

# FOSTERING SUCCESS IN EDUCATION

National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care

**April 2018**

National Working Group on  
Foster Care and Education

# FOSTERING SUCCESS IN EDUCATION: EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE

## INTRODUCTION

Recognizing the importance of supporting the educational needs of students in foster care, child welfare agencies, education agencies, and courts are working together to improve policies and practices around the country. For more than a decade, momentum has grown at the federal, state, and local levels to prioritize the educational needs of students in foster care. Importantly, there has also been an increase in collecting and reporting on data at state and local levels to evaluate what programs are working and identify where interventions are needed.

This publication provides a comprehensive review of data and research, laws, and promising programs impacting the educational success of children in foster care. It consists of four sections that can individually or collectively inform advocates, policymakers, agency leaders, and other key stakeholders. These four sections are:

- 1) A brief **data at a glance summary** about the educational outcomes of students in foster care;
- 2) A **summary of select federal policies** that support educational stability and success and increased data collection and reporting;
- 3) A **comprehensive review of the studies and research** related to the education of students in foster care, with accompanying citations; and
- 4) An overview **of some promising data-supported programs or interventions** around the country designed to benefit students in foster care.

This national factsheet reflects a shift in policy and practice around the country over the past decade. The first edition, released in 2006, included a limited, but consistent, group of research studies, all depicting the poor educational outcomes of students in foster care. The 2006 national factsheet raised awareness about the critical importance of prioritizing education for students in foster care. For more than a decade, through the leadership of the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education (National Working Group), with support from various foundations including Casey Family Programs, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Stuart Foundation, several revised editions of this factsheet have been released, including this 2018 version.

We now have a growing body of research that reflects the educational needs of this group of students, most of which still indicates that students in foster care face significant educational challenges. Fortunately, we also have a growing number of federal and state laws that provide rights and protections for students in foster care, and many promising programs and interventions designed to address a wide range of factors influencing the disparities in education outcomes. With cross-system collaboration and the implementation of improved federal and state policies, we are positioned to build on what is being learned, bring about change, and promote success for all children and youth in foster care.

We are grateful to the National Work Group members who have provided information to make this resource a valuable compilation of data, research, and promising interventions. For a full list of National Working Group members see <http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/OurWork/NationalWorkingGroup.aspx>. This publication was compiled by the Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, a project of the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, in partnership with the Education Law Center and Juvenile Law Center. For more information visit [www.fostercareandeducation.org](http://www.fostercareandeducation.org).

## DATA AT A GLANCE: FACTS ABOUT EDUCATION AND FOSTER CARE

When supported by strong practices and policies, positive school experiences can counteract the negative effects of abuse, neglect, separation, and lack of permanency experienced by the more than 400,000 U.S. children and youth in foster care. Education provides opportunities for improved well-being in physical, intellectual, social and emotional domains during critical developmental periods and supports economic success in adult life. While there is no comprehensive source of national data on education performance of students in foster care, much can be learned from the national, regional and local data presented below to guide policy and practice reforms. For more information about the charts below and methodology, see Appendix B.

National Demographic Data of Youth in Foster Care*	
Number of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2016	437,465
Number of children age 0-4	155,632
Number of children age 5-17 (typical school age)	268,517
Number of young adults age 18-21	13,316
Percentage with more than one living placement while in foster care	65%

\*These data come from the most recent report from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) released November 30, 2017.

### National Education Data and Regional Data Based on Special Studies

The table below presents outcome data on educational experiences and achievements of youth in foster care, with some comparisons with the general population. Where available, we have used national estimates, but there are many gaps in national data in this area, so multi-state studies are included.<sup>1</sup>

Educational Experience or Outcome	Findings
% of youth in foster care who change schools when first entering care	31% - 75% <sup>2</sup>
% of 17- to 18-year-olds who experienced 5 or more school changes	34.2% <sup>3</sup>
Likelihood of being absent from school	About twice that of other students <sup>4</sup>
Likelihood of 17- to 18-year-old youth in foster care having out-of-school suspension	About twice that of other students <sup>5</sup> (In one study the rate was 24% vs. national general population rate of 7%) <sup>6</sup>
Likelihood of 17- to 18-year-old youth in foster care being expelled	About 3 times that of other students <sup>7</sup>
Reading level of 17- to 18-year-olds in foster care	Average level 7 <sup>th</sup> grade 44% at high school level or higher <sup>8</sup>
% of youth in foster care receiving special education services	35.6% <sup>9</sup> - 47.3% <sup>10</sup>
% of 17- to 18-year-old youth in foster care who want to go to college	70% <sup>11</sup> - 84% <sup>12</sup>
% of youth in foster care who complete high school by age 18 (via a diploma or GED)	Colorado: 41.8% <sup>13</sup> Midwest Study (age 19): 63% <sup>14</sup>
% of youth in foster care who complete high school by age 21	65% by age 21 <sup>15</sup> (National data) (Compared with 86% among all youth ages 18-24 <sup>16</sup> )
% of youth in foster care who graduated from high school who enrolled in college at some level	31.8% <sup>17</sup> - 45.3% <sup>18</sup> (Compared with national college enrollment rate of 69.2% in 2015, which is slightly below national record high of 70.2% in 2009) <sup>19</sup>
% of foster care alumni who attain a bachelor's degree	3 - 10.8% <sup>20</sup> (Compared with national college completion rate of a BA or higher of 32.5%) <sup>21</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> When comparing youth in foster care with other groups, it is important to note that most studies do not control for other factors like age, race and gender. The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, when comparing emotional and behavioral health conditions, used propensity score matching to align the foster care alumni sample and the “general population” sample by age, race and gender. See Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. C., Williams, J., Downs, A. C., English, D.J., & White, J. & O’Brien, K. (2010). *What works in family foster care? Key components of success from the Northwest foster care alumni study*. New York and Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. The Midwest study used a sample from the Adolescent Health national study that was of the same age range as the comparison group. See Courtney, M.E., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Conditions of youth preparing to leave state care*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. Even fewer studies control for key variables such as family income, housing instability or insecurity, food insecurity, English language proficiency, child maltreatment that did not result in out-of-home placement, and other Adverse Childhood Experiences like parent divorce, substance abuse, emotional/behavioral health issues and incarceration. These factors can outweigh the negative or positive effects of placement and enrollment in a poor or high-quality school. Pecora, P.J., Whittaker, J.K., Barth, R.P., Borja, S., & Vesneski, W. (In press). *The child welfare challenge*. (Fourth Edition.) New York City: Taylor and Francis, Chapter 5.
- <sup>2</sup> In Colorado the rate was 31%. See Clemens, E.V., Klopfenstein, K., Tis, M. & Lalonde, T.L. (2017). Educational stability policy and the interplay between child welfare placement changes and school moves. *Children and Youth Services Review*. But the rate in one California study was 75%. See Frerer, K., Sosenko, L.D., Pellegrin, N., Manchik, V., Horowitz, J. (2013). *Foster youth stability: A study of California foster youths’ school and residential changes in relation to educational outcomes*. Retrieved from [http://www.iebcnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/pub\\_foster\\_youth\\_stability\\_2013.pdf](http://www.iebcnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/pub_foster_youth_stability_2013.pdf).
- <sup>3</sup> Courtney, Terao, & Bost (2004), p. 42.
- <sup>4</sup> Sample drawn from a cohort of youth entering out-of-home care from 2006 to 2008 in a large mid-Atlantic city. See Zorc, C.S., O’Reilly, A.L.R., Matone, M., Long, J., Watts, C.L. & Rubin, D. (2013). The relationship of placement experience to school absenteeism and changing schools in young, school-aged children in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35, 826-833. In California, the absentee rate for youth in care for the 2016-2017 school year was more than double the overall student population (25.1% vs. 10.1%). See California Department of Education. (2017). *Report: A quarter of California’s foster students are chronically absent from school*. Sacramento: Author, p. 1. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr17/yr17rel88.asp>.
- <sup>5</sup> Courtney, Terao & Bost (2004), p. 42.
- <sup>6</sup> Scherr, T. (2006). Best practices in working children living in foster care. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology V* (pp. 1547–1563). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- <sup>7</sup> When interviewed at age 23 or 24, 16.5% of the foster care alumni in the Midwest study had been expelled, compared with 4.6% of youth in the national Adolescent Health study (Courtney, Terao & Bost, 2004, p. 42).
- <sup>8</sup> Courtney, Terao & Bost (2004), p. 45.
- <sup>9</sup> Over one-third (35.6%) of the youth in the Northwest Alumni Study were in special education classes for students needing extra help. See Pecora, Kessler, Williams, Downs, English, White & O’Brien (2010). p. 120.
- <sup>10</sup> Courtney, Terao & Bost (2004), p. 40.
- <sup>11</sup> McMillen, C., Auslander, W., Elze, D., White, T., & Thompson, R. (2003). Educational experiences and aspirations of older youth in foster care. *Child Welfare*, 82(4), 475-495.
- <sup>12</sup> Courtney, Terao & Bost (2004), p. 39.
- <sup>13</sup> Parra, J., & Martinez, J. (2015). *2013-2014 state policy report: Dropout prevention and student engagement*. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education, p. 20. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention/2014statepolicyreport31215>.
- <sup>14</sup> Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Ruth, G., Keller, T., Havlicek, J. & Bost, N. (2005). *Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, Chapin Hall Center for Children, p. 21.
- <sup>15</sup> National Youth in Transition Database as cited on page 3 of U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2016). *Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf>.
- <sup>16</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (2014). Digest of education statistics, 2014 - table 104.40. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15\\_104.40.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_104.40.asp?current=yes).
- <sup>17</sup> Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., & Lee, J. & Raap, M. (2010). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 23 and 24*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, p. 24.
- <sup>18</sup> The proportion of alumni aged 25 and older in the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study that has completed any postsecondary education (45.3%) is substantially lower than that (57%) of the general population in the same age group who completed some college coursework (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). (Note that the alumni group statistic includes vocational training, while the general population statistic does not. Therefore, the difference between the two groups is underestimated.) See Pecora et al. (2010), p. 125; and U.S. Census Bureau. (2000h). Profile of selected social characteristics—2000 (Table DP-2.). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved March 10, 2005, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/bf/\\_lang=en\\_vt\\_name+DEC\\_2000\\_SF3\\_U\\_DP2\\_geo\\_id=01000US.html](http://factfinder.census.gov/bf/_lang=en_vt_name+DEC_2000_SF3_U_DP2_geo_id=01000US.html).
- <sup>19</sup> See Bureau of Labor Statistics data at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgec.nr0.htm> for 2015 data and National Center for Education Statistics data for 2009 at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgec.nr0.htm>.
- <sup>20</sup> Note the college completion rates vary by study, in part because of variations in how long youth are followed out of foster care and the states that are included in the study. For example, the college completion rate for the alumni in the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study was 2.7% (mean age: 24.2), while the rate for the Midwest Study at ages 23-24 was 3%. But the Casey National Foster Care Alumni study that involved youth served first by the public agency and then by Casey found a rate of 10.8% for alumni who were on average 30.5 years old. See Pecora, P.J., Williams, J., Kessler, R.J., Downs, A.C., O’Brien, K. Hiripi, E., & Morello, S. (2003). *Assessing the effects of foster care: early results from the Casey national alumni study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs. Website: <http://www.casey.org>, p. 28.
- <sup>21</sup> See the U.S. Census Bureau data for 2015 at Ryan, C.L. & Bauman, K. (2016) *Educational attainment in the United States: 2105*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf>.

