

IMPACT REPORT

# Antelope Valley Compassionate Education Systems Impact Report

2018-2025

# Overview

Compassionate Education Systems, a compassionate systems initiative of the National Center for Youth Law, joined in solidarity with a growing movement across the country to ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes for all young people. We are working to create a reality where all system-involved youth graduate from high school with the widest array of possibilities for their future. We also envision a future where leaders from multiple public systems – child welfare, education, mental health, probation, and judicial agencies – band together with a sense of imperative and persistence to build conditions in which:

- Children and youth are engaged in learning, empowered to create futures they are excited about, and have champions in their corner for the long run.
- Parents, family members, mentors, and other trusted adults are fully invested in their role as education champions and are consistently and meaningfully supported.
- System and community leaders deeply collaborate on a shared vision that systematically lifts up the voices of young people and helps realize equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students.
- Professionals working directly with young people in support of their education are appreciated, supported, and connected with one another.

**We believe that for young people to graduate with a wide array of possibilities for their futures, they need three key things: student-centered engagement; well-coordinated education teams; and effective and committed education champions. Our goal was to facilitate and implement a collaborative program that ensures young people are supported in all the ways they need to succeed.**

**We worked to ensure each young person was positively engaged in school and learning, empowered to take charge of their educational futures, and participating in meaningful relationships with caring adults who consistently and effectively helped guide their educational trajectory.**

# Antelope Valley Introduction and Evolution

The Antelope Valley (AV) is the northernmost part of Los Angeles County, spanning approximately 2,200 square miles. The largest cities represented in the AV are Lancaster and Palmdale. While it is a part of Los Angeles County, due to its geographic location, the resources are limited and not as abundant as they are in the other areas of LA County. A need for resources and support was clearly identified. Compassionate Education Systems (Formerly known as FosterEd) launched a demonstration site in the Antelope Valley in 2018 to begin supporting students in the 2018-2019 school year. Partnerships were established with the Antelope Valley Union High School (AVUHSD) and Lancaster School District (LSD) through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Informal partnerships included maintaining contact and updates with the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) through participation in the Regional Learning Networks which convene education partners throughout Santa Clarita Valley and the Antelope Valley monthly to address challenges and share resources for youth in care. The Los Angeles County Office of Child Protection partnered in leveraging their Education Coordinating Council (ECC) which convened cross system partners to address challenges for youth in care, by sharing information about our demonstration site and raising youth voice by incorporating feedback from students the Education Liaisons serve in the ECC's work.

The CES team included a Program Manager and four Education Liaisons (EL). Each EL managed two school sites. ELs were embedded into the counseling department of each school, working closely with the counseling staff and team. ELs also collaborated with the administrators on site in support of youth in care. In 2023, through additional funding from the Los Angeles County Office of Education, our program was able to hire a 5th Education Liaison.

ELs in Antelope Valley Union High School District were co-located full time at Eastside High School, Highland High School, Lancaster High School, and Palmdale High School serving students in the 9th through 12th grades. ELs in the Lancaster School District were co-located full time at Amargosa Creek Middle School, Endeavor Middle School, New Vista Middle School, Piute Middle School and followed the students to The Leadership Academy/ Rise if a transfer is made. While the focus for the middle school level was serving students in 7th and 8th grade, we also served 6th grade students if a need was expressed.

## STUDENTS RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING SUPPORTS

### FROM OUR EDUCATION LIAISONS:

- Specialized educational case management including bi-weekly 1:1 check-ins.
- Development of a comprehensive plan with goals and actions.
- Referrals to outside service providers.
- Engagement with adults in the youth's life.
- Thorough review of academic records including transcript and class review.
- Facilitating team meetings.
- Supporting the social emotional learning and development of students.
- Special Education support and advocacy (when applicable).
- Post-secondary support and planning up to six months post high school graduation.

