February 7: “Community Based Treatment of Meth Addiction: New Approaches, New Accountability and New Outcomes”, Nicolas Taylor, Ph.D. (a researcher, treatment provider and current Chair of the Curriculum Committee of the National Drug Endangered Children Committee), Sponsored by the Iowa Judicial Branch, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Hotel Fort Des Moines, Des Moines, Registration Required (you must register before January 31st). To register, contact: Tina.Schweitzer@jb.state.ia.us

February 21: “Dental Health – What Services are Available?”, Polk County Model Court Training Academy; 12:15, Room 209A, Polk County Courthouse, Des Moines. Free CLEs and CEUs.

March 7-8: Iowa Foster & Adoptive Parents Association (IFAPA) 2008 Spring Conference, Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines. For more details, go to http://www.ifapa.org/training/2008%20Conference%20Booklet.pdf

March 20: “Parents as Partners”, Polk County Model Court Training Academy; 12:15, Room 209A, Polk County Courthouse, Des Moines. Free CLEs and CEUs.

Federal Congress Comes Back into Session: United States Congress is back in session. Here are the key upcoming dates for congress:

- **January 15:** Start of second session of 110th Congress, House Returns.
- **January 22:** Senate Returns.
- **January 28:** President's State of the Union Address.
- **February 4:** President's proposed budget for FY 2009 submitted to Congress.

The Iowa General Assembly is Back: This past Monday, the Iowa General Assembly (the Iowa Legislature) came back into session. Here is a breakdown of the schedule for the session:

- **January 14:** First day of the session.
- **January 25:** Final day for individual legislator requests for bill drafts to the Legislative Services Agency.
- **March 7:** The First “Funnel.” Final date for Senate bills to be reported out of Senate committees and House bills out of House committees.
- **March 10-14:** Senate considers only Senate bills and unfinished business and House considers only House bills and unfinished business.
- **March 28:** The Second “Funnel.” Final date for House bills to be reported out of Senate committees and Senate bills out of House Committees.
- **April 22:** The presumed final day of the session (per diem expenses end.)

As always, this electronic newsletter will report the progress of all bills affecting child welfare as they move through the legislative process. The fact that a bill is reported in this newsletter does not mean that the Middleton Center supports the bill. However, this newsletter will provide detailed reports on the progress of bills specifically proposed by or supported by the Middleton Center.

Governor Culver’s “State of the State” Address: On Tuesday, January 15, Governor Culver presented his “State of the State” address to the Iowa Legislature. In his address the Governor called for expanding health care to 7,500 Iowa children. Currently about 20,000 Iowa children qualify for public insurance but aren’t covered.

Chief Justice Ternus’ “State of the Judiciary” Address: On Wednesday, January 16, Chief Justice Marsha Ternus of the Iowa Supreme Court gave her “State of the Judiciary” address to the Iowa General Assembly. The chief justice devoted almost half (8 1/2 pages of an 18 page address) to children’s issues,
showing again the priority that the Iowa Judicial Branch has devoted to children. The Chief Justice emphasized that this prioritization of children’s issues is a continuation of the priorities set by her last year:

In my remarks to you last year, I talked about the plight of Iowa’s most vulnerable children — children in foster care. I described our efforts to strengthen court oversight of child welfare cases so we can expeditiously find permanent, loving homes for these children. Today, I thank you for heeding our concerns, joining our efforts, and making these children one of your top priorities. You should be so proud of what you did for these children during last year’s session. By working together, all three branches of government made great strides to improve results for children in foster care. . . While we have accomplished a great deal towards that goal, our work on behalf of children in juvenile court has just begun.

The Chief Justice concluded her remarks with these words: It is enough to say that childhood is brief and so is the window of opportunity to help these children. Consequently, the future of these children depends a great deal on what we do now—so please, let’s do all we can.

