

# California Connected by 25

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## **EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE K-12 EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF TRANSITIONING FOSTER YOUTH**

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Prepared for:

The Annie E. Casey Foundation  
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation  
The Walter S. Johnson Foundation  
The Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation  
The Stuart Foundation



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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The California Connected by 25 Initiative is a collaborative effort of five foundations to improve the life prospects of youth transitioning out of foster care in California. Counties participating in CC25I aim to improve policies, programs and outcomes for transition-age foster youth in seven focus areas: K-12 Education; Employment/Job Training/Post-Secondary Education; Financial Competency and Asset Development; Housing; Independent Living Skills Programs; Personal/Social Asset Development; and Permanency. Four counties – Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties – are early implementers of the initiative.

This report documents the Initiative's progress made in the area of K-12 Education by each of the early implementing counties. K-12 education is a high priority because objectives and outcomes in this focus area interact with efforts in other CC25I focus areas such as permanency and post-secondary education and employment.

### **The Educational Challenges Faced by Foster Youth**

The educational trajectories of foster youth are far behind even those of other disadvantaged, low-income youth. The statistics are daunting; three-quarters of foster youth perform below their grade level and over half are held back in school for at least one year. Foster youth achieve lower scores on standardized achievement tests in reading and math and only 45 percent have graduated from high school at the time of emancipation from the foster care system. Although the State of California has passed legislation to begin to address these serious educational deficits – the Foster Youth Services program funds services to meet the educational needs of foster children and Assembly Bill 490 provides provisions to improve school stability and educational advocacy for foster youth – these policies are limited in scope, funded at insufficient levels, and have been inconsistently implemented across the state.

Accordingly, the CC25 Initiative has identified the K-12 educational experience of transition-age foster youth as a matter of primary importance and has dedicated the resources to improve outcomes in this area. The K-12 Education objective of CC25I is to achieve shared responsibility between the child welfare system and local school districts in order to provide foster youth with a stable, uninterrupted, needs-appropriate, high quality education that supports and encourages their academic success. To this end, the four early implementing CC25I counties are creating new collaborations among child welfare agencies, county offices of education, school districts, caregivers and other community partners.

Key strategies supported by these collaborations include: furthering educational stability for foster youth by helping them stay in the same school even if their foster placement changes and ensuring that their records are transferred rapidly and completely if they do switch schools; systematically monitoring youth's educational progress and sharing this information among all key stakeholders; ensuring that youth receive tutoring and other supportive services; and, across all these domains, ensuring that youth, caregivers, educators and social workers take full advantage of the opportunities and services already available under state or federal law.

### **County Progress Towards the K-12 Education Objectives of CC25I**

Currently in their third year of the Initiative, early implementing CC25I counties have already made substantial strides towards these goals, drawing on the resources, collaborations and technical assistance provided directly or indirectly by the Initiative. CC25I has sponsored several general and topic-specific convenings at which team members from each county participate in technical assistance opportunities and share the lessons learned with regard to K-12 education and other topics since joining the Initiative.

CC25I county child welfare agencies made great progress in integrating K-12 educational objectives within agency policies and practices:

- In all four counties, the child welfare agency has a staff member identified as Educational Liaison; in three of four counties, the position is full time.
- All counties train social workers and other staff on how to comply with legislation and better serve the educational needs of youth.
- Counties increasingly incorporate educational assessments and record-keeping into routine social worker tasks.
- Two counties have created resource or training guides for child welfare staff and foster caregivers, and one developed a self-advocacy binder to help youth with their own educational planning.

The partnerships these child welfare agencies have developed with local educational agencies and other community partners have changed school procedures for foster youth facing home placement changes, have improved cross-agency communication and have opened up auxiliary tutoring and other academic supports for youth:

- Agencies offer workshops and trainings to educational agencies so that principals, counselors and teachers understand foster youth challenges and relevant legislation.
- Agencies and school districts collaborate to create standardized forms and procedures for seamless school discharge and re-enrollment procedures when there is a change in foster home placement.
- All counties have some level of data sharing in operation between the child welfare agency and schools or school districts.
- Each county has its own mix of targeted programs providing academic enrichment and support to different groups of foster youth: at-risk (below 2.0 GPA) youth; potentially college-bound youth; GED-focused youth; truant youth; special education youth; middle school students; and high school freshman.
- Counties also offer workshops to foster youth and caregivers on educational rights, graduation requirements and available local educational supports.

### **Local Initiatives**

Counties have developed solutions to K-12 educational challenges that build on local strengths and resources and respond to the needs of their particular foster youth population. Some of the more innovative and effective approaches taken include:

#### **Fresno County**

- Fresno County made K-12 education a high priority within its child welfare agency. It placed Independent Living Program social workers directly on school campuses in three school districts attended by many foster youth. Agency staff initiated a number of school-specific initiatives to support youth.
- The County posted in one central Internet location the forms and procedures needed by multiple agencies to ensure smooth placement and enrollment changes, as well as disseminate information on relevant legislation, A-G requirements and community resources for foster youth.

#### **San Francisco County**

- San Francisco County made early identification of mental health needs among foster youth a priority and has developed streamlined policies and procedures to ensure compliance with AB 3632 among foster youth.
- The County prioritized putting education and health data for all foster youth into their CWS/CMS records.
- The County was the first among CC25I early implementing counties to seek a draw down of Title-IVE funding to support Foster Youth Services programs and resources.

#### **Santa Clara County**

- Santa Clara County demonstrated an energetic commitment to multi-partner strategies: The Juvenile Education Task Force leads ongoing efforts to find collaborative and cross-agency solutions to issues related to foster youths' educational needs and the legislative mandates to meet them.
- The County is home to several fruitful collaborations between the child welfare agency and various community partners aimed at improving the GPAs of 9th and 10th graders; creating educational plans and ensuring auxiliary supports for all middle school foster youth; and supporting foster youth enrollment in the college-preparation program AVID ("Advancement Via Individual Determination").

#### **Stanislaus County**

- Stanislaus County developed a strong partnership between the child welfare agency and the county Office of Education to expand tutoring services available to youth and also assist youth in preparing for and taking exams such as the GED.
- The County created a self-advocacy binder to help youth engage in strength-based goal setting, secure needed supports and prepare for post-secondary opportunities.
- An Educational Liaison has worked closely with foster youth, caregivers and social workers to properly assess needs and plan educational supports; reviewing hundreds of school transcripts to ensure appropriate credit accrual, and advocating at 125 IEP meetings and expulsion hearings.

### **Outcomes: Educational Results for Transition-Age Foster Youth**

Counties are still implementing new data tracking strategies that will allow ongoing assessment of the K-12 educational outcomes identified by CC25I : the percentage of foster youth passing the California High School Exit Examinations in Math and English Language Arts and the percentage of foster youth graduating from high school (with a high school diploma, GED or

equivalent certificate). However, in some counties, measures of intermediate youth outcomes are available:

- Among foster youth attending Fresno Unified School District in Fresno County, the average GPA of middle and high school youth increased from 1.69 in the 2004-2005 school year to 1.90 in the 2006-2007 school year, and from 1.33 to 1.72 among group home youth in particular during the same period. There were also improvements in school change, attendance, yearly credits earned and suspensions.
- Also in Fresno County, foster care youth with GPAs below 2.0 who participated in the Youth Law Center pilot study saw their average GPA increase from 1.15 to 1.55 within a one year period.
- In an effort to encourage foster youth to set college attendance as a goal and complete college prerequisites while in high school, CC25I counties are trying to link students with college-directed programs like AVID. Early results show that Santa Clara County enrolled nine foster youth in AVID or similar programs and Fresno County enrolled 25 youth. These are significant achievements; local AVID programs often have no foster youth among their participants.

## **Key Lessons Learned**

**1. Focus and Leadership on K-12 Education Objectives are Essential.** Counties that prioritized K-12 education over other CC25I target areas showed more progress in program and service innovation in this focus area. Fresno and Santa Clara Counties, for example, made K-12 Education a high-priority area, and implemented a number of initiatives on school campuses and in collaboration with individual school districts to expand academic supports for foster youth. Strong leadership is very important; anticipating the possibility of changes in senior county leadership or having a key point person (or two) in each focus area can minimize the impact of high-level changes.

**2. The CC25I Emphasis on Agency Collaboration and Community Partnerships is Valuable.** CC25I has generated a number of valuable partnerships in all counties to address educational challenges and expand the available continuum of academic supports. In Santa Clara County, for example, the abundance of local educational initiatives resulted in a large collaborative effort to integrate and streamline each of the separate projects, taking community partnership to a new level. Going forward, it will be essential for counties to develop strategies to sustain these partnerships and collaborative undertakings over the long term.

**3. Small-scale or Targeted Program Interventions are an Effective First Step.** Innovative strategies to better assess and respond to the academic needs of youth were initially implemented not county-wide, but with single school districts within a county or with certain subgroups of foster youth. Fresno and Santa Clara Counties worked closely with one to three school districts to implement services and to improve the educational outcomes of foster youth with GPAs of 2.0 or below. San Francisco County targeted truant and special education foster youth for review and service referrals. Counties also made concerted efforts to enroll youth in targeted, high priority programs such as AVID and similar programs. Going forward, the challenge in this area will be finding ways to take these efforts to scale – to serve more schools, districts and youth – and to sustain larger-scale efforts over time.

**4. The Challenges of Supporting Out-of-County Youth Remains Largely Unaddressed.** The fact that two of the four CC25I counties, San Francisco and Stanislaus respectively, either place half their foster youth with caregivers in other counties or find that nearly half of the foster youth in their local schools are under the jurisdiction of another county, suggests that out-of-county placement is a widespread issue statewide. Data sharing agreements among counties that frequently find themselves in a sending/receiving relationship for foster youth may be a good jumping-off point for progress here. In general, counties will probably need to develop targeted approaches to this particular challenge, working with the counties where most of their youth are placed, or from where most of their youth originate.

**5. Data Sharing and Outcomes Tracking.** Counties need a variety of strategies to overcome the barriers that appear when agencies with different missions, confidentiality rules and multiple stakeholders try to share administrative data. A Memorandum of Understanding is often the first step in opening up an avenue for data sharing between agencies and is sometimes supported by a standing court order, as is the case in Fresno and Santa Clara Counties (and is being developed in San Francisco County). Establishing data-sharing between the child welfare agency and a limited number of school districts (rather than attempting a county-wide effort involving multiple districts) may also be helpful. Sharing of effective strategies among counties, efforts facilitated by CC25I-sponsored convenings and technical assistance, can contribute greatly to improvement in data tracking and sharing.

## II. INTRODUCTION

In September 2005, there were 513,000 foster youth in the United States and 70 percent (361,000 youth) were of K-12 school age (5 to 18).<sup>1</sup> One in six (or 62,000) of these school-aged foster youth live in California.<sup>2</sup> Large numbers of these foster youth perform academically below grade level, repeat grades and fail to ever complete high school.<sup>3</sup> Any improvements to the currently dismal educational trajectories of foster youth (which we summarize below) will depend heavily on stakeholder learning, better interagency coordination and data-sharing, improved program management and research and better use of the educational resources already available.

Recognizing this imperative, child welfare agencies participating in the California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I) are partnering with local educational agencies (county offices of education and school districts), caregivers and other community partners to assure foster youth a stable, needs-appropriate, high quality education that will lead many to higher education and a college degree, and lead others to a satisfying livelihood even without a college credential. Key strategies towards this challenging goal include: systematically monitoring youth's educational progress and sharing this information among all key stakeholders; guaranteeing educational continuity and stability for foster youth (i.e. helping youth stay in the same school even if their foster placement changes and ensuring that their records are transferred rapidly and completely if they do switch schools); and ensuring that youth receive all the supportive services – including tutoring – they need. Putting priority on these key strategies is essential to improve the academic success of foster youth.

### **2a. K-12 Educational Outcomes of Foster Youth**

There is a substantial body of literature indicating that youth in out-of-home care fare much worse academically than other students. Three-quarters perform below their grade level and over half are held back in school at least one year.<sup>4</sup> Foster youth earn lower grades and achieve lower scores on standardized achievement tests in reading and mathematics,<sup>5</sup> they have lower levels of engagement in school (39 percent versus 20 percent), high levels of behavioral and emotional problems (27 percent versus 7 percent), and are half as likely to be involved in extra-curricular activities.<sup>6</sup> Many foster youth have mental health problems, which may be associated with behavioral problems and special-education placement. Foster youth are placed in special education at a much higher rate (30 to 52 percent) than their peers (10 to 12 percent)<sup>7</sup>, and one study found foster youth were twice as likely to be suspended and four times as likely to be expelled as non-foster youth.<sup>8</sup> Nearly a third suffers from at least one affective or substance use disorder and nearly a quarter use prescription drugs to treat a psychological or psychiatric condition.<sup>9</sup> When mental and physical health needs are not addressed, they can lead to or compound pre-existing academic difficulties.<sup>10</sup>

The long term consequences of poor academic experiences are significant. Foster youth are twice as likely as other students to drop out of school before graduation. Only 45 percent have graduated from high school at the time of emancipation,<sup>11</sup> in comparison to an estimated public school graduation rate in the United States of 71 percent and in California of 68 percent in 1998.<sup>12</sup> Courtney and Dworsky (2006) found that 32 percent of current and former foster youth ages 18 to 20 were neither employed nor in school (compared with 12 percent of 19 year olds in the general population), and 37 percent of females (11 percent of males) were receiving one or more government benefits.<sup>13</sup> Another study found that two to four years after leaving the foster care system, only half of the young adults were regularly employed, nearly half had been arrested, a quarter had experienced homelessness, and more than half of the young women had given birth.<sup>14</sup> It is estimated that among youth who emancipated from the foster care system, only 10 to 30 percent have attended at least some college (versus 60 percent of American youth in general) and only one to five percent of foster youth earn a bachelor's degree (compared with roughly 25 percent of all youth nationwide).<sup>15</sup> Former foster youth also earn significantly less than their same-age peers with over 75

percent earning less than \$5,000 a year and 90 percent earning less than \$10,000 a year, a gap that is surely due in part to their limited education.<sup>16,17</sup>

## **2b. Challenges to K-12 Academic Success for Foster Youth**

Entry into and movement through the child welfare system is clearly correlated with the academic difficulties detailed above.<sup>18</sup> Placement instability and lack of agency coordination are two of the leading challenges that must be addressed in attempts to improve support services and educational outcomes for foster youth.