## STUDENTS WERE REFERRED TO SERVICES BY SCHOOL COUNSELORS

### THROUGH A REFERRAL FORM PROCESS. REFERRAL REASONS INCLUDED:

- Decline in grades, failing or has failed 1+ courses in the last few months
- Decline in Attendance or Meets criteria for or at risk of Chronic Absenteeism
- Major Behavior Referrals, Internalized Behavior / Mental Health Need
- Placement Change (School or Caregiver/Housing)
- Credit deficient
- Transfers to the district mid-semester
- Below/far below proficiency in ELA or Math, Social/Emotional
- Has been previously identified as potential candidate to receive tier 3 (intensive) district supports, and other areas of needs identified by staff.

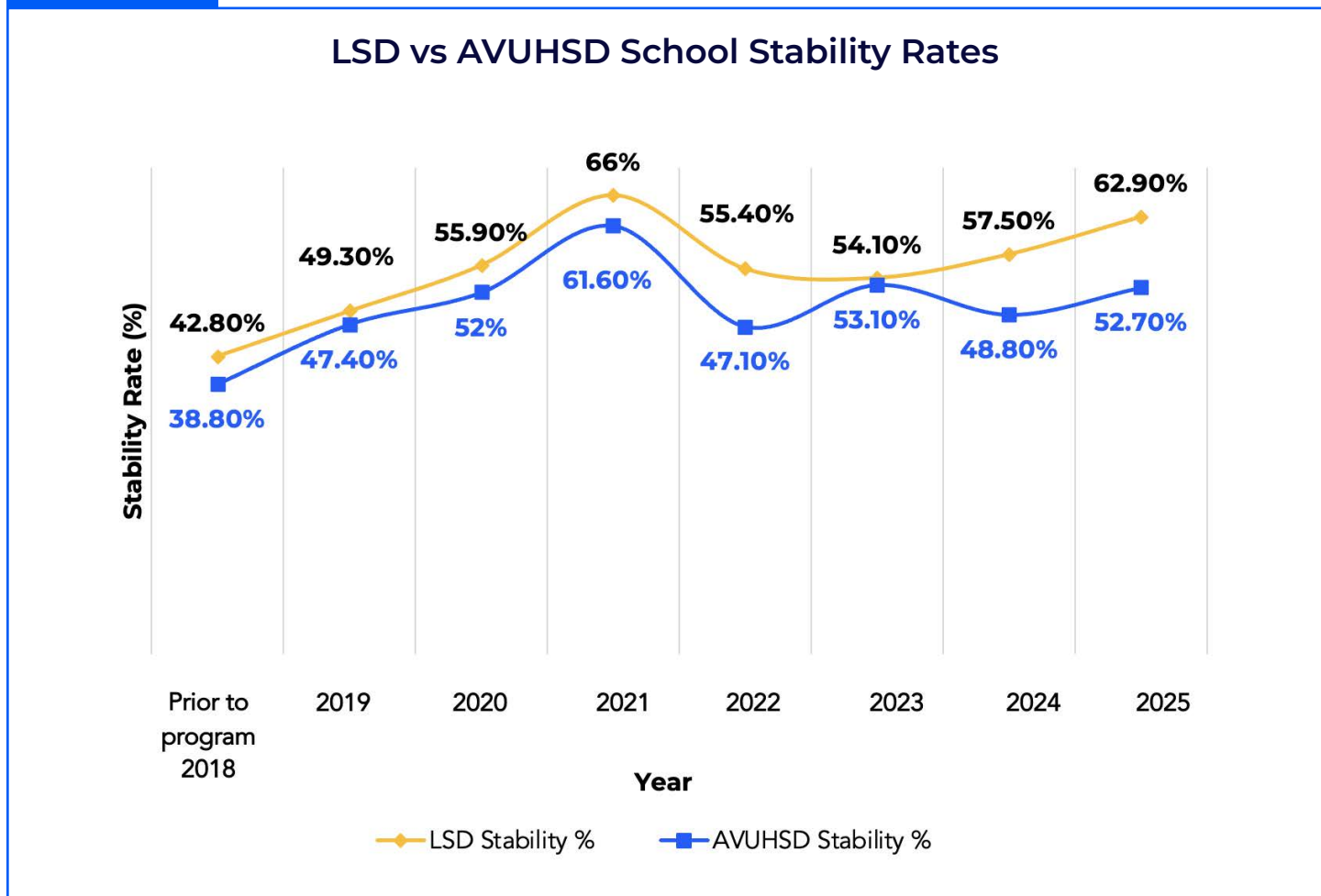
During the pandemic, when learning was moved to a virtual platform, ELs served every student at the co-located sites who were in foster care. The support was provided via phone and virtual meetings to ensure they had the technology and resources they needed for a successful school year. As a result of this additional support provided, a responsive model was implemented to support student immediate needs through consultation support. Consultations were requested via electronic form by counselors, administrators, teachers, and school staff. This responsive model was provided across the district for LSD and at the co-located sites for AVUHSD. Support included, but was not limited to, connection to services, academic review, records request, Graduation Exemption eligibility, school of origin support, and Education Rights Holder verification among other support. Additionally, ELs supported students with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion for all seniors being served as well as seniors who were not assigned to ELs.

