Evaluation of FosterEd Santa Cruz
Year 1of Implementation

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Executive Summary

"[The first year of implementation] has been very successful. The term 'FosterEd' is part of our culture. We've been trying to make education a centerpiece, and FosterEd has been the impetus to bring about changes we'd thought about but didn't think we had the power to do. Education is now on the table more now than ever before. When I started, education was a one line item in the court report. Now everyone is focused on education."
—County Leadership Team Member

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 starting in 2009. With many lessons learned and promising initial findings, California's Improving Educational Outcomes for Children in Care (IEOCC) workgroup encouraged FosterEd to establish a two-year pilot in a California county.

In 2011, FosterEd approached leaders of the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (SCCOE), Family and Children's Services (FCS), and Juvenile Court to gauge their interest in partnering on a pilot project. After a number of exploratory conversations, and with a strong foundation in effective cross-agency collaboration, the County leaders welcomed the opportunity and thus the Santa Cruz FosterEd partnership began.

FosterEd has five major objectives:

- Identify one or more Educational Champions for each school-age foster child in Santa Cruz County.
- Ensure Educational Champions have or develop the beliefs, expectations, and knowledge needed to support the student's school success.
- Create an education team for each school-age foster child in Santa Cruz County.
- Ensure students' educational needs are increasingly identified and addressed.
- Over time, contribute to improvement in educational outcomes (e.g., attendance rates) for foster youth.

FosterEd's work in California is part of the Education Equals Partnership, a statewide effort dedicated to improving educational outcomes for students from foster care, starting with preschool and extending across the entire education continuum.

Evaluation Overview

In July 2012, NCYL contracted with RTI International to conduct an external evaluation of the Santa Cruz FosterEd pilot. The evaluation is expected to go through December 2014. RTI is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to conducting innovative, multidisciplinary research that improves the human condition.

RTI has approached this study from a Developmental Evaluation framework, allowing for greater flexibility when analyzing initiatives or innovations, which tend to continuously develop and evolve. Furthermore, Developmental Evaluation separates itself 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.

The evaluation is guided by four general questions:

- Who participates in FosterEd?
- What activities are associated with the implementation of FosterEd?

- Do Educational Champions who participate in FosterEd demonstrate growth over time in beliefs, behaviors, and capacities associated with educational success?
- Do students demonstrate improvement in educational performance?

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. The evaluation matrix 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 Santa Cruz pilot and the first year of implementation (January 2013 through December 2013). 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.

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 Santa Cruz County. By December 2013, seven of the infrastructure elements were completed and four were ongoing.

The completed infrastructure components include:

- Developed Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) and Interagency Agreements within the County
- Hired and trained FosterEd staff
- Co-located ELs at County Office of Education and Child Welfare Offices
- Established joint employment status with NCYL and SCCOE
- Developed Mentoring Modules
- Customized Foster Focus for Santa Cruz

The ongoing infrastructure components include:

- Establishment and persistence of County Leadership Team
- Engagement with California's Improving Educational Outcomes for Children in Care (IEOCC) workgroup
- Linking districts in Foster Focus

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 2013? **116**
- How many Educational Champions were served by FosterEd in 2013? **123**
- How many volunteers were recruited and trained in 2013? **17**

Progress on Outcomes Indicators

RTI has identified a number of youth, Educational Champion, county, 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 faced by foster youth as a group and because 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 plans for foster youth were developed in 2013? **102**

Some of the youth that were served in the program were recent entrants into FosterEd who did not yet have a case plan at the time the data were extracted for analyses from Foster Focus in the first week of January 2014.

Within a youth's case plan, there is at least one Service Objective, otherwise known as a goal. Each Service Objective has any number of Case Management Services and any number of Stakeholder Objectives. Case Management Services are expected to be provided by a service provider, often the FosterEd Educational Liaison, to support the Service Objective. Stakeholder Objectives are goals set for a non-service provider, typically the Educational Champion, to support the Service Objective.

- How many Service Objectives were identified for FosterEd Cases? **566**

- How many Service Objectives were completed by the end of the first year of implementation? **61%** completed, **25%** still in progress

Seventy-seven, or 14%, of the 566 Service Objectives had not been completed and were not in progress (see Figure A). An analysis of those incomplete Service Objectives revealed they were associated with cases that had been closed by FosterEd because the child left dependency (e.g., was reunited with his or her parents or was adopted), moved out of county, or was a non-minor dependent who declined FosterEd services.
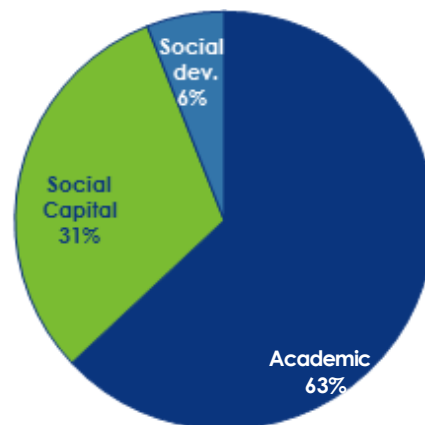
FIGURE A: Status of Services Objectives, Year 1 of Implementation
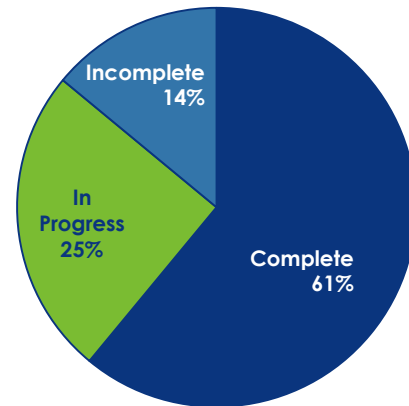
SOURCE: Education plan data from Foster Focus.

- What types of Service Objectives were identified for FosterEd cases? Mostly academic, followed by social capital and social development (see Figure B).

FIGURE B: Type of Services Objectives, Year 1 of Implementation

SOURCE: Education plan data from Foster Focus.

Educational Champions Outcomes

All Educational Champions who completed a feedback survey reported that "since participating in the FosterEd program, I have learned new ways of helping [my youth] do well in school" and that they would "recommend the FosterEd program to others adults in the lives of foster youth."

County Outcomes

While a number of Community Leadership Team members noted during interviews that FosterEd benefited from a history of collaboration in the County between SCCOE, FSC, the Juvenile Court, and community-based organizations such as the Parent Center and CASA, all reported that collaboration among these agencies has increased due to FosterEd. RTI witnessed deep and effective collaboration during the monthly Community Leadership Team meetings, and during those meetings many other interactions and new systems for collaborating were discussed, such as improved processes for FSC to help districts identify their foster youth.

State Outcomes

RTI is tracking a number of state-level outcomes identified by FosterEd as goals to achieve, beyond the Santa Cruz 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 as a reflection of FosterEd's efforts given the knowledge of the extent of its involvement in state working groups and other state-level activities.

NCYL did not expect to achieve many of the state goals during the first year of the Santa Cruz pilot, but rather aimed to meet them toward the end of the pilot or in the first few years following the pilot. Nevertheless, five state-level outcomes were attained during this first year:

- Legislation requiring data sharing between the California Department of Social Services

(CDSS) and California Department of Education (CDE) and between CDE and Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

- Legislation holding schools and school districts accountable for the educational outcomes of foster youth.
- Legislation requiring school districts to develop plans detailing how they will improve the educational outcomes of foster youth.
- Improved judicial process and forms to identify a foster child's education rights holder developed, adopted, and used outside of Santa Cruz County.
- Standardized MOU for use in using FYS funds to leverage Title IV-E funds developed, adopted, and used outside of Santa Cruz County.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The launch and first year of implementation of FosterEd Santa Cruz has been remarkably successful. Rarely do complex initiatives involving many partners and multiple system changes achieve so much so early.

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

- Carefully monitor the use of Goalbook among team members, particularly parents and caregivers. Be ready to support the engagement of team members outside of Goalbook.
- Invest more effort in developing stronger relationships with districts, schools, and social workers.
- Ensure the Court continues to be a prominent partner.
- Use the Santa Cruz experience of linking data to press for a good state solution.
- Focus now on planning the transition from pilot to post-pilot program.
- Continue integrating FosterEd and the Education Equal Partnership.

Contents

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 starting in 2009. With many lessons learned and promising initial findings, California's Improving Educational Outcomes for Children in Care (IEOCC) workgroup encouraged FosterEd to establish a two-year pilot in a California county. The IEOCC is an inter-agency workgroup with representatives from the California Department of Education, Department of Social Services, Administrative Office of the Courts, and Child Welfare Director's Association.

In 2011, FosterEd approached leaders of the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (SCCOE), Family and Children's Services (FCS), and Juvenile Court to gauge their interest in partnering on a pilot project. After a number of exploratory conversations, and with a strong foundation in effective cross-agency collaboration, the County leaders welcomed the opportunity. In May of 2012, the partners applied for and received a grant from the Children's Bureau of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. The pilot is also supported by generous funding from the Stuart Foundation, USA Funds, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the TK Foundation.

FosterEd's work in California is part of the Education Equals Partnership, a statewide effort dedicated to improving educational outcomes for students from foster care, starting with preschool and extending across the entire education continuum. Santa Cruz County is one of four Partnership demonstration counties, each implementing a common agenda for change and tracking progress on collectively established educational outcomes.

The Need

In 2012, there were approximately 400,000 children in foster care in the United States, with approximately 55,000 living in California (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013; Needell et al., 2013). Taken from their families because they had experienced abuse or neglect, foster children are among the most vulnerable of the American population. Research has shown that along with the abuse and trauma from being taken from their families, many foster youth 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 had ever received an "A" in English, math, history, or science

- As many as 69% screen positive for a behavior 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 in California 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 students designated as having low socioeconomic status (SES), English learners, and students with disabilities, foster youth experience more educational challenges and have poorer educational outcomes (Frerer, Davis Sosenko, & Henke, 2013; Barrat & Berliner, 2013). Compared with these other groups,

- foster youth were consistently among the lowest performing subgroups academically in math and English;

- had the highest dropout rates and were less likely to graduate from high school;

- were more likely than the general population to be enrolled in the lowest performing schools;

- were twice as likely to be designated with a disability and five times more likely to be classified with an emotional disturbance;

- were more likely to change schools during the school year; and

- were less likely to enroll and persist in community college for a second year.

The Santa Cruz Context

Approximately 300 Santa Cruz County youth were placed in out-of-home foster care in 2012 (Needell et al., 2013). In addition, there were approximately 150 active child welfare cases in which the child was residing at home (Data provided by Santa Cruz County Human Services Department, January 2012). Almost one-quarter were age two or younger, 18% were age 3 to 5, which are typical preschool ages, particularly given the ages measured in July (Figure 1).

The remaining youth were ages in which youth are expected to be in K–12 education or early postsecondary education (ages 6 to 20).

The largest ethnic group of youth in foster care in Santa Cruz is Latino (48%), followed by White (45%). Small percentages are African American and Asian (5% and 2%, respectively).