*Placement and School Instability* - Many of the challenges that foster youth face academically and in terms of their general well-being stem from the instability in their lives. Many experience frequent changes in their home and school placements, adults that come and go from their lives, a revolving door of support providers, and a general sense that they do not have control over their own future. Youth in care have a *median* of three to four foster-home or group-home placements; more than one-quarter experience five or more foster home placements and about 14 percent live in four or more different group homes.<sup>19</sup> A 2003 study found that 63 percent of foster youth had switched schools at least once in the last year<sup>20</sup> and almost 80 percent of youth in the longitudinal Midwest Evaluation changed schools at least once during their foster care episode.<sup>21</sup>

A school move can interfere seriously with a youth's educational progress, the more so if (as often happens) it occurs in the midst of the school year.<sup>22,23</sup> With no reliable system to ensure that academic records are provided to a new school, foster youth often fall further behind with every move. In a 2001 study, 12 percent of foster youth experienced delays of two or more weeks in school enrollment, while another 2001 study documented an average delay of more than 18 days in obtaining education records for newly placed group home residents.<sup>24</sup> A study of California group-home transfers similarly found students missing almost three full weeks of school between being placed in a new group home and enrolling in their new school.<sup>25</sup> Special education services and even academic credits for courses already taken often fail to travel with a youth who changes schools.

Not only do youth suffer academically from the multiple moves, but they have to adapt to new social structures within a school. It is difficult for youth to make new friends at each new school when they do not know how long they will be there. This transient feeling often results in youth not participating in the social aspects of school and being truant more often.<sup>26, 27, 28</sup> One estimate suggests that, on average, it takes four to six months for a youth to recover academically from the disruption of changing schools.<sup>29</sup>

*Systems Challenges: Lack of Agency Coordination and Data Sharing* – Although most youth who are under the jurisdiction of a county child welfare agency attend public schools, and so are the responsibility of a local educational agency, historically there have been almost no formal channels of communication between the two entities to collaborate about the educational needs of these youth.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the lines of adult responsibility and authority for youth's lives -- particularly their educational progress -- are diffuse and unclear.<sup>31</sup> Social workers are, in theory, required to update the health and education passport of foster youth as part of their case plans, but in practice this rarely happens.<sup>32</sup> Attention to a youth's educational needs among social workers and court appointed special advocates (CASAs) is often overshadowed by a host of more pressing issues related to securing a safe and stable placement.

Instead, operating all too often in organizational silos, social workers and school staff may make educational decisions for youth without a complete understanding of the youth's larger needs. For example, a child welfare worker might change a youth's placement based on the therapeutic services available at a new home, but unknowingly interrupt the services the youth was receiving at school. Foster youth already identified as having special needs can lose special education services when they transfer schools, or can experience disruption and

delay in receiving the needed services.<sup>33, 34</sup> One study found that 39 percent of foster youth surveyed had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)<sup>35</sup>, but only 16 percent were receiving special education services.<sup>36</sup> Lack of communication and coordination also results in discrepant record keeping; one study showed that about 30 percent of foster youth actually received special education services, but social worker case records indicated that only five percent received such services.<sup>37</sup>

Because local education agencies and child welfare agencies have different missions, are accountable to different governing structures, are each bound by complex and different legal requirements (especially privacy laws)<sup>38</sup> and even encompass different geographic areas, the lack of collaboration is hardly surprising. On the ground, educational staff and social workers who make decisions affecting a foster youth's education do not perceive an easy mode of communication between the two systems and all too often misunderstand basic features of how the other system works. Compounding these difficulties, no comprehensive data system exists to track foster youth's K-12 academic progress as they move across schools.<sup>39</sup> Accessing such data from incompatible data systems used by multiple collaborating agencies is extremely difficult.

In short, although a youth might have a large team of family members, caregivers, social workers, service providers, teachers and court representatives working on his or her behalf, it is possible that none of these adults has *both* access to all the relevant information (educational assessments and records) *and* the decision-making authority to best prioritize the educational needs of that youth.<sup>40</sup>

### III. STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING K-12 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF FOSTER YOUTH

Because the state has assumed responsibility for the overall well-being of foster youth, its public agencies should strive to work together so youth, who contend with complicated and changing home lives, receive the best education possible given limited public resources. The challenges to coordination and collaboration are daunting. This section provides a sketch of the complex landscape of legislative, research and programming efforts that address these challenges and provides a context for the current work of CC25I counties to improve foster youth educational outcomes.

#### 3a. Policy Responses

The needs of foster youth have drawn the attention of California legislators, as the following description of two seminal pieces of legislation, the Foster Youth Services (FYS) program and the more recent AB 490, demonstrates.

*Foster Youth Services* - California's Foster Youth Services (FYS) legislation funds counties and districts to develop local coordinated approaches to meet the educational needs of foster children. FYS educational programming focused initially on foster youth residing in group homes.<sup>41</sup> Local FYS programs allow courts, child welfare agencies, schools, probation agencies and other service providers to share information and coordinate proper educational placement and comprehensive service provision, including counseling, tutoring and mentoring, for foster youth.

The Budget Act of 2006 and AB 1808 extended FYS eligibility to foster youth of all ages in licensed foster homes and county-operated juvenile detention facilities.<sup>42</sup> By 2008, 57 of the 58 counties were participating, and county FYS programs served virtually all group-home foster youth in participating counties in fiscal year 2005-2006, some 11,200 individuals.<sup>43</sup> As recently as March 2008, the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care issued a recommendation that FYS eligibility should be expanded to foster youth in kinship care placements (which account for almost half of all foster youth), thereby extending FYS services to all foster youth age five and older.<sup>44</sup>

Outcome data for the FYS Core District Programs are encouraging: 68 percent of foster youths served in school year 2004-05 gained more than one month of academic growth per month of tutoring received and only 0.2 percent of foster youth served were expelled. School attendance reached 96 percent for participating foster youth.<sup>45</sup>

*Assembly Bill 490* - The intent of AB 490 (2003) was to amend and expand California's Education Code to ensure that "all pupils in foster care...have a meaningful opportunity to meet the challenging state pupil academic achievement standards to which all pupils are held." Recognizing that foster youth's unstable living arrangements lead to serious educational difficulties, lawmakers established roles for the schools, school districts and county child welfare agencies to assure school stability when possible; immediate enrollment and timely transfer of records when school change is required; and proper assignment and transfer of grades and credits earned for full or partial coursework.<sup>46, 47</sup> The law also requires each county and district in California to have a designated point person or "educational liaison" to "assist foster children when transferring from one school to another or from one school district to another in ensuring proper transfer of credits, records, and grades."<sup>48</sup> The educational liaison serves as the social worker's primary contact at the school district and assists in carrying out the activities that serve the educational needs of foster youth. Social workers are supposed to provide the liaison with updated information about the foster youth's life outside of school so the liaison can provide appropriate educational supports to respond to a youth's particular situation.

Unfortunately, implementation of AB 490 across the state has been inconsistent. One barrier that undermines AB 490 efforts is that although the law mandates the collaboration of multiple agencies, it does not place ultimate responsibility for ensuring cross-agency collaboration with any single agency or office.<sup>49</sup> The law fails to provide

state funding for the mandated educational liaison positions and does not specify key details of the position, such as whether liaison staff should be full-time or if there is a desired maximum number of children per liaison.<sup>50</sup> In addition, no guidelines are provided in terms of how the educational liaisons are to collaborate with existing Foster Youth Services programs operating locally.<sup>51</sup> Another lingering challenge has to do with AB 490 requirements that student records be released to any child welfare or probation department if necessary to prepare a health and education summary for a foster youth's case plan or for educational case management purposes.<sup>52</sup> In most cases, without a court approved Memorandum of Understanding or legislation that specifically allows interagency information sharing, many agencies still refrain from sharing student information for fear of violating confidentiality laws. As a result, data sharing continues to be a barrier to ensuring that foster youth receive the appropriate educational support in many localities.

Despite the challenges, various districts and counties are making progress in terms of implementing AB 490, particularly through the use of trainings. For example, Fresno Unified School District and the Fresno County Office of Education Foster Youth Services have conducted interagency trainings on AB 490 for child welfare, mental health, probation, educators and foster youth.<sup>53</sup> Also, a group of child advocacy organizations, including California Youth Connection which is run by current and former foster youth, created a comprehensive training package on AB 490 to ensure that implementation of the law would address important educational issues.<sup>54</sup>

There are a number of other legislative acts passed in recent years that paved the way for AB 490 and continue to expand upon its efforts. This legislation is summarized in **Appendix A**.

### **3b. Collaborative Research Initiatives**

There have been a number of collaborative research and planning efforts in California and beyond to improve the policies and programs that serve the educational needs of foster youth. The membership, goals and recommendations of the collaborations listed here overlap somewhat, but each has made unique contributions to expanding awareness of the education-related challenges facing foster youth and to increasing the momentum of policy and program improvement in the area of K-12 educational outcomes. For additional details on these collaborative efforts, please see **Appendix B**.

*The Foster Care Work Group* – The Foster Care Work Group, a subcommittee of the Youth Transition Funders Group, issued a publication in 2004<sup>55</sup> that recommended a comprehensive set of strategies to improve the well-being and future success of emancipating foster youth.

*California Foster Youth Education Task Force* – Starting with the National Higher Education and Child Welfare Summits sponsored by Casey Family Programs in 2003, regional agencies established the California Foster Youth Education Task Force in 2004. Task Force members meet regularly to develop strategies to better serve the educational needs of foster youth and to organize annual California Education Summits; the first of which were held in January 2007 and May 2008.<sup>56</sup>

*Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care* – The Commission was established in March 2006 and regularly develops recommendations<sup>57</sup> to guide the California Judicial Council and child welfare agencies in efforts to improve the outcomes of foster youth.

*National Governors Association Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care* – In 2006, California joined the National Governors Association Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care. The Academy brought state and community leaders together with national experts to develop plans for improving adult outcomes of

former foster youth. In 2008, the work of the California Education Team was integrated into the California Foster Youth Education Task Force.<sup>58</sup>

*The California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care* – In 2005, the Stuart Foundation funded the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning and Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc. to carry out the California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care (CECCFC). Recommendations based on their research of effective strategies to better serve the educational needs of foster youth are detailed in the CECCFC 2008 report.<sup>59</sup>

The most common recommendations among these five collaborative initiatives include:

- Ensure compliance with and full funding of existing legislation to promote school stability and improve foster youth educational experiences and outcomes (such as AB 490).
- Expand foster youth access and linkage to educational supports that are appropriate and proven effective (through increased funding, expanded program eligibility, accurate needs assessment, etc.).
- Increase the use of educational advocates and outreach to ensure that youth and caregivers are aware of educational rights and are well-positioned to pursue a youth's best interests.
- Expand outreach and training opportunities so educators, social workers and others working with youth know how best to serve the educational needs of this population.
- Create partnerships and implement tools to allow the collecting and sharing of educational data among those working to serve the needs of foster care youth.

### **3c. Programmatic Strategies**

Public agencies and community collaborations are developing local programming that corresponds to existing recommendations and addresses the challenges preventing K-12 academic success among children in out-of-home care. While not an exhaustive list, this section provides some examples of model programs or best practices that have emerged in the area of K-12 supports for foster care and court-involved youth.

*Education Advocates & Surrogates* - While undeniably important, education often falls to the wayside as social workers and court appointed special advocates (CASAs) try to support foster youth by focusing on more immediate issues,<sup>60</sup> such as physical health and safety, reunification, permanency and mental health. Without a well-informed adult advocating on behalf of a foster youth, education often remains unaddressed. Programs providing volunteer advocates that focus specifically on supporting youth and caregivers on educational issues attempt to integrate consideration of a youth's academic well-being into the larger systems and processes. Going a step further, the concept of an educational "surrogate" was developed because a parent's right to make educational decisions on behalf of a child are not automatically terminated when custody rights are severed, but it is often the case that parents or caregivers are unavailable or unable to fulfill this essential role or do not know that they still have this responsibility. Educational surrogates serve voluntarily and are appointed by the court. However, as the procedures for recruiting, appointing, and training education surrogates vary considerably, not all volunteers are fully qualified and often the need for educational advocates far exceeds the supply. Occasionally, an educational surrogate will share decision-making authority with a parent or guardian.

A number of programs across the state and country have been developed to provide educational advocates or surrogates for foster youth, and particularly youth who are involved in the juvenile court system. Educational advocacy programs utilize trained volunteers to support youth and caregivers and pursue action and resources that respond to a youth's educational needs and goals. These programs can be operated directly through the court, such as Alameda County's Educational Advocacy Program in California, or through local Court Appointed Special Advocate Programs (CASAs) such as Prince William County's Court Appointed Educational Advocate program in Virginia.<sup>61</sup> In Siskiyou County, California, the CASA program employs a full-time educational advocate that works

with court-referred youth and their caregivers on education issues, attends court hearings and completes an educational supplement to the CASA report. In the future, Siskiyou County hopes to expand the advocate's work to monitor the health and education passports of all foster youth. Alameda, Contra Costa, Riverside and San Diego Counties are among those offering Educational Surrogate programs, providing trained volunteers who can serve as a surrogate when a parent is not available to make educational decisions. The San Diego County program offers four categories of advocates or surrogates: the traditional CASA; a Case Assessor who reviews court files to match the needs of a child with the appropriate advocate or surrogate; an Educational Surrogate to focus on the educational needs of a child on a monthly basis; and a Court Appointed Special Monitor who is assigned to youth in long-term care and focuses on education and employment related issues for older and aging-out youth.

