April 2010

EDUCATION ADVOCACY FOR FOSTER YOUTH IN WASHINGTON STATE

Washington State has funded education advocacy services for foster youth through the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) since 2006. The DSHS Children's Administration contracts with Treehouse, a Seattle-based nonprofit organization, to operate the statewide Education Advocacy Program (EAP). The EAP coordinators help foster youth and their caregivers navigate the K–12 school system. All Washington youth placed in out-of-home care are eligible to participate in the program.

The Children's Administration contracted with the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) to analyze the experiences of youth who receive services from the EAP. Ideally, such an analysis would examine youth K–12 outcomes, including days enrolled in school, changes in special education status, grade retention, suspensions and expulsions, test scores, and high school graduation. Unfortunately, the timeframe of this study did not allow us to track youth after they leave the program or to locate the youth in statewide K–12 databases that measure these outcomes.

This report, therefore, presents a simpler, descriptive analysis of youth who participated in the Education Advocacy Program during the 2007–08 and 2008–09 school years. The Institute obtained program data from Treehouse and foster care placement data from the Children's Administration. We analyzed these data to identify factors that influence which K–12 issues youth address in the EAP. We also examined variation by DSHS region.

Summary

Washington State's Education Advocacy Program (EAP) helps over 2,000 foster youth annually to resolve problems in school. EAP coordinators provide direct advocacy, working with school staff to address issues such as youth academic performance. The coordinators also consult with foster youth, caregivers, and social workers to help youth and their caregivers advocate for themselves in the K–12 system. The EAP also provides information and referrals to local resources.

The EAP is structured around four goals:

1) Improve access to services,
2) Stay enrolled in school and improve attendance,
3) Maintain academic progress, and
4) Reduce school disciplinary actions.

Of EAP youth who received direct advocacy or consultation services in 2007-08 and 2008-09, over half sought to improve access to services—often special education—and over a quarter worked to maintain school enrollment or academic progress. Approximately one-fifth of EAP youth addressed more than one goal.

This report describes factors—youth characteristics and foster care placement history—that influence which of the four goals youth address in the EAP. Using statistical analyses, we identified some characteristics associated with particular goals. For example, we found that boys were more likely than girls to address school discipline, and that the more time youth spent in foster care, the more likely they were to seek help to improve access to services. We also identified regional differences in which goals EAP youth addressed. We do not know whether regional differences were due to variation in youth issues, local practices, or both.

The analyses examined youth experiences while they are being served by the EAP. Future research could examine youth outcomes—such as grade retention, test scores, and high school graduation rates—after youth leave the program.

Educational Outcomes of Youth in Foster Care

Foster youth in Washington State face challenges to success in school and have poor educational outcomes, on average. In comparison with all Washington public K–12 students, foster youth:

- are more likely to have a reported disability that impacts learning (28 to 42 percent versus 10 percent);

- are more likely to be behind at least one grade level (10 to 14 percent versus 5 percent);

- are less likely to be in the same school during the school year (49 to 56 percent versus 88 percent); and

- have lower on-time high school graduation rates (26 to 44 percent graduate within four years versus 71 percent).[1]

The Education Advocacy Program

Coordinators for the Treehouse Education Advocacy Program (EAP) intervene on behalf of youth who face challenges to success in school. Children's Administration caseworkers make referrals to the program. The EAP has placed coordinators in each DSHS region. These coordinators provide **direct advocacy** for foster youth, as well as **consultation** and **information and referral services** to caregivers and social workers.

Direct advocacy is when EAP coordinators work with school staff to ensure that youth: stay enrolled in school when there is a home placement change, are on track to advance to the next grade level, are not subjected to excessive school disciplinary actions, or are receiving appropriate special education services, if needed.

Coordinators also provide **consultation,** where the coordinator coaches the caregivers, youth, and/or social workers so they can address K–12 conflicts or obstacles themselves. For example, a coordinator might explain to caregivers how to initiate a change in special education services.

Coordinators also provide **information about and referrals to local resources** or programs that may help youth with their educational goals, such as alternative education programs, community tutoring or mentoring services, and special education laws.

Approximately half the youth served by the EAP in 2008–09 received information and referral services (see Exhibit 1). As requested, this report focuses on direct advocacy (15 percent) and consultation services (34 percent).

