

Aligning California's foster youth services (FYS) program with the LCFF¹

The definition of “foster youth” in the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) includes all foster youth, regardless of where they are placed. This does not match the definition of “foster youth” in California’s Foster Youth Services (FYS) program, nor the funding for the FYS program, both of which are limited to foster youth placed in traditional foster care settings. This misalignment is creating confusion for school districts and county offices of education. More importantly, it means foster youth placed with relatives are not eligible or funded to receive services provided by FYS programs, despite recent studies finding they have educational outcomes that are similar, and similarly poor, to foster youth placed in traditional foster care settings. **The FYS program should be aligned with the LCFF so that all foster children receive the educational supports they need, regardless of the type of foster placement in which they reside.**

Where are foster children placed?

Removed from their families because they have experienced abuse or neglect, the State is responsible for the health, safety and well-being of foster children. One of the State’s most important decisions is determining the child’s foster placement. Many times, it is in a child’s best interest to live with a relative. Indeed, relative foster placements are the preferred placement under both State and federal law. **Because FYS programs are not authorized or funded to serve foster youth in non-traditional foster care settings only 48% of California’s foster youth receive FYS support.**

What are their educational outcomes?

The educational outcomes of students in foster care are heartbreakingly poor. The Invisible Achievement Gap, a recent groundbreaking report found that California foster youth:

- Were significantly more likely to change schools.
- Were significantly more likely to be enrolled in the lowest-performing schools.
- Tested *below basic* and *far below basic* at twice the rate of students statewide.
- Were significantly more likely to drop out than any other at-risk student group.
- Had a 58 percent grade-12 graduation rate, the lowest rate among at-risk student groups, and as compared to a grade-12 graduation rate of 84 percent for students statewide.²

Studies have found the educational outcomes of foster children living with relatives to be just as poor as those living in non-relative foster homes. In fact, a recent report found that California foster youth who spent most of their time living with relatives do not complete high school, enroll in community college, or persist in community college at rates any different than youth who spent most of their time living in non-relative foster homes.³

How can we align FYS with LCFF?

Recognizing that *all* foster youth face unique educational challenges, the definition of “foster youth” in the LCFF includes all foster youth, regardless of where they are placed. (Ed. Code § 42238.01). Yet FYS programs are not authorized or funded to serve foster children living with relatives or in several other placements types (Ed. Code § 42921). Unless the FYS program is aligned with the LCFF, over 20,000 school age foster children will not receive the educational supports they need.⁴

The current FYS budget is approximately \$15 million. This supports 48% of California’s foster youth. Maintaining the per-student funding level established in 2006 while funding the FYS program to support all foster youth requires a total FYS budget of \$28.6 million. ***Aligning FYS with LCFF requires changing the FYS definition of foster youth to match the LCFF definition of foster youth and increasing FYS funding by \$13.6 million. These changes will ensure the LCFF fulfills its promise to all California’s foster children, regardless of where they are placed.***

¹ Produced by the Alliance for Children’s Rights, Children Now, and the National Center for Youth Law. Please contact Melissa San Miguel at msanmiguel@youthlaw.org for more information or with any questions.

² Vanessa X. Barrat, BethAnn Berliner, *The Invisible Achievement Gap, Part One*, The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning at WestEd, 2013.

³ Kristine Frerer, Lauren Davis Sosenko, Robin R. Henke, *At Greater Risk: California Foster Youth and the Path from High School to College*, Stuart Foundation, 2013.

⁴ Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Williams, D., Yee, H., Hightower, L., Mason, F., Lou, C., Peng, C., King, B., & Lawson, J. (2014). *CCWIP reports*. Retrieved 2/24/2014, from University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website.