UNDERSTANDING FOSTER YOUTH EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES
Comprehensive Supports Throughout Foster Youths' Lives Result in Better Outcomes

Foster children and youth remain one of California's most academically vulnerable populations. Because of the abuse and neglect foster youth have experienced in their young lives, they often face physical and emotional problems that interfere with their learning and negatively impact their educational outcomes.

California is in the early stages of piecing together a complete picture of foster youths' educational performance. New data systems allow us to collect information and monitor outcomes for some of the foster care population. While these innovative efforts are limited in scope, we are able to draw insights from the data, as well as a deeper understanding into what works and necessary policy actions.

Comprehensive and cohesive supports throughout foster youths' lives are critical to their educational performance, ability to secure a higher education and success in life. What we do to support foster youth at every stage in their development matters greatly.

How Are We Doing?
Improving the educational outcomes of California's foster youth is within our reach:

We have the knowledge and tools to ensure that foster youth succeed and thrive.

○ **Foster Youth Trail Other Students in Educational Achievement –** California has made progress in reaching foster youth with programs that increase educational achievement, but much more remains to be done. Foster children continue to lag far behind other students in academic performance and educational achievement.

More than 80% of California's 58,000 foster children are school age.

○ **Tracking Student Progress is Critical –** California is making significant gains in developing data systems that specifically track foster youths' educational achievements. This information is vital in determining which programs and supports are most effective. We must not lose ground we have made in data systems that track outcomes and must continue to promote policies that reduce barriers to sharing data between child welfare and education.

○ **Foster Youth Succeed When Provided With Support –** When foster youth are provided with the attention and supports they need, they can and do succeed. Innovative strategies that provide educational champions for foster youth coupled with collaborative, cross-system programs make a big difference in improving high school graduation rates, enabling success in college and advancing young people's careers. **In fact, when foster youth receive support in college, they outperform other students in graduating from college.**

IN THIS ISSUE

- *Linking Education and Foster Care System Data*
- *Outcomes Improve Through Collaboration and Leadership*
- *Foster Youth Can Succeed in School and in Life*

Linking Education & Foster Care Data

Until recently, California has had little data to know how foster children are doing in school – or to know what programs or services are most effective. New research, culled from single and four-county studies, tracks foster youths' educational needs and performance over time. When combined with other statewide data, we see a more complete picture of how well foster children and youth are doing, which will help to better inform decisions about how best to ensure their success in school and life.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS ACROSS THE AGE SPECTRUM:

YOUNG CHILDREN (Age 0-5)
Pilot Project, Fresno County

Our youngest foster children are not taking full advantage of early learning opportunities.

• Only 10% of foster children receive early intervention services.[1]

1 in 10

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• Only 35% of foster children attend pre-school.[2]

3.5 in 10

● ● ● ◐ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

GRADE SCHOOL (Age 6-13)
Legislative Analyst Office Report [3]

Foster children trail other students in elementary school.

• 75% of foster children perform below grade level standard.

7.5 in 10

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• By 3rd grade, 80% of foster children have had to repeat a grade in school.
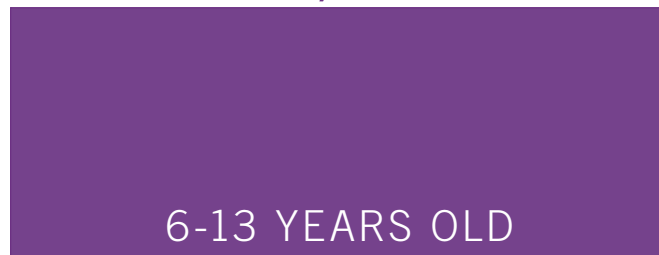
8 in 10

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○

19,513

0-5 YEARS OLD

19,380

6-13 YEARS OLD

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN & YOUTH IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM BY AGE

How children grow is inextricably linked to their ability to learn. What we do to guide our youngest foster children directly impacts their ability to do well in school, continue their education and do well in life. How much more might we accomplish if supports were provided to foster children at young ages when human brain development is most dynamic?

HIGH SCHOOL (Age 14-17)
Four County Study [4]

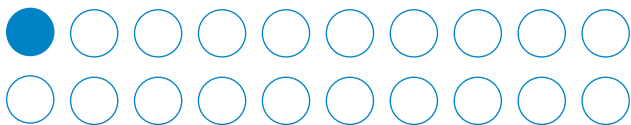**Foster youth lag in English and math.**

- Only 1 in 5 is proficient in English by grade 11.

