

Synthesis: Child Welfare - Education System Collaborations to Increase Educational Stability Round Two

The Children’s Bureau funded 10 projects to build capacity among State, local, or Tribal child welfare agencies and education systems to improve educational stability and permanency options for middle- and high-school aged children in the custody of child welfare agencies. The synthesis is comprised of information from grantee’s final project reports and evaluation reports.¹

Funding Opportunity Announcement

In 2012, the Children’s Bureau published a [funding opportunity announcement](#) (FOA) for the Child Welfare - Education System Collaborations to Increase Educational Stability cluster. The FOA was issued to award 24-month infrastructure-building grants to support collaborative initiatives among State, local, or Tribal child welfare agencies and education systems to improve educational stability and permanency outcomes for middle- to high-school aged children in foster care.

The FOA provided research findings that indicate older youth in foster care are less likely to finish high school, more likely to have poorer academic outcomes, and, on average, experience more school placements than their peers who are not in foster care. (Smithgall, Gladden, Duck-Hye, & Goerge, 2005; Stone, Andrade, & Austin, 2007; Burley & Halpern, 2001). Additionally, older youth in foster care are more likely to be in alternative school environments than their peers due to placement in residential settings or mental health facilities, loss of credits due to placement changes, or inability to enroll in school in a timely manner.

¹ Links to these reports are included within this document and are available in the Children’s Bureau’s Discretionary Grant Library.

WHAT’S INSIDE

Funding opportunity announcement

Grantees

Key program interventions and activities

Overarching themes

Evaluation

References

According to the FOA, these projects would seek to achieve the following:

- Foster strategic coordination and institutionalized communication among public child welfare and education agencies, community organizations, and targeted youth in care and their families
- Support the development of policies, procedures, and/or practices to increase the identification, enrollment, and attendance of targeted youth in care in comprehensive, high-quality education services
- Promote the awareness and utilization of multidisciplinary interventions and quality practices that increase protective factors and decrease risk factors to improve outcomes for youth in foster care
- Promote social and emotional well-being
- Promote the development of policies and procedures across the child welfare, education, and other supporting systems (e.g., courts, juvenile justice, health) aimed at increasing permanency and educational outcomes
- Disseminate findings and support knowledge transfer from these projects to the field

Eligible applicants included State, county, local, and Tribal governments, as well as nonprofits and public school systems and institutions. The Children's Bureau expected to award grants to 10 grantees for a total of \$2.5 million.

Grantees

This section provides information about each project, including a brief summary of key grant activities and links to final reports. Later sections of this synthesis contain more detailed information about the grants' activities.

For ease of reading, projects will be identified by the postal abbreviation for the State in which they are located. For example, the Our Kids Education Collaboration Project in Florida will be referred to as FL. States with more than one grantee will be identified by the State postal abbreviation followed by the city in parenthesis. For example, the FosterEd Initiative in Oakland, CA, will be referred to as CA (Oakland).

Project Title: FosterEd Initiative

- Location: California (Oakland)
- Lead agency: National Center for Youth Law
- Partners: Santa Cruz County Family and Children's Services Division; Santa Cruz County Office of Education; Superior Court of California, County of Santa Cruz, Juvenile Division; Pajaro Valley Unified School District; Santa Cruz County Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Department; CASA of Santa Cruz County; Parents Center; Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts; California Department of Social Services; California Department of Education; and County Welfare Directors Association of California
- Target population: School-aged children and youth who are in the custody of and reside in Santa Cruz County
- [Final report](#)
- Key grant activities:
 - Established a community leadership team composed of representatives from partner agencies and organizations
 - Identified an educational champion and established an education team to support each child served by the project
 - Developed educational intervention plans for each child served
 - Hired educational liaisons who provided ongoing support to the children and their education teams

- Developed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that outlined the plan for collaboration between the various school districts within the county
- Improved the data-sharing infrastructure between the school districts and child welfare agencies to better support and provide services to youth in foster care
- Developed and implemented forms to identify an education rights holder for children in foster care whose biological parents are unavailable or incapable of exercising educational rights

Project Title: Promoting Increased School Stability and Permanence

- Location: California (San Diego)
- Lead agency: San Diego County Office of Education
- Partners: San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency, Child Welfare Services; Voices for Children; 42 school districts within San Diego County; and the Foster Youth Services Advisory Council
- Target population: Youth 11–17 years of age in foster care in San Diego County
- [Final report](#)
- Key grant activities:
 - Hired a project supervisor to facilitate and advocate for appropriate mental health services for youth in foster care receiving special education services
 - Collaborated with school districts to remove barriers to uploading student information to the Foster Youth Student Information System that houses education information on students in San Diego County who are in foster care and those on probation
 - Established a transportation protocol to allow youth in foster care to remain in their schools of origin if their placements changed and remaining in the same school was in their best interests
 - Trained court-appointed special advocate (CASA) volunteers on special education and education laws related to youth in foster care
 - Matched CASA volunteers with children in foster care in need of educational advocacy

Project Title: Colorado Educational Stability Grant Project

- Location: Colorado (CO)
- Lead agency: Colorado Department of Human Services
- Partners: Adams County Department Human Services; Adams 12 Five Star Schools; Brighton School District 27J; Colorado Court Improvement Program; Colorado Department of Education; Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice; Denver Human Services; Denver Public Schools (DPS); OMNI Institute; and Rocky Mountain Children’s Law Center
- Target population: Youth in foster care ages 10–17
- [Final report](#)
- Key grant activities:
 - Selected Denver and Adams counties as the two demonstration sites
 - » Adams County: Focused on expanding service options and program improvement
 - Held roundtable discussions with educators, advocates, human services providers, and foster parents to discuss current processes, communication across the child welfare and education systems, and areas needing improvement
 - Provided academic coaching to students in foster care
 - Conducted multidisciplinary trainings on educational stability, the impact of trauma on learning, and trauma informed care
 - » Denver County: Focused on developing infrastructure and building upon existing cross-system planning
 - Held key informant interviews with staff responsible for supporting the educational needs of students in foster care to learn more about successful practices, areas of expertise, and areas for improvement
 - Piloted and institutionalized a revised family engagement meeting structure—Value of Individual and Community Engagement

