



Community Collaboration to Support the Educational Success of Foster Youth

Beyond the Bench XXII Conference  
December 2, 2013  
1:45 – 3:15 pm

Judge Denine Guy  
Michael Paynter  
Kim Corneille  
Rachel Velcoff Hults

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Getting Started:  
Attendee Questions



- What does it mean to hold education rights for a student in foster care?
  - What rights and responsibilities do educational representatives have?
  - Who can hold education rights for a student in foster care?
  - How are education rights holders selected and appointed?
- Do you know of any support services, resources, or training opportunities available to education rights holders?
- Can you identify any strategies your county has employed to support the educational success of students in foster care?



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Background: Educational Outcomes of Students in Foster Care



- As documented in *The Invisible Achievement Gap*, students in foster care:
  - Constitute an at-risk subgroup that is distinct from other low-income students
  - Are far more likely to change schools during the school year
  - Are more likely than the general population to be enrolled in the lowest performing schools
  - Have the lowest participation rate in California's statewide testing program
  - Show an achievement gap on statewide testing
  - Have the highest dropout rate and lowest graduation rate

WestEd, *The Invisible Achievement Gap* (November 2013)



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## Challenges Faced by Students in Foster Care



- What barriers to educational success do students in care face?
  - Frequent changes in school placement
  - Transitions in classes, teachers, school environments, and peer groups
  - Frequent changes in homework and study routines
  - Frequent school absences
  - Impact of trauma
  - For many youth, the lack of a responsible adult who is consistently providing educational support



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## Educational Representatives for Students in Foster Care



- California statutes and Rules of Court provide a framework for identifying and monitoring educational decision-makers for students in foster care.
  - Generally, parents have the right to make educational decisions for their children, unless:
    - The child has a legal guardian;
    - Parental rights have been terminated; or
    - The Court has limited the parent's educational rights and assigned them to another responsible adult.
- Providing resources and support can help ensure educational representatives are equipped to support the student's school success.

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## One approach to improving ed. outcomes – FosterEd: Santa Cruz County



- Key Collaborative Partners
  - Superior Court of California, County of Santa Cruz, Juvenile Division
  - County Office of Education – Foster Youth Services
  - Human Services Department – Family and Children's Services
  - Community organizations and providers (CASA, Parents Center)
  - National Center for Youth Law
- State-level oversight provided by California's Improving Educational Outcomes of Children in Care workgroup, which includes CDE, CDSS, and California CWDA



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## FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Pilot Implementation



- Target population includes school-age children/youth who are the subject of an open Santa Cruz County dependency case and reside in Santa Cruz County.
  - There are approximately 245 such children/youth in Santa Cruz County at any given time.
- Pilot implementation began in February 2013, and has reached approximately 120 cases to date.
- Project builds on strong collaborative relationships between Santa Cruz County's judicial, education, and child welfare agencies.



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## FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Pilot Implementation (cont.)



- Placement of foster youth education liaisons at the county office of education and child welfare agency offices
- Identification of educational champions to serve as educational advocates for children in care
- Identification of the educational champion's and student's education-related strengths and needs



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## FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Pilot Implementation (cont.)



- Development of educational goals and objectives for students and their educational champions
- Implementation, ongoing monitoring, and updating of educational goals and objectives
- Use of a team-based approach to engage multiple stakeholders committed to supporting each student's educational success
  - Going forward, use of [Goalbook](#), an online educational case management and communication tool, to facilitate team-building and collaboration among agencies

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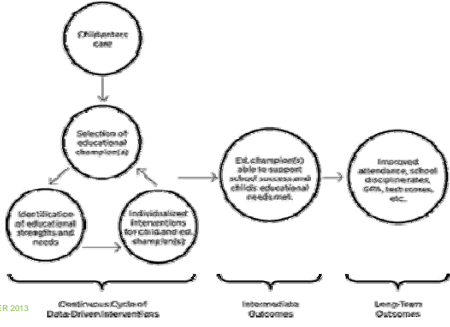
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FosterEd: Santa Cruz County  
Logic Model



