

# Project Wrap Around Evaluation Report

## Evaluation of Program Functioning and Summative Outcomes during the 2018-2019 School Year

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### Introduction

Project Wrap Around is a federally mandated joint project between the **Tennessee Court Improvement Program** (CIP) and the **Tennessee Department of Children’s Services** (DCS), with **Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools** (MNPS) and the **Davidson County Juvenile Court** as collaborative partners. The goal of Project Wrap Around is to address barriers to **secondary education success** of MNPS high school students in DCS custody and Extension of Foster Care by providing **early collaboration and intervention** between MNPS and DCS.

Project Wrap Around was evaluated to examine program functioning and impact on summative outcomes during the 2018-2019 school year.

- 185** Students
- 75.4** Avg. # of school days in the project (43% of school year)
- 9<sup>th</sup> grade: **18%**  
10<sup>th</sup> grade: **24%**  
11<sup>th</sup> grade: **39%**  
12<sup>th</sup> grade: **18%**
- Dep./Neglect: **76%**  
Juvenile Justice: **14%**  
Ext. Foster Care: **10%**

During the 2018-2019 school year, students in Project Wrap Around were:

- In **DCS custody** – dependency/neglect, juvenile justice, or Extension of Foster Care;
- Under the jurisdiction of **Davidson County Juvenile Court**; and
- Attending an **MNPS high school**.

#### Data Sources

- Pre-Intervention Perception Survey
- Procedures Feedback Survey
- Project Notifications
- Wrap Around Meeting Forms
- Semi-Annual Transcript Review Data
- MNPS System Data Points
- Extension of Foster Care Data
- Focus Groups

## Key Findings: Short-Term Summative Outcomes

### 1. Information Exchange

**Goal: Improve information exchange regarding MNPS students in foster care.**


One of the primary goals of Project Wrap Around was to improve information exchange between DCS and MNPS. Project Wrap Around notifications from DCS to MNPS served not only to alert MNPS of a student entering or exiting the project, but also to provide valuable support information regarding the student. For each student entering the project, DCS caseworkers additionally completed a Wrap Around Referral Form that supplied contact information; high school placement history; and support information about academic progress, safety, permanency, and well-being.

 **387 Student Notifications** were sent from DCS to MNPS.

 **322 Wrap Around Referral Forms** from DCS to MNPS.

Focus groups with MNPS high school counselors reported:

- ✓ More information about DCS custody entries, placement moves, and FSW contact information;
- ✓ The Wrap Around Referral Form helped counselors support students; and
- ✓ Exchanging attendance records at the Wrap Around Meeting helped improve attendance.

 **Challenges.** Although information exchange regarding student placement moves improved during the 2018-2019 school year, missing or delayed notifications of students experiencing placement moves were still a concern and were addressed during project procedure fidelity meetings. When students were moved without proper notification or unenrollment procedures, students were often counted as dropouts at their prior school due to accruing excessive absences, which counted against the student and the prior school's graduation rate.

### 2. School Stability

**Goal: Improve school stability by minimizing school placement moves when in the student's best interest.**

Project Wrap Around established procedures for Wrap Around Meetings to be held for students experiencing substantial changes in their lives. Wrap Around Meetings were support meetings that were held in the student's school and included the student, school support staff, DCS staff, and the student's family. When the student's physical placement changed, project procedures indicated for the student to maintain stability in their school of origin until a Wrap Around Meeting could be held, which would also include, when

applicable, a best interest determination (BID) regarding the best school placement for the student.



- 44%** of students remained in **same school**.
- 38%** of students **moved schools one time**.
- 18%** of students **moved schools two or three times**.

After analyzing a sample of 49 WAM forms and BIDs from the 2018-2019 school year, **47%** recommended remaining in the **school of origin**, **27%** recommended moving to the **school of zone**, and **10%** recommended transfer to a **non-traditional school** to increase credit accrual and support.



**Challenges.** Although many students in Project Wrap Around experienced school stability during the 2018-2019 school year, students in **temporary out-of-home placements** experienced instability because a BID could not be made until a permanent out-of-home placement was identified for the student. Temporary placements were often referred to as “night-to-night” placements due to these placements sometimes changing daily. Of the **146 project entry notifications** sent during the 2018-2019 school year, **42%** were for students in **temporary placements** waiting for a permanent foster home to be identified. Students entering **DCS custody or returning from runaway** had the highest proportion of temporary placement (66% and 62% of project entry notifications, respectively).