Services—so that it includes school personnel in the family’s multidisciplinary and support team

- Developed worksheets and an educational video to assist child welfare education liaisons in determining whether it is in a child’s best interests to remain in his or her school of origin when a change in placement results in a change in school districts
- Hosted two educational stability summits for staff from the juvenile justice, child welfare, and education systems, as well as various other community partners, to promote awareness of the educational stability grant and the demonstration sites’ collaboration within communities to improve the educational outcomes of students in foster care
- Conducted trainings for child welfare education liaisons to raise awareness of the grant’s data-sharing and analysis project and the development of a best-interest determination process, as well as to share strategies on communicating the needs of students in foster care

Project Title: Our Kids Education Collaboration Project

- Location: Florida (FL)
- Lead agency: Our Kids of Miami-Dade/Monroe, Inc.
- Partners: Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Agency for Health Care Administration, Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida, Communities In Schools, and The Thurston Group
- Target population: High-school aged youth in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools who are in licensed foster care
- [Final report](#)
- Key grant activities:
 - Conducted interviews to gather information on how to develop a robust information technology (IT) strategy
 - Developed an IT strategy and a data-sharing agreement that allowed frontline caseworkers to have access to the education data of youth in foster care

- Improved how data were used and analyzed, which resulted in staff working more effectively with youth under their care
- Designated an education coordinator as the point of contact for day-to-day communication with the school system regarding the needs of the students served by the project

Project Title: Pathway to Academic Stability and Success (PASS)

- Location: Kentucky (KY)
- Lead agency: University of Louisville (UofL) Kent School of Social Work
- Partners: Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Department for Community Based Services; Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS); Family & Children’s Place (FCP); and Jefferson County Family Court
- Target population: Youth in foster care in grades 6–8
- [Final report](#)
- Key grant activities:
 - Conducted focus groups with school personnel, child welfare caseworkers, youth in foster care attending middle school, birth parents, foster parents, family court judges, and attorneys in order to assess strengths and barriers to meeting the educational needs of youth in foster care
 - Conducted a comprehensive review of existing policies and procedures across the education, child welfare, judicial, and mental health systems, which resulted in a data-sharing agreement among project partners, the requirement of educational reviews and assessments in family court, and revisions of the Educational Passport
 - Trained two educational navigators in the PASS practice model and on the child welfare system to assist them in the following activities:
 - » Working directly with youth in foster care to address educational and psychosocial needs that posed a barrier to their success in school
 - » Coordinating with other service providers across other systems of care

- » Advocating for resources and more comprehensive services for youth in foster care
- Engaged 100 youth in grades 6–8 in foster care in Jefferson County over a 2-year period to pilot the PASS practice model
- Provided training to teachers, mental health providers, child welfare caseworkers, and other relevant professionals on issues related to youth in foster care achieving academic success
- Provided training to foster parents and youth in foster care on factors related to academic success
- Developed and identified resources that could be used by other localities seeking to increase capacity and develop infrastructure to promote the academic stability and success of youth in foster care in their communities
- Coordinated with foster care provider agencies to provide educational support services to students in foster care
- Provided training and technical assistance on utilizing data to foster care partner agencies, data analysts, the project manager, and other stakeholders, including the NYC DOE
- Hired a consultant to develop a central education database that could be accessed directly by foster care provider agency staff so they could analyze NYC DOE data for children in their care
- Developed a short-term transportation plan to enable students to remain in their schools of origin
- Developed curricula and delivered training to foster care provider agency staff on topics relevant to maintaining school stability in order to facilitate informed, collaborative decision-making and interventions for youth in foster care

Project Title: Project School Success—Phase II²

- Location: New York (NY)
- Lead agency: New York City Administration for Children’s Services
- Partners: New York City Family Court, New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE), and foster care provider agencies
- Target population: Children and youth in foster care
- [Final report](#)
- Key grant activities:
 - Engaged data specialists to analyze the educational outcomes of children and youth in foster care for foster care provider agencies
 - Provided monthly reports that included various education data for all foster care provider agencies
 - Administered surveys and conducted onsite visits to ensure provider agency staff received educational data that were useful and understood how to interpret the results for their practice

Project Title: Lucas County Pathways to Success Initiative

- Location: Ohio (OH)
- Lead agency: Lucas County Juvenile Court (LCJC)
- Partners: Lucas County Children Services (LCCS), and Toledo Public Schools (TPS)
- Target population: Youth in foster care ages 10–17
- [Final report](#)
- Key grant activities:
 - Hired a “change leader” to oversee the development and implementation of the project
 - Enhanced the Foster Placement Stability Mediation Program to provide an opportunity to problem-solve situations before they reached crisis level and resulted in a placement disruption
 - Developed a process to address transportation barriers that prevented educational stability
 - Hired a full-time social worker/behavioral management specialist to provide evidence-based crisis intervention services for students, as needed, and to provide consultation services to school staff on individual behavior plans and interventions that met a youth’s specific needs

² In 2006, the Office of Education Support and Policy Planning (OESPP) within the New York City Administration for Children’s Services funded Project School Success—Phase I. The findings from the first phase formed the basis of Project School Success—Phase II, the federally funded project that is the subject of this report.

