PIPELINE TO SUCCESS

Supporting California Foster Youth from High School to Community College

OCTOBER 2019

EDUCATIONAL RESULTS PARTNERSHIP

CALIFORNIA COLLEGE PATHWAYS

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About Educational Results Partnership

Educational Results Partnership (ERP) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is data-informed, employer-led, and equity-focused. We are committed to improving outcomes across all levels of education — from Pre-K through career — with a focus on promoting student success in college and in attaining living-wage jobs. Our work focuses on identifying successful educational systems, practices, programs and policies in public education that are getting the best results for students, and fostering collaboration across academia and business to replicate success. At ERP, we partner with educators, policymakers, business leaders and nonprofit organizations to improve educational productivity.

Cal-PASS Plus, funded by the California Community College Chancellor's Office, is an accessible, actionable and collaborative Pre-K through career system of student data. The system and initiatives are managed through a partnership between San Joaquin Delta College and ERP. Cal-PASS Plus's mission is to provide actionable data to help improve student success along the education-to-workforce pipeline. Collaboration using data informs instruction, helps close achievement gaps, identifies scalable promising practices, and improves transitions. Cal-PASS Plus offers longitudinal data charts, detailed analysis of transitions and workplace outcomes, information and artifacts on promising practices, and comparisons among like universities, colleges, K-12 school systems and schools.

About California College Pathways

California College Pathways (CCP) is a public-private partnership dedicated to creating a seamless system of support for foster youth as they transition from high school to colleges and universities and as they work toward their post-secondary goals. The work of California College Pathways focuses on supporting foster youth in four important areas on their path to success:

- **Equip** foster youth with the knowledge, skills, and supports to pursue their college and career goals.
- **Enroll** foster youth in a post-secondary degree or certification program that prepares them for gainful employment.
- **Earn** a college degree or certificate.
- **Embark** on a career path.

CCP supports research to better understand foster youth experiences to and through college, including the identification of systemic barriers and effective practices to support this important student population. The network of campuses, and the funders and practitioners who support them, use research findings to support the continuous improvement of post-secondary, secondary and child welfare systems through actionable data, training and technical assistance, as well as to engage in advocacy and policy implementation efforts that strengthen the connections between research, policy and practice that can improve the experience of foster youth.

Acknowledgments

This report was made possible by the generous support and collaboration of several partners who provided funding and expertise:

- Stuart Foundation
- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- John Burton Advocates for Youth
- California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office
- Walter S. Johnson Foundation

The research conducted for this report was made possible by the support of the key partners below. These organizations funded the creation of the Community College Foster Youth Dashboard on the Cal-PASS system, establishing a foundation for foster youth data collection and use:

- California Wellness Foundation
- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- Pritzker Foster Care Initiative
- Stuart Foundation
- Walter S. Johnson Foundation

Educational Results Partnership would also like to thank Alliance for Children's Rights, National Center for Youth Law, and California Youth Connection for their expertise and guidance throughout the writing process.

Special acknowledgment for contributing to this report:

- James S. Lanich, Ph.D
- Anthony Dalton, MS
- Palvinder Kaur Dhillon, MPH
- Alan Chan, Ph.D
- Marissa Kraynak, Ph.D
- Elle Gemma Gruver
- Debbie Raucher, MSW
- Alexia Everett
- Devin Moynihan
- Lauren Holt
- Elliott Rice, MS

This report is dedicated to the practitioners serving foster youth across the state of California. This work would not have been possible without the participation and guidance of the K-12 districts and county offices of education that provided data for this research. Many of these foster youth champions, who work tirelessly to serve students and other practitioners, took time out of their busy days to share their experiences and questions with the research team. Their commitment to improving the lives of foster youth students inspires us to continue our work leveraging data to accelerate success for this historically disadvantaged population.

Background on this Research Series

In October 2017, California College Pathways (CCP) and Educational Results Partnership (ERP) completed research exploring the outcomes and supports available to foster youth in the California Community College system. The resulting report, *Accelerating Success: Turning Insights into Action for Foster Youth at California Community Colleges*[1] highlighted the importance of early alert systems and indicated that providing targeted support to a large percentage of foster youth on campus leads to better outcomes for these students. Prior to the release of *Accelerating Success*, CCP worked with RTI International and ERP to provide institutional-level data detailed in a 2015 report *Charting the Course: Using Data to Support Foster Youth College Success.*[2] This report outlined data that showed that foster youth who enrolled at these institutions face significant academic and economic challenges and that student support programs specifically for foster youth may address some of these issues.

The findings in *Accelerating Success* and *Charting the Course* built on existing research that illustrates the educational achievement gap between foster youth and non-foster youth and some of the causes for this gap. The following report augments these previous studies and aims to answer key questions related to foster youth transitions from high school to community college.

Executive Summary

In response to a series of policy changes enacted in recent years to elevate foster youth success in California Community Colleges, there is a need for a comprehensive, data-driven understanding of how foster youth fare compared to their peers on the pathway between high school and community college. This report links K-12 and community college data to address the following questions:

1. How do foster youth compare to their peers in transitioning from high school to community college?
2. What factors predict success along the transition between high school and community college?
3. What barriers or risk factors contribute to the equity gap between foster youth and their peers in transitioning from high school to college?

Findings

- Academic achievement among foster youth lags behind their peers in both high school and in the first year of community college, signaling persistent barriers to a successful high school-to-college transition.
- Foster youth face systemic barriers and challenges throughout their high school experience compared to their peers. Foster youth experience greater school mobility, suspensions and exclusion, and missed days of school when compared to their peers.
- Foster youth are applying to community college at a higher rate than their peers.
- Targeted support programs for foster youth are working: foster youth are accessing financial support grants and academic support services more often than their peers.
- Linking data from K-12 and community college revealed issues that can be addressed to bolster success for foster youth in their journey towards earning a post-secondary degree.
- School mobility and suspensions and exclusions while in high school negatively impact academic success in the first year of community college. Foster youth are affected by these risk factors more than their peers.
- Both financial and academic support in the first year of community college are predictive of greater academic success.

Recommendations

- **Reduce school mobility for foster youth.** Increased school mobility in high school is detrimental to academic success in community college. To address this barrier, practitioners working with foster youth should implement key practices like ensuring a best interest determination process (BID) that includes an education rights holder is available for all students, developing cost sharing agreements and transportation plan templates, and documenting processes for sending and receiving students between schools.
- **Address suspensions and exclusions for foster youth in high school.** Time away from the classroom is also detrimental to success in the high school-to-college transition. Foster youth are disproportionately suspended or excluded from high school compared to their peers. Educational leaders should re-examine existing suspension/exclusion procedures and prioritize trauma informed training for all school personnel.
- **Provide funding for foster youth specific supports within K-12 systems.** Providing dedicated financial resources for supporting foster youth within K-12 systems is a significant step toward keeping these students in their school of origin as well as in improving attendance and suspension/exclusion rates for foster youth in high school.
- **Develop strategies to reduce summer melt.** Many foster youth who apply to college don't end up enrolling. This phenomenon is termed "summer melt" as it happens during the summer between high school and college. High schools and colleges should develop and implement strategies and programs that specifically focus on reducing this lack of momentum for foster youth during this crucial transition point.
- **Increase access to financial supports for foster youth in community college.** Ensuring access to financial support for tuition and daily life expenses has a significant positive impact on foster youth in their post-secondary journey. Several support programs exist, but not all eligible students are accessing them. Targeted efforts toward getting foster youth into these financial aid programs is necessary.
- **Ensure foster youth have access to educational support services.** Increased educational support for foster youth is also beneficial. Colleges should ensure foster youth have access to counseling and advising services and have the tools to create an education plan.

- **Create data systems that allow data sharing across K-12, colleges, and child welfare to enhance the identification of foster youth in college systems.** Because foster youth have their data in multiple systems across individual schools, districts, local child welfare agencies, community college, and community-based organizations, some students are not identified as foster youth and miss out on key supports. Systematically linking this data will provide better insights for the field and decrease the likelihood that a student will fall through the cracks.

The Appendices at the end of this report provide descriptions of analytic methods, metric definitions, and results tables for all samples and subsamples included in this report.

Statewide data related to attitudes, behaviors, and performance of foster youth in California's K-12 schools can be found on the California School Dashboard. Cal-PASS Plus members can explore foster youth outcomes on the Student Success Metrics and the Community College Foster Youth Dashboards on the Cal-PASS Plus system.

