Foster Care Children Webinar

Improving Educational Opportunities for Arizona’s Foster Care Children
Why Are Foster Students A Priority For Arizona?

Dawn Wallace, Arizona Governor’s Office
Vince Yanez, Arizona Community Foundation
Arizona’s Invisible Achievement Gap

Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in the State’s Public Schools

Vanessa Barrat
WestEd

February 23rd, 2016
Documented achievement gap for racial/ethnic minority students, English learners, students living in poverty, and students with disabilities.

- **But what about students in foster care?**

There has been little statewide information:

- No common definition of the foster-care population.
- No common unique identifier.
- No routine data exchange.
## Linkage of Arizona statewide datasets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Education (ADE)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Child Welfare (DCS)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About 1 million students ages 5–17 enrolled in an AZ school during school year 2012-2013</td>
<td>About 12,000 children ages 5–17 with an open placement during school year 2012-2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Matched population of 10,770 students in foster care, a matching rate of 89%
Key findings...

Student characteristics and

Program participation and school characteristics

“It’s like no one at school noticed me. They never saw nothing. Never knew I was in the foster care system and nobody helped. They didn’t know what I was going through. That’s why I worked my butt off at school. To get out.”

— Student in foster care

“My best memory of school is those teachers who took the time to listen to me. Being seen and heard was empowering.”

— Student in foster care
Finding 1: Students in foster care constituted an at-risk subgroup that was distinct from low SES students.

“When I entered the foster care system, the first school I attended thought I was mentally retarded. I just had ADHD real bad. But I found out I was smart, and now I’m in college.”

— Student in foster care
Finding 2: Students in foster care were more likely to change schools during the school year.

“I changed schools a lot. At least a dozen times while in foster care, and that doesn’t include all the schools I went to before I entered the system. I can’t even remember some of their names.”

— Student in foster care
Finding 3: Students in foster care were more likely than the general population of students to be enrolled in lower-performing schools.

“Moving around schools a lot I noticed there were differences in quality. I graduated from a high school that didn’t offer the math classes I needed to get into college, so I took them on my own online. No one helped me.”

— Student in foster care
Finding 4: Students in foster care were more likely to attend an alternative school than other students.
“Foster care was kind of rough. It was such a motivator for me to stick with school when a teacher was supportive, said ‘good job’, helped me figure things out, took a special interest in me.”

— Student in foster care
Finding 5: Students in foster care had the lowest participation rate in Arizona’s statewide testing program.
Finding 6: Statewide testing showed an achievement gap for students in foster care and other at-risk student groups.

- All students with limited English proficiency: 63%
- Students with limited English proficiency in foster care: 40%
- All students with disabilities: 27%
- Students with disabilities in foster care: 23%
- All low-SES students: 54%
- Low-SES students in foster care: 40%
Finding 6: Statewide testing showed an achievement gap for students in foster care and other at-risk student groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>All Students</th>
<th>Students in foster care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students in that category</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with limited English proficiency</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-SES</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finding 7: High school students in foster care had the highest dropout rate.
Finding 8: High school students in foster care had the lowest grade-12 graduation rates

“I plan to graduate but it’s taking me extra time. I have to make up credits. I lost them by changing schools and missing finals and being institutionalized.”

— Student in foster care
Summary of the Findings

Different profile:
• Twice as likely to be eligible for special education services
• Four times more likely to change schools at least once during the school year

Poor academic achievement and education outcomes:
• Lowest participation rate in the state’s assessment program
• For those tested, their achievement gap was comparable or greater than other at-risk subgroups
• Highest dropout rate and lowest graduation rate

“The key to success at school for kids like me: Never doubting them. Always telling them they’re capable of it. Giving support when it’s needed.”
—Student in foster care
“It’s easy being a foster care kid to go unnoticed. I feel it’s important that schools engage with us. I know it made a big difference in my life.”

-Student in foster care

Contact:

Vanessa Barrat: vbarrat@wested.org
BethAnn Berliner bberlin@wested.org
FosterEd

Closing the Achievement Gap for Students in Foster Care

I. Every Child Succeeds Act Foster Youth Provisions

II. A Pivotal Moment in Time for Arizona’s Students in Foster Care

III. What We Know is Working
About the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

- Enacted December 10, 2015

- Reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), Originally enacted in and last reauthorized in 2002, as the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

- For the first time, contains key protections for students in foster care to promote school stability and success, and requires collaboration with child welfare partners.

- ESSA, paired with the 2008 *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act*, envisions dual-agency responsibility for supporting educational success for foster youth.

- ESSA is an important step forward, but state and local action is essential to ensure adequate protections are put in place.
Why These Protections Are Needed

- Foster youth are some of the country’s most educationally disadvantaged students. Compared to their peers, students in foster care have highest dropout rates, poorest attendance rates, highest school mobility rates, poorest academic performance of any other group of students.

- Closing the achievement gap for this population of young people requires a multi-agency approach, involving deep partnership between state and local education, child welfare, judicial and community based agencies.