FIGURE 1: Age and Ethnicity of Santa Cruz County Foster Youth, 2012
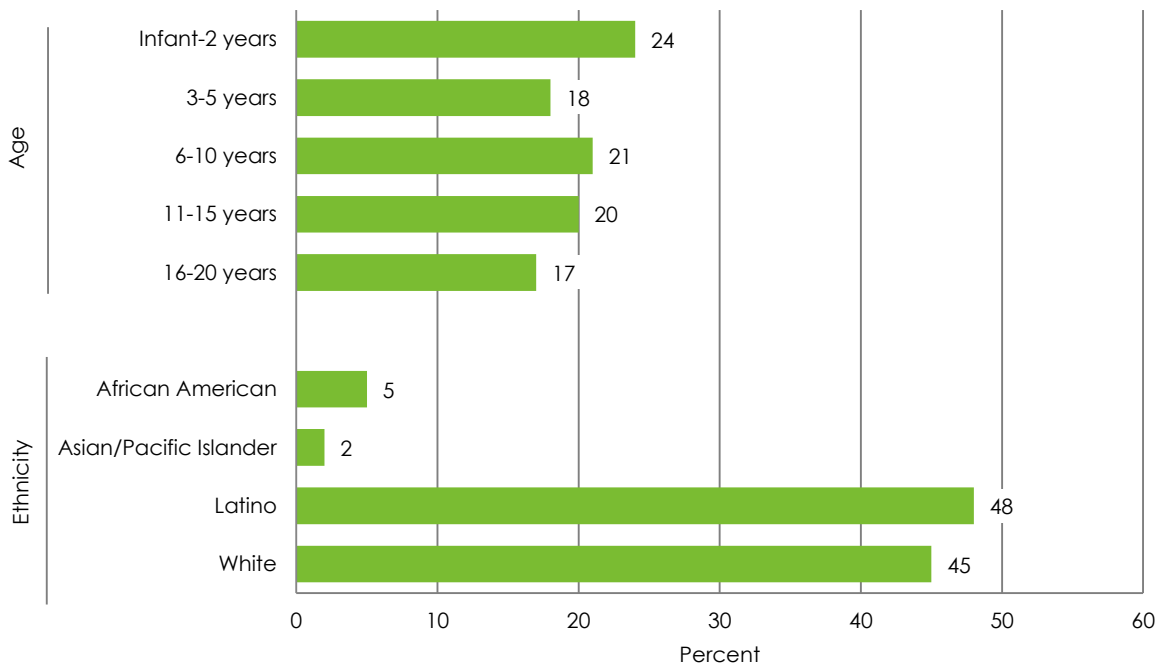
NOTE: Included in the figure are children under age 21 in foster care on July 1, 2012. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Needell et al., 2013.

Of the 58 counties in California, Santa Cruz ranks number 27 in greatest number of foster youth. It has about 20 more children than the median number of foster youth per county (Needell et al., 2013, http://www. kidsdata.org). The county range is tremendous, with 18,523 foster youth in Los Angeles County, and none in Alpine County as of July 1, 2012.

FosterEd Model

As will be discussed later in this report, the details of the FosterEd Santa Cruz model evolved over the course of the first year of the Santa Cruz pilot to respond to contextual challenges and opportunities and early learnings. However, the overall objectives have persisted.

FOSTERED OBJECTIVES

1 Identify one or more Educational Champions for each school-age foster child in Santa Cruz County.

Parental involvement in education is one of the strongest predictors of students' 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 wellbeing; 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.

2 Ensure Educational Champions have or develop the beliefs, expectations, and knowledge needed to support the student's school success.

FosterEd expects that most Educational Champions will need mentoring or coaching to effectively support and advocate for the youth. Many of these Educational Champions may not have been traditionally successful students themselves and may not know how or have the confidence to navigate school systems. Thus the FosterEd program includes a component that provides the necessary mentorship.

3 Create an education team for each school-age foster child in Santa Cruz County.

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.

4 Ensure students' educational needs are increasingly identified and addressed.

As youth enter FosterEd, their strengths and needs, Educational Champions, and teams are identified. The process of doing so has evolved substantially over the course of the first year. This evolution is described on page 29. Based on the assessment of strengths and needs, goals are set for the youth and the Educational Champions. The team collaborates to support the goals and track progress.

5 Over time, contribute to improvement in educational outcomes (e. g. attendance rates) for foster youth.

The guiding objective of FosterEd is to improve educational outcomes for youth, including increased school attendance rates, improved grades and test scores, decreased behavior incidents at school, and increased high school graduation rates.

Logic Model

Figure 2 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 by 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.

FIGURE 2: FosterEd Logic Model
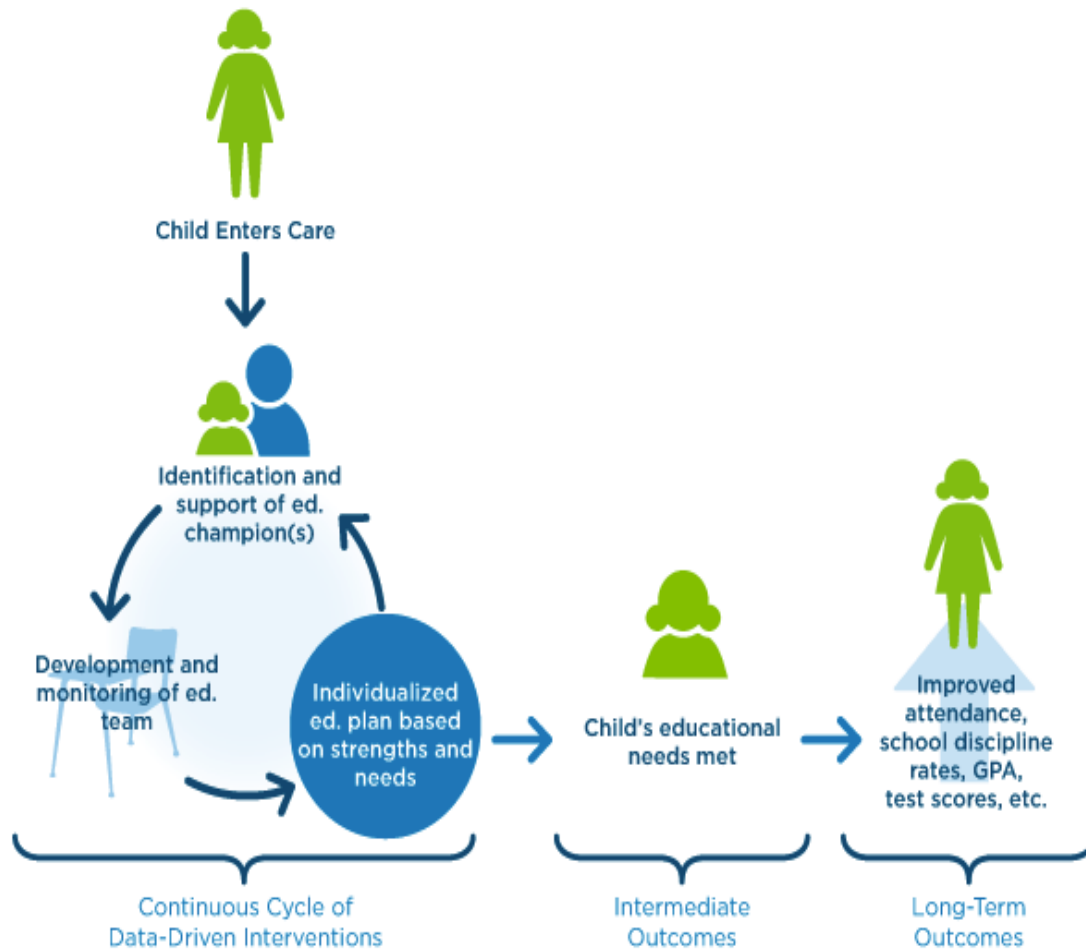
SOURCE: National Center for Youth Law

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.

The Critical Role of the Educational Liaison

Educational Liaisons (ELs) essentially staff the FosterEd program. In Santa Cruz, three ELs manage the FosterEd cases, and a full-time project manager provides oversight and support to the ELs, while also nurturing and supporting partnerships with SCCOE, FCS, Juvenile Court and other collaborators.

The ELs work with FCS and the Dependency Court Judge to bring cases into FosterEd, then stay with FosterEd cases throughout their duration. ELs coordinate the assessment of the strengths and needs of the youth, identify Educational Champions, and assist the team in developing and tracking educational goals and objectives. Details of the ELs' roles have evolved considerably over the first year of implementation, which is described on pages 31–33.

Evaluation Overview

In July of 2012, NCYL contracted with RTI International[1] to conduct an external evaluation of the Santa Cruz FosterEd pilot. The evaluation is expected to go through December of 2014. 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. Dr. Beverly Farr led the early stages of the evaluation, with support from Dr. Jennifer Laird. With Dr. Farr's retirement, Dr. Laird has assumed leadership of 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 Development Evaluation framework, which allows for greater flexibility when analyzing initiatives or innovations, which in nature 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.

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[1] The initial contract was with MPR Associates. In May 2013, MPR was acquired by RTI.

"When innovating within a complex system, [however], it is difficult to understand the ramifications of changes. The dynamics of a complex system have a high degree of connectivity and interdependence. There are diverse elements whose interactions create unpredictable, emergent results...The very techniques that enable evaluation excellence in more static situations—standardization of inputs, consistency of treatment, uniformity of outcomes and clarity of causal linkages— are unhelpful, even harmful, to situations where there is a lot of uncertainty and 'moving goalposts...Developmental evaluation applies to an ongoing process of innovation in which both the path and the destination are evolving"
(Gamble, McConnell Family Foundation, 2008, pp. 14-15.)

By using a Developmental Evaluation framework the study is able to adjust with the evolution of the program. Furthermore, Developmental Evaluation separates itself from more traditional evaluative approaches in that the evaluators actively participates in partnership, and are expected to support on-going program improvement by helping program leaders use data as it emerges from the evaluation to improve the program.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation is guided by four general questions.

- Who participates in FosterEd?

- What activities are associated with the implementation of FosterEd?

- Do educational champions who participate in FosterEd demonstrate growth over time in beliefs, behaviors,

and capacities associated with educational success?

- Do students demonstrate improvement in educational performance?

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 make sure 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 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 Santa Cruz pilot, the pilot is part of a broader NCYL effort in California to support the education of foster youth. FosterEd in California 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 Community Leadership Team and incorporated their feedback. RTI believes that this level 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 1 lists the methods used thus far. Moving forward, RTI expects to continue with those evaluation methods and adding more methods. Most importantly, longitudinal educational data for the youth will be extracted from Foster Focus and analyzed.

TABLE 1: Methods for Evaluating FosterEd Santa Cruz, Year 1 of Implementation

Qualitative Data Collection Methods	Notes
Weekly Calls with FosterEd Staff	The purpose of these calls were two-fold: To coordinate about the logistics of the evaluation (e. g. plan for data collection), and to discuss challenges and unexpected opportunities that were arising within the program with the goal of supporting continuous program improvement.
Observations of Community Leadership Team Meetings	The Leadership Team met monthly or bimonthly leading up to and during the first year of implementation. RTI participated in these meetings, providing periodic evaluation updates and observing the dynamics of the group and the issues discussed.
Interviews with Community Leadership Team	RTI interviewed 9 of the 10 Leadership Team Members between December 2013 and January 2014. One team member was not interviewed because she was a recent replacement for a former member. The interview protocol is included in Appendix B.
Focus Group with Educational Liaisons	RTI conducted a focus group with the three Education Liaisons in December of 2013. The focus group protocol is included in Appendix C.
Quantitative Data Collection Methods	Notes
Administrative data (e. g., number of cases, number and relation of Educational Champion)	FosterEd tracked case administrative data in an Excel workbook. Moving forward, this information will be tracked in Goalbook.
Case Planning data	During the first year of implementation, case planning data were kept in Foster Focus. RTI worked with FosterEd and the Sacramento Office of Education which manages the Foster Focus data system to extract the data for analysis. Moving forward, this information will be tracked in Goalbook.
Surveys of Educational Champions	In collaboration with FosterEd, RTI developed a survey for Educational Champions to gather their experiences with and feedback on FosterEd. The survey is included in Appendix D.
Volunteer Data	One of the Educational Liaisons leads the recruitment and training of volunteers and keep records of those efforts, including feedback surveys administered at the end of the training session.

