**College Pathways Coverage Areas**

The goal of FMC’s coverage around College Pathways is to drive public and political will behind increasing the number of California foster youth who graduate from college and experience academic success at the same or better rates than their non-foster peers.

This will require expanded utilization of College Pathways type services by foster youth who attend schools with existing programs, and require more colleges to launch programs of their own. The architects of College Pathways are pursuing both these goals, with increased support for existing programs, expansion to new campuses and increased cohesion of practice across disparate programs.

Our role will be to draw the outlines of a dream system by highlighting the areas of greatest need, while focusing on successful models of post-secondary support for foster youth within California and other states. Our work will spawn follow up coverage in media outlets throughout California, paving the way for: state and/or federal legislation and investment; inspiring other private charities to step up; and stoking excitement for College Pathways throughout California’s higher education system.

The following is a list of coverage areas we have identified after copious interviews with stakeholders across the College Pathways spectrum.

**Preparedness:**

Foster youth entering college -- like many low-income and minority students leaving California’s public schools – do so at a grave academic disadvantage. With the recent passage of K-12 education reform in California, there is an opportunity to influence the public education system to better serve students in foster care. In particular, our coverage can help alter K-12 education policy to focus on outcomes that will give foster youth a better shot of staying in and succeeding in college once they arrive.

In addition, we will focus on ways the Child Welfare system can better prepare foster youth for success.

* News stories on foster youth oriented implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula
* Examples of programs that are working to equip high school aged students for college: Courageous Connection, Foster Youth Services
* How ILP programs are working with schools to better ensure that foster youth are prepared for college
* Interviews with school administrators and experts on how to best serve foster youth and low performing students in college preparedness
* How child welfare and juvenile probation agencies do or do not prioritize educational stability and college readiness for foster youth as they reach maturity
* How foster youth could sign up for the FAFSA prior to March 2 deadline as seniors in high school at a higher rate

**National Comparisons:**

It is entirely possible that our coverage will stoke state level and possibly federal legislation to bolster College Pathways. To do this we need to take a look at the challenges other states have faced and the solutions they have found.

* How foster youth factor into the Higher Education Act: timeline on re-authorization, committee that oversees it and the politicians on it
* Washington State’s system and more examples of how it works
* Profiles of all the states that will have representation at the Blueprint Conference and how their programs work and are funded.
* Chaffee – how Chafee is administered in California versus other states
* Medicaid uptake – how other states are doing this

**School Administration Buy-In:**

UC Merced is beginning a Guardian Scholars program for the first time this year, prompted by a University administrator who saw a need to help foster youth on their campus. Many of the foster youth service programs on college campuses say that having the support of University administrators helps sustain the program, and increase financial support.

Debbie Raucher of the John Burton Foundation has called this the “crux” of the whole College Pathways initiative. Institutionalized support is what allows programs to flourish without the specter of discontinued funding to face each New Year. In addition to buy-in from individual campuses administrations, creating a commitment to funding services for this population within the Chancellor’s offices at each of the three public post-secondary systems will further support the sustainability of foster youth campus support programs.

**Achievement:**

When the general public thinks of foster youth and college, the first reference is often the low rates of graduation. While this is a part of the story, it is far from the everyday success that is going on campuses throughout the state and country. To help outline a future where foster youth are experiencing academic success at rates equal to or better than their peers we should look to examples in existing Guardian Scholars type programs.

Whether at the community college or four-year university level, we will explore what supports foster youth need to achieve, and in so doing lead practice by highlighting solutions.

**Financial Literacy**

Chafee grants, FAFSA, scholarships, school financial aid reward letters—who helps youth understand and manage their funding streams? Most Guardian Scholars programs say no one: not a social worker, foster parent, mentor -- Just the 18-22 year old. More work needs to be done to equip youth with understanding how to find money for college, what fees will be covered, and what they will be responsible for. Some ILSP programs and organizations are working to teach financial literacy, but more work needs to be done. Without such a financial education, many youth fall into debt or become discouraged by the college process, decreasing the number of foster youth who matriculate. An opportunity for incentivizing such skill building now exists through the Supervised Independent Living Placement option through the readiness assessment process if implemented effectively by Child Welfare agencies.

**System Stigma**

Many of the Guardian Scholars programs report trouble recruiting students on their campus because many don’t want to identify themselves as a former foster youth. Although the program provides services that would be beneficial to students, those who hate the stigma of being a “foster kid” often run from anything that labels them as such. Some campuses come up with ways to help students understand that identifying with this system will not be the same the system they know as foster care.

**Building Networks With Other Schools**

College Pathways is using its grant monies to support the formation of networks with other campuses nearby—helping to decrease the feeling that students are all alone in their educational pursuits. Many of the Guardian Scholars programs average about 60 students, yet when they partner on events with other campuses, their numbers increase. This network with community colleges and 4-year universities also helps more students understand the transfer process.

**Increased Need For Dental Care**

Many programs report students having problems in the classroom because of problems with their teeth. A number of students don’t have access to dental care, or limited access, which is impeding on academic success.

**Healthy Eating**

Top Ramen is a popular cheap food amongst college students. But many Guardians Scholars program administrators report that students are overly dependent on unhealthy, inexpensive foods because they don’t have the money for better options. Or they skip meals entirely. Some schools are holding workshops on nutrition, getting discounts on meals at the dining hall, and helping students understand how choosing healthier options can also save them money.