Foster Youth Support in California High School Districts: A Review of Year 2 LCAPs

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BACKGROUND: WHAT WE KNOW

The introduction of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) have provided the opportunity to address the specific needs of foster youth within the California educational system. Before this legislative shift, the education sector oftentimes lacked an overarching and coordinated plan to meet the needs and track the outcomes of this population. Currently, foster youth have some of the lowest academic outcomes among at-risk youth which can begin to be addressed through LCFF's supplemental funding for this new subgroup. Some of the outcomes for foster youth are below:

- Constitutes an at-risk subgroup that is distinct from other low income students.
- More likely to change schools during the academic year.
- More likely than the general population to be enrolled in the lowest performing schools.
- Has the lowest participation rate in California's statewide testing program.
- Shows a significant achievement gap on statewide testing.
- Has the highest dropout rate and lowest graduation rate.[1]

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to review a statewide sample of districts' Year 2 LCAPs for outcomes, actions, and allocations specifically aimed at addressing the needs of foster youth. Twenty California high school districts were selected to be reviewed for this study. The high schools selected represented those with the highest foster youth populations[2] and specifically mid-size and large districts. A mid-size district is characterized as having 15-100 foster youth students and a large district has 100 or more foster youth students. Districts who have 15 or less foster youth students are not required to outline any actions directed towards the population, therefore they were not included in this study.

LIMITATIONS

As mentioned above, the study focused on foster youth specific outcomes, actions, and allocations. Therefore, any items that may have included foster youth but also incorporated other subgroups (low-income students and English language learners) are not present in the findings. It is also important to note that the purpose of the LCAP is to inform the community of the broader goals within the district, but does not encapsulate all targeted efforts that impact student needs. Many of the programs and services that foster youth receive within a district may not be reflected within the LCAP.

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[1] West Ed. (2013). The Invisible Achievement Gap. www.stuartfoundation.org

[2] Foster youth number was taken from The Invisible Achievement Gap.

SUMMARY

From this LCAP review emerged 32 goals that specify outcomes, actions, and/or allocations that are specific to foster youth. In order to better understand how these goals addressed the needs of foster youth students, eight themes/codes[3] were identified to categorize the actions outlined and understand opportunities for growth within the sample of high school districts. The themes utilized are:

- Establish data monitoring system
- Develop local policies and procedures
- Coordinate services across agencies and within district staff
- Provide appropriate support staff
- Provide academic supports
- Provide behavioral, social, and emotional supports
- Train staff on foster youth needs and policies
- Provide parent education and communication.

Frequency of Foster Youth Specific Actions

Action Themes	Quantity
Establish data monitoring system	6
Develop local policies and procedures	4
Coordinate services across agencies and within district staff	2
Provide appropriate support staff	12
Provide academic supports	14
Provide behavioral, social, and emotional supports	7
Train staff on foster youth needs and policies	5
Provide parent education and communication	5
Total Number of Actions	**32**

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[3] *These themes/codes were adopted from the dissertation, "Shared Accountability to Improve Educational Outcomes of Foster Youth: Examining the Conditions that Influence Evidence-Based Decision Making" (Huff, 2015)

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District highlights: Promising practices for foster youth

Below are some of the promising practices that districts outlined in their LCAPs. As mentioned before, these actions are specific to foster youth and do not include the general population or other subgroups.

Establish data monitoring system

County: Riverside
District:Perris Union High
District Size:10,169
Projected Foster Youth Size: 120

Example: Data systems are created to ensure that the district identifies and serves its foster children (fields may include points of contact, grades, assessments, further supports, etc.).

Develop local policies and procedures

County: Kern
District: Kern High School District
District Size: 36,486
Projected Foster Youth Size: 351

Example: The Resource Counselor will work to coordinate counseling services/programs and develop/implement new practices/protocols that will reduce inefficiencies and improve overall services to students. A main focus is to provide avenues for "seamless transitioning" into college or career.

Coordinate services across agencies and within district staff

County: Kern
District: Kern High School District
District Size: 36,486
Projected Foster Youth Size: 351

Example: Improve and increase services for Foster Youth that will include working closely with community and education agencies to coordinate services.

Provide appropriate support staff

County: San Bernardino
District: Victor Valley Union High
District Size: 12,872
Projected Foster Youth Size: 234

Example: Ensure Foster Youth District Liaison has adequate training, knowledge, time and resources to carry out responsibilities (Ed. Code 48853.5) to reduce the effects of mobility for our foster youth.

Provide academic supports

County: San Diego
District: Sweetwater Union High
District Size: 40, 683
Projected Foster Youth Size: 319

Example:Develop and pilot Foster Youth Educational Plans for foster youth in 10th grade. Foster youth students eligible to receive 1:1 tutoring provided by a consultant in addition to site based tutoring.

Provide behavioral, social, and emotional supports

County: San Bernardino
District: Victor Valley Union High
District Size: 12,872
Projected Foster Youth Size: 234

Example: Assist foster youth with school engagement (funds for sports and extracurricular activities).

Train staff on foster youth needs and policies

County: Orange
District: Anaheim Union High
District Size: 32,347
Projected Foster Youth Size: 152

Example: Provide additional professional learning/training on strategies to better support socio-emotional and/or mental health issues: cost included in District Professional Learning Plan.

Provide parent education and County: Riverside

District: Perris Union High
District Size: 10,169
Projected Foster Youth Size: 120

Example: School staff meet with the foster parent, court appointed special advocate, social worker, and/or other support adult to partner on the most successful school program for the student.

NEXT STEPS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Below are some areas of growth that districts can begin to incorporate into their LCAPs. While there are many efforts aimed at supporting foster youth, the suggestions below reflect areas that were not highly represented.

Attach outcomes to actions & allocations to better evaluate programming efforts. Many of the actions outlined in the LCAPs were not specific to an outcome for this subgroup. By specifying an outcome, districts can evaluate their efforts and make appropriate adjustments to their programs.

Focus on building parent engagement throughout the year and during the LCAP community engagement meetings. By engaging parents and caregivers throughout the year, schools can help address the academic, social/emotional, and behavioral issues that impact foster youth students' academic achievement. By having foster parents' voices present during the LCAP community engagement meetings, districts can begin to better understand how the specific needs of foster youth are being addressed and areas for continued growth within the district.

Coordinate with local social service agencies, such as the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), to properly identify foster youth and the services they need to be successful. Coordinating with social service agencies is important for providing appropriate services for foster youth, as well as avoiding the duplication of services. The services provided to foster youth are often specific to each child, therefore engaging all community partners will help in providing meaningful and targeted services.

Create and maintain policies and procedures for incoming foster youth. Implementing policies and procedures within a district will help to ensure that all staff are able to appropriately refer students to staff who can provide them with support. This can also help with transitioning students into the district in a timely manner; as well as ensuring foster youth students receive the appropriate academic and social supports so that they can be successful and continue to focus on their education.