LCAP REVIEW - YEAR 2 UPDATE REPORT

Foster Youth in California Public Schools

Years of research have documented that school-age children and youth in foster care have serious educational challenges. The most recent and comprehensive California study, *The Invisible Achievement Gap [IAG] Report,*[1] found that students in foster care had lower academic achievement than other students, even when compared to low-income and other disadvantaged student groups. For example, the high school graduation rate in 2010 for foster youth was 58%, compared to 79% for other disadvantaged students and 84% for the general student population.

Students in foster care have experienced neglect and/or abuse, with associated trauma, so they are likely to need more support to achieve positive educational outcomes. Also, the *IAG Report* found that students in foster care are more likely to be diagnosed with a disability and to be eligible for special education services, and more likely to be over-age for their grade level. They are also less likely to be enrolled in gifted and AP courses compared to other low socioeconomic status students.

One key difference between foster youth and other disadvantaged students is school mobility. According to the *IAG Report,* students in foster care are four times as likely to change schools at least once during the school year as other students; 32% of foster youth attended more than one school during the 2009-2010 academic year, compared to 8% of low-income students and 7% of the general student population. Students in foster care are also more likely to be attending the lowest-performing schools, and to be attending nontraditional schools (e.g., alternative schools, continuation schools, and non-public schools co-located with group homes).

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[1] Weigmann, W., Putman-Hornstein, E., Barrat, V.X., Magruder, J, and Needell, B. (2013 and 2014), *The Invisible Achievement Gap Part 1: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in California's Public Schools*, and Part 2: *How the Foster Care Experiences of California Public School Students are Associated with Their Education Outcomes,* available at http://www.stuartfoundation.org.

Multiple placement changes were strongly correlated with low academic achievement; 50% of students with three or more foster placements during the school year scored in the "below basic" or "far below basic" range in English language arts and math, and had the highest dropout rates.

The Local Control Funding Formula Legislation

In 2013, California passed the landmark Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) legislation. For the first time in any state in the country, LCFF explicitly recognized the unique educational needs and challenges of students who are in foster care, provided supplemental funding to school districts to enable them to meet these needs (along with the educational needs of other disadvantaged student populations, including low-income students and English Learners), required each district to develop a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) including goals, actions and funding for foster youth as well as for other disadvantaged populations and for all students, and created a framework for data collection and reporting of educational outcomes so that school districts will be held accountable for educational outcomes specific to foster youth and other disadvantaged populations.

In 2014, a group of child welfare and education advocacy and policy organizations reviewed the 80+ Year 1 Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) of Los Angeles County school districts to examine how these districts addressed the educational needs of foster youth, and produced a narrative report summarizing LCAP goals, actions and services, and/or funding specifically targeted for foster youth, highlighting promising practices and areas in which more attention may be needed to address the educational needs of foster youth.

The Year 1 LCAP Review highlighted LAUSD and other districts that emerged as 'early leaders' in including foster-youth-specific goals, action steps, and funding in their Year 1 LCAPs; discussing the various approaches taken by these districts; and recommended that in future years, all districts with significant populations of foster youth students take steps to analyze and address the unique educational needs of these students.

This report is a follow-up to the Year 1 LCAP Review, examining the Year 2 LCAPs of the Los Angeles County school districts with larger populations of foster youth (100 students or more) to determine how these districts are continuing or adapting their efforts to address the educational needs of foster youth, as LCFF implementation progresses.

The analysis and conclusions presented in this report are limited, however, by the difficulty of making direct comparisons between districts' Year 1 and Year 2 LCAPs. The Year 2 LCAPs use a new template, and many districts changed or consolidated goals and action steps between years 1 and 2. Also, due to complexity and variation in how districts reported their planned and actual 2014-2015 expenditures and future years' budgets along with some districts' merging of funding for foster youth into budget allocations for the other, larger subpopulations (low-income and English Learner students), it was often difficult to tell what funds were allocated to implement foster youth-specific goals and action steps. Allowing for these data limitations, this report identifies emerging themes, promising practices, and recommendations for future years' LCAP updates.[2]

Demographics

Los Angeles County has, by far, the largest number of students who are foster youth of all California Counties. As of 2009-2010, Los Angeles County had 12,648 students in foster care, almost 40% of the state population.[3] Three of the ten school districts with the largest numbers of foster youth in California are located in this county: Los Angeles Unified School District, Long Beach Unified School District, and Antelope Valley Union High School District.

