

Kids In School Rule! Today & Tomorrow
May 2015



KISR!

**A collaborative project
in Cincinnati, Ohio
promoting school
stability and success
for students in child
protection**

This report was made possible through the technical assistance of the ABA Center on Children and the Law, Legal Center for Foster Care and Education. To learn more about ways the Legal Center can support your work visit www.fostercareandeducation.org.

In recent years, the Center has been integral to our achievements in creating systemic changes that promote education success and stability for students in foster care, and to the development of cross-systems data collection. In addition, we place tremendous value on the Center as a resource to keep us informed about changes in federal laws, regulations and other communications that have tremendous implications for our work. There is no other entity that effectively fills the need for leadership in the intersection of education and child welfare.

KISR! Leadership Team

KISR! EXPLAINED

Kids in School Rule! (KISR!) is a **collaboration to promote improved education outcomes** for students in Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) who are either in the custody of the Hamilton County, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (JFS) or under agency protective supervision, and attend CPS.

KISR! is a **partnership** between:

- Cincinnati Public Schools
- Hamilton County JFS
- Hamilton County Juvenile Court
- Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati

The program seeks to boost education outcomes for KISR! students through child specific efforts, systemic improvements, and data-driven interventions. These include:

- **Increase school stability**
- **Improve academic achievement**
- **Enhance school engagement**
- **Reduce disruptions and removals from school for discipline or other reasons**
- **Improve coordination among systems, including integrated data sharing**
- **Improve direct communication about individual students**

For children in foster care, school should be a place of stability, consistency, and valuable opportunities. KISR! is designed to ensure that happens with objectives aligned with research demonstrating that a strong school connection can have a powerful impact on the lives and futures of children in the child protection system. KISR! transcends barriers that may exist between child welfare and education systems.

Increasing positive school experiences, maintaining continuity, and maximizing opportunities to connect in a stable education environment propel children in foster care to become successful members of society.

We are pleased to share this first Summary Report, which includes: an overview of our program; a focused look back at the 2013-2014 school year; highlights of trends over multiple years of the project including some notable highlights and achievements; and goals for the future of KISR!.

This past school year, 100% of the KISR! 3rd graders met the reading guarantee, and 83% of KISR! students achieved 90% attendance. Over the past three years, KISR! achieved a 97% graduation rate for eligible seniors. This kind of positive outcome data demonstrates that investment in education is a powerful influence in maximizing the potential of children in foster care.

John M. Williams,
Administrative Judge,
Hamilton County Juvenile
Court

PROJECT DETAILS AND HIGHLIGHTS

KISR! was launched as a pilot in 22 Cincinnati Public Schools in 2008 and expanded to all 57 schools in January 2012¹. Since its inception, new interventions and innovations to support school success and stability have been added. Key components of KISR! include:

- High-level commitment from all KISR! partners who serve on a dedicated **Leadership Team** that meets monthly. The leadership team creates the core infrastructure that supports effective communication among partners to resolve problems, KISR! data-driven interventions and strategies to develop and expand, and the quality of the program to improve and flourish.
- Leadership structure that relies upon Legal Aid's critical perspective and relationship with each agency and the Court to ensure accountability by each partner.
- A CPS **KISR! Liaison** is identified by each school. The individual school Liaison communicates regularly with the JFS Education Specialist assigned to that school and students.
- Two **JFS KISR! Education Specialists** link KISR! Liaisons with the JFS caseworker and assist in education-related issues.
- The integrated real-time data dashboard, the **Learning Partner Dashboard (LPD)**, maintained by CPS, incorporates data from both CPS and JFS, and allows for quality case management decisions using up-to-date education information. The LPD allows KISR! to track trends and overall progress of the program and its participants.
- Immediate access by JFS Education Specialists to updated education information via **Power School** and the LPD, facilitating sharing of necessary information between the KISR! partners and can feed into up to date education information included in KISR! Court reports. A customized



All members of the Leadership Team have been critical, but the role of Legal Aid as the glue that guides the Leadership Team, holds the project partners accountable, and keeps the program moving forward, cannot be underestimated.