Exhibit 1
Types of Services Provided to EAP Youth 2008–09
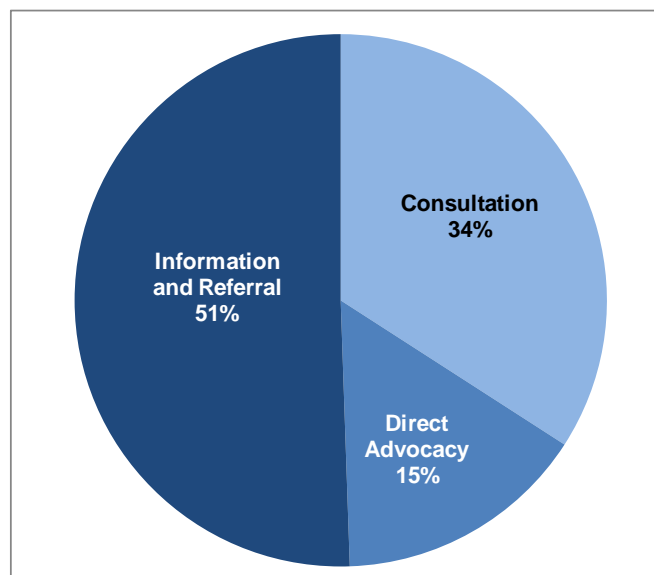
WSIPP, 2010

WSIPP analysis of data from the Treehouse Year End Report 2008–09. N=2,020

The EAP is a state-funded program. Washington State provided Treehouse with $650,000 annually in fiscal years (FY) 2007 through 2009; state funding for the EAP increased to $995,000 in FY 2010.[2] The program served 2,020 youth and provided 65 training sessions to 1,248 caregivers and social workers in 2008–09.[3] In the first half of the 2009–10 school year, the EAP served 1,157 youth.[4]

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[1] M. Burley (2009). *Graduation and dropout outcomes for children in state care (2005–2008).* Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document 09-11-3901.

[2] Treehouse also obtained private funding to enhance the EAP assessment tools and improve its data tracking system.
[3] *Treehouse Educational Advocacy Program Year End Report 2008–09*, Seattle: Treehouse.
[4] *Treehouse Educational Advocacy Program Mid Year Report 2009–10*, Seattle: Treehouse.

Youth Goals in the Education Advocacy Program

The EAP is an individualized program; the type of services youth receive depends on the issues they face. The program is structured around four goals:

1) Improve access to services,

2) Stay enrolled in school and improve attendance,

3) Maintain academic progress, and

4) Reduce school disciplinary actions.

While in the program, foster youth and their EAP coordinators choose to address one or more of these goals. The coordinators complete an assessment form for each youth, detailing the goal(s) addressed, whether consultation or direct services are provided, and the youth's progress every six months (in 2008–09) or three months (2007–08). Exhibit 2 describes how each of these goals is measured on the EAP assessment forms.[5]

Over half of EAP youth seek to increase access to services—often special education services—and over a quarter work on maintaining school enrollment or academic progress (see Exhibit 3).[6] Over one-fifth address more than one goal while in the program.

Exhibit 2
Education Advocacy Program Goals

Goal	How Measured in the EAP Assessment Forms*
Improve access to services	• Changes in the youth's Individual Education Plan (IEP) • Changes in special education status • Referrals for special education assessment • Connections with non-special education services (such as tutoring or mentoring)
Stay enrolled in school	• Re-enroll in school when there is a change in foster care placement that requires a change in school building • Re-enroll within three days • Use of McKinney-Vento[7] provisions, including help with transportation, to get to school
Maintain academic progress	• Stay on track to advance to the next grade level or graduate from high school
Reduce school discipline	• Reduce the number and duration of suspensions and expulsions

*Reported by EAP coordinators every six months (2008–09) or three months (2007–08)

