

The Cal-Learn Program in the County of Los Angeles: Process and Barriers

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What is Cal-Learn?

Cal-Learn is a mandatory program, implemented by the State of California in 1995, and administered at the County level, designed to reduce long-term welfare dependency among pregnant and parenting teens in CalWORKs families by providing them with the necessary support and resources to earn a high school diploma.

Evaluating the Cal-Learn Process

This presentation is based on a process evaluation that is an outgrowth of concerns the Board of Supervisors expressed in 2003 about outcomes for teens participating in the Cal-Learn program. The evaluation provides a detailed description of the functionality of the Cal-Learn program and then focuses on the person-level and program-level barriers that impede the progress participants are able to make in school.

Data Sources

1) Focus group Interviews

- Case managers at the Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP) agencies;
- GAIN Services Workers (GSWs) at DPSS;
- Program Directors at the AFLP agencies;

2) Short Survey

- Case Managers at the AFLP agencies;

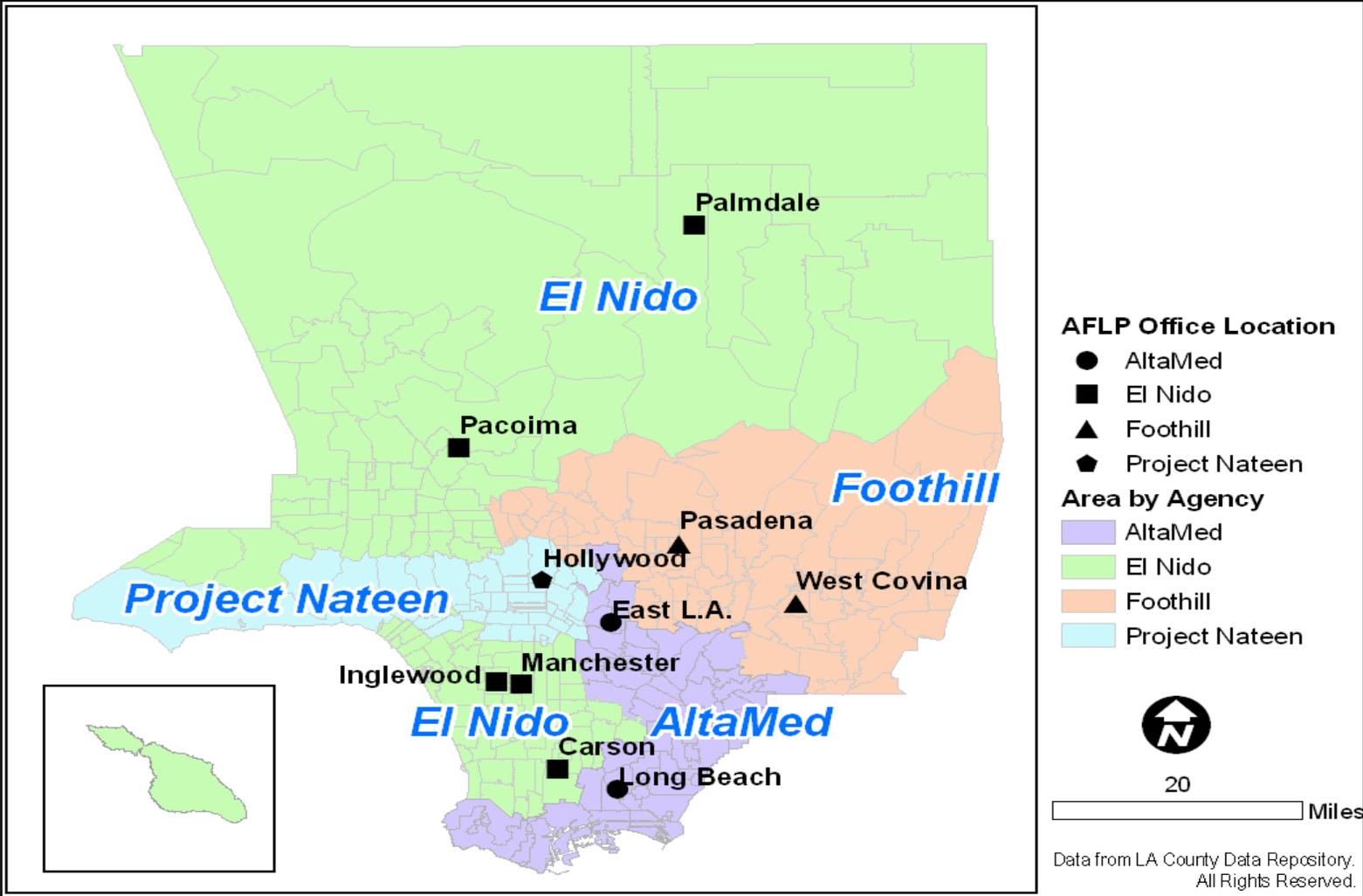
The Cal-Learn Program

- The program uses a combination of intensive case management and financial incentives;
- The program targets pregnant and parenting teens under 19 years of age who have not completed their high school diploma or equivalent;
- There is no minimum age limit for Cal-Learn;
- The program is open to both teen mothers and fathers;

Central Program Feature: Case Management

- In the County of Los Angeles, DPSS contracts with four Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP) agencies to provide case management to approximately 2,900 Cal-Learn participants.
- Each AFLP agency covers a geographic region or regions, and together the agencies have offices dispersed throughout the County.

Cal-Learn Adolescent Family Life Program Service Areas

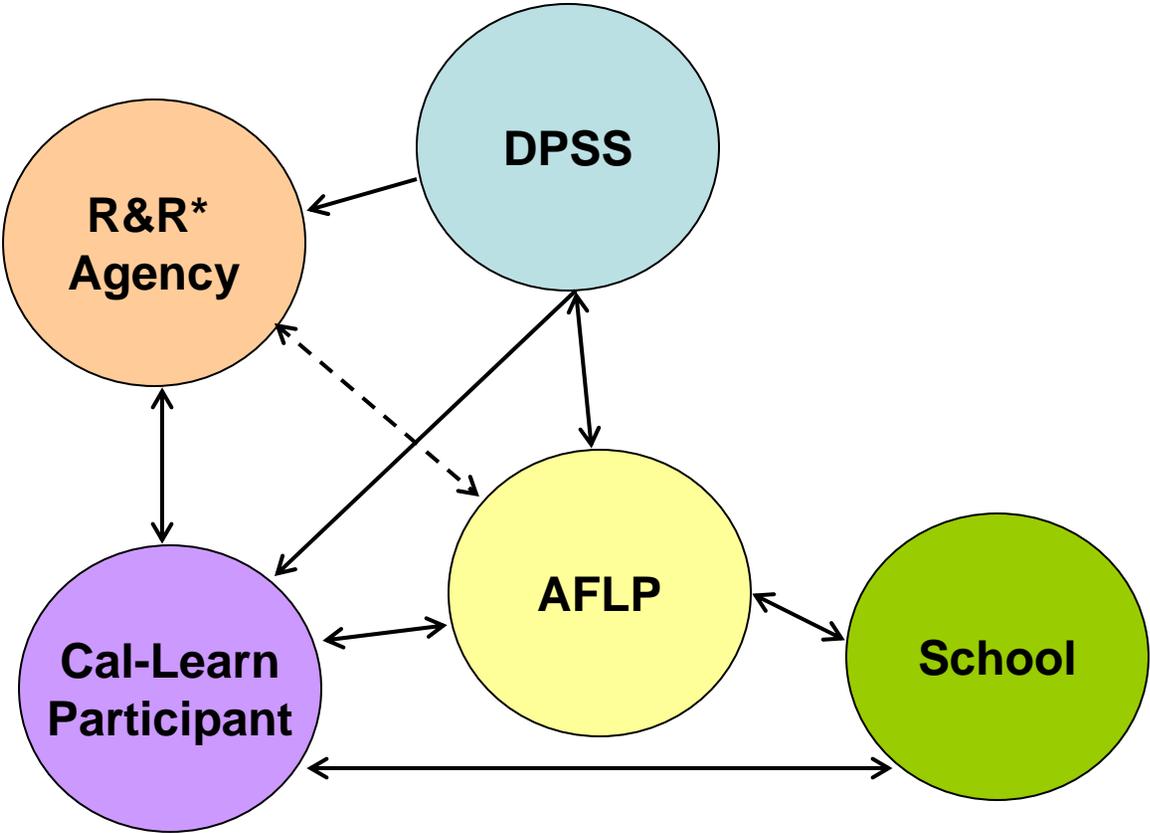


The Role of the Case Managers

The Cal-Learn case managers employed by the AFLP agencies deal directly with the program's participants. Their responsibilities are as follows:

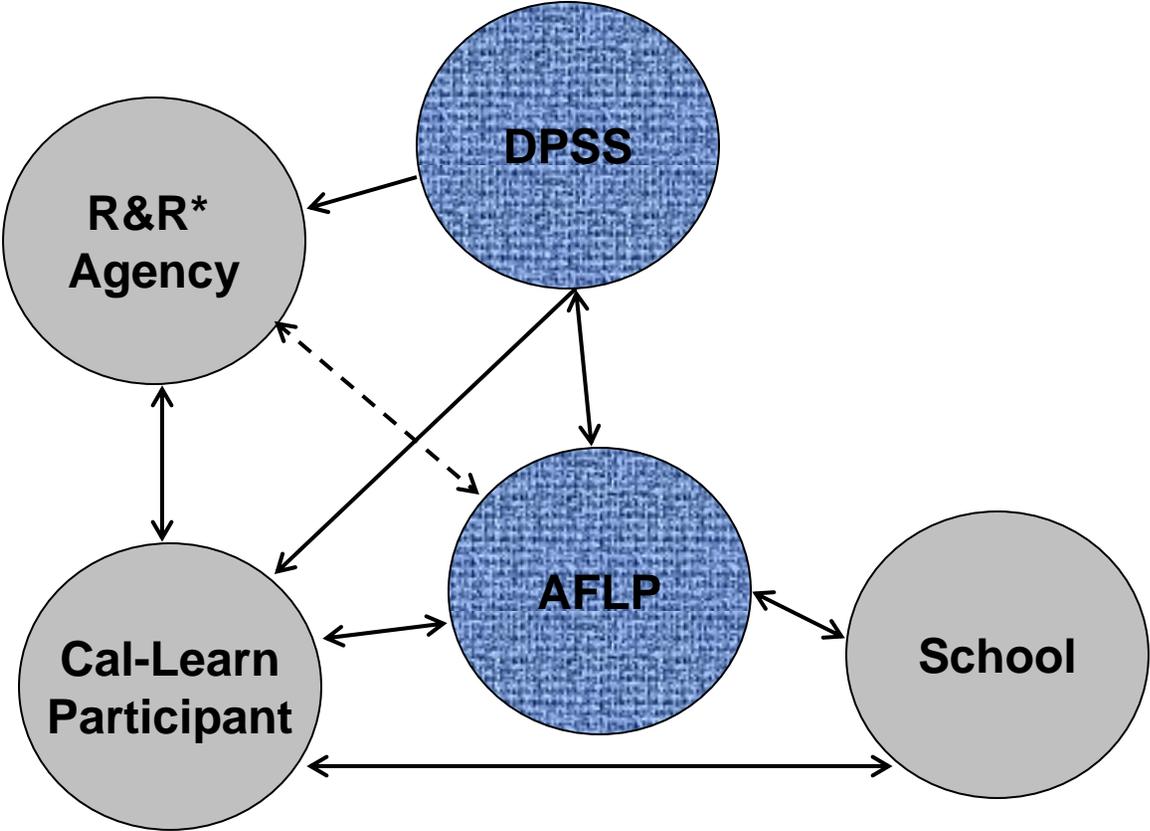
- Conduct Orientation;
- Assist teens in accessing child care services, transportation expenses, and ancillary expenses;
- Help teens access any Specialized Supportive Services they might need in order to deal with mental health, substance abuse or domestic violence issues;
- Keep track of teen progress in school, including the collection of report cards;
- Help teens access additional services designed to encourage general health and deal with prenatal and postpartum issues;