# Antelope Valley and Lancaster School District Data

Los Angeles County has the highest population of students in foster care in the state. Both districts are within the top five districts with the highest foster youth population in LA County. The population of students in foster care for the demonstration sites during the program ranged from 2.6%-3.5% (LSD) and 1.7%-2.1% (AVUHSD) of the student population. These numbers are significantly high when compared to the state (.47%-.55%) and county (.59% -.75%) youth in foster care population.

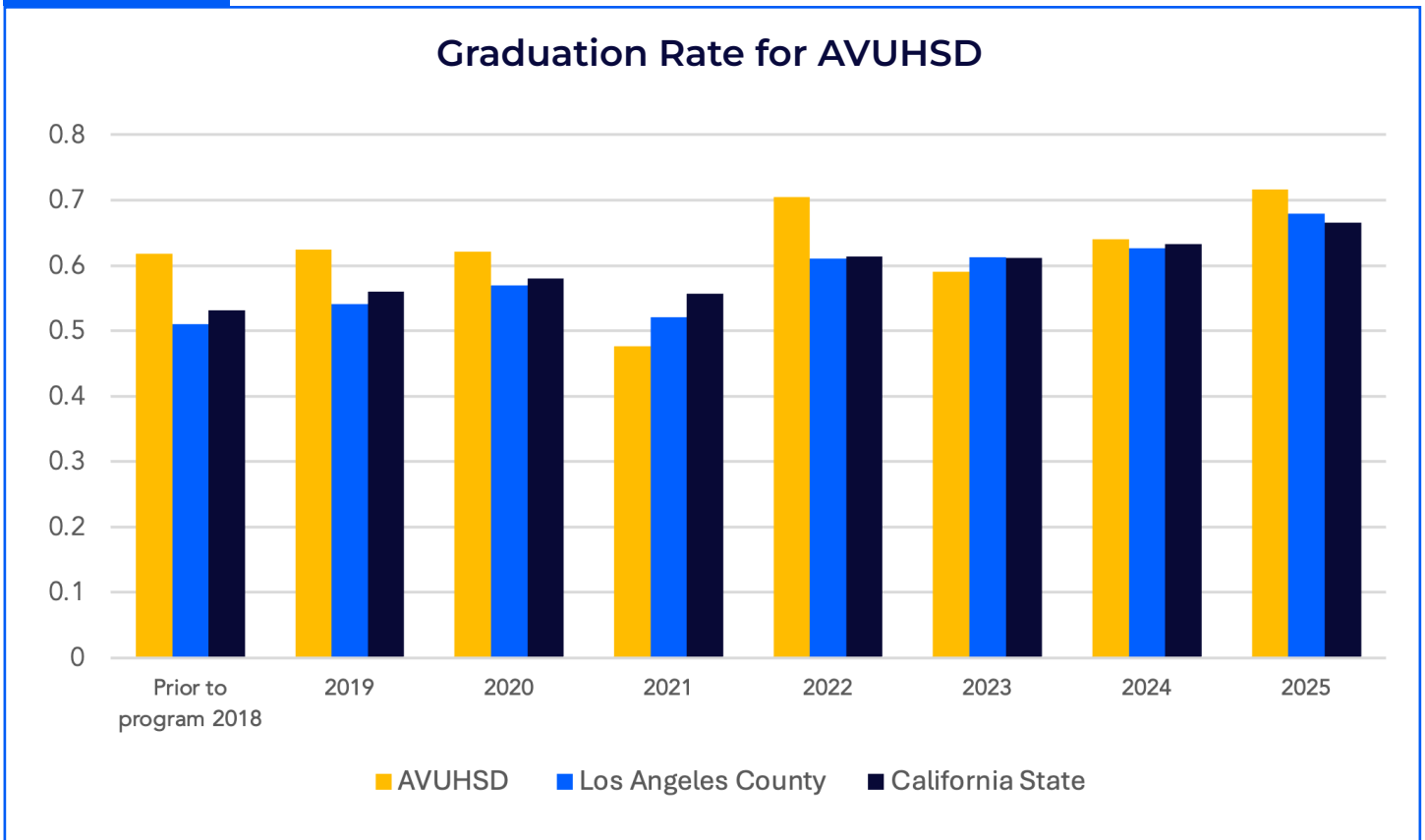
School stability rates fluctuated throughout the partnership. During our partnership with the districts, there was an increase in student stability rates. In 2018, prior to our partnership, LSD stability rate was 42.9% and AVUHSD was 38.8% for students in foster care. In 2025, the stability rate for LSD was 62.9% and AVUHSD was 52.7%. While there was an increase in school stability among both districts, there continues to be a need for highly mobile populations. One focus of the program was advocacy and ensuring that students have stable education access. Even with the dedicated work of ELs advocating for youth, **42% of students served through the program closed services due to moving out of the service area.**