- Established six committees (Data, Placement Stability, Transportation, Training, Alternatives, and Transition Assistance) that worked under the direction of the change leader to develop new protocols and procedures
- Facilitated trainings on trauma exposure and trauma-informed care to teachers and school personnel
- Developed and administered a youth survey and conducted focus groups with youth to gain an understanding of their perspectives and experiences related to foster care and education
- Developed a joint interpretation of the Uninterrupted Scholars Act, which was enacted in 2013, that allowed ODE and DHS to share education information about children in the custody of DHS without parental consent and that eliminated the need for MOUs on data sharing
- Provided training to teachers and school counselors on trauma-informed practices
- Developed protocols for child welfare staff to enter timely and accurate education data into OR-Kids, Oregon's statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS)
- Added education measures to the Child Welfare Quarterly Business Review and the quarterly State Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) to improve the ability of DHS, ODE, and the Oregon Department of Justice to monitor and support the educational stability of youth in foster care

Project Title: Oregon Education Stability Matters: Increasing the Well Being of Children in Substitute Care

- Location: Oregon (OR)
- Lead agency: Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS), Child Welfare Programs
- Partners: Oregon Department of Education (ODE); Oregon Department of Justice; child welfare offices, judicial departments, and school districts in Multnomah, Marion, Lane, and Washington counties; and Roosevelt High School, Cottage Grove High School, McKay High School, and Aloha High School
- Target Population: Middle and high school youth in foster care ages 12–20
- [Final report](#)
- Key grant activities:
 - Hired two education coordinators who were colocated in DHS and ODE to ensure ongoing communication and collaboration between the school and child welfare systems
 - Established a steering committee made up of State agency leaders, community partners, child and youth advocates, and local school employees
 - Established education teams in the four partner high schools to address timely enrollment and transfer of records; identify students who are in foster care; and ensure that culturally appropriate educational, behavioral, and emotional services and supports are in place to meet the identified needs of each student in foster care

Project Title: Vermont Fostering Understanding to Reach Educational Success

- Location: Vermont (VT)
- Lead agency: University of Vermont College of Education and Social Services
- Partners: Vermont Department of Children and Families (DCF); Vermont Agency of Education; Vermont Judiciary, Justice for Children Task Force; and children and families involved with DCF
- Target population: Middle and high school youth in foster care
- [Final report](#)
- Key grant activities:
 - Pilot-tested, revised, and finalized an evidenced-informed intervention (Rock the GRADES) and toolkit for improving educational stability
 - Held over 200 trainings and outreach events throughout the 12 districts of Vermont to share tools from the project and provide training on supporting youth who have experienced trauma

- Created bench cards to disseminate to courts in all 12 DCF districts to support judges in asking about educational stability
- Collected and disseminated statewide educational stability data that could be examined at the child, region, and State levels
- Engaged youth formerly in foster care to develop and administer the Youth Education Survey to youth in foster care
- Created a brief documentary about the educational experiences of foster care alumni from across the State
- Analyzed data on education outcomes for students in out-of-home care (e.g., graduation rates by county, placement type)
- Developed a prototype data-sharing portal system between public schools and county child welfare agencies to give caseworkers access to students' school attendance, academic progress, and behavior reports directly and in real time
- Developed online training modules for school staff on the foster care system, trauma, ways to support youth in foster care, and effective collaboration techniques

Project Title: Wisconsin Educational Collaboration for Youth in Foster Care

- Location: Wisconsin (WI)
- Lead agency: Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, Division of Safety and Permanence
- Partners: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Dane County Department of Human Services, Madison Metropolitan School District, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System
- Target population: Youth in foster care in grades 6–8 at risk of dropping out of school
- [Final report](#)
- Key grant activities:
 - Created an Education Passport form in eWiSACWIS, Wisconsin's SACWIS, to alert school officials that a child in foster care enrolled or withdrew from a school and to provide other pertinent education-related information
 - Developed a desk guide that provided information to assist child welfare staff in collaborating with schools
 - Contracted with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Institute for Research on Poverty to conduct research analyzing characteristics of foster care placements and educational needs and outcomes

Key Program Interventions and Activities

Grantees focused on organizational-level activities to coordinate systems and encourage knowledge transfer across various systems. These activities included, but were not limited to, the following:

- **Service integration procedures.** All of the projects within this cluster reviewed and/or revised agency policies and procedures. This promoted collaboration across the child welfare, education, and other supporting systems (e.g., courts, juvenile justice) in order to improve permanency and education outcomes and increase communication and information exchange between child welfare and education staff.
- **CA (Oakland)** worked with county agencies to improve the infrastructure and processes serving youth in foster care. For example, the project incorporated Foster Focus, a database that links child welfare and education data. Foster Focus gives child welfare staff direct electronic access to educational records for a youth on their caseloads, and gives school districts direct electronic access to information from the child welfare system about the youth. It also helps school districts identify which of their students are in care. This access helps agencies provide more targeted care, better distribute resources, implement best practices, and develop relevant policies.

- **CA (San Diego)** established a transportation protocol to help a youth in foster care remain in his or her school if the placement changed and if remaining in the same school was in his or her best interest. The protocol was developed collaboratively between Child Welfare Services, the education liaisons, and contracted transportation companies.
- **CO** established an education liaison to work with child placement agencies, county departments, and the Colorado Department of Human Services to facilitate the prompt and appropriate placement, transfer, and enrollment in school of students in out-of-home care. The project also developed a best-interest determination process to assist child welfare education liaisons determine whether it is in a child's best interest to remain in his or her school of origin when a change in placement results in a change of school districts. It also developed a case-flow diagram that outlined steps that should occur when a child or youth is referred to child protection, removed from the home, and placed in foster care. The Adams County demonstration site also developed a visual map of educational stability through the eyes of a student in foster care. The map also described how educational success should look. Lastly, CO piloted and institutionalized a revised family engagement meeting structure (Value of Individual and Community Engagement Services) so that it included school personnel in the family's multidisciplinary and support team.
- **FL** developed an IT program that allowed data and information sharing between the schools and frontline caseworkers. The system provided access to child-specific information, such as school performance, health status, behavioral issues, and family history.
- **KY** conducted a review of existing policies and procedures across the education, child welfare, judicial, and mental health systems to modify existing procedures and practices. In addition, the project team examined transcripts from focus groups for information about collaborative practices, including data-sharing needs, cross-system communications and coordination, and training needs. The grant identified three changes that would significantly improve the attention placed on the educational needs of youth in foster care: (1) sharing data across systems of care, (2) having an order for an educational review and assessment of the child or youth at the time of the temporary removal hearing, and (3) making critical components of the child's education records accessible to child welfare workers and foster care providers via the Education PASSport when the child is placed in foster care. The PASSport provided information about school attendance, grade point average (GPA), State assessments, the youth's learning style, and behavioral and motivational strategies that the student responds to.
- **NY** developed a transportation plan to assist with the short-term transportation needs of youth in foster care. The project also provided monthly data reports, which included attendance, grades, class credits, standardized testing scores, promotional status, and eligibility for special services, to all foster care provider agencies.
- **OH** hired a "change leader" to oversee the development and implementation of the project. The change leader encouraged incremental and transformative organizational change by facilitating the development, implementation, and fidelity of policies among all staff. The project developed an online referral process through which teachers, caregivers, court personnel, child welfare caseworkers, CASAs, and guardians ad litem (GALs) could request educational support assistance from partner agency staff. Once the referral was made, an automatic notification was sent to the project change leader, the project social worker, the CASA, and an LCCS designee. This allowed for a rapid response to all referrals, which ensured that services were provided as quickly as possible. The online referral system automatically recorded the referrals and captured all required data elements for reporting outcomes.

