



# WRESTLING WITH THE OCTOPUS – AND WINNING!

A Brief Discussion on Strategies for Helping Students in Special Circumstances: November 2011

## The Challenge

If current national trends continue, less than 15 of every 100 of the 10,600 youth in the Missouri foster care system will ever go to college; only 2 in 100 will complete a four-year degree. We can do better!

## How Can We Help?

- By understanding how the system works – and doesn't
- By learning about some unique resources for Missouri youth in foster care
- By speaking up to support resources for youth in foster care

## Understanding the System -- We sometimes use the wrong logic model to support our youth!

- Rational Model – this classic problem-solving only works when you agree on goals and the methods to get there
- Trial and Error Model – This model works when you agree on the goals but disagree on methods; this assumes you have lots of time and energy for each issue
- Coalition Model – the premise of this decision model is that you agree on methods but disagree on the goals. A “stamp out poverty” rally would be a good example of this
- Garbage Can Model – developed in academic and political areas; it suggests you disagree on the precise methods AND the goals to be achieved
  - Characteristics of Garbage Can problems: Problem preferences are confusing; means to fix them are unclear, and decision-makers come and go regularly... assuming you can even figure out who the decision-makers are
  - How do you use the Garbage Can Model to help those in special circumstances?
    - Embrace the chaos – understand the best you can do is increase the odds of success
    - Overwhelm the system; have many, many participants adopt the same language and message
    - Persist... the climate to support may change rapidly
    - Network, network, network!

## How is Missouri Helping?

- Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Youth Aging out of Foster Care - 2009
- Foster Care Education Bill of Rights – 2010
- Post-secondary education waivers for youth in foster care – 2010
  - Missouri Reach, a tuition waiver program; expanded for 2012
  - Missouri Education and Training Voucher program (ETV); up to \$5,000 a year for qualified school expenses
  - Website: [www.statevoucher.org/missouri.shtml](http://www.statevoucher.org/missouri.shtml)



## Can We Do More? Yes! Consider supporting:

- Continued allocations for post-secondary education waivers (currently \$180,000 statewide)
- Legislation to expedite transfer of high school records for youth in foster care; (HB 419 in the 96<sup>th</sup> General Assembly)
- Establishment of an Statewide Older Youth Coordinating Board, to keep youth in special circumstances a top priority.