



# FosterEd Arizona: Year 1 Evaluation

Prepared for  
National Center for Youth Law

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# Executive Summary

## Background

FosterEd is an initiative first developed in Indiana in 2009 by the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL), aimed at improving the educational experiences and outcomes of foster youth. With many lessons learned and promising initial findings, in 2011 child welfare and education leaders in Santa Cruz County, California agreed to develop a FosterEd pilot program. In 2012, the Director of FosterEd began discussions with child welfare, education, and philanthropic leaders in Arizona about the possibility of establishing a FosterEd pilot in one county within the state, with a long-term goal of expanding the program state-wide. After much consideration, Pima County was selected as the pilot Arizona County.

FosterEd has three major objectives:

- Identify and support Educational Champions for foster youth. Ideally, the Educational Champion would be a biological parent or assumed long-term caregiver of the youth, someone likely to be a part of a youth's life long-term and therefore able to continue supporting the child educationally even after he or she leaves foster care.
- Develop and monitor educational teams to support foster youth.
- Create an individualized education plan based on the foster youth's strengths and needs.

## Evaluation Overview

In January 2013, NCYL contracted with RTI International to conduct an external evaluation of the Pima County FosterEd pilot which is expected to run through December 2015. RTI has

approached this study from a Developmental Evaluation framework, allowing for greater flexibility when analyzing initiatives or innovations that tend to continuously develop and evolve. Furthermore, Developmental Evaluation is distinct from more traditional evaluative approaches in that the evaluators actively participate in the partnership and are expected to support ongoing program improvement by helping program leaders put to use data emerging from the evaluation.

RTI is employing multiple methods for the evaluation, involving the collection and analysis of various types of quantitative and qualitative data. In collaboration with FosterEd staff, RTI developed an evaluation indicators matrix, which groups indicators into three major sections: infrastructure, practice, and outcomes.

This Year 1 evaluation report focuses on the preparation for the launch of the FosterEd Pima County pilot and the first nine months of implementation (January 2014 through September 2014). Preliminary data are currently available for some, but not all, of the proposed FosterEd youth and Educational Champion outcomes. Most importantly, education data such as students' attendance rates, grades, and school behavioral rates are not included in this Year 1 report. This is due to the slower than expected Foster Focus linking process. (Foster Focus is database to which districts can "link," enabling nightly data uploads from their district's management information system to Foster Focus, where key child welfare data are also stored. FosterEd staff have access to Foster Focus and can extract de-identified data for the evaluation.) Educational outcomes measures will be a focus of the Year 2 evaluation report.

## Progress on Infrastructure Indicators

In the early stages of the evaluation, RTI and FosterEd identified 11 infrastructure indicators reflecting systems, staff, and products that needed to be in place to launch and support the implementation of FosterEd in Pima County. By October 2014, eight of the infrastructure elements were completed and three were ongoing.

The completed infrastructure components include:

- FosterEd Staff hired and trained
- Standard motions and orders for appointing Educational Champions in Pima County developed
- Data sharing agreements established
- Process document developed, including Partners' approval of document. FosterEd relies on strong partnerships with a number of agencies, including the local child welfare and education agencies.
- Customized Foster Focus for Arizona
- Customized Goalbook for Arizona
- Customized Mentoring Modules for Arizona
- Co-located Education Liaisons at County Office of Education and Child Welfare Offices

The three ongoing infrastructure components include:

- Establishment and persistence of State Leadership Team, Community Planning Team, and Steering Committee
- Linking districts with Foster Focus
- Customization of CHILDS, or its successor, to include a more robust template for case planning

## Progress on Practice Indicators

The practice indicators for the evaluation include the number of youth and Educational Champions involved in the program and the number of volunteers trained.

- How many youth were served by FosterEd in 2014? **193**
- How many adult team members served on students' teams? **362** unique adults served across the **193** teams. Some of these adults served on multiple teams.
- How many volunteers were recruited and trained in 2014? **37**

## Progress on Outcomes Indicators

RTI has identified a number of youth, Educational Champion, program, and state outcomes to track for the evaluation.

### *Youth Outcomes*

The partners agreed to consider the identification of the educational needs of foster youth as an outcome given the educational challenges that foster youth, as a group, often face. Additionally, educational needs have historically not been given adequate attention by the adults working with these youth, who have been more focused on the other critical dimensions of safety and wellbeing. Since FosterEd aims to raise the profile and attention given to the educational needs and outcomes of foster youth, simply identifying those needs is one outcome of the program.

- How many educational goals were set for foster youth? **729**
- How many goals had been completed in the first nine months of implementation? **221 (30%)**
- How many goals were not yet completed, but had some objectives met? **149 (20%)**

- How many goals were not yet completed, and no objectives had yet been met? **241 (33%)**
- How many goals were considered “future” goals, to be addressed once more urgent goals were met? **118 (16%)**

Although education data were not yet available for a sufficient number of students in order to adequately examine for this report whether, for example, youth who participated in FosterEd improved their attendance rates, the perceptions of the adult team members regarding the impact of FosterEd on the youth were assessed through a survey. At least 80% of adult respondents perceived at least “a little” positive impact of FosterEd on each of the seven dimensions, including their grades, attendance, and attitudes towards school.

### *Educational Champions Outcomes*

FosterEd expects that many Educational Champions will need mentoring or coaching to effectively support and advocate for the youth. 81 student teams included a goal to increase the capacity of the Educational Champion. Most of these (58) have been labeled “future goals” because there is not another adult on the team who is available to provide mentoring to the Educational Champion. 15 of the 81 teams with Educational Champions who need mentoring are providing that mentoring, but objectives associated with those goals have not yet been met. Five of the 81 teams in which mentoring the Educational Champion is occurring have met some of those mentoring objectives. Three of the 81 teams have met their goal of increasing the capacity of the Educational Champion.

## Program Outcomes

Results from adult team member surveys revealed that 83% of respondents felt that FosterEd has helped them collaborate with other adults in the youth’s life to support the youth’s education, and 87% would recommend FosterEd to other adults in the lives of foster youth. 75% of Department of Child Safety Specialists reported that FosterEd has enabled them to better collaborate with school and district staff, and 89% of teachers and school and district staff reported that FosterEd enabled them to better collaborate with Department of Child Safety Specialists.

During focus groups and interviews, respondents noted that increased visibility of the educational needs of foster youth was an important achievement for the first year of implementation. Two quotes illustrate this point:

*“From the educator point of view, the simple fact of raising the visibility of FosterEd and foster kids, in and of itself, will create big change. Principals and Superintendents often do not even know who the foster kids are in their schools until they need to deal with them for disciplinary reasons or some other reason.”*

*“Having [Education Liaisons] is something that’s desperately needed for children involved with the Department of Child Safety because the DCS specialists aren’t given much information about education, education[al] achievement, and how to monitor a child’s education. Frankly, DCS specialists are more focused on safety and what they need to get done. Having people who focus on [the foster youth’s] education is phenomenal.”*

### *State Outcomes*

RTI is tracking a number of state-level outcomes identified by FosterEd as goals to achieve, beyond the Pima County pilot project, which reflect its state policy and practice efforts. Although it is impossible to quantify or isolate NCYL’s

contributions to the state outcomes, RTI is comfortable reporting on them given the perspectives shared during the State Leadership and Community Planning Team interviews, and RTI observation of State Leadership Team meetings.

FosterEd did not expect to achieve many of the state goals during the first year of the Pima County pilot, but rather aimed to meet them toward the end of the pilot or in the first few years following the pilot. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made on five of the state-level outcomes.

- MOUs developed for data sharing between the Arizona Department of Education and the Department of Economic Security
- Regular data sharing between the Arizona Department of Education and the Division of Child Safety and Child Services
- Data sharing between state agencies and local agencies
- Production of Arizona Invisible Achievement Gap report
- Legislative briefings and hearings about FosterEd and the Arizona Invisible Achievement Gap

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the full range of quantitative and qualitative data collected, the evaluator concludes that the first year of implementation of the Pima County pilot has been a success, with much achieved and much learned. The evaluator has been impressed with the critical self-reflection of the FosterEd Pima County project. Throughout the first year of implementation, the project leaders, staff, and members of the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams have

been hungry for the data emerging from the evaluation and other sources. They have used this information to reflect on the project and identify challenges in order to address them.

RTI offers the following recommendations for continuing to strengthen FosterEd in Pima County during the second year of the pilot:

- Continue to raise awareness among the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams about the substantial delays and other challenges encountered with regard to access to education data through linkages with Foster Focus. Without solutions, the evaluation is in danger of being unable to report on educational outcomes.
- Refine targets for Education Liaisons' caseloads so that they can sufficiently attend to their cases while also serving as many foster youth as possible. Work with the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams to clearly communicate the program capacity to agency partners (e.g., the court, DCS).
- Work to improve team member communication within Goalbook. Develop clearer plans and protocols for supporting team members who cannot collaborate through Goalbook.
- Focus on engaging more youth in their education teams.
- Focus on engaging more parents and caregivers in their education teams, including tracking those who participate outside of Goalbook.
- Strengthen ties with schools and districts to continue raising awareness of FosterEd and further support teacher engagement in students' education teams.

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## Background

FosterEd is an initiative of the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) aimed at improving the educational experiences and outcomes of foster youth. It was first developed in Indiana in 2009. With many lessons learned and promising initial findings, in 2011 child welfare and education leaders in Santa Cruz County, California agreed to develop a FosterEd pilot program.<sup>1</sup> In 2012, the Director of FosterEd began discussions with child welfare, education, and philanthropic leaders in Arizona about the possibility of establishing a FosterEd pilot in one county within the state, with a long-term goal of expanding the program state-wide. After much consideration, Pima County was selected as the pilot Arizona County. A director for FosterEd Arizona was hired in February 2013, and development of the Pima pilot began in earnest. The first few youth cases joined the program in November and December of 2013, and in January 2014 the program was officially launched. The pilot is supported by generous funding from the Accio Education Fund, the Arizona Community Foundation, the Paul and Amy Blavin Foundation, the Blessings Fund, the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona, the Eaglet Fund, the Helios Foundation, the Jewish Community Foundation of Southern Arizona, the Kieckhefer Foundation, the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, the May and Stanly Smith Charitable Trust, the Troller Fund, and the Ventana Fund.

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluation reports for the Indiana and Santa Cruz pilots available as of the writing of this report can be found at: [http://www.youthlaw.org/fileadmin/ncyl/youthlaw/child\\_welfare/Report-FosterEd-SantaCruz-Final-5.2.2014.pdf](http://www.youthlaw.org/fileadmin/ncyl/youthlaw/child_welfare/Report-FosterEd-SantaCruz-Final-5.2.2014.pdf); <http://www.foster-ed.org/images/FosterEd%20Indiana%20Evaluation.pdf>

## The Need

In 2012, there were approximately 400,000 children in foster care in the United States, and approximately 14,000 in Arizona (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013; Needell et al., 2013). Taken from their families because they have experienced abuse or neglect, foster children are among the most vulnerable of the American population. Research has shown that in addition to the abuse and trauma associated with being taken from their families, many foster youth also have low educational achievements.

- As many as 75% perform below grade level (Kelly, 2000).
- 50–80% have been retained at least one year in school.
- More than 50% do not graduate from high school.
- Less than one in five have ever received an “A” in English, math, history, or science.
- As many as 69% screen positive for a behavioral problem, academic skill delay, or school failure (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2008).
- A disproportionate number are subjected to punitive school discipline policies and are suspended or expelled from school (Courtney et al., 2004).

Recent research reveals that foster youth constitute a distinct subgroup of academically at-risk students with documented achievement gaps. Compared to other vulnerable student populations such as low income students, English-language learners, and students with disabilities, foster youth experience more educational challenges and have poorer educational outcomes (Frerer, Davis Sosenko, & Henke, 2013; Barrat & Berliner, 2013). Additionally, foster youth:

- Are consistently among the academically lowest performing subgroups in math and English;
- Have the highest dropout rates and are less likely to graduate from high school;
- Are more likely than the general population to be enrolled in the lowest performing schools;
- Are twice as likely to be designated with a disability and five times more likely to be classified with an emotional disturbance;
- Are more likely to change schools during the school year; and
- Are less likely to enroll and persist in community college for a second year.

## The Pima County Context

Of the 15 counties in Arizona, Pima ranks number 2 in greatest number of foster youth. In December 2014 approximately 3,375 children were in foster care in Pima County, with approximately 2,000 being of school age (i.e., 5 years or older).

Within the first few weeks of the Pima County pilot, a major change occurred in the state's child welfare agency. In January 2014 Governor Jan Brewer dissolved the agency and placed the state's Juvenile Corrections director in charge of a newly-named Child Safety and Family Services Division, with the new director reporting directly to the Governor. This change proceeded from an investigation in the fall of 2013 which found the agency had failed to follow-up on more than 6,500 reports of child abuse and neglect. This overhaul of the state child welfare agency was unforeseen by FosterEd staff and members of the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams,

whose members helped FosterEd staff navigate through the changing landscape. To the credit of FosterEd, their advisors, and their agency partners, the Pima County pilot was not substantially delayed or hindered by the major shifts that occurred just as the pilot was launching.

## FosterEd Model

The details of the FosterEd model are customized for each county and evolve as each pilot progresses, but the overall objectives are consistent and have persisted.

### *FosterEd Objectives*

1

Identification and support of Educational Champion(s)

Parental involvement in education is one of the strongest predictors of a student's educational success. Foster youth often do not have anyone in their lives championing their education by monitoring their academic progress and advocating for their educational needs. Understandably, agency and caretaker attention is often focused on their safety and well-being, and consequently the educational needs of youth are typically not given sufficient time in child welfare team meetings or service plans.

FosterEd aims to raise awareness about the educational needs of foster youth by identifying at least one person who can serve as a champion in this area. Ideally, this would be a biological parent or assumed long-term caregiver, someone likely to be a part of a youth's life long-term and therefore able to continue supporting the child educationally even after he or she leaves foster care. However, this may not always be feasible, and in those instances FosterEd works to identify and train a volunteer to serve as an Educational Champion.