Exhibit 3
Goals Addressed by EAP Youth

Access	Enrollment	Academic	Discipline	Multiple goals
58%	26%	31%	12%	22%
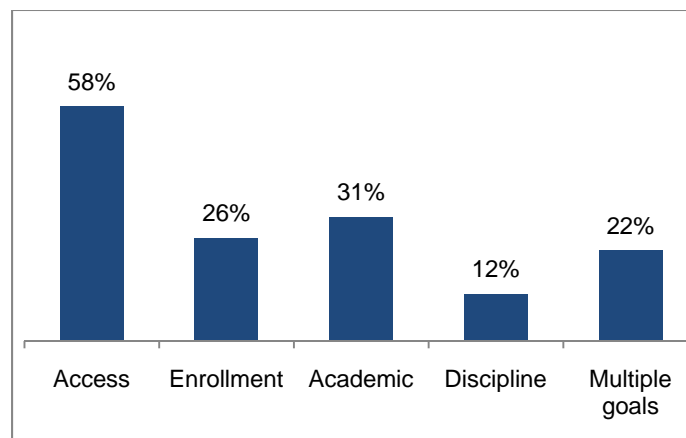
WSIPP, 2010

WSIPP analysis of EAP data, 2007–08 and 2008–09. N=1,774

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[5] The EAP assessment forms are available by request (contact the study author).
[6] Attendance data were not available for analysis.

[7] The federal McKinney-Vento Act provides assistance for homeless youth, as well as foster youth. The assistance includes help enrolling in a new school, transportation to school, and other educational and supplemental services.

Youth in the Education Advocacy Program

This report focuses on 1,774 youth served in the EAP in 2007–08 and 2008–09 and matched in the Children's Administration foster care placement history database. These youth represent 80 percent of those served during these years (20 percent were not matched with the foster care data).[8]

The EAP serves foster youth statewide. Exhibit 4 shows the distribution of EAP youth by DSHS region. Exhibit 5 displays the six DSHS regions.
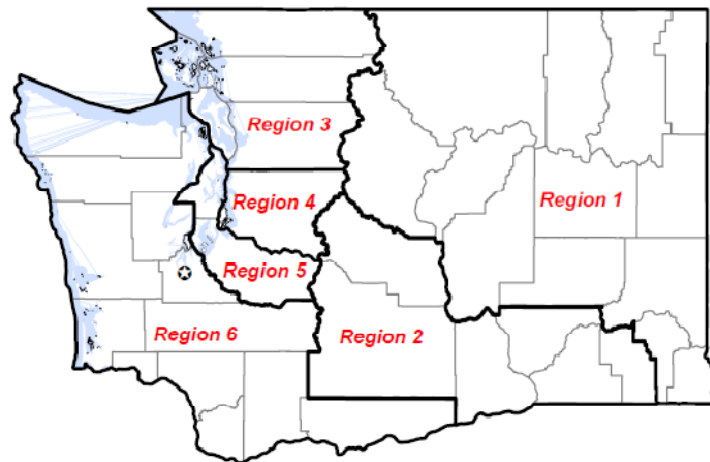
Exhibit 4
The EAP Serves Youth Throughout Washington State

WSIPP, 2010

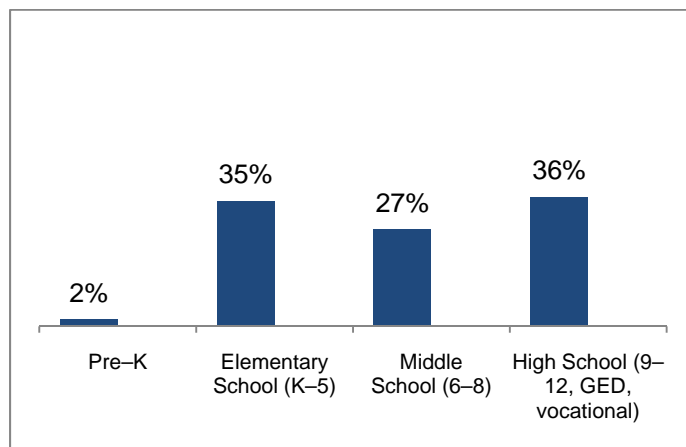WSIPP analysis of EAP data for 2007–08 and 2008–09. N=1,774