*Tutoring Programs* – In their review of the impact evaluation literature, the California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care highlighted the positive academic effects of tutoring programs on at-risk students<sup>62</sup> and identified two exemplary programs in the area of K-12 tutoring of foster youth.<sup>63</sup> Supported by Casey Family Programs, the Tutor Connection in San Diego County is an interagency collaboration that arranges for future teachers in training to provide academic tutoring to foster youth, thereby familiarizing teachers early on with the particular educational needs of foster youth while providing them critical tutoring support. Evaluation of this program found a positive impact on foster youth in the areas of reading, math and spelling.<sup>64</sup> Since 2002, over 1,250 student teachers at California State University, San Marcos have worked with over 1,500 foster youth. Because of its positive impact on the academic performance of participating foster youth, the program is now a finalist for the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Partnership Award for Campus-Community Collaborations.<sup>65</sup> In addition, the Treehouse program, which operates in Washington State, provides intensive support to foster youth by utilizing certified teachers to provide basic skills tutoring on public school campuses.<sup>66</sup>

*Specialized Academic Programs* – There are a number of programs operating in K-12 schools that target youth who have the potential to attend and complete college, but are struggling academically while in secondary school. These programs, which provide a rigorous academic curriculum, tutoring and other support, and a community of peers with similar backgrounds and aspirations, could be of tremendous benefit to foster youth, who are some of the least likely students to attend college. The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program is an effective example of this model. First developed at Claremont High School in San Diego in 1980, there are now over 3,500 schools nationally offering the program. AVID targets students in the academic middle who are likely to be the first in their family to attend college – 83 percent of AVID participants in 2006 applied to a four-year college and 75 percent were accepted.<sup>67</sup> Research indicates that students who participate in AVID and AVID-like programs exceed their peers in attendance, credit accumulation and performance on standardized tests.<sup>68, 69</sup> Because these programs do not specifically target foster youth, some California counties are now developing strategies to increase knowledge of and access to AVID among youth in foster care.

*Collaboration* – States and localities are forging interagency partnerships and agreements that clarify the role of partnering agencies in serving the educational needs of foster youth. The collaborations mentioned above – the California Foster Youth Education Task Force, the NGA Education Team and the California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care – are examples of this work at the state level. In San Diego County, an interagency agreement was established between child welfare, probation, the court agencies, the County Office of Education, the school districts and the local CASA program, which details the role of each party in carrying out the policies and programs that serve the educational needs of foster youth. The signed document also contains the procedural guidelines and forms needed by the courts<sup>70</sup> and the child welfare agency to authorize these new roles, as well as interagency documents to be used when youth must change out-of-home placements and schools.<sup>71</sup> Partnering agencies are also exploring how they can combine funding to support positions and programs that serve foster youth, as in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina where the child welfare agency and school district co-fund a school

psychologist that provides cross-training for both agencies. The psychologist is part of a larger initiative that creates a comprehensive database of students' information.<sup>72</sup>

*Information Sharing* - Privacy concerns have hindered many districts from moving forward with innovative data sharing systems, but some districts, even large urban ones are embarking upon this challenging process.<sup>73</sup> There are two main types of information sharing in use. One is an aggregate system that uses a separate entity, usually a research institution, to collect aggregated (i.e., non-identifiable) data from various agencies and produce reports that can be used for program design and monitoring, and to inform funding priorities. The other approach is to gather identifiable information about individual youth and link across programs. The first approach raises fewer privacy concerns because the information accessed is not student specific, but the second is potentially more informative.

The San Diego County Foster Youth Service has one of the most functional systems of the second type. There, FYS maintains a database that contains information about every foster youth in the county. It is updated every Friday from information maintained by the child welfare system so that the student list is always current. The district downloads grades and transcript information into the database about foster youth in the district. Also, most of the 42 school districts in San Diego County have agreed to use the same data system, facilitating the ease with which schools can access information about new students transferring into their district.<sup>74</sup> Another local example, not specific to foster youth, is the Youth Data Archive (YDA), jointly maintained by the John Gardner Center at Stanford University and the SPHERE Institute (a research organization in San Mateo County). The YDA collects and links information about individuals from districts, city and county agencies and youth-serving organizations. Currently, YDA has been implemented in San Mateo County and is being developed in Alameda and San Francisco Counties.

*Advancing Implementation of AB 490* – There are a number of efforts being made to advance implementation of the AB 490 mandates to protect the educational rights of foster youth and promote their residential and school stability.<sup>75</sup> To facilitate immediate enrollment of youth who must change schools, forms are being developed by organizations, school districts and county offices of education to guide school administrators and staff in promptly discharging and enrolling students when required by a foster care placement change. For examples, the California Foster Youth Education Task Force created an instructional flyer on how to enroll foster youth in compliance with AB 490.<sup>76</sup> In addition, offices of education in counties such as Fresno and San Diego have created and posted on the Internet a series of procedural documents and placement/discharge forms that social workers and probation officers can use to notify schools of placement changes.<sup>77</sup> These forms also inform schools discharging youth of the educational records and information they must make available to the new school enrolling a youth. Efforts are also being made to ensure that foster youth do not lose whatever course credit they have accrued when changing schools mid-semester. In response to findings presented at the California Foster Youth Education Summit earlier that year, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell issued a letter in June 2007 instructing all county and school district superintendents to grant and transfer partial course credits earned by students.<sup>78</sup> Some school districts, such as Hemet Unified developed a policy to guide the assignment of such partial credit based on the number of days enrolled.<sup>79</sup>

*Technical Assistance* – A recent initiative in seven California counties has demonstrated the value of technical assistance as a strategy to improve K-12 education programs for foster youth.<sup>80</sup> After a three-year pilot education initiative with Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, researchers at California State University, Los Angeles and Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc. received funding from the Stuart Foundation to develop the F2F Education Technical Assistance Project (ETAP) to provide technical assistance to counties participating in Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family to Family (F2F) Initiative to facilitate improvements in K-12 educational outcomes for foster youth. The participating F2F counties, identified because they made great strides in maintaining foster youth in their home communities and stabilizing their out-of-home placements, were part of a two-year case study of the impact of technical assistance.<sup>81</sup>

Recognizing that no single model for collaboration works in every situation,<sup>82,83</sup> ETAP supported local flexibility and was sensitive to the organizational structures and goals at play in each situation. Counties were able to select the most appropriate strategies to form or expand partnerships between child welfare, education and other agencies. Strategies included: establishing an education work group; identifying educational data available on local foster youth; conducting assessments of educational outcomes among foster youth; and creating systematic plans of action to improve those outcomes, including improved collection and analysis of educational data. Some participating counties used TA for only two to three sessions a year, while others had sessions every four to six weeks.

There was variation in the level of success achieved by participating counties as measured by the child welfare agency's embrace of education issues and their efforts to develop policies and practices to improve the outcomes of foster youth. By the end of year one, child welfare agencies and their local partners identified two concrete goals they could achieve to improve educational outcomes for foster youth, designated a leader on educational issues within the child welfare agency, and implemented an option for inclusion of an educational representative at meetings where a youth's placement change was being discussed. At the end of year two, counties identified additional goals related to educational outcomes and established quarterly benchmarks to track progress in meeting those goals.

Ensuring that interagency education workgroups convened regularly, and creating them where needed, was essential to carrying out the work of this initiative. Not surprisingly, consistent and committed leadership also mattered. Workgroups identified several barriers to improving the educational outcomes of foster youth: 1) Poor communication, adversarial relationships and absence of mutual responsibility between child welfare agencies and local education agencies; 2) a mutual lack of knowledge among agencies about one another's mission, organizational structure and standard procedures; and 3) challenges to serving the educational needs of foster youth under their jurisdiction who are physically placed in other counties. Child welfare agencies found that one of the best strategies for working with education agencies was by collaborating with the county's Foster Youth Services program. AB 490 educational liaisons worked directly with child welfare to identify youth, share data, and coordinate educational services. As their collaborative work deepened, child welfare staff increasingly saw the need to train staff on educational barriers impacting youth, and to create educational liaison positions within their agency. Technical assistance encouraged child welfare staff to incorporate questions on educational needs into team-decision meetings that determine a youth's placement.

ETAP offered technical assistance at critical junctures of this work and provided neutral facilitation for focus groups and meetings among child welfare staff, caregivers and diverse stakeholders in which participants discussed barriers to serving the educational needs of foster youth in general or particular subgroups of foster youth. The technical assistance emphasized cross-county learning and sharing of data system models to improve interagency collaboration on educational data sharing. It also helped set in motion efforts to secure court orders and interagency agreements to share placement and educational data.

## IV. CC25I EFFORTS IN THE AREA OF K-12 EDUCATION

Counties participating in CC25I aim to improve policies, programs and outcomes for transition-age foster youth in seven focus areas: K-12 Education; Employment/Job Training/Post-Secondary Education; Financial Competency and Asset Development; Housing; Independent Living Skills Programs; Personal/Social Asset Development; and Permanency. The K-12 Education objective of CC25I is to achieve shared responsibility between the child welfare system and local school districts in order to provide foster youth with a stable, uninterrupted, needs-appropriate, high quality education that supports and encourages their academic success.

K-12 Education is a high priority focus area because the educational experiences of foster youth start at age five or younger, but their academic outcomes impact their success and well-being long after the transition to adulthood. Therefore, K-12 Education objectives and their impact on youth also interact with efforts in the other CC25I focus areas. Improved permanency outcomes can result in increased placement stability and more enduring supportive relationships throughout childhood and adolescence that can help youth achieve more positive K-12 educational outcomes. And K-12 educational outcomes – in particular high school graduation – have a strong effect on the likelihood of youth attending post-secondary education, securing a well-paying job and housing and developing the personal and social assets that will assist in becoming a healthy and active members of their community.

This section reviews the progress made thus far by the four early implementing CC25I Counties – Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus – in advancing the CC25I logic model in the area of K-12 Education. In some cases, the counties' work in the past two to three years has been a continuation of education-focused efforts that began prior to CC25I. In other cases, the counties are engaging in work and forging community partnerships that are new since CC25I began. This section begins with a summary of the inputs, targeted goals and activities, and anticipated outcomes of the K-12 educational logic model. This is followed by a summary of the main accomplishments of each county, as detailed in their year one and year two interim reports, and the key lessons learned in each. The section concludes with the K-12 Education activities and benchmarks planned by the counties in the near future.

### 4a. The CC25I Logic Model for K-12 Education

Though each county participating in CC25I has flexibility to develop strategies that capitalize on local resources and respond to the educational needs of their specific foster youth populations, the CC25I K-12 Education Logic Model encapsulates the overarching philosophy, desired impact and strategies that guide these efforts.

*K-12 Education: Anticipated Outcomes* – In the area of K-12 Education, there are two ultimate youth outcomes that all CC25I counties are required to track:

1. The percentage of foster youth passing the California High School Exit Examinations in Math and English Language Arts
2. The percentage of foster youth graduating from high school with a high school diploma, GED or equivalent certificate. (In Stanislaus County, they are also tracking the percentage of foster youth who have *either* graduated from high school/received a certificate of completion of high school *or* completed vocational education.)

In addition, some counties are also tracking improvements in intermediate educational outcomes that precede the completion of high school. Santa Clara County is tracking the percentage of foster youth ages 14 to 18 who 1) have had their educational needs assessed and 2) are completing the grade-appropriate number of school units. Fresno County is monitoring improvement in the grade point averages (GPA) of 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> graders with initial GPAs of 2.0 or lower.

There are three additional outcomes being tracked by CC25I counties that intersect both the K-12 Education and the Employment/Job Training/Post-Secondary Education focus areas. These are 1) the percentage of youth who have college as an educational goal; 2) the percentage of youth who are taking A-G college pre-requisites; and 3) the percentage of youth who have completed A-G college pre-requisites. These outcomes affect the post-secondary goal of increasing college attendance among foster youth, but they are achieved through strategies implemented while youth are still attending middle and high school. Fresno County has adopted an additional intermediate outcome, the percentage of foster youth participating in local AVID programs, to measure progress in helping foster youth choose and prepare for college as their post-secondary educational goal.

*K-12 Education: Goals and Activities* – As part of CC25I, child welfare agencies are engaging in efforts to address internal policies and practices, as well as collaborate with local schools and educational agencies, youth and caregivers, and community partners to achieve the following goals:

- Increase understanding and fulfillment of foster youth educational rights among youth, caregivers and adults working with foster youth
- Improve the school stability of foster youth
- Improve the assessment and tracking of youths' educational needs
- Increase access to academic supports and educational opportunities among foster youth and caregivers

In order to achieve these goals, child welfare agencies in CC25I counties identified the following activities in their initial proposals and in the updated benchmarks provided in their interim reports:

- Establish an educational liaison position within the agency to integrate educational objectives into child welfare policies and practices
- Conduct trainings that 1) inform child welfare staff on how their efforts can better fulfill the educational rights of youth and help the agency comply with relevant legislation such as AB 490 and 2) that educate youth and caregivers on their educational rights and the resources available.
- Collaborate with schools and community partners in order to better assess the educational needs of youth and link them to the appropriate support services.
- Work closely with local educational agencies to promote cross-agency understanding, ensure compliance with relevant legislation and establish strategies for information-sharing to better assess, track and serve the educational needs of youth.

*K-12 Education: Inputs* – CC25I early implementing counties have created education workgroups and community collaborations to develop and implement these K-12 Education activities. In addition to the flexible CC25I grant dollars, which could be used by counties to support strategies in any of the seven focus areas, participating counties had access to a variety of technical assistance opportunities made possible through support from the CC25I funding partners.

Three of the four CC25I early implementing counties – San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties – participated in the F2F Educational Technical Assistance Project (ETAP) discussed above. The K-12 workgroups in these counties worked closely with the ETAP team to identify local barriers to improving educational outcomes of foster youth and developing strategies to overcome these barriers. It was through this work that counties made progress in strengthening agency leadership in the area of K-12 education, developing forms and procedures to facilitate data sharing and compliance with AB 490, developing closer collaboration between public agencies and community partners, and promoting mutual understanding through cross-agency trainings. Even after conclusion of the project, the educational liaisons from each of three participating CC25I counties, as well as the educational liaison from Fresno County, continued to hold cross-county collaboration meetings and conference calls) to share lessons learned and jointly work through ongoing challenges.