**2** Development and monitoring of an educational team

While Educational Champions are an important component of the model, FosterEd recognizes that to fully support the educational strengths and needs of youth, a team of adults needs to be engaged, including representatives from the children’s schools and child welfare agencies. Other adults in the children’s life, such as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), coaches, or an engaged aunt or uncle may also be team members.

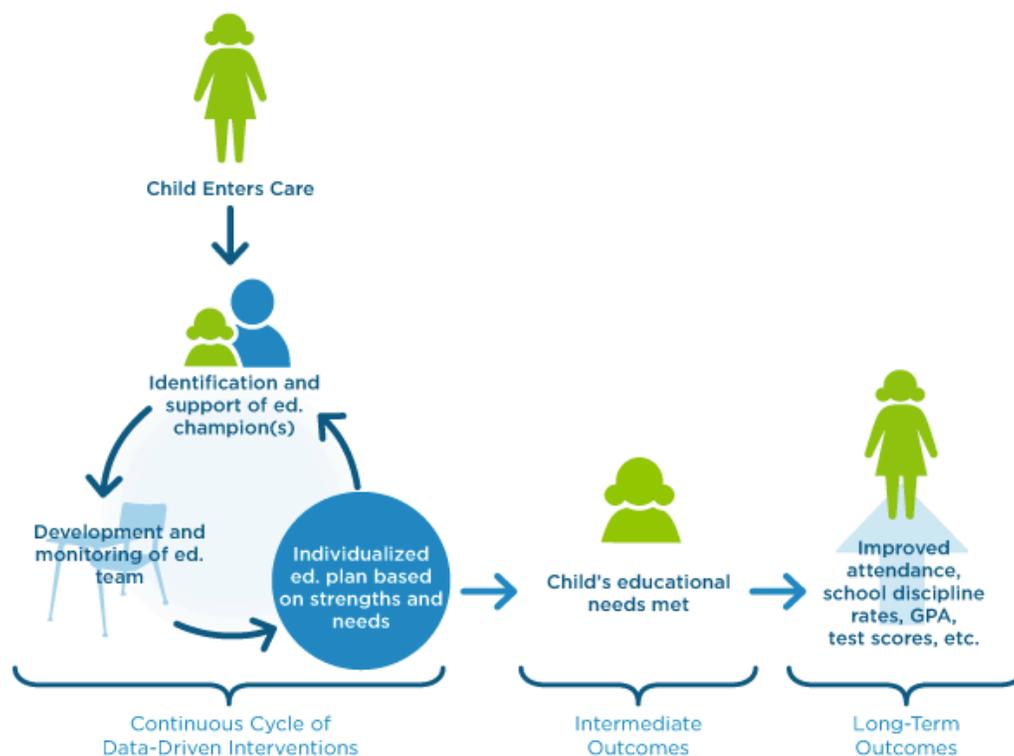
**3** Individualized education plans based on strengths and needs

As youth enter FosterEd, their strengths and needs are assessed and Educational Champions and teams are identified. Based on the assessment of strengths and needs, goals are set for the youth and the Educational Champions, and the team collaborates to support the goals and track progress.

**Logic Model**

**Figure 1** depicts the logic model underlying FosterEd. In addition to supporting the objectives outlined above, note the inclusion of a continuous cycle of data-driven interventions. FosterEd recognizes that educational information about the youth must be readily accessible and shared with members of the youth’s team. Gathering educational information is accomplished in one of two ways, both involving Foster Focus, a database managed by the Sacramento County Office of Education. Districts can “link” to Foster Focus, enabling nightly data uploads from their district’s management information system. Alternatively, if districts are not “linked” to Foster Focus, educational information can be gathered from the school through records requests and manually entered into Foster Focus by FosterEd staff.

FIGURE 1: FosterEd Logic Model



## FosterEd Core Practice Components in Pima

### *The Critical Role of the Education Liaison*

Education Liaisons (ELs) essentially staff the FosterEd program. In Pima, three ELs manage the FosterEd cases, and a full-time director provides oversight and support to the ELs while also nurturing and supporting partnerships with county and state partners. The ELs work with Pima County Department of Child Safety (DCS) specialists to identify school-age youth to involve in FosterEd (further explained in subsequent section). The ELs assigned to the youth's FosterEd case stay with that case throughout its duration. ELs coordinate the assessment of the strengths and needs of the youth, identify a team of adults to support the youth educationally, identify an Educational Champion for the youth who is also a part of the team, and then assist the team in developing and tracking educational goals and objectives.

### *A Focus on Youth Most in Need of Additional Educational Support*

The original goal was to serve all Pima County K12 foster youth. However, it became apparent early in the pilot, that the needs of the youth were so great that serving all 2,000 school-age foster youth was not possible given the staffing constraints of three ELs. Thus, with input from the Community Planning and State Leadership Teams, FosterEd staff developed a referral checklist for DCS workers to use in considering which cases to refer to FosterEd. Factors on the check list include whether the child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan, is an English-language learner, has attendance issues, and/or is in danger of being retained or is not on-track for high school graduation, along with other indicators that signal a need for increased attention to the

educational experiences and performance of the youth.

### *ELs Participation in a Child and Family Team Meeting*

The ELs typically attend one Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting when they first bring a case into FosterEd. The purpose of attending the meeting is to meet the adults involved in the youth's life, to get a sense of the circumstances of the youth, and to introduce the FosterEd program. In practice, ELs are not always notified when a CFT is occurring, attendance of the adults in the youth's life at the meeting can vary (e.g., parents, caregivers and/or a school representative may be absent), there may be very little time to talk about FosterEd, and/or emotions during the meeting may run high making it difficult to turn the conversation to education. Nevertheless, the meetings do generally serve the purpose of giving the ELs a window into the youth's educational and life circumstances, and which adults to follow up with about starting the youth in the FosterEd program (including adults who did not attend the CFT).

### *Use of Goalbook*

For both the Santa Cruz County and Pima County pilots, FosterEd has contracted Enome, Inc., a company that developed Goalbook, an online social networking application (originally designed to support teams of adults working with Special Education students), to set goals, track progress on those goals, and generally communicate about the education of the student, including celebrating successes. FosterEd worked with Goalbook to adapt the tool for teams working to support the education of foster youth, and Goalbook has become a central tool for the Pima County FosterEd pilot. ELs create a Goalbook team for each FosterEd student and invite key stakeholders (such as the youth's Educational Champion, social worker,

teacher, CASA, and caregiver) to join the student's education team in Goalbook. The student is invited, if appropriate, to participate in the team if or when he or she is 14 years old. Based on an assessment of the youth's educational strengths and needs, the EL identifies goals for the youth to list within Goalbook. The assessment and identification of goals is based on information provided by the social worker, the student's school, through conversation with the parents, caregivers, and the youth themselves when possible. The team then tracks progress on the goals by updating Goalbook.

### *Volunteer Educational Champions*

Ideally, the presumed long-term caregiver of the youth (e.g., their biological parent or a relative who will likely have ongoing custody of the child) is able to take on the role of Educational Champion. Unfortunately, identifying a long-term caregiver is not possible for some youth (e.g., they live in a group home), or the assumed long-term caregiver is focused on other issues and cannot currently take on the role of Educational Champion. In those cases, FosterEd tries to assign a volunteer Educational Champion to the youth's FosterEd team. As will be discussed on page 20, during the first year of implementation of the pilot, the demand for volunteer Educational Champions outstripped their supply. This will be one focus of program improvement during the second pilot year in Pima County.

# Evaluation Overview

In January of 2013, NCYL contracted with RTI International to conduct an external evaluation of the Pima County FosterEd pilot which is expected to go through December of 2015. RTI is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to conducting innovative, multidisciplinary research that improves the human condition. With a worldwide staff of more than 3,700 people, RTI is active in education, child welfare, health and medicine, environmental protection, and decision support systems. RTI maintains company headquarters in North Carolina, eight regional offices in the United States, 10 international offices, and many project-specific offices around the world. This project is conducted out of the Berkeley, California, office with Dr. Jennifer Laird leading the evaluation.

RTI aims to conduct evaluations that are methodologically sound, transparent, and meaningful. Our goal is to both capture the impacts of programs and systems changes, and inform their ongoing development. We have approached this study from a Developmental Evaluation framework, which allows for greater flexibility when analyzing initiatives or innovations, which tend to continuously develop and evolve. When a great deal is in flux, it is impossible to establish a static logic model that reflects precisely what is to happen as implementation advances. Alternatively, linear logical approaches work well when the problem is well understood and the solution is clearly defined.

By using a Developmental Evaluation framework the study is able to adjust as the program evolves. Furthermore, Developmental Evaluation separates itself from more traditional evaluative approaches in that the

evaluators actively participate in partnership, and are expected to support on-going program improvement by helping program leaders use data as it emerges from the evaluation in order to improve the program.

## Evaluation Indicators Matrix

In collaboration with FosterEd staff, RTI developed an evaluation indicators matrix (see Appendix A). RTI considers it a “roadmap” for the evaluation, acknowledging that it must be revisited periodically to ensure that it remains consistent with the evolving FosterEd practices. The matrix presents information on what will be measured in the evaluation (i.e., the indicators), what the data source will be for each indicator, how frequently it will be measured, and when it is reasonable to expect to see change on the indicator. To the extent possible, RTI is leveraging data and instruments that are used as part of the practice, as opposed to being used solely for the evaluation. This is to limit the burden of additional data collection on the program.

The evaluation matrix groups indicators into three major sections: infrastructure, practice, and outcomes. The infrastructure indicators include products, systems, staff, and resources that need to be in place to support the FosterEd practice (e.g., Memorandum of Understanding for data sharing). Practice indicators list activities of the program that RTI and FosterEd consider critical and therefore should be counted, tracked, and reported. Outcomes indicators are what FosterEd is trying to affect, and include youth outcomes (e.g., improved attendance) and Educational Champion outcomes (e.g., increased capacity to support the youth’s education).

Although this evaluation is focused on the Pima County pilot, the pilot is part of a broader NCYL effort in Arizona to support the education of foster youth. FosterEd in Arizona operates at

both the local and state level, with local programmatic challenges and successes informing state policy efforts, and improvements to state policy facilitating improved local implementation. FosterEd's state policy efforts include legislative advocacy and collaborative projects with state child welfare, education and judicial agencies. The matrix includes some state-level outcomes as well.

After drafting the evaluation matrix with FosterEd staff, RTI presented it to the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams and incorporated their feedback. RTI believes that this level of transparency and collaboration with the partners involved in FosterEd is critical to conducting a comprehensive and useful evaluation.

## Evaluation Methods

RTI is employing multiple methods for the evaluation. **Table A** on the next page lists the methods used thus far. Moving forward, RTI expects to continue using these evaluation methods as well as incorporating additional methods as needed. Most importantly, longitudinal educational data for the youth will be extracted from Foster Focus and analyzed.

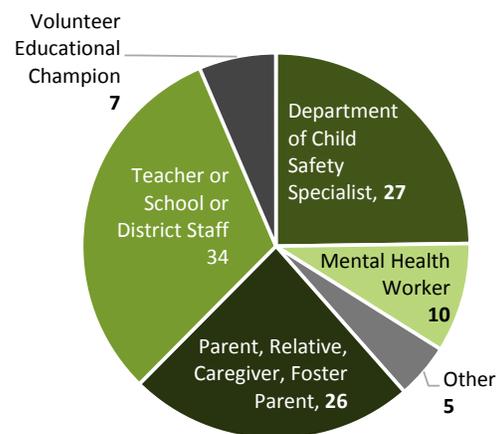
As noted in Table A on the next page, adults serving on students' education teams were surveyed in October 2014. **Figure 2** reports the number of adult survey respondents. The largest group was teachers or school/district staff (34) followed by DCS specialist (27) and parent, relative, caregiver or foster parent (26).

This Year 1 evaluation report focuses on the preparation for the launch of the FosterEd Pima County pilot, and the first 9 months of implementation (January 2014 through September 2014). It does not cover the full year of implementation (January 2014 through December 2014) because RTI and FosterEd

agreed it was important to produce an evaluation report in time for the January 2015 State Leadership and Community Planning Team meetings, and January also marks the beginning of the next legislative session.

The evaluation findings are grouped by progress made on infrastructure, practice, and outcomes indicators. Qualitative data are woven throughout the presentation of quantitative data. A final section presents conclusions and recommendations from the evaluators. Preliminary data are currently available for some, but not all, of the proposed FosterEd youth and Educational Champion outcomes. Most importantly, education data such as students' attendance rates, grades, and school behavioral rates are not included in this Year 1 report. This is due to the slower than expected Foster Focus linking process and a delay in being able to extract those data from Foster Focus. These critical outcomes measures will be a focus of the Year 2 evaluation report.

FIGURE 2: Role Type of Adult Team Member Survey



SOURCE: Adult Team Members Survey, October 2014

TABLE 1: FosterEd Pima County Evaluation Methods

Qualitative Data Collection Methods	Notes
Bi-Weekly Calls with FosterEd Staff	RTI holds bi-weekly calls with the focus of coordinating the logistics of the evaluation (e. g. plan for data collection), and discussing challenges and unexpected opportunities that are arising within the program with the goal of supporting continuous program improvement.
Observations of State Leadership and Community Planning Team Meetings	RTI participates in most of the meetings of the State Leadership Team (quarterly meetings) and the Community Planning Team (monthly in 2013, but now bimonthly), providing periodic evaluation updates and observing the dynamics of the group and the issues discussed.
Interviews with Members of the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams	RTI interviewed 4 members of the State Leadership Team and 7 members of the Community Planning Team in October of 2014. At the time the interviews were conducted, 20 members served on the Community Planning Team and 10 members served on the State Leadership Team. RTI selected the members who had served the longest and/or who represented key partnerships for FosterEd.
Focus Group with Education Liaisons	RTI conducted a focus group with the three Education Liaisons in September of 2014.
Quantitative Data Collection Methods	Notes
Administrative Data (e. g., number of cases, number and relation of Educational Champion)	FosterEd tracked case administrative data in Goalbook. The data were extracted, de-identified, and transferred to RTI.
Case Planning Data	Goalbook data, including case planning that tracks the goals set and progress made on those goals, were extracted, de-identified, and transferred to RTI.
Communications Data	Data on the number of communications in Goalbook were extracted, de-identified, and transferred to RTI. This includes updated statuses of goals, celebratory messages, and emails from Goalbook to all team members or selected team members. The actual content of the communications were not shared with RTI.
Surveys of Adult Team Members	In collaboration with FosterEd, RTI developed a survey for adult team members to solicit their feedback on the FosterEd program. Those who had an activated Goalbook account and served on team for at least two months were surveyed (N=273). The survey was administered using Survey Gizmo during October 2014. Respondents were sent four email requests to complete the survey and told they would be entered into a raffle for a \$100 gift card if they completed the survey. Of all invited to participate, 109 (or 40%) of eligible adult team members completed the survey.
Volunteer Data	One of the Education Liaisons leads the recruitment and training of volunteers and keeps records of those efforts.

