Bridging the Achievement Gap

An Analysis of the Implementation of the
Los Angeles Unified School District’s
Foster Youth Achievement Program

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# Table of Contents

**Executive Summary** .................................................................................................................. 5
**Introduction** ............................................................................................................................ 7

1. **The Problem:** What stands in the way of improving foster youth educational outcomes? .......................................................... 8

2. **What is the Foster Youth Achievement Program? What are some of its critical features?** .......................................................... 10

3. **What shortcomings have characterized the FYAP’s implementation to date?** .......................................................... 12

4. **How can the FYAP do a better job of meeting its challenges in the future?** .......................................................... 17

5. **Conclusion** ............................................................................................................................ 28

**Appendices**

- **Appendix A:** Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 30
- **Appendix B:** Who are LAUSD’s Foster Youth? ........................................................................ 34
- **Appendix C:** Legislative and District Policy Background .................................................... 36
- **Appendix D:** Methodology ..................................................................................................... 38
- **Appendix E:** The Child Welfare System .................................................................................. 39
- **Appendix F:** FYAP Counselor Survey .................................................................................... 42
- **Appendix G:** FYAP Counselor Interview ................................................................................. 43
- **Appendix G:** FYAP Counselor Interview (Continued) ............................................................ 45
- **Appendix H:** FYAP Organizational Chart .................................................................................. 46
- **Appendix I:** Comprehensive Academic Assessment (CAA) ................................................ 49
- **Appendix J:** FYAP Budget for AY 2014-2015 ........................................................................ 50
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Executive Summary

At current rates, more than 60% of the Los Angeles Unified School District’s (LAUSD) approximately 8,000 foster youth will fail to graduate from high school on time and only about 3% will ever graduate from college.

Until recently, school administrators have done a poor job of identifying foster youth and addressing their unique needs. In an effort to address this failure, the LAUSD launched the Foster Youth Achievement Program (FYAP) in August 2014 by hiring 65 in-school counselors with dedicated funding from the State. The challenge for the Foster Youth Achievement Program is how best to improve outcomes for the District’s foster youth.

We identify three key problems:

1. Foster youth desperately need school-based academic advocates who will ensure that they are enrolled in the right classes and making sufficient academic progress toward graduation. The counselors LAUSD has hired are formally trained as social workers. Though FYAP counselors may be well-equipped to address students’ socioemotional problems, their background in social work does not prepare them to serve as academic counselors or advocates. FYAP counselors also face overwhelming caseloads and often lack adequate work space and supplies.

2. Inefficient collaboration between FYAP personnel and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), caregivers, community partners, and/or other districts exacerbates school instability rates, impedes timely disenrollment and re-enrollment, and delays the transfer and updating of student records.

3. The FYAP’s current data management system is disjointed, very time-consuming to maintain, and does not reliably provide accurate or complete information on foster youth.

Based on the input of students, in-school counselors, FYAP program administrators, DCFS social workers, and other primary stakeholders, we propose a set of recommendations to restructure counselor professional development, improve collaboration between FYAP administrators and community partners, and streamline FYAP data management.

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1 Because the FYAP is located within the District’s Division of Student Health and Human Services, the program adheres to the DSHHS hiring policies which include hiring counselors with a master’s degree in social work, counseling, or other relevant field.
Problem 1: FYAP counselors are ill-equipped and inadequately trained to serve as academic advisors.

We recommend that:

❖ School-based counselors have access to adequate resources and supplies: phones, business cards, workspace at the schools they serve, copier codes, internet access, etc.
❖ Counselor training must be oriented toward the FYAP’s academic goals: counselors should be fluent with the LAUSD’s A-G graduation requirements and know how to ensure that the students in their caseload are enrolled in the appropriate classes that they need to graduate on time.

Problem 2: Collaboration between FYAP administrators and other community partners is inadequate and inefficient.

We recommend that:

❖ The FYAP program director/assistant director establish an “Interagency/Interdepartmental Collaboration” workgroup specifically charged with initiating or improving interagency cooperation between the FYAP, DCFS, Juvenile Probation, the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), and other relevant agencies. This workgroup should include senior delegates from each of the aforementioned agencies.

Problem 3: The FYAP’s current data management system is inefficient and disjointed.

We recommend that:

❖ Student assessment data be centrally stored in a database that is accessible to all FYAP counselors, as well as DCFS case workers and juvenile court 52 judges (with necessary restrictions).
❖ Data entry for foster student assessment forms be automated by integrating them with existing LAUSD databases to minimize the time FYAP counselors spend filling out paperwork.
❖ The FYAP initiate a data-sharing agreement with the Los Angeles County Office of Education to improve the transfer of student records between LAUSD and other LA County school districts.
❖ The FYAP track additional foster student educational and process measures, such as frequency and timing of transfers, patterns of school mobility, lag times for transfer of student records, uptake rates of supplemental services, etc.
Introduction

The Los Angeles Unified School District currently serves more than 45% of the roughly 17,000 school-age foster youth who live in Los Angeles County.\(^2\)

Foster youth are characterized by high mobility rates that cripple their academic progress. For example, foster youth are about five times more likely to switch schools in the middle of the academic year than other students.\(^3\) About 26% of LAUSD foster students are chronically absent, meaning they miss more than 20 days of school per academic semester.\(^4\) Their performance on standardized tests is dire: 75% of LAUSD foster youth score basic or below in the English statewide standardized test and 70% scored basic or below in the Math statewide standardized test (compared to 60% overall who scored basic or below in English, and 50% who scored basic or below in Math).\(^5\) Overall, foster youth are twice as likely to drop out of high school as non-foster youth. These distressing educational statistics presage even grimmer outcomes in young adulthood, including massively elevated risks of homelessness and incarceration relative to their peers.\(^6\)

Recent changes in California school finance have significantly expanded K-12 funding for foster youth.\(^7\) In 2014, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) used this additional funding to launch the Foster Youth Achievement Program (FYAP).

This report examines the first year of FYAP's implementation and addresses two overarching questions: What shortcomings have characterized the FYAP’s implementation to date? And how can the FYAP do a better job of meeting its challenges in the future?\(^8\)

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\(^6\) A recent study sponsored by the Hilton Foundation (2011) on transition-age youth in Los Angeles found that: "65% of foster youth leave foster care without a place to live; only 3% of former foster youth graduate from college; 25% of former foster youth are incarcerated by age 20; and more than 50% of former foster youth do not have any earnings during the four years after leaving foster care. Those that do average an income of about $7,500 per year."

\(^7\) As part of its 2013-2014 budget package, the California State Department of Education introduced new K-12 funding guidelines known as the Local Control Funding Formula. The LCFF established supplementary grants to school districts targeted for disadvantaged students they serve, including foster youth. The LCFF also requires school districts to develop and adopt a three-year Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) to establish benchmarks and measure performance across multiple areas for different student subgroups.

\(^8\) Please see Appendix D for information on our methodology.
1. The Problem: What stands in the way of improving foster youth educational outcomes?

Based on our interviews and a review of relevant literature, we identify three key obstacles.9

**Foster youth need dedicated academic advocates.** Socioemotional problems coupled with high mobility rates mean that foster youth often lack stable relationships with adults at home and in school who are sensitive to their needs and will support their academic progress. High mobility contributes to numerous problems, particularly around school instability. For example, foster students, their caregivers, and their educational rights holders are often not aware that foster students have the right to remain in their school of origin10 after a placement change. This frequently leads to foster youth switching schools unnecessarily, at great detriment to their academic progress. Even when a school change is unavoidable (as in the case of a distant placement change) foster youth are often not promptly re-enrolled in their new school after the move. This causes them to miss school days, which compounds the already disruptive effect of the school change.11 Moreover, foster youth are sometimes enrolled in new schools without being disenrolled on a timely basis from their prior schools. And even when they are re-enrolled in new schools promptly, they are often placed in inappropriate classes: classes that they have already taken at another school, or classes that do not place them on track to graduate on time. These factors are especially detrimental to older foster students, who end up with low GPAs and insufficient credits, further diminishing their already low odds of graduating from high school and going to college.

**Child welfare agencies and school districts do not collaborate effectively.** Historically, these two bureaucracies have operated in silos. In order to protect children’s privacy and

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10 School of origin refers to the school the foster youth attended when he or she was removed from his or her parents, the school he or she most recently attended, or any school he or she attended in the past 15 months where he or she had significant ties.

11 Oftentimes, children in foster care are not immediately enrolled due to misinterpretation of state law and district policy by school administrators and/or caregivers (AB 490 grants a right to immediate enrollment for foster youth who are missing educational records).
avoid legal liability, school districts and county child welfare agencies often operate under restrictive interpretations of confidentiality statutes that govern what information can be exchanged without parental (or caregiver) consent.

