NO TIME TO LOSE

*A Policy Agenda to Support
College Success for Foster Youth*

JANUARY, 2015

JOHN
BURTON
FOUNDATION
FOR CHILDREN WITHOUT HOMES

CALIFORNIA
COLLEGE
PATHWAYS

CALIFORNIA COLLEGE PATHWAYS

The California College Pathways initiative provides resources and leadership to campuses and community organizations to help foster youth succeed at community colleges, vocational schools, and four-year universities. With support from the Stuart, Walter S. Johnson and Hilton Foundations, California College Pathways is managed by the John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes. The work of California College Pathways focuses on supporting foster youth to achieve four important milestones.

- **EQUIP** with essential resources
- **ENROLL** in a college or training program
- **EARN** a college degree or certificate
- **EMBARK** on a career path

EQUIP
WITH ESSENTIAL RESOURCES

ENROLL
IN COLLEGE OR TRAINING PROGRAM

EARN
A DEGREE OR CERTIFICATE

EMBARK
ON A CAREER

This work is accomplished through the following five strategies:

- *Expand College and Career Pathways.* Build strong campus and community networks with effective systems for coordinated action.
- *Strengthen Campus and Community Capacity.* Provide resources that increase knowledge and capacity to support foster youth.
- *Promote Data-Informed Decision Making.* Develop an effective shared measurement system that empowers stakeholders to make informed decisions regarding policies, practices, and programs.
- *Engage the Expertise of Foster Youth.* Create opportunities for foster youth to inform, lead, and build effective educational pathways for all youth in foster care.
- *Encourage Supportive Policy Development and Implementation.* Advocate for the creation and implementation of policies that support positive education outcomes for foster youth.

For more information, visit www.cacollegepathways.org

★ INTRODUCTION

O ver the last decade, California has made important gains in addressing the educational needs of children and youth in foster care. This improvement started with the implementation of landmark legislation Assembly Bill 490 in 2004, which established key educational rights for children and youth in foster care and new responsibilities for child welfare and local education agencies. Progress continued into 2012, when California significantly changed how it funds K-12 education and in doing so, placed a new emphasis on measuring the educational outcomes of children and youth in foster care and ensuring that financial resources follow them to the school site.

While these gains are significant, they focus exclusively on the K-12 educational experience. To date, California has made very little policy change to increase the number of foster youth who enroll, persist and ultimately complete college, or career and technical education programs. The most significant development has been the creation of "campus support programs," often known as Guardian Scholars Programs. These innovative programs have increased academic achievement for foster youth in college and yielded critical information about which practices result in higher retention and graduation rates. Yet they are available on a limited basis and do not address a range of barriers that prevent post-secondary achievement.

Now is a critical time to develop a comprehensive strategy to improve post-secondary education outcomes for foster youth. With the 2012 implementation of the extension of foster care to age 21 in California (AB 12), there has been a significant change in the demographics of the foster care population. In just three years, the percentage of older youth in foster care (age 18 years and above) has increased 300%. This significant demographic change highlights the need to re-think how we address the post-secondary educational needs of youth in foster care and acknowledge that college, and career and technical education fall squarely within the domain of child welfare practice.

We know that most youth in foster care want to go to college. When surveyed, a representative sample of 17-year-olds in foster care stated that the main reason they want to participate in extended foster care is to achieve their educational goals. What we haven't yet determined are the specific policies and practices that must change to help foster youth achieve their post-secondary goals.

The purpose of this report is to identify those specific policies and practices. Through extensive interviews with state and national experts, together with analysis of education and child welfare data as well as input from foster youth themselves, the report arrives on a set of 17 policy recommendations. Together, these address the barriers that prevent young people from succeeding in post-secondary education.

Our hope is that the next decade will be one in which child welfare and local educational agencies recognize the critical role they play in the post-secondary success of foster youth and adopt new policies and practices. With these changes, California will take an important step forward in ensuring the educational aspirations of foster youth become a reality.
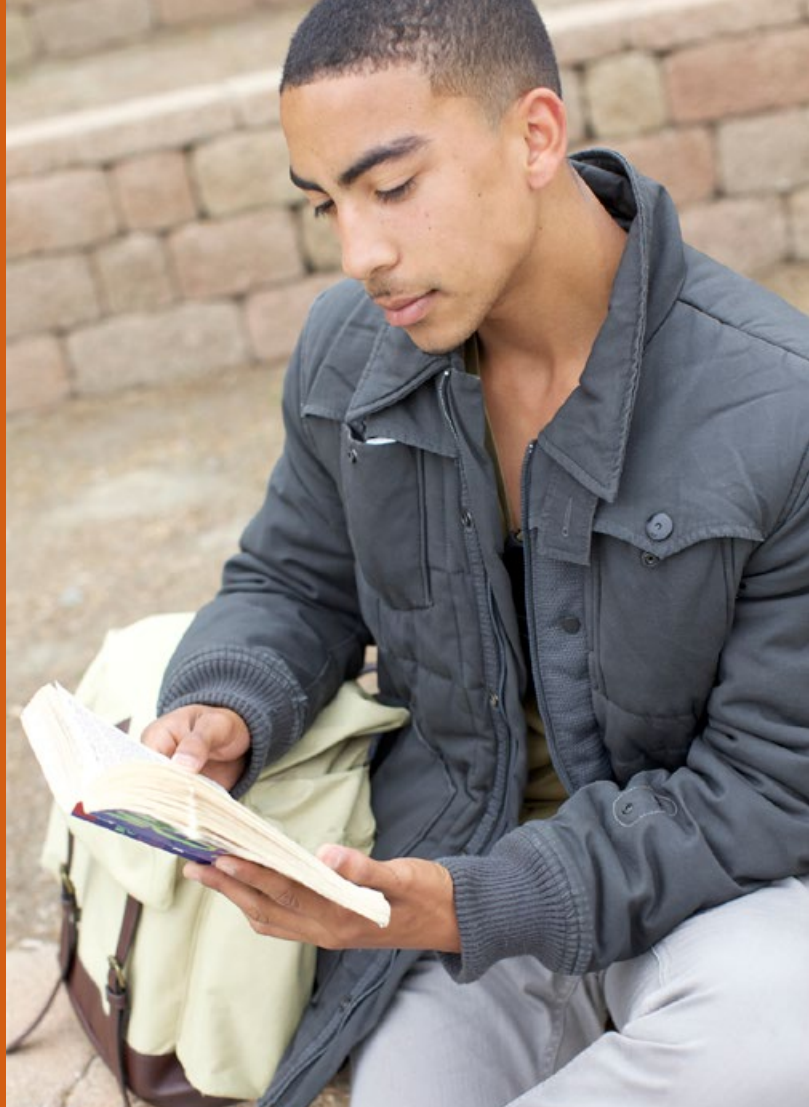
★ POLICY
RECOMMENDATION
OVERVIEW