## Progress on Infrastructure

In the early stages of the evaluation, RTI and FosterEd identified 11 infrastructure indicators reflecting systems, staff, and products that needed to be in place to launch and support the implementation of FosterEd in Pima County. By October 2014, eight of the infrastructure elements were completed and three were ongoing. This section briefly summarizes the progress made on these indicators. While all of the progress should be considered achievements, this report calls out extraordinary achievements within some of the indicators (labeled as “particularly notable achievements”), as well as areas still in need of attention. The information presented in this section is based on evaluator observations, information supplied by FosterEd staff, interviews with State Leadership and Community Planning Team Members and the focus group with Education Liaisons.

### Completed Infrastructure

The following eight infrastructure indicators were completed by October 2014, with many having been accomplished before the launch of FosterEd in January 2014.



#### FosterEd Staff hired and trained

Leading up to the launch of FosterEd Pima, three Education Liaisons (ELs) were hired and trained. These ELs were supervised by the Program Director for FosterEd Arizona who was hired in February 2013. The Arizona Program Director is a former State Representative, and thus joined the project with deep knowledge of the state policy landscape and relationships with state policy makers and community leaders. In addition to these four full-time positions for the Pima pilot, a Data

Manager supported both the Pima and Santa Cruz pilots. In October 2014 the Data Manager position was replaced by a Technology Project Manager who serves both the Pima and Santa Cruz pilots. A Chief Operating Officer and the Founder/Director of FosterEd also support the Pima pilot part-time.



#### **Particularly notable achievements related to hiring and training FosterEd staff**

During interviews, a number of State Leadership and Community Planning Team Members noted the assembly of very strong FosterEd leadership and staff as a critical accomplishment for the program leading up to and throughout the first year of implementation. There were no interviewees who expressed negative comments about FosterEd employees, and those who did discuss employees did so in clearly positive terms. Below are illustrative comments about the FosterEd leadership and staff.

*“The Liaisons that have been selected are superb.”*

*“I’ve met with Liaisons at meetings and they seem very effective.”*

*“I hear very good things about the Educational Liaisons from the [Department of Child Safety Specialists] who have had a chance to work directly with the Liaisons.”*

*“[The] leadership is very effective... the [FosterEd National Director has the ability] to develop relationships with people by the way he conducts business and who he is as a person. And [The Arizona FosterEd Director] already had a sterling reputation, and relationships were already built. This is a smaller community and so a lot of it is the person who is leading it. [FosterEd’s National Director’s] content knowledge is off the charts, his ability to listen to*

*others (he was an outsider and didn't come in here with a set agenda), and his passion for the project is unquestionable. He did his homework on our community: how we're different from other areas in Arizona (like Maricopa and Phoenix). He took advantage of some of the people he knew here and built on that."*

*"[The National FosterEd Director] has the right personality, background, and skills to get it off the ground. And picking [the Arizona FosterEd Director] was nothing short of brilliant in my mind. They both have very good personalities and can deal with both sides of the political aisle. This has been the key to getting this off the ground."*

 Standard motions and orders for appointing Educational Champions in Pima County developed

Standard motions for the appointment of Educational Champions by the Juvenile Court were developed and are in use in Pima County. The order rescinding the appointment was developed and is in use.

 Data sharing agreements data sharing agreements put in place (with DES, with Pima districts)

In developing the pilot, FosterEd staff and the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams agreed they should focus on students attending the six largest districts in the county, which collectively educate about 90% of all K12 public school students in the county (the remaining eight districts are relatively small). Data sharing agreements were established with all six of the focal districts as well as the Department of Child Safety.

 Process document developed and Partners approved the Process document

Given the number of partner agencies involved in FosterEd, the need for a document outlining each agency's roles became apparent. Such a document was developed and has been modified multiple times as the program has evolved. The Partners have each accepted/endorsed the document, including its modifications.

 Customized Foster Focus for Arizona

Foster Focus is a database developed and managed by the Sacramento County Office of Education which brings together child-level information from child welfare agencies and schools and has a standard set of components that counties can access through licensing agreements. FosterEd uses many of those standard components and also has additional features developed to support the program. Additionally, the partners worked to modify the coding script for the nightly uploads from Arizona's child welfare database, CHILDS, to Foster Focus.

 Customized Goalbook for Arizona

In mid-2013, FosterEd started working with Goalbook to modify their tool (originally developed to support Special Education students) in order to better support the education of foster youth.<sup>2</sup> In developing a tool for FosterEd, new features and functionalities were added, such as a dashboard for FosterEd staff to more easily monitor Goalbook activity as well as extraction tools to be able to extract data from Goalbook for the evaluation and for program administration.

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<sup>2</sup> As noted earlier, Goalbook is an online social networking application designed to support teams of adults working with students to set goals, track progress on those goals, and generally communicate about the education of the student, including celebrating successes.



### Customized Mentoring Modules for Arizona

For the Santa Cruz pilot, FosterEd developed 12 mentoring modules to help adults become effective Educational Champions for their youth. FosterEd staff modified these modules for Pima County (e.g., admissions information for the three Arizona state universities was included in place of admissions information for the California state universities). Each module contains a guide, supporting materials, and tip sheets. The topics of the 12 modules are:

- Beliefs, Expectations, and Aspirations
- Monitoring and Facilitating Learning
- Communication with Child and School
- Education Records and Credits
- Enrollment in Appropriate Schools and Classes
- School Attendance
- Obtaining Academic Support
- Special Education and Accommodations
- Behavioral and School Discipline Issues
- Extracurricular Activities
- Transition to College and Career
- Mentoring Non-Minor Dependents

All versions are available online for free download. For Pima versions, see: <http://www.foster-ed.org/resourcespima.html>.



### Co-located ELs at Child Welfare Offices

To facilitate collaboration with Department of Child Safety staff, each EL was provided office space in regional DCS offices. One EL is located in the Pima north DCS office, another in the Pima south DCS office, and the third in the Pima east DCS office. The ELs and some of the Community and State Leadership Team

members cited co-location as critical to establishing FosterEd in the county:

*“For me, and other Liaisons as well, [it’s been] very helpful to be in same office as [DCS] workers. If we have questions or if they have questions we are readily accessible. If a [DCS] worker has a question they can come to my desk, or I can help out with something or provide a number.”*

*“Truthfully, we couldn’t have gotten started without being co-located. DCS caseworkers are overwhelmed. Walking to our desk and getting to know faces: that has gotten the ball rolling in being a collaborative force.”*

*“Having ELs is an incredible addition to the system. Having them in the CPS office is great because the staff just walk by them and can interact directly with them. Brilliant to have them in CPS offices.”*

## Ongoing Infrastructure

Progress on three of the 11 infrastructure indicators is ongoing, with activity beyond the first year of implementation continuing as expected. However, progress on one of these indicators, linking with Foster Focus, has been much slower than anticipated.



### Establishment and persistence of the State Leadership Team, Community Planning Team, and Steering Committee

The State Leadership Team and the Community Planning Team are responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the pilot. The State Leadership Team provides the broader state-wide perspective, including advising about how the pilot can be expanded to other counties in the coming years. The Community Planning Team, on the other hand,

provides advice on implementation issues specific to Pima County. The Steering Committee within the Community Planning Team formed in order to meet even more frequently than the Community Planning Team to work on details of implementation that were best addressed by a smaller group of individuals. The State Leadership Team started in October 2013 and meets quarterly. The Community Planning Team first met monthly beginning in March 2013 through the end of the year, and in 2014 met roughly every other month. The Steering Committee was formed in March 2013 and meets on an as-needed basis. This was quite frequent in 2013, but has become less frequent in 2014.

The membership of the teams has varied as members have left their agencies' positions and others have taken their place. At any given time there have been approximately 10 members on the State Leadership Team, including high-level staff from DCS, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), the state Attorney General's Office, and the Governor's Office. Recent additions to the team include representatives from the Arizona Community Foundation. The Community Planning Team is larger than the State Leadership Team, and typically includes about 20 members at any given time. These include district-level staff from some of the six focal districts, a representative from the County Schools Superintendent's Office, representatives from the Pima County Juvenile Court (including the Juvenile Court Commissioner), DCS, the county behavioral health unit, and the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona.



**Particularly notable achievements related to the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams**

Through interviews with members of the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams,

and the evaluators' participation in their meetings, there is clearly a unity of purpose among those serving on the team and they played critically important roles in developing the Pima Pilot and assisting with its first year of implementation. Compositions of the teams were well-thought out, and meetings were well-attended and efficient. Considerable effort was invested by the FosterEd National and Arizona Directors and their early supporters in identifying potential agencies and organizations to involve in the teams, and the appropriate representatives from those groups. The team members reported feeling adequately prepared about the evolving plans for the pilot and engaged in its refinement and execution. Team members also reported that they felt they were able to effectively guide and support the program. Below are quotations demonstrating these sentiments.

*"Because [the National FosterEd Director] had so many conversations and followed-up with so many different people, I think he really had everyone's buy-in so that when he picked the State Leadership Team he knew exactly who would support the project. I think that has a lot to do with the sustainability of the Team as well."*

*"Everyone at the table has the same goal and understands the importance of education for these youth. I think we also have great leadership in [Arizona Director] and [National Director] who really have set a great foundation in Arizona before putting our team together."*

*"I think all of our stakeholders have remained committed from the get-go. Sometimes people start fading off when you have State Leadership Committees and then you go local, sometimes you lose membership, but that does not seem to have happened. We continue to have a lot of enthusiasm and support for the program."*

*"The Community Planning Team is an active voice in the entire project. They're really involved*

*and I'm impressed with the diversity of folks who sit on the CPT. [Arizona Director] and [National Director] have done an amazing job of bringing the right people to the table."*



### **Areas in need of attention related to State Leadership and Community Planning Teams**

The first year of implementation saw major leadership and staff turnover in agencies central to the FosterEd partnership, including at the state child welfare and education departments. For the most part, interview respondents felt the FosterEd program was able to weather these changes effectively. However, a number of respondents suggested that an additional focus on strengthening the collaborations with some partners was needed, particularly with the Arizona Department of Education (ADE).

*"I think the composition has been pretty effective. I do think we need someone from the Department of Education." [The original ADE representative on the State Leadership Team left ADE and a stable replacement was not yet in place at the time of the interviews.]*

*"I don't know what has been done with State Department of Education to further their support of FosterEd, which will be critical."*

*"I suggest involving ADE more. I do not think there is appropriate awareness [of the FosterEd project] ... People are much more focused on issues like Common Core which the whole country is grappling with. Agency-wide there was not great recognition of [FosterEd]."*

Behavioral Health was another agency where enhanced collaboration was suggested:

*"Mental health collaboration is really good. The mental health representative on the Community Leadership Team is invested. With that being*

*said, from a behavioral health perspective there have been challenges. Just the way the organization is set up, it's the RBHA (Regional Behavioral Health Authority) and [they] directly contract with comprehensive service providers (CSPs), and those providers are the ones who have members or patients who are actually enrolled... It's a tough system and there are so many mandates – and I hear that some of the basic things, like participating in the educational team meetings – don't happen often."*



### **Linking districts in Foster Focus**

In order to effectively support a child's education, the adults in his or her life need current and accurate information about the child's educational strengths and challenges. For youth in foster care, a number of new adults enter their lives (e.g., foster parents, social workers, dependency court judges, attorneys, CASAs, and new teachers if the child changes schools). These new adults certainly need information about the child's schooling, and even adults already connected to the child, such as biological parents and other relatives, may need support in understanding the educational strengths and needs of the child.

School systems maintain a great deal of educational information on students, including attendance rates, test scores, grade point averages, and behavioral incidents. However, this information is typically not easily accessible to child welfare staff. Foster Focus, a data system developed and managed by the Sacramento County Office of Education, aims to address this challenge by linking education data supplied by participating districts with CHILDS data, thereby giving the ELs access to the educational information of foster youth. With this access ELs can help the educational teams understand the current educational circumstances of the youth. The education data stored in Foster Focus will also enable RTI to examine whether foster youth improve on

important educational indicators, such as attendance and grades, after joining FosterEd.

**Table 2** reports the status of linkages between Foster Focus and the six focal Pima County districts as of December 2014.

TABLE 2: FosterEd Pima County Linkages

District	Percent of County K-12 Enrollment	Linked Status	Notes
Tucson Unified	41%	Partially linked	Most of education data elements from the district are linked with Foster Focus. However, it was discovered in the fall of 2014 that not all foster youth were appropriately identified in Tucson Unified's data system. Thus, data for all the district's foster youth were not transferring into Foster Focus. The reason that not all Foster Youth were identified in the district's data system was because the McKinney--Vento liaison position is vacant this school year. By January of 2015 the district had resolved this issue. Tucson Unified uses a custom SQL database called Mohave, but the school board recently approved a migration to Synergy by Edupoint.
Sunnyside Unified	14%	Partially linked	Most of the education data elements from the district were linked with Foster Focus. However, an error has recently caused the uploads to stop. FosterEd is working with the district on restoring the linkage. District uses Powerschool Installed.
Amphitheater Unified	11%	Partially linked	About one-third of the education data elements from the district are linked with Foster Focus. Additional elements should be linked in the first quarter for 2015. District uses Tyler SIS installed.
Marana Unified	10%	FosterEd Plans to link	District is seeking a bid from Edupoint to complete the extract process. District uses Synergy by Edupoint.
Vail Unified	8%	Linking in progress	The linking process has begun and is being tested for accuracy. FosterEd expects the district to be fully linked in the first quarter of 2015. District uses Powerschool Installed.
Flowing Wells Unified	4%	Linking in progress	The linking process has begun and is being tested for accuracy. District uses Powerschool Installed.