- **OR** developed protocols to ensure child welfare staff entered timely and accurate education data into OR-Kids. For example, DHS worked with ODE to ensure an updated list of schools was available every year so it could be inputted into the OR-Kids system. The DHS Office of Business Intelligence also updated an emergency locator report to include school information. This report allowed child welfare branches to pull data on children with missing education data so that they could be updated on an ongoing basis. Additionally, the project colocated two education coordinators at DHS and ODE to ensure ongoing communication and collaboration between the school system and child welfare. The coordinators worked with schools and child welfare staff to address problems, answer questions, and provide joint training opportunities.
- **VT** worked closely with DCF to embed relevant elements of the Rock the GRADES toolkit into training manuals, policies, and guidance documents across all 12 districts in Vermont. For example, one part of the Rock the GRADES toolkit, a best interest determination form, was included in the case plan process for youth in care age 14 and older. If a youth's education plan changed, completion of the form was required. Toolkit materials were also provided to the nonprofit organization responsible for training educational surrogates for Vermont and included in the list of online resources for volunteers.
- **WI** created an Education Passport form in eWiSACWIS. After the form was completed for a child, DCF provided it to schools to alert them of whether a youth in foster care enrolled or withdrew from a school as well as provide general education information; child welfare contact information; out-of-home care provider information; information about the parent, guardian, or custodian; and information for school staff to promote academic success. The project developed a desk guide to assist child welfare staff in collaborating with schools. The guide included a school enrollment checklist, information on Federal and State laws regarding information sharing between child welfare agencies and schools, information on the Education Passport form, data-sharing best practices, and links to national resources. Additionally, the project created an education toolkit that was housed on the Office of Youth Services website. The toolkit included grant deliverables, a guide to the Education Passport form, the caseworker desk guide, links to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction resources for students, research findings from the Institute for Research on Poverty, and tools to aid in information sharing between child welfare and school staff.
- **Training.** A majority of the projects offered child welfare, education, and other stakeholders training to help them understand the importance of assessing and supporting students educationally during their time in foster care. Some projects offered training about trauma to assist educators and other stakeholders in understanding the effects childhood maltreatment and removal from the home may have on a child. In addition to helping staff gain knowledge, training also helped develop and strengthen collaborative relationships with partnering agency staff in some projects.
 - **CA (Oakland)** The FosterEd Initiative hired school site educational liaisons to support students and their educational champions with the goal to build an education team to support the child. Educational champions are biological parents, relative caregivers, or foster parents. Volunteers that were recruited and trained by the educational liaisons helped collaborate with the educational champion and student to develop education-focused goals, coaching, and mentoring to support the child's academic success.
 - **CA (San Diego)** provided training to CASA volunteers on special education, as well as education laws relating to students in foster care.
 - **CO** provided multiple trainings for child welfare education liaisons to raise awareness of the needs of youth in foster care and best practices for communicating those needs. The project hosted two educational stability summits for juvenile justice staff, child welfare professionals, educators, State agency staff, and community service providers.

Attendees learned about national child welfare and education best practices, data sharing, best-interest determination processes to promote school stability for students in foster care, consent to release information, the Pathways to Success grant, and a collaboration supporting youth involved with child welfare and juvenile justice. They also listened to panel discussions with former students in foster care about their experiences and barriers. The project also conducted cross-disciplinary trainings with child welfare caseworkers, educators, community service providers, and CASAs on educational stability, the impact of trauma on learning, and trauma-informed care.

- **KY** provided training to teachers, mental health providers, child welfare caseworkers, and other relevant professionals on issues related to youth in foster care and on promoting academic success for youth in care. Foster parents and youth in foster care received training on factors related to academic success.
- **NY** developed curricula for the Planning to Achieve School Success Academy, a comprehensive training program to support foster care agencies in monitoring, planning, and intervening to improve educational services. The project delivered training on topics relevant to school stability to facilitate informed, collaborative decision-making and interventions. Training topics included the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, New York State education law, and local child welfare and education policies and procedures. The project also delivered trainings on compliance with Fostering Connections to new child protective and foster care caseworkers and new attorneys in the Administration for Children's Services Division of Family Court Legal Services.
- **OH** provided trauma-focused training to teachers, CASAs, GALs, court personnel, caseworkers, foster parents, and other community stakeholders.
- **OR** developed and provided joint ODE-DHS comprehensive training that included information

about foster care, Fostering Connections, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, residency and best-interest findings, confidentiality, records transfer, immediate enrollment, and other topics as requested. Although the curriculum was developed for ODE and DHS staff, it was also provided to other community partners upon request. The project also provided trauma-informed training to teachers and school counselors.