Limited information sharing contributes to various problems. For example, schools could potentially intervene to minimize disruption to a foster student’s academic progress if they knew when a placement change was imminent, by ensuring that students, their caregivers, and educational rights holders are notified of the student’s right to stay at his/her school of origin.\(^\text{12}\) If the student’s educational rights holder were to determine that a school change would nonetheless be necessary or desirable, the school could then act to ensure that the student received appropriate check out marks and partial credits in advance of the move, and proactively forward the student’s records to the new school to facilitate re-enrollment. Unfortunately, however, schools almost never know when a foster student’s placement change is imminent, and often only learn of the placement change well after a student has stopped attending their old school. This makes it much more difficult for schools to compile the checkout grades and partial credits that foster students are legally entitled to, and leads to delays in transferring students’ educational histories to their new schools.

**Educational outcomes and mobility patterns of foster youth have not been closely monitored.** Most school districts, including LAUSD, have only recently begun identifying and tracking the foster youth they serve. Child welfare agencies, on the other hand, do not typically collect data on educational outcomes. Building and maintaining a well-functioning information management system that incorporates various distinct LAUSD databases, as well as DCFS data, is a daunting task. But such a system will be crucial to the FYAP’s success.

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\(^{12}\) Many placement changes happen because of behavioral problems at school - a child will act out and disrupt class too often, which results in frequent phone calls to caregivers, which leads to caregiver’s being frustrated with the situation and opting out of caring for the child altogether.
2. What is the Foster Youth Achievement Program?  
What are some of its critical features?

The Foster Youth Achievement Program, housed within the District’s Division of Student Health and Human Services, employs approximately 81 full-time staff, which includes program administrators, lead counselors, and in-school counselors. The program’s mission is to ensure that all foster youth from LAUSD (pre-kindergarten to 12th grade) have access to comprehensive services and opportunities that promote educational achievement. To fulfill its mission, the FYAP is guided by the goals outlined in the District’s Local Control and Accountability Plan: 1) increase foster youth educational achievement; 2) increase foster youth school engagement; 3) improve school climate; and 4) increase caregiver engagement. In order to identify foster youth, the program relies primarily on a data sharing agreement between the District and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services. Foster youth are also sometimes (but not always) identified when they enroll at a new school, if their caregiver or DCFS social worker notifies the school of the student’s foster status.

The 65 in-school counselors (all of whom are required to hold a master’s degree in social work, counseling, or other related field) are tasked with providing ongoing case management and advocating for the educational rights of foster youth. Typically, FYAP counselors are assigned a caseload of approximately 100 students, and alternate their days between several different schools. Upon receipt of the list of students assigned to their caseload, counselors are responsible for assessing the needs of each foster youth in their caseload and referring them to interventions and community resources, such as tutoring programs. Counselors accomplish this by filling out Comprehensive Academic Assessments (CAAs) and other supplemental forms; documenting progress notes (i.e., contact with social workers and individual meetings with foster youth); filling out an Individual Success Plan which outlines student’s short- and long-term goals; and providing a summary of services on a monthly basis for each student in their caseload.

The FYAP has created various working groups comprising program administrators, lead counselors, and foster youth advocacy organizations that work together to improve program operations. These include the: Youth Engagement Workgroup, the Caregiver Engagement Workgroup, the Data and Accountability Workgroup, the Policy and

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13 Please see Appendix H for organizational chart.
14 Due to high transiency rates experienced by foster youth and children entering or exiting foster care, the number of students assigned to a counselor’s caseload is constantly changing.
15 Student administrative/educational data is contained in the LAUSD central data systems - My integrated student information system (MiSiS) and MyData.
Legislation Workgroup, and the Professional Development Workgroup. In addition, the program holds monthly collaborative meetings in which representatives from DCFS, other divisions within LAUSD (e.g., Division of Early Childhood Education), community partners, and other interested parties are invited to attend. Both the workgroups and the collaborative meetings provide a platform to address and improve the program’s shortcomings.
3. What shortcomings have characterized the FYAP’s implementation to date?

LAUSD’s Foster Youth Achievement Program arose out of the need to alleviate barriers that stand between foster youth and academic success. Our analysis finds that the FYAP is beginning to make significant strides. The counselors we interviewed expressed a nearly unanimous sense that they were already making a significant positive impact on students’ lives. In addition, the FYAP has shown itself to be very open to collaboration with the Department of Children and Family Services and other stakeholders, and has taken steps to solicit feedback from current foster students.

However, there remains considerable room for improvement, particularly in three areas: counselor professional development and support, interagency collaboration, and data management.

In the sections that follow, we review the problems the FYAP faces under each of these three areas.

1. Counselors are overloaded, not supported with adequate professional development, and ill-equipped to deal with the pressures of their job.

1.1. Excessive caseloads interfere with one of the most crucial aspects of an FYAP counselor’s job, which is to establish rapport with foster youth, school administrators, caregivers, social workers, and other partners. On average, FYAP counselors manage a caseload of about 100 students. Student-counselor ratios fluctuate considerably, with some counselors juggling as many as 150 or more students at the same time. Very few, if any, FYAP counselors have a caseload of fewer than 90 students. But most of the counselors we interviewed, keeping realistic budget constraints in mind, seemed to agree that their effectiveness would be optimized with caseloads in the range of 50-75 students. Counselors also noted how difficult it was to balance their time between multiple schools. They reported not being able to visit schools often enough to provide optimal levels of service to their clients.

1.2. Not having an official phone number impedes counselor effectiveness. Each FYAP counselor is assigned to multiple schools. Because they are not at the same school every day, many counselors mentioned that not having an official phone number makes communication with foster youth, DCFS caseworkers (DCFS CSWs), and caregivers more difficult. Additionally, counselors noted that not having access to a direct phone line impeded prompt completion of CAAs and supplemental forms. A few counselors we spoke

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16 PSA-FYAP Counselors, telephone interviews with authors, February 9-March 14, 2015 and FYAP Counselors Online Survey, February 6-March 14, 2015.
17 Please see Appendix I to see the Comprehensive Academic Assessment.
with, however, have been distributing their personal cell phone numbers or using Google Voice to communicate with foster youth and other important contacts.

1.3. Counselors do not have enough supplies or adequate work space. Although their job requires them to be fairly mobile and move from school to school, the schools that FYAP counselors serve frequently do not (or cannot) provide them with designated work spaces. Counselors mentioned that they often lack access to printers, copiers, fax machines, mailboxes, and other basic office necessities. Even though counselors are issued laptop computers, they sometimes cannot access wireless internet at the schools where they are assigned. Many counselors also said that being issued official LAUSD business cards would make their jobs easier.

1.4. Professional development sessions are not sufficiently interactive and are not often pertinent to a counselor’s assigned grade level. All counselors are required to go to monthly professional development training sessions. These usually last for about half a day. Some counselors mentioned that the training sessions do not encourage two-way conversations between them and the presenters. In addition, counselors mentioned being required to go to numerous professional development meetings that are not directly relevant to their grade level.

1.5. Counselors are not always sufficiently focused on ensuring academic progress. DCFS administrators expressed concern that FYAP counselors may be unnecessarily (if not counterproductively) duplicating behavioral or mental health services that DCFS already provides. They emphasized the need to focus attention on academic counseling and tutoring, particularly for students who are already receiving so-called “Wraparound” services.

In addition, foster youth advocates from the Advancement Project and the Alliance for Children’s Rights suggested FYAP counselors of middle and high school students should ideally have the authority of academic counselors (i.e., the power to enroll or disenroll), or at least should be able to move foster students to the “front of the line” when referred to academic counselors.

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18 According to the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, Wraparound is a child-focused, family-oriented planning process that provides access to an array of comprehensive mental health services. Among the goals of wraparound services are to assist foster youth in returning home and successfully remaining home; preventing future placement instability; reduction of behavior problems and mental illness symptoms; as well as overall improvement of family functioning and preventing psychiatric hospitalization.
2. Inefficient collaboration with other agencies, school staff, advocacy groups and caregivers exacerbates school instability rates, impedes timely disenrollment and re-enrollment, and delays the transfer and updating of student records.

2.1. FYAP counselors find it difficult to maintain open channels of communication with all of the adults in foster youths’ lives. Inter-agency collaboration is an integral part of an FYAP counselor’s job. Accurately assessing a child’s needs and problems requires reaching out to DCFS caseworkers, teachers, school administrators, and caregivers. However, many counselors voiced frustration with the difficulties they faced in contacting and communicating with all of the adults in their students’ lives.

In particular, counselors frequently noted how difficult it was to reach DCFS caseworkers. We heard several reports of DCFS CSWs not returning phone calls and emails in a timely manner, if ever. While some counselors noted that information sharing tended to smooth out once initial contact had been established, others said they found themselves grappling with a pervasive reluctance on the DCFS side to share information. This reluctance was likely caused by lingering liability concerns on the part of DCFS CSWs regarding confidentiality and caseworkers’ unfamiliarity with the FYAP program itself.