NOTE: There are eight additional districts in Pima County that FosterEd does not expect to link with Foster Focus. Collectively they educate 12% of the K-12 students in the county.



### ***Areas in need of attention related to Foster Focus linkage***

Foster Focus linkages are not progressing as hoped. At the close of the first year of implementation, only three of the six focal districts are at least partially linked. Recognizing the relatively slow pace of linking, FosterEd hired a Data Manager in 2013 to help support this process. (Similar challenges were experienced in the Santa Cruz pilot and his duties were to help both county pilots.) That position was recently replaced with a FosterEd Technology Project Manager. FosterEd also contracted with an outside programmer to develop the scripts for linkage between PowerSchool and Foster Focus, one of the SISs used in Pima County."

Despite these adjustments, linking districts with Foster Focus has been far more difficult and time-consuming than expected. In preparation for this evaluation report, existing education data were extracted from Foster Focus in order to examine whether sufficient data existed to conduct preliminary education outcomes analyses. The examination indicated there were not. With this information, the FosterEd staff investigated the linkages and discovered that in one district where linkages had been established, data flow had slowed considerably because the staff person at the district who had been flagging the foster youth in their data in order to be transmitted to Foster Focus, had left the district many months prior. She had not been replaced and the responsibility for flagging foster youth in the district's data was not transferred to any other existing staff. This problem has been resolved by January 2015, but not in time to include education data in this report.

RTI hopes that by calling attention to the lack of progress made in the process of linking districts with Foster Focus and the State Leadership Team, the Community Planning Team and other

stakeholders will renew their commitment to support FosterEd in this critical work of making education data easily accessible to child welfare staff and others supporting the youth. Furthermore, it is critical these groups understand that without a solution or work-around to the data linking problems, RTI will not be able to analyze education data in order to report whether foster youth who participate in FosterEd improve on education indicators.



Customization of CHILDS to include a more robust template for education case planning

DCS is interested in further developing state-wide capacity for supporting education case planning within the agency's case management data system. That system is currently called CHILDS, and discussions with FosterEd staff in 2013 included considering how to build a more robust template within CHILDS for this purpose. However, rather than continuing to modify CHILDS, the state has decided to create a Request for Proposal to replace CHILDS. The state has determined it is more prudent to replace CHILDS than to invest in attempts to upgrade it. DCS has proposed allocating funds in 2015 to begin this work. Once funds are appropriated, building a system to replace CHILDS will take several years. FosterEd will continue to advocate for a robust education case planning component in the new system.

## Progress on Practice Indicators

In designing the evaluation, RTI and FosterEd identified a set of FosterEd practice indicators to track (see Appendix A). These include the number of youth and Educational Champions involved in the program, the frequency of Goalbook use, and the number of volunteers trained. The data presented in this section come primarily from administrative and case management data stored in Goalbook and extracted and de-identified for RTI.

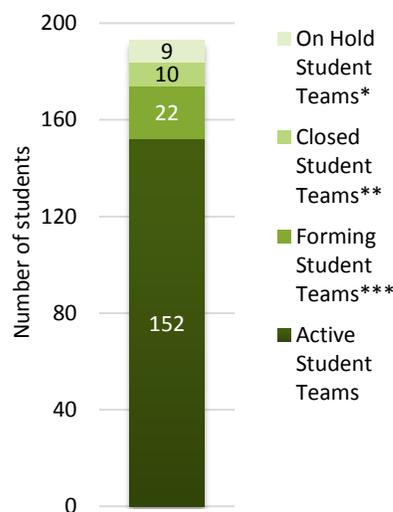
### How many youth were served by FosterEd in the first nine months of 2014?

As noted previously, FosterEd began taking a few cases in November of 2013, and formally launched in January 2014.

Between November 2013 and the end of September 2014 when the data for this report were extracted, **193** foster youth had been served, with 152 of the cases active at the end of September and 10 closed (**Figure 3**). During the first year of implementation, FosterEd cases were only closed in when the youth left dependency (e.g., was reunified with a parent and the child welfare case was closed) or if the youth was placed outside of the county and that placement was expected to last a long time. Cases were put on hold if a youth was placed out of county but the placement was expected to be short term, or if a youth went AWOL (e.g., ran away from a placement and cannot be located by the child welfare agency). Cases were considered to be forming during the period after a case was been referred to

FosterEd but before adult team members had been identified.

FIGURE 3: FosterEd Pima County Student Teams



SOURCE: Goalbook data, extracted October 1, 2014.

\* Youth placed out of county and that placement is expected to be short term; youth is AWOL.

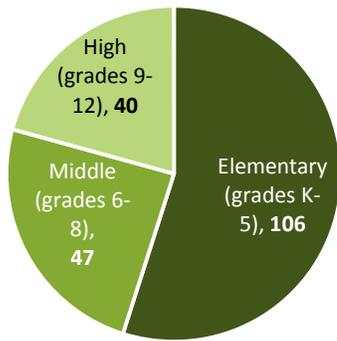
\*\* Dependency case has ended; youth is placed out of county and that placement is expected to last a long time.

\*\*\* Student referred, identifying and activating team members

### Who are the foster youth served?

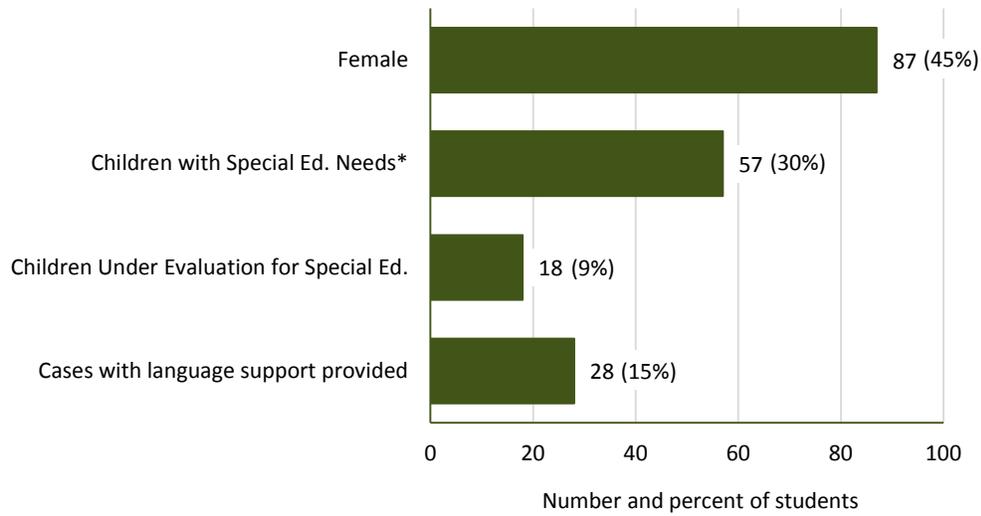
Most of the FosterEd youth were in elementary grades (**Figure 4**). About half were female (**Figure 5**). Thirty percent were identified as Special Education students (e.g., they had an IEP or 504 plan), and an additional 9 percent were suspected by someone on the youth's FosterEd team to have undiagnosed learning disabilities and were being evaluated for Special Education Services. Fifteen percent of students' teams required non-English language support. Typically the need was for Spanish translation for adult relatives which was provided by the Education Liaison.

FIGURE 4: School Level for Foster Youth Served



SOURCE: Goalbook data, extracted October 1, 2014.

FIGURE 5: Demographic Characteristics of Foster Youth Served



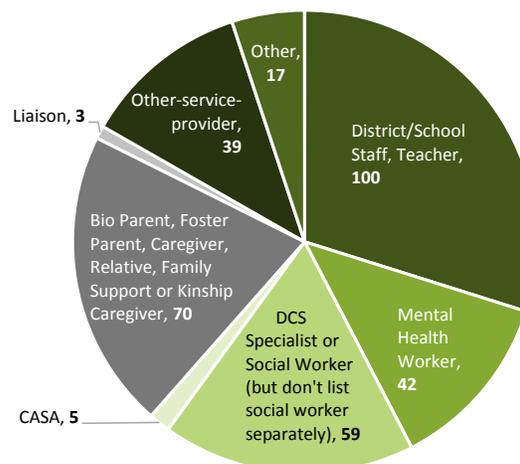
SOURCE: Goalbook data, extracted October 1, 2014.

## Who serves on the foster youth's team?

A cornerstone of the FosterEd model is identification and engagement of adults in the foster youth's life to support the youth educationally. Some team members serve on many teams. For example, there are only three Liaisons, but a Liaison is required for each team. The number of duplicative team members, including those who have served on teams that had closed by the end of September 2014 is **889**.

**Figure 6** shows the number of unduplicated team members for cases that were active by the end of September 2014 and who activated their Goalbook account. (RTI is working with FosterEd Staff and Goalbook to be able to provide counts for team members who are participating on teams but not through Goalbook.) **335** unduplicated team members were serving on at least one team at the end of September 2014. The non-duplicative counts for all team members, including those who only served on teams that have closed is 362. The largest share of unduplicated team members were district/school staff or teachers. The second largest share were relatives or caregivers (e.g., biological parents, foster parents).

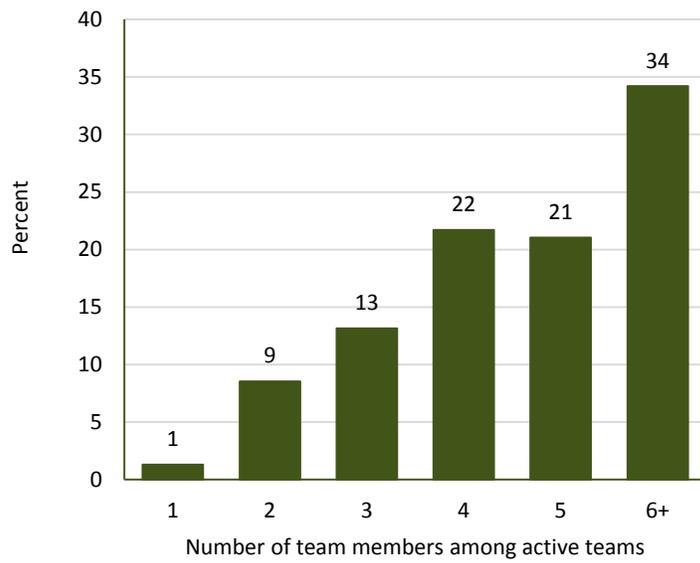
FIGURE 6: Number of Non-Duplicative Team Members for Open Teams



SOURCE: Goalbook data, extracted October 1, 2014.

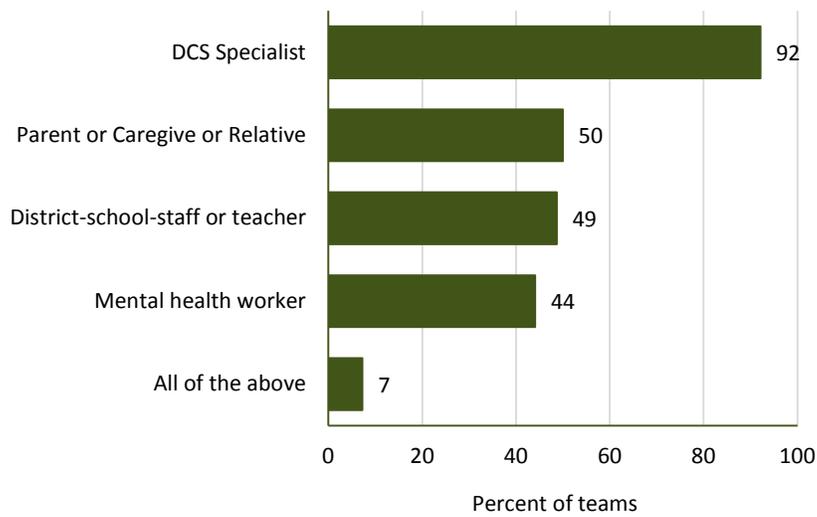
**Figure 7** reports the percent of active teams with various numbers of members. About one-third of active teams had six or more members. **Figure 8** reports the percent of active teams with various types of members. As in Figure 7, the team member had to have activated their Goalbook account to be counted in Figures 8 and 9. Almost all active teams had a DCS specialist. About half had a parent, caregiver or relative on the team with an activated Goalbook account, and about half had a representative from the school or district on the team. Mental health workers were on 44% of teams. When each of these four role types were considered in conjunction, only 7% of students had each of these representatives on their team.

FIGURE 7: Percent of Active Teams with Various Numbers of Members



SOURCE: Goalbook data, extracted October 1, 2014.

FIGURE 8: Percent of Active Teams with Various Types of Members

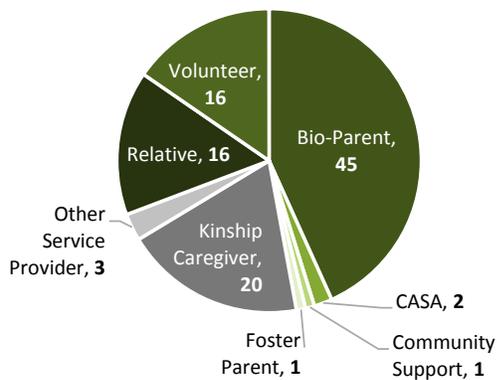


SOURCE: Goalbook data, extracted October 1, 2014.

## How many Educational Champions have been identified, and who are they?

As of the end of September 2014, **104** Educational Champions had been identified. With 193 foster youth served as of that date, this translated into 54% of youth cases with an Educational Champion. **Figure 9** reports the relationship of the Educational Champion to the youth. The largest share are biological parents, followed by kinship caregivers. 16 of the Educational Champions were volunteers.

FIGURE 9: Relationship of the Educational Champion to the Students (Counts)



SOURCE: Goalbook data, extracted October 1, 2014.