Exhibit 5
DSHS Regions
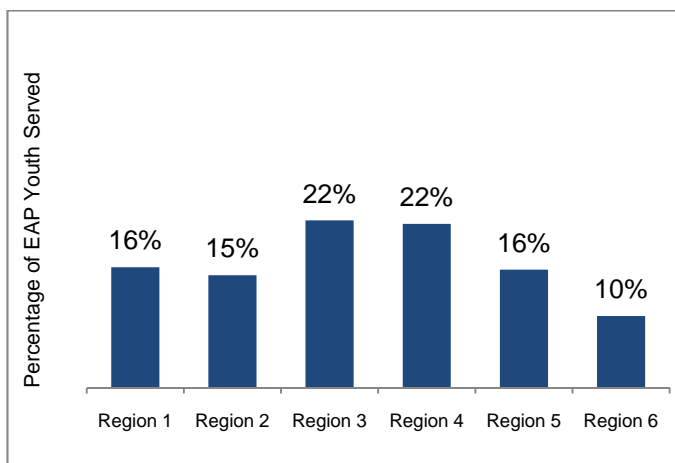
In 2007–08 and 2008–09, EAP youth were, on average, 12 years old and in middle school when they participated in the program. The program serves youth at all grade levels, from pre-K through high school (see Exhibit 6). Sixty percent of youth served were boys.

Exhibit 6
The EAP Serves Youth in Pre-K Through High School

WSIPP, 2010

WSIPP analysis of EAP data for the 2008–09 school year. N=769. Information about grade level was not collected in 2007–08.

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[8] Unduplicated counts. "Served" refers to youth who received direct advocacy services or consultation. The figures exclude youth who received information and referral services only. The data in this report are limited to the records of youth we were able to match in the Children's Administration foster care placement data; we matched 80 percent of EAP youth (1,774 out of 2,204) using children's names and dates of birth.

EAP youth were first placed outside the home at age seven, on average. These foster youth had an average of five out-of-home placements between January 1993 and August 2008, with a range of one to 53 placements.[9] Exhibit 7 shows variation in the average number of placements by DSHS region.
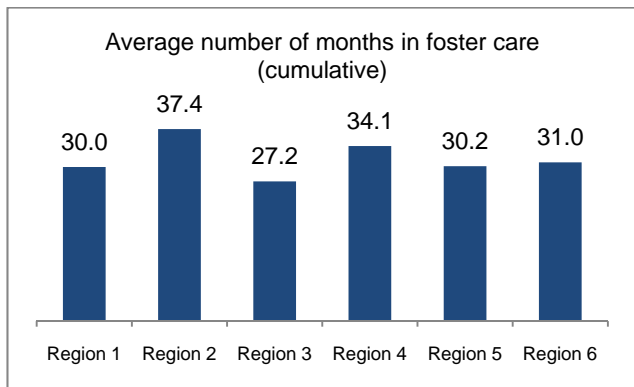
Over half (58 percent) of EAP youth were dependents of the state in 2007–08 and 2008–09. The remaining 42 percent had permanent adoption or guardianship plans established. Exhibit 9 displays the percentage of EAP youth who were dependents of the state, by region.

Exhibit 7
EAP Youth Have Had Multiple Out-of-Home Placements in All DSHS Regions
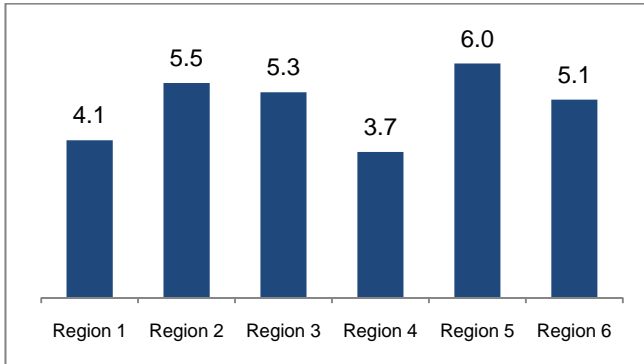
Region 1	4.1
Region 2	5.5
Region 3	5.3
Region 4	3.7
Region 5	6.0
Region 6	5.1

WSIPP, 2010

WSIPP analysis of foster care placement history data (1993–2008) from the DSHS Children's Administration. N=1,774

Exhibit 9
Over Half of EAP Youth are State Dependents in Most DSHS Regions

Region 1	58%
Region 2	59%
Region 3	65%
Region 4	60%
Region 5	55%
Region 6	42%

WSIPP, 2010

WSIPP analysis of foster care placement history data (1993–2008) from the DSHS Children's Administration. N=1,774

On average, EAP youth spent over 30 months in foster care (see Exhibit 8). This figure is cumulative; time spent in foster care is added up between placements.