| BARRIERS	#	POLICY RECOMMENDATION	LEGISLATION REQUIRED	MILESTONE
Foster Youth Are Not Academically Prepared for College	1	Ensure that Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) implementation includes adequate accountability mechanisms for foster youth outcomes.	No	**EQUIP**
	2	Expand support while in grades K-12 by aligning the Foster Youth Services (FYS) definition of foster youth to the LCFF and leveraging federal Title IV-E funds for FYS.	No	**EQUIP**
Foster Youth Lack Knowledge Regarding the Matriculation Process	3	Clearly delineate expectations that post-secondary preparation and transition be included within the mandates of FYS programs.	Yes	**EQUIP**
	4	Require caregivers to be trained on post-secondary education, including financial aid, admission and matriculation requirements.	Yes	**ENROLL**
	5	Fund and enforce existing mandates in state law for colleges, universities, CDSS and CSAC to conduct college outreach to foster youth.	No	**ENROLL**
Foster Youth Do Not Have Access to Adequate Financial Aid	6	Require county social workers to screen age-appropriate youth for financial aid eligibility.	Yes	**EQUIP**
	7	Expand both federal and state contribution of funds to the Chafee grant program by $50 million.	Yes	**EQUIP**
	8	Increase the effectiveness of existing Chafee program to increase its reach and improve the timeliness of distribution of funds.	No	**EQUIP**
	9	Use CalSAVE options to create college savings accounts for foster youth.	No	**EQUIP**
Foster Youth Struggle to Access Documentation Necessary for Enrollment and Benefit Access	10	Create a centralized verification system that allows current and former foster youth to easily obtain evidence of foster youth status.	Yes	**EARN**
Foster Youth Are Less Likely to Complete College	11	Expand the availability of priority registration by removing the 2017 sunset and updating eligibility to align with other programs.	Yes	**EARN**
	12	Institute expanded tracking of educational status through court reporting.	Yes	**EARN**
	13	Establish campus support programs at all publicly funded California campuses.	Yes	**EARN**
Foster Youth Have Inadequate Access to Housing, Including During Summer Breaks	14	Improve access to housing for foster youth through expanded THP-Plus Foster Care programs.	No	**EQUIP**
	15	Provide summer housing to foster youth.	No	**EQUIP**
Adequate Data to Track Foster Youth Progress Is Not Available	16	Create a data sharing mechanism to enable tracking of foster youth college outcomes.	Yes	**EARN**
	17	Implement data tracking of foster youth at CSUs, as required by current law, and recommend tracking at UCs.	Yes	**EARN**

★ BARRIERS TO FOSTER YOUTH POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SUCCESS

E
xisting research identifies a series of barriers that have prevented the development and execution of a successful strategy to improve educational outcomes for California's foster youth. These obstacles include inadequate academic preparation for college, a lack of information about matriculation processes, insufficient access to financial aid and housing, not enough support to help foster youth stay in college, and a lack of data to gauge success. These barriers are summarized below.

★ Foster Youth Are Not Academically Prepared for College

A recently published series of reports clearly documented for the first time that students in foster care are a distinct subgroup of at-risk students—with education outcomes that are consistently poorer than those of the broader population of students, including English language learners, students with disabilities, and those with low socioeconomic status (low-SES). As the chart below demonstrates, far fewer foster youth are proficient in the basic skills necessary to succeed at college.