## How many FosterEd volunteers have been recruited and trained?

As described on page 5, volunteers fill a critical role in FosterEd Pima County by serving as Educational Champions when the presumed long-term caregiver (e.g., biological parent or other relative) is not able to serve in that role. As of the end of September 2014 when data for this evaluation report were collected, 54 individuals had contacted FosterEd Pima

County to express interest in becoming a volunteer (**Table 3**). Of these volunteers, 37 had been trained and most (21)<sup>3</sup> were assigned to a case. An additional 11 were waiting to be assigned. Five had been trained but withdrew.

Table 3: FosterEd Pima County Volunteers, through September 2014

Status	Number of Individuals
Contacted FosterEd to express interest	54
Trained	37
Assigned to a case	21
Waiting to be assigned to a case	11
Trained but withdrew	5

SOURCE: Administrative records kept by FosterEd.

Based on the statistics cited above indicating that 54% of cases had an Educational Champion (the goal is for all have all cases to have an Educational Champion) and through qualitative data collected during the biweekly calls with FosterEd staff and from the EL focus group, it is clear that the volunteer program needs greater attention. One of the Education Liaisons has led the program thus far, which has been very difficult given the demands of her case load. A successful volunteer program requires a great deal of dedicated attention, particularly around recruitment, training, and support for volunteers, as well as managing the process of fingerprinting and testing for tuberculosis. With generous support from the Community Foundation of Southern Arizona, FosterEd Pima County will be able to hire a coordinator to manage the volunteer program full-time.

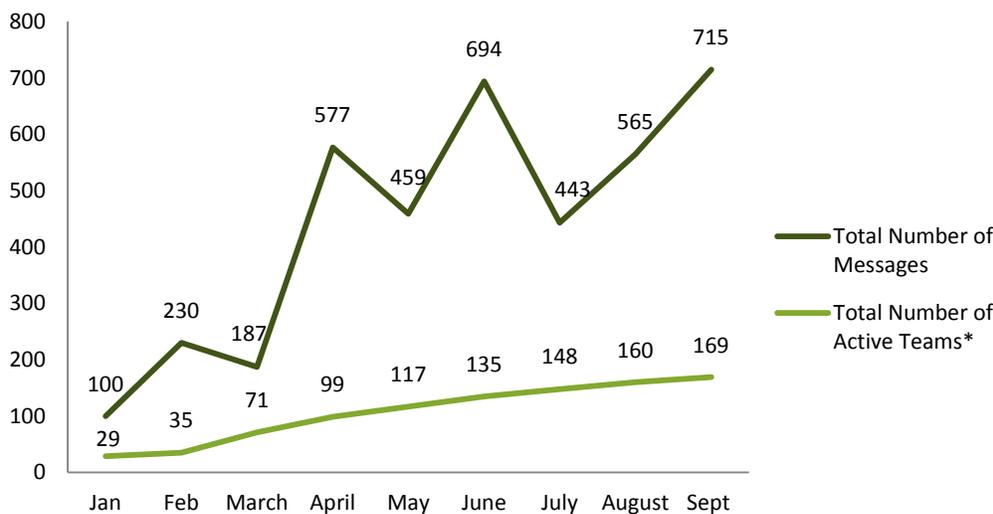
<sup>3</sup> Figure 10 reports 16 volunteers while Table C reports that 21 volunteers had been assigned to a case. RTI suspects the discrepancy is due the time lag between assigning a volunteer to a case and the volunteer activating their account in Goalbook

## How much communication is happening in Goalbook?

By program design, the majority of team collaboration is expected to occur via Goalbook. **Figure 10** reports the number of messages sent via Goalbook by month. This includes updating goals, sending messages to all or a select group of team members, and posting celebratory messages. Teams must have at least two members during the month to be included in

the analyses. The graph shows a general increase in Goalbook communication, with dips in some months, particularly during July when school was not in session. **Table 4** shows the amount of communication that occurred within teams. During the summer months and into the fall, about one-third of active teams with at least two members did not have any messages during the month. Similar percentages had 2-4 messages per month. Depending on the month, between 4 to 13% of teams had 11 or more messages.

FIGURE 10: Number of Goalbook Messages, by Month



SOURCE: Goalbook data, extracted October 1, 2014.

TABLE 4: Percent of teams with varying amounts of Goalbook communication, by month

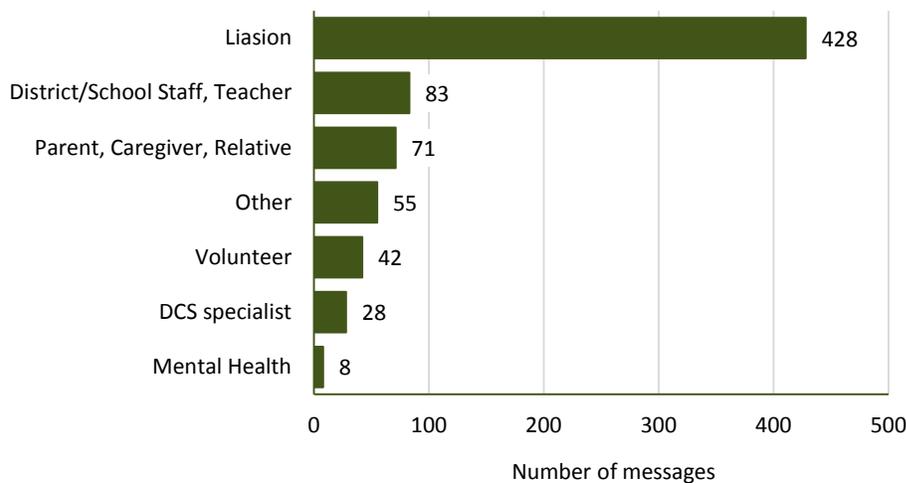
	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
0 messages	7%	9%	32%	15%	24%	12%	34%	37%	32%
1 message	45%	11%	17%	8%	20%	16%	15%	19%	10%
2-5 messages	24%	51%	37%	38%	29%	35%	36%	24%	31%
6-10 messages	17%	11%	10%	25%	21%	24%	9%	11%	16%
11+ messages	7%	17%	4%	13%	7%	13%	6%	8%	11%

SOURCE: Goalbook data, extracted October 1, 2014.

To further examine collaboration within Goalbook, **Figure 11** reports how many messages were sent by team member role type in a given month. September was chosen for this analysis because it had the largest number of messages sent (715). Most of these messages were sent by Education Liaisons (428 messages). In distant second were messages sent by District/School Staff or teachers (83 messages). **Figure 12** presents the percent of

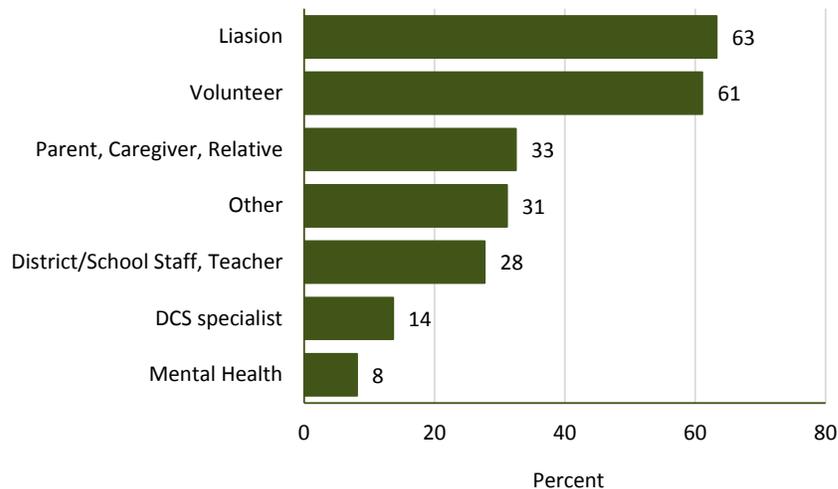
teams that had a message sent by select role types (among teams that have at least two members and a member of the given role type). Again, Education Liaisons were the most likely to send a message (63% of teams had a message sent by an Education Liaison in September), followed by Volunteer Educational Champions (61% of teams had a message sent by a Volunteer Educational Champion in September).

FIGURE 11: Number of Messages Sent by Team Member Role Type, September 2014



SOURCE: Goalbook data extracted October 1, 2014.

FIGURE 12: Percent of teams with a message sent by the role type, September 2014



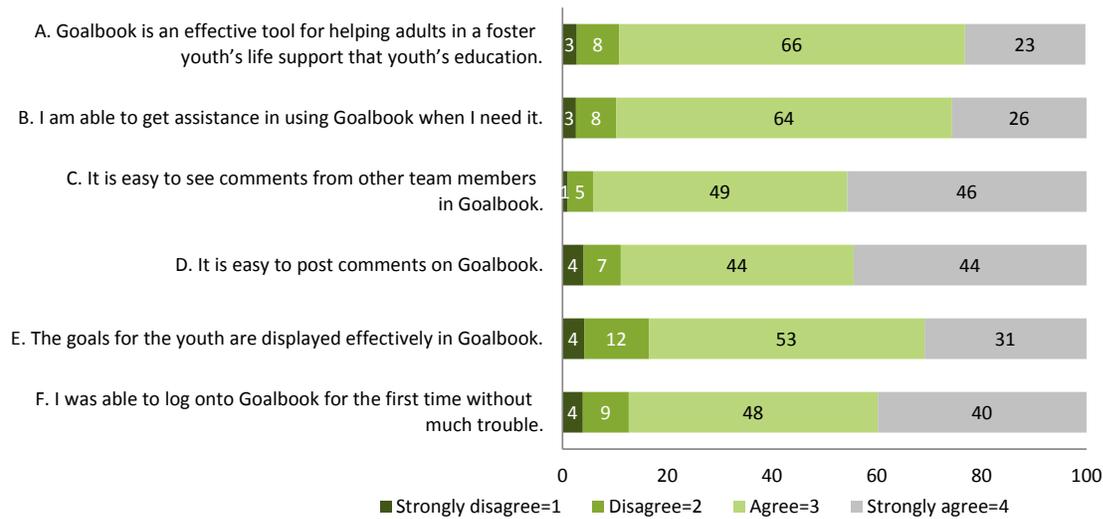
SOURCE: Goalbook data extracted October 1, 2014.

## What are adult team members' perceptions of Goalbook?

The adult team member survey administered in October 2014 asked respondents about their experiences with Goalbook. Over 80% of

respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” to each of the positive statements about Goalbook (**Figure 13**), with 89% reporting that it is an effective tool for helping adults in a foster youth’s life support the education of that youth.

FIGURE 13: Adult Team Members’ Perception of Goalbook (Percent)



SOURCE: Adult Team Members Survey, October 2014

TABLE 5: Adult Team Members' Perception of Goalbook, by Role Type (Average Response)

	A. Goalbook is an effective tool for helping adults in a foster youth's life support that youth's education.	B. I am able to get assistance in using Goalbook when I need it.	C. It is easy to see comments from other team members in Goalbook.	D. It is easy to post comments on Goalbook.	E. The goals for the youth are displayed effectively in Goalbook.	F. I was able to log onto Goalbook for the first time without much trouble.
Department of Child Safety Specialist	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.5
Mental Health Worker	3.0	2.8	3.6	3.6	3.1	3.5
Parent, Relative, Caregiver, Foster Parent	3.2	3.0	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.3
Teacher or School or District Staff	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.1
Volunteer Educational Champion	2.1	2.9	3.0	2.9	2.3	3.1

SOURCE: Adult Team Members Survey, October 2014

When asked to explain their answer to whether Goalbook is an effective tool for helping adults in a foster youth's life support that youth's education, 78 respondents did so. Below is the most common **positive** feedback, with illustrative quotes, (46 participants provided positive qualitative feedback):

**1** Greater awareness for all stakeholders

*"I very much appreciated being able to communicate with my student's advocate and collaborate on solutions for specific obstacles that otherwise I might have been unaware of."*

**2** Provides a central location for information and coordination

*"It's great to have the whole team in one place, that allows feedback, progress, and goals to be shared."*

**3** Serves as a helpful reminder and motivation to keep on track

*"This program enforced for everyone to work towards one goal, the child's success in school."*

**4** Helps to keep track of student goals and progress

*"Goalbook allows easier access to students' goals and helps [keep] track of student work. It also helps with record keeping, [the records] are a mouse click away."*

Below is the most common **negative** feedback, with illustrative quotes (26 participants provided negative qualitative feedback):

**1** Using email rather than Goalbook would be easier

*"Email is easier and more efficient. It is more difficult to have to communicate on yet another forum with a busy schedule."*

**2** Not enough online interaction/participation

*"People who are involved with the child do not use Goalbook. Without full cooperation Goalbook is ineffective."*

*"I think the purpose of Goalbook needs to be stated more clearly when new team members are added. I can honestly say I was not aware of its purpose. It also needs to be more widely used by all members of the youth's team, including the youth."*

**3** Difficult to use/used ineffectively/does not work properly

*"There were many aspects about using Goalbook that were confusing or added extra unnecessary steps. For example, I was managing a sibling group, and I often had to post the same message twice."*

Respondents offered the following recommendations for **improving** Goalbook (illustrative comments):

*"Improve Goalbook to get real-time updates on records of behavior, attendance, grades, etc."*

*"It is good, but it would be more helpful if we had access to IEP's (Individualized Education Program), if the student has one. Also, medical records, attendance and grades, and disciplinary records."*

*"Make a program besides Goalbook that can be utilized without having to use a computer, some parents don't have computers."*

*"We already have a student and parent portal where grades and assignments are listed. Please don't make teachers do this twice, use our existing system to attain this info and again, you will get much more cooperation and buy-in which will ultimately serve the student's needs best!"*

*"It would be more useful if more school administrators, teachers, etc. would be active in it."*

## Progress on Outcomes Indicators

RTI is tracking a number of outcomes indicators for the evaluation, including some related to youth and others related to Educational Champions (see Appendix A). Preliminary data are currently available for some, but not all, of the proposed FosterEd youth and Educational Champion outcomes. Most importantly, education data such as students' attendance rates, grades, and school behavioral rates are not included in this Year 1 report. This is due to the slower than expected Foster Focus linking process. These critical outcomes measures will be a focus of the Year 2 evaluation report.