Counselors also reported difficulty building relationships with caregivers and school personnel. Many school personnel are reluctant to provide information, access to workspace, or even students themselves. This is primarily because many principals, teachers, and families remain unaware of the program. Thus, counselors find themselves repeating details of the program again and again to various stakeholders in their efforts to build trust and rapport.

2.2. Very low turnout at caregiver engagement workshops leads to inefficient use of resources and missed opportunities. Caregivers play a critical role in foster children’s lives on a day-to-day basis, and the Foster Youth Achievement Program cannot be successful without their cooperation and support. Because studies have shown a correlation between parent involvement and student achievement, providing services to engage caregivers is a crucial task for the FYAP. DCFS officials we interviewed also cited friction between school administrators and caregivers regarding behavior issues as a frequent driver of placement changes. Positive relationships between caregivers and schools can not only improve day-to-day student attendance and achievement, they can also help reduce rates of school instability for foster youth.

The FYAP has scheduled caregiver engagement workshops in October, November, February and May.\textsuperscript{19} As currently structured, each workshop deals with a different theme (e.g., how to recognize and respond to signs of trauma). We observed very low turnout at all five caregiver workshops we attended in February, whether the workshops were scheduled in

\textsuperscript{19} “Pupil Services Foster Youth Achievement Programs Essential Strategies-School Based Counselors.” Los Angeles Unified School District Division of Student Health and Human Services. Received February 10, 2015.
the morning or evening. At the workshops we observed, the presentations were primarily delivered by non-FYAP personnel (usually psychiatric social workers) who devoted little, if any, time to describing what the Foster Youth Achievement Program does, or how counselors could help students and caregivers navigate the LAUSD system. As currently conceived, the workshops appear not to be tailored to the different interests and needs of different types of caregivers (e.g., relative caregivers, non-relative foster families, or group home staff) and instead take a “one-size-fits-all” didactic approach that centers around teaching parenting skills to caregivers and on informing them of the psychiatric and behavioral resources available from other LAUSD departments.

2.3. Lack of a formal handoff procedure for students who transfer schools within as well as out of the District. The counselors we interviewed noted that it is typically up to the counselor at the new school to contact their counterpart at the old school to arrange the transmission of the CAA and other student records. While this procedure may be unavoidable in some circumstances, such as when the counselor at the sending school is never notified by DCFS, the caregivers, or the student that the transfer has occurred or is about to happen, a proactive rather than reactive approach would reduce delays in transferring records and help ensure that transferring foster students receive the partial credits and checkout marks that they are legally entitled to (and that they need in order to stay on track to graduate).

3. The current data management system is disjointed, very time-consuming to maintain, and does not reliably provide accurate or complete information on foster youth.

3.1. Unreliable data system and inefficient data management lengthens the data entry process. Many counselors noted that information in LAUSD data systems was often out-of-date or missing altogether. For instance, several counselors told us that working from data-match lists composed of DCFS and LAUSD rosters was inefficient because the lists contained both old and new foster youth clients, as well as duplicates, and, in some cases, falsely identified students in foster care. To overcome this, counselors must manually cross-match information from multiple sources to reconcile case rosters and eliminate duplicates. Furthermore, FYAP’s data collection process (which involves filling out Comprehensive Academic Assessments and supplemental forms) does not automatically incorporate information already stored in LAUSD data systems (MiSiS and MyData) and DCFS files, resulting in wasted time in manually re-entering the data for each student in their caseload.

Lastly, crucial information on students is often not easily accessible. For example, several counselors expressed frustration that CAAs are not centrally stored in a way that makes them accessible to all counselors serving a particular grade level. In addition, counselors also do not have easy access to attendance records and progress reports to monitor which classes students are failing.

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20 Many of these problems are due to persistent unresolved issues with MiSiS, LAUSD’s student information system.
3.2. Lack of measures to monitor the uptake of services and track school changes of foster youth. Foster youth advocates from the Advancement Project and the Alliance for Children’s Rights expressed concern that the FYAP seems to not be tracking how many foster students are actually receiving supplemental tutoring and other services (as opposed to just being referred to services). Monitoring the uptake rate of these services would enable the FYAP to evaluate how effective individual counselors are at motivating students to partake in supplemental services (as opposed to merely measuring how prolific counselors are at issuing service referrals), and, more importantly, would help the program evaluate whether the supplemental services themselves are effective at helping the FYAP achieve its goals. Additionally, the LCAP does not include a school stability metric that measures the timing and frequency of foster students’ school transfers, accompanied with a concrete plan that outlines how LAUSD intends to minimize unnecessary and disruptive school changes.
4. How can the FYAP do a better job of meeting its challenges in the future?

The problems described in the previous chapter show that the FYAP can do much more to improve educational outcomes for foster youth. This section outlines our recommendations for how the FYAP can do that. Our recommendations are organized by three overarching goals. We delegate responsibility for implementing these recommendations to the relevant existing workgroups within the FYAP.

**GOAL 1: ENSURE FYAP COUNSELORS ARE WELL-SUPPORTED AND WELL-TRAINED.**

**Problem 1.1** Counselors are assigned overwhelming caseloads.

**Recommendations:**
Although most of the counselors we interviewed indicated they would be most effective with a caseload between 50-75 students, hiring additional counselors is not economically feasible at this time. The recommendations below have the potential to increase counselors’ effectiveness:

*a. Establish a peer counselor/buddy system.* As consequence of their high rates of school mobility, foster students often have a difficult time establishing and maintaining relationships with peers. We recommend that the FYAP identify middle and high school foster students with the willingness and potential to serve as peer counselors to other foster students at their school. While many foster students would probably be willing to serve as peer counselors on a volunteer basis, we recommend paying older peer counselors a nominal wage if possible to incentivize accountability, build valuable work history, and foster peer counselors’ pride in their job.

Several of the students who make up the Fostering Education Youth Council expressed enthusiasm for this idea, so we recommend recruiting some of those students to initiate a pilot peer counselor program in select schools.

*b. Advise foster students of their educational rights.* Foster students are often unaware or ill-informed of their educational rights, such as the right to remain in their school of origin in the event of a placement change, and that they are entitled to checkout marks and partial credits when transferring schools mid-semester. Ensuring that foster students are fully aware of these rights would enable them to advocate for their own educational continuity, and if necessary, to enlist their FYAP counselor to intervene on their behalf.
As a routine part of their case management, FYAP counselors should advise foster students of the educational rights they are entitled to under AB 490 and other laws, and make sure that students understand that FYAP counselors can help ensure that their rights are respected. Empowering foster youth with the knowledge they need to assert their educational rights will help increase school stability and other important factors that contribute to their social development and academic success.

We suggest that counselors read through a script resembling the one below when they initiate contact with students that have been identified as having open child welfare cases, and at any other time when the information might be relevant and useful to the student. (The exact language should be adapted at the counselor’s discretion based on the student’s age and language skills):

“You have the following rights as long as your foster care case is open with the court...

❖ Any educational and placement decisions that affect you should be in your best interest. [AB 490]
❖ You are entitled to immediate enrollment at school, even if you are missing any of the normally required documentation including your birth certificate, proof of residence, or your immunization records. [AB 490]
❖ If you are enrolling at a new school, you have the right to be immediately enrolled in the same or equivalent classes as you were taking at your old school. [AB 490]
❖ If you had to leave a school in the middle of the semester, you are entitled to receive partial credits and checkout grades for all of the classes you were taking, based on how many hours of class you attended. [AB 490]
❖ You are not required to retake or repeat any portions of a course you have already completed. [SB 578]
❖ You cannot be prevented from taking or retaking a course that meets eligibility requirements for admission to the University of California or California State University. [SB 578]
❖ You have the right to access academic resources, services and extracurricular activities including sports, even if you missed the sign-up deadline. [AB 490]
❖ You have the right to stay in your school of origin as long as you are in care and advance to the next school level. (Your school of origin may be the school you attended when you were removed from your parents, the school you most recently attended, or any school you attended in the past 15 months where you had significant ties.) [AB 490]

21 These rights apply specifically to foster youth with open cases juvenile dependency court. Most FYAP counselors are also responsible for serving at least some "voluntary" cases that may or may not eventually progress to open court cases. Students with voluntary cases are not entitled to these rights unless their case transitions to an open case juvenile dependency court.
For as long as your case is open, you are also entitled to enroll at the middle or high school in the same attendance area as your school of origin when you advance from one school level to the next. [AB 1933]

If you move, only your Educational Rights Holder [counselor should identify the student’s ERH by name or their relationship to the student based on the student’s records] can decide whether remaining in your School of Origin is in your best interest. HOWEVER, if there is a dispute over this, you have a right to stay in your School of Origin until the dispute is settled. [AB 490]

I can help ensure that your educational rights are respected. Please reach out to me immediately if you feel that your educational rights are being violated.”

