FosterEd

Community Collaboration to Support
the Educational Success of Foster Youth

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

Judge Denine Guy
Michael Paynter
Kim Corneille
Rachel Velcoff Hults

Getting Started: Attendee Questions

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

Background: Educational Outcomes of Students in Foster Care

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

WestEd, The Invisible Achievement Gap (November 2013)

Challenges Faced by Students in Foster Care

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

Educational Representatives for Students in Foster Care

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

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

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

Santa Cruz County Office of Education

Human Services Department COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Pilot Implementation

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

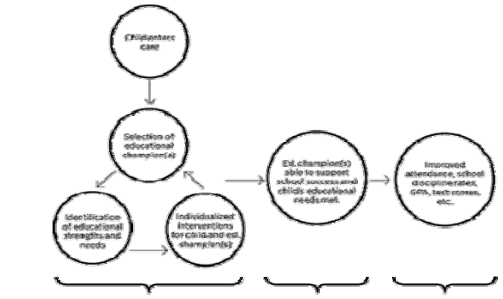
FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Pilot Implementation (cont.)

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

FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Pilot Implementation (cont.)

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

FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Logic Model



FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Objectives

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

FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Sample Case

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

FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Pilot Implementation (cont.)

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

FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Pilot Implementation (cont.)

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

FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Evaluation

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

FosterEd: Santa Cruz County Sustainability Plan

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

Panelist Discussion: Challenges and Lessons Learned

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

Panelist Discussion: Challenges and Lessons Learned

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

Panelist Discussion: Key Stakeholders to Engage

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

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

Panelist Discussion: Possible County-Level Strategies

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

Group Discussion and Q&A

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

Resources

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

Contact Information

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Thank you for participating!