In addition to youth and Educational Champion outcomes, RTI has also identified, with FosterEd, a program-level outcome of improved collaboration between educators, child welfare professionals, community-based organizations, and the court. Finally, RTI is tracking a number of state-level outcomes identified by FosterEd as goals to achieve beyond the Pima pilot project which reflect their state policy and practice efforts (see Appendix A for these program-level and state-level outcomes). It is important to point out that it is impossible to isolate the impact that FosterEd has had on these state-level policy and practice changes. Nevertheless, based on interviews with State Leadership Team members, RTI is comfortable reporting on the state outcomes as a reflection of FosterEd's efforts, with the important caveat that the impact of its contributions cannot be disentangled from the contributions of others working at the state-level.

## Youth Outcomes

### *How many unmet educational needs were identified and addressed?*

RTI and FosterEd agreed to consider the identification of the educational needs of foster youth as an outcome. This is because educational needs have historically not been given adequate attention by the adults working with these youth, who are often more focused on the other critical dimensions of safety and well-being. Since FosterEd aims to raise the profile and attention given to the educational needs and outcomes of foster youth, simply identifying those needs is one outcome of the program.

As of the end of September 2014, **729** goals had been set for foster youth. Each of these addressed an identified need of the foster youth. When establishing a goal, the education team also identifies objectives for achieving those goals. An example is setting a goal for improved attendance, and identifying approximately three objectives to meet that goal, such as caregiver establishing a 9:00 p.m. bedtime, child setting and rising with an alarm clock, and child having no absences or tardies for 6 weeks.

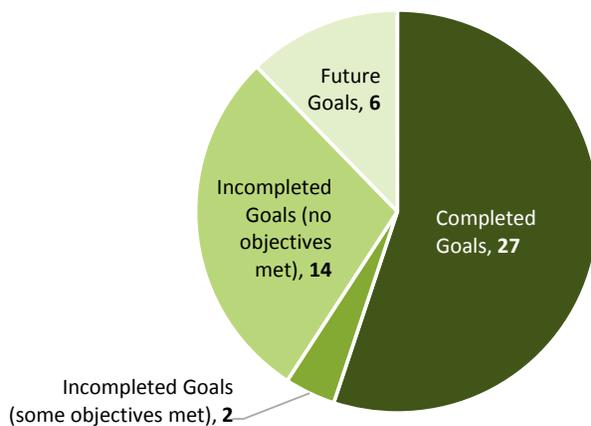
**Figures 14 and 15** present the status of these goals for Active and Forming Students Teams, and Closed and On Hold Student Teams, respectively. Most of the goals (680) were associated with Active or Forming Teams. Among those, 194 had been completed, 147 were active and some of the objectives had been met, 227 were active but no objectives had yet been met, and 112 were identified as "future" goals. To help keep teams focused, teams typically have no more than three goals active at any time. If more than three goals have been identified, some are noted as "future" goals to be addressed once a more urgent goal has been met.

FIGURE 14: Status of Student Goals, for Active and Forming Teams (Counts)



SOURCE: Goalbook data extracted October 1, 2014.

FIGURE 15: Status of Student Goals, for Closed and On Hold Teams (Counts)



SOURCE: Goalbook data extracted October 1, 2014.

Of the total 729 student goals set, 40 are associated with closed or on hold teams. Among those, most (27) had been met. Two had been active goals that were not completed when the team closed or was put on hold, but progress had been made on the goal. 14 were not completed when the team closed or was put on hold, and progress had not been made on the

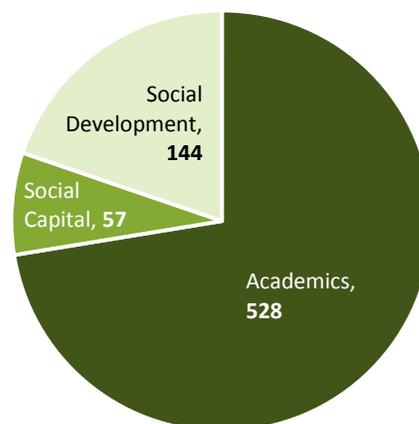
goal, while six had been identified as future goals and had not been activated.

**What types of goals have been set for youth?**

Figure 16 reports the general categories of the 729 goals that have been set for foster youth. The largest group (528) were academic, followed by social development (144), and social capital (57).

Table 6 describes the academic, social capital, and social development goals identified for students. One thing to note is the variety of types of goal description: 27 different kinds of goals were identified across all of the student cases. Among the academic goals, the top five were ensuring the youth were enrolled in appropriate schools and classes, addressing issues related to their academic records and credits, improving their reading and math proficiency, and ensuring they were receiving adequate Special Education or 504 plan support. Within the social development category, the most common goal set related to enrichment resources/extracurricular activities. Within the social capital category, the most common goal set concerned positive peer relationships.

FIGURE 16: Category of Student Goals (Counts)



SOURCE: To Goalbook data extracted October 1, 2014.

TABLE 6: Description of Student Goals

Academics			
Goal Title	Count	Goal Title	Count
Enrollment in Appropriate Schools and Classes	91	Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) Test -Related Goals	14
Academic Records/Credits	80	Academic Proficiency Benchmark State Test	7
Reading Proficiency	58	Course Completion-High School	6
Math Proficiency	57	Proficiency Course Class Specific	6
Special Education/504 Accommodations	57	Appropriate ELL services	3
Attendance	36	Career Readiness	3
Writing Proficiency	30	College Readiness	2
Academic Supplies	27	Academic Proficiency K to 2nd Grade	2
Grade improvement	26	High School Readiness	1
Grade progression	22		
Social Development		Social Capital	
Goal Title	Count	Goal Title	Count
Enrichment Resources/ Extracurricular Activities	85	Positive Peer Relationship	29
Behavior and School Discipline	37	Positive School Staff Relationship	18
Future Expectations	19	Access to Community Resources	7
Enrichment Resources/ Summer Enrichment	3	Additional Adult Supports (Family & Community)	3

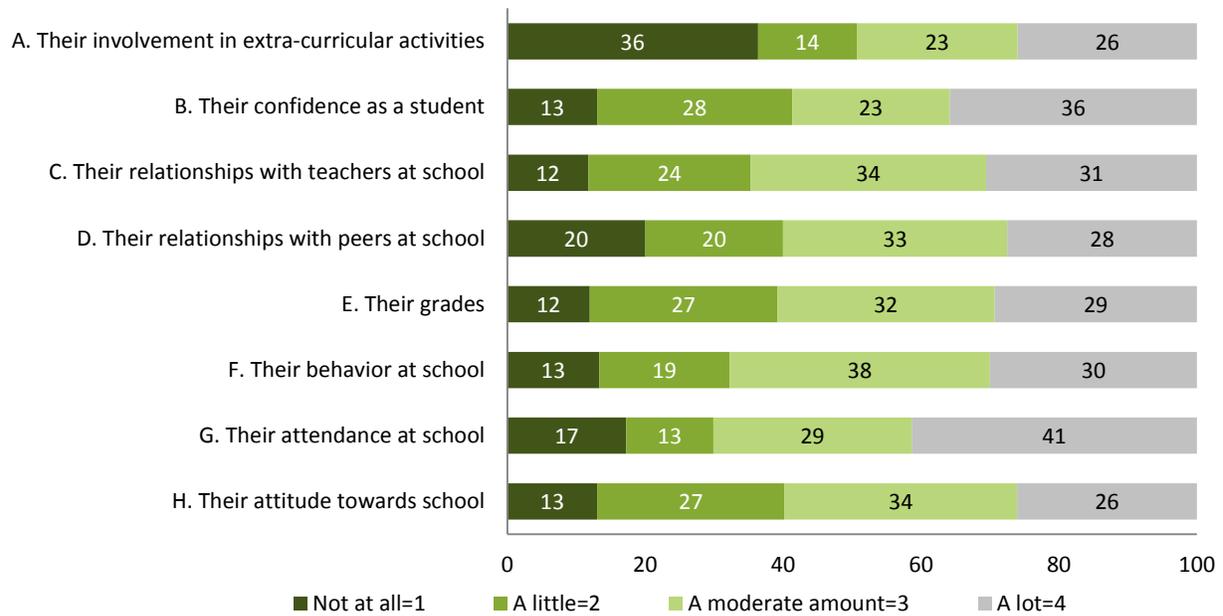
SOURCE: Goalbook data extracted October 1, 2014.

## What do adult team members perceive as the impacts of FosterEd on foster youth?

In Year 2 of the evaluation, RTI expects to be able to examine the educational records of FosterEd youth to consider whether the youth improve on important educational indicators such as attendance and grades after joining FosterEd. The current status of district linking with Foster Focus did not yield enough education data to perform these analyses for

this Year 1 evaluation report. However, adult team members' perception of the impact of FosterEd on participating youth was assessed in the survey (**Figure 17**). At least 80% of adult respondents perceived at least "a little" positive impact of FosterEd on each of the dimensions, with the exception of increased involvement in extra-curricular activities. **Table 7** shows the mean responses by team member role type. DCS specialists, the teacher subgroup and the parent/caregiver subgroup, generally perceived the highest levels of positive impact.

FIGURE 17: Perceived Impacts of FosterEd on Youth, from the Perspective of Adult Team Members ( Percent)



SOURCE: Goalbook data extracted October 1, 2014.

TABLE 7: Perceived Impacts of FosterEd on Youth, by Adult Team Member Role Type (Average Response)

Item	Department of Child Safety Specialist	Mental Health Worker	Parent, Relative, Caregiver, Foster Parent	Teacher or School or District Staff	Volunteer Educational Champion
A. Their involvement in extra-curricular activities	2.5	1.4	2.7	2.3	2.0
B. Their confidence as a student	2.7	2.3	3.1	3.0	1.8
C. Their relationships with teachers at school	2.7	2.4	3.0	3.0	2.4
D. Their relationships with peers at school	2.6	1.5	2.9	2.9	2.0
E. Their grades	2.8	2.8	3.2	2.6	1.8
F. Their behavior at school	2.8	2.7	3.0	2.9	2.2
G. Their attendance at school	3.0	2.9	3.1	2.9	2.6
H. Their attitude towards school	2.7	2.3	2.9	2.8	2.2

SOURCE: Adult Team Members Survey, October 2014

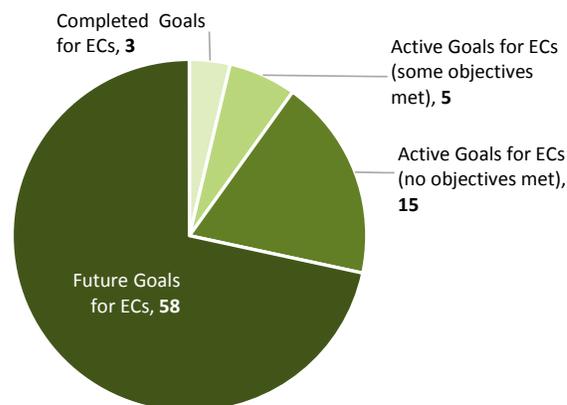
## Educational Champion Outcomes

### *How many Educational Champions had a goal to increase their capacity to support the youth educationally?*

FosterEd expects that many Educational Champions will need mentoring or coaching to effectively support and advocate for the youth. When the presumed long-term caregiver cannot serve as an Educational Champion, community volunteers fill this role to the extent that there are enough volunteers to cover the need. Those volunteers receive 8 hours or more of trainings and ongoing support from the Education Liaisons. When a presumed long-term caregiver can fill the role of Educational Champion, those individuals may need different supports for their role. Many have not been traditionally successful students themselves, and may not have the confidence or know how to navigate school systems. Thus the FosterEd program includes a component that provides the necessary mentorship to the Educational Champions. 81 student teams included a goal to increase the capacity of the Educational Champions (42% of all student teams; 78% of teams with an Educational Champion Identified). **Figure 18** shows that most of these (58) have been labeled as “future goals.” This means that the need to support the Educational Champion has been identified and the Educational Champion has agreed to the support, but there is not another adult serving on the team who is available to provide that mentoring. 15 of the 81 teams with Educational Champions needing mentoring are providing that mentoring but objectives associated with those goals have not yet been met. Five of the 81 teams in which mentoring to the Educational Champions is occurring have met some of those

mentoring objectives. Three of the 81 teams have met their goal of increasing the capacity of the Educational Champion.

FIGURE 18: Status of Goals to Increase the Capacity of Educational Champions (Counts)



SOURCE: Goalbook data extracted October 1, 2014.

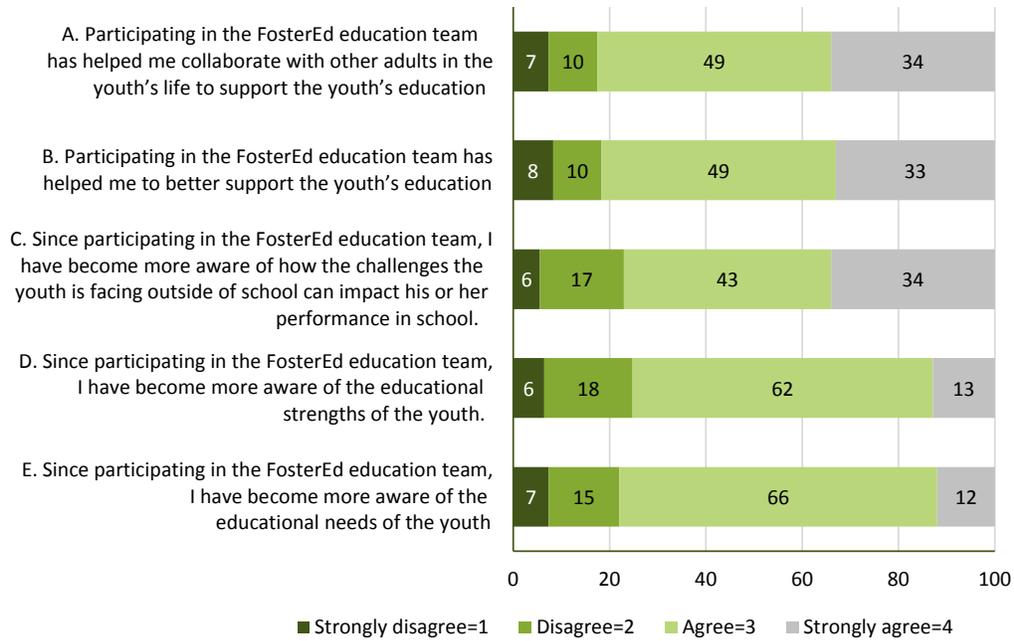
## Program Outcomes

In addition to asking adult team members about their perceptions of the educational impacts of FosterEd on the participating foster youth, the team member survey assessed a number of other dimensions, including team members' general feedback on the program, their experience with Goalbook, and the extent to which it has helped them collaborate with others to support the youth.