Carla Guenthner
Chief Magistrate

¹ As of 2014 CPS is comprised of 56 schools.

Judicial Bench Card for Education Success, used by all eight Juvenile Court Magistrates who preside over abuse and neglect cases, which promotes attention and court action on educational issues every time a KISR! student comes before the Court.

- KISR! conducts numerous trainings each year related to the program. **Trainings** reach hundreds of professionals, including Magistrates, caseworkers and supervisors, Guardians ad Litem (GALs), Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), mentors, foster parents, KISR! CPS Liaisons, school psychologists, school social workers, and principals. **Legal Aid attorneys** conduct numerous trainings on education law and school issues. **JFS also conducts trainings** on the KISR! program.
- **Legal Aid represents students on issues related to** enrollment, school discipline, and special education when referred by JFS or others.
- Partnership with the **Higher Education Mentor Initiative (HEMI)**, a University of Cincinnati program designed to encourage foster youth to pursue higher education after high school, and to provide support towards that goal. The HEMI recruits, trains, and supports mentors who have been assigned to KISR! students.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

- Revised and expanded **Education Court Report** tool and **Judicial Bench Card for Education Success** to focus caseworkers and the Court on key areas needed for education stability and success.
- Developed **key data indicators** and expanded Learning Partner Dashboard as the vehicle to share student-specific data about all KISR! students, and to generate reports for analysis to guide future project enhancements and improvements.
- Created new **Operations Manual and Liaison Handbook** as a resource for JFS Specialists, CPS Liaisons and Principals describing special procedures, and outlining job expectations and responsibilities that enhance the KISR! project infrastructure.
- Championed **“No Barrier Enrollment” process** to ensure seamless transitions and timely enrollment of KISR! students.
- Established a streamlined process to ensure **waiver of school fees** for KISR! students, to avoid delays in records access or transfer due to lack of fee payment.
- Devised a **model for county- and state-wide efforts around foster care and education**, which includes the capacity to promote additional opportunities for replication, as data supports successful Project initiatives.

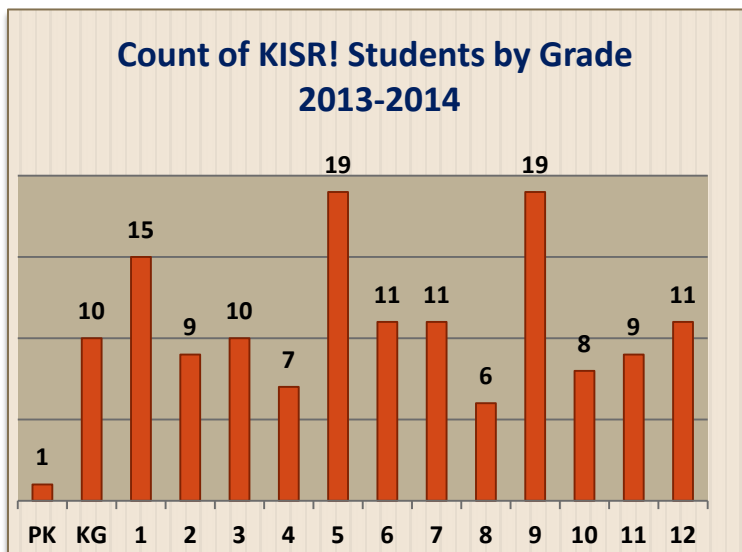
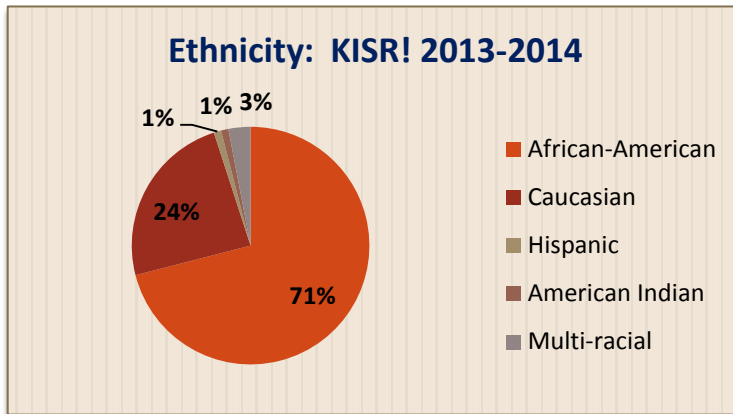
I am so grateful that KISR! exists. KISR! advocated on my behalf to make sure that I did not fall behind or fall through the cracks. I am very thankful that I had someone to advocate for me and my education. KISR! is a great program and I don't know where I would be without it.

