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# FIRST LOOK

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## Foster Youth Education Outcomes in Four California Counties

NOVEMBER  
2011

Highlights based on a pilot project conducted by the Center for Social Services Research at the University of California, Berkeley and the California Partnership for Achieving Student Success



STUART FOUNDATION

INVESTING IN CHILDREN & YOUTH TO CREATE LIFELONG IMPACT

These highlights are based on a pilot research project funded by the Stuart Foundation and conducted by the Center for Social Services Research (CSSR) at the University of California, Berkeley and the California Partnership for Achieving Student Success (Cal-PASS). The research set out to answer the following three research questions in four California counties:

1. What are the high school and college education outcomes for students in foster care in California?
2. How do foster students' education outcomes compare to those of closely matched students?
3. What factors facilitate or impede successful completion of high school and college education for students in foster care?

A larger, statewide research project will deepen our understanding of many of the preliminary findings based on this pilot project. Those results will be available in summer 2012.

Education is the key to success for all children. For students in foster care, education is the door out of instability into a more promising life. What we learn from improving education outcomes of students in foster care will help close the achievement gap for all at-risk youth.

**Students in foster care have the ability and strong desire to succeed in school, but the instability they face in their family lives takes a toll on their school performance. Of a sample of students in foster care who had aged-out of the system, 75 percent had goals of graduating college, but only 30 percent had completed high school (Reilly, 2003). The good news is, with the right support and intervention programs, students can and do succeed.**

However, there has been limited investigation to show exactly which supports and intervention programs in California are most effective. Now, that is changing.

This first-of-its-kind pilot project gets us closer to knowing how students with a history of foster care placement are faring in California's education system in comparison to closely matched at-risk student populations and the general student population. **Accessible, linked child welfare and education data is the most critical component needed to fill the information void.**

**This research compared students in foster care with closely matched at-risk students. At-risk characteristics include ethnicity, English Language Learner status, participation in the free lunch program, primary disability, school rank (a measure of school quality) and foster care status.**

By understanding where students in foster care are succeeding and encountering stumbling blocks, we can create more effective supports and intervention programs — and target those services where they are needed most to improve education outcomes for all students.

# HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS

## STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE FALL BEHIND OTHER AT-RISK STUDENT POPULATIONS

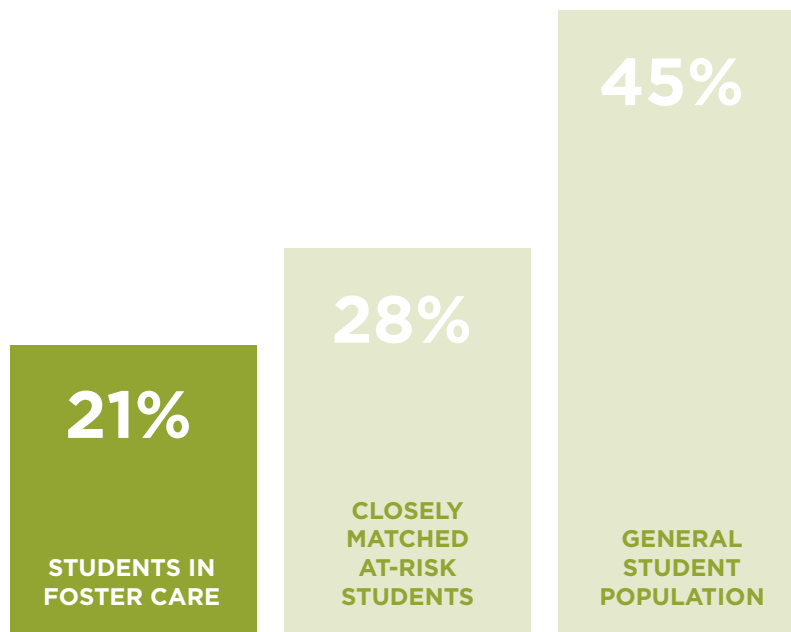
Students in foster care not only fall behind the general California student population; they fall behind other at-risk student populations. Students in foster care have high aspirations, but face many barriers due to the instability in their lives.

This research compared students in foster care and closely matched at-risk students in grades 8-11. These highlights represent data from grade 11, unless otherwise noted, which is representative of the trends in other grades. Education outcomes measured include proficiency on the English and math California Standards Test (CST), a key benchmark for education success in the state.