For most EAP youth, the reason for their most recent out-of-home placement was neglect or physical or sexual abuse (see Exhibit 10).

Exhibit 8
Most EAP Youth Have Spent Over 30 Months in Foster Care

Average number of months in foster care (cumulative)

Region 1	30.0
Region 2	37.4
Region 3	27.2
Region 4	34.1
Region 5	30.2
Region 6	31.0

WSIPP, 2010

WSIPP analysis of foster care placement history data (1993–2008) from the DSHS Children's Administration. N=1,774

Exhibit 10
Most EAP Youth Were Placed Outside the Home Due to Neglect or Abuse

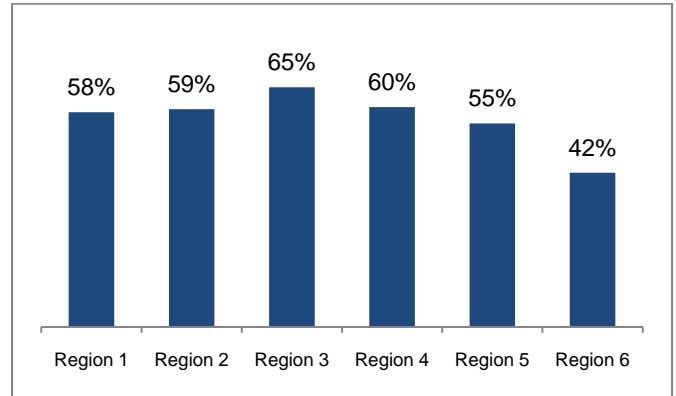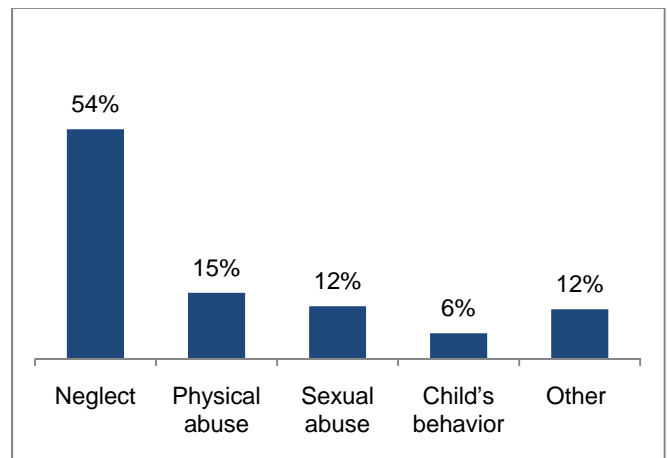|	
Neglect	54%
Physical abuse	15%
Sexual abuse	12%
Child's behavior	6%
Other	12%

WSIPP, 2010

WSIPP analysis of foster care placement history data (1993–2008) from the DSHS Children's Administration. N=1,774

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[9] Some of these placements are brief, for reasons such as respite care or hospital stays.

Just over half of EAP youth in 2007–08 and 2008–09 were white; about a third of the remaining youth were African American, Hispanic, or multiple races (see Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11
EAP Youth by Race/Ethnicity
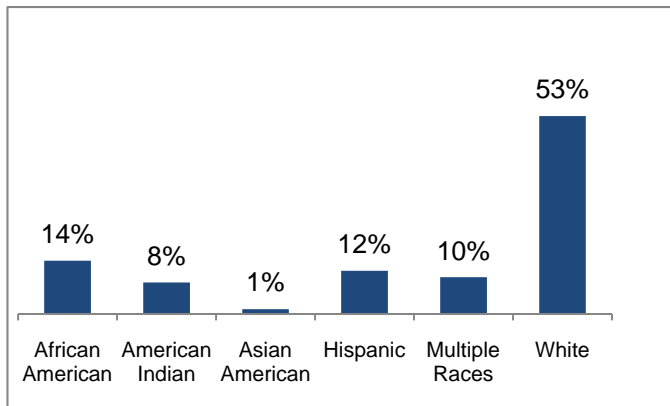
WSIPP, 2010

WSIPP analysis of EAP data for 2007–08 and 2008–09. N=1,774

What Characteristics Are Associated With Different Program Goals?