In addition to ETAP, CC25I has sponsored a number of general and topic-specific convenings at which team members from each county can participate in technical assistance opportunities and share with one another the lessons they have learned since joining the Initiative. In the area of K-12 Education, CC25I counties have participated in the following:

- **Sharing Education Information Convening** – In March of 2006, all of the CC25I early implementing counties gathered in Oakland, California for a one-day seminar on best practices related to the interagency sharing of K-12 educational data on foster youth. The event was organized by the Youth Law Center and facilitated by members of the F2F Educational Technical Assistance Project. The counties learned about the use of court orders to allow the sharing of youths' educational information in Los Angeles and Fresno Counties; interagency agreements developed to facilitate partnership and data sharing in Fresno and San Luis Obispo Counties; and the forms that have been created in San Francisco and Fresno Counties to facilitate school discharge and enrollment following a youth's placement change. Participants were encouraged to hear from and interact with many other individuals engaging in similar efforts to overcome the barriers to data sharing and learn from the examples of promising practices on this issue.
- **AVID Technical Assistance and Convenings** – Supported by a planning grant from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, teams in three of the early implementing CC25I counties (Fresno, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties) and Orange County, a CC25I county since mid-2007, are engaged in efforts to form collaborative partnerships between schools, child welfare agencies and Foster Youth Services programs, and receive technical assistance on the development of effective strategies to increase the participation of foster youth in local AVID programs. In January and October of 2008, these counties attended one day convenings to discuss the challenges and the lessons learned from their work thus far, and to share their recent accomplishments.
- **Peer-to-Peer Technical Assistance on the Use of Title IV-E Funding for K-12 Academic Support Services** – In May 2008, nearly all of the CC25I counties gathered to learn from staff of the Orange County Department of Children and Family Services how they utilized existing funding to leverage additional funds from Title IV-E for educational services and support for foster youth. Through interagency collaboration, funding from the Office of Education's Foster Youth Services and Probation's juvenile detention funds were used to strengthen available academic supports, increase service partnerships and draw down an additional \$250,000 in Title IV-E funding. This increased financial support is allowing Orange County to double the number of school based social workers/educational liaisons available to provide case management and other support to better serve the educational needs of foster youth.

#### **4b. CC25I K-12 Educational Accomplishments**

The four CC25I early implementing counties, Fresno, San Francisco, Stanislaus and Santa Clara, have been involved with the Initiative since 2005. The first three joined CC25I in July 2005 and Santa Clara County joined in December 2005. To date, all four counties have completed interim reports marking the end of their first and second years of CC25I funding and work. This section looks more closely at these early implementing counties and summarizes their accomplishments as reported in their second year interim reports.

As the counties are still implementing new data tracking strategies that will allow ongoing assessment of foster youth outcomes, we can not yet determine how they are faring in terms of meeting the ultimate K-12 Educational outcomes identified by CC25I - the percentage of foster youth passing the California High School Exit Examinations in Math and English Language Arts and the percentage of foster youth with a high school diploma, GED or equivalent certificate. However, the progress made in accomplishing the goals and activities of the K-12 Education Logic Model

can provide an early indicator of whether counties are on track to achieve the anticipated outcomes, and in some counties, measures of intermediate youth outcomes are also available.

Though all located in Northern California, the four counties vary considerably in their geographic and demographic profiles, as well as their foster care dynamics, as demonstrated in **Table 2**. The counties differ in size, ethnic/racial composition, economy and the number of in-county school districts foster youth may be attending. Their foster-care caseloads also vary in size, with Fresno County having the largest number of youth under its child welfare jurisdiction, and in terms of caseload dynamics. San Francisco, for example, has a smaller percentage of youth in the 0-5 age range but a larger percentage in the transitional age range (16-18+) than the other counties. Particularly challenging for some CC25I counties is the large number of youth placed outside the county and, conversely in some counties, the large number of youth coming from elsewhere. This is discussed further in the Challenges and Lessons Learned section below.

**Table 2: CC25I County Profile<sup>84</sup>**

	<b>Fresno</b>	<b>San Francisco</b>	<b>Santa Clara</b>	<b>Stanislaus</b>	
Population	816,400	787,500	1.7 million	454,600	
% by Ethnicity	37 White 47 Hispanic 5 Black 9 Asian/PI 2 Other	45 White 14 Hispanic 7 Black 32 Asian/PI 3 Other	43 White 25 Hispanic 3 Black 27 Asian/PI 1 Other	52 White 38 Hispanic 2 Black 5 Asian/PI 3 Other	
Geography	Rural	Urban	Urban/ Suburban	Rural	
School Districts	34	1	32	27	
<b>Child Welfare(CW)-Supervised Foster Care Caseload, by Age &amp; Out-of-County Placement (January 2008)</b>					
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,541</b>	<b>1,645</b>	<b>1,870</b>	<b>587</b>
Age Breakdown of Children in Foster Care	0-5	735 (29%)	330 (20%)	619 (33%)	200 (34%)
	6-15	1,366 (54%)	855 (52%)	874 (47%)	281 (48%)
	16-17	379 (15%)	321 (20%)	316 (17%)	97 (17%)
	18+	61 (2%)	139 (8%)	61 (3%)	9 (2%)
% of the County's CW-Supervised Caseload Placed Out-of-county (January 2008)	11%	57%	32%	17%	
Additional Children Placed in County from Other Jurisdictions (January 2008)	406	100	152	504	

While each county catered their CC25I K-12 educational activities to the needs and characteristics of its local foster youth population, all four placed great emphasis in their early efforts to 1) better integrate K-12 educational objectives within the policies and practices of their child welfare agencies and to 2) reach out to community partners to promote mutual understanding of the issues and develop collaborative strategies to better serve the educational needs of foster youth, as demonstrated in **Tables 3 and Table 4**.

**Table 3**

**CC25I Initiatives within Child Welfare Agencies to Support K-12 Education Goals**

	<b>Fresno</b>	<b>San Francisco</b>	<b>Santa Clara</b>	<b>Stanislaus</b>
<b>1. Child Welfare Agency has a Designated Educational Liaison Staff Member</b>	One full-time Liaison	One full-time Liaison; designated as Special Education Advocate and SFUSD Liaison	One full-time Liaison; designated as Education Services Unit Coordinator.	One part-time Liaison
<b>2. Child Welfare Agency has Integrated Educational Objectives within Work of Child Welfare Agency</b>	Case managers regularly track education outcomes. ILP social workers are on school campuses.	Includes discussion of education in foster youth Team Decision Making meetings.	Working towards goal of completing educational assessment/plan for all foster youth ages 14 to 18 (within 3 years)	Liaison attends IEP meetings and expulsion hearings. Analyzes school transcripts to ensure proper school credit accrual.
<b>3. Child Welfare Agency is Training Staff in How to Comply with Legislation and Serve the Educational Needs of Youth</b>	For new social workers, on AB 490 and related issues, Also for current social workers in Long-Term Foster Care and Family Reunification.	For social workers, on educational rights, AB490, graduation requirements and support resources.	For new and current social workers on AB 490, academic achievement issues and the educational needs of foster youth.	Training on 12 topics including educational rights and education-related legislation offered to child welfare and probation staff.
<b>4. Child Welfare Agency is Creating Resource Guides for Staff</b>		Created resource guide on Bay Area tutoring services.		Educational advocacy manual created for agency staff.

All four counties have appointed Educational Liaisons to lead K-12 educational efforts within each child welfare agency. Counties also conduct trainings to inform agency staff of youths’ and families’ educational rights, with a focus on how better to serve their educational needs and keep K-12 educational needs and outcomes a central focus of ongoing casework.

With Educational Liaisons in place, agencies now have the capacity to work systematically with schools and districts to maximize school stability and minimize disruptions when a youth’s foster placement changes. School and agency staff members have together explored the opportunities and constraints within each system and are developing informal as well as formal collaborative relationships. In three of the four counties, probation is included in some aspect of this collaborative work. Partnership and cross-training with local educational agencies and schools have resulted in policies and procedures to achieve compliance with AB 490 (to promote school stability and smoother enrollment when school change is unavoidable) and to establish methodologies for improved tracking and sharing of educational outcomes data for foster youth.

Counties have also reached out to youth and their caregivers with trainings and other resources to increase their understanding of topics ranging from a foster youth’s educational rights, through self-advocacy, educational requirements for high school graduation, and the education-related services and opportunities available to youth.

**Table 4**

**CC25I Initiatives with Schools, School Districts, Youth, Caregivers, and Community Partners to Support K-12 Education Goals**

	<b>Fresno</b>	<b>San Francisco</b>	<b>Santa Clara</b>	<b>Stanislaus</b>
<b>1. Offering Trainings to Schools/ Districts to Support Collaboration and Understanding of Foster Youth Challenges and Relevant Legislation</b>	Conducts trainings with school faculty and personnel at one school district; will expand training to other districts.	Conducts cross-training for child welfare staff and school principals on Team Decision Making and other child welfare practices.	Offers ongoing trainings for school personnel on foster youths' educational rights and education-related issues and services.	Trainings developed on 12 foster-care education topics for school district staff. Agency staff held meetings with high school faculty and staff.
<b>2. Facilitating School Discharge and Enrollment when Placement Change Occurs, through Standardized Forms and Cross-Agency Procedures</b>	Developed standard procedures and forms between child welfare, probation and school agencies for enrollment/placement changes.	Developed standard forms for child welfare staff for enrollment/ placement changes. MOU to help child welfare and school district jointly comply with AB 490.	Child welfare, educational agencies, probation, and partners collaboratively implement AB 490 and other relevant legislation.	Child welfare agency works with individual high schools and the Office of Education to coordinate trainings and efforts to meet the needs of youth.
<b>3. Implementing Systems of Data-Sharing between Child Welfare Agency and Schools/ School Districts</b>	Fresno Unified shares educational data with Agency. Agency can share foster placement information with school personnel.	MOU allows school district and Agency to share data. Agency is entering education data for all new youth into CWS/CMS (statewide foster care database).	MOU allows three school districts, Agency and probation to share data. Collaborative creation of educational database accessible to all agencies.	Child welfare staff enters educational data on foster youth into an ILP-related database.
<b>4. Agency Offers Workshops/Training to Youth and Caregivers on Educational Rights, Graduation Requirements and Available Resources</b>	Annual trainings for 8th graders transitioning to high school and their caregivers. Held informational meetings with group home staff, and administrators.	Will expand the existing training on graduation requirements to reach caregivers. Created resource guide for caregivers on tutoring.	Ongoing trainings for parents and caregivers on educational rights, education related issues and services, and post-secondary education.	Trainings on 12 topics also implemented for caregivers and community partners. Educational advocacy manual also shared with caregivers.
<b>5. Partnering with Schools, Supplemental Education Programs (AVID) and Other Partners to Expand Assessment, Academic Planning, Advocacy and Tutoring Supports for Foster Youth</b>	Conducted a pilot program to improve academic performance among youth with GPA of 2.0 or lower.  Focusing efforts in one school district to increase foster youth participation in AVID.	Monthly reviews of truant foster youth; give service referrals.  Assigning education surrogates to special education youth.  Early efforts to seek Title-IVE funds to expand Foster Youth Services supports.	Created high school freshman orientation for foster youth.  Project to support 9 <sup>th</sup> /10 <sup>th</sup> graders with GPAs of 2.0 or lower.  Project to provide educational plans/ academic support for middle school youth.  Project to link youth with AVID and similar programs.	Expanded tutoring for foster youth; linking eligible youth with AVID program.  Provided new resources to help youth complete the GED and other exams.  Created a self-advocacy binder to help youth understand their strengths and prepare for post-secondary education.

While changing agency culture and practice (in both child welfare and education sectors) was critical to establishing a foundation for ongoing efforts to improve K-12 educational outcomes, all four counties also made great strides in developing or expanding direct services and programs to better support foster youth and improve their academic outcomes. County efforts responded to the need for improved assessment of youths' needs, educational planning

and the provision of academic tutoring and other supports, particularly among foster youth with a 2.0 or lower GPA. Programs also emphasized the need to reach youth at critical junctures, preparing them to successfully transition to high school and providing them with sufficient preparation for college.

Counties developed solutions to K-12 educational challenges that built on local strengths and resources and responded to the needs of their particular foster youth population. Highlights of some of the more innovative and effective approaches taken include:

### **Fresno County**

- In early 2006, the Fresno County's Independent Living Program began placing their social workers directly on campuses in three school districts with high concentrations of foster youth. The project started with four social workers outreaching to foster youth at 20 schools, but the County will continue increasing the number of social workers and high schools served. This innovative service approach further integrates educational objectives within child welfare practice by providing the ILP social workers better and more frequent access to the youth and information on their educational status. This strategy has also contributed to child welfare and educational agency collaboration, increasing each school's awareness of the needs of foster youth, the role of child welfare and ILP in their life, and the services available to support them.
- Fresno County not only developed procedures and forms to assist multiple agencies in communicating on placement changes and expedited enrollment, but posted these materials (as well as information on relevant legislation, A-G requirements, and available resources) in one central, publicly accessible Internet location. The Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services has been participating in a Casey Family Programs Breakthrough Series Collaboration on Educational Continuity and School Stability for Children in Out-of-Home Care. This collaboration encourages participating jurisdictions to utilize bold action and innovative leadership to develop strategies that will ultimately improve educational outcomes of foster youth.