Figure 1: Percent of students who scored at each of five proficiency levels at the California Standards Test in English Language Arts[1]
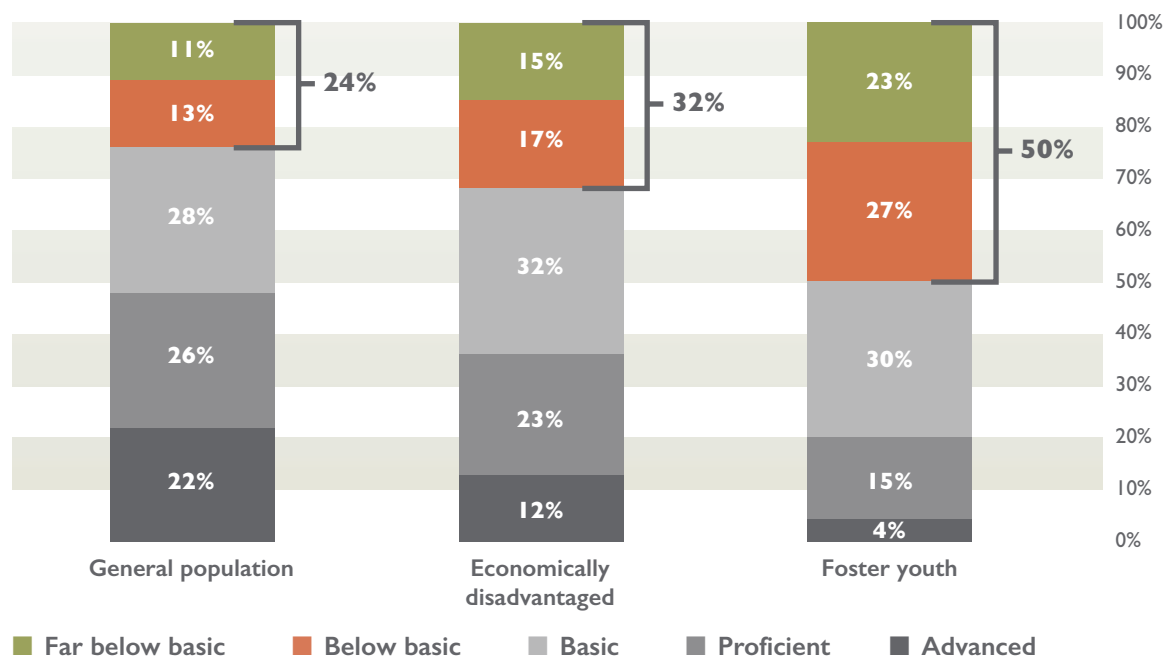
Students in foster care were less likely to pass the California high school exit exam (CAHSEE), more likely to drop out, and less likely to graduate than the statewide student population and low-SES students.[2]

This lack of preparation is also reflected in the high rates of foster youth who place into remedial coursework upon entry into a community college or CSU campus. While systemwide data is not available, data from individual campuses indicate a high rate of such placement. Students can spend years completing basic coursework before ever taking a transfer-eligible course and many get discouraged and drop out. Others use up valuable financial aid during this period, and those who move on to 4-year universities are at particular risk for reaching the six-year cap on federal aid before completing college.

★ Foster Youth Lack Knowledge Regarding the Matriculation Process

The timing of college entrance for foster youth can be a significant factor in their odds of success. Foster youth who delay entrance into community college for one year or more are 40% less likely to continue compared to those who enroll right after 12th grade.[3] Unfortunately, children who experience frequent placement and school changes may face challenges in developing and sustaining supportive relationships with teachers, counselors or other mentoring adults and may not have access to the help they need to enroll in college as they near high school completion. While there may be other relatively stable adults in youth's lives, including social workers, foster parents, and group home staff, these adults are not typically adequate sources of information on complicated and timely college matriculation and financial aid applications.[4]

With the recent implementation of the Student Success Act (Senate Bill 1456), community college matriculation requirements now include attending an orientation, completing assessment tests, working with an academic counselor to prepare an education plan, payment of necessary fees, and course enrollment. In order to access fall priority enrollment, students must complete all of these activities by mid-spring. At 4-year universities, the process begins even earlier with fall term applications due on November 30 of the previous year. Applications for financial aid and to campus-based support programs must also be completed well in advance. Interviews with campus professionals revealed that foster youth are more likely to miss important deadlines or arrive on community college campuses too late to complete the necessary steps in time to enroll in classes.

This lack of information may also result in insufficient preparation for English and math assessment tests, resulting in placement below college level. Being placed in remedial courses can lead to student discouragement, dropping out, and risk of using up financial aid resources before completion.

★ Foster Youth Do Not Have Access to Adequate Financial Aid

Financial aid is crucial to the vast majority of foster youth's ability to enroll in and complete college. According to new research from the Public Policy Institute, students who receive grants and scholarships are more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than otherwise similar students. These findings hold even after controlling for institutional and student characteristics, including high school grade point average and family income. Financial assistance enables and encourages students to focus on their coursework, rather than attending school part-time and working part-time jobs to finance their education, a practice common among foster youth.[5]

A pivotal study conducted in 2009 by the Institute for College Access and Success revealed troubling realities, however, about foster youth's access to needed aid. The study found that of identified former foster youth who applied for financial aid in California, 84% were eligible for a Pell Grant, 17% received or were offered a Cal Grant, and only 9% received a Chafee Grant. Less than 4% of foster youth who completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) received all three grants.

Getting financial aid is a complicated process, with a series of hurdles that can trip up all kinds of students, but foster youth in particular. One major obstacle is a lack of information about application deadlines, in particular the March 2 Cal Grant deadline. Few former foster youth interviewed for the 2009 study were aware of the Cal Grant deadline or had applied for financial aid at the time of interview, six months before the start of the school year. In addition, shortfalls in funding have resulted in many eligible foster youth not having access to Chafee grants. In the 2013-14 academic year, according to the California Student Aid Commission, of 18,000 eligible applicants for Chafee grants, only 3,500 received funds. It is likely that the true number of unfunded eligible youth is greater than this, as many eligible foster youth are not aware of the program or hear from peers who did not receive grants that it is not worth applying because the likelihood of receiving a grant is so low.