This report focuses on Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) – in a category by itself since it has about 8,500 foster youth,[4] over ten times as many foster youth as the next largest district in the state – and all other districts in the County that have over 100 students who are foster youth. These districts, taken together, serve the vast majority of the County's school-age foster youth (approximately 8,500 in LAUSD and 6,000 in the other districts).

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[2] To address this difficulty in interpreting the LCAPs, the authors sent drafts of report language to the foster youth liaisons for each district covered in the report. The final report incorporates additions and corrections provided by foster youth liaisons who responded to our request for review and comment.

[3] IAG Report Part 2, Table D11. This report uses the 2009-2010 data on numbers of foster youth per school district because more recent, accurate data is not yet available. The statewide and Los Angeles County foster care population has increased since 2010, so this data is likely an undercount of the current numbers of students who are foster youth. Additionally, the IAG Report data excludes students who had turned 18 as of October 7, 2009 even though many such students were still attending high school. It also only counts students in any given district as of October 7. Given the high mobility of foster youth, this point-in-time count dramatically undercounts the number of foster youth students these school districts serve over the course of each school year.

[4] Numbers of foster youth per district referenced in this report are based on the IAG Report's 2009-2010 data, except in the case of LAUSD, for which there is more recent local data obtained through a data match between LAUSD's student information system and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services' data system.

Innovative and Promising Practices

LAUSD, in light of its large population of foster youth – and perhaps influenced by the organized efforts of a coalition including youth advocates, community-based organizations, and representatives of the county child welfare agency[5] – made a major effort to address the educational needs of foster youth in its Year 1 LCAP, and continued and strengthened this commitment in its Year 2 LCAP. LAUSD set LCAP goals aimed at closing the achievement gap between foster youth and other students, and providing comprehensive educational needs assessment and support to each student in foster care. LAUSD allocated approximately $9M in Year 1 and $11M in Year 2 for its "Foster Youth Achievement Program," currently including 69 specially trained Pupil Services counselors who work directly with foster youth, plus 11 lead counselors and 3 administrators who provide oversight and support, development of policies, procedures, MOUs with the County's child welfare agency, improvements in local data collection and information-sharing, etc.

Aside from LAUSD, several other districts established clearly articulated LCAP goals specific to foster youth, supported by action steps and substantial funding, in their Year 1 LCAPS, and continued these commitments in their Year 2 LCAPs, as shown in Table 1, below. In addition, several districts that did not include foster youth-specific goals, actions, or funding in their Year 1 LCAPs showed substantial progress in their Year 2 LCAPs toward recognizing and addressing the needs of foster youth, including: Pasadena USD (312), Hacienda-La Puente (220), and Paramount USD (131). [6]

For example, Compton USD (466) set an overall goal of closing the achievement gap for foster youth on all metrics of student achievement, and included detailed action steps to implement this goal, including establishing district-level policy and data infrastructure, taking steps to reduce rates of school transfers for foster youth, and hiring additional staff at the district- and school-site levels. Compton USD funded these action steps with a total of $710K in Year 1, with planned increases to $891K in Year 2 and $1.178M in Year 3.

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[5] The Coalition for Educational Equity for Foster Youth (CEEFY) was organized in fall 2013 and engaged in meetings throughout 2014 with LAUSD Board members, Superintendent, and high-level administrators, provided testimony at Board hearings, disseminated position statements, etc.

[6] Numbers in parentheses represent the estimated number of foster youth in the district; see footnote 3 for data sources.

Compton USD's Year 2 LCAP indicates an ongoing commitment to these goals, action steps, and funding allocations – but also illustrates some key implementation challenges that other districts may also be grappling with. The Year 2 LCAP section on 2014-2015 activities and funding reports that only one of two foster youth counselor positions was filled, and that new policies were developed, but still awaiting Board approval. Similarly, Downey USD's and Paramount USD's Year 2 LCAPS also discussed challenges in implementing foster-youth-specific action steps due to delays and challenges in filling new positions. In light of these districts' experiences, future LCAP action steps involving hiring new staff, and putting new policies in place should factor in and plan to address the delays inherent in recruiting and hiring qualified staff, obtaining Board approval of new policies or hires, etc.