### **San Francisco County**

- The early identification of the mental health needs of students as a priority issue helped guide San Francisco County in developing streamlined policies and procedures to ensure compliance with AB 3632 among foster youth attending San Francisco Unified School District.<sup>85</sup>
- The San Francisco County Human Services Agency has prioritized the entry of Health and Education Passport (HEP) data into the CWS/CMS data system for all foster youth. The County estimates that HEPs are current for 90% of new placements and that information has been entered for 950 individual education plans and 200 educational advocate/surrogate appointments.
- San Francisco was the first among CC25I early implementing counties to follow the lead of Orange County and San Diego County in efforts to draw down Title-IVE funding to support Foster Youth Services programs and resources.

### **Santa Clara County**

K-12 Education efforts within Santa Clara County drew heavily on the wealth of community partners available and vested in the issue of improving educational outcomes for foster youth:

- The Juvenile Education Task Force leads ongoing efforts to find collaborative and cross-agency solutions to issues related to foster youths' educational needs and the legislative mandates to meet them.
- The Department of Family and Children's Services partnered with Child Advocates of Silicon Valley and East Side Union High School District on the pilot project to improve the GPAs of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders and collaborated with the Silicon Valley Children's Fund to implement the Middle School Literacy Project to create educational plans for all middle school foster youth and provide the supports necessary to improve their educational outcomes.

- Collaboration between the Department of Family and Children’s Services, Foster Youth Services, San José State University’s Connect, Motivate Educate Society and AVID established a workgroup to recruit and support foster youth eligible for AVID and similar programs that historically have had few, if any, foster youth participants.

### Stanislaus County

- The Stanislaus County Community Services Agency and Stanislaus County Office of Education Foster Youth Services have forged a very strong partnership. Together they have prioritized the expansion of tutoring services available to youth and also assist youth in preparing for and taking exams such as the GED.
- The Educational Liaison within the agency has worked closely with foster youth, their caregivers and their social workers to properly assess and plan for necessary educational supports. The Educational Liaison has analyzed hundreds of school transcripts to ensure appropriate credit accrual, advocated at 125 IEP meetings, appeared at expulsion hearings.
- The Educational Liaison developed a self-advocacy binder to help all foster youth engage in strength-based goal setting, secure needed academic support and other resources, and prepare for post-secondary opportunities.

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“I feel my work with transition age foster youth has been supported, and my understanding of key issues increased, through our partnership (with Stanislaus County Community Services Agency). Our combined effort to increase educational outcomes for foster youth is exemplified through our partnership to provide tutoring services. The (Educational Liaison’s) advocacy insures that the youth, the social workers and the caregivers understand the importance of academic success.”

- Kathleen Dennis, Educational Liaison, Stanislaus County, Office of Education, Foster Youth Services

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There are also early measures of improvements made in some of the intermediate educational outcomes preceding high school graduation that CC25I early implementing counties are tracking:

- Among foster youth attending Fresno Unified School District in Fresno County, the average GPA of middle and high school youth increased from 1.69 in the 2004-2005 school year to 1.90 in the 2006-2007 school year and from 1.33 to 1.72 among group home youth in particular during the same period.<sup>86</sup> There were also minor improvements in school change, attendance, yearly credits earned and suspensions.
- Also in Fresno County, foster care youth with GPAs below 2.0 who participated in the Youth Law Center pilot study increased their average GPA from 1.15 to 1.55 within a one year period.
- In an effort to increase the likelihood that foster youth will set college attendance as a goal and complete college prerequisites while in high school, CC25I counties are implementing strategies to link students with AVID (or similar) programs to support those efforts. Early results show that in their first eligibility reviews of middle school students, Santa Clara County enrolled nine foster youth in AVID or similar programs and Fresno County enrolled 25 youth. This is a significant achievement as prior to these concerted efforts to link foster youth to these types of programs, it was not uncommon for local AVID programs to have not a single foster youth among their participants.

A more detailed description of each county’s CC25I accomplishments thus far can be found in **Appendix C**.

### 4c. Observations & Lessons Learned

CC25I counties have faced the same challenges as other localities in improving K-12 educational outcomes among foster youth: placement practices that often result in school instability; irregular tracking and sharing of data on youths’ needs and progress; poor coordination between child welfare, education and other public agencies; and inadequate educational support services for foster youth. Working individually and collectively through CC25I, early implementing counties have made great strides in developing strategies to address and overcome these challenges. This section reviews some of the key observations and lessons learned over the first two to three years of the Initiative.

*Focus and Leadership on K-12 Education Objectives* – CC25I counties have flexibility in identifying areas of high priority on which to focus their efforts, and counties that specifically targeted K-12 Education showed more progress in developing program and service innovations in that area. In Fresno and Santa Clara Counties, for example, K-12 Education was an especially high priority focus area and these counties implemented a number of initiatives on school campuses and in collaboration with community partners to expand academic supports for foster youth. In San Francisco County, in contrast, the primary focus area is Employment/Job Training/Post-secondary Education. Positive change did occur in San Francisco County's K-12 educational policies and practices within and between the child welfare and K-12 educational agencies, but program and service supports for foster youth focused more on preparing youth for college, vocational training and employment in the post-secondary period.

Strong leadership on K-12 Education objectives within the child welfare agency was also important. In all counties, having child welfare administrators and educational liaisons within the agency firmly committed to K-12 Education goals and objectives was instrumental in setting and achieving benchmarks, while change in leadership often caused a slowdown in progress.<sup>87</sup> All four of the early implementing counties have experienced changes to program administrators, child welfare educational liaisons or other key program staff since beginning the Initiative and these changes have created challenges in carrying out objectives in all CC25I focus areas. However, having one or two key point persons in each focus area can minimize the impact of changes in higher-up leadership. If it is the key point person who transitions out of the Initiative, a new person should be appointed as soon as possible to maintain the momentum of change.

*Importance of Agency Collaboration and Community Partnerships* – Efforts to better serve youth are more effectively advanced when partners within counties come together to learn together and from one another, and to coordinate resources. CC25I has generated a number of these collaborations, such as between the child welfare agency and the Youth Law Center in Fresno County and between the child welfare agency and the County Office of Education, Foster Youth Services program in Stanislaus County. In Santa Clara County, the abundance of local educational initiatives resulted in a large collaborative effort to integrate and streamline each of the separate projects, taking community partnership to a new level. Partnerships with organizations such as the Silicon Valley Children's Fund, Child Advocates, San Jose State University and local school districts not only resulted in rapid implementation of pilot projects to improve the educational outcomes of foster youth, but also brought together financial and in-kind resources that can help sustain and expand these efforts in the future. Across the counties, the collaboration and partnerships sparked by CC25I have led to progress in achieving K-12 educational goals, particularly related to expanding academic supports for foster youth.

*Effectiveness of Small-scale or Targeted Program Interventions* – Innovative strategies to better assess and respond to the academic needs of youth were initially implemented not county-wide, but with single school districts within a county or with certain subgroups of foster youth. Fresno and Santa Clara Counties worked closely with one to three school districts, rather than the nearly three dozen in each county, in their efforts to implement services and supports to improve educational and other outcomes of foster youth. San Francisco County targeted truant and special education foster youth for review and service referrals and both Fresno and Santa Clara Counties directed specialized academic support services to middle or high school foster youth with GPAs of 2.0 or below. Counties also made concerted efforts to enroll youth in targeted, high priority programs such as AVID and similar programs. As reported above, these narrowly defined strategies are already paying off in terms of improved GPAs and enrollment in academic support programs. Going forward, the challenge in this area will be finding ways to take these efforts to scale to serve more schools, districts and youth and to sustain larger-scale efforts over time.

*The Challenge of Out-of-County Youth* – While CC25I counties have made tremendous progress on collaboration to improve educational outcomes for foster youth within county, challenges remain in assisting youth placed out of

county and youth in county that are under another county's jurisdiction. Out of county placements intensify collaboration difficulties because the social worker from the county of jurisdiction, who is responsible for monitoring a youth's educational progress, lives and works several hours away and may be quite unfamiliar with the local educational agencies in the county of placement. The challenge for the receiving county is that youth under the jurisdiction of other counties might not be identified by local schools as being foster youth. The F2F Education Technical Assistance Project researchers reported that most counties in their study had set the issue of cross-county collaboration aside for the moment, focusing their current efforts on improving educational outcomes for within-county foster youth.<sup>88</sup>

However, there is reason to believe that counties might benefit greatly from small-scale or targeted approaches to this particular challenge. For example, although over half (57%) of the San Francisco County's child welfare-supervised foster care caseload is placed in other counties, most (76%) of these children and youth are placed in one of eight counties immediately bordering the San Francisco Bay. Collaborations with just one or two of these counties would serve a substantial portion of out-of-county youth. Stanislaus County faces the reverse sort of foster care dynamic; in January 2008, half (51% or 504 youth) of the 990 youth placed in Stanislaus County were under the child welfare jurisdiction of other counties, but half (48%) of them hailed from San Joaquin, Alameda and Merced Counties.<sup>89</sup> School districts in Stanislaus County serving these youth could start by establishing collaborations with the responsible child welfare agencies in one or more of these other counties. Data sharing agreements among counties that frequently find themselves in a sending/receiving relationship for foster youth may be a good jumping-off point for progress here.

*Data Tracking Efforts* – It can be difficult, but is also critically important, to establish consistent and comprehensive systems for tracking and sharing educational and placement data on foster youth. The primary lessons learned from CC25I efforts in this area are that counties need a variety of strategies to overcome these challenges and that county sharing of strategies, through CC25I and related technical assistance, can contribute greatly to improvement in data tracking and information sharing across agencies.

Barriers include a lack of practical tools to share data, no clear lines of responsibility for the task, limited time available for social workers to accomplish it and legal confidentiality restrictions. Information on the various data-sharing strategies counties were using to address these problems was made available early on, both by the F2F Education Technical Assistance Project and at a CC25I convening in March 2006. An MOU is often the first step in opening up an avenue for data sharing between agencies and is sometimes supported by a standing court order, which is the case in Fresno and Santa Clara Counties and is being developed in San Francisco County. Establishing data-sharing between the child welfare agency and a limited number of school districts rather than attempting a county-wide effort involving multiple districts may also be helpful. For example, Fresno County first established data sharing procedures with Fresno Unified School District in 2004, but the standing court order signed in 2006 allowed the sharing of placement data with *any* school or district. Other counties have also made progress; child welfare staffmembers in San Francisco and Stanislaus Counties now enter educational data into the child-welfare data systems. In Santa Clara County a collaboration of community partners are creating a new data-sharing platform that will be accessible to all agencies, though certain fields of data may be restricted to certain parties.

#### **4d. Future CC25I K-12 Educational Objectives**

In their third year of CC25I funding, the counties will continue to implement strategies to improve the systems, policies and programs that support the K-12 educational achievement of foster youth. There are a number of remaining challenges to be addressed in this work. Efforts to increase awareness of youth educational rights, comply with legal mandates and integrate educational outcomes within the larger work of the child welfare agencies must continue. Counties and their community partners must further strengthen interagency relationships and protocols to

facilitate better communication, data sharing and collaborative program development. Strategies must be created to address the educational needs of foster youth who are placed outside of their county of jurisdiction. Child welfare agencies, offices of education, foster youth services programs and school districts must expand their efforts to link youth with the support services they need to catch up and stay on track academically, and this must be done at earlier ages before youth transition to high school. This includes efforts to link foster youth to mainstream programs and educational supports, such as AVID, for which they are eligible but of which they are often unaware. This section provides a brief summary of each county's benchmarks for year three of CC25I implementation.

### **Fresno County**

In Fresno County, the Department of Children and Family Services will continue to conduct trainings developed in the area of K-12 education, including ongoing training of existing and new child welfare workers, in-service trainings for school personnel and workshops for 8<sup>th</sup> grade foster youth who are about to transition to high school and their caregivers. The County will strive to work with additional school districts, including Central Unified School District and Clovis Unified School District, which are attended by a large number of foster youth residing in group homes. In addition, the County will develop a strategic plan for increasing the participation of foster youth in local AVID programs. Fresno County has chosen to track additional K-12 education outcomes in the CC25I database including improved GPA, increased understanding among youth and caregivers of educational issues, and greater participation of foster youth in AVID. The County will develop an implementation plan for increasing the participation of foster youth in all local AVID programs. Fresno County's AVID team is exploring possibilities to strengthen these efforts such as hiring a part-time Foster Youth Services staff member and utilizing Master in Social Work Interns from Cal State University Fresno.

The energy and creativity in the area of K-12 education exhibited by the Department of Children and Family Services and community partners explains why Fresno County was picked by the Stuart Foundation as one of three pilot counties to implement a full set of K-12 education strategies based on the recommendations of the California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care. Fresno County's participation in this new initiative will build on and further strengthen their existing CC25I work in the area of K-12 Education.

### **San Francisco County**

In San Francisco County, the Human Services Agency will continue to maintain educational and health records for all youth in the CWS/CMS data system, and will develop new outreach and training modules to reach both child welfare workers and caregivers to inform them of high school graduation requirements. This year the Human Services Agency will begin drawing down Title IV-E funding for SFUSD to support expanded case management, advocacy and educational support services for foster youth.

### **Santa Clara County**

The County will co-locate FYS staff in the Department of Family and Children's Services office to further promote interagency collaboration and will apply for Title IV-E funding to improve educational support services for foster youth. Collaborative efforts between the Department of Family and Children's Services and community partners in Santa Clara County will expand existing pilot projects in the Eastside Union High School District. Partners will also advance their work to complete educational needs assessments for all 14 to 18 year olds by ensuring that all middle school foster youth in the County have education plans completed. Santa Clara County will continue outreach strategies to provide caregivers with information regarding educational rights and support services available, and will use completed Educational Plans to as a tool to identify appropriate resources for each youth, including referral to AVID. Since effective recruitment and preparation for AVID is a major challenge, the current plan is to send letters to incoming 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade foster youth and their caregivers to notify them of the program and its eligibility requirements. There will be designated interns at the Santa Clara County Department of Family and Children's Services who will work closely with AVID to recruit youth who are qualified and work with those who are not to

prepare them for future program participation. In addition, Santa Clara County is working with AVID partners to identify other programs that provide similar resources and support to ensure that all qualified youth are able to access AVID or a similar program.