The disbursement process for Chafee Grants is also problematic. The California State Aid Commission (CSAC) makes Chafee Grant offers throughout the year until funds are depleted and some eligible applicants receive offers months after classes have begun. Having received insufficient financial aid up to this point, would-be recipients may have cut back on classes, dropped out entirely or perhaps opted for student loans to cover expenses that they are ill prepared to pay back. Students need to be able to access their aid at the time they need it most: when school starts, educational expenses kick in, and earnings potentially decrease. In response to unexpected delays in financial aid, youth cope by sleeping on friends' couches, deciding not to buy the textbooks required for their classes, or dropping some or all courses to work instead of going to school.[6]

★ Foster Youth Struggle to Access Documentation Necessary for Enrollment and Benefit Access

Foster care status can enable students to: claim independent status for the purpose of federal financial aid (based solely on a student's income, exempt from parental income reporting requirements), access foster-youth-specific campus support programs, and qualify for priority enrollment. While these benefits may be available to students with a foster care history, the Institute for College Access and Success' 2009 study revealed that students frequently struggle to obtain documentation verifying their foster care status. This struggle leads some youth to abandon the effort to obtain certain benefits, and can even lead to youth giving up entirely on school enrollment out of frustration. While the law requires that foster youth receive documentation of foster care status prior to their 18th birthday, not all youth consistently receive it, and those who do sometimes lose it and need to request new copies, and in some cases find the documentation provided is deemed inadequate by a college. The Institute for College Access and Success found that several students described traveling back and forth between various administrative offices to obtain documentation; one young man attending college in San Francisco even had to go to Los Angeles, the county in which he was in foster care, to retrieve documents verifying his status.[7] This report also revealed inconsistency across campuses regarding what is considered acceptable documentation.

★ Foster Youth Are Less Likely to Complete College

Although studies indicate that most youth in foster care have college aspirations, numerous studies have found lower college completion rates among them as opposed to other young adults.[8] For example, one study using administrative data from Michigan State University showed that former foster youth were more likely to drop out of college compared to a comparison group of youth who were never in foster care, but were from low-income backgrounds and were first-generation college students. The study showed that 34% of former foster youth dropped out before earning a degree compared to 18% for the comparison group.[9] Only 8% of foster youth participating in the Midwest study had obtained a postsecondary degree by age 26. By comparison, 47% of 26-year-olds in the nationally representative National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health sample had obtained a two- or four-year degree.[10]

Figure 2: Education attainment by age 26[11]

	Former foster youth	Same age comparison group
No high school diploma or GED	20%	6%
High school diploma only	31%	18%
GED only	9%	4%
One or more years of college, but no degree	32%	26%
2-year college degree	4%	10%
4-year college degree	3% — 8%	24% — 47%
One or more years of graduate school	1%	13%

According to a 2013 study of California foster youth enrolled in community colleges, only 41% enrolled in college for a second year as compared with 62% of the general population. Foster youth also fared worse that those with similar socio-economic backgrounds, of whom 48% enrolled for a second year of community college.[12]

★ Foster Youth Have Inadequate Access to Housing, Including During Summer Breaks

Foster youth often struggle with accessing permanent housing and those residing in college dorms often experience instability during long holidays and summer breaks if year-round campus housing is unavailable. In a survey of foster youth attending colleges in California and Washington, 97% of youth who received some form of housing assistance said that it was a service that was "important" or "very important" to their college success.[13] Unfortunately, the same study confirmed that while housing is one of the most difficult challenges for foster youth to overcome on their own, housing assistance is the least adequately provided service for foster youth students.

Interviews with foster youth support staff at 4-year universities revealed in particular that housing during summer breaks is a major challenge due to the unavailability of financial aid over the summer if the student is not enrolled in summer courses. Many foster youth end up "couch surfing" or returning to their biological parents, often an unhealthy setting for them.

★ Adequate Data to Track Foster Youth Progress Is Not Available

It is impossible to assess which interventions are most successful without knowing: how well the target students are performing academically, how successfully they are accessing and benefiting from available resources, and how the academic and personal success of students receiving intervention compares with that of students who are not. Without an evaluation process, both systems and individual college campuses are limited in their ability to improve services.

The community college system took an important step in 2012 with the addition of a foster youth identifier within the central Management Information System. Both the CSU and UC systems also request applicants to report foster care status on admission applications. Philanthropic partners have been instrumental in partnering with the CalPASS Plus system to facilitate better access to foster youth data. CalPASS Plus, created through leadership and funding by the California Community College Chancellor's Office, is managed by Educational Results Partnership and offers various mechanisms for accessing campus-level data. CalPASS Plus obtains data from each community college district as well as some K-12 school districts and 4-year universities, offering an opportunity to provide more robust tracking and analysis than any one system could provide independently.