Focus and Structure of This Report

This Year 1 evaluation report focuses on the preparation for the launch of the FosterEd Santa Cruz pilot, and the first year of implementation (January 2013 through December 2013). The evaluation findings are grouped by progress made on infrastructure, practice, and outcomes indicators. Qualitative data are woven throughout the presentation 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.

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 Santa Cruz County. By December 2013, seven of the infrastructure elements were completed and four were ongoing. This section summarizes the progress made on these indicators. While all of the progress should be considered achievements, this report calls out extra-ordinary 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 Community Leadership Team Members and the focus group with Educational Liaisons.

Completed Infrastructure

The following seven infrastructure indicators were completed by December 2013, with many having been accomplished before the launch of FosterEd in January 2013.

✅ Developed Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) and Interagency Agreements within the County

A number of necessary agreements were developed and signed prior to the launch of FosterEd Santa Cruz:

- An Interagency agreement signed by the County Office of Education, Human Services Department, and districts to share child welfare and education data through Foster Focus.

- Two addenda to the above noted interagency agreement to share de-identified data with RTI for evaluation (one signed by districts, and the other by the Human Services Department)

- A MOU between the County Office of Education and RTI to share de-identified data for evaluation.

- An MOU signed by the districts, NCYL, County Office of Education, Family and Children Services, and the Juvenile Court regarding educational teaming approach to support foster youth educational success (signed in fall 2013).

✅ Developed MOU to draw down Title IV-E Funds

NCYL worked with the Family and Children's Services and the County Office of Education to apply for drawdown of federal Title IV-E funds, through the California Department of Social Services. The purpose of this drawdown was to create and support one of three EL positions.

✅ Hired and trained FosterEd staff

Leading up to the launch of FosterEd Santa Cruz, three Education Liaisons (ELs) were hired and trained. These ELs were supervised by the Project Manager for FosterEd Santa Cruz who started in that position in November of 2011. Mid-way through the first year of implementation and as FosterEd was launching a new pilot in Pima County Arizona, a Data Manager was hired to support both pilot projects. When one EL went on maternity leave, a fourth EL was hired. This person had worked previously with NCYL in another capacity. In anticipation of the FosterEd work continuing to expand to other counties, and expanding

activities at the state level, a plan was developed to transition the original FosterEd Santa Cruz Program Manager into the Chief Operating Officer position of the overall FosterEd initiative. The fourth EL that was hired joined the team with the understanding that when the EL on maternity leave returned from leave, he would transition into the Project Manager role. During most of 2013 there were four full-time staff dedicated to the FosterEd Santa Cruz pilot (three ELs and a Project Manager) and two additional staff supporting part time (the Data Manger and the Founder and Director of FosterEd).

Particularly notable achievements related to hiring and training FosterEd staff

Construction of a Strong FosterEd Staff. Community Leadership Team members voiced much confidence in the skills, dedication, and collaborative spirit of the FosterEd staff. A few noted that they participated in the EL hiring process, and felt the inclusion of Community Leadership Team members in the hiring decisions contributed to selection of a strong EL staff.

Exceptional Project Manager; Thorough Leadership Transition. The leadership of the original Project Manager was cited by many Community Leadership Team members as a critical ingredient to the success of the first year of implementation. *"[The Program Manager] is beyond exceptional. She is brilliant, incredibly prepared, humble, and really open to people's ideas. Her response time is impressive. She really matches people's styles. She meets people where they are at,"* described one member. While initially concerned by the news that she would transitioning away from a Santa Cruz-only role to a broader set of responsibilities, Community Leadership

Members felt the transition to the new Project Manager was smooth and well

planned, and they had confidence in his credentials and ability to establish himself in the project and within the partnerships.

Comprehensive Training and Professional Development for ELs. The initial formal training for ELs consisted of a one-week set of sessions, including a number led by partner agencies. The ELs noted the value in meeting with the partner agencies during their initial training in order to understand the basic operations of those agencies and discuss how they were going to collaborate. One EL noted that observing dependency court was one of the most valuable components of the training. In addition to formal training sessions during their first two week, ELs had time to read various background documents, such as the mentor modules discussed below, and to discuss them in a more informal setting with each other and their Program Manager. The ELs generally had more professional experience in education than in child welfare. However, they felt that the formal trainings did equip them with sufficient knowledge to start their positions, and they continued to learn more on the job. In addition to participating in the initial, formal training for ELs, Community Leadership Team members have assisted with ongoing professional development. For example, recognizing that the ELs needed more support in handling complex and emotionally difficult cases, one partner with therapeutics credentials and a lot of experience in child welfare offered to facilitate a monthly session, lasting one and a half hours, with the ELs during which they discussed strategies for effectively working with difficult cases and managing job stress. The sessions were cited as being very helpful during the EL focus group

Co-located ELs at County Office of Education and Child

Welfare Offices

To facilitate collaboration with staff the County Office of Education and Family and Children's Services, the ELs' offices are located within those agencies' buildings. One EL is located at the County Office of Education, and the other two are located at two separate child welfare offices, one in South County and the other North County. This co-location was cited by a few Community Leadership Team members and the ELs themselves as an important factor in rooting FosterEd in the county. One EL explained, *"My location has been excellent because a lot of the social workers are here, and I'm in the cubicle in the middle of the room and they have to pass me to use the restroom! I have a lot of casual conversations and it's good for the project."*

✔ Established joint employment status with NCYL and SCCOE

Two ELs have joint employment statuses, as do the Project Manager and Data Manager with NCYL and SCCOE. The third EL is an employee of SCCOE only, not of NCYL as her position is funded by federal IV-E funds (discussed above). This joint employment status enables ELs to better support cases because as COE staff they have access to foster youth's educational information.

✔ Developed Mentoring Modules

FosterEd developed 12 mentoring modules to help adults become effective Educational Champions for their youth. Each module contains a guide, supporting materials, and tip sheets. Two versions of the modules were developed: California standardized and Santa Cruz County specific. The topics of the 12 modules are:

- Beliefs, Expectations, and Aspirations about Education and Academic Performance

- 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 Santa Cruz versions, see http://www. foster-ed. org/resourcescc. html.

✔ Customized Foster Focus for Santa Cruz

Foster Focus is a database developed and managed by the Sacramento County Office of Education. It has a standard set of components that counties can access through licensing agreements. FosterEd uses many of those standard components and also needed additional features developed to support the program. FosterEd staff worked with Sacramento County to add survey and case plan components, and the ability to create adult record (for Educational Champions) linked to child record. Additionally, the partners worked to modify the script for the nightly uploads from the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to Foster Focus to include all dependency cases (Family Maintenance cases were not previously included in Foster Focus).

Ongoing Infrastructure

Progress on four 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 County Leadership Team

The County Leadership Team for the Santa Cruz FosterEd pilot is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the pilot. The team is comprised of 10 members, representing county agencies and community groups (see Table 2). An eleventh member joined in November 2013, representing Santa Cruz County Children's Mental Health agency. Each of the members is the leader of their agency or appointed by the leader to represent the agency on the Leadership team. It was established in October of 2011 and typically meets monthly or bi-monthly for two hours. Between October 2011 and the end of that year

TABLE 2. Members of the County Leadership Team

Santa Cruz County Agency/Community Organization	Representative
Juvenile Court	Presiding Juvenile Judge
Administrative Office of the Courts	Attorney
Family and Children's Services	Program Manager
Human Services Department	Director of Planning and Evaluation
County Office of Education	Foster Youth Services Coordinator
County Office of Education	Education Liaison (not for FosterEd)
Pajaro Valley Unified School District	AB 490 Liaison
CASA	Executive Director
CASA	Program Manager
Parents Center	Executive Director

the team met twice, in 2012 it met nine times, and in 2013 it met seven times. The FosterEd project manager facilitates the County Leadership Team meetings, and all three ELs as well as the FosterEd Director participate. RTI attended most of the meetings.

Particularly notable achievements related to the County Leadership Team

Strong, collaborative engagement among the Leadership Team members. Through the December evaluation interviews conducted with members of the County Leadership Team, it was clear that the members had a consistent understanding of the role of the Leadership team, felt it functioned very effectively, and thought that its contributions were important and valued. Furthermore, they felt the meetings were very well organized and facilitated by FosterEd staff. One member explained, *"I think the communication is amazing. I never felt like National Center for Youth Law took control—it's been very collaborative. We feel that if there are different issues that come up, we have an opportunity to talk about those things."* Based on its many observations of the Leadership team meetings, RTI concurs with the positive feedback given by its members. Much is accomplished in the meetings. Program challenges are discussed openly and participants provide useful and specific suggestions for addressing the challenges. Attendance is consistently high and the tone of the meetings is positive and forward looking.

A few members cited the strong history of collaboration in Santa Cruz and FosterEd's benefit in having been built on that foundation. *"It's a small town, so a lot of people have been in each other's shoes. We've literally had each other's jobs in some cases,"* noted one member. Another gave examples of past collaboration, *"We worked together in small groups on the program improvement plan for Family and*

Children's Services, and worked together to come up with the parent report to the court. We also had 'Education Village,' which was an informal collaboration where providers got together for lunch every few weeks to talk about how we could support each other. It was a great way to get to know each other and what we are doing."

Diverse set of agencies and community organizations represented on the Leadership Team; particular value of having the Dependency Judge actively involved. RTI has observed, and Leadership Team members have cited, the important contributions made by all members of the team. The early efforts by CASA to make education a primary focus for foster youth was noted by a number of interviewees as the reason why it was important that CASA was a Leadership Team member. One person explained, *"CASA is a big partner and we couldn't have done it without them. Five years ago they started thinking about the education piece and it seemed like they were more interested in it than anyone else."*

The active participation of the Dependency Judge in FosterEd was noted by a few Leadership Team members and the ELs as being particularly important. RTI also observed this. She strongly supported the program, especially when speaking to families that she was referring to FosterEd.

✔ Engagement with California's Improving Educational Outcomes for Children in Care (IEOCC) workgroup

The FosterEd Director updates the IEOCC workgroup on FosterEd Santa Cruz activities at the IEOCC's quarterly meetings. The workgroup is comprised of representatives from the California Department of Education, California Department of Social Services, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and Child Welfare Director's Association.

✔ 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 lot 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 CWS/CMS data, thereby giving social workers and other authorized child welfare staff access to the educational information of foster youth.