FIGURE 1.



Graduation rates for the Antelope Valley Union High School District increased during the demonstration site period. When looking at overall AVUHSD district graduation rate data in 2018, prior to the program, the graduation rate was 61.8% for youth in foster care. In 2025, the graduation rate for the district was 71.6%. Since Education Liaisons were not co-located at all district high schools; the graduation rates for the co-located sites were considered.

**FIGURE 2.**



Graduation rates for the school sites where ELs were co-located for the school year 2024–2025 were; **Eastside High School 82.4%, Highland High School 75.9%, Lancaster High School 85.2%, and Palmdale High School 71.4%**. Graduation rates in 2025 for Los Angeles County were 68% and the rate for the state of California was 66.6%

# Antelope Valley CES Data

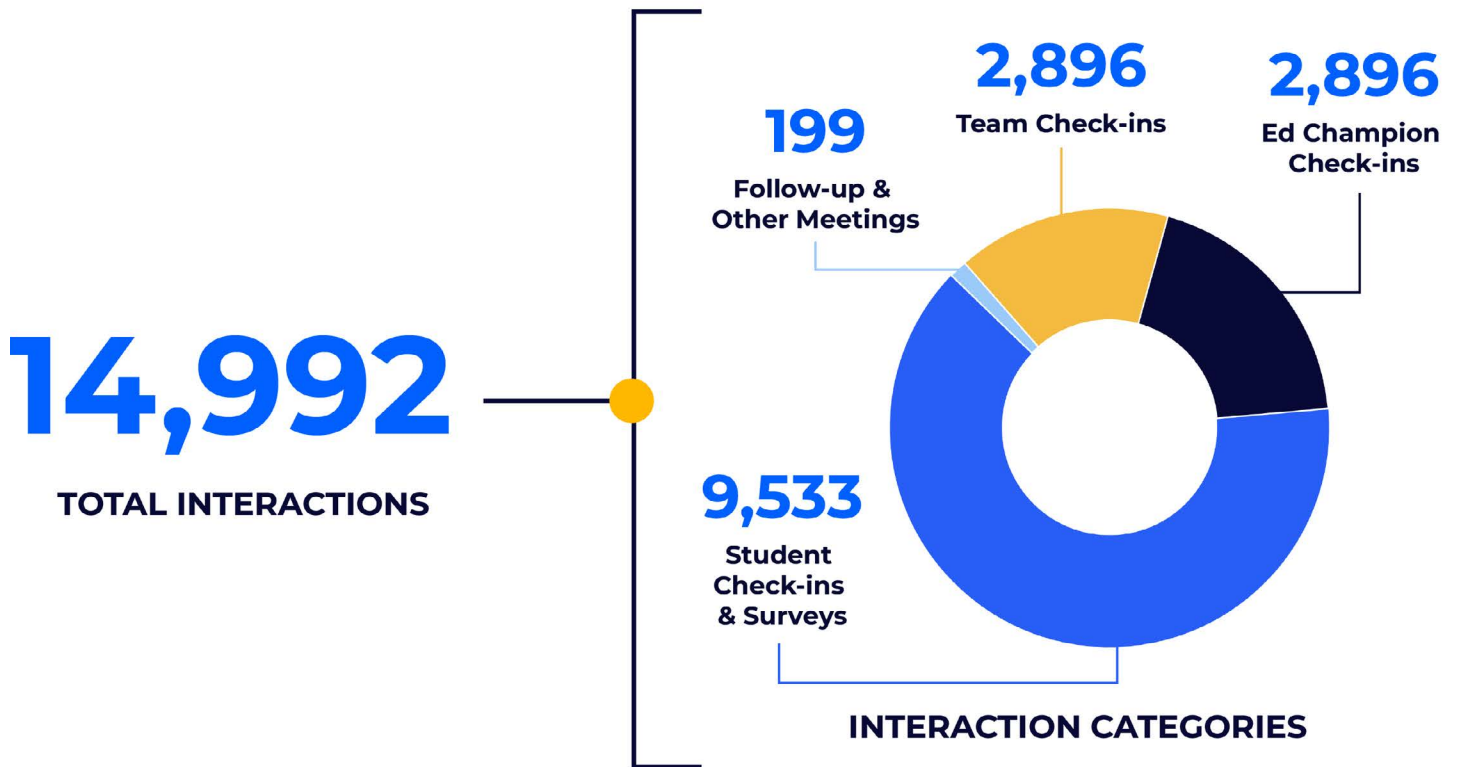
Throughout the entirety of the program, CES served a total of 450 students through the intensive program model. ELs met with students bi-weekly or more, if needed, to build relationships, set goals, discuss student strengths and needs. Additional meetings that took place were monthly check-ins with the social worker and the student's education champion. There was a total of 14,992 interactions throughout the program.