## KEY FEDERAL LAWS THAT IMPACT SCHOOL STABILITY AND DATA FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Federal policy has undergone a significant shift over the past decade, adding protections and supports for students in foster care related to their education. Because child welfare and education systems must each work to support these students, changes have taken place in both federal child welfare and education law. This summary highlights those laws directly related to school stability and data collection and sharing. Many other federal and state laws include rights and protections for students in foster care.

In 2008, the **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (Fostering Connections)** included several education provisions in federal child welfare law.<sup>1</sup> This was the first time that school stability<sup>2</sup> was prioritized in federal law and marked a shift in the need for child welfare agencies to prioritize the educational needs of students in foster care.

In December 2015, Congress passed the **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**, which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA).<sup>3, 4</sup> This was the first time federal education law included specific provisions that promote school stability and success for youth in care and require collaboration between education and child welfare agencies to achieve these goals. These provisions, which mostly took effect on December 10, 2016, complement those in the Fostering Connections Act and require State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to work with child welfare agencies to ensure the education stability of children in foster care.

In addition to changes made to support the school stability and success of students in foster care, a significant shift in federal law and **policy now supports better information sharing and data collection** related to the educational outcomes of students in foster care.

- Under **ESSA**, beginning in the 2017-18 school year, SEAs were required to collect and report annually on student achievement and graduation rates for all students in foster care. To implement this requirement, education and child welfare agencies need to work together to ensure effective, appropriate, and confidential data and information sharing between systems.
- On December 14, 2016, final regulations were released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) revising the data that child welfare systems will be required to report annually to HHS as part of the **Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)**, a child welfare data collection system designed to gather uniform and reliable information across states on children in foster care and children who have been adopted. Among the many changes under the final rule, child welfare agencies must now report on several elements related to education, including school enrollment, highest grade completed, special education, whether the child experienced school moves, and the reason for any school moves.<sup>5</sup>
- Another important building block to support data occurred in the 2013 **Uninterrupted Scholars Act**, which amended the **Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**. This amendment made it clear that child welfare professionals can access educational records of youth in their care, even without parental consent.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guidance on the Fostering Connections Act is available at:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/pi1011>.

<sup>2</sup> School stability is an important foundational issue to be addressed to ensure improved education outcomes while a child is in foster care. As the Blueprint for Change Framework outlines, school stability is one of many issues that needs to be addressed to see educational success, but without achieving a stable school placement, it is challenging to address the other education areas (academic achievement, special education needs, etc.) The Blueprint for Change can be found at: <http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/AreasofFocus/BlueprintforChange.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> The full text of the Every Student Succeeds Act is available at: <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services released joint guidance on the Every Student Succeeds Act, as it amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Adoption and Foster care Analysis and Reporting System Final Rule is available at: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/12/14/2016-29366/adoption-and-foster-care-analysis-and-reporting-system>. As of March 2018, new Notices of Proposed Rulemaking have been issued that may alter the timeline for implementation and the substance of AFCARs requirements.

<sup>6</sup> S. 3472 (112th): *Uninterrupted Scholars Act (USA)*. (2012). The full text of the Uninterrupted Scholars Act is available here:

<https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ278/PLAW-112publ278.pdf>.

## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

The body of research on the educational outcomes of students in foster care has grown significantly over the past several years. Public and private agencies, universities, and philanthropic organizations have contributed to this increase in data collection and research at the state and local levels.<sup>1</sup> Research shows a consistent theme: children in foster care face significant barriers to their educational progress, starting from before school begins and extending through postsecondary education. The following sections summarize the available research, and include detailed notes and references to the research.

### Lay the Foundation for a Strong Start for Young Children in Care

Intervening early in the lives of young children impacted by abuse and neglect is critical.<sup>1</sup> Almost one third of children in foster care are under age five.<sup>2</sup> Not only are the numbers of infants and young children who live in out-of-home care concerning, their vulnerability is extremely high. Many infants in care have been prenatally exposed to alcohol and/or dangerous drugs. Forty percent of children in care under age five are born with low birth weight and/or are premature, which puts them at greater developmental risks and more than half suffer from serious physical health problems. Developmental delays occur at a rate four-to-five times greater than that of children in the general population.<sup>3</sup>

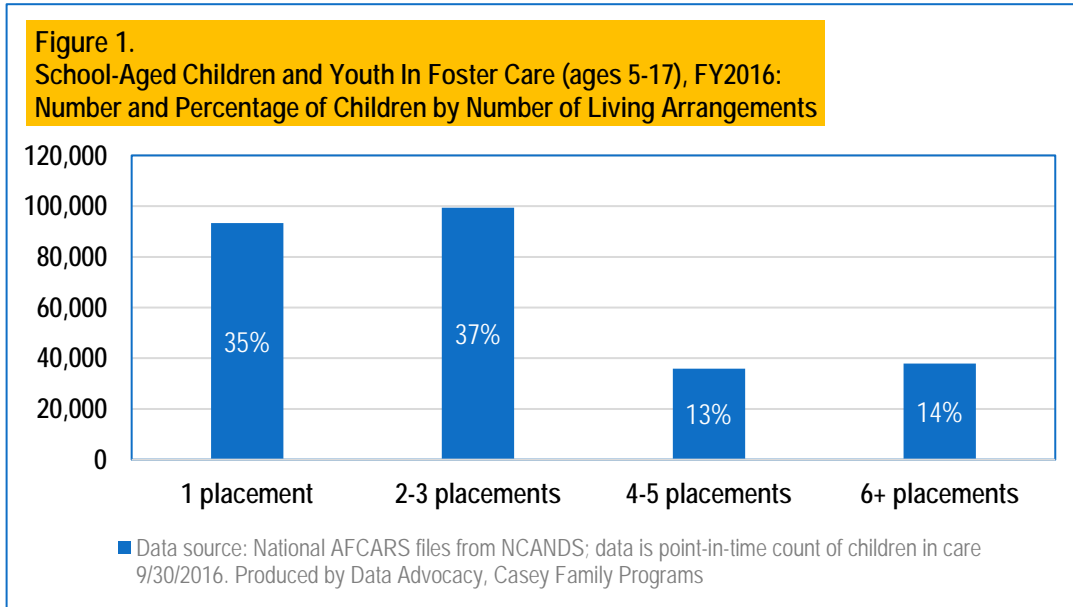
Research has consistently found a high need for early intervention and early childhood education services among young children in foster care as a result of their developmental, emotional, and behavioral problems.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup> More than one-half of children in foster care had experienced caregiver violence or caregiver incarceration and almost two-thirds had lived with someone with an alcohol or drug problem. Estimates for children in other nonparental care subgroups were lower than for foster care, but still elevated above those of children living with biological parents.<sup>8</sup>

Data suggest that effective interventions exist to improve the performance of children in foster care when entering kindergarten. Yet, several studies indicate that many young children do not receive the early intervention or early childhood education services they need to address these problems.<sup>9</sup> Studies indicate that children in foster care as a group are less likely to be enrolled in Head Start than eligible, low-income children.<sup>10</sup> In addition, they lose out on potential benefits of participation in a Head Start program<sup>11</sup> or other high-quality early childhood education programs.<sup>12</sup> Even when children in care receive high-quality early childhood education, some data suggest they continue to have academic and social difficulties indicating the need for continued support into their K-12 years in addition to earlier intervention.<sup>13</sup>

### Ensure School Stability

School-age children in foster care commonly experience a number of moves while in out-of-home care as shown in Figure 1. School changes are a significant problem for children and youth in foster care.<sup>14</sup> Numerous studies have found that children in foster care frequently experience school changes.<sup>15,16,17,18,19</sup> These school changes often occur when children are initially removed from home, returned home, or when they move from one foster care living arrangement to another.<sup>20</sup> The rate of school mobility for children in foster care is greater than for their non-foster care peers.<sup>21, 22, 23</sup> Black and Hispanic students in foster care are more likely to experience school changes than their white peers in foster care.<sup>24</sup> School mobility has negative effects on academic achievement, including lower scores on standardized tests<sup>25, 26, 27, 28</sup> and greater risk of dropping out.<sup>29</sup> Some of these differences predate their entry into foster care.<sup>30</sup> In a national study of 1,087 foster care alumni, youth who had even one fewer change in living arrangement per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before leaving foster care.<sup>31</sup>

Children who experience frequent school changes may also face challenges in developing and sustaining supportive relationships with teachers or with peers.<sup>32, 33</sup> Supportive relationships and a positive educational experience can be powerful contributors to the development of resilience and are vital components for healthy development and overall well-being.



### Enroll Students Promptly

Delays in school enrollment can occur when a child’s initial entry into foster care, or a subsequent change in living arrangement while in foster care, involves changing schools.<sup>34</sup> These delays can negatively impact attendance and have a number of other adverse consequences such as students having to repeat courses previously taken, schools failing to address the special education needs of students, and students being enrolled in inappropriate classes.<sup>35</sup> Federal law now requires immediate enrollment even without typically required records, and creates both state and local education agency points of contact to address barriers students in foster care face, including enrollment barriers.<sup>36</sup>

### Promote Regular School Attendance

Studies show that children who enter foster care have often missed a substantial number of school days<sup>37, 38</sup> and that once in foster care, children and youth often have higher school absence rates than their non-foster care peers.<sup>39, 40, 41</sup> The extent to which children experience absences from school appears to be influenced by the child’s age, their pre-foster care experiences, and their experiences while in care.<sup>42</sup> Children who have early placement stability have been shown to have less absenteeism than other children in foster care.<sup>43</sup>

### Support Children and Address Trauma to Prevent Serious Behavior Problems at School

A growing body of research documents the behavioral problems that children and youth in foster care experience — issues that impact their prospects for academic success — in the form of disciplinary infractions and other offenses.<sup>44</sup> Children and youth in foster care experience school suspensions and expulsions at higher rates than their non-foster care peers.<sup>45</sup> Educational experts believe that failure to address the needs of children in foster care leads to behavioral problems at school.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the effects of childhood maltreatment that remain unaddressed can impact mental health and manifest in behavioral problems.<sup>47</sup>