Many issues remain, however, both with data accuracy and availability. Despite improvements to foster youth identification, not all campuses have systems in place to accurately track which students are current or former foster youth. There is no mechanism in place for any college to easily confirm foster youth status through data sharing with the California Department of Social Services. In addition, the only system currently with the capacity to produce extensive aggregated foster youth data is CalPASS Plus. Not all campuses participate in CalPASS Plus, however, and the information that is available through CalPASS Plus is not widely accessible due to restrictive data-sharing agreements.

★ POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

T he barriers that stand in the way of foster youth post-secondary educational attainment are complex and do not lend themselves to easy solutions. There are, however, many concrete steps that can be taken to improve educational outcomes and create an environment conducive to helping foster youth turn their dreams into degrees. Realization of the policy recommendations below would be a significant step towards fulfilling the promise and obligation implicit in the State's role as parent, caretaker and mentor for these vulnerable youth. The complement of ideas presented below does not capture every potential policy solution, but rather seeks to highlight those ideas that have the potential to be the most impactful while also being practical to implement over the next several years.

★ SOLUTIONS TO LACK OF ACADEMIC PREPARATION

1. *Ensure that Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) implementation includes adequate accountability mechanisms for foster youth outcomes.*

Under the newly implemented Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), all school districts are required to develop three-year plans known as Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP). The first LCAPs submitted under the LCFF to county offices of education for review were finalized on July 1, 2014. These plans establish goals for improving educational outcomes and metrics to measure the counties' and districts' success. The State Board of Education has until October 1, 2015 to adopt an evaluation rubric for districts, county superintendents and the state superintendent of public instruction to determine whether districts have met performance goals or need outside support or intervention. LCFF directed districts to consider, many for the first time, the unique educational needs of foster youth. According to an analysis of LCAPs completed by The Education Trust West, despite this mandate, most districts do not directly and distinctly address the needs of foster youth in their first-year LCAPs, apart from saying they will receive the same services as all students.[14] It is essential that this rubric include accountability mechanisms that adequately gauge whether sufficient progress is being made in foster youth outcomes and provide for substantive intervention when it is not.

2. *Expand support while in grades K-12 by aligning the Foster Youth Services (FYS) definition of foster youth to the LCFF and leveraging federal Title IV-E funds for FYS.*

a. Definition alignment. The Foster Youth Services (FYS) program provides counseling, tutoring, mentoring, vocational training, emancipation services, training for independent living, and other related services to foster youth enrolled in K-12 systems. Data from six Core FYS programs demonstrated a 70% high school completion rate for participants, well above the 45% completion rate for all foster youth.[15] However, the FYS program and the LCFF are currently misaligned in their definitions of "foster youth."[16] While the LCFF definition includes all foster youth, regardless of where they are placed, as well as those who are receiving family reunification and family maintenance services, the FYS definition and funding are limited to foster youth placed in traditional foster care settings. This misalignment is creating confusion for school districts and county offices of education. More importantly, it means that foster children placed with relatives as well as children in families receiving family maintenance or reunification support are not eligible or funded to receive support provided by FYS programs.

Studies have found the educational outcomes of foster children living with relatives to be similar to those living in non-relative foster homes, significantly worse than the general student population and worse than other at-risk student subgroups.[17] In recognition of this fact, the LCFF definition includes all foster youth. The FYS program should be aligned with the LCFF so that all foster children receive the educational supports they need, regardless of the type of foster placement in which they reside. Aligning FYS with LCFF requires changing the FYS definition of foster youth to match the LCFF definition, and increasing FYS funding to accommodate this change.

b. Leveraging federal funds. The State of California is not accessing federal resources that could be used to supplement the state contribution to FYS. Title IV-E of the Social Security Act provides federal funds in support of certain child welfare activities. It is an open-ended entitlement funding program, through which states may seek partial reimbursement for allowable activities. One such category is administration expenditures, which can include referral to services, case plan development, case reviews, and case management and supervision. In several California counties, child welfare agencies and county offices of education have entered into MOUs and successfully sought additional Title IV-E funding to provide increased educational case management services, based on a partial federal match of FYS grant dollars. These federal funds have been used to supplement the services provided by FYS, establish educational liaison positions, and significantly increase support available to foster youth. These counties' efforts have paved the way for the leveraging of Title IV-E dollars based on FYS grant funds to become a statewide practice.

★ SOLUTIONS TO LACK OF KNOWLEDGE REGARDING MATRICULATION

3. *Clearly delineate expectations that post-secondary preparation and transition be included within the mandates of FYS programs.*

Existing statute requires that Foster Youth Services programs assist with "transitioning services" and "emancipation services." Both terms, however, are undefined and programs vary in the degree to which they work specifically on preparation for college. The implementation of extended foster care expands the responsibility of the child welfare system beyond high school graduation, creating an even greater imperative for FYS programs to play an expanded role in college preparation. With the implementation of the LCFF, additional resources may be available through local districts for direct services such as tutoring and educational planning, allowing FYS coordinators to take on a greater role in supporting system integration and providing assistance to local districts with system improvements designed to better serve foster youth.

Changes to the statute governing FYS should include clearly delineated expectations that post-secondary preparation and transition be included within the mandates of FYS programs. Language should be added to make it explicit that preparation for post-secondary education, including assistance with matriculation and applying for financial aid, falls under the purview of the support that FYS would provide to districts, and that systems integration should include post-secondary institutions. This intent should also be included in any Request for Proposals that is issued and used as a component of the basis for determining the allocation of FYS funding. Post-secondary representatives should also be added to the list of mandated participants for FYS advisory committees.