TABLE 3. Status of Foster Focus Linkages, December 2013

District	Percent of County K–12 Enrollment	Linked Status	Notes
Pajaro Valley Unified	50%	Mostly Linked	Most of the data expected to be linked are linked (enrollment, demographics, special education status, behavior, CAHSEE test scores, GPA, course credit). Programmer is working to link the remaining data (attendance). District uses eSchoolPlus.
Santa Cruz City Schools	18%	Linking In Progress	Working with district and Infinite Campus on linkage.
San Lorenzo Valley Unified	11%	FosterEd Plans to Link	District uses PowerSchool
Scotts Valley Unfied	6%	FosterEd Plans to Link	District uses PowerSchool
Live Oak Elementary	5%	FosterEd Plans to Link	District uses PowerSchool
Santa Cruz County Office of Ed	3%	FosterEd Plans to Link	District uses PowerSchool

NOTE: There are five additional districts in Santa Cruz County that FosterEd does not expect to link with Foster Focus. Four of these each educate less that 1% of the K–12 students in the county (Bonny Dune Elementary, Happy Valley Elementary, Mountain Elementary, and Pacific Elementary). The fifth, Soquel Union educates 5% of the K–12 students in the county.

Leading up to the launch of FosterEd Santa Cruz and throughout the first year of implementation, the FosterEd program manager worked diligently with members of the Community Leadership Team, representatives from county school districts, and the Sacramento County of Office of Education, to prepare for and implement Foster Focus linkages. The team agreed to concentrate first on linking Pajaro Valley Unified School District, by far the largest district in the county, educating half of the county's K–12 public school students. Table 3 summarizes the progress made through December 2013 in linking the Santa Cruz county districts in Foster Focus.

Areas in need of attention related to Foster Focus linkage

Foster Focus linkages not progressing as initially expected. Only one of the 11 districts in Santa Cruz county, Pajaro Valley Unified School District, was linked in Foster Focus by December 2013, and the linkages

for that district were not complete. For a second district, Santa Cruz City Schools, FosterEd was working with the district's system information system (SIS) vendor, Infinite Campus, to finalize a design document so that the script-writing process to load the district's data into Foster Focus could begin. Linkages are planned for four additional districts. Those four districts collectively educate about one quarter of K–12 public school students in the county, and all use PowerSchool as their SIS. Foster Focus links are not planned for five districts, four of which each educate less than 1% of K–12 public school students. The fifth, Soquel Union Elementary, educates 5% of the county's K–12 public schools students and uses a SIS system that is unique in the county.

Much effort invested, still more work to be done. FosterEd and its partners have made good, strategic decisions with regard to prioritizing the order in which they attempt to link districts with Foster Focus, including starting with the two largest

districts and then planning to work with a set of districts that use a common SIS vendor. Realizing the Project Manager was expending a large proportion of her time supporting the linking process, FosterEd hired a Data Manager with availability to invest even more time working with partners in both Santa Cruz and Pima County (the location of the Arizona pilot) to manage the linking process. FosterEd also provided funds to districts to hire consultants with deep familiarity with their SIS systems to assist in the linking process.

Despite these adjustments, linking districts with Foster Focus has been far more difficult and time-consuming than expected. The sources of the challenges are many. Among them is the variety of SIS systems used across the county; some differences in the content and format of district data, even among those using the same type of SIS system; and difficulty securing adequate time from consultants for the school SIS vendors. RTI has observed the many efforts FosterEd and their partners have dedicated to this process and recognize that there is no easy solution. Nevertheless, RTI hopes that by calling attention to disappointing progress made in the process of linking districts with Foster Focus the Community Leadership 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.

Customization of Goalbook for FosterEd Santa Cruz

The FosterEd model has evolved to place a greater emphasis on the role of a team of adults in supporting a foster youth's education. (This evolution is discussed in the section, "Shifts in the FosterEd SantaCruz Model".) This contrasts with the initial version of the model which focused much more heavily on supporting the Educational Champion with the idea that the Educational Champion would in turn support the youth. With this shift to a team model, FosterEd has contracted with Goalbook, an online social networking application 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. In approximately the middle of the first year of implementation, FosterEd started working with Goalbook to create a similar tool for foster youth. By the end of December, the standard features of this modified Goalbook tool for FosterEd were complete and ELs had started setting up educational teams for FosterEd in the application. FosterEd is continuing to work with Goalbook to add new features and functionalities, such as a dashboard for FosterEd staff to more easily monitor Goalbook activity and extraction tools to be able to extract data from Goalbook for the evaluation and for program administration.

Summary of Progress on Infrastructure Indicators

Much has been accomplished with regard to developing and sustaining infrastructure components to support the launch and implementation of FosterEd Santa Cruz. Each infrastructure component required substantial effort and should be considered a notable achievement. However, the Community Leadership Team, the ELs, and RTI found a few components to be particularly successful, including the process and outcomes of hiring and training the FosterEd staff and the functioning of the Community Leadership Team. The largest infrastructure challenge faced by FosterEd has been the process of linking districts within Foster Focus.

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, and the number of volunteers trained. The data presented in this section come primarily from administrative data kept by FosterEd and case management data maintained by ELs in Foster Focus.

How many youth were served by FosterEd in 2013?

Between January and November 20, 2013, **116** youth were served by FosterEd. Of these, 99 cases remained active through November 20, and 17 cases had closed by that time. Cases were closed in FosterEd when they were dismissed from dependency (e.g., children were reunified with their parents or they were adopted) or when children were placed in a foster home in another county.

Figure 3 presents demographic information on the youth served. Slightly over half (55%) were female, and slightly more than one-fifth were "transition age youth," defined as youth age 16 or older. When comparing Figure 3, which presents demographic characteristics of youth served by the program, with Figure 1, which presents demographic information for all Santa Cruz County foster youth, it may seem that

FIGURE 3 : Demographic Characterstics of FosterEd Youth, Year 1 of Implementation.
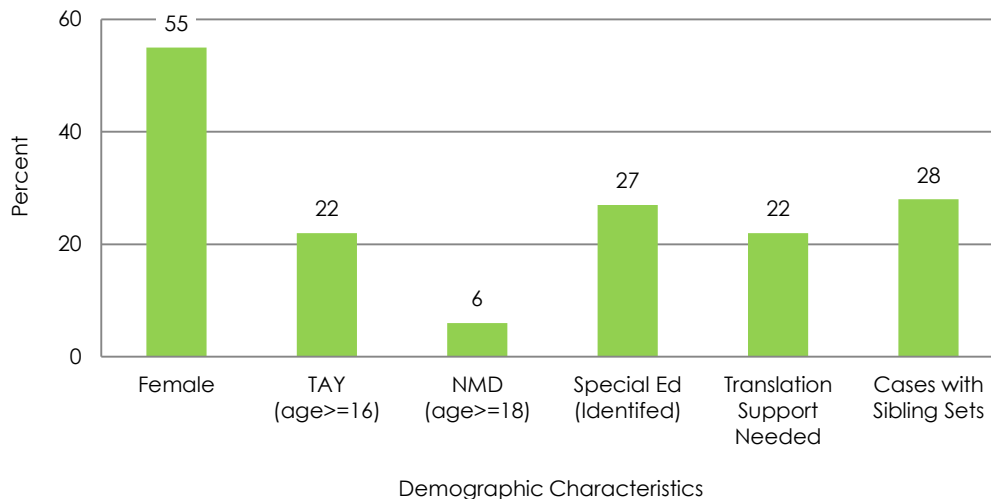
NOTE: "TAY" stands for "transition aged youth" and is defined as youth ages 16 or older. "NMD" stands or "non-minor dependents" and is defined as youth age 18 or older.
SOURCE: Administrative case data from FosterEd.

transition age youth are over-represented in FosterEd. It is important to recall, however, that FosterEd only serves youth in grades K–12 and does not serve children not yet in elementary school. Thus, infants through age 5 are included in Figure 1, but these young children are not part of the FosterEd caseload and therefore are not reflected in Figure 3 (with the exception of 5-year old kindergartners).

Approximately one-quarter of FosterEd youth have been identified by their school as Special Education students. This rate is about two-and-a-half times greater than the rate for the overall population of California K–12 students (California Legislative Analyst's Office, 2013).

How many Educational Champions were served by FosterEd in 2013?

Between January and November 20, 2013, **123** Educational Champions participated in FosterEd, 99 who were involved in cases that were still active by November 20, and 24 who were associated with cases that had closed by then. The difference in the number of youth and the number of Educational Champions reflects the fact that youth could have more than one Educational Champion, and an Educational Champion could have more than one youth.

Figure 4 presents information about the relationships between youth and their Educational Champions. Almost half (47%) of Educational Champions were biological parents; the next largest group were relatives (20%). These data suggest FosterEd was successful in identifying Educational Champions who were 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 left foster care.
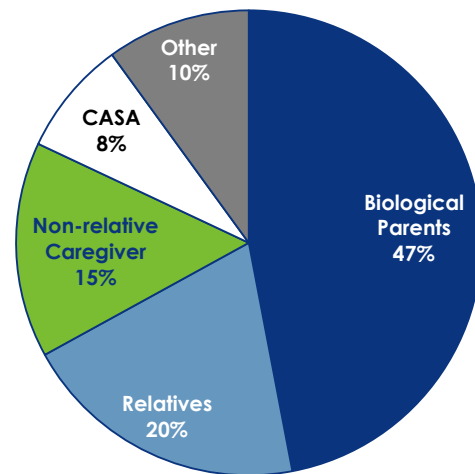
N=123
SOURCE: Administrative data from FosterEd.

How many FosterEd volunteers were recruited and trained in 2013?

FosterEd developed an extensive set of coordinated activities to recruit volunteers, including:

- Created a profile and advertised the volunteer opportunity and upcoming trainings on volunteermatch.org, scvolunteercenter.com, idealist.org, and craigslist.org

- Presened at local group meetings such as the CA Retired Teachers Association, Soroptimist Club, and Lifelong Learners

- Attended volunteer fairs and other events with CASA to do outreach

- Attended Rotary Club mixers and passed out flyers

- Circulated a press release about the Educational Support volunteer program to local papers

- Created and circulated 15 and 30 second radio spots to local radio stations
- Circulated volunteer flyers through the public library database
- Submitted information about trainings onto the community calendar which is broadcast on a local TV station
- Submitted information about trainings onto the community calendar on the COE website
- Posted flyers around the community
- Kept a master email list of people who have reached out to FosterEd to keep them apprised of upcoming volunteer training opportunities

Table 4 reports information about the number of people who contacted FosterEd to express interest in volunteering, the number who were trained, and the status of those trained. Eighty-two community members contacted FosterEd to express interest in volunteering. Of those, 16 attended a training in 2013. [2] About one-third of those trained (6) decided to withdraw from volunteering. The remaining were either assigned to a case (8) or waiting to be assigned to a case (2). For these two volunteers, the delay was their choice: one had recently had a baby and the other had a family health issue arise but expected to be available in a few months.

TABLE 4: Volunteers, Year 1 of Implementation

Status	Number of Individuals
Contacted FosterEd to express interest	82
Trained	16[2]
Assigned to a cases	8
Waiting to be assigned to a case	2
Trained but withdrew	6

[2] As of the writing of this report, an additional 15 potential volunteers have been trained.

