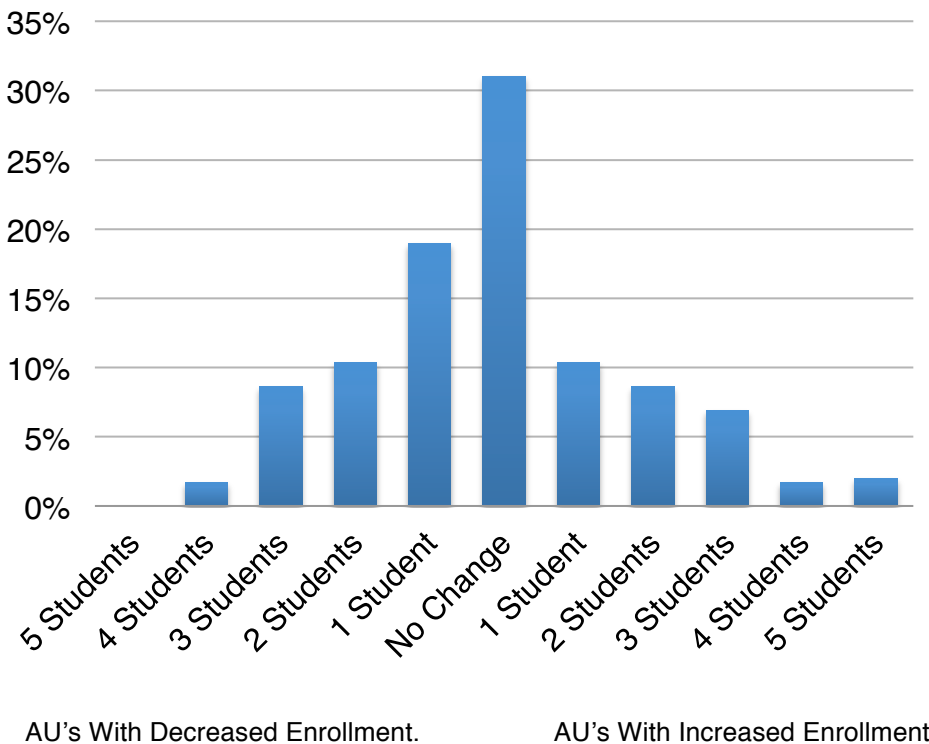
The net enrollment change is the number of students in foster care that transferred in, minus the number of students in foster care who transferred out, then averaged over three years. The net change in enrollment ranged from a decrease of four students per year to an increase of five students per year.

Thirty-one percent of AU's typically had no net change in enrollment. The distribution of AUs by net enrollment change is depicted in Figure 2.

No AU had a net change in enrollment of more than five students per year. For all AU's, the net change in enrollment due to foster care placement and special education transfers represents less than one percent of special education students served in a given AU.

Figure 2. Percent of AUs by Net Change in Number of Students Enrolled.

Data Source: Colorado Department of Education



## Facility Schools and Detention Centers

Transitions between public schools and facility schools or juvenile detention centers occur less frequently than school transfers. The prevalence foster care students in special education entering a public school from facility schools and juvenile detention centers or exiting from a public school to these environments may be relevant to implementing *The Blueprint for Change* Goal 1 Benchmark 1-C:

*When in their best interests, youth have a legal right to remain in their same school (school of origin) even when they move outside the district, and schools that retain children are not financially penalized. –Benchmark 1-C*

A best interest determination team might consider the school of origin to be where the child attended school prior to the facility school or detention center placement. The school of origin in these cases could be a recently attended school in the same district or an adjacent school district to the child's residence.

### Facility Schools

Over the last few years, facility schools have gained foster care students in special education. Annually, there are more incidents of foster care students in special education exiting from a public school to a facility school than entering a traditional public school from a facility school.

Table 2. State level data on facility school entries and exits.

	Number of Entries from a Facility School to a Public School	Number of Exits from a Public School to a Facility School
<b>2014</b>	99	118
<b>2013</b>	129	146
<b>2012</b>	115	200

Data Source: Colorado Department of Education

## Juvenile Detention Centers

There are relatively few incidents of foster care students in special education entering or exiting a juvenile detention center each year. Receiving school districts reported slightly more entries from juvenile detention centers (DYC) than exits to DYC.

Table 3. State level data on juvenile detention center (DYC) entries and exits.

	Number of Entries from DYC to a Public School	Number of Exits from a Public School to DYC
<b>2014</b>	41	35
<b>2013</b>	45	32
<b>2012</b>	49	45

Data Source: Colorado Department of Education

## Data Source, Sample, and Analytic Method

*Colorado Study of Students in Foster Care* is a longitudinal dataset developed out of a data-sharing agreement between the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Department of Education. The data source for all education data was the Colorado Department of Education. The data source for out-of-home placement data was the Colorado Department of Human Services.

This sample was students who experienced an out-of-home placement and were enrolled (K-12) in a Colorado Public School between the July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2014. The duration of the out-of-home placement could be brief (e.g. a few days) or across multiple years.

Reported school transfers occurred in the same year as an out-of-home placement. Patterns of within and between Administrative Units transfers are based on the sequence recorded in school records and school district codes.

Frequency of entries and exits to or from facility schools and juvenile detention centers were based on school entry codes as reported by the receiving school or district.

## Acknowledgment:

The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305H15007 to the University of Northern Colorado. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

## Endnotes:

---

<sup>i</sup> Out-of-home placements include congregate care settings such as group homes, residential childcare, detention and youth corrections, and psychiatric facilities, as well as family-like settings including foster care, certified and non-certified kinship, and even youth in independent living arrangements.

<sup>ii</sup> Colorado Department of Education Office of Special Education analyses of data from 2013-14.

<sup>iii</sup> Students in foster care and in special education receiving services at a hospital, private school, or through homebound instruction are not included in this count. These data are based on CDE Data Services collections.

<sup>iv</sup> Initial enrollment is operationalized as a student's first school record for the academic year. Based on pairwise analysis of district and school codes and school entry types as reported to Colorado Department of Education. School transfers do not include school entries from or exits to juvenile detention centers or facility schools.