Introduction

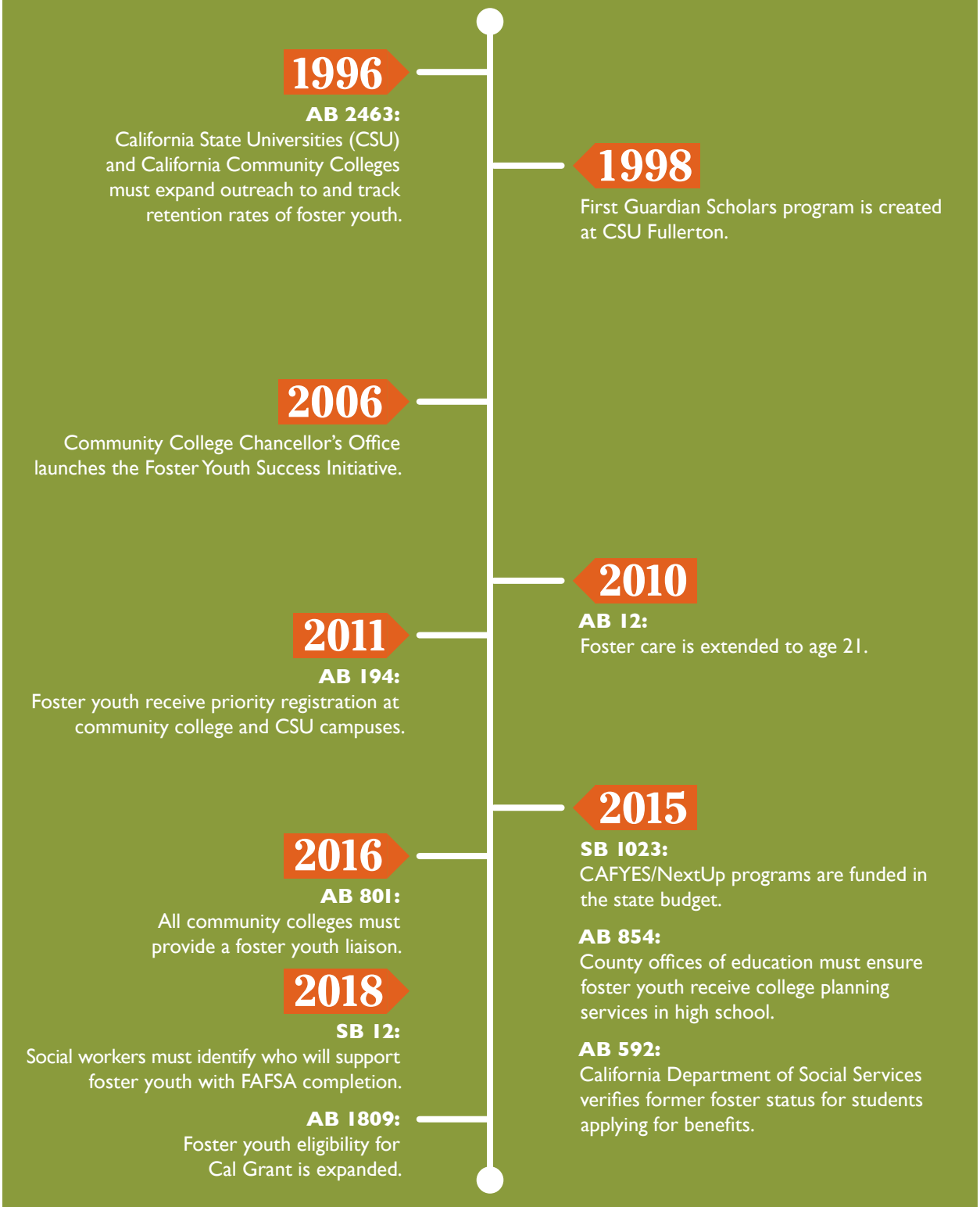
Among students in the California education system, foster youth face a disproportionate number of hurdles towards academic success. These students require a unique set of educational supports and services to achieve at the same level as their peers. Data-informed studies provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and barriers foster youth face and are a tool for foster youth practitioners to target effective interventions to close the persistent equity gap between foster youth and their peers. While much research has focused solely on K-12 outcomes and higher education outcomes for foster youth separately, this report is unique in that it connects both high school and community college data. This report aims to better understand how experiences within each system interrelate and what can be done during the crucial transition point between high school and college to better support foster youth in their educational trajectory.

Over the past two decades, California legislators, advocates, and practitioners have transformed educational pathways to improve outcomes for foster youth. The first targeted campus support program for foster youth emerged in 1998 with the creation of the Guardian Scholars program at California State University, Fullerton. The model quickly spread and programs for foster youth are now in place at 125 community colleges and universities across the state. In 2006, the Community College Chancellor's Office launched the Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI), pioneering a system-wide effort to support foster youth as they navigate the path to a post-secondary degree. Through FYSI, a foster youth liaison is designated at every community college to provide targeted services for foster youth students. This requirement became codified in law with the passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 801 in 2016.

The California legislature has enacted several measures designed to remove barriers for foster youth, including providing them with priority registration and priority access to on-campus housing. In 2012, the landmark measure AB 12 extended foster care age to 21, opening pathways to college for thousands of foster youth. The passage of Senate Bill (SB) 1023 in 2014 and subsequent budget allocation in 2015 created the Cooperating Agencies Foster Youth Educational Support (CAFYES) program, later rebranded as NextUp. NextUp provides foster youth with service coordination, counseling, tutoring, career guidance, and direct support for non-tuition costs such as books, childcare, transportation and housing at 45 colleges with a combined $20 million annual budget.

In recent years the legislature has also created greater accountability for college planning for foster youth through AB 854, which requires County Offices of Education (COEs) to ensure foster youth receive college planning services while in high school and SB 12, which requires social workers to identify in the case plan who will support foster youth with financial aid and college applications. Finally, new measures are now in place that remove barriers and expand access to financial aid, including budget augmentations to the

Key Policy Milestones for CA Foster Youth



Introduction Continued

Chafee Education and Training Voucher program, expanded access to the state's CalGrant program and removal of a key administrative burden through automated verification of foster youth status.

While systemic barriers still remain that hinder foster youth's ability to realize their educational goals, these positive advances in both practice and policy have eased the path for thousands of foster youth. As many of these policies are relatively new, the full impact is yet to be realized. While progress has been significant, the available data points to the reality that foster youth continue to trail behind their peers in both high school and community college achievement.

Transitioning between high school and college can be an overwhelming life experience for many young adults. Most students, however, have parents who can serve as a safety net by assisting with the college application and financial aid process, offering an emotional support system, providing stable housing and transportation throughout college, and the financial support to cover food, supplies, and tuition. Unfortunately, many foster youth do not have this safety net, making an already difficult transition seem impossible. The research available to date that can point practitioners and policymakers to data-driven solutions has been limited. Because the number of foster youth is relatively small, even when compared to other marginalized groups of students, the amount of actionable data available for use by foster youth stakeholders is also relatively small.

While previous research has demonstrated the deficiencies in foster youth academic performance, this report identifies the factors that contribute to these outcomes and serves as a foundation for understanding the predictors of a successful transition to college for foster youth. This report further outlines practices that can support improved academic outcomes for foster youth, offering a roadmap for both practitioners and policymakers on how to move the needle on foster youth success.

Methodology:

This report analyzes data drawn from two samples of high school and community college students. The first dataset identified a cohort of students who were flagged in the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) as foster youth. CALPADS verifies foster care status through a data match with the California Department of Social Services. The second dataset comprised first-year community college students who self-reported their foster youth status when they enrolled in community college.[a] The two datasets were used in combination to validate the findings described in this report.

Samples

1. **High School Data:** Data from 10 K-12 districts and County Offices of Education (COEs) ranging in size and geographic location were available for this study. These partners submitted verified rosters of foster youth enrolled in a district or county in the 2016-2017 academic year to the Cal-PASS Plus system. Three subsamples from this data are included in the analyses:
   - **High School Cohort:** The total sample size of high school students for the 2016-2017 academic year was 625,126. Within this sample, 4,068 students were identified as foster youth.
   - **12th-Grade Cohort**: There were 149,170 12th-graders included from the High School Cohort. Within this subsample, 491 of these students were identified as foster youth.
   - **Community College Cohort:** Of the High School Cohort, there were 57,190 students who went on to enroll in community college in 2017-2018. Within this subsample, 172 were identified as foster youth.
2. **Self-Reported Community College Data:** Data from a sample of community college students was examined to look at first-year college success in the 2017-2018 academic year. Only students that were able to be linked to a K-12 record in the Cal-PASS Plus system were included in the study. This sample was included to offer a more robust analysis from a larger sample than what was available in the High School Cohort.

   Students in this sample identified themselves as foster youth at the time of application. In some cases, colleges further validated or supplemented this information with data from financial aid applications; however, this practice was not consistent across institutions. These self-identified students may have been in foster care at any point in their lives and were not limited to a foster care experience while they were in high school.

   There were 146,066 first-year community college students included in this sample, 2,353 self-identified as foster youth.

Research analysis

The research approach in this study was to first generate quantitative baseline comparisons between foster youth and non-foster youth in high school and community college settings to understand where academic achievement and access gaps persist. We subsequently used sophisticated statistical techniques to analyze various factors that could explain why these gaps persist between foster youth and their peers. Finally, we identified areas stakeholders can target to improve academic outcomes for foster youth based on the data. A full summary of statistical techniques used in the report can be found in Appendix A.

[a] See Appendix A for a full description of the cohorts used in this study.

Study limitations

1. The foster youth High School Cohort was compiled from data reports from 10 districts and county offices around the state of California in the 2016-2017 academic school year. This report represents a snapshot in time, therefore not all foster youth enrolled in participating institutions during this school year are included. Students who may have been in foster care at a previous or subsequent point in their lives who were not currently in foster care when the report was captured were also not included.

2. The Community College Cohort consisted of students who self-identified as current or former foster youth in the college application process and could be matched to K-12 records in the Cal-PASS Plus system. There may be students with experience in the foster care system who were not included in the community college self-identified sample. This is, in part, because some foster youth may choose to not self-identify during the application process because they do not want to be associated with their current or former foster status, are afraid of being stigmatized, or are uncertain about how this designation will be used. It is also possible that some students who had never been in foster care were erroneously identified as foster youth.

3. The analyses in this report do not control for the length or intensity of a child's experience in foster care.

4. This analysis was limited to foster youth in California, so these findings may not be generalizable to other states.

Cal-PASS Plus

This report utilized data from Cal-PASS Plus, a voluntary, actionable, system of data that links K-12, community college, university, and workforce data. Cal-PASS Plus is an initiative of the California Community College Chancellor's Office managed in partnership with San Joaquin Delta College and Educational Results Partnership. K-12 institutions that are members of Cal-PASS Plus upload data from CALPADS, at which point the data are deidentified to protect the confidentiality of student records. Cal-PASS Plus also includes comprehensive community college data from the Chancellor's Office MIS (COMIS). Using Cal-PASS Plus data, this report links longitudinal student-level data across high school and community colleges.

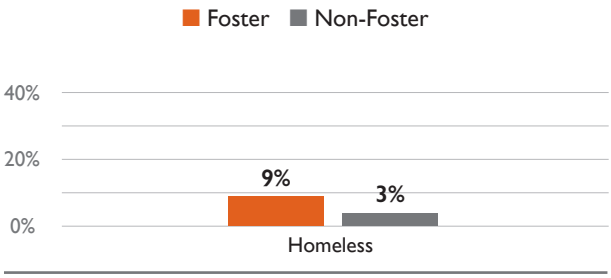
Key Demographic Information

Using the High School Cohort from the 2016-2017 academic year, 4,068 foster youth were compared to 621,058 non-foster youth from the same districts and counties to determine where demographic differences emerged. Gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and housing status were all examined in this comparison. While similarities do exist between foster youth and their non-foster peers, the students included in this study exhibited two key demographic differences: race/ethnicity and housing status.