## THESE INTERACTIONS INCLUDED:

- **9,533** student check-ins
- **2,364** team check-ins (CSW, teacher, counselor, school staff)
- **2,896** Ed Champion (Ed rights holder, foster parent) check-ins
- **199** follow up/Other meetings.
- **1,692** attempted meetings
- Additionally, **3,000 general notes** for ongoing case management. When setting goals with students, ELs ensured that they were student led. Students learned how to create meaningful and measurable goals. A total of **2,303 student-led goals** were created throughout the program; **1,774 goals** were completed. Goal categories included but not limited to academics, extra-curricular, social capital, and post-secondary. Students learned this skill as a tool to contribute to success while navigating different stages of life. Goals were reviewed with students to ensure they were continuing to make progress or to develop action steps needed to achieve the identified goal.

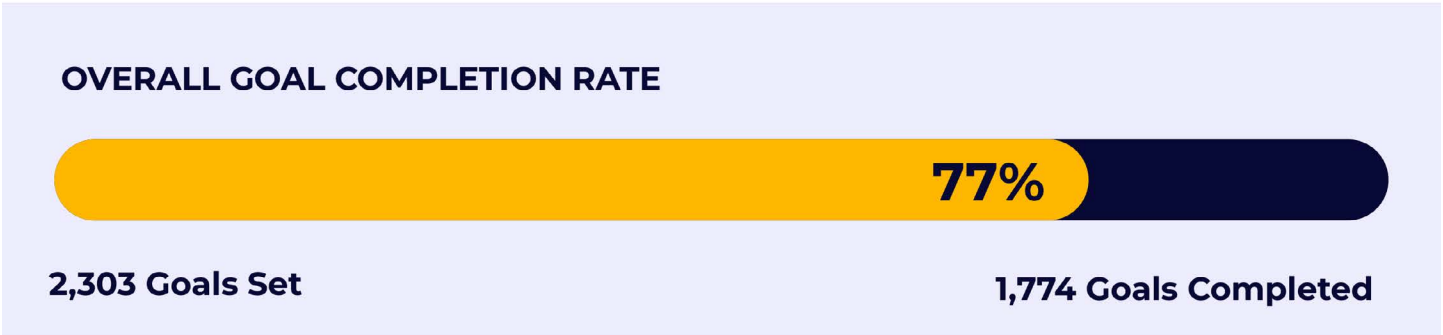
Through consultation services, ELs supported the short-term needs for students and were able to identify if intensive support was needed. A total of 562 consultation requests for support were completed beginning school year 2020-2021 through the 2024-2025 school year.