FosterEd developed and administered short feedback surveys for the volunteer trainings. In 2013, ten trainees completed the survey (which had not been developed in time for the first training). In that survey, all reported that the "training has helped [them] understand the FosterEd Educational Support Program" and that they "understand the role of an Educational Support as well as the population [they] would be working with." All but one reported that the information provided "helped [them] understand the mentoring process." When asked to rate the overall quality of the presentation, the handouts, and presenter's knowledge about the program all 10 respondents rated each of the dimensions "excellent."

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 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.

In addition to youth and Educational Champion outcomes, RTI has also identified, with FosterEd, a county-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 Santa Cruz pilot project which reflect their sate policy and practice efforts (see Appendix A for these county-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 FosterEd's role in the IEOCC and RTI's knowledge of FosterEd state-level efforts, 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, given the educational challenges faced by foster youth as a group and because 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.

During the first year of implementation, the educational needs identified for foster youth participating in FosterEd were tracked through case plan data kept by ELs in Foster Focus. Moving forward, this information will be kept in Goalbook.

Image 1 presents a sample case plan in Foster Focus. Within a youth's case plan, there is at least one Service Objective. In this sample, a Service Objective of "Improve ELA Proficiency" has been set (ELA stands for English Language Arts). Each Service Objective has any number of Case Management Services and any number of Stakeholder Objectives. Case Management Services are expected to be provided by a service provider, often the EL, to support the Service Objective. Stakeholder Objectives are goals set for a non-service provider, typically the Educational Champion, to support the Service Objective. (See Table 5 for definitions of Service Objectives, Case Management Objectives, and Stakeholder Objectives.)

IMAGE 1: Sample FosterEd Case Plan

Case Plan Report

November 15, 2013

Service Objective 1:

Improve ELA Proficiency

    Status: In Progress
    Projected Completion Date: 02/26/13
    Details:
    02/07/13:   Language Arts Intervention- TBD

> **Plans have at least one Service Objective**

Case Management Service 1:

Support ELA learning

    Projected Completion Date: 02/26/13
    Provider: FosterEd Liaison
    Provider Name: Kim Co
    Participant: Caregiver
    Participant Name:
    Details:
    02/11/13:   I will meet with child and caregiver and show them the reading at home contract and incentive chart that I created. They will sign this "contract" to ensure that child is reading the books from his book bag nightly at home.

> **Service Objectives can have any number of Case Management Objectives**

Stakeholder Objective 1:

Stakeholder will ensure that child practice ELA skill at home.

    Projected Completion Date: 02/26/13
    Participant: Caregiver

> **Service Objectives can have any number of Stakeholder Objectives**

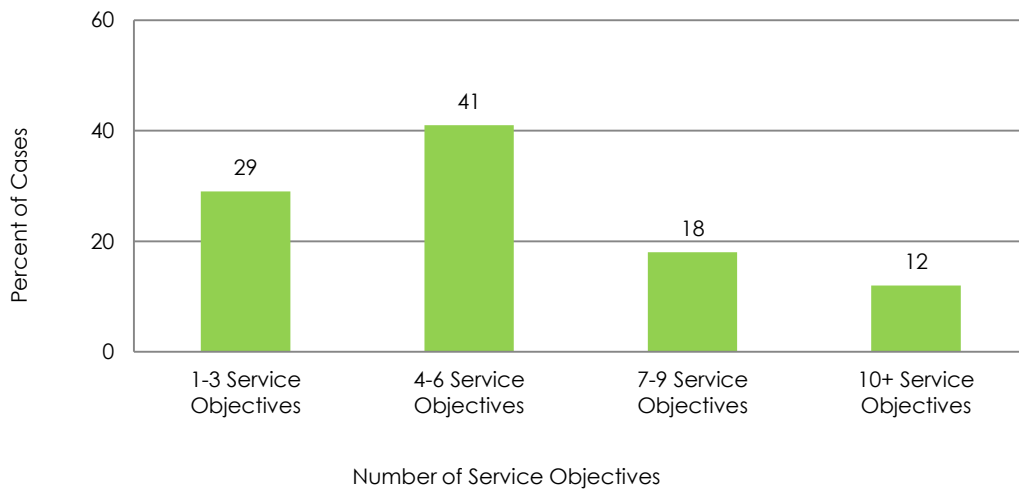## How many Service Objectives were identified for FosterEd cases?

Of the 116 youth served by FosterEd in 2013, **102** had case plans with at least one service objective, considered in this report as an indicator of an identified unmet educational need. Not all the youth that were served in the program had case plans because some were recent entrants into FosterEd did not yet have a case plan at the time the data were extracted for analyses from Foster Focus in the first week of January 2104.

Across these 102 cases there were **566** Service Objectives, or an average of 5.5 Service Objectives per case (Table 5). As shown in Figure 5, 29% of cases had 1 to 3 Service Objectives, 41% had 4 to 6, 18% had 7 to 9, and 12% had 10 or more Service Objectives. The maximum number of Service Objectives was 16 (Table 5).

TABLE 5: Summary of FosterEd Case Plan Activity, Year 1 of Implementation

Type of Objective	Definition	Count	Minimum Per Case	Maximum Per Case	Average Per Case
Service Objectives	An education-related goal identified for the case.	566	1	16	5.5
Case Management Objectives	Within a Service Objective, an activity for the case manager (typically the EL) to support the Service Objective.	807	1	44	8.6
Stakeholder Objectives	Within a Service Objective, an activity for a "stakeholder" (e.g., anyone other than the EL, often the Educational Champion) to support the Service Objective.	709	1	31	6.9

FIGURE 5: Percent of Cases with Varying Numbers of Service Objectives, Year 1 of Implementation
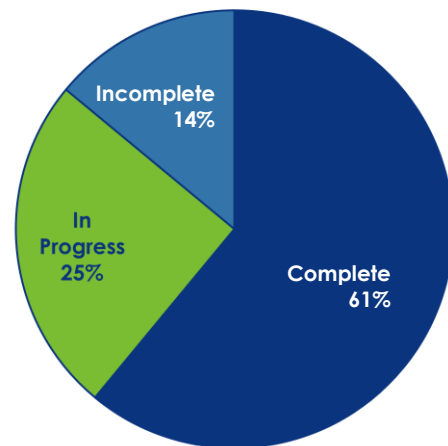

SOURCE: Education plan data from Foster Focus.

How many Service Objectives were completed by the end of the first year of implementation?

Figure 6 presents information on the status of the Service Objectives at the time the data were extracted from Foster Focus in the first week of January 2014. Of the 566 Services Objectives set for cases, 341 or 61% had been completed by the end of 2013. An additional 143, or 25% had not yet been completed but were in progress. Seventy-seven, or 14%, of the 566 Service Objectives had not been completed and were not in progress. An analysis of those incomplete Service Objectives revealed they were associated with cases that had been closed by FosterEd because the child left dependency (e.g., was reunited with his or her parents or was adopted), moved out of county, or was a non-minor dependent who declined FosterEd services.

FIGURE 6: Status of Services Objectives, Year 1 of Implementation

N=566
SOURCE: Education plan data from Foster Focus.

What types of Service Objectives were identified for FosterEd cases?

Figure 7 reports the general categories of the 566 Service Objectives. The largest group (63%) were academic, followed by social capital (31% percent), and social development (6%).

Table 6 present information on the types of academic, social capital, and social development Service Objectives. One thing to note is the variety of types of objectives set: 36 different kinds of Service Objectives were identified for cases. Among the academic Service Objectives, the top five were ensuring the youth were enrolled in appropriate schools, improving their English Language Arts proficiency, making sure they had the right school supplies, improving attendance, and ensuring they were in appropriate classes.

FIGURE 7: Type of Services Objectives, Year 1 of Implementation
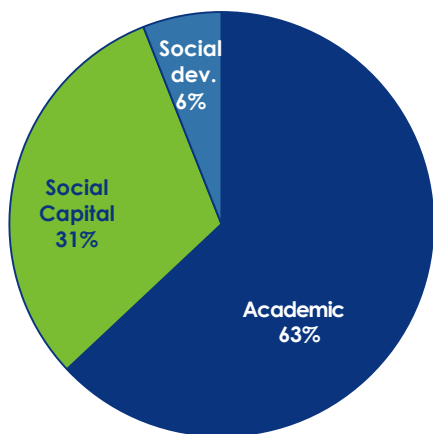
N=566
SOURCE: Education plan data from Foster Focus.

TABLE 6: Type Of Service Objectives

Academic	Count	%
Appropriate School	47	8%
Improve ELA Proficiency	36	6%
Appropriate School Supplies	27	5%
Improve Attendance	25	5%
Appropriate Classes	23	4%
Other to Support Academic Performance	19	3%
Improve Other Subject Proficiencies	18	3%
Identify Special Ed/504 Needs	17	3%
IEP/504 Is Appropriate	17	3%
Ed Records Complete	15	3%
Improve Math Proficiency	15	3%
Youth on Track to Attend College	14	3%
HS Completion: Courses and Credits	8	1%
IEP/504 Is Implemented	7	1%
Youth on Track to Secure Employment	5	1%
All Credits Received	3	1%
HS Completion: Exam	1	<1%
Social Capital	**Count**	**%**
Improve EC Ability to Monitor Education	49	9%
Improve EC-School Communication	35	6%
Increase EC Empowerment	34	6%
Improve EC Ability to Support Learning	26	5%
Improve EC-Child Communication	16	3%
Ensure Appropriate Ed Champions	11	2%
Increase EC Beliefs, Expectations, Aspirations	10	2%
Ensure Appropriate Ed Rights Holder	9	2%
Improve Caregiver Support for Education	4	1%
Ensure Other Adults Are Supporting Ed Success	3	1%
Improve Peer Relationships	3	1%
Improve Relationships with School Staff	1	<1%
Social Development	**Count**	**%**
Increase Summer Enrichment Participation	23	4%
Increase Extra Curricular Participation	18	3%
Decrease Behavioral Issues in School	14	3%
Increase Social Wellness	4	1%
Increase Ownership of Education	2	<1%
Increase Emotional Competency	1	<1%
Increase Emotional Wellness	1	<1%

NOTE: The percent indicates the percent of the 566 Service Objectives that were this type.

The social capital Service Objectives related to strengthening the capacity of the adults in the youth's life to support the youth. The most common objective, both within the social capital subset and across all three subsets was improving Educational Champions' abilities to monitor the education of the youth. Among the top five were improving Educational Champions' communication with the schools, improving their communication with the youth about a school, increasing their feeling of empowerment with regard to the education of the youth, and increasing their ability to support learning.

Social development objectives were the least frequently set Service Objectives, but within that subgroup there were three Service Objectives that were set relatively frequently: increasing summer enrichment participation, increasing extracurricular participation, and decreasing behavioral issues at school.
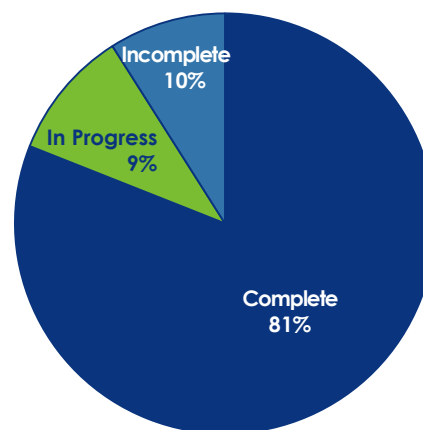
How many Case Management Objectives were identified?