When viewing race/ethnicity, foster youth were more likely than their peers to be Black and less likely to be Asian and Pacific Islander (API). Hispanic and White youth were similarly represented in both groups in the High School Cohort **(Figure 1A)**.

The second key difference is that foster youth were disproportionately impacted by homelessness while they were in high school. Foster youth were nearly three times more likely to experience homelessness in the 2016-2017 school year compared to their non-foster youth peers (**Figure 1B**). This begs the question: why are identified high school foster youth experiencing homelessness when they are supposed to be in a placement? Youth experiencing homelessness regardless of foster youth status, face many disadvantages,

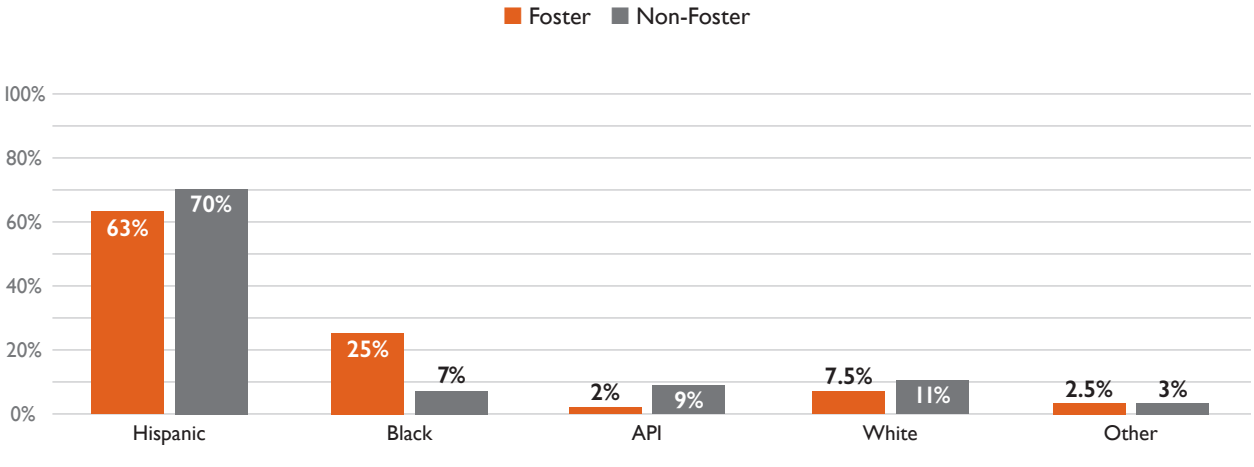
Figure 1B: Youth Experiencing Homelessness



especially when it comes to educational attainment. Students impacted by homelessness are much less likely to complete high school compared to their peers who have not.[3] Other studies have found that foster youth are more than twice as likely to experience homelessness in community college, suggesting that a foster youth who experiences homelessness in high school may continue to face this challenge once they transition into post-secondary.[4]

These disparities provide context for how foster youth's experience differs from their non-foster youth peers. Considered in conjunction with this report's findings, these can further inform factors that impact foster youth success along the high school-to-community college pipeline.

Figure 1A: Race/Ethnicity of High School Cohort



Findings

Foster youth advocates, policymakers, and educational leaders have made targeted strides to elevate success for foster youth in community colleges. These efforts do appear to be having a positive impact, but more work is still needed. Ongoing disparities signal the need for a greater understanding of what factors are contributing to poor outcomes across both K-12 and community college and what forms of intervention are most effective in the quest for educational equity for foster youth.

Equity gaps in high school achievement persist for foster youth.

A student's high school experience is highly predictive of their future success in college.[5] The many barriers that foster youth face are reflected in persistent achievement gaps between foster youth and their non-foster peers while in high school. Foster youth in this study, regardless of their race/ethnicity, were more likely to achieve a lower grade point average (GPA) than their peers across all high school grade levels (**Figures 2A and 2B**).

Figure 2A: Average GPA by Grade Level

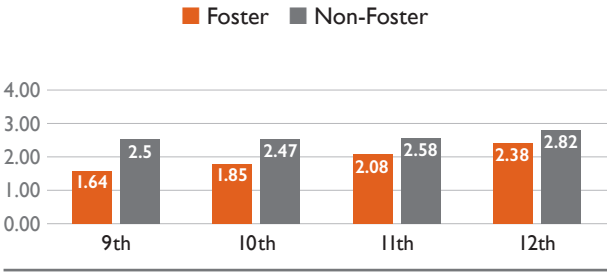
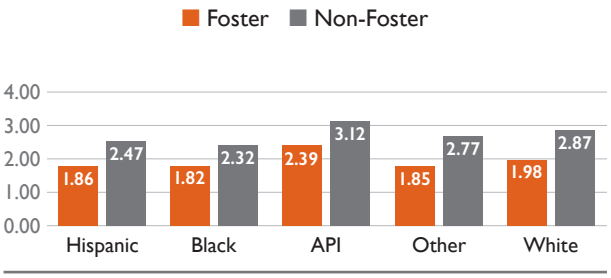
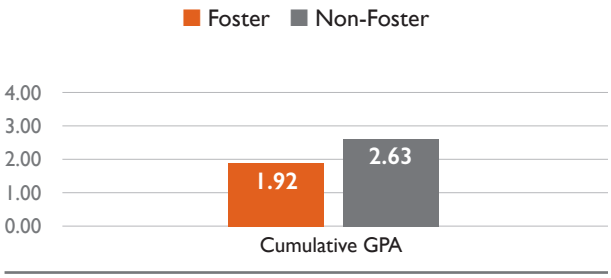


Figure 2B: Average GPA by Race/Ethnicity



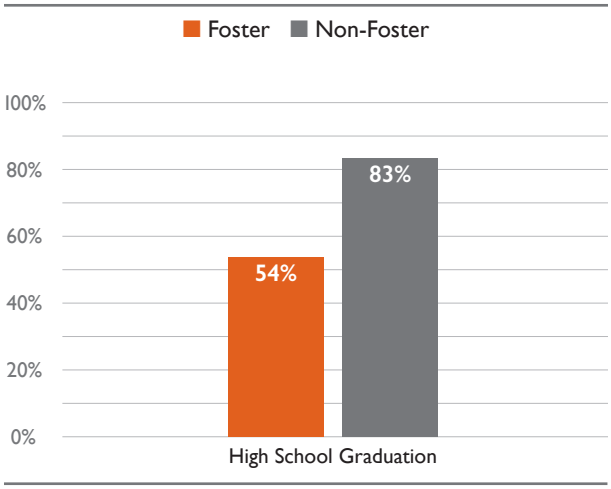
The average cumulative high school GPA for foster youth was nearly one whole grade point lower than their non-foster youth peers (**Figure 2C**).

Figure 2C: Cumulative High School GPA



Compounding lower academic achievement, only 54 percent of foster youth graduated from high school in four years compared to 83 percent of their non-foster youth peers (**Figure 2D**). The average student graduates high school in four years, so this analysis used a four-year graduation rate for comparison. However, the 2018 CalYOUTH study[6] found that by 21 years old, nearly 80 percent of foster youth earn a high school diploma, nearly closing the gap between foster youth and the general population.

Figure 2D: Four-Year Graduation Rates for 12th Grade Students

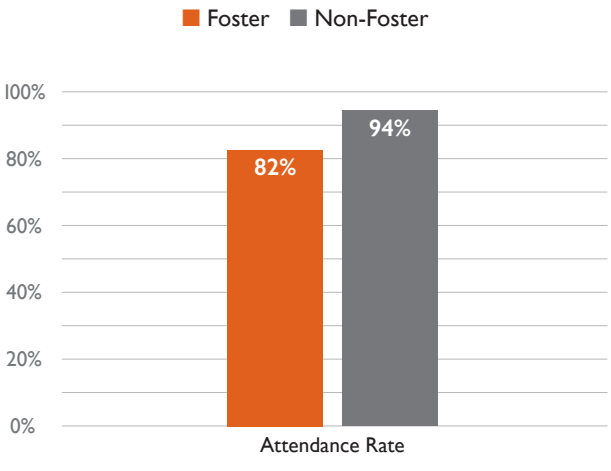


Throughout high school, foster youth experience barriers that impede academic success.

Because foster youth endure a greater number of challenges outside of the school environment than their non-foster youth peers, this study also examined a range of non-academic factors that can impact a student's school experience. Foster youth included in this study experienced lower rates of attendance, higher rates of suspension or exclusion, greater number of high schools attended, and less access to advanced placement courses. When analyzed further, both suspension and exclusion as well as the number of high schools a student attends are strong predictors for whether a student graduates high school. This is particularly important for foster youth because they have greater school mobility and are more likely to be suspended or excluded from school.