In addressing behavioral problems with students in foster care, schools need to understand the experiences students have had and the impact of trauma on their lives. Research suggests that between half and two-thirds of all children are exposed to one or more adverse childhood experiences that can be trauma-inducing. Not surprisingly, children in foster care experience trauma at a disproportionate rate.<sup>48</sup> From medical centers to courts to child welfare systems, several evidence-supported and evidence-based approaches to address trauma have proven effective. These approaches include trauma-informed systems (approaches that shape organizations to be more trauma sensitive) and trauma-specific-treatment interventions (implemented at the individual level to address trauma and its symptoms).<sup>49</sup>

### **Meet Children's Special Education Needs with Quality Services**

Research indicates that children in foster care experience rates of emotional and behavioral problems impacting their education at higher rates than their peers who have not been involved in the child welfare system.<sup>50</sup> Studies consistently document that significant percentages of children in foster care have special education needs and/or are receiving special education services,<sup>51, 52</sup> with several studies showing children and youth in foster care are between 2.5 and 3.5 times more likely to be receiving special education services than their non-foster care peers.<sup>53</sup> Research also suggests that children in foster care who are in special education tend to change schools more frequently, be placed in more restrictive educational settings, and have poorer quality education plans than their non-foster care peers in special education.<sup>54</sup> Studies conducted with California caregivers and school liaisons indicate that children in foster care need more intensive educational and support services to succeed in school.<sup>55, 56</sup> While screening youth in foster care for special education needs has been shown to increase the chance that youth receive needed services, one study showed 84% of the youth whose screenings indicated potential special education needs did not receive related services within 9-12 months.<sup>57</sup>

### **Support Students to Succeed and Graduate**

Researchers have found that youth in foster care are less likely to complete high school than their non-foster care peers,<sup>58, 59, 60</sup> including peers who are homeless.<sup>61</sup> This is troubling considering that high school graduates earn an average of \$8,500 more per year than nongraduates.<sup>62</sup> When youth in foster care do complete high school, they often graduate later than expected.<sup>63, 64</sup> Studies consistently show that children in foster care are more likely to be retained.<sup>65, 66, 67</sup> Because of grade retention, children in foster care are more likely to be old for their grade and under-credited compared to their peers who have not been involved with the child welfare system.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, children in foster care are significantly more likely than their peers to do less well on standardized math and reading tests.<sup>69</sup> Evidence suggests that young people in foster care are less likely to graduate high school if they experience repeated changes in their foster care living arrangements,<sup>70, 71</sup> as well as when they experience repeated school changes.<sup>72</sup>

Youth in foster care are also more likely to complete high school with a GED than with a high school diploma<sup>73</sup>. Youth of color in foster care, in particular, are less likely to have a high school diploma and more likely to have a GED than youth in foster care who are non-Hispanic white.<sup>74, 75, 76</sup> Despite the fact that having a GED can improve the life chances of individuals who do not graduate high school, a GED is not equivalent to a regular high school diploma when it comes to labor market outcomes and postsecondary educational attainment. Compared to high school graduates, individuals who have a GED earn less, on average, and are less likely to graduate from college.<sup>77</sup> For youth in and from foster care who have been able to find educational success, school can prove to be a "safe haven" for them.<sup>78</sup> Fortunately, an increasing number of programs support high school completion and college access by students in foster care. A summary of some of these programs can be found in the section of this factsheet titled "How Can Systems Support the Educational Needs of Students in Foster Care?".<sup>79</sup>

### **Support Transitions to College**

Although youth in foster care often indicate they have college aspirations, numerous studies have found lower college enrollment rates<sup>80</sup> and lower college completion rates<sup>81, 82, 83</sup> among young people who have been in foster care



compared to other young adults. One study suggests that former foster youth who do enroll in college are confident about their academic abilities and optimistic about their chance of success in college; however the same study finds former foster youth lag behind their college peers in academic performance.<sup>84, 85</sup> Research suggests college enrollment is more likely when young people are allowed to remain in care until age 21<sup>86</sup> and/or receive mentoring services.<sup>87</sup> Research indicates that graduation from college is more likely when young people have had fewer foster care living arrangement moves.<sup>88</sup> One study found that foster care alumni were more likely to stay in a postsecondary program if they had independent living stability and tangible supports (tutoring, help with paperwork, etc.).<sup>89</sup> Other studies examining the relationship between postsecondary educational attainment and race/ethnicity among young people who had been in foster care had mixed findings.<sup>90, 91, 92, 93</sup> Studies have found that financial difficulties, needing to work, and concerns about housing are among the barriers that prevent former foster youth from pursuing postsecondary education.<sup>94, 95</sup>

Overcoming these barriers is important because increasing postsecondary educational attainment among youth in foster care would increase their average work-life earnings. With a four-year degree, youth in foster care could expect to earn approximately \$481,000 more, on average, over the course of their work-life than if they had only a high school diploma. Even if they did not graduate with a degree, completing any college would increase their work-life earnings, on average, by \$129,000.<sup>96</sup> One study found that increased levels of education have larger benefits for youth who exited care than youth<sup>97</sup> from the general population, and at higher levels of attainment the two groups have similar employment rates and earnings become less pronounced.

### **Supportive Adult Advocates**

Youth in foster care need supportive adults to help them achieve their education goals and pursuits. All students in foster care, in particular those with disabilities, must have an identified education decision maker. Research shows that students in foster care are less likely to have an advocate present during special education meetings.<sup>98</sup> In addition to clearly identified education decision makers, a growing body of research is demonstrating the importance of having adult mentors and advocates to support students' education success.

## HOW CAN SYSTEMS SUPPORT THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE?

Overwhelming evidence finds children and youth in care are vulnerable in our education system. The achievement gap between youth in care and the general population is staggering, with youth in care trailing their peers in standardized test performance, high school graduation rates, and likelihood of attaining postsecondary education. Research highlighted in this document shines a light on the discrepancies of educational outcomes on children in foster care and their non-foster peers.

In part because of increased data and research about education outcomes for students in foster care, there is growing attention to the need to support the educational needs of this vulnerable student group. In addition to the significant policy changes at the federal, state, and local levels, an increasing number of programs, practices, and interventions are focusing on improving these poor outcomes. These efforts span the entire educational trajectory of students in foster care and include:

- Targeted early intervention and screening to help children in foster care enter school ready to learn;
- Required data collection and information sharing between child welfare and education agencies;
- Better collaboration between child welfare and education agencies;
- Increased supports and services for students in foster care, including related to maintaining school stability;
- Educational advocacy for students in foster care to get the extra supports they need and ensure systems are working together;
- Targeted services for students in foster care to help them prepare for, and complete, postsecondary education.

This section highlights promising interventions and programs from around the country that are improving educational outcomes for youth in foster care. Although there are numerous programs helping support positive outcomes for children and youth in foster care, we include here a list of programs that have data to support their success. While this list is nonexhaustive, it includes numerous examples of data driven results.

### Lay the Foundation for a Strong Start for Young Children in Care

**Kids in Transition to School:** A randomized control trial of the Kids in Transition to School (KITS) Program in Oregon — a short-term, intensive intervention designed to enhance psychosocial and academic school readiness in children at high risk for school difficulties — showed children in foster care participating in this pre-kindergarten program displayed considerably less aggressive or oppositional classroom behavior than a comparison group.<sup>99</sup>

**ABC Intervention Program:** A study from the University of Delaware evaluating the Attachment and Bio-behavioral Catch-up (ABC) intervention, a 10-session parenting program that targets children’s self-regulation, showed that preschool aged children in foster care who received this intervention exhibited stronger cognitive flexibility and theory of mind skills than a comparison group of children in foster care.<sup>100</sup>

### Ensure School Stability

**Achievements Unlocked:** This project, developed by the Washoe County, Nevada, Department of Social Services, is a multidisciplinary team model that seeks to change the educational trajectory of students in foster care by providing advocacy, tutoring, mentoring, and case management to high school aged foster youth. Among the other benefits of the program, data demonstrate improvements in school stability. While one-third of all students in foster care in the district changed schools during the school year, only two of the 26 participating in the pilot changed schools.<sup>101</sup>

## Promote Regular School Attendance

**NCYL FosterEd Program:** This program, developed by the National Center for Youth Law, uses data to improve the educational outcomes of system-involved youth, including attendance rates. The program uses education liaisons, who are co-located in child welfare agency offices or at school sites. Education liaisons work with youth, supportive adults called "education champions," and education teams to proactively identify the youth's strengths and needs, and to help the youth work toward his or her individual goals. A multiyear external evaluation of FosterEd's work in its Santa Cruz County, California demonstration site found students served through the program experienced increases in attendance rates and GPAs.<sup>102</sup>

**Electronic Data Sharing:** Allegheny County in Pennsylvania has established a data-sharing program between the school system and the Department of Human Services that enables caseworkers and other child welfare staff to easily access the educational records of foster youth. This collaboration has led to including an "education page" in the electronic child welfare case record for each child involved in the child welfare system. One example of the benefit of access to shared data from the school district is that caseworkers can be automatically alerted when a child has had three unexcused absences from school.

**Kids in School Rule!:** Kids in School Rule! (KISR!) is a collaborative program designed to promote improved education outcomes for students in Cincinnati Public Schools who are either in the custody of the Hamilton County, Ohio, Department of Job and Family Services (JFS) or under agency protective supervision, and attend Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS). The partnership between the school system, courts, legal aid, and child welfare provides a host of supports to students in foster care including child welfare agency-based education specialists who liaison with caseworkers and schools. The education specialists use real-time data to alert them when a student in care is absent so they can intervene to ensure the child is attending school regularly.<sup>103</sup>

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*Over the past three years, KISR! achieved a 90% attendance rate, exceeding the rate of non-foster youth in the school district.<sup>104</sup>*

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## Support Children to Address Trauma and Prevent Serious Behavior Problems at School

**Compassionate Schools Model:** Ensuring that schools are trauma-informed is a collaborative process that involves participation by parents, teachers, administrators, and staff.<sup>105</sup> One such effort in Delaware between the courts, child welfare agency, and schools is being undertaken to train teachers and staff in trauma-informed practices and strategies using the *Compassionate Schools Model*.<sup>106</sup> Caring adults that can foster a sense of belonging at school have been shown to be effective in helping youth create a positive student identity.<sup>107</sup> A 2016 Delaware report from the Office of the Child Advocate found that one school district using this model experienced dramatic improvement on their statewide assessment tests, with an eleven percentage-point gain in math and a fourteen percentage-point gain in English language arts (ELA). Notably, suspensions went down to the same level of other general students in the 2015-2016 school year compared with previous years.