For full analysis and data covering all grades, please see the full report.  
Download at [www.stuartfoundation.org](http://www.stuartfoundation.org)

### English CST Proficiency

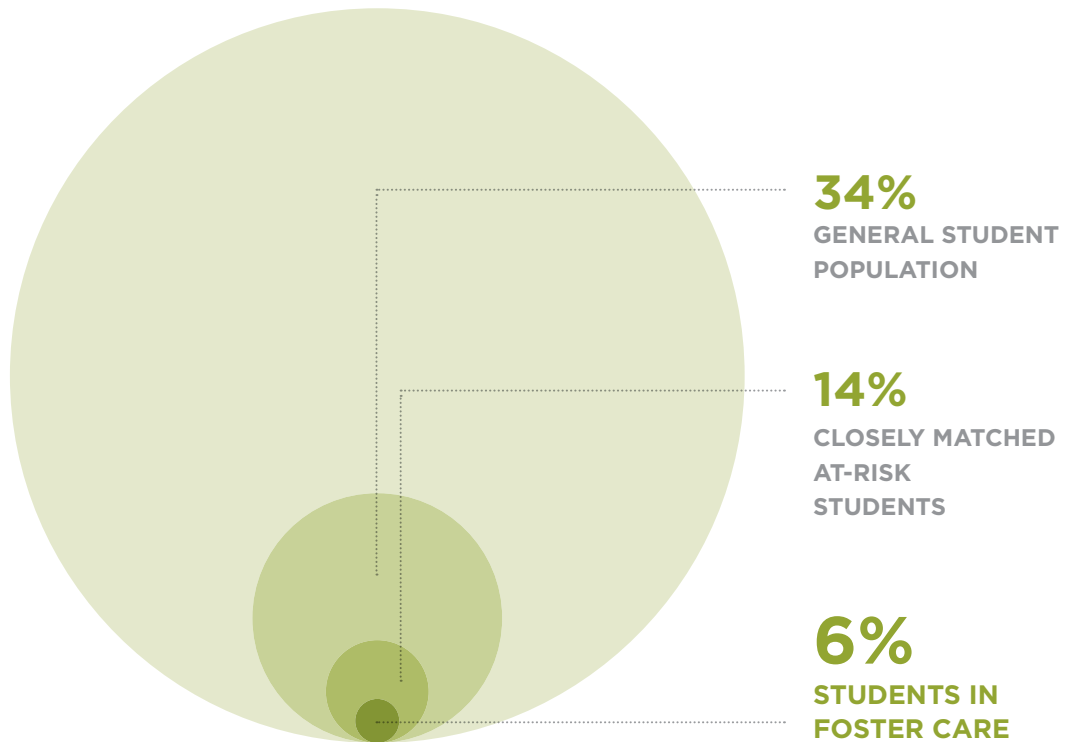
- ▶ Students in foster care are half as likely to achieve proficiency on the English CST as the general student population.
- ▶ Students in foster care are 25% less likely to achieve proficiency on the English CST than other closely matched at-risk students.





### Math CST Proficiency

- ▶ Students in foster care are five times less likely to achieve proficiency on the math CST as the general student population.
- ▶ Students in foster care are half as likely to achieve proficiency on the math CST as other closely matched at-risk students.



11<sup>TH</sup> GRADE MATH CST PROFICIENCY

## FACTORS THAT WIDEN THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE

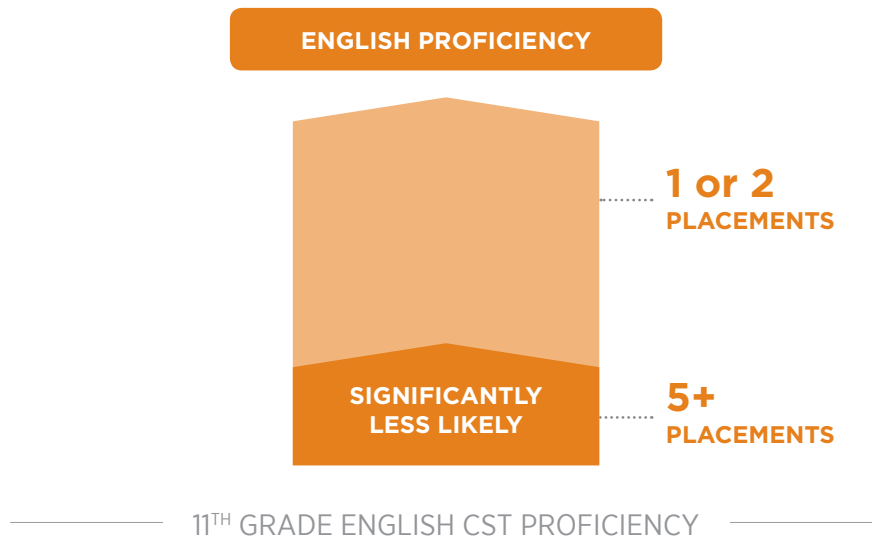
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This research has helped identify factors that facilitate or impede successful completion of high school and college education for students in foster care. It looked at child welfare variables that impact academic achievement, such as a stable home environment. This research also showed that students of color in foster care have poorer education outcomes. Assessing needs, aligning supports and coordinating efforts will ensure students get the support they need in order to close the achievement gap.