Problem 1.2 Counselors lack official phone numbers.
Problem 1.3 Counselors lack necessary supplies and adequate work space.

Recommendation:
Ensure that school-based counselors have access to appropriate resources and supplies to do their jobs. We recommend that the Department of Student Health and Human Services ensure that:

- Counselors are equipped with necessary hardware and office supplies, including cell phones (or official District phone numbers that can be forwarded to their existing personal cell phones), business cards, and fully functioning laptop computers. Based on cell phone and calling plan prices from the Information Technology Finance and Administration office, we estimate that it would cost FYAP approximately $40,000 to provide basic cell phones for all 65 in-school counselors per school year.
- Principals are made aware by their Educational Service Center superintendent of the FYAP counselor assigned to their school and informed of their duties and responsibilities. We recommend that the Professional Development group establish guidelines for school administrators’ provision of workspace for FYAP counselors (including a desk and space to meet privately with students), as well as access to copy/fax machines, mailboxes, internet, and other necessary resources. Principals should be held accountable for failures to provide counselors with basic access to resources and supplies.

Problem 1.4 Professional development sessions are inadequate.
Problem 1.5 Counselors are not sufficiently focused on academic progress.

Recommendation:
Reorient counselor training to be more reflective of the FYAP’s academic goals. We recommend that FYAP counselor training workshops emphasize academic counseling.
Training sessions currently tend to focus on the social-emotional aspects of counseling. However, foster youth often receive mental health services from DCFS-contracted Wraparound counselors, school-based Psychiatric Social Workers, and other providers. FYAP counselors can play an important role in supporting these efforts, but their special responsibility—and the FYAP’s LCAP goals—center around foster students’ academic achievement.

We recommend that training workshops for high school counselors focus on, for example, ensuring that counselors are knowledgeable of A-G high school graduation requirements so that they can more effectively advocate for students to be enrolled in the classes they need. In addition, we recommend that training sessions be tailored so that counselors who serve early education and elementary schools are not required to attend workshops that focus on matters relevant only to high school counselors.

Finally, we recommend that LAUSD solicit feedback from counselors regarding the sorts of professional development and training they would find useful. This would also involve incorporating recommendations from in-school counselors regarding the scheduling of training seminars (in our conversations with counselors, several remarked that professional development meetings were often announced on short notice and that it was sometimes difficult to work around them).

GOAL 2: IMPROVE COLLABORATION BETWEEN FYAP ADMINISTRATORS AND OTHER COMMUNITY PARTNERS.

Recommendation:
Create an Interagency and Interdepartmental Collaboration Workgroup. We recommend that the FYAP establish a workgroup focused primarily on promoting interagency collaboration between the FYAP, DCFS, Juvenile Probation, LACOE, and other LA County social services and educational agencies. Professor Lois Weinberg, emphasized the importance of formally identifying structural obstacles for effective interagency collaboration. She noted that high-level administrators from both agencies need to be present during collaborative meetings and work group meetings, so that they can leverage their clout to make meaningful changes and institute formal procedures (especially with respect to placement transfers, et cetera). A second responsibility of this workgroup would be to foster collaboration between various departments within LAUSD whose cooperation is crucial to the FYAP’s success, including the Office of Data & Accountability, Information Technology Division, MiSiS, the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and School Support, the Superintendent’s Office, and other divisions whose policies and behavior impact the FYAP’s effectiveness. We recommend that this workgroup include at least one

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22 Professor Lois Weinberg, telephone interview with authors, March 2, 2015.
23 Ideally, there should be a system in place so that LAUSD FYAP counselors are notified as soon as DCFS becomes aware that a placement change is imminent.
senior FYAP program administrator with sufficient authority to influence policies and procedures outside of the Department of Student Health and Human Services where the FYAP is housed.

**Problem 2.1** Counselors have difficulty reaching and communicating with adults in foster youths’ lives.

**Recommendations**

*a. Temporarily collocate certain DCFS and LAUSD mid-level program administrators in the opposite agency’s office to help foster interagency cooperation.* Given that LAUSD and DCFS headquarters are both located near downtown Los Angeles, it would be feasible to arrange an “exchange program,” where one or two DCFS Children’s Services Administrators in the Education Unit, and one or two corresponding FYAP administrators would trade offices and work out of the other agency’s headquarters for a period of weeks or months. This would expose representatives from each agency to the other agency’s internal culture and bureaucratic structure. Several counties and districts in California have adopted this approach with promising results to successfully improve long-term interagency cooperation (Orange County and Fresno in particular).

*b. Have LAUSD representatives participate more frequently at DCFS-hosted conferences on foster youth and education.* The DCFS program administrators we interviewed noted that LAUSD representatives were often absent from the DCFS-hosted events they were invited to. These events would not only be a good opportunity to learn about how the DCFS side of things works, but also an opportunity to meet and network with DCFS staff.

**Problem 2.2** Turnout at caregiver engagement workshops is low.

**Recommendations**

*a. Relocate caregiver engagement workshops to schools with the highest concentrations of foster students.* We recommend that the FYAP separately target specific subgroups of caregivers (e.g. group home directors or relative caregivers) to improve caregiver turnout. Specifically:

In order to improve turnout at workshops hosted by the Caregiver Engagement workgroup, we recommend identifying schools with especially high concentrations of foster youth and focus caregiver outreach efforts in those schools (for example, by locating caregiver workshops on those campuses whenever possible). We recommend that caregiver engagement workshops not be located at Educational Service Centers, WorkSource offices, or other non-school venues unless it can be determined that they are conveniently located in areas with high concentrations of caregivers, and/or they provide valuable ancillary services that caregivers should be exposed to. We also recommend that caregiver
engagement presentations and evaluation forms be available in Spanish (some workshops have simultaneous translation, but bilingual materials should be made available as a matter of course whenever Spanish-only-speaking caregivers are expected to attend).

**b. Re-tool caregiver engagement approach.** Since different classes of caregivers have very different interests and needs, we recommend that the FYAP not take a “one-size-fits-all” approach to caregiver engagement. Rather, approaches to caregiver outreach should be tailored toward specific subgroups of caregivers (e.g., group home staff, relative caregivers, foster family agencies caregivers, foster family home caregivers). Professor Lois Weinberg and foster youth advocates from the Advancement Project\(^{24}\) and the Alliance for Children’s Rights\(^{25}\) recommended that the FYAP seize the opportunity to collaborate with foster parent groups that meet regularly, such as the Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency (SCFFAA) or local community colleges’ Foster and Kinship Care Education programs. The specific interests and needs of each class of caregivers should be considered with regard to the timing, location, and content of workshops, mailings, and other outreach efforts. For example:

**Group Home Staff**
Group homes vary widely in size but often house a dozen or more foster youth in one facility. For any given high school, a significant proportion of its highest-need foster students are likely to reside in one or two nearby group homes. We recommend that the Caregiver Engagement group identify the locations of all group homes within LAUSD territory, and the corresponding schools each home’s residents would attend. (DFCS, and possibly advocacy groups such as the Advancement Project should be able to provide the FYAP with up-to-date rosters or maps listing the addresses of licensed group homes in Los Angeles.)

In-school FYAP counselors should be advised of the locations of the group homes in their schools’ areas and encouraged to arrange visits the facilities in person when possible, in order to introduce themselves to the group home staff, inform the staff about the FYAP, and share information about the students they mutually serve. For example, there is a very high concentration around the Figueroa Corridor between the 10 and the 105 freeways. Counselors who serve South LA high schools should visit group homes nearby to introduce themselves in person to staff at the group homes where their students live. Establishing open channels of communication between in-school counselors and staff in the group homes where their students live could pay long-term dividends in more efficiently assessing and responding to student needs, reducing behavior issues, truancy, dropout rates, and other areas of concern for this high-risk population.

\(^{24}\) Foster youth advocate, telephone interview with authors, February 26, 2015.

\(^{25}\) Foster youth advocate, telephone interview with authors, March 2, 2015.
Relative Caregivers
Relative caregivers (typically a child’s aunt, uncle, or grandparent) often do not think of themselves as foster parents. But since they typically only have temporary custody and are not the child’s actual parents, it may also not occur to them that they should attend parent-teacher conferences, welcome nights, or other school-parent outreach events.

We recommend that FYAP counselors identify their highest-need foster students who live in kinship care. We recommend that they reach out to their relative caregivers and encourage the caregivers to attend parent-teacher conferences and other family outreach events at the school. When possible, in-school FYAP counselors should arrange to be on campus at the same time as these events and try to schedule one-on-one meetings with the relative caregivers (as well as possibly the students’ teachers) to inform the caregivers about the FYAP program, explain the special educational rights foster students are entitled to, and to discuss the students’ individual needs and progress.