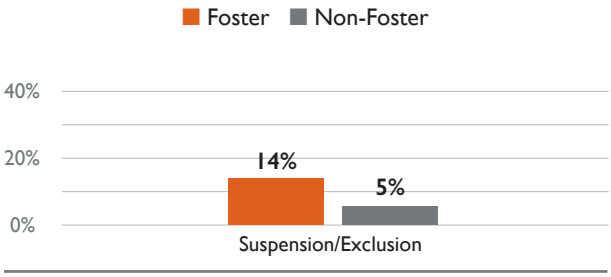
The attendance rate for foster youth in this study is 82 percent, whereas the attendance rate for all students is 94 percent (**Figure 3A**). This supports other research that found foster youth students experience chronic absenteeism more often than their peers, sometimes by twice as much, throughout their education. Family and caregiver issues among foster youth can lead to running away or a lack of school motivation, contributing to foster youth missing more days of school. Many previous studies examined younger foster student absenteeism, finding evidence that attendance rates for foster youth improve when they have greater stability in their placements.[7-9]

Figure 3A: Average Attendance Rate in 2016-2017



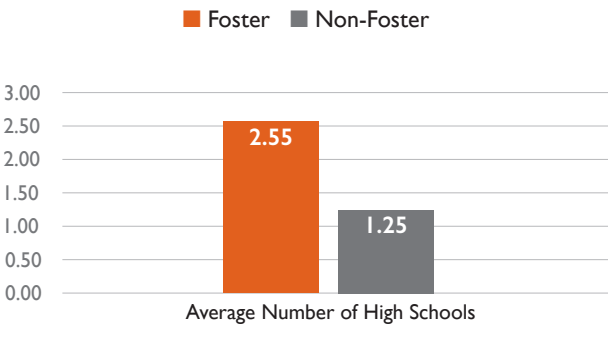
Additionally, foster youth were more than two times more likely than other students to face suspension or exclusion throughout high school (**Figure 3B**). Disciplinary actions against students are known to disrupt their academic performance and are associated with decreased academic achievement.[10-11] Foster youth often lack a parent advocate when they are faced with disciplinary actions which may contribute to this equity gap.

Figure 3B: Students Suspended/Excluded in 2016-2017



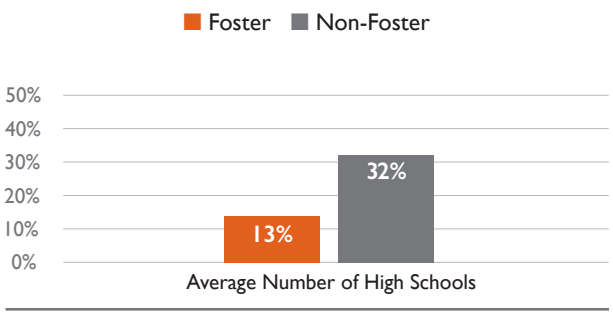
Consistent with other studies, this analysis also found that foster youth experienced more school mobility than their peers. On average, foster youth attended 2.55 high schools between 9th and 12th grade, compared to only 1.25 high schools attended by their peers (**Figure 3C**). Each move to a new high school requires students to adjust to a new environment, resulting in higher levels of stress and a sense of displacement due to disruptions in academic, family, peer, and other important domains among youth.[12] Student mobility has also been shown to negatively affect test scores and high school graduation.[13]

Figure 3C: Average Number of High Schools Attended by 12th Grade Students



In addition to attendance and disciplinary barriers, foster youth also experience academic barriers. In this cohort, only 13 percent of foster youth attended schools that offer advanced placement (AP) courses compared with 32 percent of their peers (**Figure 3D**). Students who do not have access to AP courses are at an academic disadvantage, meaning that the foster youth in this study experience academic inequities when it comes to opportunities to pursue advanced coursework.

Figure 3D: Students Attending a School Offering AP Courses



Foster youth are applying to college at high rates but many do not subsequently enroll.

Of those students who are able to overcome these barriers and successfully complete high school, foster youth are applying to community college at a higher rate than their peers. While this may be due in part to higher application rates to four-year universities for non-foster youth,[b] this is an encouraging finding that shows that efforts to support foster youth with the college application process are working (**Figures 4, 5, and 6**).

While college application rates for foster youth who have graduated high school are high, only about 50 percent of those who submitted an application subsequently enrolled in a community college. Although completing an application for college is a significant accomplishment, some foster youth still experience challenges in making the final push to enroll in classes and make it to campus. There are many barriers to actually attending college, including financial support, housing stability, and family supports, and this leak in the high school-to-college pipeline should be a significant area of focus.

Figure 4: High School to Community College Transitions

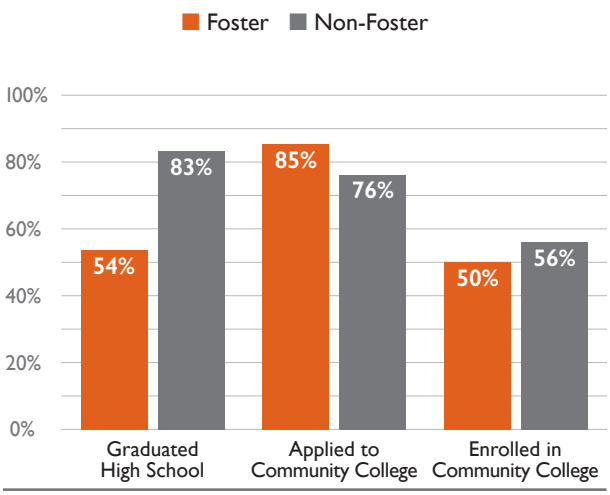
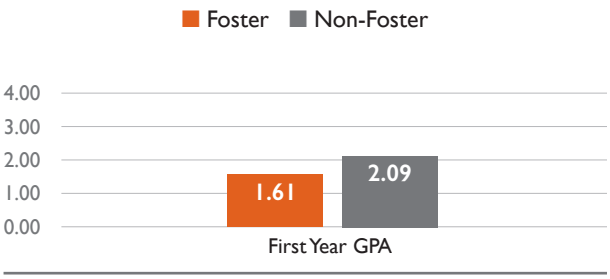
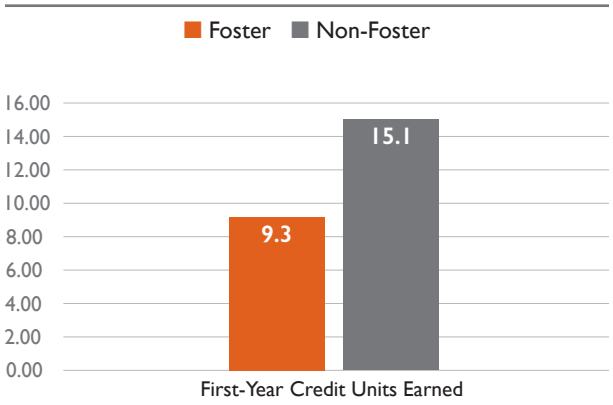


Figure 5: First-Year Community College GPA



[b]Data from the 2016-2017 California Department of Education (CDE) describes post-secondary education enrollment across many different sectors including public and private universities in and out of state as well as California Community Colleges. According to this data from the CDE, 83 percent of foster youth who go on to post-secondary education enroll in California Community Colleges as opposed to 17 percent at other institutions. The general population of students enrolling in post-secondary education, however, is less skewed with 55 percent of students enrolling in Community College and 45 percent of students enrolling in other institutions.

Figure 6: First-Year Community College Credit Units Earned



In their first year of community college, foster youth are not performing at the same level as their peers.

For those students who do enroll in community college, foster youth achieved at a lower level of success than their non-foster youth peers. When comparing first-year academic outcomes in community college, foster youth completed fewer credit units than their peers and earned half a grade point less than non-foster youth students. These findings highlight that even when foster youth overcome barriers in the high school to college transition, challenges persist once they reach college.

Missing key first-year milestones can have consequences beyond academics. For example, on average, foster youth do not achieve a 2.0 GPA in their first year, which is the minimum required GPA to maintain most forms of financial aid. This fact has serious implications for these students' ability to remain enrolled for a second year. Students earn course credit units by completing a course with a "pass" for an ungraded course, and a grade of "C or above" for graded courses, so falling below this threshold inhibits students from receiving credit for the courses they've taken. Additionally, foster youth in this sample earned about nine credit units in their first year on average. To be considered full time, a student must take a minimum of twelve credit units per term. *Accelerating Success* found that students who earn at least 15 credit units during their first term are more likely to finish their degree than those earning less than 15 credit units. Further, students earning 30 credit units

in the first year of community college are most likely to stay on track to graduate.[1] This finding signals that foster youth face major hurdles to obtaining a post-secondary degree and thus there is an urgent need to better understand how foster youth practitioners can support foster youth with earning more credit units early on in college.

This study employed a novel approach to pinpoint what contributing factors predict success along the high school-to-college transition. Looking at a range of experiences and supports in both high school and college, specific factors along the educational pipeline were identified as success factors that explain achievement or risk factors that contribute to lower outcomes. Success in community college was measured by GPA and credit units earned by students in their first year of community college.

Figure 7:

What Relates to First-year Community College Outcomes for Foster Youth?

Factors that Contributed to Positive First-Year Success

Student Support Grants
Foster youth were more likely to receive student support grants. Students who received student support grants had a higher GPA and earned more credit units.

Pell Grants
Foster youth were more likely to receive a Pell Grant. Students who received a Pell Grant had a higher GPA and earned more credit units.

Concurrent Enrollment
Foster youth were concurrently enrolled at the same rate as their peers. Students who were concurrently enrolled had a higher GPA and earned more credit units.

Education Plan
Foster youth were more likely to create an education plan. Students with an education plan had a higher GPA and earned more credit units.

Counseling & Advisement Services
Foster youth were more likely to receive counseling and advisement services. Students who received these services had a higher GPA and earned more credit units.

Factors that Contributed to Reduced First-Year Success

Attended Multiple High Schools
Foster youth attended more high schools. Students who went to more high schools had a lower GPA and earned fewer credit units.

Suspended or Excluded During 12th Grade
Foster youth were more likely to be suspended or excluded in 12th grade. Students who were suspended or excluded had a lower GPA and earned fewer credit units.

Fee Waivers*
Foster youth were more likely to receive fee waivers. Students who received fee waivers had a lower GPA.

First-year Outcomes for Foster Youth

-0.33 GPA

-3.97 Units

After accounting for the above factors and additional demographic factors, there was still a gap in first-year community college outcomes for foster youth.

* Fee waivers may be more indicative of disadvantaged status and high need for financial assistance. For a more thorough discussion of this result, please see Finding 7. Further research is necessary to understand this unexpected finding.

Addressing systemic barriers in the foster youth high school improves college success.

The likelihood of academic success in college is not impacted solely by factors specific to the college experience. Two factors that were found to be predictive of low levels of achievement in the first year of community college were, in fact, high school experiences.