KISR! Alumna
(also a HEMI participant, high school graduate, college student, and employee of the child welfare agency)

2013-14 YEAR END SNAPSHOT

This is the first time KISR! has created a school year snapshot report, providing a quick look at the students the project serves and some of the most relevant education related outcomes.

KISR! served a total of 233 students throughout the course of the 2013-2014 school year. Remember that some KISR! students remain in the program for the full school year, while many enter or exit during the school year. To take a deeper look at the profile of children we have chosen to review a point in time – the last day of the school year—to give a snapshot of the 146 KISR! students enrolled on that day.



KISR! 2013-14 FAST FACTS

146

Total number of students in KISR! on the last day of the 2013-14 school year

83%

In JFS custody

17%

In protective supervision

40%

With an IEP (compared to 18.5% of general student population)

3%

Identified as gifted (compared to 10% of general student population)

4%

With 504 plans (compared to 1% of general student population)

76%

Remained in just one school (compared to 91% of general student population)

62%

With no disciplinary referrals (compared to 74% general population)

I've been an Education Specialist working with youth in the KISR! program for over 6 years. It has been a great addition to the work I already love to do in child welfare. The program has had a huge impact on my professional perspective in addition to its support for the students involved -- it now comes naturally to make the education of all youth in foster care a priority. The effective collaboration among the project partners has been a tremendous help in advocating and supporting foster youth success.

KISR! Education Specialist
Hamilton County, Department of Job
and Family Services



KISR! 2013-14 FAST FACTS

100%

Students enrolled in their first high school of choice

100%

Enrollment of new students at beginning of 2013/14 school year

100%

3rd graders who met reading guarantee (compared to 97.1% of 3rd graders District-wide)

91%

Graduated (compared to 73.6% of seniors District-wide)

83%

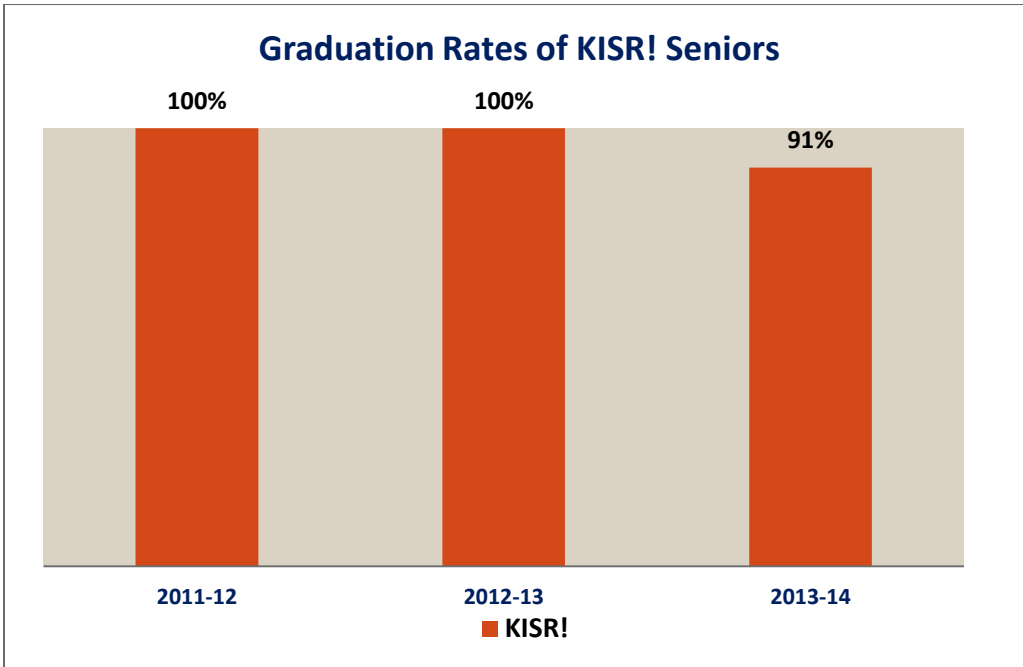
KISR! students achieved 90%+ attendance (compared to 88% students District-wide)