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*The rate of suspensions and expulsions for youth in foster care dropped significantly from 2015 to 2016 with results more in line for non-foster care youth. The team attributes the dramatic decrease to the use of trauma-informed strategies.<sup>108</sup>*

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**Graduation Success:** This Washington State model employs long-term education specialists and in-school mentors who provide supports to students in foster care from eighth grade until and beyond their high school graduation. The in-school

mentors connect with youth daily, communicate emerging needs, and collect student data to provide real-time interventions when needed. During the 2015-2016 school year, of the 145 students who participated in the Graduation Success program for three consecutive semesters, there were 0 suspensions and 0 expulsions.<sup>109</sup>

**Data Sharing to Reduce Absenteeism and Discipline:** Allegheny County, Pennsylvania’s data-sharing program has led to better information to drive policy and program development for all students, including those in foster care. Data showed, for example, that some of the highest chronic absenteeism rates are among students living in public housing. Analysts were also able to provide demographic and geographic information and trends about chronically absent students. The same approach is also helping define the high rate of suspensions in the district and lend insight into steps the district can take to address this problem. By sharing information between child welfare and education, Allegheny County can now see suspensions by streets, by neighborhood, and other parameters — even by individual blocks. It can also do a multi-dimensional analysis, such as looking at suspensions and trancies together. With better information, the child welfare and education system are better able to collaborate to develop interventions and services.<sup>110</sup>

### Meet Children’s Special Education Needs with Quality Services

**TAKE CHARGE:** A randomized trial of 69 16.5-to-17.5-year-olds receiving both special education and foster care services in Portland, Oregon found 72% of youth involved in the TAKE CHARGE program had graduated high school or obtained a GED a year after the program compared to only 50% of the control group. The TAKE CHARGE intervention involves weekly coaching in self-determination and goal-setting skills as well as quarterly mentoring by former foster youth.<sup>111</sup>

### Support Students to Succeed and Graduate

**Fostering Opportunities:** In Jefferson County, Colorado, a collaboration between the child welfare agency and school district called Fostering Opportunities is designed to support the educational stability for youth in foster care. This project involves a monthly meeting with the specialist and the student’s teacher, using a rubric designed to guide the conversation. A Best Interest Determination process was developed in the fall of the 2016-2017 school year to increase school stability and ensure the most appropriate educational placement for students who have historically been impacted by multiple school moves. This project also identifies and addresses individual needs, such as a student in need of special education services or adaptive accommodations in the classroom. Data from the 2016-17 school year found 89% of participating students demonstrated growth academically, behaviorally, or both.<sup>112</sup>

**Graduation Success:** The Graduation Success program at Treehouse in Washington State works with youth in care in middle and high school to create individualized plans to help them reach academic success. Graduation Success monitors students’ academics, behavior, and attendance while connecting students with academic resources, such as tutoring, college counseling, and career preparation. Graduation Success also works with youth in care to address common obstacles, such as transitioning between schools, retrieving course credit, and addressing special education needs. Students in Graduation Success are graduating not only at higher rates than other students in foster care, but higher even than the state average for non-foster care peers.

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*In 2016, the 5-year graduation rate for students in the Graduation Success program was 89% — 40% higher than the 5-year graduation rate for Washington state foster youth and 7% higher than the extended graduation rate for all students in the state.*<sup>113</sup>

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**First Star Academies:** First Star Academies are four-year programs for high school-aged youth in foster care that include residential summers on a university campus, and monthly sessions during each school year. Throughout all four years, Academy staff provide holistic, long-term education case management to the youth and their families to sustain the

progress youth make during the university immersion sessions. The First Star Academies currently serve approximately 350 youth across 13 campuses nationally. Ninety-nine percent of First Star Academy youth who have completed four years of programming have graduated high school, and 91% have enrolled in higher education, including a significant proportion to four-year universities.

**Education+ Program:** Developed by the Foundation for Foster Children in Winter Park, Florida, the Education+ Program supports the academic performance and advancement of children and youth in foster care through comprehensive academic services. The program's services include: individualized student needs assessments, private in-home tutoring, and advocacy for students with developmental disabilities, delays, and diagnoses. To effectively identify and address the needs of these students, the Education+ Program develops and meets specific programmatic objectives.

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*Data from the 2015-2016 school year found: 100% of seniors graduated (n=13) and 94% of students were promoted (n=155).*

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**Kids in School Rule!:** The Kids in School Rule (KISR!) program of Cincinnati, Ohio, includes targeted educational planning and supports and a team approach from the juvenile court, child welfare agency, public school system, and legal aid. Among the many interventions are school-based counselors for all students in foster care in the program. Since the program started tracking data in the 2011-2012 school year, 72 out of 76 children in the program who begin the year as seniors have graduated from high school.

**Closing the Achievement Gap:** In Washington, D.C., the Child and Family Services Agency's Office of Well Being has expanded and enhanced tutoring services offered to youth in foster care, with a focus on improving the quality of tutoring services and monitoring students' progress. After at least one year of tutoring services, 80% of students improved their reading skills, with 50% improving by a full grade level. In math, 80% of students showed improvements, with 46% of students improving by a full grade level. Achievement data is also used to target academically at-risk students.

### **Support Transitions to and Graduation from College**

**Seita Scholars:** The Seita Scholars program at Western Michigan University is one example of a successful campus-based support model. In a research study of the perceived value of this campus-based college support program by students who aged out of foster care, the students participating in the program responded very positively. Specifically, 95% of respondents were "extremely" or "very satisfied" with the program and not one respondent was dissatisfied. Additionally, 77% of respondents indicated the program was so helpful that they "can't graduate without it." Overall, the study also confirmed the importance of financial aid, housing, and adult guidance for this population in successfully graduating from college.

**Higher Education Mentoring Initiative:** The Higher Education Mentoring Initiative (HEMI) in Hamilton County, Ohio, helps prepare foster youth for educational opportunities beyond high school. The program recruits, trains, and supports mentors to establish positive long-term relationships with youth in and from foster care, including helping them prepare to submit college applications. Foster youth who participated in HEMI were much more likely to finish high school, enroll in a postsecondary institution, and obtain a job than their emancipated foster peers. Eighty-eight percent of participants eligible to graduate had obtained a high school degree or GED at the time of the analysis. HEMI participants were employed more frequently than the general population and had a higher mean wage. Additionally, the female participants from the study group had lower rates of teen and early-adult pregnancy than both the general population and emancipated foster youth.<sup>114</sup>

**Persistence Plus:** This program uses a “nudging model” to increase college persistence, by sending individualized reminders to students. At Middlesex Community College (in Connecticut), students receiving the messages continued to the next semester at a rate seven percentage points higher than the overall cohort. At University of Washington-Tacoma, freshman fall-to-fall persistence increased six percentage points in 2015 after implementing Persistence Plus with all entering students. Randomized trials with partners have shown a significant impact on persistence for first-generation college-goers, online learners and returning adults. This model will be implemented in California for youth and nonminor dependents in foster care attending college, who are participating in 40 different housing programs across the state.

**California College Pathways:** John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) serves as the backbone organization for California College Pathways (CCP), a statewide public-private partnership that uses a collective impact framework to make systemic change to improve foster youth postsecondary outcomes. Through collaboration, advocacy, training and research, CCP has increased the number of foster youth campus-based support programs in California from 47 in 2012 to 96 in 2017. Successful policy initiatives include priority course registration for foster youth, priority access to on-campus housing, the creation of a state-funded foster youth support program within the community college system with a \$15 million annual state investment and a \$3 million increase in state funding made available annually for the Chafee Education and Training Voucher program. A 2017 study of foster youth outcomes within the community college system found that for every 10% increase in foster youth served by a specialized program, colleges can expect a small, but statistically significant increase (1.4%) in students who complete 30 credits in an academic year.<sup>115</sup>

**Better Futures:** Better Futures supports young people as they explore their postsecondary interests and opportunities, and prepares them to participate in postsecondary education, including college and vocational training programs. A study in Oregon showed youth involved in the program showed positive gains in the areas of postsecondary transition preparation and postsecondary participation. Grounded in self-determination promotion, and developed as a postsecondary-focused adaptation of the My Life program, Better Futures engages youth in a four-day postsecondary immersion experience along with supports that are provided for 9 months after that experience.<sup>116, 117</sup>

**Fostering College Success Initiative:** In partnership with community-based organizations and educational systems throughout New York, the Administration for Children’s Services has implemented various support services to increase postsecondary enrollment and graduation rates for youth in foster care. The Fostering College Success Stipend Program provides weekly stipends for youth attending college and living in approved student housing. A second program, administered in collaboration with City University of New York (CUNY) and The New York Foundling, provides participants with wraparound services such as tutoring, academic advice, and socio-emotional support. The programs have resulted in increases in GPAs and credits earned, as well as a 24% increase in students achieving As and Bs.

## Supportive Adult Advocates

**FosterEd:** The National Center for Youth Law's FosterEd program works to improve the educational outcomes of system-involved youth, in part by ensuring that caregivers and other natural adult supports in the youth's life – called "education champions" – develop the knowledge and capacity to advocate for the youth's school success and help the youth navigate toward his or her individual goals. In a survey administered as part of an external evaluation of FosterEd's work, 88% of parent, relative, foster parent, and other caregiver respondents reported learning new ways of helping the youth do well in school, and 84% indicated that they felt more comfortable contacting the youth's school with questions or concerns.<sup>118</sup>

**Educational Advocates:** In Catawba County, North Carolina, the educational advocate (EA) is a full-time social worker who serves as a liaison with public school systems and focuses on the educational achievement, stability, and continuity of children from their entry into foster care through post-care. The EA promotes a stronger partnership between the three school systems and social services; establishes school stability and seamless school transition procedures; empowers youth, family, and community; increases stakeholder investment through training and education; and ensures equal

access to quality education and educational support services for children in care and post care. Data from 2016 show 88% of school-aged children in foster care passed all academic subjects.<sup>119</sup>

**Keeping Foster and Kin Parents Supported and Trained (KEEP):** KEEP, an evidence-based support and skill enhancement program, was designed for foster and kinship parents of children and teens. KEEP includes the use of parental reports, positive coaching of foster parents, and basic anticipatory guidance and contingency management as core program elements.<sup>120</sup> Caregivers who received the intervention reported fewer placement disruptions and better foster parent retention. Recently KEEP has been combined with other related interventions, including one for reunification and one that teaches supervisors and resource parents to better apply social learning principles in all interactions. These have been piloted in New York City,<sup>121</sup> and, now, in Tennessee.

## CONCLUSION

We are accustomed to thinking about the educational achievement of vulnerable children as an issue of the individual child. But, it is also a school-level and system-level issue, raising important questions around how to foster collaboration between the education and child welfare systems and design interventions to enhance the education of the most vulnerable children.

To ensure all youth in care are afforded opportunities to learn and develop the skills to succeed in life, the field must continue to invest in developing the tools, materials, ideas, practices, and policies that support the work of the caseworkers, teachers, judges, lawyers, parents, and foster parents working to improve the educational experiences of these children.