FFA-certified and foster family home caregivers
We recommend that the Caregiver Engagement group explore opportunities to connect its caregiver outreach workshops with local community colleges’ Foster and Kinship Care Education programs, where caregivers frequently go to obtain DCFS-mandated PS-MAPP training and to fulfill their “renewal hours” requirements. Many of these programs, such as those offered at Los Angeles Community College, Pierce College, West LA College, and other campuses around the city include workshops on topics such as “school issues/advocacy,” “community resources,” or “navigating the system.” We recommend that representatives from the FYAP Caregiver Engagement group reach out to the directors of these programs, arrange to attend workshops relevant to education or community resources and give brief presentations on what the FYAP program is and how it seeks to help foster students.

Even though not all of the foster parents who attend these workshops necessarily care for students enrolled in LAUSD schools, many of them do, and turnout at these well-established and ongoing community college workshops is likely to be higher than the workshops the FYAP has hosted on its own. In addition, linking caregiver engagement workshops to these long-running community college programs could potentially conserve District resources (in terms of time and personnel) relative to the existing FYAP Caregiver Engagement workshop approach. Rather than requiring two or more lead counselors plus additional staff over several hours to plan and stage each workshop, only one LAUSD representative would need to attend the community college workshops to make the presentation.

26 PS-MAPP stands for “Permanence & Safety: Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting”
27 See Appendix K for a list of Los Angeles area Foster and Kinship Care Education program directors’ contact information.
Another benefit of this approach is that it would inform the community colleges’ Foster and Kinship Care Education coordinators about the FYAP, and would enable them to pass on information about the FYAP when they encounter the caregivers of LAUSD foster students at other workshops they teach.

**Problem 2.3. No formal handoff procedure exists for student transfers within and out of the District.**

**Recommendations:**

*a. Establish formal procedure between DCFS and LAUSD when 7-day notices are filed to reduce school changes.* We recommend that the Interagency and Interdepartmental Collaboration workgroup enlist the help of DCFS leadership to devise a plan to reduce school changes. This would involve establishing a protocol so that DCFS CSWs notify FYAP counselors whenever a 7-day notice to remove a foster child from placement is filed. At present, FYAP counselors rarely, if ever, receive this sort of advance warning. But it would allow FYAP counselors to try to intervene to maintain placement and/or school stability or, at worst, be prepared to facilitate disenrollment and hand-off of student records to the receiving school.

If a placement change is in fact inevitable, the knowledge could enable the FYAP counselor to try to facilitate placement change to a nearby caregiver, ideally within the same school catchment area (this assumes FYAP counselors have already established rapport with other foster families or group home staff in the area). The LAUSD counselor could also remind the student of AB490 school of origin rights in the event of a placement change, and, if necessary assist the student in collecting checkout marks and partial credit.

Lastly, at or before time of placement change, DCFS caseworkers could notify FYAP counselors of the location of the new placement. The LAUSD counselor would then be able to identify the new school and new FYAP counselor and facilitate handoff.

*b. Improve data-sharing with LACOE.* The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) is currently designing a centralized countywide data system that will gather foster student records in the hope of making it easier for school districts to access this information. Several school districts have already signed memoranda of understanding for sharing information with DCFS and the Los Angeles County Probation Department. However, LACOE officials we interviewed mentioned they have encountered resistance from LAUSD when it requested limited access to MiSiS.

We recommend that the Data & Accountability workgroup invite representatives from the LACOE’s Technology Infrastructure Services and Foster Youth Services departments to the
Data & Accountability workgroup meetings. This will enable LACOE to better understand LAUSD’s data systems and protocol, as well as provide LAUSD a platform to voice their concerns regarding the centralized countywide data system that LACOE is currently developing to host foster student records. Other school districts in LA County have already entered into data-sharing agreements with LACOE in order to facilitate inter-district transfers and re-enrollment. LACOE schools serve a large population of former (and future) LAUSD foster students, and improving data sharing with LACOE and other school districts in LA County will help reduce the disruptions associated with inter-district transfers.

**GOAL 3: STREAMLINE DATA MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES.**

**Problem 3.1:** The FYAP’s existing data management system is unreliable and inefficient.

**Recommendation:**
*Centralize student assessment data management and automate data entry.* We recommend that the Data & Accountability group develop a cloud-based data system on which to store case assessment forms such as the Comprehensive Academic Assessment. Current protocol is to store these forms on counselors’ hard-drives. This greatly inhibits the flow of information from counselor to counselor and reduces the FYAP’s ability to centralize and manage important student information such as academic and behavioral intervention histories, caregiver relationships and contact information, etc.

We also recommend that the CALPADS/DCFS data match lists be cleaned, free of duplicates, checked for errors, new clients flagged, and merged with the LAUSD data before the data arrives at the counselors’ desks. In addition, we recommend that fields on forms such as the Comprehensive Academic Assessment be set up so that they populate automatically with data that have already been entered into MiSiS, My Data, or other LAUSD databases.

**Problem 3.2** Lack of measures to monitor the uptake of services and to track school stability.

**Recommendation:**
*Develop methods to track and monitor school stability, educational continuity, resources uptake, and FYAP counselor turnover measures using existing LAUSD data.*

School stability and Educational continuity measures: Advocates from the Advancement Project and the Alliance for Children’s Rights suggested that LAUSD FYAP actively collaborate with school personnel (such as the School Administrative Assistant, Assistant Principal Secondary Counseling Services and academic counselors) to effectively track foster youth enrolling and disenrolling from schools to ensure that checkout marks and
partial credit are obtained when due, and that students are immediately re-enrolled in appropriate classes at their new school.

Resource uptake measures: Most foster youth have a multitude of plans from different service providers—mental health plans, reunification plans, graduation plans, Individualized Education Plans, etc. Foster youth advocates from the Advancement Project and the Alliance for Children’s Rights noted that FYAP counselors could help tremendously by monitoring their progress, identifying holes, and aggressively pursuing services with respect to the educational components.

Reasons for FYAP counselor turnover: New FYAP counselors face the daunting task of learning how to navigate their students’ network of social workers and caregivers, school administrative structures, and the LAUSD bureaucracy. Maintaining high morale among counselors (and minimizing turnover) is crucial to the long-term success of the FYAP. The knowledge and experience that veteran counselors will eventually contribute to the collective wisdom of the FYAP is a crucial asset that must be cultivated and maintained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 - Metrics to track school mobility and administrative processes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School stability measures</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>● Frequency of foster student transfers between schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Frequency of mid-semester foster student transfers</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Location of intra- and inter-district transfers (i.e. sending schools/districts and receiving schools/districts) in order to identify school mobility patterns</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Educational continuity measures</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Lag time for transfer of student records between sending and receiving schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Rates and timeliness with which partial credit and checkout marks are assigned when foster students transfer mid-semester</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resource uptake measures</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Rates of foster students’ participation in or use of (rather than referrals to) supplemental educational and behavioral services including:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Tutoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>○ Positive Behavior Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>○ Restorative justice activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>○ The Pathways to College Program</td>
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</table>

Reasons for FYAP counselor turnover
# Matrix of Goals: Problems, Recommendations, and Working Groups

| 1 | GOAL 1: ENSURE FYAP COUNSELORS ARE WELL-SUPPORTED AND WELL-TRAINED. |
|---|---|---|
| 1.1 | Excessive caseloads interfere with one of the most crucial aspects of an FYAP counselor’s job, which is to establish rapport with foster youth, school administrators, caregivers, social workers, and other partners. | **RECOMMENDATION**  
● Establish a peer counselor/buddy system.  
● Advise foster students of their educational rights.  
**WORKING GROUP** Youth Engagement |
| 1.2 | Not having an official phone number impedes counselor effectiveness. | **RECOMMENDATION**  
● Ensure that school-based counselors have access to appropriate resources and supplies to do their jobs.  
**WORKING GROUP** Professional Development |
| 1.3 | Counselors do not have enough supplies or adequate work space. | **RECOMMENDATION**  
● Ensure that school-based counselors have access to appropriate resources and supplies to do their jobs.  
**WORKING GROUP** Professional Development |
| 1.4 | Professional development sessions are not sufficiently interactive and are not often pertinent to a counselor’s assigned grade level. | **RECOMMENDATION**  
● Reorient counselor training to be more reflective of the FYAP’s academic goals.  
**WORKING GROUP** Professional Development |
| 1.5 | Counselors’ focus is not sufficiently oriented toward ensuring academic progress. | **RECOMMENDATION**  
● Establish a peer counselor/buddy system.  
● Advise foster students of their educational rights.  
**WORKING GROUP** Youth Engagement |