4. *Require caregivers to be trained on post-secondary education, including financial aid, admission and matriculation requirements.*

Youth learn about college and financial aid opportunities from adults with whom they have stable relationships. However, the adults that foster youth interact with most frequently have typically neither been tasked nor trained to provide this information, and many youth miss out on it as a result.[18] Caregivers are the best-positioned adults to provide critical college-going information to the youth in their care and as such should receive training from the state on college options for foster youth, including financial aid availability, scholarship opportunities and important matriculation deadlines.

a. Foster parents and kinship caregivers: Training for foster parents and kinship caregivers is provided through the Foster Kinship Care Education (FKCE) program, which is housed within the community college system and by foster family agencies. Funding for the FKCE program comes from state general funds along with a match of federal Title IV-E funds. Current law mandates that foster parents receive 12 hours of training before placement and either eight or 12 hours of annual ongoing training depending on whether the foster parent is licensed by the county or certified by a foster family agency. Kinship caregivers, while not required to receive training, are entitled to access FKCE training services. The list of training topics that must be offered by FKCE programs for both foster parents and kinship caregivers includes an overview of educational services available to foster children but does not specifically include services available at the post-secondary level.[19]

Current law also specifies that foster youth aged 16 and up have the right to access information regarding post-secondary education[20] and licensing regulations require caregivers to make such information available,[21] yet there are no specific training requirements in place to ensure that this happens. Statute should be updated to include training related to college access in the list of mandated training for foster parents of any child over the age of 13, as well as the list of training options available to kinship caregivers. Such training should include information regarding financial aid, admission and matriculation requirements (including the importance of assessment tests at community colleges) and available support services. In order to ensure that this training be adequately provided, the number of ongoing annual training hours would need to be increased from the current requirement.

b. Group home and foster family agency staff: Existing regulations that enumerate staff training requirements for group homes and Foster Family Agency (FFA) providers do not currently include an educational component. Licensing regulations require that group homes offer assistance to non-minor dependents with "educational and career development" and there are requirements that group homes ensure each child's attendance at an educational program in accordance with state law, but no specific training is mandated.[22] Licensing regulations for FFA providers require that education be addressed in the needs and services plan, but again no specific training is mandated.[23] All group home and FFA direct service staff should receive training regarding foster youth educational rights, and those who work with youth ages 13 and up should be required to receive training regarding post-secondary educational resources.

5. **Fund and enforce existing mandates in state law for colleges, universities, CDSS and CSAC to conduct college outreach to foster youth.**

Through the enactment of Assembly Bill 2463 (1996) the State Education Code was amended to require that the State University Educational Opportunity Program and California Community College Extended Opportunity Programs and Services ensure that identified emancipated foster youth are informed of services, including mentoring, provided by these programs. In addition, the State Department of Social Services, county welfare departments and Student Aid Commission were mandated to "communicate with foster youth at two grade levels designated jointly by the California State University and the California Community Colleges" in order to support outreach efforts to foster youth. This mandate has not been funded or enforced in a meaningful way and should be fully implemented.

★ SOLUTIONS TO INADEQUATE FINANCIAL AID

6. **Require county social workers to screen age-appropriate youth for financial aid eligibility.**

Many foster youth miss out on financial aid because they are not aware of the March 2 Cal Grant deadline and other deadlines. County child welfare workers should be tasked with ensuring that foster youth are provided with information regarding the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) during the month of January of their senior year of high school, including information about the

March 2 deadline and a list of local resources for obtaining assistance with FAFSA completion. It would not be expected that social workers become financial aid experts, but rather would be well versed in the resources available to assist foster youth with this process. As the single individual with regular contact with all youth placed in the foster care system, the caseworker is the logical entity for consistent distribution of this information. In order to ensure adequate accountability, confirmation of transmission of this information should be added to court reporting requirements, including the date that the information was provided.

7. *Expand both federal and state contribution of funds to the Chafee grant program by $50 million.*

Research has found that only one in 25 foster youth financial aid applicants in California is receiving all three major federal and statewide grants, and that many still have more of a gap between college costs and financial aid than they could cover through a reasonable amount of work.[24] One significant source of financial aid for foster youth is the Chafee Grant, composed of both federal and state dollars, which is available to former foster youth under age 23 who were in foster care at any point between ages 16 to18. Due to shortfalls in funding, however, many eligible youth are deprived access to this essential resource. According to the California Student Aid Commission, during the 2013-14 academic year only 3,500 of 18,000 eligible applicants for Chafee grants received funds. It is likely that the true number of unfunded eligible youth is greater than this, as many youth are not aware of the program or hear from peers who did not receive grants that it is not worth applying.

In recent years, the funding available for Chafee grants has been further eroded by federal sequestration. For the 2012-13 award year, California received a reduction of $233,000 and for the 2013-14 award year, a reduction of $412,000 was imposed out of a total funding pool of approximately $11 million. Additional investment by both the federal government and the State of California would allow more foster youth to receive desperately needed financial aid, making college both affordable and achievable. In order to fully fund all eligible applicants, based on current application rates, an additional investment of $50 million would be required.