In its annual reports, Treehouse describes youth progress while in the program. For example, Treehouse reported that in 2008–09, of the 142 youth who worked on decreasing school disciplinary actions:

- 101 of these 142 youth (71 percent) experienced school discipline, with a total of 125 suspensions/expulsions;

- Of the 57 expulsions, EAP coordinators (or advocates that they trained) helped to dismiss or reduce 75 percent of those expulsions (reducing an expulsion means it was converted to a suspension or dismissed);

- Of the 68 suspensions, 41 percent were reduced.[10]

For this report, to increase understanding of youth in the EAP, we used a statistical technique called logistic regression to identify factors—youth characteristics and foster care placement history—associated with working on each of the four program goals. Using available data, we

[10] *Treehouse Educational Advocacy Program Year End Report 2008–09*, Seattle: Treehouse.

examined the characteristics described in this report and summarized in Exhibit 12.

Exhibit 12
Characteristics Examined in the Statistical Models

Youth Characteristics	Foster Care Placement History Characteristics
Gender Race/ethnicity Age when in the program	Age at the time of first out-of-home placement
	Number of out-of-home placements
	Days spent in foster care
	Whether youth were dependents of the state
	In which DSHS regions youth lived
	Reason for the most recent out-of-home placement (neglect, abuse, youth behavior, or other)

Youth Characteristics Associated With Program Goals. The statistical models allow us to identify youth characteristics that are associated with addressing particular EAP goals, holding all other characteristics constant.[11] We identified the following youth characteristics to be associated with the selection of EAP goals:

- Boys were <u>more</u> likely than girls to address **school discipline** (32 percent versus 18 percent) and <u>less</u> likely to work on **academic progress (**27 percent versus 37 percent);

- African American and American Indian youth were <u>less</u> likely than white youth to work on **academic progress** (30 and 25 percent versus 34 percent);

- Hispanic youth were <u>more</u> likely than white youth to work on **academic progress** (44 percent versus 34 percent) and <u>less</u> likely to address **access to services** (44 percent versus 62 percent);

[11] We determined a characteristic to be statistically significant if, in each logistic regression model: (a) the variable had a p-value of 0.05 or lower and (b) the overall model-fit statistic, the Area Under the Receiver Operating Characteristic Curve (AUC), was 0.700 or higher for one or both school years (2007–08 and 2008–09).

- American Indian youth were <u>less</u> likely than white youth to work on reducing **disciplinary actions** (7 percent versus 11 percent); and

- Older youth were <u>less</u> likely than younger youth to select the goal of increasing **access to services**, and <u>more</u> likely to address **school enrollment** and **academic progress**.

We did not find a statistically significant association between youth characteristics and whether youth worked on more than one goal at a time.

Foster Care Placement History Characteristics Associated With Program Goals. We identified foster care placement history characteristics statistically associated with addressing particular EAP goals as follows:

- Youth with more out-of-home placements were <u>more</u> likely than those with fewer placements to address **school enrollment** and <u>less</u> likely to **address academic progress**;

- Youth with more time in foster care were <u>more</u> likely than those with less time to select the goal of increasing **access to services**, and <u>less</u> likely to address **school enrollment**;

- Youth in state custody, versus those with permanent plans established, were <u>less</u> likely to address **school discipline**; and

- Youth placed in foster care due to sexual abuse, compared with those placed due to neglect, were less likely to address increasing **access to services** (47 percent versus 62 percent).

We did not find a statistically significant association between foster care placement history and whether youth worked on more than one goal at a time. We also did not find any statistically significant association between "reason for last placement: youth behavior" and whether youth addressed school disciplinary actions or other goals.

Variation Among DSHS Regions. The statistical models reveal variation among the six DSHS regions in terms of which goals youth address in the Education Advocacy Program.