| 2 | GOAL 2: IMPROVE COLLABORATION BETWEEN FYAP ADMINISTRATORS AND OTHER COMMUNITY PARTNERS. |
|---|---|---|
| 2.1 | FYAP counselors find it difficult to maintain open channels of communication with all of the adults in foster youths’ lives. | **RECOMMENDATION**  
● Temporarily collocate certain DCFS and LAUSD mid-level program administrators in the opposite agency’s office to help foster interagency cooperation.  
● Have LAUSD representatives participate more frequently at DCFS-hosted conferences on foster youth and education.  
**WORKING GROUP** Interagency/Interdepartmental Collaboration |
| 2.2 | Very low turnout at caregiver engagement workshops leads to inefficient use of resources and missed opportunities. | **RECOMMENDATION**  
● Relocate caregiver engagement workshops to schools with the highest concentrations of foster students.  
● Re-tool caregiver engagement approach.  
**WORKING GROUP** Caregiver Engagement |
| 2.3 | There is a lack of a formal handoff procedure for students who transfer schools within as well as out of the District. | **RECOMMENDATION**  
● Establish formal procedure between DCFS and LAUSD when 7-day notices are filed to reduce school changes.  
● Improve data-sharing with LACOE.  
**WORKING GROUP** Interagency/Interdepartmental Collaboration, Data & Accountability |

| 3 | GOAL 3: STREAMLINE DATA MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES. |
|---|---|---|
| 3.1 | Unreliable data system and inefficient data management lengthens the data entry process. | **RECOMMENDATION**  
● Centralize student assessment data management and automate data entry.  
**WORKING GROUP** Data & Accountability |
| 3.2 | Measures to monitor the uptake of services and track school changes of foster youth are lacking. | **RECOMMENDATION**  
● Develop methods to track additional foster student educational and process measures.  
**WORKING GROUP** Policy and Legislation and Data & Accountability |
5. Conclusion

Foster youth have unique academic needs that have long been ill-served by the agencies charged with their care. The LAUSD’s Foster Youth Achievement Program is uniquely positioned to fill this void and ensure that foster youth have at least one adult in their lives who will advocate for their academic success. Our team’s analysis focused on evaluating the implementation of the FYAP to date and identifying key areas for improvement.

We found that LAUSD’s compliance with state laws and procedures is satisfactory, inter-agency collaboration is off to a good start, and that the FYAP is making steady progress toward the LCAP goals it set for itself.

However, we also find that LAUSD can do much to improve its data management, improve interagency communication, optimize counselor caseloads, streamline data collection, provide counselors with crucial supplies, and improve caregiver outreach. Our matrix of goals summarizes our analysis of key problems, recommendations, and identifies who is responsible for ensuring that each problem gets addressed to help improve the Foster Youth Achievement Program.
6. Appendices

A. Bibliography
B. Who are LAUSD’s Foster Youth?
C. Legislative and District Policy Background
D. Methodology
E. The Child Welfare System
F. FYAP Counselor Survey
G. FYAP Counselor Interview
H. FYAP Organizational Chart
I. Comprehensive Academic Assessment (CAA)
J. FYAP Budget for AY 2014-2015
K. Foster and Kinship Care Education Phone List
Appendix A: Bibliography

Interviews

Foster Youth Achievement Program Lead Counselors (5)
Confidential

Foster Youth Achievement Program Counselors (13)
Confidential

Field Experts:
1. Advancement Project - Policy Analyst
2. Alliance for Children’s Rights - Program Director
3. Cal State Los Angeles - Professor Lois Weinberg
4. Los Angeles County of Education - Coordinator
5. Los Angeles Legal Counsel - Attorney
6. Department of Children and Family Services - Administrators (4)
7. Department of Children and Family Services - Caseworker
8. WestEd - Vanessa X. Barrat and BethAnn Berliner
9. Downey Unified School District - Dr. Robert Jagielski and foster youth educational liaisons
10. Orthopaedic Hospital Medical Magnet High School - Academic Counselor
11. First Star Bruin Guardian Scholars Academy - Administrator

Literature

http://www.wested.org/wp-content/files_mf/1399319170DistrictTables.pdf

http://www.wested.org/wp-content/files_mf/1399319170DistrictTables.pdf


28 Names are not included to protect the privacy of our interviewees, per terms established in our IRB.


Bridging the Achievement Gap


**Los Angeles Unified School District Documents**


“Caseload Data: Completed Comprehensive Academic Assessment.” Los Angeles Unified School District Division of Student Health and Human Services. Received March 5, 2015.


“Comprehensive Academic Assessment and Supplemental Forms and Procedures for Foster Youth Counselors.” Los Angeles Unified School District Division of Student Health and Human Services. Received January 28, 2014.

“Foster Youth Achievement Program - Comprehensive Academic Assessment.” Los Angeles Unified School District Division of Student Health and Human Services. Received January 10, 2015.
“Foster Youth Achievement Program Logic Model.” Los Angeles Unified School District Division of Student Health and Human Services. Received November 10, 2014.

“Fostering Education Youth Council.” Los Angeles Unified School District Division of Student Health and Human Services. Received January 10, 2015.

http://www.lausd.net/lausd/offices/sis/SSIS%20folder/SSIS/manage/h%20BUL-787%20AB490.pdf

http://notebook.lausd.net/pls/ptl/docs/PAGE/CA_LAUSD/FLDR_ORGANIZATIONS/STUDENT_HEALTH_HUMAN_SERVICES/BUL-787%201%20DOC%20(2).PDF


“Pupil Services Foster Youth Achievement Programs Essential Strategies-School Based Counselors.” Los Angeles Unified School District Division of Student Health and Human Services. Received February 10, 2015.
Appendix B: Who are LAUSD’s Foster Youth?

Who counts as a “foster youth?”
Under the California Department of Education’s Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) policy,29 a student is considered a foster youth if:

- She or he is declared to be a dependent of the court due to the presence or likelihood of abuse or neglect. (This includes children who continue to live at home with their biological parents, as well as children whom the court has ordered to be placed outside the home under the custody and care of a social worker), or;
- She or he is declared to be a ward of the court due to the child’s criminal violation and had been previously court ordered to be removed from home and placed in foster care, or;
- She or he is between 18-21 years old, is enrolled high school and under transitional jurisdiction of the juvenile court, and is participating in a transitional independent living plan.

Additionally, the FYAP has extended its services to so-called “voluntary” cases who fall outside the LCFF’s above definition of foster youth. These voluntary cases are students still living at home with their parents who have been determined to be in potential danger of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, and where the families have agreed to accept DCFS services and take corrective action in the absence of a court order.

Who are LAUSD’s foster youth?
Most students in foster care are in elementary schools (49%), followed by high and middle schools (24% and 20%, respectively). Children in the Early Education Centers represent the smallest share of the population, only 7%.

Figure 1 shows that African Americans are highly overrepresented among foster youth (29%). Latinos constitute the largest racial/ethnic group in foster care (59%), but the proportion of Latinos in foster care is roughly equivalent to their share of the general LA County child population (62%). Non-Hispanic white children make up about 10 percent of foster youth population, but only about 17% of the children in LA County are non-Hispanic white. Finally, only a very small percent of LA County foster youth are Asians even though Asians constitute 10 percent of the general child population of LA County.30

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Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of 2014
LA County Foster Youth vs. Overall Child Population

Source: CA Child Welfare Indicators Project (2014) and LAUSD data
Appendix C: Legislative and District Policy Background

Assembly Bill 490 ("Ensuring Educational Rights and Stability for Foster Youth") took effect on January 1, 2004. This law established new rights for California’s foster youth and imposed new responsibilities on the schools and county child welfare agencies that serve them. Among AB 490’s provisions was that every school district and County Office of Education must designate a liaison responsible for foster students’ education. The liaison’s responsibilities include:

- Ensuring appropriate school placement, enrollment and disenrollment.
- Assisting with the transfer of grades, credits and student records when foster youth change schools.
- Ensuring that foster students’ school records are transferred within two business days.

In July 2004 the District adopted Policy Bulletin 787 (Guidelines for School Enrollment of Students in Out-of-home Care) to establish procedures for handling school transfers for foster students and outline the responsibilities of the school-site foster care advocates mandated by AB 490. This Policy Bulletin was revised in August 2013 as Policy Bulletin 787.1, and is currently under revision again.