### **Stanislaus County**

The Stanislaus County Community Services Agency in Stanislaus County will expand on its previous efforts to provide trainings to caregivers, agency staff and school personnel and will work to engage a larger number of high school campuses in efforts to improve the educational outcomes of foster youth. Tutoring services will continue to be provided through the Huntington Learning Center and the Community Services Agency will develop strategies with community partners on how to secure funding, including Title IV-E monies, to maintain and expand tutoring and other educational support services for all foster youth. Stanislaus County will also engage in efforts to more effectively link foster youth to local AVID programs.

## V. APPENDICES

**Appendix A:  
Additional State Legislation to Support the K-12 Educational Achievement of Foster Youth**

<b>Bill</b>	<b>Sponsor</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<b>CA Assembly Concurrent Resolution 58</b> (2005)	Assembly Member Parra	This assembly concurrent resolution, urges various state departments, such as social services, education, health services, and mental health, to develop practices to assist foster youth in understanding their rights and available resources. The resolution particularly notes the importance of education as the foundation and key to self-sufficiency for many foster youth, necessitating awareness of rights with this particular population. It also stresses the importance of adequately funding the Office of the State Foster Care Ombudsperson so that representatives can travel to and support local foster care ombudsperson offices.
<b>CA Assembly Bill 1261</b> (2005)	Assembly Member Leno	The act makes technical corrections to 2003 legislation, clearing up some vague aspects and adding specificity to particular clauses. One example is a clarification of existing law that the Superintendent of Public Instruction is to create an Academic Performance Index to demonstrate comparable improvement in academic achievement by all numerically significant ethnic and socio-economically disadvantaged subgroups and to develop an alternative accountability system for specified schools. AB 1261 clarified that nonpublic schools are included in such specified schools. This is especially important for foster youth since many attend nonpublic schools as they are often linked with high level group homes. All the clarifications in this cleanup legislation are aimed at improving educational outcomes of foster youth.
<b>CA Assembly Bill 1633</b> (2005)	Assembly Member Evans	AB 1633 expands existing law so that 18 year olds in foster care may remain in their foster home until they turn 19 if they are completing their high school equivalency certificate. This act is aimed at preventing foster youth from dropping out of school because of transitional issues.
<b>CA Assembly Bill 1858</b> (2004)	Assembly Member Steinberg	This requires the State Department of Education to ensure that California School Information Systems (CSIS) includes disaggregated data on pupils in foster care. This is important given the specific needs of foster youth and the challenges that their living situation presents in school. The act also requires a local educational agency that has placed a foster youth with exceptional needs in a nonpublic school to conduct an annual evaluation of whether the placement is the least restrictive environment appropriate to meet the youth's needs. It also requires the nonpublic school to report to the local educational agency on a quarterly or trimester basis the educational progress of the youth towards attainment of the goals and objectives in that youth's individualized education plan. AB 1858 requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to monitor nonpublic schools and conduct an unannounced site visit if there is any evidence of a significant deficiency in the quality of educational services provided by the school or noncompliance with any requirements.
<b>CA Senate Bill 464</b> (2003)	Senator Murray	This act requires group home representatives to be invited to individualized education plan meetings for the youth that live in their facilities.
<b>CA Assembly Bill 899</b> (2001)	Assembly Member Liu	This act requires social workers to inform the youth on their caseloads of their rights at least every six months and to post a list of rights in all facilities housing six or more foster youth.

## **Appendix B: Collaborative Research Initiatives to Address the Educational Needs of Foster Youth**

There have been a number of collaborative research and planning efforts in California and beyond to improve the policies and programs that serve the educational needs of foster youth. The membership, goals and recommendations of the collaborations listed here overlap somewhat, but each collaboration has made unique contributions to expanding awareness of the issue and to increasing the momentum of policy and program improvement in the area of K-12 educational outcomes.

*The Foster Care Work Group* – A subcommittee of the Youth Transition Funders Group, the Foster Care Work Group issued a publication in 2004 which recommended a comprehensive set of strategies to improve the well-being and future success of emancipating foster youth. These recommendations were based on existing research on the needs of vulnerable youth populations, including foster youth, and the interventions which have proven effective in improving the outcomes of such young people. In the area of education, the group recommended that strategies be developed to advocate and support educational achievement by investing in programs that motivate and facilitate participation of foster youth in academic, enrichment and support services.<sup>90</sup> These programs should:

- Establish placement stability, in order to reduce school changes
- Provide appropriate and effective academic supports, through strengthened child welfare and educational agencies
- Ensure the availability of an educational advocate, to help youth and caregivers successfully navigate the educational and child welfare systems
- Provide opportunities to engage in other activities, ones that link youth to community and others, build self-confidence and self-determination, and broaden a youth's thinking and aspirations.
- Prepare youth for enrolling and attending college, by raising expectations that foster youth can complete college and then both encouraging and supporting them in their efforts to realize this goal.

*California Foster Youth Education Summit* – In 2007 current and former foster youth; agency staff from education, child welfare, probation and the courts; service professionals and community leaders came together to attend the first statewide convening on issues related to foster youth education.<sup>91</sup> The California Foster Youth Education Summit followed from work done by five regional California teams participating in the National Higher Education and Child Welfare Summits (sponsored by Casey Family Programs) since 2003. In 2004, these individuals and regional agencies established the California Foster Youth Education Task Force, co-chaired by Casey Family Programs and the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, who had also done a great deal of work organizing similar educational summits for Los Angeles County. Task Force members teleconference monthly and also hold quarterly meetings to advance their work to better serve the educational needs of foster youth. The Task Force, along with Casey Family Programs and the Child and Family Policy Institute of California, sponsored the first California Education Summit in January 2007 and the second in May 2008. The Summits provide a growing number of community collaborators with information on the most promising practices and partnership models to improve educational services for and academic outcomes of foster youth, and makes available policy briefs and policy recommendations based on the work of six Task Force workgroups: Early Childhood Education and Care, Academic Supports, Educational Decision Making and Parental Notice, Post-secondary Education and Training Programs, Data Collection and Sharing, and AB 490 Implementation.

Presented here are a sampling of the detailed findings and recommendations from the 2007 California Foster Youth Education Summit.<sup>92</sup>

- The Academic Supports Workgroup recommended efforts to address students at risk of grade retention and advance academic readiness for high school graduation and college attendance, and explore promising educational support and tutoring programs for replication.
- The Workgroup on Educational Decision Making and Parental Action urged activity to increase understanding of educational rights of foster youth within the juvenile justice system and development of uniform procedures for determining and updating educational rights holders.
- To facilitate the sharing of essential individual-level information, the Data Collection Workgroup recommended that the California Department of Education develop a single statewide data system that is compatible with state and local systems currently utilized by education, child welfare, probation, judicial and other relevant agencies and that protocols be developed for integrating local/county data systems with the statewide system and for conducting evaluation of this data. The same Workgroup also urged the establishment of court orders to facilitate the sharing of individual student academic records and the mandated use of forms to notify educational agencies of discharge and enrollment changes that follow from placement changes.
- Finally, the Workgroup on AB 490 prioritized the designation of a single agency with ultimate authority and responsibility for ensuring compliance with AB 490 as well as continued training of all relevant agency employees/faculty, caregivers and educational advocates on the mandates of this legislation. The Workgroup also recommended the development of specific strategies to facilitate school enrollment, school transportation, and the transferring of partial credits for youth who change schools mid-year.

*Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care* – The Commission was established in March 2006 to develop recommendations and guide the California Judicial Council and child welfare agencies in efforts to improve the outcomes of foster youth.<sup>93</sup> The recommendations focus on four areas: preventing removal/achieving permanency, court reforms, court collaboration with other partners serving families and youth, and the need for adequate but flexible funding streams.<sup>94</sup> Recommendation 4D pertains to policies and practices that impact the educational outcomes of foster youth. In summary, the Commission emphasizes that courts and other agencies ensure that foster youth receive the education and services they are entitled to by law and urges the Judicial Council to advocate for legislation that prioritizes the needs of foster youth and provides sufficient funding to do so (such as transportation funding to facilitate school stability). In addition, the Commission asks that: the Child Welfare Council prioritizes the educational rights and needs of foster youth; the California Department of Education designates foster youth as at-risk students so they have increased access to programs and funds; and the Foster Youth Services program be expanded to include all youth over five, including those in kinship placement. The Judicial Council recently amended the Rules of Court, effective January 2008, to require that the representatives of the courts, advocates, child welfare workers and caregivers partner together to more effectively serve the educational needs of foster youth.<sup>95</sup>

*National Governors Association Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care* – In 2006, California was one of six states chosen to participate in a National Governors Association (NGA) Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care. The Academy, which ran from June 2006 through December 2007, provided a unique opportunity for teams of state leaders to work with state and national experts to help improve outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood. California’s NGA team brought together a broad and interdisciplinary body of state leaders, community partners and advocacy organizations. The California teams – focusing on Education, Permanence and Employment – assessed current efforts to serve transitioning foster youth in the State and developed recommendations for strategies that systematically address key challenges and improve transition outcomes. The overarching goal for Education is that every youth receives a quality education, high school diploma, and support in pursuing postsecondary opportunities. Relating to K-12 education, the Team prioritized efforts to ensure that youth have adequate academic preparation, increase the supply and quality of education advocates, and increase the number of foster youth graduating from high school.<sup>96</sup> At the conclusion of

the NGA Academy, Education Teams' work was rolled over to the California Foster Youth Education Task Force (discussed above).

*The California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care* – In 2005 the Stuart Foundation funded the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning and Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc. to carry out the California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care (CECCFC). The Collaborative was charged with identifying and addressing strategies through which child welfare, education and court agencies, as well as caregivers and partnering service professionals could better serve the educational needs and improve the educational outcomes of foster youth. The CECCFC Design Team consisted of over four dozen representatives of public agencies, philanthropic interests and community service providers, who were divided into three workgroups to focus on School Readiness (Pre-K), School Success (K-12) and Data Sharing. This section briefly summarizes some of CECCFC's findings and recommendations from their 2008 report.<sup>97</sup>

The recommendations put forth by the Collaborative follow from a thorough review of the academic literature on the educational needs of foster youth and effective educational interventions, as well as findings from the variety of focus groups, surveys and meetings the Collaborative conducted with educators and a variety of education and child welfare stakeholders during the course of their study. The recommendations also build on recent legislative and program efforts in the area of K-12 education (e.g. AB 490, Foster Youth Services, the Family to Family Educational Technical Assistance Project, etc.) and echo the findings and recommendations of others groups active in this area including the California Foster Youth Education Task Force, the Education Workgroup of the National Governor's Association on Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care, and the other collaborative efforts listed above. Most relevant to the K-12 educational experience and outcomes of transition-age foster youth are the findings and recommendations with regards to school success and data sharing.

The report recommends that, in order to support a foster youth's K-12 success, improved school stability should be achieved through strategies such as recruiting foster families who live near schools areas; implementing and fully funding the requirements of AB 490; locating education liaisons in child welfare offices to facilitate social workers' efforts to serve the educational needs of youth on their caseloads; aligning child welfare agency boundaries with school catchment areas; and offering caregivers additional training, support services and incentives to prioritize the educational needs of the children in their care. In addition, assessment of academic and behavioral functioning of foster youth should be conducted initially and periodically to assist school staff in providing appropriate services and academic supports. Appropriate intervention programs and support should ensure that foster youth receive the required assistance with academic skill development and are linked to programs promoting rigorous and college-relevant curriculum, support services and college tutors, such as the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program discussed below. Teachers should be provided the proper training and information necessary to best serve the educational needs of foster youth; all foster youth should be appointed an individual contact at school who can welcome them and guide them and their caregivers in making educational choices and in obtaining the schools, classes, teachers and services they need to progress academically; and mental health services should be integrated into the school environment. Finally, research should be conducted on the efficacy of interventions specifically for foster youth and funding for school-based training and support for youth who have been traumatized by violence should be pursued legislatively.

The report also addresses strategies for improving data-sharing across agencies. Among the short-term recommendations, the authors suggest conducting a pilot version of a database that can evolve into a statewide database of foster youth educational data. The database would be web-based, utilize a unique student identifier (UID), be compatible with the systems used by both child welfare agencies and local educational agencies, and be capable of daily electronic updating. The UID already used by educational agencies would be included in the child welfare and court data systems so that data on a youth could easily be joined in the future. To protect confidential

information, data on past history would be limited and access to the data would be guided by what an individual needs to know in order to serve the best interests of a youth. Efforts would be made to share best practices currently available in educational data tracking through meetings with stakeholders in child welfare, education and juvenile justice agencies. Among the longer term recommendations, legislative action would seek to secure funding to support the costs of a statewide database for foster youth educational data and to clear the way (through state mandate or a federal waiver) for smooth exchange of data between the child welfare and educational data systems. Specific educational variables would be identified so that data collection on the local level would be standardized. Once a statewide database is established, agency staff would be educated on what the system is and will track.

Acknowledging state budget concerns, the CECCFC report urged immediate actions that could improve educational support for foster youth without additional state or local program costs. Some suggestions included raising the profile of foster youth and their needs so that their access to existing programs is increased and linking efforts to assist foster youth with ongoing State efforts to address the achievement gap among students since the foster care population overlaps considerably with the student body most vulnerable to poor educational outcomes. The report encouraged policies and programs that involve strategies and outcomes on which representatives of both child welfare and educational agencies have agreed. A “united front” effort in dealing with the challenges to the academic success of foster youth could also attract significant contributions from philanthropy and other community partners. A prime example of this came in early 2008 when the Stuart Foundation announced that they would fund (at one million dollars a year) a three-county pilot project to implement the recommendations of the California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care. The three counties – Fresno, Sacramento and San Diego – will have flexibility in designing their own pilot project and in implementing the recommendations. The ultimate goal is for evaluation of this pilot project to inform the development of a larger-scale implementation of CECCFC’S recommendations.

