



Information on the Purpose and Use of Ready to Succeed Project Findings

What is the project about?

The child welfare population in California is the largest in the nation. As of January 1, 2007 there were 75,759 children in care with more than 45% residing in foster care for two years or more. For the over 44,000 children who exit every year, 59% are reunified, 16% are adopted, 8% reside with legal guardians, and approximately 9% emancipate or age out of the foster care system (Needell, et. al., 2008). Prior research into secondary and post-secondary education and training outcomes for foster youth has primarily focused on youths who age out of the child welfare system. As a result, there is a considerable gap in knowledge as to how the majority of children served by the child welfare system fare in educational institutions. What is known is that foster children struggle in primary and secondary educational settings and are twice as likely to leave high school before completion (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Aviles, Anderson, & Davila, 2006; Leiter & Johnson, 1994; Smithgall, Gladden, Howard, Goerge, & Courtney, 2004). As less than 9% of jobs in the workforce are available to high school dropouts (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003), the opportunity for foster youth without a high school degree to become self-sufficient is limited.

- This study will fill the gap in knowledge about educational outcomes for all foster youth, not just those who age out of the system.
- The study will link educational data and social service data for all youth served in foster care.
- We will look at educational outcomes compared to how youth leave the system, and by the services they receive.
- The findings will inform policy makers, educators, and practitioners throughout the state to better care for and educate this vulnerable population.

Two research questions will guide this study and the reporting process:

Question 1: What are the secondary and post-secondary education and/or training outcomes for foster youth in California?

Question 2: What factors facilitate or impede successful completion of secondary and post-secondary education and/or training for foster youth?

Project Partners

The **California Partnership for Achieving Student Success (Cal-PASS)** is the only informational resource that creates regional partnerships among K-12 schools, community colleges, and universities through the sharing of student transcripts and performance information. Using the Cal-PASS system, educators develop continuity and align curricula to make instructional improvements that better prepare students as they move from kindergarten to the university. Since being initiated by the Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District in 1998, over 7,000 educational institutions across California have joined Cal-PASS. The Cal-PASS database currently holds almost 300 million records.

The **Center for Social Services Research (CSSR)**, established in 1994, conducts research, policy analysis and program planning, and evaluation directed toward improving the public social services. Housed in the School of Social Welfare at the University of California at Berkeley, the Center responds to the concerns of community. Collaborating with public social service officials, elected policy-makers, community professionals, and consumers of service, it engages in research activities that are directly and immediately practice- and policy-relevant. CSSR uses Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) data under an agreement with the California Department of Social Services.

The **California Department of Social Services (CDSS)** strives to carry out its mission of providing aid, services and protection to needy children and adults. At the same time, the Department strives to strengthen and encourage individual responsibility and independence for families. By managing and funding its programs, the objectives of the Department are carried out through the 4,200 employees located in 51 offices throughout the state, the 58 county welfare departments, offices and a host of community-based organizations. CDSS controls the CWS/CMS data used in this research and will facilitate the data transfer between Cal-PASS and CSSR.

Benefits to Districts

- In this study, we will identify educational attainment of foster youth and the strengths and challenges of this attainment. This information can change policy and the delivery of services for the foster care population as a whole.
- Improving foster youth access to post-secondary institutions will increase long term economic self-sufficiency of this population.
- When foster youth have the necessary skills and education to be self-supportive, benefits to society include decreased reliance on public services including medical and unemployment insurance, and the criminal justice and welfare systems.

Data Security

- Cal-PASS will encrypt and strip data of all student identifiers before the data are shared with CDSS and CSSR.

- The study team will only report findings at the county level.
- This process complies with the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- An Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the study design and granted approval.

What data will we use?

- Due to the longitudinal nature of the database, the team will follow outcomes for cohorts over time to enhance understanding of educational pathways and the influence of policy and practice change.
- We will obtain the secondary and post-secondary outcomes from Cal-PASS data, including certificate or degree type earned, institution type and number of units attempted and completed. To explore factors which may affect outcomes, other educational variables of interest include secondary level grades, advanced placement courses, special education status, and CST and CAHSEE test scores.
- Relevant child welfare variables include age at entry, length of stay in foster care, number of placements, last placement type, exit type, and age at exit. Demographic variables such as gender and race will be included in addition to family variables if available (i.e. siblings in care, parent educational level, etc.).

Reporting

- Cal-PASS will produce report findings for all member districts that participated in the project.
- Cal-PASS also will provide electronic access to the report on its public website, and disseminate report findings at conferences and to stakeholder groups, such as the Child Welfare Co-Investment Board and California Foster Youth Education Task Force, to provide the field and all stakeholders with findings to inform policy and practice.

Please contact Lauren Davis Sosenko, lsosenko@calpass.org or 562-743-9304 if you have additional questions.

Citations

- Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., & Kabbani, N. (2001). The dropout process in life course perspective: Early risk factors at home and school. *Teachers College Record*, 103(5), 760-822.
- Aviles, A., Anderson, T., & Davila, E. (2006). Child and adolescent social-emotional development within the context of school. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 11(1), 32-39.
- Leiter, J., & Johnson, M. (1994). Child maltreatment and school performance. *American Journal of Education*, 102(2), 154-189.

Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Winn, A., Lou, C., & Peng, C. (2008). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved [June 15, 2008], from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

Smithgall, C., Gladden, R., Howard, E., Goerge, R., & Courtney, M. (2004). Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.