In January 2013, President Obama signed into law the Uninterrupted Scholars Act. This law amended the 1974 Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act to allow schools and local educational agencies to release students’ educational records—without parental consent—to child welfare agencies and caseworkers when such agencies are “legally responsible... for the care and protection of the student.” An analogous statute, California’s Assembly Bill 643, was enacted in August 2013 to amend California State educational privacy laws into compliance with the Uninterrupted Scholars Act.

http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/03-04/bill/asm/ab_0451-0500/ab_490_bill_20031012_chaptered.pdf
http://www.lausd.net/lausd/offices/sis/SSIS%20folder/SSIS/manage/h%20BUL-787%20AB490.pdf
http://notebook.lausd.net/pls/ptl/docs/PAGE/CA_LAUSD/FLDR_ORGANIZATIONS/STUDENT_HEALTH_HUMAN_SERVICES/BUL-787%201%20DOC%20(2).PDF
https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/s3472/text
http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=11975031b82001bed902b3e73f33e604&rgn=div5&view=text&node=34:1.1.1.1.33&nd=34
http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB643
Table 2 shows LAUSD’s current LCAP goals pertaining to foster youth:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>AY 2014-15</th>
<th>AY 2015-16</th>
<th>AY 2016-17</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase graduation rates</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the number of foster students scoring “proficient” or above on state standardized exams(^{37})</td>
<td>Establish Benchmark</td>
<td>Benchmark +1%</td>
<td>Benchmark + 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the number of foster students with proficient or advanced attendance rates (i.e. 96% attendance and above)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease chronic absence rates for foster youth</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease foster youth suspensions</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Comprehensive Academiac Assessments and Annual Culmination/Graduation Plans for foster students:</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Additionally, the LAUSD has set its own internal, intermediate goals to track its progress in implementing the Foster Youth Achievement Program. Specifically, the District has set targets for completion of referrals to local FamilySource centers for additional case management services, such as free tax preparation and/or computer literacy classes.

As of this writing, the Foster Youth Achievement Program is collaborating with lawyers from non-governmental foster youth advocacy organizations such as the Alliance for Children’s Rights and First Star to ensure that the District’s internal policy bulletin (“Guidelines for School Enrollment of Students Living in Out-of-Home Care”) is updated to better align with the guiding principles of California’s AB 490, AB 167/216, and the federal Uninterrupted Scholars Act. FYAP is doing a laudable job of seeking and incorporating advocates’ input into District policy while ensuring that any revisions to policy are clearly stated and reasonable for school staff and administrators to implement.

\(^{37}\) Benchmarks not known because students in LAUSD have yet to take the new standardized tests aligned with the Common Core State Standards.
Appendix D: Methodology

Due to the program’s recent inception and a paucity of long-term quantitative data, we took a primarily qualitative approach to answer our policy questions: (1) What shortcomings have characterized the FYAP’s implementation to date with regard to its stated mission and District policy? And (2) How can the FYAP do a better job of meeting its challenges in the future? Since counselors are the central component of the FYAP, they were our main source of information. Our research also consisted of on-site observations of LAUSD workshops, training sessions and meetings, as well as in-person and telephone interviews with administrators, county agencies and community partners who advocate for foster youth. Table 3 shows our methods of data collection with respective sources.

### Data Collection

| Semi-structured in-person and phone interviews with: | ● 10 school-based counselors, as well as several lead counselors and program administrators.38  
● Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) personnel.  
● Los Angeles County of Education (LACOE) personnel.  
● Alliance for Children’s Rights representative.  
● Advancement Project representative.  
● Los Angeles Public Counsel representative.  
● Academic experts on foster youth educational issues.  
● Foster youth academic liaisons in other LA County school districts. |
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<tr>
<td>Online Survey</td>
<td>● Open-ended questionnaire for counselors, with approximately 25 responses.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| On-site observations | ● Caregiver Engagement workshops.  
● Foster Youth Council meeting to hear from current foster youth.  
● FYAP workgroup meetings (Policy and Legislation, Data & Accountability )  
● Collaborative meetings between community partners, DCFS, and LAUSD divisions.  
● Counselor training session. |

Given that there is still a dearth of evidence-based interventions that show their effectiveness at improving educational outcomes of foster youth, our recommendations are

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38 Please see Appendix G for full details regarding the phone interviews.  
39 Please see Appendix F for full details regarding the online survey.
primarily supported by information gathered during our interviews with key expert informants.
Appendix E: The Child Welfare System

What are the different types of out-of-home placement foster youth may experience?

Typical placements for foster youth include the following:

- **Adoptive Home**: This is a home where the child’s caregiver has filed (or intends to file) a petition to adopt the child in their care.
- **Court Specified Home**: This may be any type of home that is mandated by the Court.
- **Foster Family Agency Certified Home**: A placement made by a Foster Family Agency, which is a nonprofit organization licensed by California to support foster parents.
- **Foster Family Home**: Any residential facility providing care for up to six children in foster care. This facility may be owned, leased or rented and is the home of the foster parent.
- **Group Home**: A facility with staff employed by the licensee, which provides non-medical care and supervision to children in foster care.
- **Guardian with Dependency**: An individual appointed by the Court to care for the foster child.
- **In-Home Care**: Children in “in-home care” are still living in their home of origin. Even though the family has an open court case with the child welfare agency and is receiving pre-placement services, they have not been removed into an out-of-home placement.
- **Relative/Non Related Extended Family Member (NREF) Home**: Caregivers who can provide care and are related and/or have a mentoring relationship with the foster child.
- **Small Family Home**: Any licensed residential facility providing care for no more than six foster children with “mental disorders or developmental or physical disabilities and who require special care and supervision as a result of their disabilities.”
- **Supervised Independent Living Placement**: A placement for foster youth who are ready to live independently (e.g. apartment, university dorm, etc.). Under the SILP, foster youth receive a monthly allowance.

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Bridging the Achievement Gap

In LAUSD, a plurality (49%) of foster youth are living at home while a dependent of the court, about 27% are in kinship care, and about 10% are placed in a Foster Family Agency (FFA) certified home (see table below).

### Distribution of LAUSD Foster Youth by Placement Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adoptive Home</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Specified Home</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFA Certified Home</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Family Home</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Home</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian Home</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Home</td>
<td>3,330</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Foster Care</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Home</td>
<td>1,811</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Family Home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervised Independent Living Placement</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,786</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### What are some of the agencies involved in foster children’s lives?

The child welfare system in California comprises several agencies (federal, state, and county), juvenile courts, as well as private social service agencies. The following list provides a brief overview of the agencies and organizations that are typically involved in foster youth’s lives.42

**Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS):**

This agency is the most crucial component of the county child welfare system. It is responsible for:

- investigating reports of child abuse
- screening and assessing families to determine if opening a case is warranted
- providing case management and other services for families
- placing and monitoring foster children

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● providing adoption services

The child’s and family’s main contact with DCFS occurs via social workers.

**Juvenile Dependency Court**

Once a social worker determines that there is reasonable evidence of child abuse or neglect, the case gets passed to the juvenile dependency court, which is a division of the county superior court. The juvenile dependency court then determines whether the child should be brought under the court’s jurisdiction and be declared a “dependent” of the court or whether to order Family Maintenance services so that parents can work on the concerns that DCFS may have about the family. If the court chooses to remove a child from his or her home, responsibility for meeting the child’s health and educational needs is granted to DCFS. The court has to approve service plans developed by the social worker. In addition, the juvenile court judge also determines Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to help advocate for the child’s needs. Each child is also assigned their own attorney.

In addition, the county **public health department** caters to the health care needs of Medi-Cal eligible foster children. The county **mental health department** also provides mental health services to foster children and their families. Some foster youth also are involved with the county **probation department**.

Finally, foster youth also make contact with non-profit and advocacy organizations like the Alliance for Children’s Rights, the Advancement Project, or CEE Forward.
Appendix F: FYAP Counselor Survey

We are researchers from UCLA conducting a study on the LAUSD Foster Youth Achievement Program. We feel that your knowledge of the program or of the specific needs of foster youth would provide valuable insights and would help the District improve its services. Participation in the survey is completely voluntary. We are not asking for your name or information that can identify you. Your decision to participate in this survey, as well as your responses to the questions, will not affect your work status at LAUSD. If you agree to participate in this survey, please answer the questions as best as you can. It should take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions about the survey, feel free to contact us:

uclafyap2015@gmail.com

We appreciate your input!

1. What school level are you assigned to? Please check all that apply.
2. How long have you been a counselor in the Foster Youth Achievement Program?
3. How many students are in your caseload?
4. Do you feel like the size of your caseload is reasonable? If not, how much smaller would it need to be manageable?
5. Roughly how many of your students have you met so far?
6. Roughly how many of your students would you classify as high risk?
7. What, if any, are some of the obstacles or difficulties you have encountered in dealing with other agencies or service providers? Have you dealt with any agencies or individuals that have been notable helpful, and if so, which ones?
8. Are there any critical issues that you feel the program could be addressing effectively but that it is overlooking? Please list anything that comes to mind and be sure to elaborate.
9. Do you have any further concerns or comments you would like to share with us?
Appendix G: FYAP Counselor Interview

Confidentiality Script

Hello,
The purpose of the research is to help the LAUSD implement and evaluate the Foster Youth Achievement Program. We will ask you a few questions about your role as a FYAP counselor, and your perspective of the Districts’ services for foster youth. We will only record this interview if you consent to be recorded. Do you consent to be recorded? Also, we will request your permission before quoting anything you say in our report to the district. If you agree to be quoted, but wish that the quote not be attributed to you, you reserve the right to be quoted anonymously.