### *What are adult team members' perceptions of the FosterEd program?*

**Figure 19** reports the survey responses to a number of positive statements about FosterEd. At least 75% of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” to each of the statements. On each statement, each of the five main respondent groups had an average response above a calculated neutral position (i.e., 2.5) (**Table 7**).

FIGURE 19: Adult Team Members’ Perceptions of the FosterEd Program (Percent)



SOURCE: Adult Team Members Survey, October 2014

TABLE 7: Perceptions of the FosterEd Program, by Adult Team Member Role Type

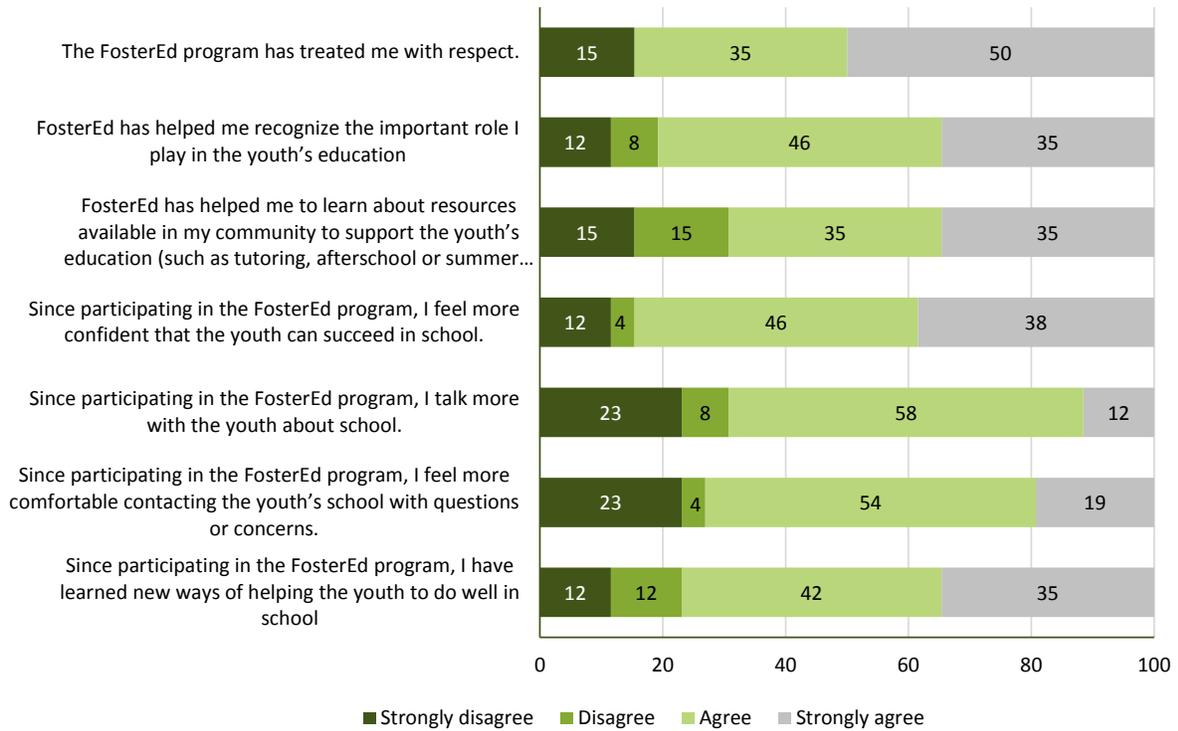
Item	Department of Child Safety Specialist	Mental Health Worker	Parent, Relative, Caregiver, Foster Parent	Teacher or School or District Staff	Volunteer Educational Champion
A. Participating in the FosterEd education team has helped me collaborate with other adults in the youth's life to support the youth's education	2.93	3.30	2.88	3.29	3.00
B. Participating in the FosterEd education team has helped me to better support the youth's education	2.96	3.00	3.00	3.24	2.71
C. Since participating in the FosterEd education team, I have become more aware of how the challenges the youth is facing outside of school can impact his or her performance in school.	2.81	2.90	3.12	3.18	3.43
D. Since participating in the FosterEd education team, I have become more aware of the educational <u>strengths</u> of the youth.	2.85	2.90	3.12	2.76	2.71
E. Since participating in the FosterEd education team, I have become more aware of the educational <u>needs</u> of the youth	2.89	2.80	2.77	2.76	3.00

SOURCE: Adult Team Members Survey, October 2014

Figures 20-22 present results of specific questions asked of different survey respondent groups. Over 65% of the parent/caregiver

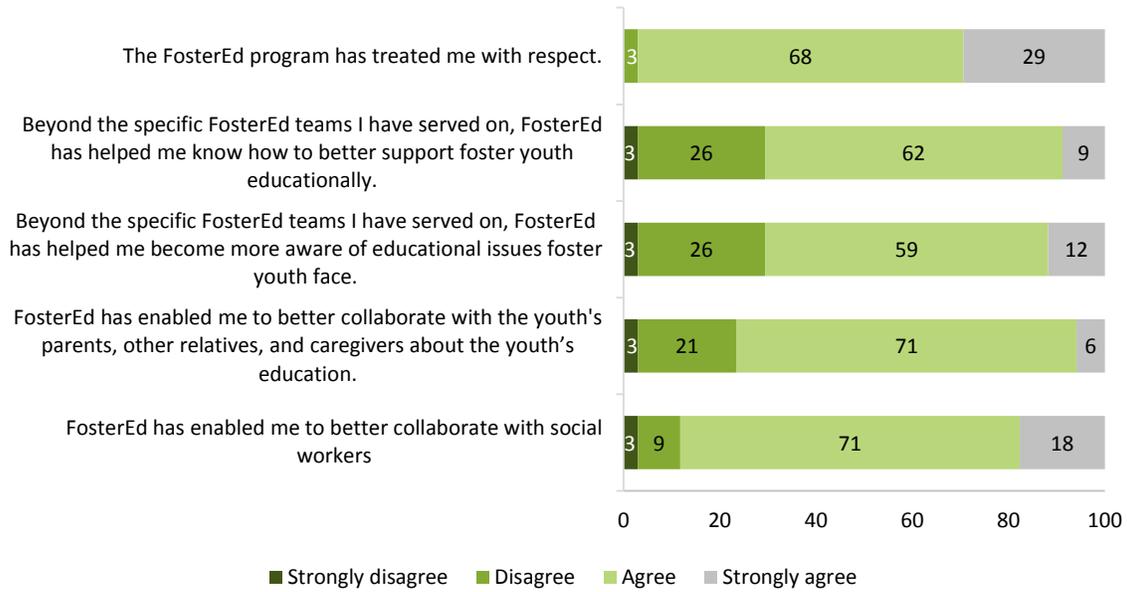
subgroup reported that FosterEd helped them be a stronger educational supporter for their child on each dimension below (**Figure 20**).

FIGURE 20: Specific Survey Questions Asked of Parents, Relatives, Caregivers, Foster Parents



SOURCE: Adult Team Members Survey, October 2014

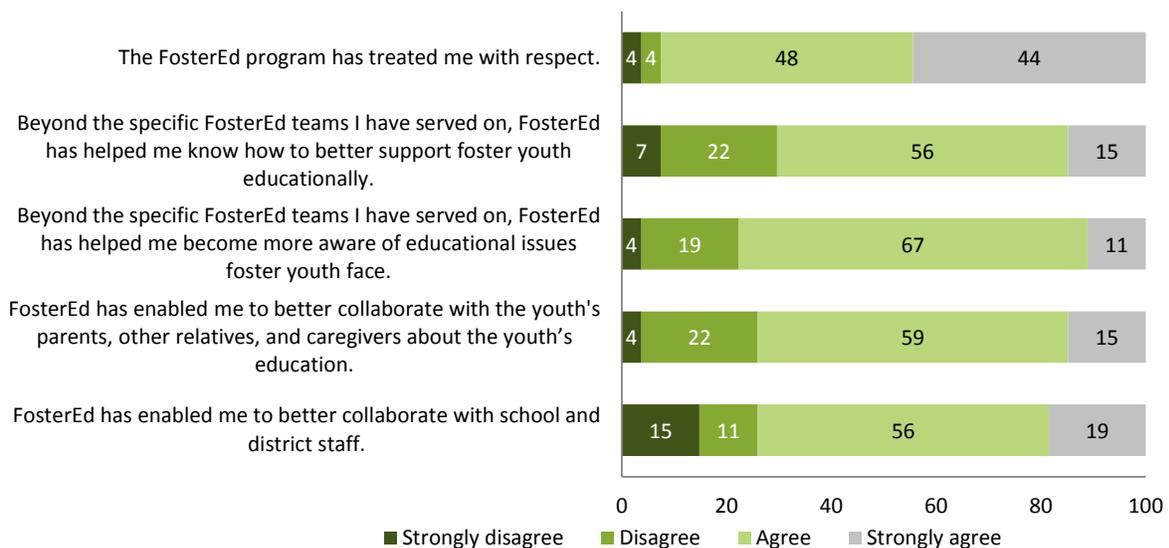
FIGURE 21: Specific Survey Questions Asked of Teachers, School and District Staff (Percent)



Over 70% of the teachers/district/school staff subgroup reported that FosterEd helped them better support foster youth educationally, and increased their awareness of the educational

issues facing foster youth (Figure 21). 89% reported that it helped them better collaborate with social workers.

FIGURE 22. Specific Survey Questions asked of Department of Child Safety Specialists (Percent)

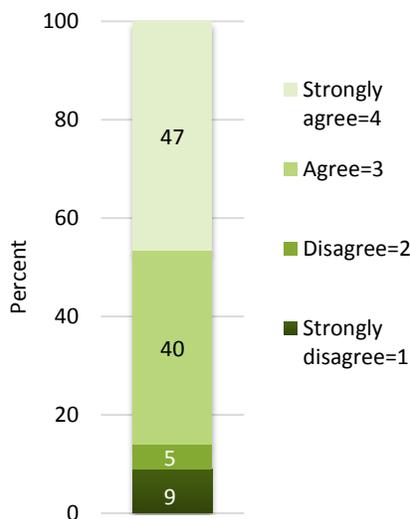


71% of Department of Child Safety staff reported that FosterEd helped them better support foster youth educationally, and 78% reported becoming more aware of the educational issues facing foster youth (**Figure 22**). 75% reported that it helped them better collaborate with school and district staff.

*Would adult team members recommend FosterEd to other adults in the lives of foster youth?*

Almost 9 out of 10 (87%) adult team members who responded to the survey indicated that they would recommend FosterEd to other adults in the lives of foster youth (47% “strongly agreed”, and 40% agreed); (**Figure 23**).

FIGURE 23: Percent of Adult Team Members who Would Recommend FosterEd



SOURCE: To Adult Team Members Survey, October 2014

When asked to explain their answer to whether they would recommend the FosterEd program to other adults in the lives of foster youth, 87 participants responded.

Below is the most common **positive** feedback, with illustrative quotes (54 participants responded positively):

- 1** Facilitates collaboration among all involved leading to better outcomes for youth

*“Collaboration and consistency is so important, especially for those youth whose lives hold a lot of uncertainty.”*

- 2** Provides an opportunity to access additional resources for foster youth and navigate the educational system more effectively

*“FosterEd can get the proper documents, proper meetings, proper personnel and help educate parents on what school districts and educators need to do for children and what their requirements are.”*

- 3** A focus on education is important for foster youth

*“I believe in the coordinated effort and emphasis on educational success that is the mission of FosterEd.”*

The most common **negative** feedback, with illustrative quote were (11 participants responded negatively):

- 1** Poor communication and/or unclear guidelines

*“Until the Pima County Program is fully configured I am reluctant to encourage others to participate due to poor communication and unclear guidelines.”*

## 2 Not enough resources (staff, training)

*"In my experience, the program was grossly under-staffed, poorly explained, and what training there was could best be described as 'minimal'."*

## 3 No need for an Educational Champion/no benefit to the program

*"If a caregiver or parent is participating, there is no need for an educational champion."*

### *What suggestions do adult team members have for improving FosterEd?*

When asked whether they had any suggestions for improving the FosterEd program, 46 of adult team members surveyed offered suggestions. Below are the most common themes, with illustrative quotes:

## 1 Better communication and more in-person contact

*"I would highly recommend starting the process with a face-to-face meeting with the student's teachers, foster parents and the Foster Ed coordinator. This will increase buy-in from staff and make the efforts much more effective."*

*"Work more closely with the volunteers. Share learning experiences so everyone is not recreating the wheel. Increase the knowledge level of the coordinators so they can better support the volunteers."*

*"More email communication between Foster Ed specialists and DCS specialists."*

*"More contact from the FosterEd [staff]."*

*"It would be nice to have an initial face to face conference with the team at least once during the school year."*

## 2 Improvements to Goalbook (summarized on page 25)

## 3 Improve training and support:

*"Greater awareness of foster youth issues, other agencies/nonprofits serving youth, background info for CPS/DCS and education system - perhaps a global view?"*

*"I believe that there needs to be a lot more training for educators [...]"*

## 4 More teacher involvement/interaction:

*"More student-teacher interaction."*

## State Outcomes

As noted in the beginning of this section, RTI is tracking a number of state-level outcomes identified by FosterEd as goals to achieve, beyond the Pima pilot project, which reflect FosterEd's state policy and practice efforts. Although it is impossible to quantify or isolate FosterEd's contributions to the state outcomes, RTI is comfortable reporting on them as a reflection of FosterEd's efforts given perspectives shared during the State Leadership and Community Planning Team interviews, and RTI observation of State Leadership Team meeting.