Across the 102 FosterEd cases that had a case plan, **807** Case Management Objectives were set. The minimum number per case was 1, the maximum was 44, and the average was 8.6 (Table 5, page 20).

How many Case Management Objectives were completed?

Figure 8 reports information on the status of the Case Management Objectives at the time the data were extracted from Foster Focus. Of the 807 Case Management Objectives set 657, or 81%, had been completed by the end of 2013. An additional 70, or 9%, had not yet been completed but were in progress. Seventy-nine, or 10%, of the 566 Case Management Objectives had not been completed and were not in progress.

FIGURE 8: Status of Case Management Objectives, Year 1 of Implementation

N=807
SOURCE: Education plan data from Foster Focus.

What types of Case Management Objectives were identified?

In developing Case Management Objectives to support Service Objectives, ELs selected a title for the Case Management Objective from a set of existing titles or created their own if the available title options did not adequately describe the activity. Table 7 presents information on the most frequently set Case Management Objectives. Note that 807 Case Management Objectives had 136 titles. The eleven most frequently used titles are shown in this table. Eleven rather than ten are shown because two descriptions tied for tenth place. Most of the frequent Case Management Objectives were providing support to the Educational Champion to strengthen their ability to monitor the youth's education, communicate with the school, or increase their sense of empowerment.

TABLE 7: Top 11 Case Management Objectives, Year 1 of Implementation

Case Management Objective Title	Count	%
Provide support to improve ability to monitor education	56	7%
Provide support to improve EC-school communication	38	5%
Provide ELA focused supports	29	4%
Provide support to increase feeling of empowerment	23	3%
Other to increase EC ability to support learning	22	3%
Actions to improve attendance	21	3%
Assess available ELA focused supports	21	3%
Assess school options	19	2%
Obtain needed school supplies	18	2%
Other to ensure IEP/504 is appropriate	16	2%
Provide support to increase home-based learning	16	2%

NOTE: There were a total of 807 Case Management Objectives set across the 102 cases with a case plan. Those 807 Case Management Objectives had 136 titles. The eleven most frequently used titles are shown in this table. Eleven rather than ten are shown because two descriptions tied for tenth place.

How many Stakeholder Management Objectives were identified?

Across the 102 FosterEd cases that had a case plan, **709** Stakeholder Objectives were set. The minimum number per case was 1, the maximum was 31, and the average was 6.9 (Table 5, page 20).

**How many Stakeholder Objectives were completed?**

Figure 9 reports information on the status of the Stakeholder Objectives at time the data were extracted from Foster Focus. Of the 709 Stakeholder Objectives set 469, or 66%, had been completed by the end of 2013. An additional 121, or 17%, had not yet been completed but were in progress. One hundred nineteen, or 17%, of the 709 Stakeholder

Objectives had not been completed and were not in progress.

What types of Stakeholder Objectives were identified?

In developing Stakeholder Objectives to support Service Objectives, ELs selected a title for the Stakeholder Objective from a set of existing titles or created their own if the available title options did not adequately describe the activity, similar to the process of selecting titles for Case Management Objectives. Table 8 presents information on the most frequently set Stakeholder Objectives. Note that 708 Case Management Objectives had 147 titles. The ten most frequently used titles are shown in this table. The most common was "Other" followed by "Stakeholder actively working to determine appropriate school placement."

FIGURE 9: Status of Stateholder Objectives, Year 1 of Implementation
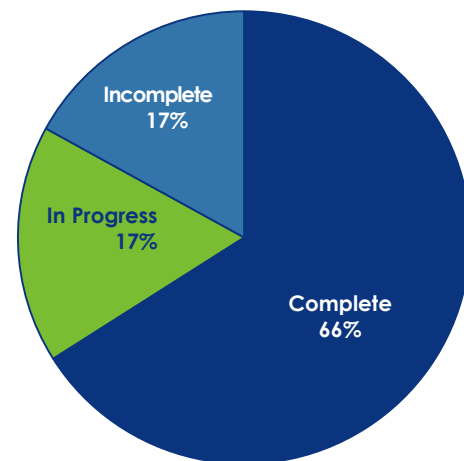
N=709
SOURCE: Education plan data from Foster Focus.

TABLE 8: Top 10 Stakeholder Objectives, Year 1 of Implementation

Stakeholder Objective Title	Count	%
Other	145	13%
Stakeholder actively working to determine appropriate school placement	24	3%
Stakeholder will ensure that child practice ELA skill at home.	21	3%
EC will regularly communicate with child's teacher	18	3%
Stakeholder obtains appropriate school supplies for child	18	3%
Review and understand role as educational rights holder	17	2%
Stakeholder completes and submits parent education report to court	17	2%
EC will regularly review child's report cards/progress reports	16	2%
Stakeholder actively working to identify appropriate classes for child	15	2%
Stakeholder enrolls the youth in one extracurricular activity	15	2%

NOTE: There were a total of 708 Stakeholder Objectives set across the 102 cases with a case plan. Those 708 Stakeholder Objectives had 147 descriptions. The ten most frequently used descriptions are shown in this table.

Educational Champions Outcomes

What do Educational Champions say about FosterEd?

A critical outcome indicator to the FosterEd evaluation is the number and percentage of team members who report that participating in FosterEd has been beneficial to them. In the first year of implementation, Educational Champions who were involved in exiting cases or who were at the six-month mark in August[3]

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[3] In addition to collecting feedback from Educational Champions who were exiting FosterEd, RTI wanted to collect feedback at the end of the summer from Educational Champions who had been in the program for six months.

were surveyed about their experiences and feedback on the FosterEd program.

Forty-five Educational Champions fit the survey criteria. Of those, 25 (or 56%) were successfully surveyed. The rest were non-responsive after three attempts (10) or unreachable because they had left the country or had been incarcerated, or because of other similar extenuating circumstances (10).

In addition to the relatively low number of completed Educational Champion feedback surveys, another limitation of this analysis relates to the methods used to survey the Educational Champions. Due to the low literacy level and lack of access to technology of some of the Educational Champions, as well as the fact that they were never gathered together in a single location (e.g., in class), RTI determined that the best option was to ask the ELs to administer the surveys over the phone to the Educational Champions. RTI, FosterEd, and the Community Leadership Team discussed the possibility of ELs surveying each other's Educational Champions instead of their own; however, this exchange was not possible because only one EL was bilingual and most of her Educational Champions were Spanish speaking. The partners also considered asking one of the partner organizations or an intern to conduct the phone interviews. These options were also deemed less feasible than ELs surveying their own Educational Champions because of concerns that Educational Champions would be less likely to return calls from people they did not know and the amount of time and continued attention that was required to make at least three attempts to survey each Educational Champion.

After much consideration and discussion, RTI and FosterEd decided to have ELs conduct the surveys via phone (or via paper in-person when possible) with their own Educational

Champions. The ELs asked the Educational Champions for their honest feedback, explaining that it was important for improving the FosterEd program. Despite this request, it is possible that the survey results are more positive than they would be if the methodology were different. For Year 2, as RTI and FosterEd develop plans to survey more Educational Champions and to survey other team members, we will continue to discuss options for separating ELs from the surveys of their Educational Champions.

With the limitations of the survey data noted, RTI is comfortable reporting on the feedback provide by Educational Champions on the FosterEd project. Figure 10 shows responses to a series of seven statements related to positive impacts of the program on Educational Liaisons, one statement about whether FosterEd treated them with respect, and a statement about whether they would recommend FosterEd to other adults in the lives of foster youth.

The feedback from Educational Champions was overwhelmingly positive. At least 90% either

FIGURE 10: Perceived Impacts of FosterEd from Perspective of Educational Champion, Year 1 of Implementation
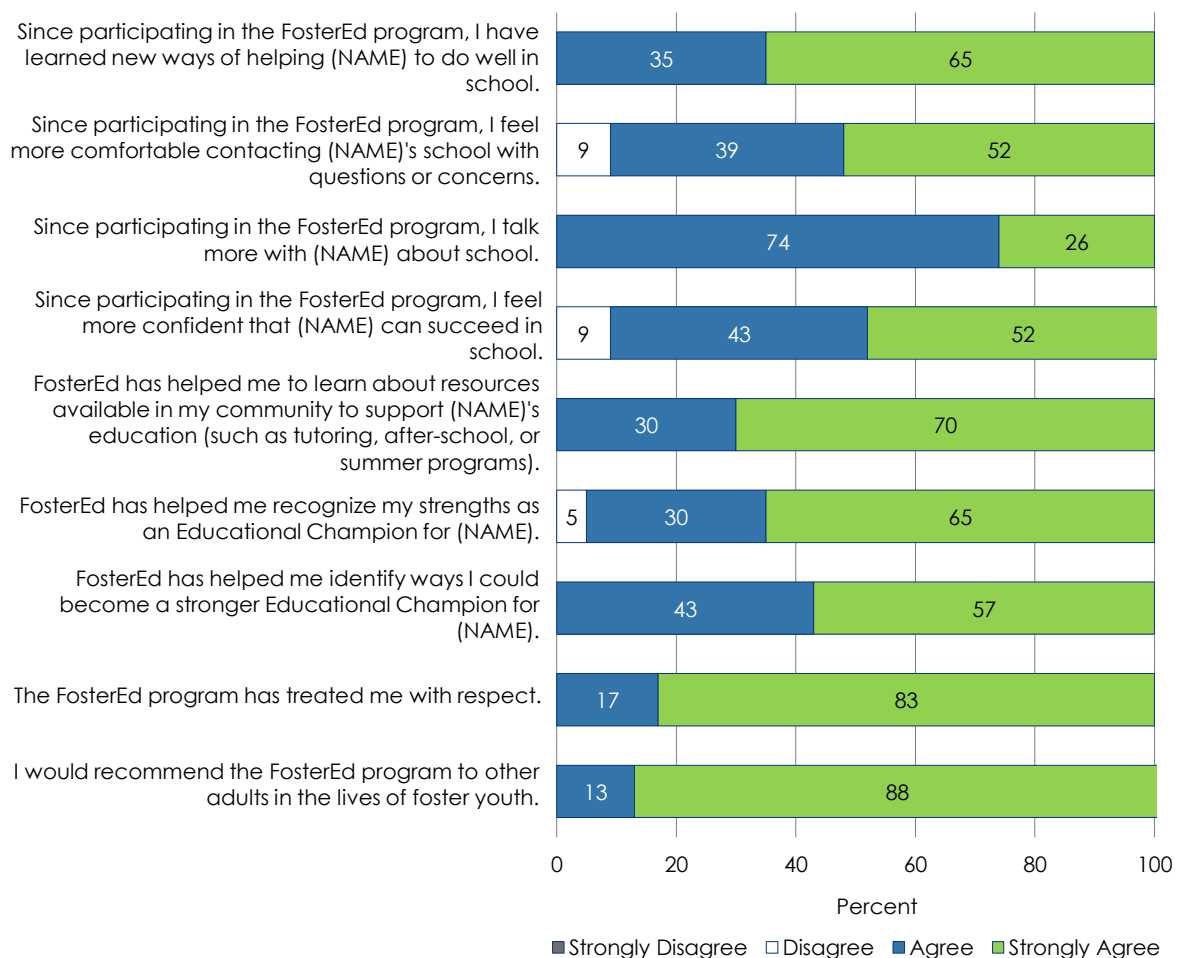
N=25
SOURCE: Feedback surveys administered to Educational Liaisons as the case was exiting FosterEd.

