



ARIZONA ED CONNECTIONS

Arizona Education Connections is a newsletter highlighting some of the important work happening in Arizona to improve the education outcomes for foster youth. By fostering connections between practitioners, policy makers and community organizations, we hope to strengthen statewide efforts on behalf of these children. For more information or to contribute content to future communications, please contact Taylor Chambers at tchambers@youthlaw.org.

FosterEd Progress Reports Presented at Governor's Council for Child Safety & Family Empowerment



Education Liaison Jennie Hedges presented Mason's Story to the Council. Read [Mason's Story](#) in Jennie's words at the bottom of this newsletter.

FosterEd announced yesterday during the Governor's Council for Child Safety & Family Empowerment the release of two reports evaluating our first year as a statewide program. The first, *Building Champions for Students in Foster Care: FosterEd Progress Update*, details our program implementation and growth. The second, *FosterEd Arizona Preliminary Evaluation Report*, from independent evaluator RTI International, includes findings from the first year of a two-year implementation and impact evaluation of the FosterEd program. Both reports are available to the public on our website at foster-ed.org.

The Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment consists of members appointed by Governor Doug Ducey, is chaired by First Lady Angela Ducey and co-chaired by Kathryn Pidgeon. The Council focuses its efforts on reducing and preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences and has heard from experts on topics related to ACEs, trauma informed care, and the prevention of childhood abuse and neglect.

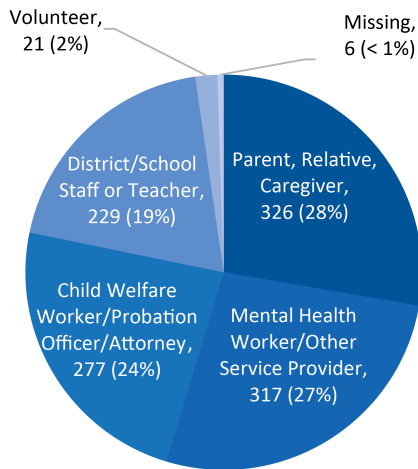
The Council engaged enthusiastically with all of our presenters, asking Education Liaison Jennie Hedges, Director Molly Dunn, Senior Director Michelle Francois, and RTI International's Jennifer Laird questions about the young people our program serves. First Lady Angela Ducey thanked the presenters as well as Dawn Wallace of the Governor's Office of Education for championing this program.

"I'm proud of our bipartisan work on this. It's such an important program for such a forgotten part of our community." - Angela Ducey

FosterEd Celebrates First Year as a Statewide Program

During the first year of statewide implementation, FosterEd began providing multi-tiered services in Maricopa County, and this summer we expanded our services into Yavapai County which, in the future, will become a service hub for students throughout Northern Arizona.

In the last year, we have provided education support to nearly 400 students in foster care throughout the state, including almost 300 students in need of immediate assistance to address issues that threatened their educational success. We also provided intensive, relationship-focused services to more than 100 high-school students. Together with our students and their education champions and teams, we worked toward achieving more than 800 education goals.



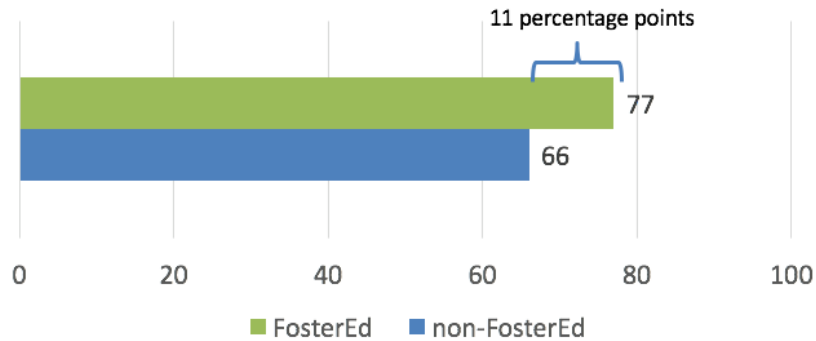
A key aspect of our approach is strengthening relationships with community members who are important in students' lives. In the past year, our students and education liaisons have worked together with over 300 parents/caregivers, nearly 300 child welfare specialists and attorneys, over 200 school staff, and over 300 behavioral health professionals. Additionally, ten percent of our students were matched with a FosterEd volunteer from their community.

Participation in FosterEd led to 11% Increase in Persistence and Graduation

At FosterEd we experience the impact of our work through students and their stories, like Mason's, whose story is featured below, on a daily basis. We are excited to share the empirical evidence of that impact with our communities through RTI's *Preliminary Evaluation Report*. For the first time, RTI's evaluation compares academic indicators for foster youth served by FosterEd and foster youth not served by the program, increasing the rigor of evaluation. Although these numbers are preliminary, the results of the evaluation point to several promising findings, including that receiving long-term supports from FosterEd increases the likelihood that a student will graduate, complete, or remain

enrolled in school at the end of the year. At the end of the 2017-2018 school year, high school students that had worked with a FosterEd Education Liaison were 11% more likely to have achieved one of these outcomes.

Receiving intensive FosterEd services increased the probability of a positive end-of-year status.



RTI's comparison study allows us for the first time to see the statistically meaningful impact FosterEd has on young people in care and their educational success. This graph shows the 11% increase in likelihood of graduation, grade completion, or continued enrollment.

Mason's Story

As told by his Education Liaison Jennie Hedges

Sometimes, being an Education Liaison is like being the middle-person between what can feel like a dozen other people who are often not happy with one another. When these adults can come together to support a student in need, so much success is possible.

When I began working with Mason*, his biological parents were at odds with the Department of Child Safety (DCS) and their child's school administration, and each party was finding it difficult to work with one another. When DCS sent FosterEd a referral for Mason, the main challenge was that Mason, a second grader, was having extreme behavioral challenges in school. He was assaulting staff and peers and spending 90% of his day sitting in the principal's office where he felt safest. Mason had a few mental and behavioral health diagnoses, and did not have a special education plan in place at the time I started working with him.

Mason's parents first refused to consent to special education evaluations despite the school's and DCS' requests. When I joined the conversation, I first focused on addressing his parents' concerns. I explained to them what the special education evaluation process looked like, what it meant for their son, what it could lead to, and asked them what their biggest fears were. After learning, listening, conversing about the pros, cons, fears, and concerns they made the decision to consent to the evaluations. Mason qualified for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and began receiving special education services related to his learning and emotional disabilities at a new school. His parents have been included and participate in each meeting that has followed and are more confident in the help he is receiving. Mason says he is excited about his new school because he likes the charts he gets to keep (the visual aids that he uses to track his daily routine).

Mason is now on a pathway to receive the education he deserves. He has a much greater chance to succeed because his school, DCS, behavioral health team and

family are working together, and because his parent's now feel empowered to make decisions to address his educational needs. This empowerment came from the opportunity FosterEd provides to members of a student's team to learn more, talk more, and achieve more as a unit whose sole focus is the student's educational success.

* We have changed the actual name of the student referenced in this story to protect the student's privacy.

“We and the youth we serve are in gratitude to the many leaders across Arizona who are committed to doing everything possible to ensure children and youth in foster care are afforded every opportunity to succeed in school” - Director Molly Dunn

Arizona Education Connections is a publication of FosterEd Arizona. For more information about FosterEd visit foster-ed.org.

FosterEd is an initiative of the [National Center for Youth Law](http://www.nacyl.org).



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