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FosterEd: Santa Cruz County  
Objectives



- Identify one or more educational champions for each student in Santa Cruz County
- Ensure educational champions have or develop the beliefs and expectations needed to support the student's school success
- Ensure student's educational needs are increasingly identified and addressed
- Over time, contribute to improvement in educational outcomes (e.g. attendance rates)

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FosterEd: Santa Cruz County  
Sample Case



- Case background
- FosterEd referral and liaison assignment
- Needs identification and goal-setting
- Educational support / mentoring
- Tracking and updating goals
- Participant feedback



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## FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Pilot Implementation (cont.)



- Approximately 120 cases to date
- Students range in age from 5 to 19
- Approximately 29% of open cases involve students with special needs
- Approximately 18% of open cases involve transition-age youth
- Approximately 21% of open cases involve families with Spanish language needs

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## FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Pilot Implementation (cont.)



- Educational champions in open cases:
  - Approximately 49% are biological parents (35% biological mothers, 14% biological fathers)
  - Approximately 20% are relatives
  - Approximately 13% are non-relative caregivers
  - Approximately 9% are CASAs

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## FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Evaluation



- External evaluators: RTI International
- Key research questions:
  - Who participates in FosterEd?
  - What activities are associated with the implementation of FosterEd?
  - Do educational champions who participate in FosterEd demonstrate growth over time in beliefs, behaviors, and capacities associated with educational success?
  - Do students demonstrate improvement in educational performance?
- Data sources: Foster Focus; Goalbook; feedback surveys; interviews

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## FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Sustainability Plan



- Implementation is being carried out by Santa Cruz County agencies, largely through use of existing resources.
- Grant-supported staff will model educational coaching, case management, and project management strategies for social workers, FYS staff, and existing service providers (train-the-trainer approach)
- Investment in development of assessment/screening tools, technological infrastructure, and practices for ongoing use beyond the grant period



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## Panelist Discussion: Challenges and Lessons Learned



- School district engagement
- Importance of judicial involvement
- Recognizing the strengths and needs of each educational champion and providing individualized support at an appropriate pace
- Effective engagement of birth parents who are facing a diverse range of challenges personally and within the court process



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## Panelist Discussion: Challenges and Lessons Learned



- Gathering and reviewing data for large numbers of children and educational champions; need for standardized tools and efficient inter-agency communication
- Need for a collaborative, team-based approach to build a network of supportive adults around each student



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### Panelist Discussion: Key Stakeholders to Engage



How can the following key stakeholders support the educational success of children in care?

- Judicial officers
- Attorneys
- Court staff
- Social workers
- Child welfare agency managers
- School district and school site staff
- County office of education staff
- Mental health workers
- Other service providers



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### Panelist Discussion: Possible County-Level Strategies



- Development of a multi-agency team to facilitate projects focused on supporting the education of students in foster care
- Identification of educational champions for students in foster care
- Interventions to help educational champions support the student's educational success
- Creation of education teams to bring together key adults supporting the student's education

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### Group Discussion and Q&A



- What other strategies has your agency/organization used to support the educational success of students in foster care?
- Who have you partnered with in these efforts?
- What steps has your county taken to strengthen interagency collaboration in this area?
- What successes have you had?
- What challenges have you faced?



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## Resources



- California Foster Youth Education Task Force ([www.cfyetf.org](http://www.cfyetf.org))
  - Ed Law Fact Sheets
- Foster Ed Connect ([www.fosteredconnect.org](http://www.fosteredconnect.org))
  - Resources, News and Events, Q&A
- FosterEd Initiative ([www.foster-ed.org](http://www.foster-ed.org))
  - Educational champion mentoring materials, including tip sheets available in both English and Spanish



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## Contact Information



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**Thank you for participating!**

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