A few districts, including Compton USD, Bonita USD (146) and William Hart USD (132) utilized a 'stepwise' approach starting with their Year 1 LCAPs and continuing in Year 2 and beyond, providing for increasing levels of staffing and funding specific to foster youth over the LCAP's three-year period. Given the challenges of initiating and sustaining new programs (as the Districts referenced above demonstrated in their LCAP updates), this incremental approach may be effective in districts that need to build capacity to address the needs of their foster youth population.

The LCAP process is designed to be an iterative process over three year cycles. While many districts took the opportunity presented by a new template to substantively revise their strategies via the goals and metrics, other districts' Year 2 LCAPs, including Inglewood USD (189) and Whittier Union HSD (100), did preserve the previous year's goals, actions, and funding allocated to address the needs of foster youth in their Year 1 LCAPs. While the new Year 2 Template does include a component for Districts to report on actual expenditures/ activities and goals/metrics, it is not possible to tell from these LCAPs whether 'lessons learned' in Year 1 were taken into account in developing the Year 2 goals, actions, and funding for foster youth.

Table 1 shows districts with large populations of foster youth students that included foster-youth specific goals, action steps, and substantial funding in their Year 2 LCAPs.

Table 1. Innovative and Promising Practices for Foster Youth from LA County Districts' Year 2 LCAPs		Change from Year 1 to Year 2/3?
District	**Example**	
Pomona (495)	Provide Foster Care Liaison Consultants at all school sites; track attendance, dropout, and suspension/ expulsion metrics specifically for foster youth.	Similar
Compton (466)	Goal of closing achievement gap for foster youth on all metrics; action steps including policy and data infrastructure; reducing rates of school transfers for foster youth, and hiring staff at district- and school-site levels	Yearly stepwise increases in staffing and funding.
Palmdale (425)*	Two Foster Youth Social Workers	Refinement of goals and dedicated funding
Pasadena (312)	Goals of improving identification and prompt enrollment of foster youth, baseline data collection; increase number of foster youth liaison staffing; provide specific academic support especially for foster youth who are also special education students.	Substantial increase in goals, actions, funding from year 1.
Hacienda-La Puente (220)	Revise policies; increase liaison, counselor staffing; provide instructional support; increase participation in STEM and other specialized programs; monitor academic outcome data (e.g., enrollment in AP and UC/CSU required courses)	Substantial increase in goals, actions, funding from year 1.
Inglewood (189)	Develop an Individual Learning Plan for each foster youth; provide educational resources (e.g., curriculum and software) and staffing (e.g., college counselors, parent liaison) for foster youth.	Similar

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* FosterEd Los Angeles is a member of CEEFY and has an MOU in place to provide technical assistance co-funding of two Full Time Equivalent foster youth education liaisons through June 2017.

Downey (171)	Revise policies; hire four case workers to support foster youth; expand in-house mental health team.	Similar
Bonita (146)	Hire and retain additional foster youth/homeless liaisons, and partner with Alliance for Children's rights to help foster youth meet graduation requirements and improve graduation rates.	Yearly stepwise increases in staffing and funding
William Hart (132)	Provide two Child Welfare and Attendance staff to ensure foster youths' educational rights are met and inform counselors about services that benefit foster youth.	Yearly stepwise increases in staffing and funding
Paramount (131)	Provide foster youth counselor, tutors, mentors, and leadership/study trips to increase college awareness for foster youth	Similar
Whittier Union (100)	Provide part-time Targeted Counselor per school site to meet the needs of foster youth.	Similar
ABC Unified (94)	Provide Child Welfare and Attendance social worker and district-level oversight to monitor foster and homeless youth attendance and coordinate socio-emotional supports	Similar

Most of the above districts concentrated their foster youth-specific actions and expenditures on socio-emotional supports such as counselors, school social workers, school-based mental health services, foster youth liaisons and linkages to community resources, rather than on academic supports. These types of school-based supports are a great first step in concentrating resources to the highest needs students, but districts will need to coordinate carefully to ensure that they are complementary to and coordinated with foster youths' existing case plans, mental health services, etc., and that the unique role of schools in supporting foster youths' academic progress and success is not shortchanged.