**Challenges.** When a high school student on an MNPS academy pathway<sup>1</sup> changes schools, the student's **progress towards graduation** can be **disrupted** if the new school does not offer the same academy pathway – a factor that should be considered in BIDs.

Out of a sample of 53 Project Wrap Around students who moved schools during the 2018-2019 school year, **16 students** had **unplanned school moves** while earning credits towards an academy pathway.



**88%** students had **academy pathway progress disrupted** after unplanned school moves.



**13%** students **maintained progress** on their academy pathway after unplanned school moves.



One student had completed **two years** of Culinary Arts Academy credits when his academy pathway was disrupted.

<sup>1</sup> Academy pathways in MNPS zoned high schools offer students practical, career-oriented learning opportunities, dual credit, and industry certifications. In the 10th grade, students begin coursework towards their chosen academy pathway that is offered by the high school where they attend. Pathway credits can be lost if the student moves to a MNPS high school that does not offer the same academy pathway, which can put the student behind on graduation credits.

### 3. Coordination of Student Supports and Services

#### **Goal: Coordinate supports and align services with student needs.**

Much of the coordination of student supports and services occurred during Wrap Around Meetings, where school support personnel, family, and DCS staff came together to identify needs and create a success plan for the student.

Focus groups with MNPS high school counselors reported that students experienced:

- ✓ Increased access to school-based services, extracurriculars, and IEP support;
- ✓ Improved connection to support staff within the school; and
- ✓ Enhanced and individualized planning for student success.

### 4. Attainment and Tracking of Credits, Reducing Repeated Coursework, and Finding Undocumented Credits from Previously Attended Schools

#### **Goal: Support progress towards graduation and mitigate barriers to students obtaining credits.**

High school students in care sometimes struggle to maintain academic progress, especially if they are forced to move one or more times while in high school. Project Wrap Around procedures were designed to mitigate these challenges and improve students' progress toward graduation.

During the 2018-2019 school year, semi-annual transcript reviews were organized for students in the project before the school year began and after the fall and spring semesters. The purpose of the reviews was to track credits obtained, assess whether the student was on track for graduation, and make recommendations for educational supports. MNPS personnel, DCS Central Office, and DCS regional personnel participated in the reviews to support student success.

 Students gained **slightly more** credits in the fall.



 **More time** in the project resulted in **more credits** earned over the fall semester.

Focus groups with MNPS high school counselors reported **increased access to student records**, which enabled school counselors to:

- ✓ correctly place students in classes;
- ✓ create success plans with students; and
- ✓ create credit recovery plans, if needed.



**Challenges.** During the semi-annual transcript reviews, it was found that many students in Project Wrap Around had their progress toward graduation **impacted by education- and transcript-related oversights** during DCS in-house school enrollment or MNPS high school enrollment.

While analyzing transcripts, multi-disciplinary review teams found that **88%** of students with DCS in-house school history were affected by some type of DCS in-house school oversight. The most common oversight was that **credits earned at in-house schools had not been transferred** to the student's current transcript (**53%** of students with in-house school history).

Multi-disciplinary review teams found that **27%** of students were affected by some type of MNPS high school oversight. The most common oversight was that credits were **incorrectly backfilled onto the student's transcript**, e.g., a credit was missed during credit transfer from a previously attended school (**9%** of students).

## Key Findings: Intermediate Summative Outcomes

### 1. Timely High School Graduation

**Goal: Improve on-time graduation rates by eliminating barriers to academic success.**

 **71% of seniors** graduated. All senior graduations were **on time**.

 **3 juniors** got back on track and graduated **on time**.

Across the state in the same year, **60.6%** of Tennessee students in out-of-home care graduated from high school in four years. The graduation rate for the out-of-home care student group was **lower than any other subgroup** of young people represented in the *Tennessee Report Card*, including English language learners (71.9%), students with disabilities (72.5%), and homeless students (77.5%).<sup>2</sup> These graduation rate data further illustrate the **importance of**

<sup>2</sup> Tennessee. Department of Education. *State Education Report Card*. Nashville, TN. <https://reportcard.tn.gov/state/0/graduation>, 2019