With states now required to report annually on education data, there should be an increasing sense of urgency to provide effective interventions to children and youth in foster care that will reduce the discrepancy in achievement. We must also continue investing in research to build a body of evidence on the effectiveness of these approaches and hold ourselves accountable for improving the trajectories of children in foster care. Devoting resources to improve educational outcomes for these children is an investment in improved life outcomes of youth in foster care that in turn strengthens our communities, economy, and society.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> To learn more about best practices and examples related to information sharing between child welfare and education agencies, see *Roadmap for Foster Care and Education Data Linkages* available at [http://fostercareandeducation.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?portalid=0&EntryId=2095&Command=Core\\_Download](http://fostercareandeducation.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?portalid=0&EntryId=2095&Command=Core_Download).

<sup>2</sup> AFCARS data on the number of children in foster care under the age of five.

<sup>3</sup> NSCAW II Wave 2 Report: Child Well-Being (July 2012) shows that 18 months after the close of investigation, children reported for maltreatment were found to be below their peers in social-emotional, cognitive, language, daily living skills, behavioral, and social skill-based domains. 34.5% of children one to five years old showed risk of developmental delay on standardized measures; 6.5% had both an established medical condition and developmental delay; overall, 42.3% were found to be potentially eligible for services under the IDEA. Less than half of likely qualified infants and toddlers have a Part C Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). (Casaneuva, et. al., 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Data from the National Study of Child and Adolescent Well Being (NSCAW) was used to determine the extent of developmental problems for 268 children who were 1 to 5 years old and had been in foster care for approximately one year at the time the sample was drawn. Researchers found that 57% had a developmental problem in at least one of three domains: 47% had cognitive delays, 49% had language delays, and 52% had behavioral problems. Forty-two percent of the caregivers of these children reported that their child had been assessed for learning problems, special needs, or developmental disabilities, and 23% had been told that they had a learning problem, special need, or developmental disability. However, only half of the children identified as having a learning problem, special need, or developmental disability had an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Thirty five percent of these children had been referred by their caseworker for an assessment to identify learning problems or developmental disabilities, 7% had been referred for special education services and 20% had been referred for services to address an emotional, behavioral or attention problem. At the same time, 39% of their caseworkers indicated that the child needed an assessment to identify learning problems or developmental disabilities, 22% indicated that the child needed services for an emotional, behavioral or attention problem and 14% indicated that the child needed special education services. In addition to the children for whom a referral had been made, another 2% to 3% were already receiving special education services or other services to address a developmental problem (Ward, et al., 2009).

<sup>5</sup> In a study of Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services, researchers found that over one-third of the three- to five-year-olds showed evidence of a possible developmental delay in at least one of the following domains: visual-motor adaptive, language and cognition, fine or gross motor, personal, social, or problem solving. Fourteen percent of the three- to five-year-olds were identified as having behavior problems ranging from lack of focus to aggressiveness (Smithgall, et al., 2010).

<sup>6</sup> An Oregon Social Learning Center study found that foster children entering kindergarten showed large pre-reading skills deficits, with average scores in the 30th to 40th percentile (Pears, Heywood, Kim, Fisher, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> A study using data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being divided a sample of infants who entered foster care into three groups based on their living arrangement 66 months after the initial baseline survey of children in the study. The three groups were children who remained in foster care, children who were reunited with their birth parents, and children who were adopted. The group of children still in foster care at age five-to-six showed worse developmental outcomes than the other two groups for measures of social skills, math, and reading (Lloyd & Barth, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Children in nonparental care were 2.7 times as likely as children living with two biological parents to have had at least one adverse experience, and more than two times as likely as children living with one biological parent and about 30 times as likely as children living with two biological parents to have had four or more adverse experiences. (Bramlett & Radel, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> A study that analyzed data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well Being for 641 children who were less than six years old and in foster care when the first wave of data was collected found that nearly half had scores on



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measures of cognitive, behavioral, and social skills that would make them eligible for early intervention services. However, their caregivers reported that just over one third of these children had received any type of service to address their developmental and behavior problems during the past year. Children at risk for delays in two or more domains were more likely to have received services than children at risk in 0 or 1, and children ages three to five were more than twice as likely to have received services as children ages zero to two (Stahmer et al., 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Between 1991 and 2005, the percentage of all children ages three to four participating in a Head Start program remained fairly constant, ranging between 9 and 11%, and was at 9% in 2005 (Child Trends, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Children in nonparental care who participated in Head Start scored higher than non-Head Start controls on a school readiness measure. Additionally, the Head Start participation also revealed a positive impact on teacher-child relationships for children in nonparental care (Lipscomb et. al., 2013).

<sup>12</sup> A national study of young children referred to the child welfare system found that those who received highly rated center-based early childhood education had better language outcomes 18 months later than those who did not receive these services (Merritt & Klein, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Using secondary data from a large Midwestern state child protection system and a local ECE evaluation, this study compared the developmental status in the year prior to kindergarten of low-income children with and without child protection involvement who were enrolled in highly rated early childhood education settings. Findings demonstrated that children with child protection involvement were performing more poorly than their low-income peers without child protection involvement (Kovan, et. al., 2014).

<sup>14</sup> A focus group consisting of school liaisons from one California school district identified the lack of stability in the lives of foster children, including school stability, as the most serious problem facing students in foster care (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> This report describes efforts taken by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and others to improve educational stability for children and youth in foster care since the 2008 passage of Fostering Connections and the 2013 federal Uninterrupted Scholars Act (Annie E. Casey, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Foster youth who entered an educationally oriented residential facility between October 2001 and June 2005 and had been in foster care for an average of nearly seven years reported a mean of six school changes (after accounting for normative changes) while they were in care (Sullivan et al., 2010).

<sup>17</sup> A study of foster children in seven states found that more than half changed schools upon entering foster care (data were not available for 15%) but more than two thirds remained in the same school during the six-month study period (data were not available for 4%) (National Foster Care Review Coalition, 2009 [data on school changes after foster care entry were only available for 28% of children]).

<sup>18</sup> PolicyLab's Children's Stability and Well-being (CSAW) study found that study participants in Philadelphia, on average, attended 2.7 different schools within the two-year study period (Zorc, O'Reilly, Matone, Long, Watts, Rubin, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> In this study, researchers examined school changes throughout high school for students in foster care. They found that Colorado students in foster care typically change schools three or more times after initially entering ninth grade. They found that only 10% of students did not change high school at all while 59% changed high schools three or more times (Clemens & Sheesley, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> A Study by the Center for Social Services Research and the Institute for Evidence-Based Change showed that three-quarters of California foster youth changed schools the year that they entered foster care compared to only 21% of the comparison group (Frerer, Sosenko, Pellegrin, ManChik, Horowitz, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> During the 2001 through 2003 school years, elementary school-aged foster children in the Chicago Public Schools were more than twice as likely to change schools as students who had no history of child welfare services involvement. School mobility was especially high among children who entered foster care during the school year, with over two-thirds experiencing a school change. Among those children who entered foster care in 2008 without first receiving in-home services, over one-half of the 6- to 10-year-olds and almost two thirds of the 11- to 17-year-olds had changed schools at

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least once within the past two years (excluding normative transitions from elementary to high school) (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> In a study conducted in San Mateo County, CA, between the 2003-04 and 2007-08 academic years, 17% of the dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who remained in their home or were returned to home while in the court's custody) left school midyear compared to only 2% of nondependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> In a WestEd study of California foster youth, two-thirds of foster youth stayed in the same school over the course of a school year compared to 90% of non-foster youth from low socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, approximately 10% of foster youth went to three or more schools over the course of the school year as opposed to only 1% of non-foster youth from low socio-economic backgrounds (Barrat & Berliner, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> A study conducted in Colorado by the University of Northern Colorado between the 2007-08 and 2013-14 academic years found that Black and Hispanic students are more likely than their White peers to change schools. Black students were also more likely to change schools more than once in the same school year. (Clemens & Sheesley, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who had remained in their homes or been returned to homes while in the court's custody) in the San Mateo County study were more than twice as likely not to be proficient in the English language and more than twice as likely not to be proficient in math as their non-dependent peers. The dependent youth also earned, on average, 14 fewer credits per year (Castrechini, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> A study by the Center for Social Services Research and the Institute for Evidence-Based Change showed that over a three-year period, California foster youth performed worse than a comparison group on standardized tests in math and English, and saw fewer gains over this period (Frerer, Sosenko, Pellegrin, Manchik, Horowitz, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> A California study conducted by WestEd showed that the standardized testing achievement gap between foster youth and the general population is similar to that seen with English language learners and students with disabilities. Furthermore, the test scores for foster youth were consistently worse than those of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Barrat & Berliner, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> The academic achievement data of over 26,000 homeless and highly mobile students (including students in foster care) across third through eighth grades were compared with other students including those who participated in the federal free meal program or reduced meals and a group of students who participated in neither. For students who fell into the homeless or highly mobile group, their math and reading achievement was lower than the other groups and growth in math was slower. However, the researchers found that 45% of the homeless and highly mobile students scored within or above the average range suggesting the impact of academic resilience (Cutuli, et. al., 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Researchers studied the relationship between school mobility for Colorado students in foster care and their ability to earn a high school diploma or high school equivalency diploma. Results revealed that students in foster care changed public schools an average of 3.46 times during their first four years of high school and as the number of school changes increased, so did the likelihood that the student would not be successful in earning a high school diploma or equivalent (Clemens, LaLonde, Sheesley, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> A Chapin Hall study of children in Illinois who enter foster care without first receiving in-home services found that among children ages six to 10 with at least one school change in the past two years, 36% were behind or underperforming compared to 56% of those with no school change. Of children ages 11 to 17, 56% were behind or underperforming as compared to 61% of children with no school changes. The researchers concluded that in many cases, children who were doing well before transferring continue to do well after transferring and those who were struggling continue to struggle (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Pecora et al., 2006; this analysis was limited to youth in foster care for one year or more and who were at least 17 years and 3 months old when they left care.

<sup>32</sup> Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, (2012).

<sup>33</sup> A study that asked students in foster care about their educational experiences found that many of those interviewed discussed how the discontinuity and instability in their educational experiences negatively impacted

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important social relationships. Most youth identified disruptions in social relationships and school placements due to the involvement in child welfare and the corresponding placement disruptions in school as an important and negative factor in their educational well-being and progress (Levy, et. al. 2014).

<sup>34</sup> One-fifth of the 11 to 17-year-olds of the Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services were either not enrolled in school or had been absent for so long that they were effectively not enrolled. Many of these youths had become disengaged from school and remained disengaged after entering foster care (Smithgall, et al., 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Failure to immediately enroll foster children in their new school when they change schools during the school year was a major problem identified by the four focus groups conducted in California with representatives from child welfare, education and other agencies as well as foster youth and caregivers (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law on December 10, 2015, reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Among its provisions, the law requires states to ensure protections for vulnerable youth in the foster care and juvenile justice systems. These include school stability and transportation, mandatory data reporting, and agency collaboration. For the immediate enrollment requirement of ESSA, see 20 U.S.C. § 1111(g)(1)(E)(ii-iii). For the points of contact requirements of ESSA, see 20 U.S.C. § 1111(g)(1)(E)(iv) and 20 U.S.C. § 1112(c)(5)(A).