Communication and Coordination



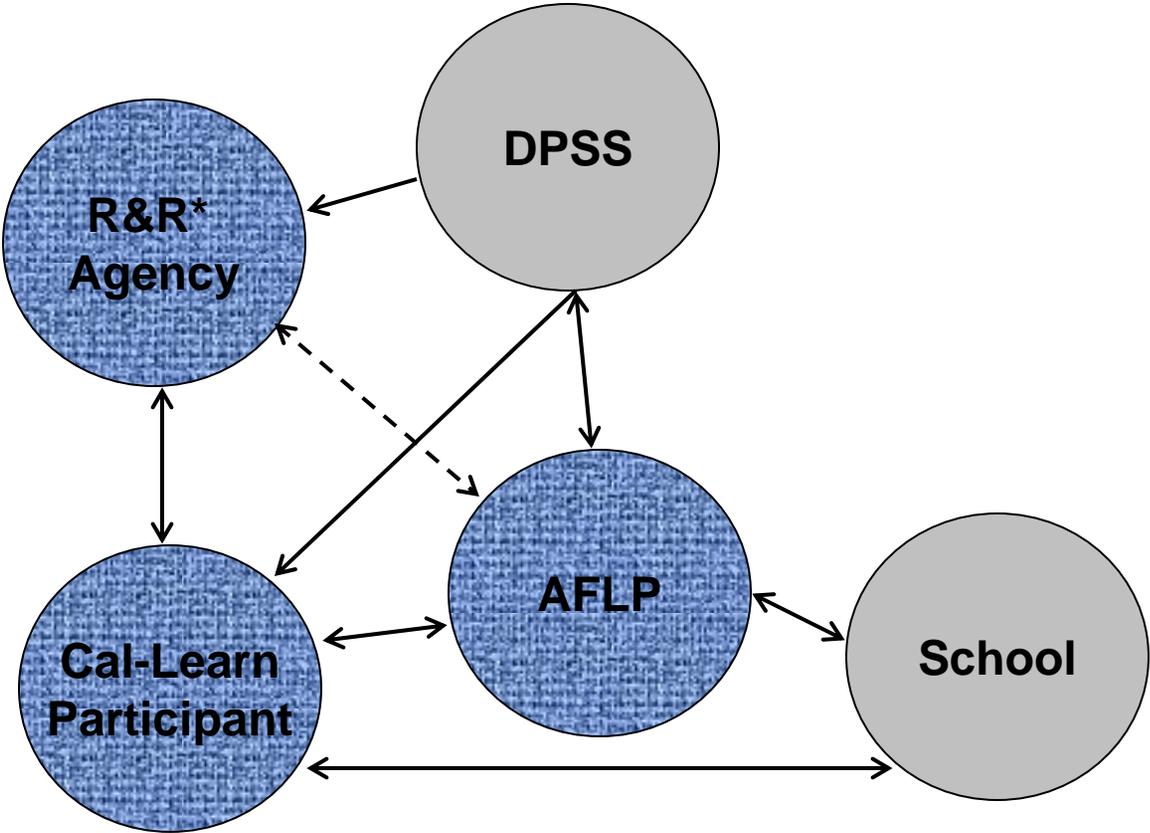
* Resource and Referral Agency

Communication and Coordination



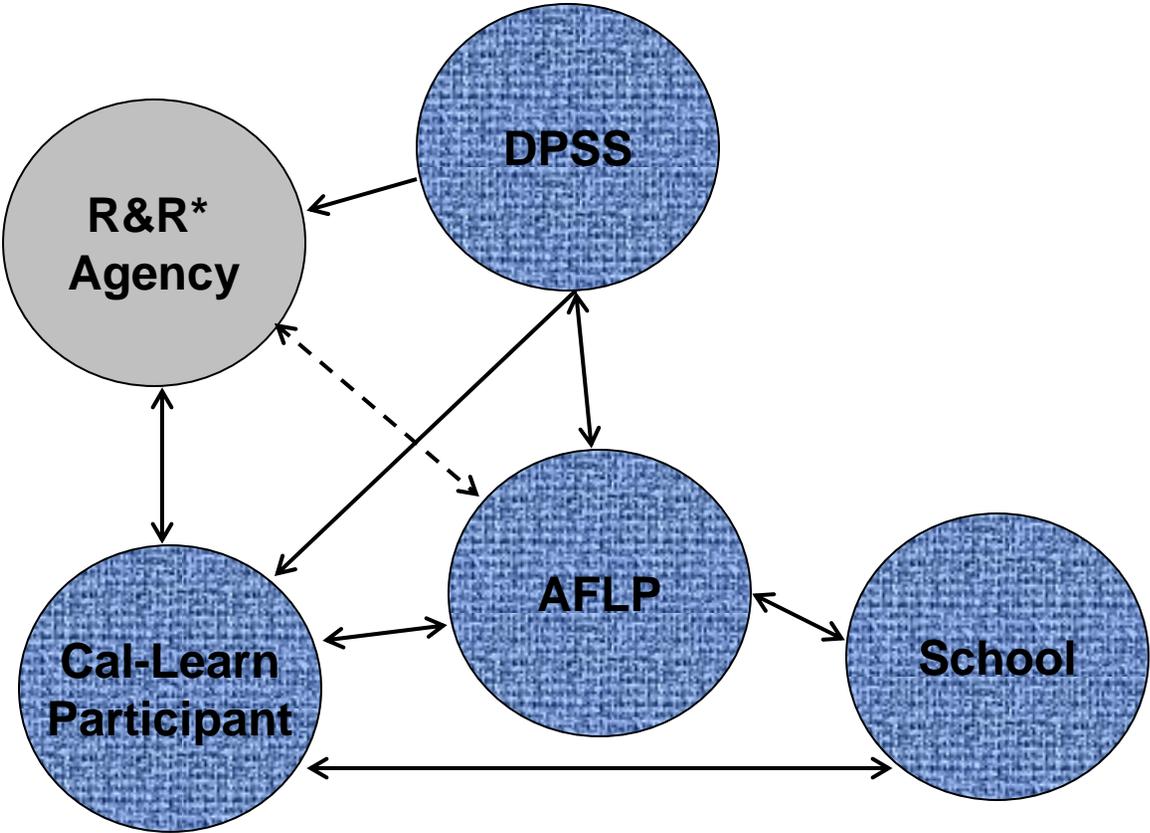
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Communication and Coordination



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* Resource and Referral Agency

Two Sets of Barriers

- **Person-level barriers**
- **Program-level barriers**

Four Types of Program-Level Barriers

Remarks made in interviews with Cal-Learn case managers at the AFLP agencies, AFLP program directors, and Cal-Learn GSWs at DPSS point to four types of inter-related program-level barriers:

- 1) Workload issues for case managers and GSWs;**
- 2) Communication and coordination breakdowns between DPSS, the AFLP agencies, the Resource and Referral agencies, school systems, and program participants;**
- 3) Delays and gaps in the availability of supportive services, and problems with the distribution of bonuses;**
- 4) The rigidity of program rules and procedures, and the emphasis given to documentation and performance measurement**