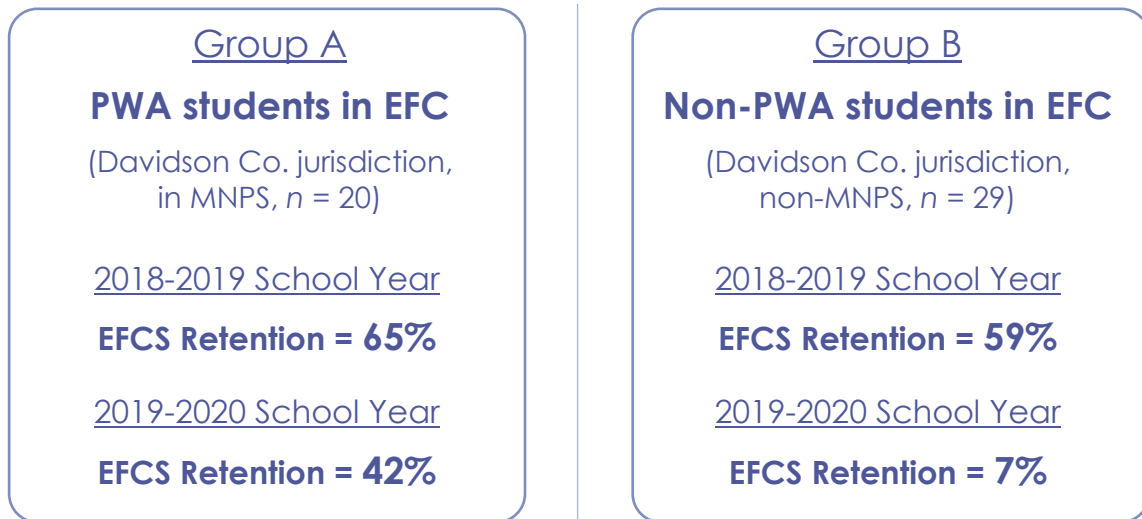
targeting educational supports and stability for the out-of-home care population – the principal objective of Project Wrap Around.

## 2. Retention of Extension of Foster Care Services

**Goal: Improve young adults’ retention of EFC Services by providing academic and other supports.**

The goal that inspired the creation of Project Wrap Around was improved retention of EFC Services for students ages 18 to 21 through providing educational support and student stability. For young adults in EFC, maintaining school enrollment over their EFC eligibility years can be challenging. This is especially true for young people who have experienced school instability in high school.<sup>3</sup>

Retention of EFC Services over a two-year period for EFC students in the project were compared to a comparison group. The comparison group of high school students who also received EFC Services during the 2018-2019 school year, but were not in the project and attended high school outside of MNPS. Both groups were under the jurisdiction of Davidson County Juvenile Court during the 2018-2019 school year.



<sup>3</sup> Clemmons & Sheesley (2016). *Every Transition Counts*. University of Northern Colorado. [https://www.unco.edu/cebs/foster-care-research/pdf/reports/Every\\_Transition\\_Counts\\_V.1\\_Interactive.pdf](https://www.unco.edu/cebs/foster-care-research/pdf/reports/Every_Transition_Counts_V.1_Interactive.pdf)

## Recommendations

Below are highlights of recommendations for strategic, operational, evaluation improvements, as well as highlights of recommendations for further development of the intervention and future interventions.

 <h3>STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All stakeholders should reinforce collaboration and investment at the central office and local levels.</li><li>• MNPS and DCS should partner with CIP to provide dedicated, continuous training on project procedures, effects of placement changes on educational progress, and factors required for consideration in best interest determinations.</li><li>• MNPS and DCS should provide additional support to ensure fidelity to project procedures and to remove barriers to educational success.</li></ul>	 <h3>OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• MNPS should strengthen support and collaboration with high school counselors to promote successful Wrap Around Meetings.</li><li>• DCS should provide accurate information to MNPS regarding which MNPS students are in foster care, students' placement changes, and safety concerns.</li><li>• DCS should identify a program manager to strengthen communication with DCS regional staff regarding school stability and updating educational records.</li></ul>
 <h3>EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fidelity to procedures should be tracked on a frequent and consistent basis.</li><li>• Focus groups should be conducted with students in the project and DCS staff to capture these perspectives.</li></ul>	
 <h3>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Project procedures should be expanded to all MNPS high school students in DCS custody, regardless of the county of jurisdiction. This will prevent disparate outcomes between the two groups of MNPS high school students in DCS custody.</li><li>• DCS should ensure that contract placement providers adhere to the school stability provisions of ESSA when moving students to placements in a different school zone.</li></ul>	 <h3>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTION</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Project Wrap Around should be expanded to a rural county, tailoring the framework procedures to the unique needs of a rural county.</li></ul>