- These incredible young people deserve Arizona’s A-Game!
Overview of Foster Youth Provisions

- **Supporting school stability for foster youth.** State education agencies must ensure foster youth remain in their school of origin unless it is not in their best interest.

- **Plans to ensure travel is provided for the student to school.** Local education agencies must adopt and implement clear written procedures as to how foster youth will be transported to their school or origin.

- **Ensuring no delays in enrollment.** When a foster youth is transferred, the new school must immediately enroll the student.

- **Records transfer on time, with the student.** When a foster youth is transferred, the enrolling school must immediately obtain their education records.

- **An administrative champion within state and local education agencies.** State education agencies must designate a foster youth education coordinator; school districts must designate a coordinator if the local child welfare agency has done so.

- **Tracking educational success for students in foster care through data.** States must make public disaggregated achievement data and graduation rates for foster youth.
Other Important Provisions

- **Data and Reporting**: SEAs must annually include information on graduation and academic achievement *disaggregated for foster youth* in their state report cards.

- **Charter Schools**: States receiving charter school grants under Title IV, Part C of ESSA must work with charter schools on recruitment and enrollment practices to *promote inclusion* of all students, including by *eliminating any barriers to enrollment* for foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth.

- **Juvenile Justice Provisions**: ESSA also requires states to ensure certain new protections for students in and returning to the community from the juvenile justice system. Including, improved access to education inside correctional facilities and support for positive re-entry into the community.
Implementing ESSA - The Urgency of the Foster Youth Provisions

Some of the new assurances and protections for students in foster care in Title I must be in effect by December 2016, within one year after enactment of ESSA. At that time, a key protection for children in foster care previously available in some states under the definition of “awaiting foster care placement” in McKinney-Vento will disappear for most states.

Because this is the first time that provisions related to students in foster care are included in federal education law, and because of the need for the State Education Agency (SEA) and Local Education Agency (LEA) to collaborate with state and local child welfare agencies in a timely manner, it will be critically important to begin state level planning on foster care provisions in 2016.
Where Additional Clarity is Needed

• **Aligned Definitions.** Both education and child welfare agencies at the state and local levels must collaborate to ensure educational success of foster youth. We will need shared definitions between both agencies of “School of Origin” and “Child in Foster Care”.

• **Clarity on Data Disaggregation Timeline and Processes.** Because of the need to work across state and local child welfare and education systems to identify students in foster care for purposes of disaggregation, regulations should be clear about consistency of timelines and methods for identifying students in foster care and the scope of academic achievement reporting required.

• **Guidance on Data Definitions and Requirements.** When developing regulations and guidance related to the report cards it is important to remember that data definitions and requirements are critical. For example, requiring the collection of data for children who have spent any time in foster care during a particular timeframe should be considered, given the temporary nature of foster care.
• The education system should be an active and critical partner in closing the achievement gap for foster youth. ESSA provides guidance and incentive for state and local education agencies to partner to improve education outcomes for foster youth.

• Unfortunately, school districts have been unable to provide support to foster youth because they haven’t known which of their students are in foster care. Efforts to link child welfare and education data can provide this capacity and support school districts in this effort.

• There is now a policy infrastructure that supports deep state and regional collaborations between child welfare and education agencies.

• We will now have the ability measure and watch the educational trajectories for Arizona’s students in foster care.

• HB2665, if passed, has the potential to expand foster youth success programs across the state and support state and local education agencies in the implementation of ESSA.
Foster Ed Pilot in Pima County: We Know What Works

- FosterEd, a pilot program that began in Pima County in 2012 is improving education outcomes for students in foster care. FosterEd is overseen by a state leadership team comprised of senior staff from the Administrative Office of the Courts, Attorney General’s Office, Department of Education, Department of Child Safety, Governors Office and State Board of Education.

- This program ensures that foster youth have an **education champion, supported by an education team and an actively monitored education plan** that is developed based on each individual student’s strengths and needs.

- **Data is a cornerstone of all efforts in this program.** Real time access to information = more responsive supports for young people. Program data collected on education teams, plans and champions = ongoing program improvement and improved outcomes.

- The **impact of FosterEd is apparent throughout the child welfare and education communities** in Pima County. The program has invested in two comprehensive evaluations, both demonstrating the program is having strong positive impact on youth education outcomes and system level transformation.
Information and Resources

- Full text of ESSA: [https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-114s1177enr/pdf/BILLS-114s1177enr.pdf](https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-114s1177enr/pdf/BILLS-114s1177enr.pdf)


- Legal Center for Foster Care and Education Fact Sheet on FY Provisions: [http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/Database.aspx](http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/Database.aspx) (search “ESSA” in publications list)

- National Center for Youth Law Fact Sheets on Foster Youth and Juvenile Justice provisions: [http://youthlaw.org/tag/essa/](http://youthlaw.org/tag/essa/)

- JLC-NCYL Fact Sheet on JJ Provisions: Available in hard copy, link coming soon
Working Towards A Solution...

Representative John Allen
Legislative Efforts This Session:

HB2665

Thank you!