"agreed" or "strongly agreed" to each of seven statements about positive impacts of the program. For example, 65% reported "strongly agree" to the statement, "Since participating in the FosterEd program, I have learned new ways of helping [my youth] do well in school." An additional 35% reported "agree" to this statement.

The survey also asked Educational Champions for feedback on components of the FosterEd program. Since the program is so individualized, only three common components were determined. Figure 11 presents the Educational Champions' feedback on these three components. For the component of "Receiving support and information to help [them] achieve [their] goals as an Educational Champion," all felt it was "useful" or "very useful." Additionally, all reported that "Setting goals for [them] to become a stronger Educational Champion was "useful" or "very useful." The feedback was somewhat less positive for the component of "Taking the survey to identify [their] strengths and areas of need as an Educational Champion."

In addition to multiple choice items, the FosterEd surveys had open-ended items asking Educational Champions to elaborate on

previous answers, add comments, or provide suggestions for the program. The results from these open-ended items are presented below.

Why Educational Champions would recommend FosterEd

Nine of the 25 survey participants responded to an open-ended question asking them to explain whether they would recommend the FosterEd program to other adults in the lives of foster youth. Five shared that the program was helpful by exposing them to new areas, resources, and helpful tools. One participant elaborated on this, stating that s/he would recommend FosterEd to others, *"Because we need a lot of help and we need help in all areas of education that not one person knows. We need the team effort so we can help kids meet educational goals."* Additionally, two other participants reported that they would recommend it because they felt it was a good program and found the staff to be very helpful. Another shared that because of the program, s/he felt more comfortable speaking with teachers, and the last of the nine respondents explained that s/he *"couldn't have done this without the support of FosterEd."*

FIGURE 11: Feedback from Educational Champions on FosterEd, Year 1 of Implementation
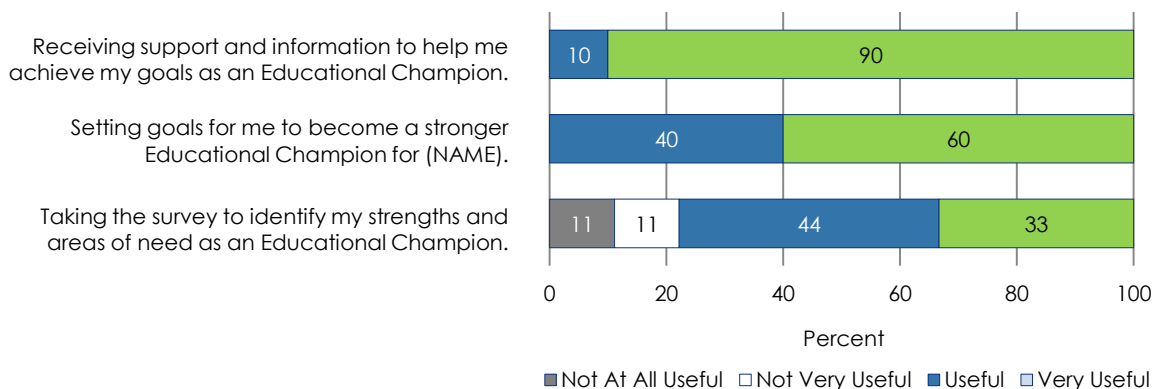
N=25
SOURCE: Feedback surveys administered to Educational Liaisons as the case was exiting FosterEd.

Educational Champions' recommendations for improving FosterEd

Thirteen of the 25 survey participants responded to an open-ended survey question asking for their recommendations for improving the FosterEd program. Nine reported that they did not have any suggestions to improve the program because it "*seem[s] to be doing really well.*" The remaining four participants all reported very different and specific suggestions. One stated that the trainings could be improved but gave no specific recommendations or identification of areas of improvement. Another participant reported that s/he wished the foster parents could be more involved in the process. Involving the Educational Champions and their youth in the process earlier was also suggested by a participant, and another simply stated that s/he liked being able to have someone to call because "*without [the program] I could have strayed and forgotten my responsibilities.*"

Educational Champions' additional comments about FosterEd

Nineteen of the 25 survey participants responded to an open-ended request on the survey for any additional comments they would like to share. Six commented on how they felt FosterEd was a good and effective program. Participants shared that "*it's a helpful program for people who don't know where to start*" and "*without it, it's another crack a child could fall through.*" Two of the responses talked about how helpful the staff were, stating that they were "*very patient and compassionate*" and, "*I really appreciate the help that [staff member] and the program have given me.*" In addition, three participants used this item to express their gratitude at being involved in the program, reporting that they were "*happy that it is out there for families*" and that they were "*glad to have this resource available to me to*

better the education of my youth." Out of the remaining three responses, one shared that s/he enjoyed the Educational Champion binder, one suggested that the program should give parents additional homework for their children, and the last stated that it might be more useful for the children if they were able to target the person with educational rights for the child. (FosterEd does try to involve the Education Rights Holder, typically asking them to be the Educational Champion.)

County Outcomes

Has FosterEd improved collaboration between educators, child welfare professionals, community-based organizations, and the court in Santa Cruz County?

While a number of Community Leadership Team members noted during interviews that FosterEd benefited from a history of collaboration in the County between SCCOE, FSC, the Juvenile Court, and community-based organizations such as the Parent Center and CASA, all reported that collaboration among these agencies has increased due to FosterEd. RTI witnessed deep and effective collaboration during the monthly Community Leadership Team meetings, and during those meetings many other interactions and new systems for collaborating were discussed, such as improved processes for FSC to help districts identify their foster youth.

Not surprisingly, the level of collaboration established by the leaders of these agencies was not always evident among all staff within the agencies. During Community Leadership Team Meetings, the EL focus group, and the Leadership Team interviews, it was noted that some social workers had not been aware of the FosterEd program, despite trainings and other announcements. However, none of the

respondents reported negative interaction or lack of goodwill, but rather recognized that weaving collaboration through all necessary levels of an organization takes time, and staff need multiple opportunities and reminders of the new systems and programs that support that collaboration.

Community Leadership Team members and ELs noted an important focus for the upcoming year for FosterEd would be continuing to strengthen collaborations, as it shifts to more of a team model. Stronger relationships and connections with school staff will be particularly important as FosterEd works to have each education team include at least one representative from the youth's school, ideally a teacher or other staff member who knows the youth the best.

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 Santa Cruz 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 as a reflection of FosterEd's efforts given knowledge of the extent of its involvement in state working groups and other state-level activities.

NCYL did not expect to achieve many of the state goals during the first year of the Santa Cruz pilot, but rather aimed to meet them toward the end of the pilot or in the first few years following the pilot. Nevertheless, five state-level outcomes were attained during this first year:

✔ Legislation requiring data sharing between the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and California Department of Education (CDE) and between CDE and Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

✔ Legislation holding schools and school districts accountable for the educational outcomes of foster youth.

✔ Legislation requiring school districts to develop plans detailing how they will improve the educational outcomes of foster youth.

Each of these state-level outcomes was achieved when Assembly Bill 97, a budget trailer bill, was signed into law in July 2013.

✔ Improved judicial process and forms to identify a foster child's education rights holder developed, adopted, and used outside of Santa Cruz County

Policy efforts conducted in close collaboration with the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts (AOC), and with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), were equally successful. FosterEd partnered with the AOC to improve the rules of court and judicial forms used in dependency proceedings to identify an education rights holder for each foster child. The Judicial Council accepted the proposed changes, which became effective statewide on January 1, 2014.

✔ Standardized MOU for use in using FYS funds to leverage Title IV-E funds developed, adopted, and used outside of Santa Cruz County

FosterEd partnered with the CDSS to draft a template MOU for use by county offices of education and county child welfare agencies, pursuant to which counties can use foster youth services (FYS) funds to leverage federal Title IV-E funds, which in turn are used to provide education case management to students in foster care. The template is based on the one developed for Santa Cruz County and is expected to bring over $5 million in additional federal funding to California's. The template MOU has been approved by CDSS' legal counsel.

Shifts in the FosterEd Santa Cruz Model

By participating in the monthly Community Leadership Team meetings and holding weekly calls with FosterEd staff, RTI has had the opportunity to observe a remarkable process of rapid learning cycles. Most programs and partnerships state an intention of continuous improvement, but many struggle to implement it. It can be a complex undertaking and requires constant attention, transparency, creativity, and ideally involvement of all partners.

Based on this evaluator's 15 years of education research and program evaluation, my assessment is that FosterEd Santa Cruz has done an extraordinary job of doing, learning, and evolving. There are many instances in which the FosterEd Director, Program Manager, and Education Liaisons have identified challenges in the FosterEd model and practice, considered options for addressing those challenges, and brought the challenges and potential solutions to the Community Leadership Team. The Community Leadership Team discussed the options, often identifying additional options, and together FosterEd and the Leadership Team decided on courses of action and implemented them. The cycle of continuous learning then began anew as the partners monitored the modified practice to assess whether it was in fact an improvement or whether additional adjustments were needed.

Many Small, Some Larger, Shifts in Practice

There were many shifts in relatively small practice elements during the first year of implementation. For example, FSC and FosterEd refined the process of how the former notified the latter of new dependency cases so that FosterEd was able to take on the case as soon possible.

FosterEd also instituted larger practice changes which required more extensive effort. During the first half of the first year of implementation, FosterEd administered surveys developed by RTI to identify the educational strengths and needs of the Educational Champions and the youth. However, the ELs noted that the surveys often elicited socially acceptable responses rather than accurately reflecting an Educational Champion's actual belief or practice. While socially acceptable responses are always a concern with surveys, because many of the Educational Champions were the biological parents of children who had been removed from their care, they may have been even more sensitive to the desire of being portrayed in a positive light.

Furthermore, the structure of completing a long survey did not help to build rapport between the EL and the Educational Champion, which is an important foundation for working together on a case plan. Additionally, the ELs noted the survey's limited utility in case plan development and goal-setting relative to the time required to administer it and record answers. In lieu of the Educational Champion strengths and needs surveys, ELs, Educational Champions, and the assigned volunteer now select goals for the Educational Champion from a goal bank developed in coordination with RTI.

Substantial Shifts in the Model

Major shifts in the model are being instituted in Year 2 of implementation. The initial vision of FosterEd Santa Cruz was to identify an adult who was expected to be in a youth's life long-

term and who would be able to champion the youth's education. FosterEd would focus on providing mentoring to that adult to strengthen his or her capabilities to support the youth's education. Whenever possible, FosterEd planned to work with the biological parent as the Educational Champion.

After the launch of the program, the ELs soon discovered that, as they took on cases, they were identifying many urgent unmet educational needs of youth, such as out-of-date Individualize Eduation Plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities, students on the verge of expulsion, and students lacking critical school supplies. While still recognizing the value of mentoring the Educational Champion to be able to effectively intervene to help address these unmet needs, the ELs found that in many cases, the process of mentoring the Educational Champions was not producing effects fast enough to address the immediate needs of the youth, and FosterEd felt they could not just stand by and witness the needs persist without intervention. The ELs found themselves simultaneously dealing with the urgent educational needs of the youth, while also doing the important but very time-consuming work of mentoring the Educational Champion.