FosterEd did not expect to achieve many of the state goals during the first year of the Pima pilot, but rather aimed to meet them toward the end of the pilot or in the first few years following the pilot. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made on five of the state-level outcomes.



MOUs developed for data sharing between the Arizona Department of Education and the Department of Economic Security

To help schools quickly and efficiently identify their foster youth, DES and ADE agreed to start flagging foster youth in data they share with schools and districts about which students are eligible to receive free- or reduced-price lunches (foster youth are automatically eligible for this). This “flagging” of foster youth was done by adding a column in the Child Nutrition Program data transfer indicating which students were in foster care. The MOU between DCS and ADE allows food service to share the list identifying foster children with the school and district administration for the purpose of promoting the educational and social success of foster children.



Regular Data sharing between the Arizona Department of Education and the Division of Child Safety and Child Services

The Child Nutrition Program data transfer happens nightly. On a larger scale, future ability to share data between DCS and ADE will depend on the improved data systems expected to be developed for both DCS and ADE.



Data sharing between state agencies and local agencies

ADE shares Child Nutrition Program data with local school districts on a regular basis. Most school districts are not yet aware of the Child Nutrition Program process. FosterEd is working with local school districts in Pima County to establish protocols to protect this information and serve as a template for other school districts in Arizona.



Production of Arizona Invisible Achievement Gap Report

WestEd, a nonprofit research and development

agency, is currently analyzing state-wide child welfare and education data to report on the educational experience and outcomes of foster youth in Arizona. Researchers from WestEd conducted a similar study in California and found tragically poor outcomes for foster youth, including poorer outcomes than other at-risk populations (e.g., low income students, Special Education students, English-language Learners).<sup>4</sup> Arizona’s Invisible Achievement Gap Report is expected to be available in the first half of 2015.



Legislative briefings and hearings about FosterEd and Arizona Invisible Achievement Gap Report

FosterEd had the opportunity to present the FosterEd program to a group of legislators at the Arizona State Senate on September 17th. Senate President Andy Biggs and Senator David Bradley sponsored the bipartisan legislative briefing for members of the Senate and House Education and Human Services Committees, as well as community stakeholders and legislative staff. FosterEd expects to participate in a second briefing at the end of January 2015.

<sup>4</sup> The California Invisible Achievement Gap study is summarized in two reports available at: <http://www.stuartfoundation.org/docs/default-document-library/the-invisible-achievement-gap-report.pdf?sfvrsn=2>; <http://www.stuartfoundation.org/docs/default-document-library/IAGpart2.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the full range of quantitative and qualitative data collected, the evaluator concludes that the first year of implementation of the Pima County pilot has been a success. Of the 11 components identified as essential for the pilot, eight were completed by the compilation of this report, and the remaining three were in process. 193 foster youth had been served, and 729 goals had been set for these youth. Significant progress was made on students' goals: 221 of the goals (30%) were completed, 149 (20%) were active goals in which some of the objectives had been met, 241 were active goals in which no objectives had yet been met (33%), and 118 were identified as "future" goals (16%).<sup>5</sup>

Feedback about the FosterEd project from adults serving on the students' teams was overwhelmingly positive: 87% reported that they would recommend FosterEd to other adults in the lives of foster youth. Feedback from members of the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams was also positive. When asked for their overall assessment of the progress made during the first year of implementation of the pilot, every interviewee shared positive sentiments, including these illustrative responses:

*"I think we've made really good progress in Arizona, I'm very pleased."*

*"At the statewide level, the collaboration between the Department of Education and the*

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<sup>5</sup> The status of the goals is summed across active, forming, closed, and on-hold teams. For closed and on-hold teams, the goals noted as "active" were active at the time the case was closed or put on hold.

*Department of Child Safety has really become a lot better than it was two or three years ago."*

*"I think we've laid a good foundation."*

*"I'm amazed at the amount of work that has been accomplished. There were a lot of tasks that needed to be completed from the beginning – staff hired, structures developed, MOUs with the districts (which were a challenge)— but overcoming those was done very well."*

*"Within our organization, we've propelled FosterEd to the top. We've brought in the FosterEd staff as part of our staff. When we're out in the community, we talk about FosterEd as being a partnership of ours; I talk about FosterEd like it is part of us."*

Prior sections of this report presented data that spoke to the many evaluation indicators identified at the beginning of this study. Two additional themes emerged from the evaluation and are important to note:

### Increased visibility and understanding of education issues facing foster youth

During the Educational Liaison focus group and in interviews with members of the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams, the increased visibility of the educational needs of foster youth was cited as an important achievement from the first year of implementation.

*"From the educator point of view, the simple fact of raising the visibility of FosterEd and foster kids, in and of itself, will create big change. Principals and Superintendents often do not even know who the foster kids are in their schools until they need to deal with them for disciplinary reasons or some other reason."*

*“Having ELs is something that’s desperately needed for children involved with the Department of Child Safety because the DCS specialists aren’t given much information about education, education achievement, and how to monitor a child’s education. Frankly, DCS specialists are more focused on safety and what they need to get done. Having people who focus on [the foster youth’s] education is phenomenal.”*

*“The first year has been really eye opening for everyone involved. DCS didn’t know about education, schools didn’t know about DCS. We are putting a spotlight on something that didn’t have a spotlight on it before. In that way [the first year has been] 100% successful”*

## Commitment to data-informed decision making and continuous program improvement

The evaluator has been impressed with the critical self-reflection of the FosterEd Arizona project. Throughout the first year of implementation, the project leaders, staff, and members of the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams have been hungry for the data emerging from the evaluation and other sources. They have used this information to reflect on the project and identify challenges in order to address them. An example of this relates to the volunteer program wherein one of the three Educational Liaisons was responsible for developing the program, including recruiting volunteers, coordinating and leading trainings, and supervising the volunteers once they had been assigned to cases. In addition to her main responsibilities of managing a full student case load, this additional duty has required tremendous time. It became clear that appropriately fulfilling both sets of responsibilities was not sustainable because in order to increase the number of volunteers and adequately support them, the Educational

Liaison would have to devote even more time to this component of the program. After considerable discussion, a member of the Community Planning Team helped FosterEd secure funding for a full-time volunteer coordinator. Interviews have recently been held for the position, and FosterEd expects to fill the position within the next month.

The following quote from a Community Planning Team member reflects the attitude of many people involved in the FosterEd project, as observed by the evaluator:

*“These are the types of projects that help me sleep well at night. This is something that, if we do it right, we know we’ll have a profound impact on kids. Can we do it better? Yeah. Can we learn how to do it more efficiently? Yeah.”*

## Recommendations

RTI offers the following recommendations for strengthening FosterEd Arizona in the second year of the Pima County pilot:

**1**

**Recommendation:** Continue to raise awareness among the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams about the substantial delays and other challenges encountered with regard to access to education data through linkages with Foster Focus. Without solutions, the evaluation is in danger of being unable to report on educational outcomes.

While substantial progress has been made on district linkages with Foster Focus, it is much slower than what was initially planned, and even among districts that have been linked, establishing practices at the district level that maintain the flow of data has been difficult. RTI examined the currently available education data to assess whether there was sufficient data to

conduct preliminary education outcomes analyses for this report, and found that there was not. Solutions to the data linkage problems are needed because without these solutions, there is a real risk that RTI will not be able to examine whether participation in FosterEd is associated with improved educational outcomes such as increased attendance and grades, and decreased disciplinary incidents. Linking delays and other problems are also impeding Education Liaisons from having immediate and ongoing access to educational records, which is needed for adequately supporting student teams.

Based on the bi-monthly updates from the FosterEd staff regarding their efforts to support data linkages, RTI is confident that they are working hard to address these problems. RTI recommends appropriate members of the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams become more involved in helping the program address this important problem.

2

**Recommendation: Refine targets for Education Liaisons' caseloads so that they can sufficiently attend to their cases, while also serving as many foster youth as possible. Work with the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams to clearly communicate the program capacity to agency partners (e.g., the court, DCS).**

There is real tension between serving as many foster youth in Pima County (and ultimately the state) through FosterEd as possible, and serving them well. Having implemented FosterEd in Indiana and in one county in California before starting the Pima County pilot, FosterEd leaders knew appropriate Education Liaison caseload target numbers would vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Setting caseload targets should be influenced by the specifics of the program and the profiles of the foster youth served in the

program. Although FosterEd has standard elements across jurisdictions, each program is customized to the jurisdiction based on existing infrastructure, policies, and partnerships in the jurisdiction. Further, given the number of foster youth in Pima County, FosterEd has not been able to serve all of them and decided to prioritize serving those with the highest needs.

Early in the pilot, FosterEd leadership considered setting targets of about 100 cases per Education Liaison, then lowered the target to 75 after the first few months of the pilot. As the first year of implementation closed, the FosterEd leadership and staff identified 50 cases at any one time as a reasonable target for ensuring that cases are provided adequate support from the Education Liaison. They recognized, however, that each Education Liaison serving only 50 cases per year would not reach enough foster youth. Thus, FosterEd is considering adjusting the length of time that cases stay with Education Liaisons. RTI has been involved in these initial conversations and supports the process FosterEd is taking to refine their caseload targets, which will include soliciting input from the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams. RTI recommends that once those refinements are made, they be clearly communicated to partners, and that the teams help FosterEd with this communication. A few State Leadership and Community Planning Team members noted there has been confusion about the expectations of the program, and especially as statewide expansion is pursued, it is critical that the capacity of the program be clearly articulated.

*"When I first became involved in FosterEd (in January 2013), I heard every child in Pima County will get an Educational Champion, but in reality that did not happen. Trying to be absolutely real about what is really going to happen [is important].... We need to be mindful that our ultimate goal is to have every kid with an*

*Educational Champion, but based on experience with other states and what we've experienced in Pima County, we think the real ramp-up time is going to be X."*

*"I think it's very important to manage the expectations of the donors and certainly of the state."*

*"In every group that sits around our table, whether that be in Phoenix or [Tucson], we need to all be saying the exact same thing. We need to be coordinated in our message."*

**3** Recommendation: Work to improve team member communication within Goalbook. Develop clearer plans and protocols for supporting team members who cannot collaborate through Goalbook.

Based on the team member data and communication statistics from Goalbook, RTI suggests that FosterEd consider both how the program can encourage more communication within Goalbook, and also recognize that not all team members can be expected to use Goalbook effectively (e.g., they have limited or no access to technology, or they have limited English proficiency). Thus, RTI recommends FosterEd Arizona develop clearer plans and protocols for supporting teams that cannot collaborate through Goalbook.

**4** Recommendation: Focus on engaging more youth in their education teams.

FosterEd's policy is to invite youth 14 years or older to participate in their education team via Goalbook. At the time data were analyzed for this report, 40 high-school youth had been served by FosterEd Arizona, but only four youth had activated Goalbook accounts. Based on these numbers, and qualitative feedback provided in the adult team member survey, RTI

suggests that FosterEd consider ways to engage more foster youth in their education teams. First, FosterEd should clarify among themselves the goals for involving youth (e.g., is it most important that the youth be aware of and agree to the education goals set for them, or it is also important that they check Goalbook frequently). With this clarified, FosterEd should work with their partners to further more practices to better support the active engagement of older foster youth in their education teams.

**5** Recommendation: Focus on engaging more parents and caregivers in their education teams, including tracking those who participate outside of Goalbook.

At the time data were analyzed for this report, 50% of cases had at least one parent or caregiver participating on the student's team via Goalbook. Data are not currently collected systematically to be able to report whether cases in which a parent or caregiver isn't participating via Goalbook is nevertheless involved in the team outside of Goalbook. However, the Educational Liaisons reported that this is an infrequent occurrence, and there currently are not clear practices in place to engage parents/caregivers who are not registered on Goalbook. RTI recommends FosterEd work with us to develop a way for the program to track team member participation outside of Goalbook, particularly for parents and caregivers, so that this can be included in the evaluation. RTI also recommends FosterEd consider, along with the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams, additional efforts to engage more parents and caregivers.

**6** Recommendation: Strengthen ties with schools and districts to continue raising awareness of FosterEd and further support teacher engagement in students' education teams.

Based on quantitative team member and communication data from Goalbook (e.g., at the time the data were analyzed about 50% of cases had school representatives on the team), and qualitative data from the team member survey and Education Liaison focus group, RTI recommends FosterEd renew their efforts to raise awareness of the FosterEd program in Pima County schools and districts. In addition to raising awareness, RTI recommends FosterEd work with the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams to consider other practices that can further support school representatives in collaborating effectively with other members of a students' education team.

## Evaluation Next Steps

With a strong foundation set in the first year of implementation, and a culture of reflection and continuous improvement, FosterEd is poised for a very strong second year of implementation. RTI, along with FosterEd leadership and staff and members of the State Leadership and Community Planning Teams, look forward to being able to examine the extent to which participation in FosterEd is associated with concrete educational outcomes, such as improved attendance and grades. The second year of the evaluation will continue to monitor the infrastructure, process, and outcomes indicators covered in this Year 1 Evaluation report, and also track changes in educational performance as those data become available.

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### **About the Evaluator**

**Dr. Jennifer Laird** is Program Director of Evaluation and Equity at RTI International. She earned her Ph.D. in Sociology at Stanford University. Dr. Laird has 15 years of experience in education research and evaluation, with expertise in the intersection between education and child welfare, as well as in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) secondary education, and outside-of-school-time programs. In addition to the directing the evaluation of FosterEd Arizona, she directs the evaluation of FosterEd Santa Cruz, and the evaluation of the Education Equals Partnership, a California statewide effort to improve educational outcomes for students from foster care, starting with preschool and extending across the entire education continuum. Four California counties -- Fresno, Orange, Sacramento and Santa Cruz -- are implementing a common agenda for change and tracking shared progress data metrics.

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