A few districts' LCAPs – Compton, Paramount, Pasadena and Hacienda-La Puente – specifically included academic outcome goals and/or specific academic supports for foster youth (e.g., tutoring, priority access to summer enrichment programs, etc.). In future years, as disaggregated outcome data becomes available – and as the role of County Offices of Education shifts toward system coordination and LCFF implementation support, and away

from direct services to foster youth[7] — districts may want to consider including in their LCAPs academic supports specifically targeted for foster youth.

Even among districts whose Year 2 LCAPs include goals, actions, and funding specifically targeted for foster youth, very few include goals and/or action steps specifically focused on increasing school stability for foster youth, e.g., by providing transportation to implement foster youths' rights to remain in their school origin despite placement changes, and/or by reducing transfers of foster youth from comprehensive schools to alternative and continuation schools. In light of the data showing that school instability is a key challenge for foster youth – and one of the major ways in which foster youth are distinct from other low-income and at-risk student populations – in LCAPs for Years 3 and beyond, more districts may find that specific and targeted efforts to improve school stability will help make progress on improving academic outcomes for foster youth.

More Progress Needed

Due to the small size of the foster care population in comparison to other at-risk student populations, it is understandable that most districts' Year 2 LCAPs do not allocate large percentages of supplemental and concentration funds to foster youth-specific actions and services. As the LCFF process continues and more data become available, districts will have a better basis for assessing how much targeted funding is necessary in order to close the achievement gap between foster youth and other students.

Several school districts' Year 2 LCAPs included one or more foster youth-specific goals and/or action steps such as closing the achievement gap, providing individualized support for foster youth students, reducing delays in enrollment, providing credit recovery and supplemental instruction, etc. – but appeared to allocate little or no designated funding or staffing to achieve these goals. [8] This apparent lack of dedicated resources, however, may reflect the difficulty of interpreting these districts' use of the LCAP template rather than an

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[7] This change is required by AB 854, effective January 2016.

[8] These districts include Long Beach USD (617) and Antelope Valley UHSD (538), two of the 10 districts with the highest populations of foster youth in the state. Long Beach USD included in its Year 2 LCAP specific academic improvement goals for foster youth, and some action steps, but appears to have allocated only $50,000 in Year 1 and $100,000 in Year 2 and subsequent years (for increased foster youth liaison staffing) to implement these goals. Antelope Valley included an action step of designating a counselor at each school site as a foster youth counselor, but did not appear to dedicate any increased staffing or funding to implement this action. Other districts in this category include Montebello USD (203); Lynwood (151); West Covina (147); El Rancho (133); Rowland (130); Bellflower (117); Westside Union ESD (117); Azusa USD (107) and ABC USD (94).

actual gap in resources. Some districts' LCAPs do not break down their supplemental and concentration funds into allocations to implement specific goals and actions for low-income students, English Learners, foster youth, etc., so the LCAPs do not reveal the actual level of funding the districts intend to use to implement foster youth-specific goals or actions.

For example, Rowland USD (130) included in its Year 1 LCAP a goal of providing "appropriate specialized services beyond the core academic program," and in this section of the LCAP set goals of closing the foster youth achievement gap and decreasing the adverse effects of school mobility on foster youth in its Year 1 LCAP, dedicating $40,000 to implement this goal by increasing staffing for the foster youth liaison/counselor. But Rowland's Year 2 LCAP, using the new template, no longer includes the "specialized services" goal, or foster youth-specific goals or action steps, so it is difficult to determine from the Year 2 LCAP how Rowland USD will continue to address the needs of foster youth students in Years 2 and beyond.

Also, some districts – especially those with smaller foster youth populations – took the approach of combining staff responsibilities for supporting foster youth with responsibilities to support other at-risk student populations such as homeless students and English Learners. This may be an effective approach for smaller districts, but it remains to be seen whether such staffing is sufficient to accomplish the district's foster-youth-specific goals.

