

Student Information Tracking System (SITS) Executive Summary

Overview: A student-information sharing system was developed between the child welfare system and Los Angeles County's school districts to identify foster youth and share academic information.

Challenge: Public Laws 110-351 and 112-34 amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act (SSA) requiring that case plans include arrangements for ensuring the educational stability of a child while in foster care; however, in the County of Los Angeles, school districts were typically unaware of the foster youth population in their schools. Also, the process for requesting information from school districts was time-consuming and often ineffective. The Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) Eligibility Workers would complete a triplicate form with basic client and Children's Social Worker (CSW) contact information, and send it to the foster youth's last known school with a self-addressed stamped envelope. The schools would reply with a copy of the last report card on record. This process would take at least six weeks, and sometimes, it would not be completed at all. In addition, DCFS would request academic records in an effort to be compliant with amendments to Title IV-E of the SSA; however, requests were not considered by the school districts, citing confidentiality and privacy laws under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). As a result, clients were delayed in receiving support services, such as academic resources and extracurricular, cultural, and enrichment activities.

Innovative Solution: To mitigate the problem, DCFS developed and proposed the Student Information Tracking System (SITS) to local school districts. The SITS is a web-based application, accessible through DCFS' intranet, for CSWs to access their clients' educational information and was implemented in November 2012. CSWs are able to view former and current school enrollments, dates of enrollment, school administrator contact information, attendance, standardized test scores, and transcript data that includes: classes taken, earned credits, and work habit descriptions. SITS is also accessible to school district counselors, who have been granted special access to view foster youth data, through DCFS' website on the internet.

In January 2013, the Uninterrupted Scholars Act was passed, allowing records for all foster youth clients with open court cases to be made available. The SITS was enabled to access foster youth educational information and currently has records for 16,100 youth, and accounts for nearly 40% of actively enrolled school age clients under DCFS' jurisdiction. The SITS expects to be implemented with 70 of the 80 Los Angeles County school districts in 2017. Records for nearly 70% of clients under DCFS' jurisdiction will be accessible. Currently SITS receives educational data from 47 school districts.

Originality: The SITS is an original web-based application developed by DCFS. Once a data match is conducted and a foster youth is positively identified, the district returns academic, attendance, and standardized testing information to DCFS, where it is placed on

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the system and made available to CSWs in real time. All information contained in SITS is easily added to the Department's Child Welfare Services/Case Management System's case notes and reports by utilizing special features in the system.

Cost Effectiveness: The SITS was developed by DCFS staff and the cost was \$127,500; however, SITS has yielded an annual time savings of over 32,200 hours in productivity for DCFS staff (based on current level of implementation county-wide), which translates into an estimated annual soft savings of \$2,190,000. Soft savings calculations are based on multiplying the staff hours saved by their respective payroll title's hourly rate. No capital costs were incurred due to development being in-house.

Results: Implementation of SITS has resulted in increased operational efficiency for DCFS, as measured by minimized work hours, while having enhanced the services and enrichments entitled to clients. Schools are able to identify which students are in foster care, thus increasing available access to services and enrichments. CSWs have benefited, as they receive timely and accurate information with fewer hurdles, and are able to document current information in case notes and court reports.

In terms of current measurable time savings, prior to the SITS, it took the school districts nearly three hours to gather records per client. At a frequency of twice yearly for court reports, the total amount of time spent would have been approximately 96,600 work hours annually (two reports at three hours each per child x 16,100 children). Upon receiving client records from the school, it would take the CSWs an additional hour to send and process returned records per client. At a frequency of twice yearly for court reports, the total time spent would have been over 32,200 work hours annually (two reports at one hour per child x 16,100 children).

The SITS has eliminated the lengthy record retrieval process. Now, school districts and CSWs need to only search for the child's records in the SITS. Therefore, the combined savings in time for both school districts and CSWs equates to approximately 128,800 work hours annually. At full implementation with all 80 school districts, 40,000 requests for records are expected annually. By substituting 16,100 requests for 40,000 to represent the projected number of requests for records that will be received upon full implementation, the total time saved by school districts and CSWs, after having eliminated the record retrieval process via SITS, would have been approximately 320,000 work hours annually. In addition, efficiency has been afforded to the CSWs, as they are able to see records in real time and complete required reports with up-to-date information in a timely manner. These qualities have been a prime tool in improving the academic and social well-being of children under DCFS' jurisdiction, thus ensuring educational stability.

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