Students were also supported through peer community and connection building. Students identified the need to connect with others experiencing systems among their peers. As a result, ELs implemented monthly Resilient Scholar meetings at the middle school level to allow students to connect and learn about foster youth rights. Students expressed excitement and looked forward to these meetings. Various topics were discussed with youth such as school of origin rights, A-G requirements, and post-secondary education opportunities.



**562**  
CONSULTATIONS

**450**  
TOTAL STUDENTS SERVED



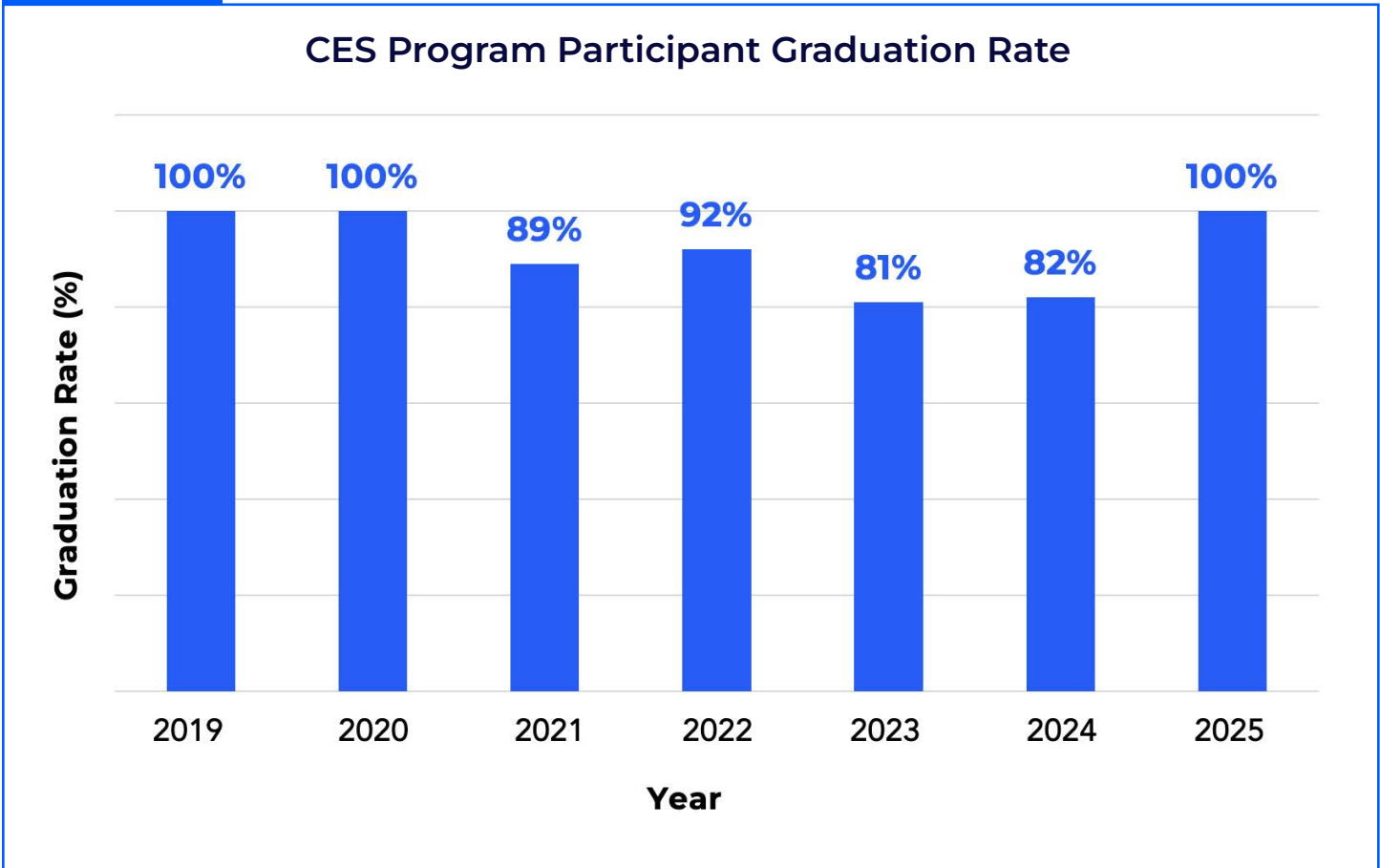
**Program graduation rate:**

This data reflects the students who participated in the CES program during their senior year and subsequently graduated. The number of seniors served each year varies. The following considerations were taken for graduation data reflecting the seniors served; 1. Students who were served less than one quarter of their senior year were not counted as a senior served that year. 2. Students who were working towards 5th year graduation and subsequently graduated were counted

as graduates. 3. Students who were working on 5th year but did not subsequently graduate were counted as non-graduates. 4. Students who were served during their senior year, transferred out, then graduated after their transfer are counted as graduates 5. Students who transferred out and did not graduate after transfer were counted as non-graduates. Throughout this program, a total of 77 students were served during their senior year. Of those students, 70 graduated high school.

**91%**  
OF CES PROGRAM  
PARTICIPANTS GRADUATED.

**FIGURE 3.**

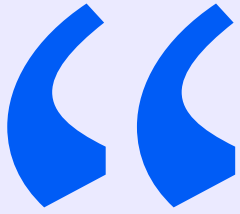


# Student and Stakeholder Voice

Surveys for feedback were obtained from students after 3 months of service or 6 meetings. This gave the CES program the opportunity to understand what was working for students and what needed improvement. Stakeholders, including School counselors and members of the student's team were also provided with a survey to be able to share their opinion about the program. Below are some quotes from students and staff that interacted with the CES program.



## Student Quotes:



**“Helped me understand MY RIGHTS”**

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**“My time with my EL was very productive. He helped me learn skills not only in school but skills that have drastically influenced the way I look at the world in a more logical standpoint.”**