1 in 5

- Only 1 in 20 is proficient in math by grade 11.

1 in 20

HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE (Age 18-20)
Statewide Study [5]

Foster youth want to continue their education but few do.

- 35% of foster youth who attend community college plan to earn an associate degree.

3.5 in 10

- Only 10% actually graduate.

1 in 10

15,667
14-17 YEARS OLD

2,723
18-20 YEARS OLD

TOTAL: 57,283 JANUARY 2011

INSIGHTS INTO WHAT WORKS

Outcomes Improve with Educational Champions, Collaboration & Leadership

Many programs in California have demonstrated that early support results in improved outcomes in school and in life. Educational champions, collaboration and leadership have been shown to produce positive results for disadvantaged youth overall and foster children in particular.

EDUCATIONAL CHAMPIONS

When foster youth have educational champions, the graduation gap closes.

Educational champions are individuals who provide one-on-one advocacy for foster youth through mentoring, tutoring and facilitating educational progress — helping to make an individual and personal difference for foster youth.

While California's Foster Youth Services program provides educational championing for some foster youth, it does not provide such services to all foster children and youth in the state.

- Less than half (49%) of foster youth graduate from high school or receive their G.E.D.[6] — compared to 71% when Foster Youth Services are provided.[7]

Foster Youth General Population — 49%

Foster Youth Who Receive Foster Youth Services — 71%

High School Completion Rates

OUTCOMES IMPROVE WHEN LEADERSHIP STEPS UP

COLLABORATION

Collaboration leads to improved school attendance, test scores and grade point averages.

Educational outcomes improve when agencies, organizations and systems work together to effectively share information and coordinate services to support outcomes. Programs that work collaboratively show improvements in school attendance, test scores and grade point averages.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the essential element of collaboration.

Successful collaborative efforts have been established with leadership from a variety of agencies. When leadership is focused, outcomes improve.

| COUNTY CHILD WELFARE AGENCY	COUNTY OFFICE of EDUCATION	LOCAL SCHOOL SITE	COUNTY BOARD of SUPERVISORS	COUNTY DEPENDENCY COURT
The Fresno County Child Welfare Division developed a Child Focus Team to screen and support all dependent children ages 0-5. Positive results were achieved through outreach and collaboration with other local systems and early intervention programs.[8]	The Sacramento County Instructional Case Manager Program showed positive results for students who received a full year of collaborative services and supports.[9]	A teacher at Laguna Creek High School in Sacramento started the Courageous Connection Program, which demonstrated improvements in GPA, truancy and suspension when working collaboratively with schools, students and the community.[10]	A Los Angeles County Board Supervisor initiated the Dependency Education Pilot Project, which demonstrated improved outcomes when child welfare programs and school districts work together and prioritize education for foster youth.[11]	The Orange County Dependency Court initiated a project to support young women in foster care and through its collaborative efforts demonstrated improvements in GPA and school test scores.[12]
• Pre-school enrollment for ages 3-5 rose from 42% to 59% in 2 years	*• Number of students with a GPA over 3.0 increased from 8% to 22%*	*• 10% increase in GPA* *• 64% decrease in suspensions* *• 9% decrease in truancy*	*• 25% increase in GPA (prior GPA was 1.39)* *• 76% graduate from high school* *• 77% enrolled in post-secondary institutions*	*• 50% of students increased thier GPA by half a grade point or better over a 2 year period.* *• Suspensions decreased by 65%.*

Outcomes Improve Through Collaboration and Leadership
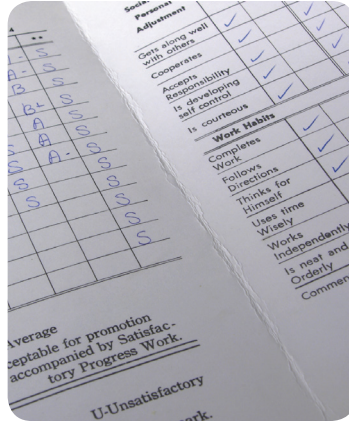
Foster Youth Outperform Other Students When Provided with Supports

