



PROGRESS REPORT **OVERVIEW**

Igniting the power and potential of students from foster care

Building on a decade of work at the intersection of child welfare and education, the Stuart Foundation launched the Education Equals Partnership in 2012. The Partnership is dedicated to improving educational experiences and outcomes for students from foster care, starting with preschool and extending through college.

The goal of Education Equals is to ensure that all students from foster care achieve in school at levels equal to or better than their peers and graduate with a wide range of possibilities for their future. The Partnership is a collective impact effort which recognizes that education and child welfare systems must embrace a common agenda and work together in order to achieve this vision. Four California counties—Fresno, Orange, Sacramento, and Santa Cruz—are demonstration sites.

Education Equals has been influenced by a number of factors, particularly reforms in how California funds its schools, requirements related to the identification of foster youth, and the release of several important reports on the academic performance of foster children.

To view the full report, visit educationequals.org



Core Elements of the Partnership

Education Equals' Theory of Change is based on five core elements that are integral to improving the educational outcomes for students from foster care.

- Engaged and informed group of adults support youth
- Inspiring and customized education plans
- Robust community of practice
- Youth-centered systems
- Dynamic use of real-time data

The Theory of Change



ACADEMIC SUPPORTS



+

SOCIAL SUPPORTS



+

EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS



=



SUCCESS

2013–14 Partnership Highlights

- **Established a backbone support team.** A team of state policy experts, researchers, a technology vendor, communications experts, youth representatives, and Stuart Foundation leaders serve as strategic advisors to support implementation and share lessons learned to inform policy in California and beyond.
- **Strengthened youth engagement.** A team of 12 youth ambassadors was created to inform development of the approach and to integrate youth perspective into communications and implementation.
- **Invested in data linking.** Foster Focus, the database developed and maintained by the Sacramento County Office of Education, combines data from the state's child welfare database—Child Welfare Services Case Management System—with education data from participating districts. Establishing these linkages required commitment and time investment from the districts, county partners, and the technology vendor.
- **Community of practice.** Through Community of Practice activities, the Partnership is able to identify best practices, seek assistance with challenges, and create new solutions. This ongoing engagement serves as a valuable structure to build trust and camaraderie among implementers.
- **Education screen and plan.** Counties piloted two new tools—the education screen and the education plan—to support youth as they enter the foster care system and to equip professionals and supportive adults with deeper information from which to best support each student. The education screen helps staff gather information about each student's academic, social and emotional strengths, and growth areas. The education plan incorporates gathered information and organizes action items to ensure students receive appropriate support.

Early Outcomes

- **Increased preschool enrollment.**

Preschool enrollment in Fresno, Orange and Sacramento increased substantially as a result of a dedicated focus of practitioners in each of these counties (Figure 1).

- **Improved results for K–12 students.**

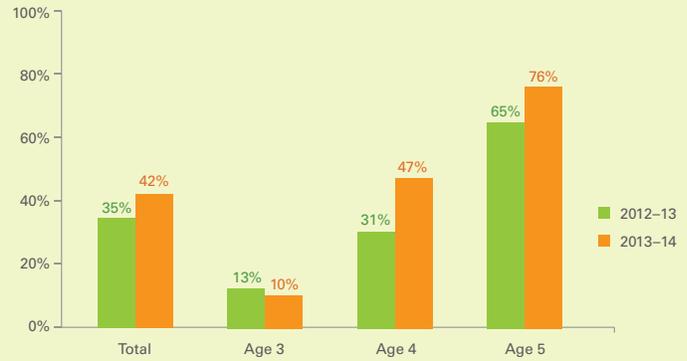
Three-quarters of students in Santa Cruz County who had attendance issues improved their attendance rate after being supported by an education plan and education team (Figure 2).

- **Strengthened relationships.** All counties reported stronger collaboration among different departments in supporting the education of foster youth.

- **Increased focus on foster youth education.**

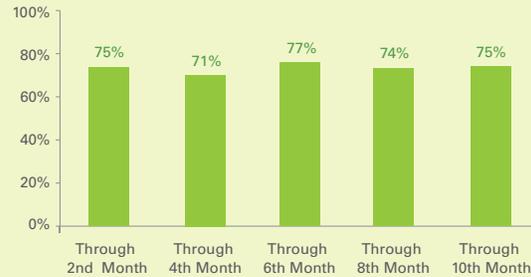
The education of foster youth has come into sharper focus in each county since the launch of Education Equals.