- **VT** developed a training curriculum to introduce the Rock the GRADES toolkit to all DCF districts, which were trained in multiple phases. Additionally, the project collaborated with a partner to create the Endless Dreams train-the-trainer workshop and then shared the curriculum with 37 child welfare professionals in the State. The project also hosted 2 days of statewide workshops for 233 educators, social workers, caregivers, members of the legal community, administrators, and others to share project materials on the educational needs of youth in foster care and provide indepth, trauma-informed training. Lastly, VT included relevant elements of the Rock the GRADES toolkit into foster, kin, and adoptive parent trainings.
- **WI** created online training modules for school staff on the needs of youth in foster care and the actions staff should consider when supporting them. The training contained seven modules: "Children in Out-of-Home Care," "The Child Welfare System," "Communication Between Systems," "Trauma," "Behavior Management," "Educational Stability," and "Transitioning into Adulthood."
- **Advisory committees and leadership teams.** These oversight bodies brought together representatives from child welfare, education, juvenile justice and family courts, and other community stakeholders and were responsible for helping with project planning, leadership development, and project implementation monitoring.
 - **CA (Oakland)** established a community leadership team at the beginning of the grant planning

phase. The leadership team was composed of representatives from partner agencies and organizations and included judges, program managers, CASAs, mental health professionals, and legal professionals.

- **CA (San Diego)** utilized the existing collaborative partnerships of the Foster Youth Services Advisory Council to facilitate this project. The membership consisted of representatives from school districts, child welfare agencies, probation offices, the juvenile courts, the Dependency Legal Group, and various other community organizations, including Voices For Children, which administers the CASA program in San Diego County.
- **CO** established a State-level leadership team to plan and coordinate State and local infrastructure development supports. The team was composed of representatives from the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice, the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Colorado Department of Education, the Rocky Mountain Children’s Law Center, and the OMNI Institute.
- **FL** used the Education Dependency Action Team model to improve its efforts to prevent school dropouts. This model provided an immediate response to school staff and case managers while providing assistance to all youth in delinquency, dependency, and unified family courts. Representatives from each team met weekly to assess each youth’s academic performance and address any basic living, educational, or transportation issues.
- **KY** established the Program Steering Committee, which was composed of representatives from each of the project partners, to review policies, procedures, and grant processes and make recommendations for addressing barriers to academic stability and success.
- **OH** formed the Strategic Planning Committee, which was composed of members from LCJC, LCCS, and TPS. The committee was charged with the revision, development, and implementation of policies and protocols related to the academic needs of youth in foster care who were ages 10–17 and at risk for academic failure.
- **OR** established a steering committee made up of State agency leaders, community partners, child and youth advocates, and local school employees. The purpose of the committee was to have a group of diverse advocates who could inform and direct the work of the project in a structured way that would meet the needs of the community.
- **VT** formed the VT-FUTRES State executive team and a national advisory board to provide input on refining and evaluating the Rock the GRADES toolkit. The State team included the coprincipal investigators as well as representatives from DCF, the Agency of Education, the Vermont judiciary, and other key stakeholders. The team met monthly throughout the grant period and provided feedback on grant work and ongoing related initiatives in Vermont and elsewhere.
- **WI** created an interagency working group with DCF and the Department of Public Instruction to advance project goals and work on policy and program initiatives related to improving educational outcomes for youth in foster care.
- **Data sharing.** Projects planned, developed, and/or enhanced data-sharing capabilities between the child welfare, education, and, in some cases, the court systems to assist in ensuring the educational accomplishments and challenges of children and youth in foster care were recognized and addressed by all entities.
- **CA (Oakland)** led efforts in Santa Cruz County to develop Foster Focus, a database that included both child welfare and education information. These data were imported directly from the child welfare database and the school districts’ student information systems. This gave child welfare staff direct electronic access to educational records for the youth on their caseloads and gave school districts direct electronic access to information about children involved with child welfare. Foster Focus also helped school districts identify which of their students were in foster care. The project

noted that this information exchange was key to each system's ability to provide quality, targeted education-related services for youth in foster care.

- **CA (San Diego)** collaborated with school districts to remove barriers to uploading student information to the Foster Youth Student Information System to ensure all necessary data were available to meet the educational needs of children in foster care and on probation in San Diego County. The barriers faced by most districts were related to IT support, but the San Diego County Office of Education IT department was able to work with districts on solving those problems.
- **CO** established an MOU between DHS and DPS to include the provision of read-only access to Trails, Colorado's SACWIS, for DPS child protection social workers.
- **FL** implemented an education data-sharing system to identify youth in care and determine if they met the core competencies and academic requirements for graduation. Caseworkers had access to this system, which allowed them to identify students who were struggling academically so they could provide the necessary services and interventions.
- **KY** created a data-sharing agreement between JCPS, UofL, and FCP. JCPS agreed to provide student demographic, attendance, disciplinary, and course outcome data to UofL and FCP so they could evaluate the success of the PASS program.
- **NY** provided monthly student data reports, including attendance, course grades, credits, standardized testing scores, promotional status, and eligibility for special services, to all foster care provider agencies.
- **OH** established a data-sharing agreement between LCJC, LCCS, and TPS. The three agencies agreed to share specific data elements about youth, such as name, date of birth, detention history, placement history, and enrollment status. The project also developed a tracking sheet for partner agencies that listed all youth in foster care. The project's data committee flagged indicators of problems, such as consecutive absences, disciplinary actions at school, or a drop in GPA, for further assessment.
- **OR** analyzed the current education data in OR-Kids and determined that education data were not entered correctly or timely into the system. To correct this, DHS included the assessment of education measures into various State review processes.
- **VT** worked closely with resource coordinators³ in the three pilot districts to gather educational stability data for all children in foster care in those districts. Through this work, a simple Excel spreadsheet was developed and then shared with the districts so they could track education data. The project also collaborated with DCF to determine which data could be pulled from the State data systems. DCF staff did not routinely update school placement changes, and these data were not included in monitoring or reports. Therefore, the grant team worked with partners to gain access to State data and then cleaned the data based on child living arrangements, information from the resource coordinators, and case record reviews. This manual cleaning of educational stability data yielded the first statewide report that could be examined on the child, region, and State levels. The project also created a report template that the State could use to analyze and report their data after the end of the grant period.
- **WI** completed a data-sharing agreement and established protocols for data exchange among DCF, the Madison Metropolitan School District, and the Dane County Human Services Department. The data-sharing agreement allowed caseworkers to access both electronic and paper school records of youth in foster care.
- **Court processes.** Some projects collaborated with the courts to establish processes, procedures, and/or forms to assist the courts with monitoring the school performance of youth in foster care. These procedures helped ensure the courts thoroughly reviewed and addressed the educational needs of youth.
 - **CA (San Diego)** worked with the juvenile court, Child Welfare Services, and minor's counsel to streamline