<sup>37</sup> A Chapin Hall study of children in Illinois who enter foster care without first receiving in-home services found about one-third (30.2%) of the six- to 10-year-old children entering foster care missed more than 10 days of school during the past semester or grading period. Some had missed as many as 40 days. Family problems were the principal reasons that children of this age group missed school. Poor school attendance was more prevalent than for younger children. Over half of the children ages 11 to 17 who were enrolled in school at the time they entered foster care had experienced excessive absences (10 days or more) during the previous semester or grading period. The principal reasons for school absences were family problems, running away, and hospitalizations (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> The CSAW study in Philadelphia showed that students had an average 31% daily absence rate in the two months leading up to placement in foster care (Zorc, O'Reilly, Matone, Long, Watts, Rubin, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> A study in San Mateo County, California found the average absence rate for children and youth in foster care was 12% compared to only 6% for nondependent youth. The percentage leaving school mid-year was 17% for children and youth in foster care compared to only 2% for nondependent youth (Castrechini, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Children participating in the CSAW study were absent for twice as many days during the school year as the overall student body (Zorc, O'Reilly, Matone, Long, Watts, Rubin, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> A study by the PolicyLab at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) was commissioned by the Mayor's Office of Education and others to examine the outcomes of students involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system. The study found that ninth graders with child welfare agency involvement were absent two-to-four weeks more than students who were never involved during the school year. (Hwang, Griffis, Song, & Rubin, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Among participants in the CSAW study, children who found permanent placement within 45 days of entering foster care were absent less than other foster children. Children with unstable placements after nine months in care were absent 38% more than children who found permanent placement within 45 days (Zorc, O'Reilly, Matone, Long, Watts, Rubin, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> The CSAW study recognized four categories to describe a child's placement pattern in foster care: early stable, late stable, unstable and reunified with a birth parent. The study found that unstable placement in foster care increased children's absences from school by 38% compared to early stable children. (Rubin, O'Reilly, Zlotnik, Hendricks, Zorc, Matone, & Noonan, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> In a study of Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services found that nearly half of the six to 10-year-olds demonstrated behaviors that were deemed problematic by the school and that two-thirds of the 11 to 17-year-olds exhibited problem behaviors, received disciplinary action, or both (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

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<sup>45</sup>A study in San Mateo County found that close to one-third of youth in foster care for more than two years (31.8%) had experienced a suspension and 4.1% of these youths had been expelled. Children in foster care for shorter (less than six months) and longer (more than two years) periods of time were more likely to be suspended or expelled (Castrechini, 2009).

<sup>46</sup> One focus group consisting of educational advocates and another consisting of school liaisons, all from California, suggested that failure to adequately address the needs of foster children led to emotional and behavior problems with which schools do not know how cope (Zeitlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> A literature review examined the relationship between childhood maltreatment and educational outcomes and found that children with maltreatment histories often experience impairments in both their academic performance—including special education, grade retention, and lower grades—and their mental well-being. Researchers found that these impairments were particularly likely to be identified among maltreated children in foster care. When maltreatment histories are not addressed adequately, there is a greater likelihood that a child will express anxiety, low mood, aggression, deficits in social skills and poor interpersonal relationships. These behaviors often disrupt their learning and potentially disrupt the classroom setting. Many schools are not adequately equipped to address the impacts of trauma on learning although there is a promising movement of schools becoming better “trauma informed” (Romano, et. al., 2015).

<sup>48</sup> Researchers investigated the lifetime exposure of older youth in foster care to various trauma including PTSD. They found the overall trauma exposure rate for youth in care was double that in the general population. They also found that females were much more likely to experience sexual trauma and consequently exhibited higher rates of PTSD than males. Approximately 30% of respondents in the study reported experiencing their worst trauma at or after age 16. While the recommendations for this study were geared to improving child welfare policy and practice to account for the trauma experience of children and youth in foster care, the findings also impact the role that schools can and should have regarding their response to students with PTSD and other trauma histories (Salazar, et. al., 2013).

<sup>49</sup> See promising practices highlighted in “How Can Systems Support the Educational Needs of Students in Foster Care” section of this document.

<sup>50</sup> A study of special education students in one large city and 32 county school districts were over three times more likely to be diagnosed with an emotional disturbance if they had a history of foster care placement than children who were poor but had no child welfare services involvement (Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Just over half of the 11-to-14-year-old foster youth and 45% of the 15-to-18-year-old foster youth in Lucas County (Toledo), Ohio were identified as having special education needs. Just under one-fifth of the five to 10-year-olds were identified as having special education needs but data were missing for nearly one-third (Theiss, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> Though limited in scope, a study of foster children in seven states found that two-thirds of the children with special education needs (data were not available for 10%) were receiving special education services (National Foster Care Review Coalition, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who had remained in their homes or had been returned to homes while in the court’s custody) in the San Mateo County study were 2.5 times more likely to be receiving special education services as nondependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

<sup>54</sup> Children in foster care and in special education in a large urban Oregon school district changed schools more frequently and were in more restrictive settings than special education students who were not in foster care. Moreover, the Individualized Education Plans the foster youth were of poorer quality and less likely to include goals related to postsecondary education or to the development of independent living skills than those of special education students not in foster care. The foster youth were also less likely than other special education students to have an advocate present during their transition planning meetings (Geenen & Powers, 2006).

<sup>55</sup> Two focus groups consisting of California foster parents and relative caregivers identified the failure of schools to acknowledge their children’s needs for services address learning or behavior problems, and provide their children with more intensive supports as ongoing problems (Zeitlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2010).

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<sup>56</sup> California school liaisons who participated in the focus group suggested that some of the problems that resulted in foster children being referred for special education services may be due to the emotional trauma or frequent school changes they have experienced rather than to learning disabilities (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> Petrenko, Culhane, Garrido, Taussig (2011).

<sup>58</sup> By age 21, 77% of the Midwest Study participants had a high school diploma or GED compared to 89% of 21 year olds in a nationally representative sample (Courtney, et al., 2007).

<sup>59</sup> A California study conducted by WestEd shows that the graduation rate for 12th-grade foster youth was 58% compared to 84% for all 12th-grade students in the state. The graduation rate for foster youth is the lowest of any at-risk group examined in the study (Barrat & Berliner, 2013).

<sup>60</sup> The Washington State Institute for Public Policy has been tracking student progress since 2005 and has identified educational outcomes for students in foster care, including school retention, behind grade level, adjusted cohort graduation rate, and the annual graduation rate. A 2013 updated report revealed that the longitudinal (four-year) graduation rate for youth in foster care was between 35 and 55% (compared to non-foster youth whose rate was between 70 and 75%) and the annual graduation rate, measured on an annual basis was 48% for youth in foster care compared to 72% of non-foster youth (Burley, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> In 2014, the Colorado Department of Education began reporting on graduation, completion, and mobility rates for students in foster care. The primary way that this was accomplished was by completing a five-year trend study (2007-2012) conducted by the University of Northern Colorado. The study compared statewide averages for students across three demographic characteristics and unique populations. Students were placed into three different groups: students who had been or were in foster care during the 2007-08 to 2011-12 fiscal years, students who were homeless over this same time period, and students who were neither homeless nor in foster care during this fiscal period with all students being in ninth grade at the start of the 2007-08 school year. The report primarily served as a measure of whether students graduated within four years of entering ninth grade. The study found that although the on-time graduation rate for Colorado students as a whole has steadily improved, the rates for students in foster care remained stable (no improvement) and well below their non-foster care peers. Students in foster care dropped out one or more times and they dropped out earlier in their educational careers than other populations of students (e.g., students who were homeless). The graduation rate for students in foster care included in the Class of 2013 was 27.5%. This is compared to the state graduation rate of 76.9% and the rate of students who are homeless who had a 42% graduation rate (Clemens, 2014).

<sup>62</sup> This report calculated that raising the graduation rate of one year's cohort of youth aging out of foster care to the national average would increase earnings and tax revenues totaling over \$2 billion with an estimated impact in excess of \$61,000,000 in the first year alone. (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Twelve percent of Washington State students who had been in foster care at any time after their 16th birthday and were expected to graduate at the end of the 2004-05 to 2006-07 school years graduated from high school one year later than expected (Burley, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> The Colorado Department of Education reported in their 2013-2014 State Policy Report that while there was improvement in graduation and completion rates for students in foster care to the 2014 graduation rate of 30% (which was 2.5 percentage points higher than the Class of 2013), the graduation rates are still significantly below that of their peers in all other "special population" groups, including students who are homeless and students with disabilities, in the state of Colorado (Parra, & Martinez, 2015).

<sup>65</sup> More than one-third of the Casey National Alumni Study participants reported that they had repeated a grade (Pecora, et al., 2006).

<sup>66</sup> Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care as well as youth who had remained in their homes or been returned to homes while in the court's custody) in the San Mateo County study were twice as likely to be retained as nondependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

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<sup>67</sup> The 17 and 18 year old Midwest Study participants were 1.7 times more likely to report that they had repeated a grade than a nationally representative sample of 17 and 18 year olds (Courtney, et al., 2004).

<sup>68</sup> Burley (2013).

<sup>69</sup> Findings of a study completed by the Center for Advanced Studies suggest that an achievement gap exists for youth in child welfare as compared to youth who haven't had child welfare involvement. The proportion of youth proficient on the Minnesota Comprehensive (MCA-II) math and reading tests were consistently lower in the child welfare populations than for the general population, even after controlling for race and socioeconomic status (Piescher, Colburn, LaLiberte, & Hunt, 2014).

<sup>70</sup> The odds of completing high school were 1.8 times higher for foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study if they had experienced one fewer placement change per year and 3.1 times higher if they had experienced two fewer placement changes per year (Pecora et al., 2006; this analysis was limited to foster youth who were at least 17 years and 3 months old when they left care).

<sup>71</sup> Researchers reported that the odds of graduating from high school among foster care alumni in the Northwest Study were 4.6 times higher if they had experienced a low rate of placement change (i.e., less than .5 per year) and 2.7 times higher if they had experienced a moderate rate of placement change (i.e., .50 to .99 per year) than if they had experienced a high rate of placement change (i.e., at least 1 per year). In addition, their odds of graduating from high school were twice as high if they had experienced six or fewer school changes than if they had experienced 10 or more (Pecora et al., 2009).

<sup>72</sup> Students in foster care drop out of school at three times the rate of their non-foster care peers. This is despite national data indicating the overall high school dropout rate is declining steadily (Clemens, 2014).

<sup>73</sup> The rate of high school completion for foster care alumni in both the Northwest Alumni Study and the Casey National Alumni Study was comparable to the 2008 high school completion rate of 85% among 18 to 24 year olds in the general population. However, 29% of the Northwest Alumni Study participants and 19% of the Casey National Alumni Study completed high school with a GED rather than a high school diploma compared to 6% of 18 to 24 year olds in the general population (Pecora, et al, 2005; Pecora, et al., 2006).