Background questions

- What school level are you assigned to?
- How long have you been a counselor in the FYAP?
- How big is your caseload?
- What proportion of your caseload have you met?
- What proportion of your caseload falls into the highest need category?

New cases / Transfers

- How are you notified?
  - After the student enrolls at one of your schools?
  - When a child moves into a placement within one of your schools’ territories?
- What’s the hand-off procedure when a kid moves?
  - To another LAUSD school?
  - To another district?
  - From another district?
  - Have you ever dealt with a foster youth counselor or comparable person at another district?
  - Have you ever seen another district with something similar to the LAUSD case assessment form?
  - Are you allowed to share the case assessment forms with other districts?

Other agencies/service providers

- Has anyone you’ve dealt with in DCFS or other agencies been especially helpful? How so?
Appendix G: FYAP Counselor Interview (Continued)

○ What roadblocks or difficulties have you encountered with DCFS or other agencies? Do you have any suggestions on how interagency cooperation could be improved?

Current cases

- How far along are you with your initial set of case assessments?
- How much time do you spend counseling students versus other admin tasks?
- What form does counseling take?
- How often do students seek out your help on their own? What sorts of problems or concerns do they approach you with?
- Do students ever resist your efforts to help? What do you do then?
- Have you run into any concerns with protecting students’ privacy in their status as foster youth? Are other school administrators sensitive to this need?
- Have you had any difficulties with the administrators at your schools? What happened? Were you able to resolve the issue quickly in the student’s interest? If not, did the district give you any recourse?
- How big is your caseload?
- What proportion of your caseload have you met?
- What proportion of your caseload falls into the highest need category?

Job responsibilities

- What, if anything, are you doing above and beyond your job description? Or do you feel that your official job description accurately describes what you find yourself doing day-to-day?
- Is there anything the district is not doing that it should be doing in your opinion? Have your students expressed any needs that the program is now failing to address, but could in the future? What are they?
Appendix H: FYAP Organizational Chart
### Appendix I: Comprehensive Academic Assessment (CAA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residency Status:</th>
<th>Relative</th>
<th>Student Status:</th>
<th>Foster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICP/GP Completed:</td>
<td>Choose an item</td>
<td>If Yes, Date:</td>
<td>Click here to enter a date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### STUDENT BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

- **Student’s Name:**
- **Gender:** Male
- **Ethnicity:** Hispanic
- **SpEd:** No
- **If Yes:** SLD LAD OHI ED
- **Services:** RSP SDC Speech & Language Bill ERMHS Other:
- **LAUSD ID:**
- **Court Case #:** CK:
- **Address:** Los Angeles
- **E-mail Address:**
- **Home Language:** Spanish
- **DOB:** 9/22/2007
- **Age:** 7
- **Grade:** 2
- **Reviewed IEP:** Choose an item
- **SSID:**
- **DCFS Client ID #:** 90011
- **Student Cell #:**
- **Pending Tickets/Warrants:** Choose an item

**Please note:** If the Educational Rights holder is biological parent, biological parents should NOT be given access to foster care caregiver information. In addition, biological parents should not be provided with school records if they are NOT the Educational Rights Holder for the youth.

#### CAREGIVER INFORMATION

- **Biological parent(s) access/contact restriction:** Choose an item
- **If Yes, whom?** Choose an item
- **Is the court order on file?** Choose an item
- **Emergency Contact Name:** Rita Estrada
- **Emergency Contact Phone:** 213-742-0382

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

- **Minor’s Attorney:** Phone/E-mail:
- **Probation Officer:** Phone/E-mail:
- **County Social Worker:** Phone/E-mail:
- **County Social Worker Supervisor:** Phone/E-mail:
- **Wrap Around (Agency Name/Point of Contact):** Phone/E-mail:

---

43 “Foster Youth Achievement Program - Comprehensive Academic Assessment.” Los Angeles Unified School District Division of Student Health and Human Services. Received January 10, 2015.
### STUDENT HEALTH:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAT Reviewed:</th>
<th>Choose an item</th>
<th>Therapist:</th>
<th>Phone/Fax:</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medication:</th>
<th>Choose an item</th>
<th>Substance Abuse:</th>
<th>Choose an item</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If Yes:</td>
<td></td>
<td>If Yes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pregnant/Parenting:</th>
<th>Choose an item</th>
<th># of children:</th>
<th>Age of child(ren):</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counseling Services:</th>
<th>Choose an item</th>
<th>Need Referral:</th>
<th>Choose an item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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### SCHOOL INFORMATION:

**Current School:** 20TH Street Elementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current: # of Absences</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Rate:</td>
<td>97.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Band:</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Enrolled:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2013-2014: # of Absences</th>
<th>10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Rate:</td>
<td>94.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance Band:</td>
<td>Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Enrolled:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsions:</td>
<td>No</td>
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</table>

| Suspension:             | No |
| Total Number of Days Suspended: |  |
| Opportunity Transfer:   | No |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Testing Date: 2013-2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA: Did not take CST 2013-2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths: Did not take CST 2013-2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GATE: No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El: Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Graduation Date:</th>
<th>On Track to Graduate:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choose an item:</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credits Earned:</th>
<th>Academic Counselor:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAHSEE Date:</th>
<th>Click here to enter a date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA Passed:</td>
<td>Choose an item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Passed:</td>
<td>Choose an item</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation Type:</th>
<th>Choose an item</th>
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</table>

### SCHOOL HISTORY:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous School:</th>
<th>District:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20TH STREET ELEMENTARY</td>
<td>K-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LAUSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20TH STREET ELEMENTARY</td>
<td>PK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LAUSD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (NOTES):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DCFS DataMatch</th>
<th>CalPads</th>
<th>My-Data At-risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MiSiS</td>
<td>MyData</td>
<td>Attendance Band</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Completed by: __________________________

**Bridging the Achievement Gap**
### Appendix J: FYAP Budget for AY 2014-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Estimated Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>$8,216,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Equipment</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Materials</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z Time (overtime pay)</td>
<td>$127,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Meetings</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welligent (special ed database)</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring Program</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Supplies</td>
<td>$61,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathways to College</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Operating Budget</strong></td>
<td><strong>$8,815,149</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

44 “Pupil Services Proposal in Support of the Local Control Accountability Plan for Foster Youth.” *Los Angeles Unified School District, Division of Student Health and Human Services.* Received January 20, 2015.
Appendix K: Foster and Kinship Care Education Phone List

Cerritos College
  Graciela Vasquez, Program Director
  11110 E. Alondra Blvd, Norwalk, CA 90650
  562-860-2451 ext 2548

El Camino College Compton Center
  Pam Godfrey, Program Director
  1111 East Artesia Blvd, Compton, CA 90221
  310-537-3808

East Los Angeles College
  Belen Gabriel, Program Director
  1301 Avenida Cesar Chavez, Monterey Park, CA 91754
  323-265-8963

El Camino College
  Alexis Estwick, Program Director
  Jacki Humphrey, Program Asst
  16007 Crenshaw Blvd, Torrance, CA 90506-0002
  310-660-3593, ext 3585

Long Beach City College
  A. Mavoumeen, Program Director
  Claudia Garcia Program Manager
  1305 E. Pacific Coast Hwy, Long Beach, CA 90806
  562-938-3114

Los Angeles City College
  Juan Alvarez
  Program Director
  855 N. Vermont Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90029

---

  http://community.piercecollege.edu/fkce/FKCE_PhoneList.aspx
323-953-4000 ext 2335

Los Angeles Harbor College
  Juanita Naranjo, Program Director
  Teresa Lamas, Program Coordinator
  1111 Figueroa Place, Wilmington, CA 90744
  310-233-4446 / 310-233-4405

Los Angeles Mission College
  Estela Miranda, Program Coordinator
  Georgina Romo, Program Coordinator
  13356 Eldridge Ave, Sylmar, CA 91342
  818-364-7664 / 818-364-7600 ext. 7138

Los Angeles Pierce College
  Cindy Chang, Program Director
  Carol Bohn, Program Coordinator
  6201 Winnetka Ave, Woodland Hills, CA 91371
  818-710-2941 / 818-710-2937

Los Angeles Southwest College
  Joni Collins, Program Director
  Janet Gordon, Program Coordinator
  1600 W. Imperial Hwy Los Angeles, CA 90047
  323-241-5288

Los Angeles Trade Tech College
  Dr. Dione Washington, Program Director
  400 W. Washington Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90015
  213-763-3665

West Los Angeles College
  Maria Mancias, Director
  9000 Overland Ave, Culver City, CA 90230
  310-287-4356