100%

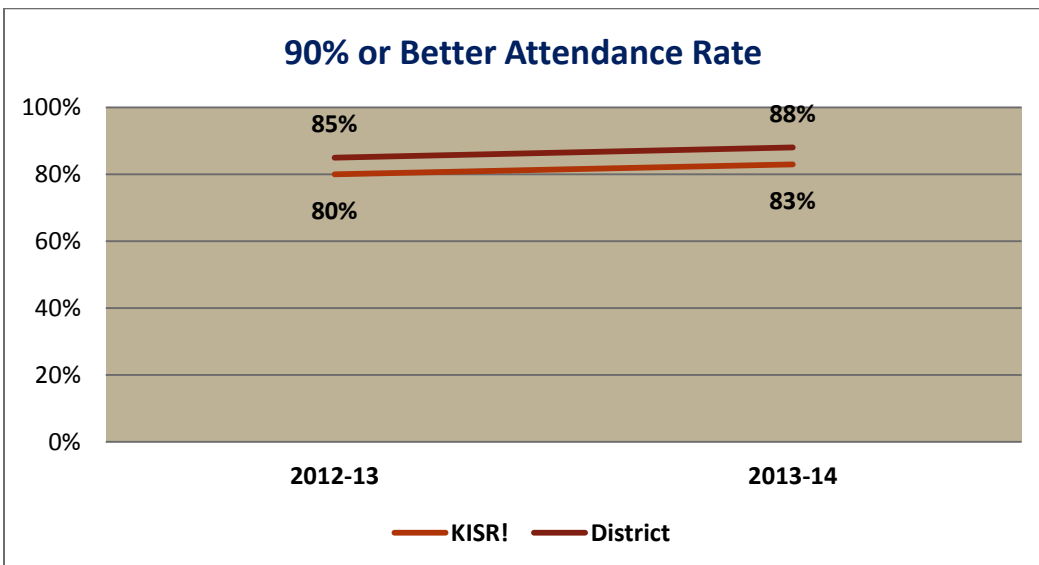
Of the 18 KISR! students proposed for expulsion and referred to Legal Aid Services, successfully remained in school.

KISR! --TRENDS OVER TIME

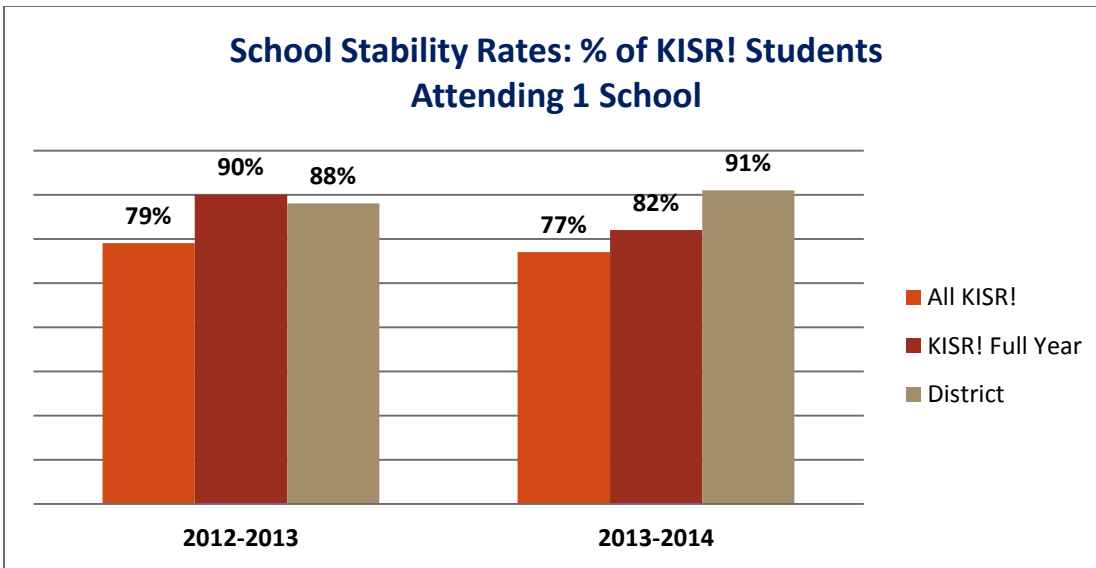
Graduation Rates: Over the last 3 years of the program, 97% of eligible KISR! Seniors graduated. This exceeds the graduation rate of CPS students overall and is far greater than the rates of youth in care completing high school across the nation.



