

# RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE EDUCATION OF FOSTER YOUTH

## STATE/DISTRICT RESPONSIBILITY

The State is responsible for ensuring that the education funding structure is adequate to cover the costs of education that meets the need of foster children while they are in foster care.

## ETHICAL

Having removed children from their own homes and placed them into foster care in order to ensure their safety and well-being, the State has an ethical obligation to provide adequate financial resources through the school district funding formula for the education of those foster children. Foster youth have no parent to advocate for them in the educational process and therefore it is the ethical responsibility of the school district to assure the unique needs of foster youth are met. Further the State and by extension the school district is responsible to adequately address the extraordinary achievement gap that exists for foster youth.

## LEGAL

As a condition of the Local Control Funding Formula, the school district receives additional funding based on the number of foster youth in the district. California law defines the residence of a child for educational purposes as the location where they are physically living, which for a foster child is the foster home or group home in which they are placed, even if they have been placed “out of county”, or outside of the catchment area of their “school of origin” by the County Child Welfare or Probation Department. Further, in accordance with the Education code Section 56836.165, each SELPA receives a “bed allowance” in additional State funding based on the number of children placed in foster and group homes in their area. AB 854 shifted Foster Youth Services funding to the County Office of Education to play a coordinating role rather than the direct service role played by Foster Youth Services. This change was made in light of LCFF directing money to the school districts to provide services to Foster youth.

## THE INVISIBLE ACHIEVEMENT GAP- HOW THE FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCES OF CALIFORNIA PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR EDUCATION OUTCOMES

With the support from the Stuart Foundation, this report establishes the effort to better understand the education outcomes of students in foster care in California. Part 1, published in 2013, documented that students in foster care were a distinct subgroup of at-risk students—with education outcomes that were consistently poorer than those of the broader population of students, including English language learners, students with

disabilities, and those with low socioeconomic status (low - SES). Part 2 underscores the relative educational disadvantage of students in foster care and highlights the differences in education experiences and outcomes by key characteristics of foster care placements, such as time in foster care, the type of foster care placement, and the number of foster care placements during the school year. This report describes important associations between foster care placement types and disability diagnosis, school changes, standardized-test performance, and dropout and graduation rates. The Invisible Achievement Gap, Part 2 also highlights the dynamics between student length of stay in the foster care system, disability diagnosis, and school changes. Finally, this report documents the association between foster care placement instability and school changes, low-standardized-test performance, as well as higher dropout rates and lower graduation rates—findings suggesting that despite legislation such as California Assembly Bill 490, which attempted to ensure school stability, as well as the timely transfer of records, grades, and credits between schools when students enter or change foster care placements, additional efforts may be needed to support the education needs of students in foster care.\*

---

## FINDINGS

1. Regardless of the characteristics of their foster care experience, students in foster care remained a distinctively disadvantaged subgroup; students in foster care were more likely to be diagnosed with a disability, to be over-age for their grade level, and to fare worse academically. Across nearly all education outcomes examined, students in foster care performed worse than their low-SES peers. These disparities persisted regardless of the characteristics of a student's experiences in foster care (e.g., placement type, removal reason, number of placements, time in care). Even students placed with kin, who typically fared better academically than their peers in other placements, lagged behind students in the general student body and among low-SES students.
2. There was a significant achievement gap between students in foster care and other low-SES students. Students in foster care consistently fell short of achieving proficiency in English language arts and elementary mathematics. Among foster care students in elementary school, 33 percent scored below or far below basic in English language arts, and 37 percent of middle school students in foster care scored in these lowest two levels. By high school, 49 percent of foster care students scored below or far below basic in English language arts. Similarly, in elementary school 32 percent of foster care students scored below or far below basic in mathematics. In middle school this figure was 45 percent (testing of students in general mathematics is not conducted in high school). Achievement gaps in English language arts and mathematics were

particularly apparent for students placed in group homes relative to other students in foster care, a finding that is consistent with the apparent association between grade level and poorer educational performance. Among students placed in group homes, 61 percent tested below or far below basic in English language arts and 66 percent tested at these lowest two levels in mathematics. Roughly two out of every three students in a group home placement failed to attain proficiency in either English language arts or mathematics. In addition, the number of placements students experienced during the school year was correlated with low performance in English language arts and mathematics, particularly among students who experienced three or more placements. Among students who experienced three or more placements, 50 percent scored below or far below basic in English language arts and 44 percent scored in the lowest two levels in mathematics.

3. Students in foster care were less likely to pass the California high school exit exam (CAHSEE), more likely to drop out, and less likely to graduate than the statewide student population and low-SES students. Placement type was correlated with student dropout and graduation rates. Among students in grades 9–12 living in group homes, 14 percent dropped out. Alternately, students placed in guardian placements (4 percent) were among the least likely to drop out. Similarly, students in kinship and guardianship placements were the most likely of foster care grade-12 students to graduate from high school at the end of the school year (64 percent and 71 percent, respectively). In contrast, students in group homes (35 percent) were among the least likely to graduate. Whereas students with one placement (63 percent) were the most likely to graduate, students with three or more placements (43 percent) were least likely.