

**ADDRESSING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS  
OF ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILDREN AND CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE**

**Recommendations for Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act**

**Preventing and Identifying Child Maltreatment: The Role of Teachers**

The nation's teachers play a significant role in identifying children who might have suffered abuse or neglect as the victims of maltreatment. In every state in the country, teachers are mandated by state law, specifically (or by inclusion, in five states: NJ, NC, RI, UT and WY) to report suspected instances of child maltreatment. In making these reports, teachers assist in efforts to prevent further harm to children by bringing them to the attention of child protective services (CPS) agencies in their communities.

According to the most recent annual survey of information on child abuse and neglect reports, *Child Maltreatment 2008*, released in April 2010, over half the reports are made by professionals who encounter the alleged victim through their occupations. Of those professionals, which include legal staff, police officers, social services staff, medical staff, mental health workers, child daycare workers, and foster care providers, teachers comprise the largest group.<sup>i</sup>

Similarly, the *Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*, also released in 2010, says: "School staff predominated as a source of recognition for maltreated children." However, the incidence study notes that school personnel, more than professionals in health and law enforcement making reports, stated that they were not always allowed to report suspected maltreatment directly to CPS but were required to go through a school representative – often the principal. Of the teachers participating in the study, 20% said their schools did not allow them to report directly to CPS.<sup>ii</sup>

**Recommendation:** The National Child Abuse Coalition recommends that the ESEA reauthorization include provisions to:

- mandate training to educate teachers, classroom aides, school social workers, guidance counselors and other school personnel better about identifying children who have been abused, neglected, or otherwise exposed to violence, including procedures for referrals and reporting to child protective services when appropriate;
- prohibit local school policies which bar teachers and other school personnel from reporting suspected abuse or neglect directly to child protective services without first going through another layer of authority within the school system; and
- provide professional development to teachers and other school personnel to familiarize them with early warning signs of the risk of academic failure based on symptoms of victimization of abuse or neglect or exposure to violence at home or in the community, as well as best practices for intervening at the individual, classroom, school and community level.

**Ensuring Educational Equity for Children Exposed to Violence: Access to Services**

Students with unstable home lives require extra stability and support while they are at school to enable them to stay in class and keep up with their peers. For a student, simple things like accommodations or support from a school counselor can mean the difference between the

despair of falling behind and the fulfillment of meeting high expectations. Addressing the social, emotional and developmental needs of children exposed to violence – community violence, family violence or as victims of maltreatment – with particular attention to those who may inappropriately end up in special education, requires a range of services the school might provide for the benefit of those students and help to ensure that children arrive at school developmentally ready to succeed.

It is increasingly understood that dropping out of school is not an isolated event but is a process that begins in early childhood and is impacted by cumulative factors,<sup>iii</sup> and that the distractions that youth experience from exposure to violence disrupt cognitive development.<sup>iv</sup> Researchers have suggested that community violence was associated with poor academic performance related to depressive symptoms and disruptive behavior in the classroom and may interfere with children's developing capacities regulate and control behavior.<sup>v</sup>

Research has long shown that abused and neglected children suffer poor prospects for success in school. Typically, abused and neglected children in school exhibit poor initiative, a disproportionate amount of incompetence and failure, and inappropriate behavior in peer and adult relationships.<sup>vi</sup>

Research into the emotional development of abused children reveals children with negative self-concepts, low self-esteem, aggressive behavior, difficulty in relating to peers and adults, impaired capacity to trust others, and general unhappiness – all characteristics of a child not expected to do well in the classroom.<sup>vii</sup>

**Recommendation:** The National Child Abuse Coalition recommends that the ESEA reauthorization include provisions to:

- authorize school-based treatment, including counseling services, and preventive interventions, and coordinate with existing social, health, mental health and other services needed, including the involvement of parents, in order to improve the educational achievement of children at elevated risk for abuse or neglect or for exposure to violence at home or in the community.
- support the development of early warning systems that help school districts to identify and intervene, at the earliest age possible, when young children are at risk of academic failure, based upon data on chronic absence, academic achievement, and classroom behavior.

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<sup>i</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families. *Child Maltreatment 2008*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Sedlak, A.J., Mettenburg, J., Basena, M., Petta, I., McPherson, K., Greene, A., and Li, S. (2010) *Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4): Report to Congress, Executive Summary*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

<sup>iii</sup> Alexander, K.L., Entwisle, D.C., & Kabbani, N.S. (2001). The Dropout process in life course perspective: Early risk factors at home and school. *Teachers College Record*, 103.

<sup>iv</sup> Horn, J.L., & Trickett, P.K. (1998). Community violence and child development: a review of research. In P. Trickett & C. Schellenbach (Eds.), *Violence against children in the family and the community*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

<sup>v</sup> Schwartz, D., & Gorman, A. (2003). Community violence exposure and children's academic functioning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95.

<sup>vi</sup> S.R. Morgan (1976). The Battered Child in the Classroom. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*.

<sup>vii</sup> E.M. Kinard (1979). The Psychological Consequences of Abuse for the Child. *Journal of Social Issues*.