71%

56%

FORMER
FOSTER YOUTH

GENERAL
POPULATION
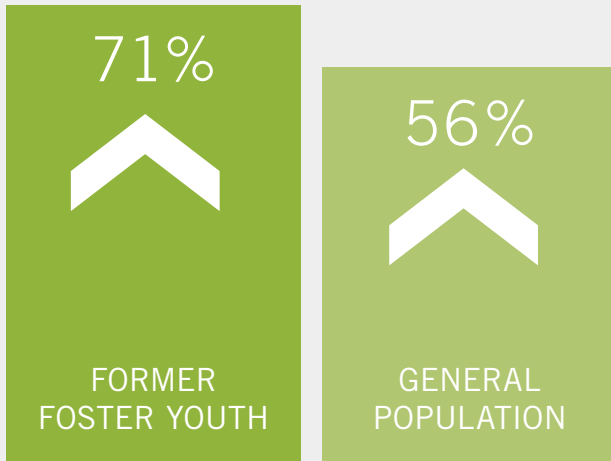
College Persistence Rates

Foster youth participating in campus support programs remain in college longer and at higher rates than other students.

Comprehensive, cohesive supports for foster youth on higher education campuses make all the difference in foster youth being able to succeed in and graduate from college. Research tells us that when former foster youth participate in campus support programs and/or receive financial aid, they are more likely to stay in school and obtain their degrees.[13]

Support programs exist on 79 campuses across California. Although each program is unique, a typical program provides an array of financial, academic, social/emotional, and logistical (e.g., housing) supports to help former foster youth stay in school and graduate.

See NOTES on back page for data sources and references.

Foster Youth Can Succeed in School & in Life

Foster children and youth come from a set of experiences that negatively impact their educational outcomes. The challenges they face often begin with the abuse or neglect that has put them in the child welfare system in the first place – that set of experiences often leaves them vulnerable to physical and emotional problems that interfere with learning.

Foster children also face additional obstacles that impact their success. Incompatible data systems and confidentiality concerns that hinder cooperation between school districts and child welfare agencies result in foster youth not receiving the assistance they need. Foster youth also generally lack a consistent, knowledgeable parent figure to support and guide them in applying for college.

Targeted public policies can support our efforts to help improve foster youths' educational outcomes. Based on what we know from data and what we are learning from the success of innovative programs, we are able to draw insights that are relevant for school administrators, public agencies and community partners.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS –
TRACK and TARGET SERVICES for INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

Educators and school administrators need to understand the unique needs of foster youth to make informed decisions. We need to:

- Track enrollment in early intervention, pre-school and school-based programs.

- Provide a full picture for each youth, including his or her educational trajectory, personal goals, and unique strengths and needs.

- Monitor educational progress and problems.

- Target needed resources and appropriate interventions.

PUBLIC AGENCIES and COMMUNITY PARTNERS –
PROMOTE and REINFORCE COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

We know that successful interventions are those that recognize the importance of partnerships between educators, care providers, advocates, child welfare, the juvenile courts and education agencies. We need to:

- Promote collaborative efforts and reinforce accountability across systems.

- Reinforce the linkages between education and child welfare data sources.

- Ensure youth receive the assistance they need to progress and succeed.

STATE POLICYMAKERS –
MONITOR OUTCOMES and INVEST in SUCCESS

When programs that focus on educational needs are provided for foster youth we know they can do as well, or better, than their peers.

Strategic investments would:

- Enable the sharing of information across systems that allows deeper understanding of the educational needs of foster youth.

- Support collaborative programs that demonstrate improved educational outcomes – between and

MEET JESSICA NGUYEN

"Without an Education, You Can't Make a Difference"

Jessica Nguyen is one of hundreds of foster youth in California working hard to continue her education, despite a set of experiences that would leave most of us struggling. Jessica is a remarkable young woman who has earned her Associate of Arts Degree in Social Science from Cosumnes River College and has now been accepted into California State University, Sacramento where she plans to study Behavioral Science.

"When school becomes over-whelming, I remember that I was once homeless and living on the streets. I think of all the kids out there right now who are homeless, hungry and being abused, and are just straight up alone in this world. I tell myself, without an education, you can't help; without an education, you can't make a difference."

A full-time mom to two young children, Jessica's long-term goal is to make a difference in the foster care system and support at-risk youth. She says the key to keeping her focused on her goals is remembering where she came from and thinking about foster youth much like her.

Jessica credits much of her success in college to an on-campus support program for former foster youth. The Enriched Scholars Program provides academic resources, mentorship, financial support and community resources so that former foster youth are able to pursue their educational goals. Most importantly, the program provides a place where students are able to receive assistance from individuals who not only understand the needs of former foster youth, but also believe in their success.

Jessica encourages other students in ways especially meaningful to foster youth, "When you feel like giving up, remember why you held on for so long in the first place."

among Child Welfare Agencies, school districts, dependency courts and other government entities with responsibility for foster youth.