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**“She made me believe and know that foster kids can do great things and do not have to abide the stereotype”**

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**“The support I received from Mr. Maciel was amazing. I was having a really hard time in foster care. I do not know what I would have done without his support.”**

## Stakeholder Quotes



**“The Educational Liaisons, Tiffany, Steven, and Alex, along with the Program Manager, Joanne, make up an essential part of our school district and student support team. In the Lancaster School District, I am fortunate enough to work with them on a regular basis. Not only do they provide support for our middle school students, but their guidance and support extend to all our school counselors across the district. Their assistance has been invaluable in our efforts to support students in foster care. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude and appreciation for their hard work.”**

## Stakeholder Quotes



**“ Ms. Amaya has been AMAZING! We are so lucky to have her. She works so hard for our kiddos, and it is apparent that she has a real passion for what she does. She is genuine, she really cares, and to our kids, that is EVERYTHING! They can sniff out a fake person really quickly. I really appreciate all of her time, effort, and positive energy. This is a very valuable program. Our kids in out of home care NEED this support.”**

# Expanding Impact: LEA Guide and AV Resource Guide

To increase the reach and impact of support for youth who are experiencing systems, CES, in collaboration with LACOE, created the [Local Education Agency \(LEA\) Leadership Guide](#). This is a guide for LEA leadership to support planning and monitoring for students that are experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or involved with the juvenile justice system. This guide offers key questions to help LEA leaders assess the use of equity focused policies, planning, and strategies for students with unique needs. It's meant for various LEA leaders, such as school board members, superintendents, and program coordinators.

While working in the Antelope Valley, a need for resources was identified. The program manager and ELs completed a landscape analysis to review the various resources accessible in the AV. Through this analysis the team created the [Antelope Valley Resource Guide](#) which included transportation, housing, basic needs, and mental health support among other resources. This was shared with families, local community-based organizations, and it was accessible via the district website.