8. *Increase the effectiveness of existing Chafee program to increase its reach and improve the timeliness of distribution of funds.*

The primary challenge with the current system of administering Chafee grants is the timing of the funds distribution. Many recipients do not receive funds until well after the school year begins and long after bills for tuition, on-campus housing and books come due. While more funding is essential, administrative changes are also necessary in order to more efficiently provide available funds.

a.To improve the timeliness of distribution:
  o Issue payments electronically to campuses along with a roster of approved students as is done with Cal Grants to avoid lengthy delays created by the use of paper checks.
  o Award more grants than are available, knowing some recipients will change their plans and not need the grant. CSAC currently has the authorization to over-award Cal Grants and has successfully done so without incurring additional liability. For example, in 2013-14, CSAC made 29,000 offers for competitive Cal Grants, close to 30% above the award cap of 22,500, but ended up paying out only 90% of the cap.
  o Eliminate the need for submission of a Needs Analysis Report (NAR) prior to approval of a Chafee grant. CSAC should issue provisional awards for students whose NAR is not yet finalized based on the information available to CSAC from the FAFSA. If necessary, changes can be made by the disbursing institution prior to disbursement.
  o Ensure that any upgrades to a new grant delivery system fully incorporate Chafee grants so that the administration of the program by financial aid administrators is as seamless as possible. This system should also allow for the timely updating of changes to school enrollment.

b. To increase the reach of available funds:
- o   Exclude colleges that do not meet Cal Grant standards for loan default and graduation rates from receiving Chafee grants.

9.   Use CalSAVE options to create college saving accounts for foster youth.

In 2008, SB 1457 was enacted which established the California ScholarShare Advancement Vehicle for Education (CalSAVE) program to fund scholarships for designated groups of students including foster youth. Both individuals and organizations can utilize the State's existing ScholarShare program to set up scholarship funds that can be designated for certain student subpopulations. Research should be conducted to determine how this option could be expanded to provide additional scholarship resources to foster youth. For example, individual campus foundations could establish accounts and direct donations to these accounts, or accounts could be set up for corporate giving and matching programs.

★ SOLUTIONS TO DOCUMENTATION ACCESS

10.   Create a centralized verification system that allows current and former foster youth to easily obtain evidence of foster youth status.

Foster youth and campus professionals report that obtaining documentation to prove foster care status can be challenging, in particular when a student has already exited the foster care system. Calls to social workers go unreturned and it is not obvious to students where to turn to obtain documentation. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is currently exploring options for remaking its data system known as the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). The updated tool should include functionality that enables foster youth over the age of 18 to have online access to the documents described in WIC§391(e), which would include a letter verifying foster care status.

As it is not anticipated that this new functionality will be available for several more years, in the short term, a system for obtaining necessary documentation should be created and standardization of what constitutes acceptable proof of foster youth status should be put in place. This could be operated through a central statewide entity or through individual counties. Regardless of whether the system is centralized or dispersed, it should:
- o   be easily accessible;
- o   be available to both current foster youth and those who exited the foster care system;
- o   ensure that foster youth can obtain the information they need promptly; and
- o   ensure that foster youth can obtain verification when they are unsure of which county has or had jurisdiction over their case.

★ SOLUTIONS TO INADEQUATE COLLEGE COMPLETION

11. Expand the availability of priority registration by removing the 2017 sunset and updating eligibility to align with other programs.

A recent report from the Campaign for College Opportunity found that the median length of time for a California Community College student to graduate is 4.1 years, double the traditional two-year commitment, in part due to insufficient course offerings and the need for remedial coursework. If unable to access needed courses, students are sometimes forced to take classes that do not count towards their degree in order to maintain financial aid eligibility, which increases both the cost of college and the risk of exceeding federal time limits on financial aid in the long term. Disadvantaged students are even more likely to earn significantly more credits than needed to graduate.[25]

Access to priority enrollment has been an essential tool in the efforts to ensure that foster youth can complete their college goals in a timely manner. Priority enrollment is currently scheduled to sunset as of January 1, 2017. This sunset clause should be removed or extended prior to the sunset date. In addition, in order to simplify eligibility requirements, the requirements for qualifying for priority registration should be adjusted to allow for students who were in foster care after the age of 13 to qualify in order to match the definition of foster youth within federal financial aid regulations. Currently a student must have been in foster care upon turning 18 to qualify. This change would both expand access to this benefit to greater numbers of foster youth and make administration simpler as the definition would be aligned with the federal definition.

12. Institute expanded tracking of educational status through court reporting.

The juvenile court plays an important role in overseeing the care and supervision of children placed in the foster care system. Review hearings must occur every six months until the child is in a permanent home and the case is closed. Education is a vital component of every child's life and yet there are no provisions currently in place for judges or hearing officers to include a comprehensive review of educational status during court hearings beyond the appointment of an educational rights holder.

Modifying the court report to include educational information would create an additional level of accountability, provide for regular monitoring of academic progress, and create the opportunity to catch problems and intervene early to ensure that children are on track academically. The court report should include information: for those in K-12; regarding college preparation for high school juniors and seniors; and about post-secondary education for those who have exited high school. This could include truancy reports, high school and college GPAs, whether high school seniors have applied for financial aid for college, and whether the student is on track to graduate.

13. Establish campus support programs at all publicly funded California campuses.

a. Community college: A key reason why foster youth fail to succeed in community college is the lack of support on campus to meet their unique needs. In 2014, SB 1023 created a supplemental component of the existing Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) program at community colleges to provide support services to meet the unique needs of current and former foster youth. These services include outreach and recruitment, service coordination, counseling, book and supply grants, tutoring, independent living and financial literacy skills support, frequent in-person contact, career guidance, transfer counseling, child care and transportation assistance, and referrals to health, mental health, housing assistance, and other related services.