Figure 1: Preschool Enrollment Among Foster Youth Ages 3–5



Data Note: Data are combined for Fresno, Orange, and Sacramento Counties. Children who were in foster care in May in the year shown were included in the analysis (558 children in 2012-13 and 711 children in 2013-14). Five-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten were included in the enrollment counts.

Figure 2: Percentage Who Increased Their Attendance, Among Those Who Joined FosterEd With Less Than a 95% Rate



Data Note: Data are for K-12 foster youth from Santa Cruz County who participated in FosterEd, a program which supports students with customized education plans and education teams. Included in the analyses are the 75 foster youth who joined the program with less than a 95% attendance rate, who participated for at least two months, and who had attendance data available prior to and after joining FosterEd. Various lengths of time are shown. For example, “Through 4th month” reports that, among youth who entered FosterEd with less than a 95% attendance rate, 71% increased their attendance over that four-month period.

County Highlights

	IMPLEMENTATION HIGHLIGHT	DATA HIGHLIGHT
FRESNO COUNTY	Expanded multidisciplinary Child Focus Teams to support all youth 0–18 years old.	Preschool and kindergarten enrollment increased substantially for 5-year-olds.
ORANGE COUNTY	Completed and disseminated Educational Progress Reports, which communicates critical student information, for 1,296 foster youth.	Preschool enrollment increased substantially for foster youth ages 4 and 5.
SACRAMENTO COUNTY	For the first time, developed systematic practices to better support the educational needs of foster children ages 3 through 5.	Preschool enrollment increased substantially for foster youth ages 4 and 5.
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY	Increased use of technology to link the adults who are supporting foster youth.	Received positive feedback from adults serving on education teams and professionals seeking to collaborate. K-12 foster youth improved their attendance rates and high school foster youth improved their grade point averages.

Lessons Learned Across the Partnership

Education Equals has yielded a number of lessons learned, including:

- 1** *Practices must be customized for each county.* Early in the process, the partners discovered the need for greater flexibility to allow each county to tailor proposed new practices to best fit its region's unique assets and conditions. The Partnership learned that a one-size-fits-all approach does not translate easily into system-level impact.
- 2** *Collaboration requires resources, including investment of staff time.* In each of the demonstration counties, effective cross-agency collaborations were built. These collaborations required a significant investment of staff time, as well as, in some cases, dedicated shared office space to enable real-time collaboration.
- 3** *Early involvement and buy-in from front-line practitioners is key.* During the process to develop Education Equals' tools, it became clear that the Education Liaisons, the front-line practitioners who would be implementing the tools, had important insights to share and should have been involved in earlier stages of their development.
- 4** *Assigning an Education Liaison specifically for the preschool population yields results.* Having a dedicated staff person to attend to the education needs of these young children provided focus and allowed for the development of an expertise to best meet the needs of preschool-aged children.
- 5** *Linking child welfare and education data, while challenging, is critical to supporting foster youth.* Similar to most large projects, data sharing and data uniformity is a challenge. Linking districts with Foster Focus, the data system used by the Partnership to combine child welfare and education data, is progressing more slowly than initially expected, but the regular use of data is continuously emphasized.

A Look Ahead

Education Equals plans to undertake a variety of important steps over the next two years, including:

- 1** *Dynamic youth partnerships.* Create and deepen effective collaboration practices and strategies to infuse the lived experience, insights, and individual talents of young leaders throughout the Education Equals Partnership.
- 2** *Integrated common agenda and county-led tailoring of practice.* Counties will continue to translate Education Equals' vision and common agenda into tailored implementation practices that integrate with and enhance existing county efforts.
- 3** *Deepening engagement with school districts.* The relationships between county leads and school districts will deepen as they develop concrete collaborations to support their foster youth and the implementation of their Local Control Accountability Plans.
- 4** *Enhanced portfolio tools.* Expand and enhance tools, such as electronic alerts and reporting mechanisms, to provide real-time data to practitioners to proactively support youth and improve their educational experiences.
- 5** *Expanded community of practice.* Focus on growing and enriching the Community of Practice by expanding beyond the four demonstration counties and targeting a wider set of stakeholders. The Community of Practice will also provide more tools and resources on EqualFutures.org, a website designed to support other school districts, county offices of education, community-based organizations, and other agencies committed to improving educational outcomes for students from foster care.
- 6** *Cohesive and reinforcing policy-to-practice cycle.* The Partnership will bolster its efforts to surface effective practices at the policy level and translate policies into effective practices at the local level.