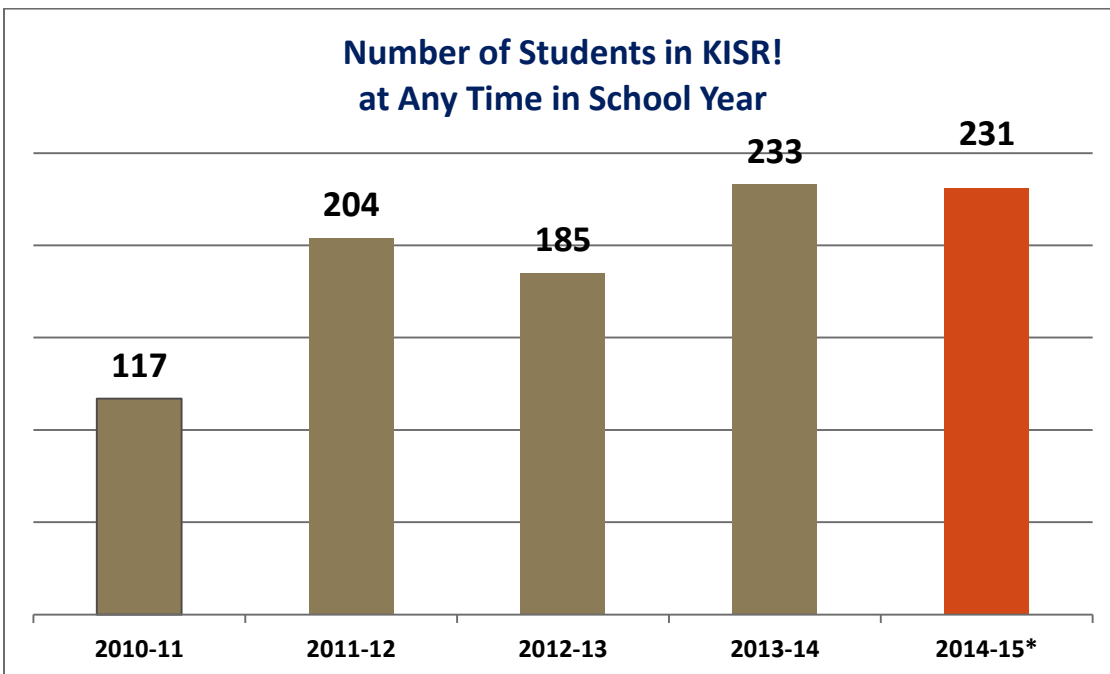
Attendance Rates: 83% of KISR! students attended 90% or more days in 2013-14, coming close to the CPS general student rate.



School Stability: While some school changes may be needed and in a student’s best interest, the KISR! program places a priority on school stability. Over the last 2 school years, 75% or more of KISR! students have attended just one school each year within Cincinnati Public Schools. Stability rates for KISR! students further increase for those KISR! students who have been supported by the KISR! program for the full school year, compared to KISR! students who were served for a portion of the year.