In the logistic regression models, each DSHS region was compared with Region 4 (King County). Exhibit 13 shows how many youth addressed each goal in each region; significant differences from Region 4 are indicated with an asterisk. In Region 1, for example, 50 percent of youth selected the goal of increasing access to services, compared with 58 percent of Region 4 youth.

We do not know why there is variation among the regions. Differences in the program goals selected by youth in each DSHS region could be due to differences in the obstacles youth face or differences in practices. For example, youth in Region 1 might have more access to services than youth in Region 4, or, caseworkers or school staff might be more focused on that issue in Region 4. Whether the variation is due to youth issues, local practices, or both is unknown.

Exhibit 13
Program Goals Selected by Youth in Each DSHS Region

Region	N	Access	Enroll-ment	Acade-mics	Disci-pline
1	142	50%*	14%	49%*	9%
2	164	56%	26%	33%*	20%
3	213	69%*	35%*	25%	8%
4	238	58%	22%	29%	15%
5	146	50%*	35%*	18%*	7%*
6	104	64%	15%*	35%	11%*

* indicates a statistically significant difference from Region 4 (p < .05), controlling for youth characteristics. N=1,774

WSIPP analysis of EAP data for 2007–08 and 2008–09 and foster care placement history data from the DSHS Children's Administration.
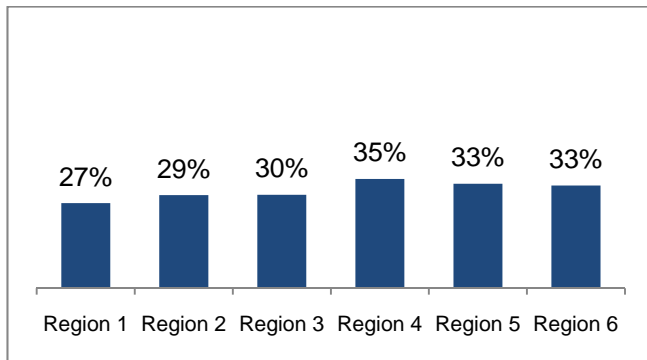
Level of Service: Consultation or Direct Advocacy

In 2008–09, 69 percent of EAP youth received consultation and 31 percent direct advocacy services.[12] The following characteristics were associated with receiving direct advocacy (versus consultation), while controlling for other characteristics:

- Boys (compared with girls, 34 versus 25 percent);

- American Indian youth (compared with white youth, 30 versus 27 percent);

- Dependents of the state (compared with non-dependents, 67 versus 72 percent); and

- Regions 1, 2, and 3 (compared with Region 4; see Exhibit 14).

Again, we do not know whether regional variation is due to different issues that youth face and/or to local practices.

Exhibit 14
Percentage of Youth Receiving Direct Advocacy (versus Consultation) Services by DSHS Region, 2008–09

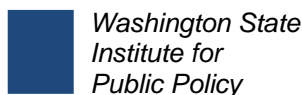|	
Region 1	27%
Region 2	29%
Region 3	30%
Region 4	35%
Region 5	33%
Region 6	33%

WSIPP, 2010

WSIPP analysis of EAP data for 2008–09. N=769

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[12] In 2007–08, the EAP did not collect information about whether youth received consultation or direct advocacy services on the assessment form.

Results Should Be Interpreted With Caution.

While we do identify some characteristics associated with the different issues youth address in the Education Advocacy Program, there are other, unmeasured factors that contribute to variation in youth experiences in the EAP. Additionally, because not all EAP youth are located in the foster care placement data, the statistical results may not be generalizable to the full population.

Youth Outcomes Research

As noted earlier, ideally, we would examine how youth characteristics and experiences in the program are associated with outcomes—changes in special education status, grade retention, suspensions and expulsions, test scores, and high school graduation. This analysis would be possible if (a) enough time were allowed to follow up with students after they leave the program and (b) Treehouse continued to collect identifying information about participating youth. Individual identifiers—such as the unique numbers used by the Children's Administration, as well as name, date of birth, gender, ethnicity, school district, and school building—can be used to link program and foster care data to the K–12 outcomes data collected by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

For further information, contact Annie Pennucci at (360) 586-3952 or pennuccia@wsipp.wa.gov