One of the risk factors for first-year community college success was attending multiple high schools. School mobility has been shown by previous studies to be detrimental to student academic performance in high school and this study reveals that this effect lasts beyond high school graduation. Students who attended a greater number of high schools had a lower GPA and earned fewer credit units in their first year of community college than students who went to fewer high schools (**Figure 7**).

When foster youth shuffle through the child welfare system, they experience more disruptions to their lives than other students. School can and should be a source of consistency for foster youth, but there are many barriers that a student faces when switching schools, particularly in the middle of the academic year. Some include: not having access to the same courses that were offered at a previous school, having to repeat or restart a course, losing established relationships with counselors and educators, being separated from friends who provide stability and support, and losing access to extracurricular activities that the youth was engaged in. The effects of this school disruption carry over to affect success in postsecondary education. School mobility stands out as a detrimental experience for high school foster youth compared to their peers.

Another factor that disrupts a student's educational experience is suspension or exclusions from school. Foster youth were more likely than their peers to be suspended or excluded in the 12th grade. These students received a lower GPA and earned fewer credit units in their first year of community college than students who were not suspended or excluded from school in 12th grade (**Figure 7**).

To ensure success in community college, foster youth practitioners need to prioritize stability in high school by decreasing school mobility as well as the frequency of suspensions and exclusions. Foster youth may have these experiences in high school because of an unstable home environment, trauma, or mental health challenge, among many other factors. Regardless, when foster youth are forced to switch schools or stay away from school, they miss key learning opportunities in high school, thereby negatively impacting their academic outcomes in both high school and college.

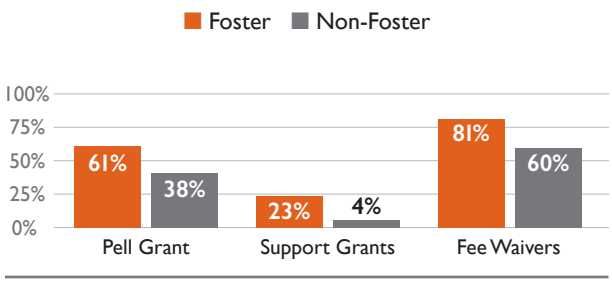
Table 2: Educational and Financial Support Descriptions
Education Plan: A plan that details the courses a student must complete to reach their desired education goal and identifies key milestones for progress. Students who met with an academic counselor or advisor to create an education plan were flagged to have made an education plan in that term.
Academic Counseling and Advisement: Students who met with an academic advisor or counselor outside of creating an education plan were flagged to have received academic counseling and advisement in that term.
Pell Grant: Students with an established financial need are eligible for this federal grant to pay for both tuition and non-tuition costs. The maximum grant in the 2017/18 award year was $5,920. Foster youth are likely to be eligible for this type of grant.
Support Grants: Financial support grants available for tuition and/or other non-tuition costs such as transportation, housing, and food. Included in this study were NextUp grants, the Chafee Education and Training Voucher, EOPS grants, and other support grants.
Fee Waiver: Financial assistance from the California Promise Grant Program specifically for waiving enrollment fees for California Community Colleges.

Efforts to increase foster youth access to financial and academic services are working.

Another key predictor of community college success found in this study is the utilization of programs that provide financial and academic support for foster youth in their first year of community college. Foster youth who receive financial and educational support during this crucial first year have greater success, earning more units and achieving a higher GPA. The types of educational and financial support examined in this study are described in **Table 2**.

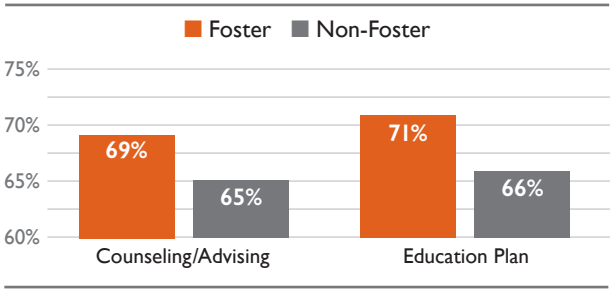
Foster youth advocates and policymakers have been working for decades to strengthen both policy and practice in order to expand access to financial aid for foster youth. Thanks in part to these efforts, foster youth in this study were more likely to receive financial aid and utilize educational support programs in their first year of college than their non-foster peers. Foster youth were compared to their peers in receiving Pell Grants, other support grants, fee waivers for course enrollment (**Figure 8**), academic counseling and advising services in community college, and the creation of an education plan (**Figure 9**).

Figure 8: Community College Financial Support by Type



This study found that access to financial support is highly predictive of success in the first year of community college (**Figure 7**). The 2018 CalYOUTH12 study reported that financial barriers contribute to foster youth being less likely than their peers to attend community college. Efforts to expand financial aid resources for foster youth are likely to improve overall academic outcomes.

Figure 9: Community College Educational Support by Type



Foster youth specific support grants include the NextUp Grant and the Chafee Education and Training Voucher. These funds can be used for supplies, transportation, housing, or other basic needs for foster youth while enrolled in community college. Pell Grants are not tied to foster youth status but are awarded to students with demonstrated financial need. Most foster youth qualify as low-income students, and thus are eligible to receive these grants. Fee waivers are another form of financial aid that relieves students from enrollment fees, an out-of-pocket cost that may not be covered by other financial aid packages. **Table 3** provides more information regarding the support and services offered to students receiving any of these included support grants.

This analysis pinpoints that financial aid services are predictive of student success in the first year of community college (**Figure 7**). Students receiving financial support grants were more likely to achieve higher GPAs and earn more credit units in that critical

first year. While financial support impacts college success, it is not the only area of support that improves outcomes for students. Some of the grants included in this analysis, such as NextUp and EOPS grants, are only offered to students who are enrolled in these respective programs, which also provide educational support programming. This report magnifies the importance of foster youth's access to educational programming, such as NextUp, EOPS, etc., to ensure success on their higher education journeys.

In addition to this targeting foster youth educational programming, California Community Colleges have invested in offering a range of academic counseling and advisement services, and advocate for students to create an education plan to better chart out their college journey. Foster youth engage in these educational supports at a higher rate than their peers. Students who receive counseling and advisement services achieve a higher GPA and earn more credit units than students who do not. Similarly, students who create an education plan are more likely to earn more credit units and have a higher GPA.

Foster youth are receiving fee waivers in community college at greater rates than their non-foster peers.

Similar to accessing financial aid grants, foster youth receive fee waivers from the California Promise Grant Program at a higher rate than their non-foster peers. Unexpectedly, however, this study found students who received a fee waiver had a lower GPA than students who did not receive a fee waiver. There was no impact of fee waivers on credit units earned in the first year of community college. It is possible these findings may be attributed to additional aspects of a student's life that are related to why they qualify for these sources of financial aid. For example, students who qualify to

Table 3: Community College Support Programs

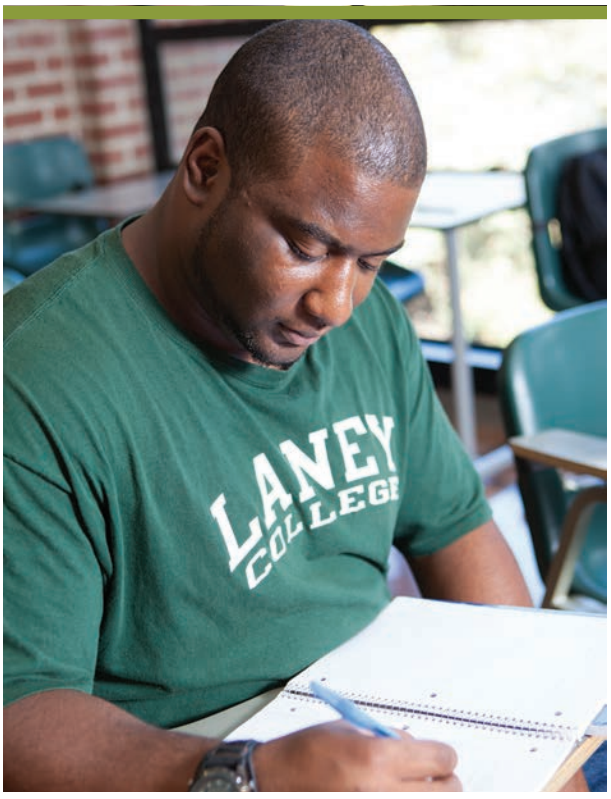
Program	Who is Eligible?	Financial Support	Educational Support
NextUp	Foster Youth in care after 16, under age 26 and enrolled in at least 9 units in community college.	Grant support for books, meals, transportation, other non-tuition needs.	Counseling and advising, tutoring, and career guidance.
Chafee	Foster Youth in care after 16, under age 26 and enrolled at least half-time in community college.	Grant support for both tuition and non-tuition costs.	None.
EOPS	Educationally and economically disadvantaged students in community college.	Grant support for community college tuition and assistance with purchasing books and supplies.	Counseling and advising, career guidance.
Fee Waivers: California Promise Grant Program	Educationally and economically disadvantaged students in community college.	Fee waiver for financial assistance.	None.

receive fee waivers are largely from historically disadvantaged groups that demonstrate financial need.

Other support grants, such as CAFYES, EOPS, and Chafee Grant, that have a positive impact on first-year college GPA and credit units earned typically provide more aid than fee waivers. Additionally, both CAFYES and EOPS aid is awarded to students who are part of programs that provide educational supports to assist students through community college. Fee waivers are solely financial aid for enrollment fees and while they provide some financial support, they fall short of helping students cover the cost of attending college and providing additional educational supports. Further research is necessary to understand this unexpected finding.

Recommendations

Foster youth striving to obtain a post-secondary degree face many challenges in both high school and community college. Although foster youth advocates, legislators, and educational leaders have made great strides over the years by passing legislation to increase programs and services afforded to foster youth, there is a need to do more to close the gap that remains between foster youth and their peers in their educational outcomes.



Reduce school mobility for foster youth.