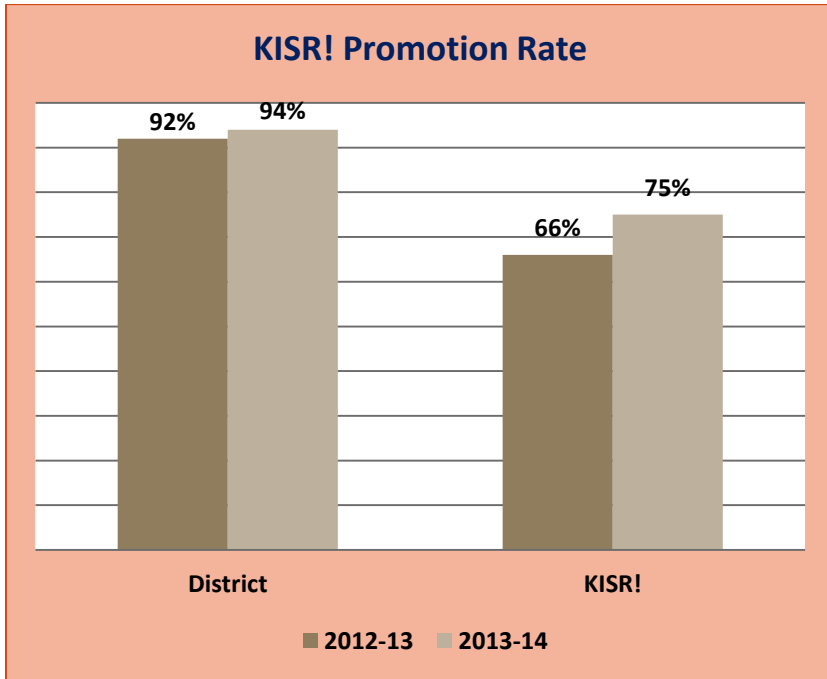


Number of KISR! Students: The total number of KISR! students served each school year is steadily increasing.

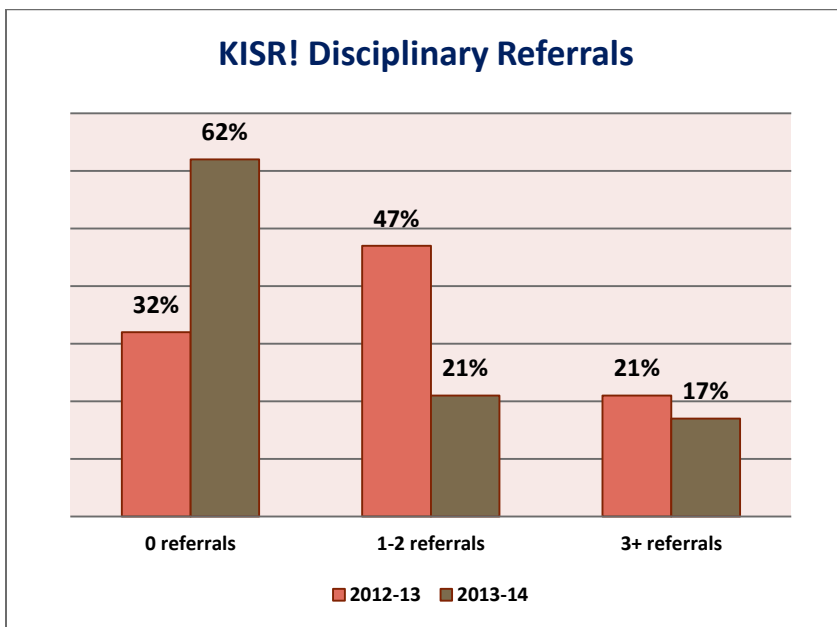


*as of April 2015

Promotion Rates: For KISR! students, there was a marked increase in promotions to the next grade in the 2013-14 school year.



Disciplinary Referrals: Disciplinary referrals of KISR! students decreased by 50% between 12/13 and 13/14 school years with a large percentage of KISR! students experiencing no referrals.



One of our 11th grade KISR! students has made **SIGNIFICANT** progress in the past 2 years. He had a history of behavior issues and academic problems, but then set a goal for last quarter of straight A's—and achieved it! The various KISR! supports in combination with efforts by his foster parent have made a huge difference.