Incorporating Educational Teams

After much discussion and consideration, FosterEd and the Leadership team decided to shift the model to incorporate a team approach. The goal in implementing this approach was to build a network of adult support around each student to address his or her educational needs and to improve collaboration among these adults. This shift reflects a recognition that the often multiple, immediate educational needs of foster youth require engaging many of the adults involved in their education, including but not limited to their Educational Champions. It also reflects the reality that the county's small Foster Youth Services team does not have the

capacity to meet all of the unmet needs of foster children identified through the assessment process, necessitating a team-based approach that engages other professionals involved in the children's lives.

FosterEd ELs will manage education teams using a secure, online social networking educational case planning tool called Goalbook. Project staff will create a Goalbook team for each 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. The student will be invited to participate in the team if or when he or she is of the appropriate age. Project staff will facilitate an initial meeting during which the team will review the student's educational needs and collectively set educational goals. Team members will then be able to communicate regarding these goals, provide updates on educational progress via Goalbook, and quickly identify and address educational needs. Project staff will help identify a "facilitator" for each team, and will monitor the teams on an ongoing basis to ensure that team members are communicating and goals are being met. As the abilities of Educational Champions are developed (see below), it is hoped that many will be able to play an increasingly active role on the student's team over time.

Refining the Process for Supporting Educational Champions

Another change being implemented in Year 2 is refining the process for supporting Educational Champions. FosterEd will continue to identify adults who will be in the life of their youth long term, and thus be best positioned to provide educational advocacy long term. If that person is interested in receiving educational support/mentoring, ELs will attempt to identify a member of the education team, an existing

service provider, or a trained volunteer to provide this support. ELs will then meet with the Educational Champion and the mentor/support person to set goals for the Educational Champion. Going forward, these goals will be recorded and updated in a separate area of Goalbook.

Risks Associated with Shifts in the Model

During the December interviews with Community Team Leaders and the focus groups with ELs, RTI asked respondents about the upcoming shifts in the model. There was an overall positive feeling about the concept of the team model. The following statement made by a Community Leadership Team member is representative of the views expressed by a number of other members and ELs:

"The idea of going through a team approach to address the educational needs of the foster youth is critical because so often in the past you had agencies working in autonomy. County mental health worker working in isolation, counselors, school counselors, social workers, legal counsel, and administrators all have worked individually in the past. I think it's a real important shift. It's going to be very helpful."

Although Community Team Leaders and ELs generally expressed support for the shift they identified some risks. Issues of practicality and time availability were raised. Participants were concerned about people's time, workload, and that there might be *"too many cooks in the kitchen."*

One respondent noted, *"Working as part of a team can be useful, but there are issues of confidentiality. Having others involved with the kids, but not having information about some of the best choices, means that there should be more parameters around what the team should do."*

Another warned, *"One of the things we need to be aware of is the fact that when you are assembling the teams, you are exponentially increasing the amount of time of the Education Liaison to coordinate the work.…Everyone is very busy, and the EL will have to do a lot to keep the team moving."*

Another noted that a risk with working with a team model is that things might not be as *"robust and organized."* A Community Leadership Team member predicted there would be challenges associated with the motivation on the part of some social workers and schools to participate and be meaningfully engaged:

"Among 60 social workers, some will be very on top of things, others won't. It will be the same with schools. You'll always have a small group on top of it all, and a small group that never gets it, in any organization. What's needed is getting the lion's share to buy into this and spend the time. Social workers, like most people tend to do what you inspect rather than expect. In other words, what's required by law, what will be looked at by judges. They'll do this if it's looked at by judges— that part of 'inspect.' School people also often focus on reaction—putting out fires."

Despite these issues, the idea of the team has been well-received. Given the partnership's demonstrated commitment and ability to identify and address challenges, RTI is confident FosterEd and the Community Leadership Team will monitor the shifts closely and strategize how to respond to challenges that arise.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The launch and first year of implementation of FosterEd Santa Cruz has been remarkably successful. Rarely do complex initiatives involving many partners and multiple system changes achieve so much so early. FosterEd has successfully implemented 11 significant infrastructure components, served 116 foster youth, and identified and supported 123 Educational Champions who are overwhelmingly biological parents, caregivers, and other relatives who will be in the youths' lives long term and can therefore advocate for their education long term.

To support the program FosterEd hired exceptional staff and, with the active involvement of the Community Leadership Team, trained and helped them to carry out a tremendous amount of work. Across the FosterEd cases, 566 Service Objectives representing youths' unmet education needs were identified. Most, 61%, of these Service Objectives were completed, and an additional 25% were in progress at the time case planning data were transferred to RTI for analysis.

While opportunities for educational support services for foster youth had been in place prior to FosterEd through Foster Youth Service (FYS) at SCCOE, these services were reactive, primarily because of staffing limitations. If a social worker or school requested help, FYS would step in. By contrast, FosterEd enables a proactive approach to addressing the educational needs of foster youth in Santa Cruz County.

Every member of the Community Leadership Team and the agencies and organizations they represent should be commended for their very high level of collaboration and commitment to this endeavor. While many challenges were

discussed, RTI was struck by the "can do," thoughtful problem-solving approach of the Community Leadership Team, the FosterEd Director, the FosterEd Program Manager, and each of the Educational Liaisons.

The second year of implementation presents opportunities to implement and refine the major shifts to the model: incorporating educational teams and changing the method for mentoring Educational Champions so that they rely on the support of another member of the education team, an existing service provider, or a trained volunteer rather than an EL.

When changing a model to address one set of challenges, a new set of risks and challenges will surely arise. RTI has confidence in the partnership's ability to address any new difficulties but has some concerns about whether solutions can be developed, fully implemented, and institutionalized within the remaining year of the pilot. Assuming FosterEd continues in Santa Cruz beyond this pilot project, it is important that the post-pilot program also embrace an ethos of continual improvement.

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

1 Recommendation: Carefully monitor the use of Goalbook among team members, particularly parents and caregivers. Be ready to support the engagement of team members outside of Goalbook.

Goalbook has the potential to be an effective tool enabling various adults in the lives of foster youth (e.g., their caregivers, biological parents, teachers, social workers, CASA, coaches) to function as a team to support the education of the youth. The teams need to stay in frequent contact but acknowledge their inability to always do so in person; the Goalbook

technology allows them to "gather" virtually. While the use of this technology for the education teams is promising, RTI recommends that FosterEd monitor the teams' use of Goalbook very carefully. It may not well serve adults with literacy, English language, and technology limitations. FosterEd and the Community Leadership Team should have alternative strategies at the ready to support those particular adults participating in the teams who cannot consistently use Goalbook. Even adults who do not have literacy, language, or technology barriers, such as school staff and social workers, may be slow to engage with Goalbook, as they surely have other technology systems they need to interact with on a daily basis for their job. Carving time out to become familiar with Goalbook and getting in the habit of using it frequently may feel daunting. Support to all team members in using Goalbook will be important and may take more time that FosterEd expects. RTI will work FosterEd to monitor this over the next few months as Goalbook becomes embedded in FosterEd Santa Cruz.

2 Recommendation: Invest more effort on developing stronger relationships with districts, schools, and social workers.

Interagency collaboration in Santa Cruz among agency leaders is very strong. As FosterEd moves to the team model which will involve social workers and teachers participating in education teams, collaboration between this other level of agency staff becomes very important. Community Leadership Team members mentioned how grateful many social workers have been for the work carried about by FosterEd Educational Liaisons in Year 1. In many cases, the ELs were able to invest a significant number of hours addressing an urgent educational need for youth. But this type of very deep direct service work is not sustainable for FosterEd. The model is therefore shifting to identify a team of adults who can

respond to the urgent and longer-term educational needs of youth. Proactively building the awareness of the need for collaboration among social workers and school staff and building the collaboration itself, including before they may even be asked to be on an educational team, is important for FosterEd.

3 Recommendation: Ensure the Court continues to be a prominent partner.

The former Presiding Juvenile Court Judge has been a very strong advocate of FosterEd. All indications are that the current Presiding Juvenile Court Judge is similarly committed and passionate about the program. This is good news as the role of the judge was cited by many Community Leadership Team members, and observed by RTI, as one of the contributing factors to the success of the first year. In addition to this leadership change at the Juvenile Court, another change involves stopping the practice of having ELs attend court hearings to be introduced to potential FosterEd cases in person. This change was made because ELs were spending many unproductive hours each week traveling to or waiting at the courthouse for an opportunity to meet a potential case. While RTI supports the decision to stop that practice, the personal introduction at the courthouse and recommendations from the judge, during the hearing, that the family become involved in FosterEd carried a lot of weight. RTI recommends FosterEd and the Court continue to strategize about how the judge can advocate for the program to potential cases, even when Educational Liaisons are not in the courtroom at the time.

4 Recommendation: Use the Santa Cruz experience of linking data to press for a good state solution.

RTI has observed FosterEd staff and the vendor for Foster Focus (the Sacramento County Office of Education) work hard to link Santa Cruz

districts in Foster Focus. FosterEd staff report that they have had good support and collaboration from the Santa Cruz districts. Nevertheless, the linking process has been slow and requires a tremendous investment of time. RTI is convinced a state-supported solution for linking child welfare and education data is needed. There is momentum for this with the passage of AB97, and RTI recommends that FosterEd share the experience in Santa Cruz to press state leaders to make the linking of education and child welfare data a priority.

5 Recommendation: Focus now on planning the transition from pilot to post-pilot program.

RTI is aware that some planning for the FosterEd Santa Cruz sustainability post-pilot project is under way, but not all Community Leadership Team members are aware of this and therefore FosterEd may not be leveraging all the available resources to develop a sustainability plan. RTI recommends sustainability be a major focus of upcoming Community Leadership Team meetings so that members are aware of current efforts and can help to enhance those efforts.

6 Continue integrating FosterEd and the Education Equal Partnership

RTI serves as the evaluator for both the Education Equal Partnership and FosterEd's Santa Cruz County pilot. As such we have witnessed significant and important cross-initiative learning and a convergence of the two projects. RTI recommends exploring further integration of the two efforts.

Closing

Having observed the development, launch, and first year of implementation of FosterEd Santa Cruz, RTI concurs with the overwhelmingly positive sentiments expressed by all members of the Community Leadership Team. Their words close this report:

"It's a marvelous thing, I love it, and I don't want it to go away."

"There is nobody that is a part of the team, or committee that isn't working from the highest ethical and well intentioned place. I have never seen a project with more heart and less selfishness than this project."

"I think there is an incredibly committed and passionate group of participants [among the FosterEd staff and the Community Leadership Team] who are very strong in their different fields of expertise, and I think that the progress that has been made in this first year has been significant. The fact that FosterEd is evolving to meet the needs of the foster youth is a huge sign of the collaborative and proactive approach being taken."

"[The first year of implementation] has been very successful. The term 'FosterEd' is part of our culture. We've been trying to make education a centerpiece, and FosterEd has been the impetus to bring about changes we'd thought about but didn't think we had the power to do. Education is now on the table more now than ever before. When I started, education was a one line item in the court report. Now everyone is focused on education."

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Acknowledgments

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Dr. Jennifer Laird is Program Director of Educational Evaluations 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 Santa Cruz, she directs the evaluation of FosterEd Arizona, 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.

RTI International 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, justice systems, health and medicine, environmental protection, and international development. 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.

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