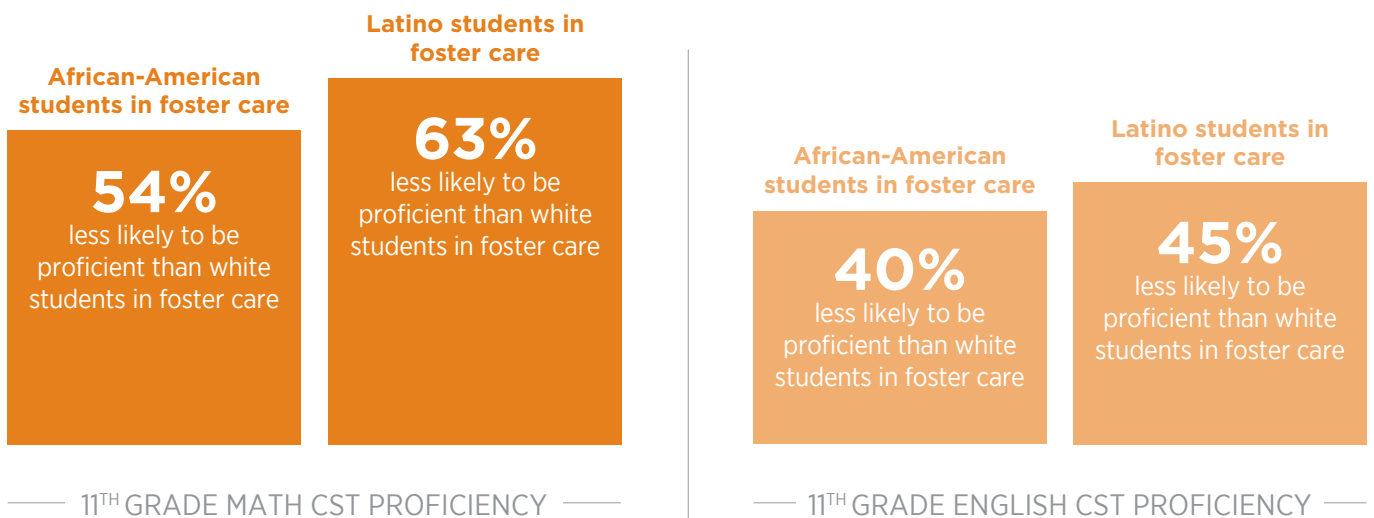
## MULTIPLE HOME PLACEMENTS AFFECT PROFICIENCY

Students in foster care with five or more home placements are **significantly less likely** to achieve proficiency on the English CST than students with one or two placements.



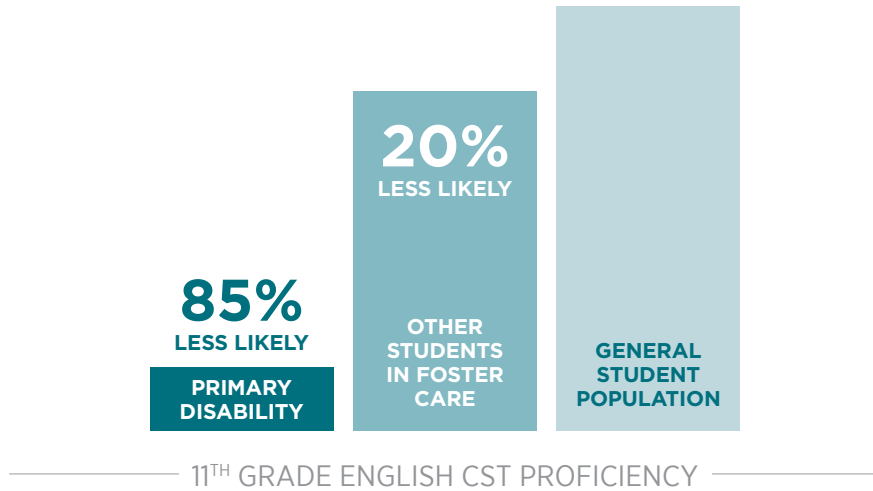
## AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND LATINO STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE

African-American and Latino students in foster care are roughly half as likely to achieve proficiency on the math and English CST as white students in foster care.