Finally, a number of districts with significant foster youth populations did not include any goals, actions, or funding specific to foster youth in their Year 2 LCAPs.[9] Some of these districts, however, do include foster youth in interventions targeted more broadly at vulnerable student populations; for example, Lancaster USD's LCAP states that counselors will prioritize monitoring attendance rates of foster students, and providing interventions to address socio-emotional needs of foster youth, African-American students, and other at-risk students.[10]

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[9] These districts include: Lancaster ESD (351); Baldwin Park (184); Norwalk-La Mirada (154); Covina Valley (115); and Torrance (97).

[10] Also, Lancaster USD's foster youth liaison stated in an e-mail communication to the authors (dated April 4, 2016) that in addition to this LCAP provision for attendance monitoring, the district considers foster youth a "priority group" for campus-based supports including counseling, tutoring, and academic intervention; this is an example of how districts' plans to support foster youth may not be entirely apparent from a review of their LCAPs.

Some districts may have also developed strategies to support foster youth students outside of the LCFF framework. Although this approach might have been understandable in Year 1, due to the newness of the LCFF legislation, and the complexity and competing needs and priorities involved in the LCAP development process, in Years 3 and beyond, these districts should consider setting specific goals, supported by actions and dedicated funding proportionate to the size, needs, and unique educational challenges of their foster youth populations. In these cases, LCFF's spirit of community engagement and budget transparency would be promoted if these districts, in future years, incorporated these strategies and investments into their LCAPs.

Also, even those districts whose Year 2 LCAPs included goals, actions, and funding specific to foster youth did not focus on inclusion of foster youth in early education. Future investment in early education specifically targeted to foster children ages 3-5 would help ensure that these at-risk children will have the pre-academic and social/emotional/ behavioral skills to be successful when they enter kindergarten. Targeted efforts to increase foster youth enrollment in early education programs would also help improve academic outcomes for foster youth, improve parent/caregiver engagement, and improve school climate.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Year 2 update of our review of Los Angeles County's LCAPs has shown that there continue to be large variations among districts' LCAPs in relation to specific supports for students in foster care. As LCFF moves towards its eight-year mark of becoming fully funded and implemented, we hope to see increased investments tailored for students in foster care. Strong partnerships between school districts, the Los Angeles County Office of Education's Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, and community partners can be critical in supporting school districts in building capacity to better serve foster youth students through the following activities:

- Continuing to improve the data infrastructure necessary to more accurately identify and track foster youth, as well as share data and information among courts, child welfare, probation, and education agencies as necessary to support the educational success of students in foster care;

- Disaggregating and tracking of foster youth education outcome data, including setting baseline data and specific targets for improvement, and using foster-youth-specific outcome data to guide strategic investments tailored for students in foster care;

- Developing targeted policies and interventions to address educational challenges specific to foster youth, such as frequent school changes; gaps in attendance; lack of consistent educational support from a parent or caregiver; and the impact of trauma on learning.

- Developing and providing comprehensive training and resources for foster youth-specific staff at the school site and district level, as well as more generalized professional development opportunities for all educators and administrators on child welfare and foster care;

- Coordinating with the Los Angeles County Office of Education's Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Mental Health, etc., to ensure that programs and services for foster youth are complementary, and avoid redundancy and service gaps.

Resources

Several tools and resources are available to assist districts in addressing the educational needs of foster youth in their Year 3 and future LCAPs, including:

- Sample District LCAP for Foster Youth 2.0, developed by the Coalition for Educational Equity for Foster Youth and the California Foster Youth Education Task Force, *available at http://www.cfyetf.org/publications.html*.

- LCAP Sample Actions & Services from the Coalition for Educational Equity for Foster Youth, *available at http://www.cfyetf.org/publications.html*.

- A 'build your own' blueprint to assist districts in customizing LCAP provisions to the characteristics and needs of their local foster youth populations, developed by the Coalition for Educational Equity for Foster Youth, *available at http://www.cfyetf.org/publications.html*.

- A Foster Youth Education Toolkit of model district policies to implement foster youths' rights regarding enrollment, partial credits, graduation with state minimum requirements, etc. developed by the Alliance for Children's Rights, Association of California School Administrators, California Department of Education, California School Board Association, California Superintendent Educational Services Association, County Welfare Directors Association, and the Child Welfare Council, available at http://kids-alliance.org/edtoolkit/.

- Education Law Fact Sheets – 5th Edition, developed by the California Foster Youth Education Task Force, *available at http://www.cfyetf.org/publications.html*.