³ Resource coordinators recruited, licensed, and supported foster and kinship parents for children in out-of-home care.

the process of identifying youth who would benefit from a CASA education rights holder⁴ and to make the assignment of a rights holder as expeditiously as possible.

- **CO** participated in multidisciplinary team meetings to address cases from the truancy and delinquency courts that involved child welfare and juvenile justice youth. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss concerns and determine the best course of action for each case. If there were services needed that were not currently being provided, the team was able to promptly determine the required funding and make referrals.
 - **VT** collaborated with the State's Court Improvement Program to disseminate judicial bench cards to inform judges about educational stability and outcomes for youth in foster care.
 - **Designated staff to work with youth in foster care.** Several projects developed roles and responsibilities for designated staff to ensure the educational needs of youth in foster care were met and that information about the youth was readily available to child welfare and education staff.
 - **CA (San Diego)** hired a project supervisor for services for youth in foster care to advocate for—and help connect students with—appropriate mental health services for youth in foster care receiving special education services.
 - **CO** partnered with Results Learning, Inc., to provide academic coaching to students in foster care who were referred by Adams County caseworkers due to poor academic performance.
 - **FL** designated an education coordinator as a point of contact for day-to-day communication with the school system to ensure students in foster care understood their behavioral and academic progress, including the steps they needed to take to graduate.
- The coordinator also was able to determine the child's attendance at school.
- **KY** trained two educational navigators to work directly with youth in foster care to address any educational and psychosocial needs that may prevent them from being successful in school. In addition, the educational navigators worked with other service providers to ensure youth were receiving the services and resources they needed.
 - **OH** hired a full-time social worker/behavioral management specialist to provide evidence-based crisis intervention services for students as needed. This specialist encouraged the use of logical consequences, including immediate responses to negative behavior, time out measures as behavioral triggers appear, and rewards and incentives for positive prosocial behavior. Additionally, the specialist worked to establish and implement trauma-informed practices and protocols that promoted alternative disciplinary approaches to in-school behavior problems that would otherwise result in suspensions or expulsions and to develop and implement policies that minimized disruptions caused by school transfers.
 - **VT** project staff engaged foster care alumni in a research project to help design a survey of the education experiences of youth in foster care. The youth helped interpret the findings, testified before the Vermont legislature on the findings, and presented at a statewide conference.
 - **Project outreach materials.** A few projects developed outreach materials to assist birth parents, foster parents, and other caregivers in meeting the educational needs of youth in their care. The materials also provided information to educators, child welfare professionals, court personnel, and youth in foster care.
 - **CO** created a best-interest determination educational video to disseminate information to county departments and school districts about the development of a process to determine whether it is in a child's best interest to remain in his or her school of origin when a change in placement results in a change of school districts.

⁴ The default education rights holder that makes educational decisions are children's biological parents. However, a court can limit a parent's rights in this regard and appoint a "responsible adult" or "educational representative." 2018 California Rules of Court Rule 5.650. For more information, refer to [2019 California Rules of Court Rule 5.650: Appointed educational rights holder](#).

- **OH** created and distributed information on the Foster Placement Stability Mediation Program to foster parents, youth in foster care, LCCS caseworkers, probation officers, CASAs, and GALs.
- **VT** teamed with a local filmmaker to create a documentary about the educational experiences of foster care alumni from across the State. The 18-minute film, “[No Decision About Me, Without Me: School Stories of Youth in Custody](#),” premiered at the fall statewide conference in year two of the grant. The film, a 12-page discussion guide, and the Rock the GRADES toolkit were placed on flash drives and distributed to social workers, educators, administrators, and other community partners.
- **Interagency agreement/MOU.** Grantees established formal agreements with partner agencies to define the expectations for each agency during the grant period. The following are examples highlighted in grantees’ final reports.
 - **CA (Oakland)** developed several MOUs during the grant period, including one that allowed child welfare and education data to be shared through Foster Focus and another that allowed de-identified data to be shared for the project evaluation. In addition, an MOU was developed to allow for a collaborative interagency approach to support the educational success of youth in foster care.
 - **KY** established a data-sharing agreement between JCPS, the UofL, and FCP. JCPS agreed to provide student demographic, attendance, disciplinary, and course outcome data to UofL and FCP so they could evaluate the success of the PASS program.
 - **NY** entered into a formal agreement with the Office of Children and Family Services and the New York State Department of Education in order to share the education data of students placed outside NYC DOE public schools.
 - **OH** developed an MOU between LCJC, LCCS, and TPS to develop and implement a model for information and data sharing between schools, children’s services organizations, and the courts. Specifically, the MOUS addressed case management; the development and implementation of written policies and protocols for school staff on allowing children to remain in their schools of origin when possible; and the allocation of staff, in-kind services, and funding to the project.
- **OR** distributed a joint MOU to child welfare agencies, judicial departments, and school districts regarding ODE and DHS’ joint interpretation of the Uninterrupted Scholars Act that allowed the two agencies to share education information about children in the custody of DHS without parental consent. This memo eliminated the need for local MOU agreements regarding data sharing.
- **VT** updated an MOU between DCF and the Vermont Agency of Education that provided guidance to schools and child welfare staff related to the Fostering Connections Act and included a flow chart on the decision-making process.
- **Data analysis to inform grant interventions.** Some projects conducted analyses of student data to better determine the needs of students in order to plan appropriate, meaningful grant interventions.
 - **CO** analyzed 7 years of child welfare and education data collected by the Colorado Department of Education in partnership with the University of Northern Colorado. These data showed how students in foster care tended to have poor educational outcomes related to graduation, mobility, and drop-out rates. In response, the project established the Educational Outcomes Steering Committee. The State of Colorado adopted the Blueprint for Change model to eliminate barriers for students in foster care based upon information from work completed by the project (e.g., roundtable discussions, academic coaching, best-interest determinations, training, addressing education in family engagement meetings) along with the work of other individual programs and demonstration projects.
 - **KY** analyzed qualitative data from focus groups to complete a needs assessment of the barriers to and strategies for educational stability. It also gathered baseline data from the school system and educational navigators on youth participants’