KISR! CPS Liaison,
School Psychologist

WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR KISR!

As the Leadership Team looks ahead to 2015, some early trends have been noted as the 2014-15 year has begun. Most significantly is a potential increase in the number of students served through KISR!. **As of April 2015, 231 students** have taken part in the KISR! during the 2014-15 school year, and there are still several months left in the year. These numbers suggest that 2014-15 school year will serve the largest number of students over the life of the program.

Once again, KISR! reports **100% enrollment of KISR! students in August 2014**, starting off strong for the 2014/15 school year. We look forward to reporting on the full year of data outcomes for the 2014/15 school year at the beginning of 2016.

Until then, the KISR! leadership team will be using the data available to them to continue to focus on the stability, achievement and success of current KISR! students, and to refine their systemic goals for school year 2014-15. These fall under three main areas.

CPS welcomed the opportunity to design and participate in KISR! from the outset. The collaboration has solidified communications between these agencies and CPS for the benefit of CPS students. CPS has taken this student-centric approach and what we have learned about supporting education stability and success for foster youth, and seeks to apply these practices to improve the education of all CPS students.

William M. Myles, Assistant
Superintendent, CPS

1. Continue to sustain existing successful model

and interventions that have been proven effective through review of the data.

These include:

- Continue to support all liaisons and specialists in their responsibilities to serve KISR! students, given the growing numbers of students in the program.
- Maintain barrier-free enrollment practices and emphasis on school stability, including quality best interest decision-making.
- Continue focus on improved academic performance, including the provision of support to current seniors for successful graduation and focus on early elementary KISR! students to ensure they meet the 3rd grade reading guarantee.

2. Continue to analyze existing data generated by the Learning Partner Dashboard and other systems to identify specific opportunities that need deeper exploration.

This annual report is an important step; the KISR! leadership team is committed to an ongoing focus on the rich data to identify other areas needing attention.

For example, the current data has sparked the leadership team to ask the following questions:

- As the number of students served by the program increases, what other considerations need to be made to continue the high quality of interventions and services available?
- Can we take a deeper look at our KISR! students in protective supervision? What trends do we see with this subset of KISR! students?
- As plans to expand KISR! to include students educated in separate facilities continue, what student data will we need to thoughtfully plan for expansion? How will we track the outcomes of this group of students separately?
- As leadership continues to explore plans for improving how education decision making is addressed for KISR! students (e.g., parent role; surrogate parents for special education students; role of GALs, attorneys), what data needs to be gathered to track and improve practice in this area?
- What does KISR! data show for retention rates between 9th and 10th grades? Does it mirror the high rate of retained status for all CPS students going from grade 9 to grade 10?
- Can we take a closer look at KISR! students with solid standardized test scores but poor course work/grades? How many students fit this criteria? What kinds of supports could benefit this group?

My wish for children in our care is the same any parent would have for their own: that they attend good schools, receive a quality education, learn without distractions or barriers and receive the same opportunities as their peers. I want them to flourish! Kids in School Rule! makes all of that possible for our children in foster care.

Moira Weir, Director of Hamilton County Job and Family Services

3. Seek additional funding to support the Implementation of new interventions and enhancements, from current data analysis. Some examples include:

- Build capacity within CPS to educate students who have experienced trauma – which is virtually all students in foster care -- and seek funds to re-initiate Trauma Informed Consultation.
- Expand HEMI mentoring and tutoring to KISR! 9th and 10th graders.
- Provide targeted academic supports to improve GPAs.
- Seek funds to engage KISR! students in more extracurricular activities that will improve school engagement.
- Disseminate best practices/lessons learned from KISR! to other districts through the Collaboration for Education Success of Students in Foster Care.



KISR! has done what so many jurisdictions dream of doing---to coordinate across systems, share data that helps drive decisions, and ultimately improve the lives and education outcomes of children in foster care. KISR! is a replicable project – but requires dedicated leaders in all agencies like the ones in Cincinnati to be committed to the program and the education success of the students they serve.

Kathleen McNaught,
American Bar Association, Center on
Children and the Law, Legal Center for
Foster Care and Education