## Trainings and Professional Development

CES staff worked collaboratively with both districts to increase the support for students in care. The program manager provided professional development opportunities to help increase the understanding of the unique challenges that students in care faced. Training included trauma informed practices, legislation review and understanding how this is practiced in everyday settings, school stability and the support they can provide, best practices, college opportunities, graduation exemptions, and general understanding of what it means to be a student in foster care. Training was provided to various groups such as teachers, administrators, office staff, and school counselors. Training also expanded beyond school sites as training was provided through state-wide conferences, County Office of Education, and webinars. From October 2022 through June 2025, a total of 17 professional development opportunities were provided where a total of 563 adults participated to better support youth in foster care.

The key impact of more adults understanding foster youth rights is that there is more opportunity for advocacy. This professional development allowed for more collaboration with staff who see students on a regular basis. CES and LSD implemented identification of students within the student information system to allow staff to be able to better support the needs of students. This opened the lines of communication and collaboration to support student success and school stability. An example of supporting school stability is enrollment staff informing the district foster liaison if a student changed home placement. This would prompt additional support to help the students remain at their school of origin and initiate the Best Interest Determination meeting process.

# From Demonstration Site to Sustainability

This program was created to support students with the plan of full sustainability within a public system. Conversations about the transition began in the 2023-24 school year. Public funding through the Wellness Coach certification became an option to support the program's sustainability. NCYL worked with ELs to ensure they were certified to qualify for future funding. Unfortunately, the reimbursement rate for this funding was not approved until spring of 2025, which did not allow the school districts to consider these funds for the following school year. LSD had started cost sharing beginning in 2022 and wanted to continue to support their students with the work that was being done at their sites. In the school year 2024- 2025 they were able to seek approval to create a new position within the district for an Education Liaison which was posted in August 2025. A new education liaison was hired and started working with students in October 2025. LSD was able to fund this position through a community schools grant and through Medi-Cal funding. They hope to be able to hire additional staff in upcoming years to support more school sites. NCYL supported the onboarding process for this staff and continues to provide support across the district and support to the Education Liaison.

An informal partnership has been maintained with AVUHSD to continue to provide professional development for district staff to support youth in care by being informed of foster youth rights and effective advocacy. Capacity building is also provided to student leaders to continue to increase their ability to self-advocate.

## Key Lessons Learned

Throughout the journey of CES in the AV, there were many lessons in learning how to best support students. Here are some key takeaways from the work in the Antelope Valley.

- 1. Relationships Matter:** Students will not engage in a meaningful way if a relationship is not established first. Showing up in an authentic manner is key to connecting with students. Not all students connect immediately. Being consistent is important when building relationships with students even if they may not seem open to engaging. Relationships are a catalyst for successful goal setting, academic achievement, and increased student self-efficacy.
- 2. Informed adults support students:** There is a benefit to providing professional development to the whole school site to best support students in care. Being able to understand the unique needs of this population helps support school stability, behavior interventions, and support a positive school culture.
- 3. School Stability continues to be a major need:** Even with ELs being co-located at school sites, there was lots of movement within our program. Our program served 450 students; 42% of students were closed from our program due to moving out of the service area. While students had support and advocacy through the EL, there continued to be lots of movement in their home and school placement. Notice of placement changes continues to be an area for improvement with staff responding reactively to support school of origin efforts after a student was moved. Staff with knowledge of foster youth rights supported school stability and informed the EL or foster liaison about potential disenrollment. This allowed the team to seek the necessary information and move forward with a Best Interest Determination meeting.



# In Appreciation!

We would like to thank the Lancaster School District, Antelope Valley Union High School District, all their dedicated staff, and the many partners for their commitment to supporting youth in care. The commitment to supporting students has been integral to creating impact. We want to express deep gratitude for the Education Liaisons who worked in partnerships with Students and their teams to build meaningful relationships and provide advocacy for the students. Everyone's commitment and meaningful support have made this work possible in the Antelope Valley. We would especially like to thank the students and their families who were dedicated to reaching their goals and believing in themselves. This work would not have been possible without your willingness to collaborate with us.