demographics, well-being, and academic indicators and compared them to follow-up data, when possible.

- **NY** utilized data in a variety of ways depending on the size of the foster care provider agency and whether the agency had dedicated data staff. In smaller agencies, agency staff were often limited to monitoring students' school attendance. Larger agencies with data-focused staff members were able to review data from the monthly reports and flag cases where attendance or grades dropped. Flagged cases were then brought to the attention of case managers for follow-up. Some agencies created databases and risk management tools that alerted relevant staff when certain education risk factors were present.
- **OR** added an education component to the DHS Child Welfare Quarterly Business Review data measures in order to count the number of school-aged children having updated education plans in OR-Kids every 180 days. The DHS education coordinator also worked with the State CFSR team to refine the education measures being addressed in case reviews. The State CFSR review teams added the following child-level education measures:
 - » During the period under review, did the agency make an attempt to keep the child in the same school (if the child entered care or changed placements)?
 - » If the child changed schools, is there a rationale why the school change was in the best interest of the child?
 - » Is the youth on target to graduate by age 19?
 - » What type of diploma is the child working to achieve?
 - » Does the child have an individualized education program, an individualized service plan, or a section 504 plan?
 - » If yes, is the school adhering to the plan requirements?
- **VT** analyzed school stability data for the 2011–2014 academic school years. The DCF Social Services Management Information System and the paper DCF placement change form included fields for recording basic school information (e.g., school name and city, grade, date entered school, date entered grade, special education status). Project staff manually reviewed the case files and revised the data for every student in foster care during this timeframe. The project also engaged a group of 10 youth formerly in foster care to design and administer the Youth Education Survey to youth in foster care (ages 15–21). These data sets informed the first statewide analysis and reporting of school stability data in Vermont and in each of the 12 participating districts.
- **WI** contracted with the Institute for Research on Poverty to conduct research analyzing characteristics of foster care placements and educational needs and outcomes. The analyses suggested that, although out-of-home placements do not appear to have a particular influence on academic achievement, they may more directly influence other educational outcomes, such as grade retention, disciplinary outcomes, and high school completion, that are more closely associated with social-emotional development.
- **Focus groups, interviews, and surveys to inform grant interventions.** Some projects conducted focus groups and interviews and developed surveys to learn more about the educational barriers and successes of youth in foster care in order to establish infrastructure to improve educational stability for these youth. The following examples were highlighted in grantees' final reports.
 - **CO** held roundtable discussions with educators, advocates, human services providers, and foster parents to discuss current processes, communication across the child welfare and education systems, and areas needing improvement. The project held key informant interviews with staff responsible for supporting the educational needs of students in foster care to learn more about successful practices and areas for improvement.
 - **KY** conducted seven focus groups. Two were conducted with public school personnel,

including school counselors, Youth Service Center coordinators, and directors of pupil personnel. The remaining focus groups were conducted with each of the following groups: child welfare caseworkers, middle school youth in foster care, birth parents, foster parents, and family court judges and attorneys. The findings from these focus groups indicated the need for changes to policies and practices regarding how students in foster care with educational challenges are identified and served; the need for education and training on Federal, State, and local education policies and practices for professionals; and the need for a coordinated approach across systems to address the educational needs of youth in foster care.

- **NY** administered information-gathering and testing surveys to foster care provider agency staff to assess staff's exposure to using data and their knowledge of data tools and databases. Most of the respondents lacked advanced data-processing knowledge, requested additional data than what was provided in monthly data reports, and agreed that the data were critical and served as a learning tool in support of better educational support services. Grant staff then conducted onsite visits to ensure that foster care provider staff obtained relevant education data and understood how best to use them.
- **OH** conducted focus groups with youth in foster care about their educational experiences while in care. The majority of youth reported having negative experiences related to education, including issues with homework and academics, changing schools, dress code compliance, and emotional health. Some youth reported they had more academic support and access to school supplies while in care. They offered suggestions for how the various systems could be improved to be more supportive to youth in foster care, including teachers and professionals increasing their understanding, empathy, and caring about youth in care. The project developed and administered a youth survey that asked about the impact of foster care placement on youths' educational experiences, experiences with remaining

in one school versus changing schools, satisfaction with transportation plans, unmet academic needs, and their voice in decision-making and planning for their own education. Additionally, the project administered pretraining and posttraining surveys to training participants to measure if respondents increased their knowledge related to the impact of trauma on youth. It also administered surveys to the Strategic Planning Committee to measure baseline and follow-up perceptions of their collaboration during the grant period.

- **OR** studied the level of collaboration among agencies by using the Collaborative Assessment Survey, which contains 23 items examining the purpose of collaboration, process, implementation, and sustainability.
- **VT** conducted qualitative interviews with youth in foster care who completed the Youth Education Survey but wanted to share more indepth stories about their educational successes and challenges. The project interviewed several young adults for the film "No Decision About Me, Without Me: School Stories of Youth in Custody."