<sup>74</sup> American Indian/Alaskan Native foster care alumni were about as likely to complete high school as non-Hispanic White alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study but were significantly less likely to have a high school diploma and significantly more likely to have a GED (O'Brien, et al., 2010).

<sup>75</sup> Although the African American foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study were about as likely to have completed high school as their non-Hispanic White counterparts, they were significantly less likely to have completed high school with a regular diploma (Harris, et al., 2009).

<sup>76</sup> Likewise, African American foster care alumni in the Northwest Study were significantly more likely to have completed high school than their non-Hispanic White counterparts, but significantly less likely to have a high school diploma (Dworsky, et al., 2010).

<sup>77</sup> Heckman, Humphries, Mader (2010).

<sup>78</sup> Nineteen young adults who were in foster care were interviewed about turning points in their lives that led them to complete a postsecondary education or were on track to complete one. One of the turning points that participants identified were "safe havens," including school and home environments that provided a place of refuge from stresses in other parts of their lives. Participants noted that schools were spaces where they could demonstrate their academic competencies or gain access to new knowledge, helping them experience a relief from distress and an opportunity to engage in goal setting (Haas, 2016).

<sup>79</sup> For a more comprehensive list of programs that are supporting youth transitioning from foster care, see the Center on Labor, Human Services and Population, December 2014; OPRE Report No. 2014-66. (Dworsky, Smithgall & Courtney).

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<sup>80</sup> Only 11% of the youth in foster care in Washington State who were in the high school classes of 2006 and 2007 were enrolled in college during both the first and second year after expected high school graduation. By comparison, 42% of Washington State high school students in the class of 2006 enrolled in college during the first year after they were expected to graduate from high school and 35% were enrolled in college during both the first and second year after graduating from high school (Burley, 2009).

<sup>81</sup> Forty three percent of foster care alumni in the Northwest Alumni Study had completed any postsecondary education and almost half of the foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study, however only 2% of the former and 9% of the latter had at least a bachelor's degree (Pecora, et al., 2006; Pecora, et al., 2005).

<sup>82</sup> 47% of participants in the Midwest study had completed at least one year of college at age 26, but only 8% had obtained a postsecondary degree. By comparison, 46% of 26-year-olds in the nationally representative National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health sample had obtained a two- or four-year degree. (Courtney et al., 2011).

<sup>83</sup> Foster care alumni who entered postsecondary education in 1995 and were first-time undergraduates, were as likely to attend four-year institutions as other first-time undergraduates and more likely to be enrolled full-time. However, they were half as likely to have earned a degree or certificate during the six-year study period as their non-foster peers (Davis, 2006).

<sup>84</sup> 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 (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, Damashek, 2011).

<sup>85</sup> In this exploratory cross-sectional survey, 81 former foster youths' readiness for college were measured as well as their first semester academic performance (Unrau, Font, Rawls, 2011).

<sup>86</sup> Midwest Study participants from Illinois, who were allowed to remain in foster care until age 21, were 1.7 times more likely to have completed at least one year of college by age 23 or 24 than their counterparts from Iowa and Wisconsin, where that option did not exist. However, the Illinois study participants were no more likely to have a college degree (Courtney et al., 2010).

<sup>87</sup> The odds of enrolling in college were 4.6 times higher for Washington State foster youth who participated in a mentoring program than for non-mentored peers with similar characteristics even after controlling for other factors (Burley, 2009).

<sup>88</sup> The odds of graduating from college were 3.7 times higher for foster care alumni in the Northwest Study if they had experienced six or fewer school changes than if they had experienced 10 or more (Pecora, et al., 2009).

<sup>89</sup> Survey data from a cross-sectional sample of 329 foster care alumni who received a national scholarship to various colleges provided by the Casey Family Scholarship Program studied two sets of factors that examined predictors of postsecondary retention: factors that have been found to be related to retention in the general population and factors that were hypothesized to be more unique to the foster care population. Four factors emerged as having indicators with significant relationship to college retention and graduation. Two were general population factors: institutional commitment and social involvement. The remaining two factors were from the foster care specific group: independent living stability and tangible support (Salazar, 2011).

<sup>90</sup> American Indian/Alaskan Native foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study were about as likely as their non-Hispanic White counterparts to have any postsecondary education, they were significantly less likely to have graduated from college (O'Brien, et al., 2010).

<sup>91</sup> In the Casey National Alumni Study, there were no significant differences in postsecondary educational outcomes between the non-Hispanic White and African American alumni (O'Brien, et al., 2010).

<sup>92</sup> African American foster care alumni in the Northwest Study were as likely to have completed any college as their non-Hispanic white counterparts (Pecora, et al., 2009).

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<sup>93</sup> Although African American Midwest Study participants were significantly more likely to have attended college and to have completed at least one year of college by age 21 than their non-Hispanic white counterparts, only the difference in college attendance was statistically significant (Courtney et al., 2010).

<sup>94</sup> A study of former foster youth participating in eight campus support programs in California and Washington State found that although former foster youth clearly appreciated the concrete services and supports they received, such as having someone to turn to or someone who believed in them and feeling understood or part of a family, it was the less tangible benefits that they valued most. Moreover, some of the challenges participants reported were not unlike those faced by many young people from low income families when they go away to school but others, particularly their concerns about having a stable place to live, were probably related to their status as former foster youth (Dworsky & Perez, 2010).

<sup>95</sup> A study examining the testimony of forty-three high school and college age foster youth in front of panels of policymakers in Michigan identified a lack of supportive relationships with caring adults as the most frequently cited impediment to graduating from high school or applying to/attending college (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, Fogarty, 2012).

<sup>96</sup> Peters et al. (2009).

<sup>97</sup> Among youth formerly in care, results from regression analyses indicate that, compared to individuals with no high school credential, a GED or certificate of completion predicts no benefits in earnings or likelihood of being employed; a diploma predicts an earnings benefit; and some college, a two-year degree, and a four-year degree or greater predict large benefits in earnings and likelihood of employment (Okpych & Courtney, 2014).

#### [Lay the Foundation for a Strong Start for Young Children in Care](#)

<sup>98</sup> Geenen & Powers, 2006.

<sup>99</sup> Pears, Kim, Fisher (2012).

<sup>100</sup> Lewis-Morrarty, Dozier, Bernanrd, Terracciano, Moore (2012).

#### [Ensure School Stability](#)

<sup>101</sup> For more information about Washoe County's Achievement Unlocked Project, see [https://www.washoecounty.us/outreach/\\_files/Achievements%20Unlocked%20Brochure.pdf](https://www.washoecounty.us/outreach/_files/Achievements%20Unlocked%20Brochure.pdf).

#### [Promote Regular School Attendance](#)

<sup>102</sup> See RTI International (2016), [http://foster-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Year-3-report-FosterEd\\_SCC\\_Draft-10-18-16.pdf](http://foster-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Year-3-report-FosterEd_SCC_Draft-10-18-16.pdf).

<sup>103</sup> For more information about Kids in School Rule! see <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/CFC/resources/local/KISR.pdf>.

<sup>104</sup> *Id.*

#### [Support Children to Prevent Serious Behavior Problems at School](#)

<sup>105</sup> Cole, Eisner, Gregory & Ristuccia, 2013.

<sup>106</sup> The Compassionate Schools Initiative within Learning and Teaching Support provides training, guidance, referral, and technical assistance to schools wishing to adopt a Compassionate Schools Infrastructure. Compassionate Schools benefit all students who attend but focus on students chronically exposed to stress and trauma in their lives. These schools create compassionate classrooms and foster compassionate attitudes of their school staff. The goal is to keep students engaged and learning by creating and supporting a healthy climate and culture within the school where all students can learn. For more information see <http://www.k12.wa.us/CompassionateSchools/>.



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<sup>107</sup> Researchers in New Zealand interviewed youth who had not completed high school about what would have fostered a sense of belonging at their school. Based on the youth accounts, they identified five orientations to practice that made the most difference to a youth's ability to stay at school. The orientations include helping youth with (PARTH): perseverance, adaptability, relationships, time and honesty. Researchers found that when school professionals adopted PARTH practices, students were better able to interact with school professionals over how support and resources would be made available, increasing the likelihood that youth would benefit from them (Sanders & Munford, 2016).

<sup>108</sup> Personal communication with Eliza Hirst, Deputy Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate, Delaware. May 22, 2017.

<sup>109</sup> *Year End Report, 2016-2017 School Year, Graduation Success*, Treehouse for Kids, Seattle, WA.  
[www.treehouseforkids.org](http://www.treehouseforkids.org).

<sup>110</sup> *Improving Educational and Well-Being Outcomes: School-DHS Data Sharing in Allegheny County*. Report available at: <https://www.alleghenycountyanalytics.us/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Improving-Educational-and-Well-Being-Outcomes-8-19-15.pdf>.

### Meet Children's Special Education Needs with Quality Services

<sup>111</sup> Powers, Geenen, Powers, Pommier-Satya, Turner, Dalton, Drummond, Swank (2012).

### Support Students to Succeed and Graduate

<sup>112</sup> For more information regarding Fostering Opportunities, see <https://www.jeffersoncountycylc.com/education>.

<sup>113</sup> *Year End Report, 2016-2017 School Year, Graduation Success*, Treehouse for Kids, Seattle, WA.  
[www.treehouseforkids.org](http://www.treehouseforkids.org).

### Support Transitions to and Graduation From College

<sup>114</sup> For more information about the HEMI program and data outcomes, see <http://www.uc.edu/cechpass/hemi.html>.

<sup>115</sup> For more information about California College Pathways, see [http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/charting\\_the\\_course\\_final.pdf](http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/charting_the_course_final.pdf).

<sup>116</sup> Abstracted from the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse. See <http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/better-futures/detailed>. Also see Geenen, Powers, Phillips, McKenna, Wings-Yanez, Croskey (2015).

<sup>117</sup> Supports provided to youth by Better Futures include: Youth-directed relationship support from a coach who is currently in postsecondary education and who has personal life experience in foster care; coaching in applying achievement, partnership, and self-regulation skills to identify and reach postsecondary and related youth-chosen goals (e.g., dream, set goals, problem-solve, network to reach out to allies, negotiate, appreciate accomplishments, hang tough against stress); support for experiential activities aimed at career and postsecondary exploration and preparation, along with related goal achievement; and workshops that bring together participants, coaches, and successful near peers (i.e., peers currently in postsecondary education and who have lived experience in foster care) for learning, peer support, and networking.

### Supportive Adult Advocates

<sup>118</sup> See RTI International, 2016: [http://foster-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Year-3-report-FosterEd\\_SCC\\_Draft-10-18-16.pdf](http://foster-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Year-3-report-FosterEd_SCC_Draft-10-18-16.pdf).