The use of campus support programs is an evidence-based approach that proves foster youth can overcome their serious academic delays and be successful when they receive the necessary academic and social support. A 2012 report concluded that foster youth who participate in campus support programs are three times more likely to persist in college than foster youth nationwide.[26]

Additionally, California's EOPS program has been rigorously evaluated and found to improve student outcomes.[27] However, SB 1023 limited the program to up to 10 districts and has not yet been funded. A funding allocation of at least $4 million should be included in the 2015-16 budget in order to implement the program, and it should be expanded in future years to allow a greater number of districts to participate.

b. 4-year universities: Similar to community college students, university students also fail to succeed at rates that match those of their peers due to the lack of support on campus to meet their unique needs. These students typically have no home to go to when campus housing closes, often lack both the emotional and financial resources to weather crises and enter the university at an educational disadvantage. Through the tremendous work of individuals dedicated to supporting this uniquely disadvantaged population, foster youth programs now exist at 21 out of 22 Cal State Universities, all 12 University of California campuses, and several private universities. These programs, however, rely heavily on private philanthropy in order to sustain their services. The State of California should make an investment in supporting these programs at 4-year campuses to ensure they can continue to provide badly needed support to foster youth university students, contributing to their success.

★ SOLUTIONS TO INADEQUATE HOUSING

14. Improve access to housing for foster youth through expanded THP-Plus Foster Care programs.

The THP-Plus Foster Care (THP+FC) program is a Title IV-E reimbursable placement option that was created for youth in extended foster care. This placement option allows youth to live in their own apartment (often with a roommate), however, unlike the Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) option, youth living in THP+FC programs receive comprehensive supportive services that include assistance with education, employment and independent living skills development. For foster youth pursuing post-secondary education, the program not only provides year-round housing, but also a wide range of resources to set the foundation for longer term stabilization. THP+FC programs are often the best and only option for non-minor dependents in areas with impacted housing and limited affordable housing options. However, limitations on the number of programs and program capacity lead to waitlists of youth who go unserved. While the number of THP+FC providers has increased over the past two years from 25 to 41, the program currently only serves roughly 1,000 youth, or 10% of extended care placements. An analysis should be undertaken to assess the barriers to expanding the number of THP+FC beds so that these barriers can be removed.

15. Provide summer housing to foster youth.

Housing during summer breaks at 4-year universities is a major challenge for foster youth due to the unavailability of financial aid over the summer if the student is not enrolled in summer courses. Many youth end up couch surfing or returning to unhealthy settings with their biological parents. Individual campuses have explored options for alleviating this situation, and other campuses should follow suit by instituting similar solutions.

For example, since 2013, San Francisco State University has reserved 10 fully furnished campus-owned apartments to house up to 40 foster youth. The university makes these units available to students during holidays and summers for no cost, and also includes a full meal plan for the entire year. Currently, the apartments house mostly freshmen students who typically need the most housing support. UC Santa Cruz reserves rooms for foster youth at a university-owned student housing community on campus. Foster youth must enroll in courses over the summer session to qualify for this housing and are charged a subsidized rate of just $18 a night, half the standard cost and significantly less expensive than rent for an off-campus apartment. At Cal State San Marcos, the university has partnered with YMCA San Diego to operate units in a campus dorm as a THP+FC program. In doing so, the YMCA is able to offer supportive services for students in extended foster care while providing

them a normal college dorm setting. The youth can remain in their dorms during the summer, and the Guardian Scholars program assists them with finding internships to help them remain financially stable during those months if they are not receiving financial aid or already employed.

★ SOLUTIONS TO INADEQUATE DATA

16. Create a data-sharing mechanism to enable tracking of foster youth college outcomes.

While much progress has been made within California's systems of post-secondary education for tracking student outcomes, garnering data specific to foster youth outcomes has been challenging, in part because of the obstacles to identifying foster youth on college campuses. A data-sharing mechanism between college systems and the California Department of Social Services data system (CWS/CMS) that would allow for the compilation of aggregate data on foster youth higher education outcomes would help to gauge progress, track the effectiveness of interventions and provide direction for future policy and practice changes. With the implementation of the LCFF, the statewide K-12 database (known as CalPADs) will now contain information about students' foster care status. A linkage of CalPASS, which contains post-secondary information, to CalPADs would allow for the transfer of this information resulting in the ability to generate significantly more accurate aggregate data regarding foster youth post-secondary access.

17. Implement data tracking of foster youth at CSUs, as required by current law, and recommend tracking at UCs.

Through the enactment of Assembly Bill 2463 (1996) the State Education Code was amended to require that, commencing in the 1998-99 academic year, community college and Cal State University systems "track the retention rates of students who voluntarily disclose to the university or community college their status as former emancipated foster youth."[28] While the community college system just made course retention and completion data for self-identified foster youth available as part of their Data Mart system, the CSU system has not implemented this regulation. In light of extended foster care, the bill should be amended to include both current and former foster youth, require that the data be publicly available and be implemented within the CSU system. The legislature should further recommend to the UC Board of Regents that the UC system implement similar tracking capabilities.

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The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the opinions of the California College Pathways funders or those interviewed for this report.
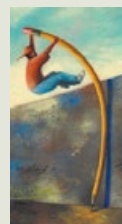
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