Overarching Themes

This section describes challenges, successful strategies, and lessons learned that grantees frequently mentioned in their reports.

Challenges

Grantees identified multiple challenges in their efforts to achieve collaboration between child welfare and education systems:

- **Information and data sharing.** Due to the child welfare and education systems having differing interpretations of laws regarding information sharing, there were barriers to exchanging information without the informed consent of the parent. In addition, some projects had difficulty establishing data-sharing agreements. Projects worked to overcome these issues through relationship building, training, information-sharing protocols and MOUs, and obtaining parental consent through release forms. In addition, the passage

of the Uninterrupted Scholars Act helped alleviate barriers to sharing educational records with child welfare agencies.

- **Maintaining key staff members.** In some projects, staff or advisory members left their agencies during the grant period. Projects then struggled with replacing them, which resulted in some key activities not being completed.
- **Length of the grant period.** Some grantees reported that planning and implementing the project within the 24-month grant period was challenging.
- **Tasks delayed by external processes.** Some project tasks were delayed for a variety of reasons, including needing to obtain the approval of governing bodies, agency leadership not signing information-sharing agreements in a timely manner, and case referrals to the project not occurring as expeditiously as expected.

Successful Strategies

The following strategies were identified by projects as influential in enhancing the collaborative process:

- **Communication and interaction across programs and agencies.** The partners met and/or communicated on a regular basis to discuss the progress in meeting the objectives of the grant projects and to modify the projects if needed. In addition, the agencies met to discuss policies and procedures, which was beneficial in addressing the barriers to service provision. Partners took the time to learn about and understand the roles and responsibilities of each program and agency involved.
- **Supportive leadership.** Having people on the leadership or advisory teams who could make decisions on behalf of their agencies or organizations or had access to the decision-makers was key to the success of the projects. Leaders who understood the need for specialized, directed educational services and educational stability for youth in foster care also were beneficial. In addition, the cross-discipline leadership team allowed members to learn from one another's areas of expertise.

- **Ongoing education and training.** The projects provided numerous trainings and technical assistance options for educators, child welfare staff, and court personnel on the importance of meeting the educational needs of youth in foster care and on maintaining their school and placement stability. In addition, some projects provided training to educators on trauma, including how it may manifest itself in a classroom setting. Trainings also were provided on information sharing and the use of data in making educational decisions for youth in foster care.
- **Data and information sharing.** The Uninterrupted Scholars Act allows an exception to FERPA confidentiality guidelines, which subsequently made data sharing between schools and child welfare agencies less of a barrier. The projects also reported that educational stability improved for youth in foster care as systems improved their communication because the information about students was readily available to those working closely with them.

Lessons Learned

The following describes the lessons learned by the projects as they implemented interagency practices and strategies (e.g., MOUs, committees) to improve educational outcomes:

- **Collaboration, communication, and relationship building.** To maintain collaboration between key stakeholders from the education, child welfare, and other closely related systems, it is necessary to implement consistent communication practices to keep them engaged. Regular contact between leadership teams and frontline staff with their counterparts via meetings or trainings is vital to the establishment and maintenance of relationships.
- **Create project guidelines, policies, and procedures.** Jointly creating project guidelines, policies, and procedures with partners and key stakeholders helps ensure that everyone is working toward common goals using consistent methods. Once the guidelines, policies, and procedures are developed and approved, it is necessary to train staff, supervisors, and other individuals they will affect.

- **Create best-interest determination procedures.** To ensure educational stability, it is necessary to have a standardized procedure for best-interest determination when assessing whether it is in a child's best interest to remain in his or her school of origin when a change in placement results in a change in school districts. When making this determination, agencies should consider several factors, including parent and student preference, commute length, safety, capacity to meet special needs, and social well-being, as well as the child's test scores, GPA, and attendance record. This information should be included in the youth's case file.
- **Transportation costs.** While Federal and State laws allow children in foster care to remain in the school district of a previous placement for the purposes of school continuity, these laws often do not provide funding to transport youth in foster care to a school outside of the school district the youth currently lives in. Often times, the financial burden for providing transportation is placed on the child welfare agency. The projects found that school stability is likely more successful if other entities assist in the coordination and financial cost of transportation.

Evaluation

The FOA required each grantee to engage in an evaluation. Where data were available and appropriate, grantees were encouraged to measure outcomes of pregrant and postgrant activities. Each project worked with an evaluator to construct a logic model, develop a design for the evaluation, and collect and analyze data. The evaluation reports—and final project reports—are available in the [Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants Library](#).

Evaluation Challenges

These projects experienced various evaluation challenges. Several projects reported they intended to collect certain types of data, including baseline data and child-specific data, but while conducting the evaluation, they determined some of these data were not available. In addition, difficulties in obtaining information from stakeholders and partners prevented projects from

performing certain components of the evaluation. In some cases, this resulted in a nonmeaningful sample size. A few projects noted that the 24-month grant period and key staff turnover inhibited the grants from assessing project outcomes adequately and thoroughly.

Evaluation Findings

Programs reported some promising findings and interventions for enhancing child welfare and education coordination and collaboration. Although it is difficult to summarize results across projects due to differences in activities, evaluation processes, and levels of participation among key agencies, some commonalities did emerge. Caution should be used, however, when making generalizations or drawing additional conclusions from these findings.

Overall, the project evaluations suggest there were improvements in communication and collaboration among child welfare, education, and other partners involved in the projects. Some evaluations noted that, at the end of the projects, child welfare and school system personnel had more knowledge and understanding about cross-system policies, operations, and challenges. In addition, projects showed improvement in the coordination of services to improve stability in education and educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care. A few projects identified early results that indicated a reduction in school changes that appeared to be directly related to new policies and procedures established by the projects.

The results of pretests and posttests and surveys indicated that most training attendees increased their levels of knowledge about the training topics, including about the unique needs of children and youth in foster care, meeting youths' educational needs, education advocacy, and promoting educational success. Most training participants reported they were satisfied with the training they received.

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