Workload Issues

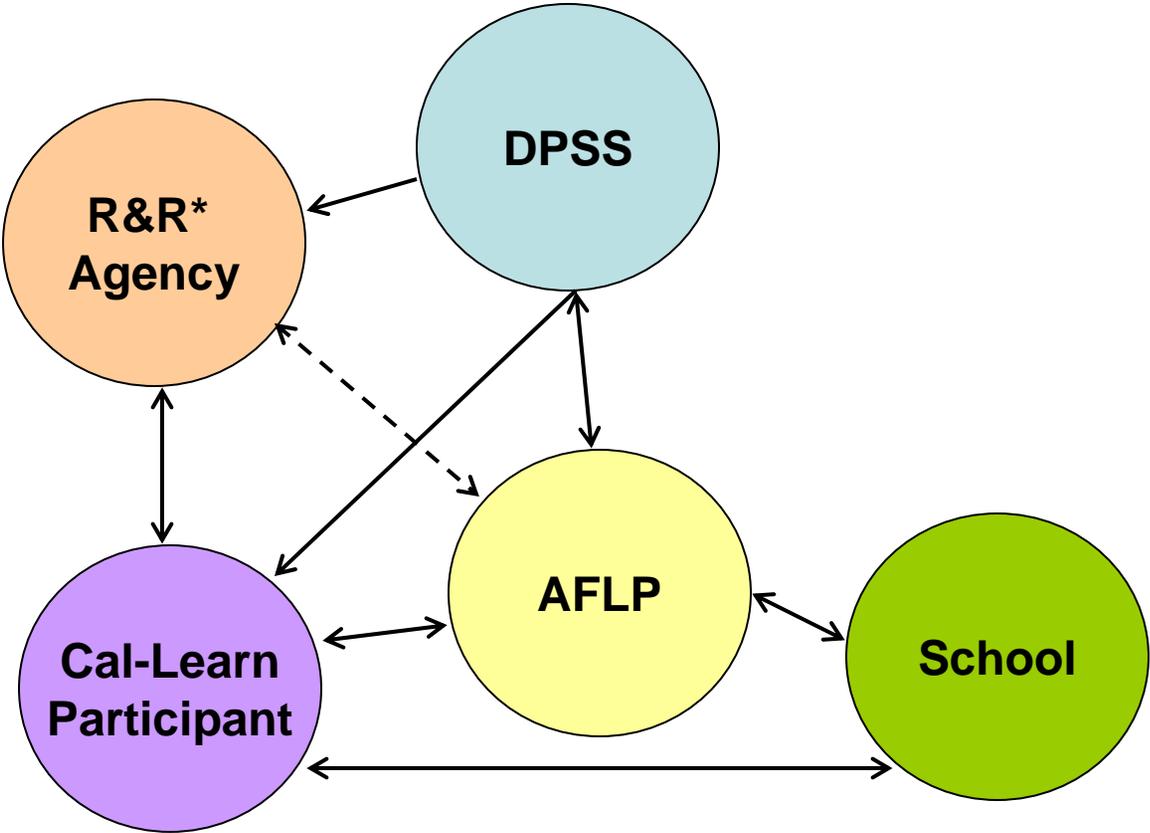
DPSS has downsized the number of GSWs working on the Cal-Learn program. As of July 2006, there were 12 GSWs serving the County's Cal-Learn population, and the caseload size per GSW has increased by about 30 percent, from 140 to 200, since 2000.

Communication and Coordination Breakdowns

In the section of the Cal-Learn process evaluation that looks at communication and coordination breakdowns, five levels of communication and coordination are examined:

- **Between DPSS and Cal-Learn participants;**
- **Between case managers and participants;**
- **Between participants and Resource and Referral agencies;**
- **Between case managers and GSWs;**
- **Between schools, case managers and DPSS.**

Communication and Coordination



* Resource and Referral Agency

Delays in the Availability of Supportive Services

- The availability of supportive services is integral to a successful experience participating in Cal-Learn
- No services, no school.

Program Rules, Documentation and Performance Measurement

Procedural Barriers:

Rigid rules, paperwork, and the pressure to 'make the numbers.'

Policy Recommendations

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- DPSS should consider committing additional GSWs to the Cal-Learn program so as to return GSW caseloads to the levels they were at in 2000.
- DPSS should take steps to ensure that all EWs are properly informed about the Cal-Learn program and properly trained in the program's rules and requirements.
- Although the Orientation notice for Cal-Learn (CL1) is a standard, state-level form, DPSS may wish to consider ways to clarify its language, as well as ways to clarify the language and improve the presentation of all other written communication with Cal-Learn participants. In short, make official Cal-Learn correspondence more 'teen friendly'.

Policy Recommendations

- DPSS and the AFLP agencies should consider organizing joint trainings, to be attended by Cal-Learn GSWs and case managers, in an effort to improve relations and overall communication and coordination between the two parties. Moreover, GSSs and Cal-Learn supervisors at the AFLP agencies might also participate in joint trainings.
- DPSS may wish to consider conducting a more detailed evaluation of the Cal-Learn program's child care referral process.

Policy Recommendations

- DPSS should work with the AFLP agencies to clarify whether or not enrollment verification is required in order for teens to access transportation expenses.
- Preliminary child care services and transportation expenses should be made available to Cal-Learn teens so that they can enroll in school.
- Where possible, DPSS may wish to consider bringing more flexibility to bear on procedures regarding paperwork and communication with the AFLP agencies. This flexibility could perhaps be negotiated in consultation with AFLP Program Directors and in joint trainings attended by case managers and GSWs.

Policy Recommendations

- Given the complex array of economic and social (person-level) barriers that, in addition to the responsibilities of parenthood, impede the ability significant numbers of Cal-Learn teens have to attend school, DPSS and the Cal-Learn administrators at the AFLP agencies might consider revising the targets set for the performance measures written into the Cal-Learn case management contracts.