Legislation Proposed by the Middleton Center: Like last year, the Middleton Center has consulted with the “Elevate 2 Inspire” group to formulate a legislative package on children’s issues. With the help of a generous grant from the United Way of Central Iowa, the Middleton Center has employed the assistance of a professional lobbyist and five legislative practice law students to draft and promote the passage of those pieces of legislation. Last year, this effort resulted in the passage of the “Sibling Visitation Bill” in Iowa. This year, the Middleton Center’s legislative package includes the following:

1. **School Records:** The proposal requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Education (D.O.E.) to develop and implement a plan for immediately providing a transcript from the old school to the new school whenever a placement change occurs for a foster youth.

2. **Attendance by Youth at Court Hearings:** The proposal requires judges, at all juvenile hearings where a youth is not present, to enquire as to whether or not the youth was informed of his or her right to attend the hearing.

3. **Provision of Documents On Aging Out of the System:** The proposal requires that in every case where a youth ages out of our child welfare system (foster care or group care), the youth will be provided with a certified birth certificate and social security card. The proposal also requires the
Department of Health to waive fees for these birth certificates if the child was from Iowa.

4. **Emancipation Law**: The proposal creates an emancipation statute in Iowa.

5. **Payment of G.A.L.s**: The proposal requires that in every case where the court is allowed to appoint a guardian ad litem for a child, the state will pay the fees for the guardian ad litem.

**Bills of Interest in the Iowa Legislature**: The following bills of interest have been submitted in the Iowa legislature so far:

**SSB 3013 JUVENILE MATTERS – RECORDS, CONSENT DECrees, AND COURT ATTENDANCE**: This bill allows a foster care child who remains so until reaching the age of majority to receive health and education records prior to discharge by the juvenile court. The bill also makes a consent decree in juvenile court good for one year, unless discharged by the court. Requires that a court determine if a child’s failure to appear during a child in need of assistance (CINA) proceeding is due to a failure to notify the child, if appropriate.

**Florida Foster Care Suit Settled**: According to the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, a civil lawsuit filed 16½ years ago by parents on behalf of their adopted son against the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), his foster parents and two private agencies has now been settled for $300,000. The lawsuit alleged that the defendants failed to protect the boy from sexual abuse during a two-year period that began when he was 6. The foster parents adopted another boy who had a history of sexually acting out, yet allowed the two boys to share a bedroom. The young man who was the subject of the civil lawsuit had told his therapist that the foster parents’ adopted son had repeatedly abused him. Another child in the home made similar allegations.

**The Plight of Children Exiting Foster Care**: A number of studies over the past twenty years have identified the poor outcomes often achieved for young adults exiting our foster care system. According to the Miami Herald, a recently
completed survey of children age 13 to 23 in state care in Florida confirms those poor outcomes. The survey relied upon interviews of more than 6,700 foster children and also included a review of state records. Here are some of the outcomes identified in that survey:

- **Educational Achievement:** In St. Augustine, fewer than one in 10 foster children age 17 are performing at grade level. In Miami, Tampa and Daytona Beach, fewer than one in four 17-year-old foster youth passed Florida's standardized assessment test.

- **Educational Plans:** Only 39 percent of foster youth age 13 through 17 had a written educational plan. In Miami-Dade, only 26 percent of 13- through 17-year-olds had an educational plan. The figure was more than double in Broward, at 70 percent. [Florida law requires that every child in foster care be given an educational plan].

- **Homelessness:** 7 percent of the foster children in Florida age 13 through 17 had experienced homelessness during the prior year, according to the survey. Among only 18-year-olds, however, 12 percent of foster youth reported being homeless. The highest reported homelessness was among foster youth in the Naples area, at 16 percent, northern Sarasota, at 21 percent, and southern Sarasota, at 36 percent. Among former foster care youth receiving assistance, about 7 percent of 20- and 21-year-olds had experienced homelessness. But among the former foster care youth not receiving stipends, the rate of homelessness jumped to 22 percent for the 20-year-olds and 20 percent for the 21-year-olds.

- **Arrests:** Former foster care youth not receiving assistance were far more likely to have been arrested: Among 18-year-olds, for example, 14 percent of the young adults getting stipends had been arrested, compared to 30 percent of the former foster care youth receiving no help.

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." -- James Baldwin