Efforts to decrease the number of high schools a foster youth attends require intentional and timely communication between local child welfare agencies, County Offices of Education (COEs), districts, and schools. The state of California requires that foster youth be afforded the opportunity to stay in their school of origin when their placement changes. A Best Interest Determination (BID) process that includes the education rights holder must take place whenever a placement change occurs to determine if it is in the student's best interest to change schools or remain in the school of origin.

This process, however, is not consistently taking place in many areas of the state and often education rights holders are not readily identified in urgent replacements. Ensuring that school- and district-based foster youth liaisons and others working with foster youth in the school district have the capacity and resources to provide an equitable BID process for each foster youth is critical. This also requires holding child welfare agencies accountable for ensuring this process occurs with every placement change.

Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), school districts, child welfare agencies, and COEs should have a clear procedure for navigating transportation cost barriers to allow a student to stay in their school of origin if it is in their best interest. Some regions have signed cost-sharing agreements between the local child welfare agency, the COE, and the district, which is a practice that should be replicated elsewhere and revisited on a regular basis. Additionally, when transportation plans are in place, they should include details such as what form of transportation (i.e. bus, public transportation, caregiver reimbursement) and specifics for who will cover the cost of the transportation agreement. A comprehensive transportation and cost sharing agreement plan would go a long way towards ensuring that a foster youth remains in their school of origin.

Finally, schools should have a clearly documented plan for sending and receiving new foster youth students that includes options for credit recovery. The Alliance for Children's Rights has developed a toolkit to assist California schools in meeting educational challenges and needs for best outcomes for foster youth.[c]

[c] https://kids-alliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/FosterYouthEducationToolkit_v3.pdf

Address suspensions and exclusions for foster youth in high school.

Foster youth experience significantly higher rates of suspension and exclusion from school, resulting in less time in the classroom. This higher rate and the resulting academic and social emotional consequences, particularly for historically disadvantaged populations like foster youth, have led to new efforts around restorative justice practices in schools. Educational leaders should prioritize reexamining existing approaches and alternatives to suspension and exclusion to ensure students spend the maximum time in the classroom.

High school districts that are doing well in reducing suspension and expulsion rates for foster youth are finding ways to make social worker or attorney advocates available for foster youth and also instituting peer-support initiatives. Trauma informed training can also help reduce instances of suspension and exclusion. Providing trauma informed training for all school personnel — including staff that may interact with foster youth outside of the classroom — can help adults in schools understand foster youth behavior and how it may be connected to trauma they have experienced.

Provide funding for foster youth specific supports within K-12 systems.

Because of the disproportionate rates at which foster youth experience school mobility, absenteeism, suspensions and exclusions, there is a need to provide focused supports for foster youth while still in high school. Dedicated foster youth staff at each school site can ensure students are receiving the targeted support needed during the BID process, a new placement in the middle of the school year, and/or a difficult transition at home. These foster-specific support systems, much like those that have been established with the NextUp program in the community college system, can also provide tutoring and academic advising and serve as an extra layer of coordination between social workers, school counselors, teachers, and education rights holders.

While foster youth are designated as a unique subpopulation under the state's local control funding formula, districts do not receive any additional funding from the state to serve this population beyond that received for any low-income student. Previous research has shown that foster youth have unique needs, even when compared to other economically disadvantaged students. The state should consider un-duplicating how foster youth are counted from other low-income students and allocating additional funding to districts specifically to serve this population.

Develop strategies to reduce summer melt.

The phenomenon whereby students who apply for college do not ultimately become college students has been termed "summer melt." Because many foster

youth who apply to college don't end up actually enrolling, colleges and high schools should develop and implement strategies and programs that specifically focus on reducing the summer melt.

The college enrollment process may be difficult to navigate for foster youth who do not have as many supports as their non-foster peers. Many students may not know of the educational and financial supports that are available specifically for foster youth hoping to pursue their postsecondary education. Promoting the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), conducting early and targeted outreach to foster youth to connect them with on-campus foster youth support programs, and assisting them with the college enrollment process are all ways that practitioners can address the challenge of summer melt.

Foster youth may also need financial support over the summer with housing, book purchasing, and other basic needs. Foster youth programs should be given flexibility to provide resources to students as they matriculate into college before classes have even begun. The summer between high school and college is a crucial transition point and yet responsibility for ensuring foster youth have support during this period is currently not part of either the high school or college system mandate. This is a gap that needs to be addressed.

Increase access to financial supports for foster youth in community college.

Navigating the financial aid process can be difficult for foster youth, who often do not know how to fill out financial aid forms that request information from their parents. Completing FAFSA forms in the first step to accessing federal, state and institutional financial aid. Existing efforts to support foster youth in knowing about and completing the FAFSA should be expanded and replicated across the state. For example, the California Foster Youth FAFSA Challenge is a statewide effort to increase the rate of FAFSA completion initiated by John Burton Advocates for Youth. County-based Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs along with school districts, community-based organizations, child welfare agencies, Independent Living Programs, and local colleges, work together to ensure that every high school senior in foster care has the opportunity to complete a FAFSA.

Such initiatives like the California Foster Youth FAFSA Challenge improve access for foster youth students to receive financial support in college. Because participation in this effort is currently voluntarily, the state should enact a requirement to ensure that all foster youth statewide are receiving the necessary support to complete a FAFSA, and that data regarding FAFSA

completion is consistently tracked. Senate Bill 12, enacted in 2017, requires child welfare workers to document in the case plan who will be supporting older foster youth with financial aid applications. Implementation of this requirement, however, is inconsistent; more should be done to ensure that this law has been universally executed.

In addition to increased support for foster youth completing the FAFSA, more funding is needed for foster youth-specific financial aid in community colleges. Currently, 45 California Community Colleges have implemented the NextUp program, which offers specific financial aid for program participants. The NextUp program should be expanded to additional colleges so that there is equitable access to this resource across the state. Also, the current eligibility requirements for the program limit participation to students who were in foster care after the age of 16, are under age 26, and who are enrolled in nine units. Other research has shown that youth in care at younger ages also face significant barriers and that many foster youth do not meet the nine-unit requirement. An adjustment to these restrictions would enable even more foster youth to realize the benefits that NextUp offers.

All community colleges also offer the Chafee Education and Training Voucher, although this program is capped based on the funding available in the state budget and not all foster youth who qualify submit an application. Additional financial aid should focus on costs that prohibit foster youth from continuing their postsecondary education. Importantly, the California Department of Education, the State of California, and all postsecondary institutions should ensure financial supports are reflective of the current-day cost of living that foster youth must consider when continuing their postsecondary education.

Ensure foster youth have access to educational support services.

While there are many barriers that foster youth encounter in utilizing academic services, there is a clear benefit to these types of support. Implementing more ways to keep foster youth connected to these services could improve academic outcomes as they navigate higher education. Greater accessibility to these services may include: increased availability of the services, flexible timing including drop-in options, and virtual sessions. It is critical that the academic staff designing and implementing these services use foster youth as a resource to determine what makes the most sense for them.

In addition to guiding foster youth into academic advising and educational planning services (which are available to the general student population), programs like the NextUp program, which offers more intensive counseling, advising, and planning services specifically for foster youth, should be expanded to all community colleges in the state.

Create data systems that allow data sharing across K-12, colleges, and child welfare to enhance the identification of foster youth in college systems.

Throughout their academic journey, foster youth will have their data in multiple systems across individual schools, districts, child welfare, college, and community-based organizations that are providing additional services. When there are different systems capturing data on the same individuals, as is the case with foster youth, inconsistent definitions can place an additional burden on practitioners in the field to collect accurate data on the students they are serving. This is especially problematic as these programs and agencies serve foster youth in intersecting capacities. How can all

foster youth be served effectively if a student might show up in one system under one definition but not another? Developing consistent definitions across systems or systematic ways to reconcile inconsistencies will ensure the field can spend more time serving students and less time on data collection.

Matching data from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to the community college system is another way that foster youth data can be improved. Currently, foster youth are held accountable for self-reporting their foster care status during the enrollment process. Students who do not identify, for various reasons, are not included in aggregate metrics reported by the California Community Colleges. In this study, about 63 percent of foster youth in 12th grade that went on to community college self-identified as foster youth. Foster youth liaisons that work between community colleges and high schools would benefit from understanding what percentage of their graduates self-identify as foster youth in the community college enrollment process. This insight would enable practitioners to guide foster youth towards the services available to them throughout their college experience. If this data match were in place, students could automatically be identified as a foster youth or choose to opt-out of this classification. This would likely result in more current or former foster youth being flagged in the community college data system, helping to ensure they know about and can access services they are entitled to.

Finally, as California embarks on the process of developing a state-wide longitudinal data system,[14] input from foster youth practitioners, child welfare workers, social workers, and education leaders should be included in the conversation.[15] Foster youth should be identified through a data match with CDSS in this system. A specific focus should be given to the data categories and metrics that are collected, the ways in which and how frequently data are collected, data availability for researchers, and dissemination of research.

Connect the silos of K-12 and post-secondary education.

Linking of data for all students from cradle-to-career will provide valuable data on student educational and career outcomes, but there is a need for secondary and postsecondary institutions to work more closely with one another. While college support programs like EOPS begin to target students in high school, foster youth practitioners and leaders in higher education need to improve programming and educational resources available to high school students. High school GPA has been shown to be the strongest predictor of post-secondary success. When students have educational disparities in K-12, and more specifically in high school, these educational disparities often continue in post-secondary education. Because multiple high school factors such as GPA, suspension and exclusion, and school mobility are predictors of postsecondary success, foster youth practitioners in higher education need to understand the educational disparities that foster youth faced in high school to provide greater support in college. With both high school and college educators and practitioners working together, foster youth will have even more support as they embark on their post-secondary journey.