<sup>119</sup> See Catawba County Child Wellbeing Project: <http://www.catawbacountync.gov/dss/PW/childwellbeing.asp>.

<sup>120</sup> Price, Chamberlain, Landsverk, Reid (2009).

<sup>121</sup> Chamberlain, Feldman, Wulczyn, Saldana, Forgatch, (2016). For more information about KEEP: <http://www.KEEPfostering.org>.

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## APPENDIX A

### Characteristics of Children and Youth in Foster Care

Number of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2016		437,465
Characteristics of children and youth in foster care on Sept 30, 2016 <sup>1</sup>		
	Number	Percent
<b>AGE</b>		
Young children (0-4)	155,632	36%
School age children and youth (age 5-17)	268,517	61%
Young adults (age 18-20)	13,316	3%
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>		
White	191,433	44%
Black	101,825	23%
Hispanic (any race)	91,352	21%
Multiracial	30,224	7%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	10,366	2%
Unknown/Unable to Determine	8,418	2%
Asian	2,290	1%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	936	<1%
<b>GENDER</b>		
Male	227,248	52%
Female	210,166	48%

<sup>1</sup> Source: AFCARS Report: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport24.pdf>. Note: Data reported from the Preliminary Fiscal Year 2016 Estimates (October 1, 2016- September 30, 2017) as of October 20, 2017. Data from both the regular and revised AFCARS file submissions received by October 20, 2017 are included in this report. Missing data are excluded from each table. Therefore, the totals within each distribution may not equal the total provided for that subpopulation (e.g., number in care on September 30 may not match the sum across ages for that group).



## Regional and Special Project Education Results for Youth in Foster Care and Foster Care Alumni

### Education Study Method Cautions<sup>1</sup>

When comparing youth in foster care with other groups, note that most studies do not control for other factors like age, race and gender.<sup>2</sup> Even fewer studies control for key variables such as family income, housing instability or insecurity, food insecurity, English language proficiency, child maltreatment that did not result in out-of-home placement, and other Adverse Childhood Experiences like parent divorce, substance abuse, emotional/behavioral health issues and incarceration. These factors can outweigh the negative or positive effects of placement and enrollment in a poor or high-quality school.

For example, in one recent study in California, education at-risk factors for youth in foster care that were present prior to placement were more reliable predictors of academic performance over time than the majority of child welfare case characteristics. Similar to other at-risk students, youth in foster care who were poor, non-White, and had disabilities (i.e., special education status) struggled on standardized tests more than others. But the association among school quality, placement changes, school transfers, and academic performance is complex. “While remaining in the same school has potential benefits for some students, it may not support the educational best interest for many foster youth. Remaining in the same school after entry into foster care may mitigate the number of changes a youth experiences. However, having foster students remain in low-performing schools may impede long-term academic achievement.”<sup>3</sup>

Another study that controlled for many of these nonplacement factors and that tracked children in out-of-home care and other children in grades three-to-eight found that out-of-home placement itself does not appear to be causally related to school achievement. Children involved with child protective services (CPS), however, were shown to have consistently low average math and reading standardized test scores. For example, the difference in Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE) scores between children in foster care and those receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) assistance, who are more similar to children in foster care than are children in the general population, is considerably smaller than that between children experiencing placement and all other children. In addition, there are relatively few differences in achievement test scores between children in foster care and other children involved with CPS but not placed out of home. No differences in achievement by level of CPS involvement were found.

Because all children involved with CPS performed similarly in this study, it suggests that out-of-home care placement by itself may not be the major factor affecting academic achievement among children involved with CPS. However, whereas they found no evidence of a causal relationship between out-of-home care and achievement, the researchers did find consistent evidence of low average math and reading achievement among children involved with CPS.<sup>4</sup> Thus, caregivers and service providers should be concerned about the cognitive development of all children experiencing maltreatment, with the caution that we do have other studies that show that changes in living situation/placement and school changes do negatively affect children in out-of-home care as well as other children.

### High School Completion Rates

Rates vary depending upon the region of the country, age range of youth in the study, and the study year.

- **Colorado:** The four-year high school completion rate of youth in foster care (graduates and other completers) was 37.4% in 2016 compared to a statewide rate of 80.3%. Six-year high school completion rates (i.e., by about age 21) were 53.3 % for students in foster care. The high school completion rate of youth in foster care (graduates and other completers) was 41.8% in 2014 compared to a statewide rate of 79.5%.<sup>5</sup>

- **Midwest Alumni Study (Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin):** When interviewed at age 23 or 24, the foster care alumni in this study had a high school completion rate of 75.3%, as compared with 92.8% of youth in the national Adolescent Health study.<sup>6</sup>
- **Northwest Alumni Study:** The high school completion rate was high for alumni aged 25 and older (90.8%), who have had more time to complete classes or their GED.<sup>7</sup>
- **Washington State:** The high school completion rate was boosted in Washington from 36% in 2010 among youth in care to 89% for the youth in care (or formerly in care up to age 21) that were served in Seattle by the Treehouse education support program. Note that this is even higher than the current general population high school completion rate in Washington (89% vs 81%). See <http://knba.org/post/why-foster-care-students-seattle-are-beating-odds>.

### School Mobility and High School Completion Rates

Youth placed in foster care often experience changes in placement, which then frequently result in a change in schools.<sup>8</sup> Higher rates of placement change can lower high school completion rates and affect other areas of youth functioning.<sup>9</sup> Consider these findings:

- Children who experience school change have 16 to 20% lower standardized test scores than children who did not experience school change.<sup>10</sup>
- One study indicated that students who have changed schools more than four times lose about one year of educational growth by their sixth school year.<sup>11</sup>
- High school students who change schools once or more, are less than half as likely to graduate as their peers who do not experience a change in schools.<sup>12</sup> In a national study of 1,087 foster care alumni served in 13 states, youth who had one fewer change in living arrangement per year were nearly twice (1.8 times) as likely to graduate from high school before leaving foster care.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, research in Colorado found these high school completion rates (diploma or GED) when youth in care changed schools:

School Changes	HS Completion Rate
None	60%
1 time	52%
2 times	44%

<sup>1</sup> Abstracted from Pecora, P.J., Whittaker, J.K., Barth, R.P., Borja, S., & Vesneski, W. (In press). *The child welfare challenge*. (Fourth Edition.) New York City: Taylor and Francis, Chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, when comparing emotional and behavioral health conditions, adjusted the foster care alumni sample and the “general population” sample by age, race and gender. See Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. C., Williams, J., Downs, A. C., English, D.J., & White, J. & O’Brien, K. (2010). *What works in family foster care? Key components of success from the Northwest foster care alumni study*. New York and Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. The Midwest study used a sample from the AD Health study that was of the same age range. See Courtney, M.E., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Conditions of youth preparing to leave state care*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

The Frerer et al (2013) study matched the youth by grade level, school year, gender, ethnicity, English Language Learner (ELL) status, National School Lunch Program (NSLP), primary disability, district or school, state rank, and baseline CST level. In the math sample, youth in foster care and youth not in foster care were additionally matched by math course level for older youth. See Frerer, K., Sosenko, L.D., Pellegrin, N., Manchik, V. & Horowitz, J. (2013). *Foster youth stability: A study of California foster youths’ school and residential changes in relation to educational outcomes*. Berkeley, CA: University of California at Berkeley, Center for Social Services Research, p.2. Retrieved from [http://www.iebcnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/pub\\_foster\\_youth\\_stability\\_2013.pdf](http://www.iebcnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/pub_foster_youth_stability_2013.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Frerer, K., Sosenko, L.D., Pellegrin, N., Manchik, V., Horowitz, J. (2013), p. 3

- <sup>4</sup> Berger, L., M., Cancian, M., Han, E., Noyes, J. & Rios-Salas, V. (2015). Children's academic achievement and foster care. *Pediatrics*, 135, e109–e116. Institute for Research on Poverty. (2015). Does Foster Care Lower School Achievement? *Focus on Policy*, No. 5. Madison, WI: Author.
- <sup>5</sup> Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-Engagement (2017). *2015-2016 state policy report: Dropout prevention and student engagement*. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education, p. 20. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention/2015-16statepolicyondpse>. Parra, J., & Martinez, J. (2015). *2013-2014 state policy report: Dropout prevention and student engagement*. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education, p. 20. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.state.co.us./dropoutprevention/2014statepolicyreport31215>.
- <sup>6</sup> Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., & Lee, J. & Raap, M. (2010). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 23 and 24*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, pp. 22 and 23.
- <sup>7</sup> Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. C., Williams, J., Downs, A. C., English, D.J., & White, J. & O'Brien, K. (2010). *What works in family foster care? Key components of success from the Northwest foster care alumni study*. New York and Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, p. 121. Note that this study involved a mixture of public and private-agency served youth in foster care in Oregon and Washington between 1988-1998.
- <sup>8</sup> Nationally, on average, 64.8% of children who were in foster care for 12-24 months have had a placement change more than once. ACYF (2016). *Child Welfare Outcomes 2010-2013: Report to Congress*. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/cwo-10-13>. The school mobility rate for students in foster care in Colorado is more than three times the state average. See Parra, J., & Martinez, J. (2015). *2013-2014 state policy report dropout prevention and student engagement*. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education. A California study indicated that students in foster care transferred schools at two to three times the rate of their non-foster care peers. See Frerer, K., Sosenko, L. D., Pellegrin, N., Manchik, V., & Horowitz, J. (2013). *Foster youth stability: A study of California foster youths' school and residential changes in relation to educational outcomes*. San Francisco: Stuart Foundation. Retrieved from [http://www.iebcnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/pub\\_foster\\_youth\\_stability\\_2013.pdf](http://www.iebcnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/pub_foster_youth_stability_2013.pdf).
- <sup>9</sup> See, for example, Herrenkohl, E., Herrenkohl, R. & Egolf, B. (2003). The psychosocial consequences of living environment instability on maltreated children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 73(4), 367-380.
- <sup>10</sup> Calvin, E. M. (2000). *Make a difference in a child's life: A manual for helping children and youth get what they need in school: advocating for children and youth who are out of home or in foster care*. Seattle: TeamChild and Casey Family Programs.
- <sup>11</sup> Kerbow, D. (1996). Patterns of urban student mobility and local school reform. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 1(2), 147–169.
- <sup>12</sup> Rumberger, R., & Larson, K. A. (1998). Student mobility and the increased risk of high school dropout. *American Journal of Education*, 107, 1–35.
- <sup>13</sup> This analysis was limited to youth in care who were at least 17 years and 3 months old when they left out-of-home care from a private foster care agency after most had been first placed with a public agency. See Pecora, P.J., Williams, J., Kessler, R. C., Hiripi, E., O'Brien, K., Emerson, J., Herrick, M.A. & Torres, D. (2006). Assessing the educational achievements of adults who formerly were placed in family foster care. *Child and Family Social Work*, 11, 220–231.