## Appendix C: Detailed CC25I Accomplishments, by County

### Fresno County

K-12 education has been a CC25I focus area of high priority for Fresno County. Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services has implemented several strategies, primarily by collaborating closely with Fresno Unified School District (the largest school district in the County and the fourth largest district in the state), and these strategies have already had a positive impact on foster youth educational outcomes in the County. According to a recent report from the Youth Law Center on academic performance of foster youth in Fresno County between 2004 and 2007,<sup>98</sup> the average GPA of youth attending middle school and high school in Fresno Unified increased from 1.69 in the 2004-2005 school year to 1.90 in the 2006-2007 school year, and from 1.33 to 1.72 among group home youth in particular. The average number of schools attended by foster youth decreased from 1.47 in 2005-2006 to 1.3 in 2006-2007. There were also minor improvements in attendance, yearly credits earned and suspensions. The energy and creativity in the area of K-12 education exhibited by the Department of Children and Family Services and community partners explains why Fresno County was picked by the Stuart Foundation as one of three pilot counties to implement a full set of K-12 education strategies based on the recommendations of the California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care.

Highlights of Fresno County CC25I Accomplishments:

#### Integration of Educational Priorities within Child Welfare Systems

- The Department of Children and Family Services has a designated Educational Liaison within the agency to work with three large school districts in the County - Fresno Unified, Clovis Unified and Central Unified - on school stability and educational support issues. The Educational Liaison's role is to ensure that educational placement decisions for foster care youth are determined by the best interest of each student and are made in compliance with current legislation and laws. Already the Department of Children and Family Services is achieving better integration of educational outcome tracking with all regular case management, team decision making and other agency work.
- In early 2006, the County's Independent Living Program began placing their social workers at campuses in three Fresno County school districts attended by relatively high concentrations of foster youth. The project started with four social workers – two in Fresno Unified School District (serving 10 campuses), one in Clovis Unified School District (serving 6 campuses) and one in Central Unified (serving 4 campuses). Not only do the ILP social workers have better and more frequent access to the youth and their educational status, this strategy has greatly enhanced each school's awareness of the needs of foster youth, the role of child welfare and ILP in the youth's life, the services available to foster youth, and the opportunities for collaborative efforts to more effectively support the youth's education. The Department of Children and Family Services will continue to increase the number of ILP social workers and the number of schools served.
- In the Fall 2007, the Department of Children and Family Services developed a half-day training for child welfare workers in Long-Term Foster Care and Family Reunification. The first training educated over 100 social workers on the educational needs of foster care youth and available supports. In addition, the agency's Educational Liaison collaborated with Fresno Unified staff to create orientation training for all new social workers to raise awareness and understanding of AB 490 and all other applicable laws and legislative requirements. The Department of Children and Family Services plans to continue the trainings in the future.

#### Collaboration/AB 490 Compliance

- Fresno County has not only developed procedures and forms to assist the Department of Children and Family Services, the Probation Department and local school districts to communicate on placement changes and expedited enrollment, but has made these materials (as well as information on AB 490, the McKinney Vento Act, FYS, A-G requirements for college, a list of group homes and which districts they fall into, etc.) available in one central Internet location.<sup>99</sup> Flow charts were also created to guide child welfare staff and school personnel in the expedited discharging and enrolling of foster youth, in compliance with AB 490.
- The Department of Children and Family Services has developed trainings for teachers and other school personnel directly on school campuses to raise awareness of the particular educational needs of foster care youth. To date ILP campus-based social workers have conducted training for Clovis Unified. Fresno Unified and Central Unified school personnel are targeted for future trainings.
- Fresno County is participating, along with nine other jurisdictions across the United States, in a Casey Family Programs Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Educational Continuity and School Stability for Children in Out-of-Home Care.<sup>100</sup> This collaborative encourages participating jurisdictions to utilize bold action and innovative leadership to develop strategies that will ultimately improve educational outcomes of foster youth.
- Though not an actual participant in the F2F Educational Technical Assistance Project (ETAP), the Department of Children and Family Services Educational Liaison has been meeting in person and through conference calls with the Educational Liaisons of the three CC25I counties that did participate in ETAP.
- Individual meetings have been held with fifteen Fresno County group home owners, administrators and staff to discuss educational issues and inform efforts to overcome the challenges facing foster care youth.

#### Educational Supports for Foster Youth

- Starting in the 2005-2006 school year, the Department of Children and Family Services collaborated with the Youth Law Center on a three-year pilot study to support a cohort of 21 foster youth in kinship care attending Fresno Unified schools with GPAs below 2.0. The participating students and care providers were mentored, supported and advocated for by MSW Interns during the first year, by a full-time Social Work Practitioner the second year and by both a full-time social worker and campus-based ILP social workers during the third year. Student Success Team meetings or IEP reviews were held regularly to discuss the student's academic, social, and emotional support needs. An educational plan was developed for each participating youth, and was monitored continuously to track progress made. In one year, the average GPA of the initial 21 participants increased from 1.15 to 1.55; among those fifteen students (71%) who saw an improvement the average GPA increased from .99 to 1.79. The study also helped identify areas of interagency communication and collaboration that needed to be addressed to comply with AB 490 and improve educational outcomes for all foster care youth in the County, and the Department of Children and Family Services stepped up its role in facilitating these efforts. Since the pilot study's inception, an additional ten youth have joined the study. The Youth Law Center will issue a three-year report in September 2008.
- In partnership with the California State University Fresno Foster Parent Training Academy, Foster Youth Services, and Fresno Unified School District, the Department of Children and Family Services has developed and is implementing yearly educational workshops for 8<sup>th</sup> grade foster youth transitioning to high school and their caregivers. The half-day Access to Higher Education workshop focuses on understanding high school graduation requirements, planning for post-secondary education and employment opportunities, and accessing available resources. Approximately 40 youth and their caregivers participated in the Fall 2007 workshop and over 150 youth along with their caregivers in the Fall 2008 event. Use of pre- and post-tests is gauging impact of the workshop on youth/caregiver understanding of educational issues and helping the Department of Children and Family Services to further improve support services.
- Efforts to increase the participation of foster youth in AVID focused on Fresno Unified, the school district attended by the highest concentration of foster youth in the County and one already engaged in active data-sharing with the Department of Children and Family Services for several years. An overview of AVID was

provided at two mandatory social worker trainings held in August 2007 to raise awareness of the program. An AVID team within the Department of Children and Family Services meets regularly to identify youth eligible for the program and then provides these names to the AVID coordinator for Fresno Unified. As a result of the Spring 2008 review of 7<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> graders eligible for the program, 25 foster youth were enrolled in AVID for the Fall 2008 semester.

### Data Sharing

- Since March 2004, Fresno Unified School District and the Department of Children and Family Services have been forming agreements on how baseline educational data for foster youth in middle and high school can be collected, analyzed and shared. This data exchange process helped to identify the youth supported in the Youth Law Center study and can be used to identify other youth in need of ongoing support. More recent agreements also allow data from Fresno Unified (school, GPA and attendance) to be downloaded into the Department of Children and Family Services' database.
- In February 2006, a standing order was signed by Fresno County Superior Court to pave the way for data sharing in order to advance AB 490 objectives. The standing order – which allows the Department of Children and Family Services to share with school personnel relevant placement information that can assist schools in better serving the needs of foster youth – supported pre-existing data sharing efforts in the County and permits expansion of these efforts.

### San Francisco County

Since 2005, the Family and Children's Services Division of San Francisco Human Services Agency has been working with the F2F Education Technical Assistance Project (described above) on data-sharing and other strategies to ensure AB 490 compliance. The County's work as part of CC25I has built upon the foundation of this earlier work in the area of K-12 education. As a result of this work, several agreements are now in place with SFUSD, the single school district responsible for serving the educational needs of most foster care youth placed within San Francisco County. However, San Francisco places more than half (57%) of foster youth under its jurisdiction in placements outside of the County. While the San Francisco Human Services Agency is still responsible for ensuring that these youth receive appropriate educational services, child welfare staff faces the substantial challenge of establishing communication with the large number of school districts in other counties attended by these foster youth, and developing strategies to better collaborate with them in the future.

Highlights of San Francisco County CC25I Accomplishments:

### Integration of Educational Priorities within Child Welfare Systems

- The Human Services Agency has a designated SFUSD Liaison within the agency that serves to work with SFUSD to ensure special education services and other needed educational services for foster youth.
- An interagency Educational Committee was established and met regularly, along with the Human Services Agency Educational Liaison, to identify policy changes needed within the agency to better serve the educational needs of foster care youth. High priority issues identified included mental health services; nonpublic school placement; need for services at low-performing schools; coordination with other counties; AB 490 compliance; and troubleshooting.
- Education-related questions developed by technical assistance providers were incorporated into the Team Decision Making meetings.
- A social worker training was conducted in March 2007 to educate child welfare staff on educational rights, AB 490 compliance, the need of foster care youth (including graduation requirements) and the educational supports available (financial aid, etc.).

### Collaboration/AB 490 Compliance

- The Human Services Agency developed forms, to be completed by social work staff, to notify San Francisco Unified School District when a foster youth is being discharged from or enrolled in a school because of placement change. A protocol was sent to all child welfare staff in June 2006 to notify them of the process for notifying schools of such placement changes.
- To improve mental health service provision for foster youth attending San Francisco Unified, forms were developed by Community Behavioral Health Services and SFUSD in 2006 to streamline policy and protocol related to AB 3632 consent. SFUSD also finalized policies related to compliance with AB 3632 and SB 1894.<sup>101</sup>
- A process was also developed with the District to ensure that the School Attendance Review Board conduct a review for all truant foster care youth and refer them to appropriate services, and the Human Services Agency Educational Liaison attends monthly reviews.
- A cross-training was conducted by the Human Services Agency for middle school and high school principals on team decision making and other child welfare practices.
- The San Francisco City Attorney joined efforts with SFUSD and the Human Services Agency to establish a policy for assigning education surrogates to foster youth with special educational needs, but without a caregiver willing or able to make educational decisions on their behalf. A new form was created to facilitate this process and centralize within the courts the efforts of both the School District and the Human Services Agency.
- An MOU for AB 490 implementation has been developed with the Human Services Agency, SFUSD, and key partners and is currently being finalized.

### Educational Supports for Foster Youth

- The Human Services Agency has created a list of tutoring resources available in San Francisco and six surrounding counties and disseminated this information among agency staff and caregivers. This was part of the County's work to create a larger resource guide for caseworkers and others assisting youth.
- An MOU between the Human Services Agency and SFUSD was finalized in July 2008 to draw down Title-IVE funding to expand funding for Foster Youth Services. This will allow for additional Foster Youth Services staffing and free up other monies to provide necessary supports such as transportation for AB 490 compliance.

### Data Sharing

- Incorporated into the MOU for implementing AB 490 is a procedure for sharing student-level information between SFUSD and the Human Services Agency developed in 2008. This involves a court order to allow the sharing of school records for an individual child, which is signed at the Detention Hearing.
- School/academic data (along with information on psychotropic medications prescribed) is now entered into the County's CWS/CMS data systems as part of their efforts to update all Health and Education Passports (HEPs) for foster care youth. As of January 2008, HEPs were current for ninety percent of new placements. Human Services Agency clerks also entered information on Individual Educational Plans for 950 youth and education surrogate information for 200 youth.

### **Santa Clara County**

CC25I efforts benefit greatly from the collaboration of resources from community partners in Santa Clara County, and this is especially true of work being done in the Pre-K-12 & Beyond Workgroup. This Workgroup is charged with carrying out CC25I educational objectives in Santa Clara County and has worked closely with the F2F Education Technical Assistance Project team to identify existing barriers and develop effective strategies to improve the educational outcomes of foster youth. Community partners have also come together to streamline the multiple

educational initiatives being implemented by the Santa Clara County Department of Family and Children's Services, the County Office of Education-Foster Youth Services (FYS), Silicon Valley Children's Fund and Child Advocates.

Highlights of Santa Clara County CC25I Accomplishments:

#### Integration of Educational Priorities within Child Welfare Systems

- The Department of Family and Children's Services has a designated educational unit (Educational Services Unit) consisting of a Social Worker and Social Work Coordinator that collaborates with the County's school districts and the various educational projects being implemented throughout the county.
- The Department of Family and Children's Services provides ongoing training to social workers, parents/caretakers, school personnel, attorneys and judges on educational rights, special education, educational legislation specific to foster youth, post-secondary education, and various other education-related topics.
- The Department of Family and Children's Services is committed to reaching within three years the goal of completing an educational assessment and an Educational Plan for every foster youth ages 14 to 18. A subcommittee of the Pre- K-12 & Beyond Education Workgroup has been established to meet this objective.

#### Collaboration/AB 490 Compliance

- Santa Clara County's Pre-K-12 & Beyond Workgroup joined with the Juvenile Education Task (J.E.T.) Force, an existing effort (since December 2006) supported by the Silicon Valley Children's Fund (SVCF), to spearhead interagency agreement between the Department of Family and Children's Services, the County Office of Education, the Juvenile Probation Department, and the 32 school districts in Santa Clara County about their respective roles and responsibilities in implementing AB 490 and related laws specific to foster youth.