Appendix A: Sampling and Variable Definitions

Foster Youth in CALPADS

CALPADS includes foster youth as defined by the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) statutes. Specifically, pursuant to EC Section 42238.01(b), the following children and youth are considered "foster youth" for purposes of the LCFF:

- A child or youth who is the subject of a petition filed under Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 300 (meaning a court has taken jurisdiction over a child and declared the child to be a dependent of the court due to the presence or risk of abuse or neglect). This includes both children who are living at home while a dependent of the court as well as children who the court has ordered to be removed into the care, custody, and control of a social worker for placement outside the home.
- A child or youth who is the subject of a petition filed under WIC Section 602 (meaning a court has taken jurisdiction over a child and declared the child to be a ward of the court due to the child's violation of certain criminal laws) and has been ordered by a court to be removed from home pursuant to WIC Section 727 and placed in foster care as defined by WIC Section 727.4(d).
- A youth between ages 18 and 21 who is enrolled in high school, is a non-minor dependent under the placement responsibility of child welfare, probation, or a tribal organization participating in an agreement pursuant to WIC Section 10553.1 and is participating in a transitional living case plan.

CALPADS 5.7 Report — Foster Youth Student List

Since the fall of 2014, the CDE has received from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), weekly foster data from the Child Welfare System/ Case Management System (CWS/CMS) maintained by county welfare departments. CALPADS matches these statewide foster data with student enrollment data in CALPADS and provides the results of the match to LEAs through CALPADS Operational Data Store (ODS) reports.

The primary purpose of these reports, which are updated on a weekly basis, is to provide LEAs with a current list of the foster students enrolled in their schools. This helps to ensure that foster students receive appropriate educational supports and services, and it identifies them for inclusion in LEAs' Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs).

Community College Foster Youth Self-Report Flag

When a student completes an application for admission for a California community college, they are asked to report their foster care status in the California Residency Section:

If a student selects "Yes," then they are asked: "When did you exit foster care?" and given the following options:

- I am currently in foster care (including extended foster care after age 18).
- I aged out/emancipated from foster care or exited voluntarily on or after my 18th birthday.
- I exited the foster care system before my 18th birthday.
- I am not sure at what age I exited foster care.

Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS)

EOPS is a support program within the California community colleges for students disadvantaged by social, economic, educational or linguistic barriers. The program offers comprehensive academic and support counseling, financial aid and an array of other services aimed at keeping students from dropping out and helping them reach their educational and career goals.

High School Cohort Variables

The following variables were examined in our analyses of high schoolers and their journey towards community college. These variables include measures of success at various stages of their journey, demographics, as well as high school and community college factors related to student success.

Variable	Description
High school graduation	Whether or not a 12th grade student graduated from high school during the 2016-2017 academic year. This variable represents one of two measures of high school completion.
Community college application	Whether or not a student had applied to community college within one academic year after completing high school.
Community college student	Whether or not a student enrolled in a course in community college within one academic year after completing high school if they had applied to enter a community college.
First-year community college GPA	The grade point average among courses taken by each student during their first year of enrollment after completing high school. Only courses taken for a letter grade are included in the calculation and these courses may be taken in any community college. GPA values range from 0 to 4.0 and each full point difference represents a full letter grade difference. This variable represents one of the two markers of first-year college success.
First-year units earned in community college	The total number of units earned by a student during their first year of community college enrollment after completing high school. This total is summed among community colleges in which students successfully completed a course. The average units that may be earned from each course taken is around three units. This is the second variable representing first-year college success.
Foster youth status	Whether or not a student is identified as a foster youth in any K-12 district or County Office of Education California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) 5.7 report.
Ethnicity	The ethnicity reported by a student's school district to CALPADS during the 2016-2017 academic year. Students were categorized into one of five categories: Black or African American, Hispanic, Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI; Asian, Filipinx, or Pacific Islander), White, or other ethnic category (American Indian or Alaskan Native, Two or More Races, Other, or Unknown). Dummy variables were constructed to examine ethnic variations between the respective ethnic minority groups compared to their White peers.
Gender	The gender reported by a student's school district to CALPADS during the 2016-2017 academic year.
Socioeconomic status	Whether or not a student was eligible for free/reduced school lunch if their district provided information about their education programs to Cal-PASS Plus. Students were marked as not eligible if their school provided information about education programs but were not found in the list of eligible students. Those who were from districts that did not provide education program information were classified as missing on this variable. Socioeconomic status at the student level, as well as at the school level, are some of the strongest correlates of academic performance.[16]
Homeless youth	Whether or not a student was eligible for homeless student services because they were identified as homeless in their education program data to Cal-PASS Plus. Students were marked as not eligible if their school provided information about education programs but were not found in the list of eligible students. Those who were from districts that did not provide education program information were classified as missing on this variable. Homeless youth face many disadvantages, especially when it comes to educational attainment. Runaway and homeless youth are much less likely to complete high school compared to their peers that have not experience homelessness.[6]
Special education student	Student who receives special education services in at least one of the following categories[17]: • Autism • Deaf-blindness • Deafness • Emotional disturbance • Hard of hearing • Intellectual disabilities • Multiple disabilities • Orthopedic impairment • Other health impairment • Specific learning disability • Speech or language impairment • Traumatic brain injury • Visual impairment Students who are placed in special education are less likely to graduate from high school[18] and have lower academic expectations set for them from the adults in their lives.[19]

Variable	Description
Access to AP coursework	Whether or not a student attended a high school that offered Advanced Placement coursework. Access to college preparatory courses is associated with higher achievement and greater equity in course access.[20]
Attendance rate	The percentage of school days that a student attended during the 2016-2017 academic year.
Suspension and exclusion	Whether or not a student was suspended or excluded from class as a 12th grader. Disciplinary actions against students can disrupt their academic performance and is associated with decreased academic achievement.[10]
High schools attended	The total number of high schools a student attended between 2013-2014 academic year to the 2016-2017 (grades 9 through 12). Each move to a new high school requires students to adjust to a new environment. This variable represents higher levels of stress and sense of displacement due to disruptions in academic, family, peer, and other important domains among youth. Student mobility effects test scores and high school graduation.[13]
Cumulative high school GPA	The grade point average among courses taken by a student during their high school years (grades 9 through 12). Only courses taken for a letter grade are included in the calculation and these courses may be taken in any school. GPA values range from 0 to 4.0 and each full point difference represents a full letter grade difference. Cumulative high school GPA represents a long-term measure of college students' prior academic success and is one of the strongest indicators of college success.[21]
Concurrent enrollment	Whether a student enrolled in any community college while they were in still a high school student. Early college enrollment relates to college degree attainment, college access and enrollment, credit accumulation, and high school achievement and graduation.[22]
Community college fee waivers	Whether or not a student received a Promise or Board of Governors waiver during their first year of community college enrollment. These are forms of financial aid in which students receive waivers to their college application or course enrollment fees.
Pell Grants	Whether or not a student received a Pell Grant during their first year of community college. This grant is limited to students with financial need, who have not earned their first bachelor's degree, or who are enrolled in particular post-baccalaureate programs.
Community college student support grants	Whether or not a student received the EOPS, Chafee Grant, NextUp Grant, or any other grant that originated from the California College Promise program during their first year of community college enrollment. These grants represent financial aid as well as additional academic and counseling support designed for students of various disadvantaged backgrounds.
Community college education plan	Whether the student developed a credit education plan any college during their first year of enrollment. These plans may be either abbreviated or comprehensive plans. Developing an education plan early on in the college process is associated with students being more likely to complete a degree on time.[23]
Community college counseling	Whether a student received any college counseling or advising services not related to developing an education plan during their first year of enrollment at any college. Counseling is associated with student retention[24] and GPA.[25]

Community College Cohort Variables

The following variables were examined in our analyses with community college students who may or may not have reported their former foster youth status to the community colleges. These variables include measures of first-year college success, demographics, and other pertinent factors behind student success during their journey from high school into community college.

Variable	Description
First-year GPA	The grade point average among courses taken by each student during their first year of enrollment after high school. Only courses taken for a letter grade are included in the calculation and these courses may be taken in any community college. GPA values range from 0 to 4.0 and each full point difference represents a full letter grade difference. This variable represents one of the two markers of first-year college success.
First-year units earned	The total number of units earned by a student during their first year of community college enrollment after leaving high school. This total is summed among community colleges in which students successfully completed a course. The average number of units that may be earned from each course taken is around three units. This is the second variable representing first-year college success.
Foster youth status	Whether or not a student self-identified as a former foster youth to any community college.
Ethnicity	The ethnicity reported by a student to the community colleges during their most recent term of enrollment. Students were categorized into one of five categories: Black or African American, Hispanic, Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI; Asian, Filipinx, or Pacific Islanders), White, or other ethnicity (American Indian or Alaskan Native, Two or More Races, Other, or Unknown). Dummy variables were constructed to examine ethnic variations between the respective ethnic minority groups compared to their White peers.
Gender	The gender reported by a student to the community colleges during their most recent term of enrollment. Females were coded as 1 and males were coded as 0 in the analyses of gender differences.
Fee waivers	Whether or not a student received a Promise or Board of Governors waiver during their first year of community college enrollment. These are forms of financial aid in which students receive waivers to their college application or course enrollment fees.
Student support grants	Whether or not a student received the EOPS, Chafee Grant, Pell Grant, NextUp Grant, or any other grant that originated from the California College Promise program during their first year of community college enrollment. These grants represent financial aid as well as additional academic and counseling support designed for students of various disadvantaged backgrounds.
Education plan	Whether the student developed a credit education plan any college during their first year of enrollment. These plans may be either abbreviated or comprehensive plans.
Counseling	Whether a student received any college counseling or advising services not related to developing an education plan during their first year of enrollment at any college.
Concurrent enrollment	Whether a student enrolled in any community college while they were in still a high school student.
Suspension and exclusion	Whether or not a student was suspended or excluded from class as a 12th grader.
High schools attended	The total number of high schools a student attended between 2013-2014 academic year to the 2016-2017 (grades 9 through 12).
Cumulative high school GPA	The grade point average among courses taken by a student during their high school years (grades 9 through 12). Only courses taken for a letter grade are included in the calculation and these courses may be taken in any school. GPA values range from 0 to 4.0 and each full point difference represents a full letter grade difference.