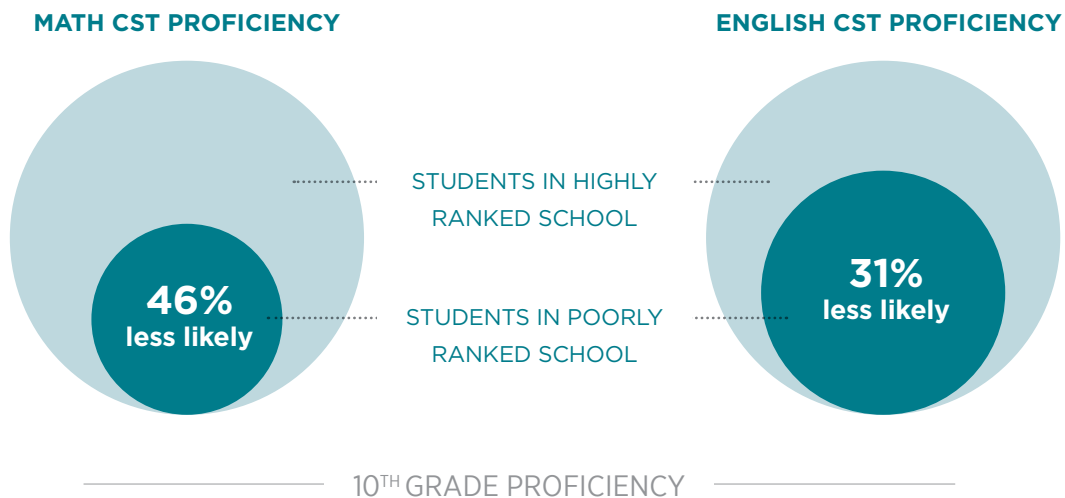
## STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE WITH DISABILITIES ARE ANOTHER VULNERABLE GROUP

Students in foster care with a primary disability are **85 percent less likely** to achieve English CST proficiency than other students in foster care, who are already about 20 percent less likely than the general student population to achieve that proficiency.



## STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE IN HIGH-RANKED SCHOOLS ARE MORE LIKELY TO SUCCEED

Students in foster care at poorly ranked schools are half as likely to achieve math CST proficiency and a third less likely to achieve English CST proficiency as students in foster care in highly ranked schools. Note that these school ranking highlights represent data from grade 10, which is representative of the trends in other grades.





## THE RIGHT SUPPORT CAN BOOST COLLEGE SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS FORMERLY IN FOSTER CARE

Students formerly in foster care who receive financial aid are five times more likely to attain a degree in community college than students formerly in foster care without aid.

### COMMUNITY COLLEGE DEGREE

**5 TIMES**  
more likely to  
attain a degree

**WITH**  
FINANCIAL AID

**WITHOUT**  
FINANCIAL AID

COMMUNITY COLLEGE DEGREE ATTAINMENT



## NEXT STEP: A CLOSER LOOK

A wide-ranging research project is underway that reaches beyond the four pilot counties and performs a statewide data match. The dataset under review is much larger and comprehensive, covering both education and child welfare variables in a longitudinal analysis. This forthcoming research will be available in summer 2012 and allow us to identify which factors affect students in foster care most. It will help us identify where students in foster care are succeeding, as well as where they are stumbling.

**With that information, we can expand the most effective supports and intervention programs and target those services to where they are needed most—particularly during the most vulnerable points along the education pipeline, like transitions from middle school to high school, or enrollment in higher education.**

Students in foster care can and do succeed when they have the right support. The right kind of support for students includes looking across the education continuum—from cradle to college and career—and ensuring we are supporting students during the critical transitions between each phase in their education.



Download *First Look: Foster Youth Education Outcomes in Four California Counties* at [www.stuartfoundation.org](http://www.stuartfoundation.org).

## **RESEARCHERS**

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## **ABOUT THE STUART FOUNDATION**

The Stuart Foundation is dedicated to transforming public education and the child welfare system so that *all* youth can learn and achieve in school and life. The Foundation is a partner and convener in melding the resources, thinking, and energy necessary to create and sustain system-wide change in California and Washington. It invests in programs and practices that serve as scalable and sustainable models and that inform policy.

## **INQUIRIES**

For more information, please contact the Stuart Foundation.