- Assist in the effective implementation of existing legislation that ensures foster youth have access to the same academic resources, services and extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to all students.

- Prioritize educational programs and supports for foster youth.

No matter the age children are when they come into foster care, we know that their life circumstances have made them academically vulnerable. How we address their educational needs will have lifelong impact. By identifying and supporting successful programs, targeting interventions and prioritizing investments, we will see improved educational outcomes for foster youth in California. From cradle to career – what we do or don't do – will have lifelong impact.

FACTS & NOTES

FACTS AT A GLANCE

Foster children lag behind other children in educational performance and achievement. The following facts (all examined more full in this issue of *Insights In-Depth*) summarize what we know about foster youths' educational outcomes or what is reasonable to conclude based on available data.

- Only 10% of foster children receive early intervention services.[1]
- Only 35% of foster children attend preschool.[2]
- Approximately 75% of foster youth perform below grade level standards, and by third grade 80% have had to repeat a grade in school.[3]
- By grade 11, only 1 in 5 foster youth is proficient in English. Only 1 in 20 is proficient in math.[4]
- Thirty-five percent of foster youth who attend community college plan to earn an AA degree. Of those, less than 10% actually do.[5]
- Less than half (49%) of foster youth complete high school or receive their GED.[6]
- Almost three-quarters (71%) of foster youth graduate from high school when receiving Foster Youth Services.[7]
- Pre-school enrollment for ages 3-5 rose 17% in 2 years through targeted screening and support by Child Focus Teams.[8]
- When receiving a full year of collaborative services and supports, the number of students with a GPA over 3.0 increased from 8% to 22%.[9]
- The Courageous Connection Program has demonstrated a 10% increase in GPA, 64% decrease in suspensions and a 9% decrease in truancy by working collaboratively with schools, students and the community.[10]
- When County Supervisors, Child Welfare and school districts prioritized education, foster youth improved their GPA, graduated from high school and enrolled in college at higher rates.[11]
- Supporting young women in foster care through collaborative efforts demonstrated improvements in GPA and a decrease in suspensions.[12]
- Foster youth participating in campus support programs remain in college longer and at higher rates than other students.[13]

FOOTNOTES

1. Ximenes Barrat, V. & Berliner, B. (2010). *The Enrollment of Young Children in Foster Care in Early Intervention Services and Licensed Preschools in Fresno County, California.* WestEd. (California Pilot Project)

2. Ibid.

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4. v/vi Frerer, K., Sosenko, L., Pellegrin, N., Zakharenkov, A., Horowitz, J., & Patton, M. (2011). *Ready to Succeed: An exploration of secondary and postsecondary educational outcomes for foster children in California.* (Four County Study)

5. Needell, B, Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Brookhart, A., Jackman, W., & Shlonsky, A. (2002). *Youth emancipating from foster care in California: Findings using linked administrative data Berkeley: Center for Social Services Research.* (Statewide Study)

6. California Department of Social Services. (2009). *Exit Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Quarterly Statistical Report, October-December 2009.* (Statewide Data)

7. California Department of Education, Foster Youth Services Program, Counseling, Student Support and Service-Learning Office. (2010). *The Foster Youth Services Program: Report to the Legislature and the Governor.* (California Report on Statewide Program)

8. WestEd, REL West. (2010) *The Enrollment of Young Children in Foster Care in Early Intervention Services and Licensed Preschools in Fresno County, California.* (California County Study); Fresno County Department of Social Services, Case Files. (2010/11). *Analysis of California Child Welfare Services Case Management System.* (County Data); Fresno County Department of Social Services (2010) *Ready To Succeed Reports.* (California County Study)

9. Sacramento County Office of Education. (2009). *Ready To Succeed Reports 2008 - 2009.* (California County Study)

10. Jones, M. & Abdulmalik, H. (2010). *Courageous Connection Program: Overview, Planning Guide and Implementation Toolkit.* (California County Project Report)

11. LA County Board of Supervisors, Memorandum. (2010). *Progress in Implementing the Recommendations in Expecting More: A Blueprint for Raising the Educational Achievement of Foster Youth and Probation Youth.*

12. *Pilot Project: DCFS LA and Montelbello and Pomona School Districts.* (California County Project Report)

13. California College Pathways. (2009). *Annual Report: Campus support programs for former foster youth in California 2007-2008.* (California Report on Multi-site Program)

California Child Welfare
Co-Investment Partnership