#### Educational Supports for Foster Youth

- The Department of Family and Children's Services and Child Advocates of Silicon Valley partnered with East Side Union High School District to establish a pilot project in March 2007 to improve the educational outcomes of 9th and 10th grade foster care youth with GPAs of 2.0 or lower attending the District's schools. East Side was chosen because it enrolls the largest concentration of foster youth in the County—14% percent of Santa Clara's in-county foster youth. Relationships were established with East Side's Superintendent, Director of Special Education, and Director of Student Services. The 20 youth participating in the pilot project were assigned a trained education advocate through Child Advocates who assisted them in pursuing the services and support they need to achieve their educational objectives. A Student Study Team Meeting was held for most of the participants to identify resources and supports. The Education Advocate then met with the youth and school personnel regularly throughout the school year to monitor the supports and educational progress. Changes to the pilot to incorporate more students and more support are being developed for the 2008-2009 academic year. Included in the 2008-09 Project will be Academic Coaches from Cal-SOAP, school counseling interns through San José State University's Counseling Program, Bachelor of Social Work interns, East Side Union staff, and Child Advocates.
- Established in August 2007, the Middle School Literacy Project is collaboration between the Silicon Valley Children's Fund (SVCF) and the Department of Family and Children's Services. The project's mission is to: 1) create educational plans for all foster children in Santa Clara County middle schools; 2) ensure all youth are at grade-level in all subject areas; 3) prepare youth for the rigors of high school; and 4) create a system that will sustain this program when the three-year funding has been exhausted. These educational plans include a compilation of the youth's attendance records, grades, transcripts, standardized test scores, previous school placements and school and community resources to meet the youth's educational needs. The Literacy Project will also fund alternative education placements/programs for gifted and talented students whose needs cannot be met in public education. The project started with 40 foster youth in East

San Jose, but the current goal is to have plans created for every middle school foster care youth in the County by December of 2009.

- In collaboration with the SVCF, FYS, San José State University's Connect, Motivate Educate (CME) Society, and Region V AVID, the Department of Family and Children's Services established a workgroup to recruit, educate, and support foster youth who are eligible for AVID and like programs that prepare students for college. The workgroup reviewed transcripts for approximately 80 7th and 8th grade foster youth, of which 27 met the minimum criteria for AVID eligibility. These 27 students were sent a personalized letter informing them that they qualified for AVID and that they were selected to participate in a workshop, Dreaming Possibilities: Making College a Reality. The half-day workshop was held at San José State University's campus, which was facilitated by an AVID teacher and former foster youth. For many youth, this was their first opportunity to step foot on a college campus. Workshop topics included an introduction to AVID, high school preparation, and a panel discussion with former foster youth. As a result of the workgroup's efforts, seven youth were accepted into AVID and two were accepted into similar college preparatory programs.
- Through collaboration between the Department of Family and Children's Services, FYS, CME Society, and SVCF the Freshman Orientation program is providing support specifically for foster youth who are incoming high school freshman. The Orientation provides these youth with the tools and information necessary to graduate high school and, if possible, prepare themselves for post-secondary education. Twenty-four youth were in attendance for the Freshman Orientation held in August 2007. The third annual Orientation took place in August of 2008.

#### Data Sharing

- JET is working to develop a web-based database of foster and probation youths' education and health information similar to the system used by San Diego and Riverside Counties. This secure database—the Foster Youth Services Information System (FYSIS)—will have varying levels of access to the Juvenile Court, the Department of Family and Children's Services, Juvenile Probation, participating Santa Clara County school districts, and caregivers. FYSIS will provide them up-to-date educational information to facilitate immediate enrollment and appropriate education placement. An MOU and Standing Court Order to allow the sharing of data between the Department of Family and Children's Services, the Juvenile Probation Department and the three piloted Santa Clara County was completed in June 2008.

#### Stanislaus County

Stanislaus County faces an unusual foster care dynamic: in January 2008, half (51% or 504 youth) of the 990 youth placed in Stanislaus County were under the child welfare jurisdiction of other counties, creating an additional challenge to interagency collaboration and resource availability.<sup>102</sup> School districts in Stanislaus County serving these youth must find ways to collaborate with the responsible child welfare agencies in other counties, notably San Joaquin, Alameda and Merced Counties where nearly half of these youth originate. Stanislaus County Community Services Agency has also been working with the F2F Education Technical Assistance Project to address the academic needs of foster care youth and improve AB 490 compliance and their efforts in the area of K-12 education have been far reaching. Special focus has been directed to development of better training and supports for agency workers, caregivers and school personnel on educational issues.

Highlights of Stanislaus County CC25I Accomplishments:

#### Integration of Educational Priorities within Child Welfare Systems

- The Community Services Agency has a part-time Educational Liaison contract position within the agency to actively move forward numerous strategies to improve the integration of educational objectives within child welfare policies and processes. During the first years of involvement in CC25I, the Educational Liaison

advocated at 125 IEP meetings, eight expulsion hearings and analyzed hundreds of transcripts to ensure proper school accrual.

- Twelve different educational presentations on topics such as AB 490, foster youth educational rights, SSTs, IEP/504 plans, McKinney-Vento and IDEA/Special Education Law have been developed by the previous Community Services Agency Educational Liaison and trainings held with child welfare staff, probation staff, MSW interns, caregivers and other community partners (over 180 individuals have been trained).
- An education advocacy manual was also created to inform Community Services Agency workers, supervisors and caregivers.

#### Collaboration/AB 490 Compliance

- Educational presentations and trainings mentioned above have also been conducted with school district staff and an increasing number of high schools are collaborating with the Community Services Agency on efforts to meet the educational needs of foster youth.
- The Community Services Agency Educational Liaison partners' closely with the Stanislaus County Office of Education and its FYS program to coordinate and increase the educational support services available to foster care youth and secure new funding to sustain expansion of tutoring services in the future.

#### Educational Supports for Foster Youth

- The Community Services Agency and FYS worked together in Stanislaus County to prioritize foster youth to receive tutoring services. Huntington Learning Center (a nationwide K-12 tutoring service on contract with the County) provided 44 foster youth with tutoring since 2006 and tutoring services are also being provided to foster youth by paid tutors from California State University Stanislaus. Early results for the first thirteen foster youth who were tutored through Huntington Learning Center showed an average improvement of 2.3 grade levels. In addition to the tutoring support provided by FYS and Huntington, foster youth receive educational case management and advocacy support from the Community Services Agency Educational Liaison.
- Stanislaus County Office of Education FYS is providing test study guides that include testing dates, instructions and practice tests and distributing these to group homes and licensed foster homes to help foster youth prepare for educational exams. The program will help youth to register and pay for these exams such as the GED. The Community Services Agency Educational Liaison shares in this effort by distributing the test study guides to youth not served by FYS, such as those in relative care settings.
- A self-advocacy binder was created by the previous Community Services Agency Educational Liaison to help youth understand their strengths and weaknesses with regard to learning, guide their academic aspirations, and help them to prepare for post-secondary education.
- The Community Services Agency Educational Liaison has been reaching out to AVID coordinators in the County's districts and informing them of which of students are foster youth and could benefit from AVID, in an effort to increase their recruitment of foster youth. Community Services Agency staff completes ongoing updates of which schools foster youth are attending and the education liaison reviews the youth's records specifically to identify which youth would qualify for AVID. Youth interested in the program, have the opportunity to practice the interviewing process in advance of the actual AVID interviews. Information on AVID is being integrated within existing education-focused outreach to foster family agencies and groups homes and both social workers and caregivers are being informed about which schools participate in AVID and who to contact if interested.

#### Data Sharing

- The Community Services Agency Educational Liaison has overseen the inputting of available school data on foster youth into an ILP-related database system.

## VI. FOOTNOTES

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- <sup>38</sup> Federal laws like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) have not been clearly interpreted in terms of data sharing between school districts and city and county agencies. We discuss below efforts in CC25 counties to create data-sharing agreements that are permissible under federal law.
- <sup>39</sup> According to the Foster Youth Services 2006 Report to the Governor, the statewide school database (California School Information Services) is not able to provide foster youth data on a disaggregate level. See: Child & Family Policy Institute of California, the California Foster Youth Education Task Force, and Casey Family Programs. (2007). *California Foster Youth Education Summit: Recommendations to Improve Foster Youth Education Success in California*.
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- <sup>40</sup> The California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care. (2008). *Ready to Succeed: Changing Systems to Give California's Foster Children the Opportunities They Deserve to be Ready for and Succeed in School*. Prepared by the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning and Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc. Available at: <http://www.cftl.org/documents/2008/FCfullreport.pdf>.
- <sup>41</sup> This restriction reflects the mandates contained in the Educational Code sections 42920 to 42925 and in Senate Bill 933 (1998). See California Department of Education, Counseling, Student Support, and Service-Learning Office. (2006) Report to the Governor and the Legislature: Foster Youth Services Program.
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- <sup>43</sup> California Department of Education, Counseling, Student Support, and Service-Learning Office. (2006) Report to the Governor and the Legislature: Foster Youth Services Program.
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- <sup>45</sup> California Department of Education, Counseling, Student Support, and Service-Learning Office. (2006). *Executive Summary: 2006 Report to the Governor and Legislature, Foster Youth Services Program*. (California Educational Code §§ 42920-42925).
- <sup>46</sup> The law mandates that "educators, county placing agencies, care providers, advocates, and the juvenile courts ... shall work together to maintain stable school placements and to ensure that each pupil is placed in the least restrictive educational programs, and has access to the academic resources, services, and extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to all pupils. California Educational Code § 48850
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- <sup>48</sup> California Educational Code § 48853.5(b)(1)
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- <sup>54</sup> Youth Law Center. (2004). Improving Educational Opportunities for Youth in the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems: A Report on a Meeting Held August 12, 2004. San Francisco, CA: Youth Law Center.
- <sup>55</sup> The Youth Transition Funders Group Foster Care Work Group. (2004). *Connected by 25: A Plan for Investing in Successful Futures for Foster Youth*.
- <sup>56</sup> Policy briefs prepared for the 2007 Education Summit as well as the report, *2007 California Foster Youth Education Summit: Recommendations to Improve Foster Youth Education Success in California*, can be found online at: <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/CaliforniaFosterYouthEducationSummitReport.htm>.
- Findings and recommendations emerging from the Education Summits can be requested from Summit cosponsors the Child & Family Policy Institute of California ([www.cfpic.org](http://www.cfpic.org)) and Casey Family Programs ([www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org)).
- <sup>57</sup> Full and summary reports on the Commission's recommendations are available at: <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/jc/tflists/blueirb.htm>.
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- <sup>66</sup> Treehouse. Retrieved June, 4, 2008 from <http://www.treehouseforkids.org/whatwedo/tutoring>.
- <sup>67</sup> For more information on the AVID program, go to: <http://www.avidonline.org>.
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- <sup>70</sup> For example, authorizing information-sharing for purposes of educational decision making, and the appointment of surrogates and CASAs.
- <sup>71</sup> This document is available at: <http://www.sdcoe.net/student/ss/fys/Interagency%20Agreement%20Signed.pdf>.
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- <sup>73</sup> D. Lee, Oakland Unified School District, personal communication, November 2007.
- <sup>74</sup> S. Terry, San Diego FYS, personal communication, November 2007.
- <sup>75</sup> These are reviewed in: California School Boards Association. (2008). *Governance & Policy Services Policy Brief: Educating Foster Youth: Best Practices and Board Considerations*.
- <sup>76</sup> This flyer is available at: <http://www.csba.org/EducationIssues/EducationIssues/FosterYouth.aspx>.
- <sup>77</sup> These forms are available at: <http://www.fosteryouthservices.fcoe.net/school.htm> and <http://www.sdcoe.net/student/ss/fys.asp>.
- <sup>78</sup> State Superintendent O'Connell's letter regarding partial course credit is available at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/partialcredit.asp>.
- <sup>79</sup> For more information please see [www.hemetusd.k12.ca.us/board/brdplcy/index.html](http://www.hemetusd.k12.ca.us/board/brdplcy/index.html).
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<sup>85</sup> AB3632, effective July 1, 1986, requires county agencies to provide mental health services to students with specified disabilities. Students must have a current individualized education plan (IEP) and the services provided must correspond with the child's needs as identified in the IEP (see <http://www.pai-ca.org/Pubs/504901.htm> for more information)/.

<sup>86</sup> A summary of the report with these data, prepared by Laura Tanner-McBrien (Program Manager/Community Partner with Fresno Unified), was included in the Fresno County's CC25I Year 2 annual report, dated April 28, 2008.

<sup>87</sup> The results of this study were reported on at 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, and the yet unpublished paper entitled "Removing Barriers to Educating Children in Foster Care Through Interagency Collaboration: A Seven-County Multiple-Case Study" was made available by authors Lois A. Weinberg, Andrea Zetlin, and Elaine MacLeod of the California State University, Los Angeles and Nancy M. Shea of Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc.

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<sup>91</sup> The 2007 California Foster Youth Education Summit Backgrounder is available at: [http://www.cfpic.org/summit\\_pdfs/SummitBackground.pdf](http://www.cfpic.org/summit_pdfs/SummitBackground.pdf).

<sup>92</sup> The report, *2007 California Foster Youth Education Summit: Recommendations to Improve Foster Youth Education Success in California*, can be found online at: <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/CaliforniaFosterYouthEducationSummitReport.htm>.

<sup>93</sup> Judicial Council News Release, dated March 14, 2008, available at: <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/presscenter/newsreleases/NR11-08.PDF>

<sup>94</sup> Full and summary reports on the Commission's recommendations are available at: <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/jc/tflists/bluefib.htm>

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<sup>96</sup> As of June 2, 2008, a summary of the work and recommendations of the California NGA Education team was still being finalized.

<sup>97</sup> The California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care. (2008).

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<sup>99</sup> Please see <http://www.fosteryouthservices.fcoe.net/>.

<sup>100</sup> For additional information, see <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Projects/BSC/Education/>.

<sup>101</sup> AB3632, effective July 1, 1986, requires county agencies to provide mental health services to students with specified disabilities. Students must have a current individualized education plan (IEP) and the services provided must correspond with the child's needs as identified in the IEP (see <http://www.pai-ca.org/Pubs/504901.htm> for more information)/. SB 1894 (the Guaranteed Educational Quality Act of 1996) "provides assistance and intervention with pupils, school programs, and neighborhoods with large percentages of pupils who are low-performing on state-approved standardized tests of basic skills achievement" per bill analysis found at: [http://info.sen.ca.gov/pub/95-96/bill/sen/sb\\_1851-1900/sb\\_1894\\_cfa\\_960624\\_164018\\_sen\\_floor.html](http://info.sen.ca.gov/pub/95-96/bill/sen/sb_1851-1900/sb_1894_cfa_960624_164018_sen_floor.html)

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