Research Methods

Comparisons between foster students and their peers were conducted with t-tests for continuous outcomes (e.g., GPA, units earned) and chi-square tests for binary outcomes (e.g., graduation rates, grant recipient rates).

Beyond examining differences in a single outcome between foster students and their peers at a time, we examined the pattern of relationships among multiple variables using the proximal-distal approach.[26] For example, in evaluating college success, foster status, gender, ethnicity, and other contextual factors are distal influences that not only affect college success but a range of outcomes in several important domains (e.g., physical and mental health). These distal influences affect more proximal factors (e.g., high school performance, access to resources, use of student services) that relate more directly to college success. Proximal factors are malleable factors that may be impacted by policy makers and educators, and thus the focus of interventions that impact student achievement.[22]

We evaluated the impact of student success factors on various measures of achievement in the student pipeline using structural equation modeling.[27] Path analysis identified potential success factors that explained group differences in outcomes between foster youth and their peers. These potential factors were tested using indirect effects models with bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap interval. Moderation analyses[27] and multiple group structural equation models determined whether the effect of success factors differed between foster students and their peers. To tease out the specific effects of success factors above and beyond the effects of other important factors, all analyses accounted for the impact of gender, ethnicity, and other relevant factors in student achievement.

Appendix B: Results Tables

High School Cohort

Table 1: High School Sample from 10 Districts and COEs
All High School Sample

		Sample Size	%	Mean	SD*
Gender	Female	625,126	48.2%		
	Male	625,126	51.8%		
Race	Hispanic	625,126	67.0%		
	Black	625,126	7.28%		
	AAPI	625,126	8.91%		
	White	625,126	13.81%		
	Other	625,126	3.00%		
	Foster	625,126	0.65%		
	Number of High Schools	625,126		1.26	0.60
	GPA	592,345		2.51	0.92
	FRSL	590,576	64.1%		
	Homeless	579,790	3.27%		
	Special Ed	564,140	2.63%		
	AP Access	584,372	31.5%		
	Attendance Rate	307,215		0.94	0.10
	Suspension/Expulsion	625,126	5.23%		

*Standard Deviation

Table 2: High School Foster Sample from 10 Districts and COE
High School Foster Youth Sample

		Sample Size	%	Mean	SD*
Gender	Female	4,068	48.7%		
	Male	4,068	51.3%		
Race	Hispanic	4068	62.9%		
	Black	4,068	24.8%		
	AAPI	4,068	1.89%		
	White	4,068	7.71%		
	Other	4,068	2.70%		
	Number of High Schools	3,933		2.55	1.64
	GPA	3,653		1.70	0.98
	FRSL	3,933	77.8%		
	Homeless	3,877	8.95%		
	Special Ed	3,296	3.64%		
	Access to AP	3,093	13.2%		
	Attendance Rate	1,041		0.82	0.22
	Suspension/Expulsion	4,068	13.89%		
	Total Sample		4,068		

*Standard Deviation

Table 3: High School Non-Foster Sample from 10 Districts and COE
High School Mom-Foster Youth Sample

		Sample Size	%	Mean	SD*
Gender	Female	621,057	48.3%		
	Male	621,057	51.7%		
Race	Hispanic	621,058	70.0%		
	Black	621,058	7.17%		
	AAPI	621,058	8.96%		
	White	621,058	10.82%		
	Other	621,058	3.01%		
	Number of High Schools	621,058		1.25	0.58
	GPA	588,692		2.52	0.92
	FRSL	586,643	64.0%		
	Homeless	575,913	3.23%		
	Special Ed	560,844	2.61%		
	Access to AP	581,279	31.6%		
	Attendance Rate	306,174		0.94	0.10
	Suspension/Expulsion	621,058	5.17%		
	Total Sample		621,058		

*Standard Deviation

12th Grade Cohort

Table 4: 12th Grade Sample from 10 Districts and COE
12th Grade Sample

		Sample Size	%	Mean	SD*
Gender	Female	149,170	48.3%		
	Male	149,170	51.7%		
Race	Hispanic	149,170	65.6%		
	Black	149,170	7.51%		
	AAPI	149,170	9.38%		
	White	149,170	14.62%		
	Other	149,170	2.89%		
	Foster Youth	149,170	0.33%		
	Number of High Schools	149,170		1.27	0.60
	GPA	141,347		2.63	0.81
	Graduated	141,030	83.0%		
	FRSL	141,162	62.5%		
	Homeless	138,786	31.2%		
	Special Ed	133850	2.43%		
	Access to AP	133,696	43.9%		
	Attendance Rate	74,962		0.93	0.12
	Suspension/Expulsion	149,170	2.90%		
	Concurrent	149,170	19.5%		
	Applied to CCC	149,170	69.5%		
	Enrolled in CCC	149,170	40.6%		

*Standard Deviation

Table 5: 12th Grade Foster Sample from 10 Districts and COE
12th Grade Foster Youth Sample

		Sample Size	%	Mean	SD*
Gender	Female	491	49.5%		
	Male	491	50.5%		
Race	Hispanic	491	54.2%		
	Black	491	31.6%		
	AAPI	491	1.63%		
	White	491	9.92%		
	Other	491	2.65%		
	Number of High Schools	491		2.77	1.82
	GPA	439		1.92	0.93
	Graduated	491	53.6%		
	FRSL	484	78.5%		
	Homeless	477	9.64%		
	Special Ed	387	1.81%		
	Access to AP	300	24%		
	Attendance Rate	84		0.82	0.26
	Suspension/Expulsion	491	6.51%		
	Concurrent	491	16.9%		
	Applied to CCC	491	64.7%		
	Enrolled in CCC	491	35.6%		

*Standard Deviation

Table 6: Grade Non-Foster Sample from 10 Districts and COE
12th Grade Non-Foster Sample

		Sample Size	%	Mean	SD*
Gender	Female	148,679	48.3%		
	Male	148,679	51.7%		
Race	Hispanic	148,679	65.7%		
	Black	148,679	7.42%		
	AAPI	148,679	9.40%		
	White	148,679	14.6%		
	Other	148,679	2.89%		
	Number of High Schools	148,679		1.27	0.59
	GPA	140,908		2.63	0.81
	Graduated	148,679	83.1%		
	FRSL	140,678	62.4%		
	Homeless	138,309	3.09%		
	Special Ed	133,463	2.43%		
	Access to AP	133,396	44.0%		
	Attendance Rate	74,878		0.93	0.12
	Suspension/Expulsion	148,679	2.89%		
	Concurrent	148,679	19.5%		
	Applied to CCC	148,679	69.5%		
	Enrolled in CCC	148,679	40.6%		

*Standard Deviation

Table 7: High School-to-Community College Transition

	Foster	Non-Foster
12th Grade Students that Graduated	53.6%	83.1%
12th Grade Graduates that Applied to California Community College	85.2%	75.6%
Applicants that Enrolled at a California Community College	49.7%	55.7%

Table 8: California Community College Sample

		CCC Sample %	CCC General Population* %
Gender	Female	50.1%	53.6%
	Male	49.9%	45.2%
Race	Hispanic	58.3%	43.6%
	Black	4.7%	6.1%
	AAPI	11.8%	11.9%
	White	20.6%	26.4%
	Other	4.6%	12.0%
	Foster	1.6%	
	Suspended in 12th Grade	2.4%	
	Fee waivers	59.8%	
	Student support grants	4.2%	
	Pell Grant	38.2%	
	Concurrent Enroll	26.4%	
	Ed Plan	66.3%	
	Counseling and Advising	65.4%	
	Total Sample	146,066	

*CA Community College General Population

Table 9: California Community College Foster Youth Sample

		Percent
Gender	Female	56.6%
	Male	43.4%
Race	Hispanic	53.3%
	Black	15.8%
	AAPI	3.5%
	White	20.0%
	Other	7.4%
	Suspended in 12th Grade	6.6%
	Fee Waivers	81.0%
	Student Support Grants	22.9%
	Pell Grant	60.8%
	Concurrent Enroll	24.9%
	Ed Plan	71.0%
	Counseling and Advising	69.2%
	Total	2,353

Table 10: California Community College Non-Foster Sample

		Percent
Gender	Female	50.0%
	Male	50.0%
Race	Hispanic	58.4%
	Black	4.5%
	AAPI	11.9%
	White	20.7%
	Other	4.5%
	Suspended in 12th Grade	2.3%
	Fee Waivers	59.5%
	Student Support Grants	3.9%
	Pell Grant	37.8%
	Concurrent Enroll	26.4%
	Ed Plan	66.2%
	Counseling and Advising	65.3%
	Total	143,713

In Which Ways Do Self-identified Community College Foster Youth Students and Peers Differ?

Self-identified Community College Foster Youth Students vs. Peers

+

Foster youth students were more likely to have developed education plans, received counseling and/or advising services, received Pell grants, and received student support grants than their peers.

−

Foster youth students attended more high schools than their peers. They were also more likely to be suspended or excluded from class in the 12th grade. Additionally, they were more likely to have received fee waivers for college courses.

What Relates to First-Year Community College Success for Both Foster and Non-Foster Students?

Students who received these services and grants were more successful in their first-year than those who did not.

- Education Plan
  +0.19 GPA | +3.34 Units
- Counseling or Advisement Services
  +0.12 GPA |+3.14 Units
- Pell Grants
  +0.07 GPA | +2.12 Units
- Student Support Grants
  +0.20 GPA | +3.00 Units

Attending more high schools and being suspended or excluded during 12th grade related to lower first-year GPA and units earned. Those who received fee waivers had a lower GPA than those who did not.

- Number of High Schools Attended
  -0.05 GPA | -0.64 Units
- Suspended or Excluded During 12th Grade
  -0.14 GPA | -2.11 Units
- Received a Fee Waiver
  -0.15 GPA | 0 Units

Disparities in Foster Youth Success

After accounting for the above factors and additional demographic factors, there was still a gap in first-year community college outcomes for foster youth.

-0.33 GPA

-3.97 Units

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