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BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

for Developing a
District System to
Improve Education
Outcomes for Youth
in Foster Care

ALLIANCE
for **CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS**





INTRODUCTION

To make real the promise of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) to create educational equity for youth in foster care, educators across the state must **renew their efforts to close the achievement gap and improve education outcomes.**

Youth in foster care continue to have the poorest education outcomes of any student population in the state, including among the three identified at-risk subgroups eligible for supplemental and concentration funding under LCFF. For example, in the area of graduation, **youth in foster care graduated at a rate of only 58.2%** in the 2019/2020 school year.¹ Meanwhile, the graduation rate for all students statewide was 84.3%.² Additionally, when looking at math and reading scores across the state for the 2018/2019 school year, youth in foster care present the same concerning low data and major gaps when compared to their peers who are not in care. **Only 24% of youth in foster care met the English standards** (compared to 51% of the general student population), **and only 15% of youth in care met the Math standards** (compared to 40% for the general population).³ These alarming statistics signify that current efforts to improve the education outcomes of youth in foster care are not working and that new supports are needed. Equity demands that districts reconsider their current supports and systems in place to meet the needs of youth in foster care.

1 Data available at <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohRate.aspx?cds=00&agglevel=state&year=2019-20>. Report Options and Filters: Data Type Options: Program Subgroup.

2 Data available at <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohRate.aspx?cds=00&agglevel=state&year=2019-20>.

3 Data available at <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/foster/fosterCaasppGrd.aspx?testtype=ELA&agglevel=State&cds=&year=2018-19> and <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/foster/FosterCaasppGrd.aspx?year=2018-19&test-type=math>.

THE NETWORK

In January 2017, six school districts serving 15% of the school-aged foster care population in Los Angeles County⁴, began an experiment, working in concert with the Alliance for Children's Rights, to implement the Foster Youth Education Toolkit, and identify and collectively problem solve every day barriers to meeting the education needs of youth in foster care.⁵ Network members included district level Program Directors with the political leverage to change policies and practices in the district, Foster Youth Education Liaisons or specialists working directly with youth in foster care in schools on a daily basis who brought a wealth of knowledge about their needs and the barriers to assisting them, and data/information technology specialists to identify and implement the best methods for collecting meaningful local data measures for youth in foster care. Network participants met as a group monthly to discuss the topics covered in this Best Practices Guide, identify barriers to the success of youth in foster care in school, collectively problem solve solutions to these barriers, and create the Best Practices Guide.⁶ Districts also met one-on-one with the Alliance to work on implementation of the recommendations found in the Best Practice Guide within their district, as well as to collect and analyze local data in a continuous improvement cycle to evaluate their effectiveness. Network members continue to meet throughout the 2021/2022 school year, to share and learn lessons and discuss best practices.

⁴ Youth served by network districts also represent 5% of youth in foster care statewide.

⁵ This work was enabled by the generous monetary and consultative support of the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE). The Network is a professional learning network, initially funded through the CCEE, with the goal of improving education outcomes for youth in foster care through collaborative learning and continuous improvement cycles. Various Network districts used the learnings from the Network, and their own internal improvement efforts, to inform working with their County Office of Education when they found themselves in Differentiated Assistance.

⁶ Network districts did not receive any additional funding for participating in the Network, other than the LCFF supplemental and concentration funds they were otherwise receiving for serving youth in foster care, although many districts effectively utilized their local data and evidence of improved practices to gain budget allocation of additional expenditures through their respective School Boards.

NETWORK PARTICIPANTS

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Patricia Mahoney, Assistant Superintendent, Student/Employee Welfare
Sally Yoo, STAR and HOPE Counselor
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BONITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Tiffany Merrill, Foster and Homeless Youth Liaison
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BALDWIN PARK UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT*

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LONG BEACH UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Claudia Sosa-Valderrama, Director, Student Support Services
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WEST COVINA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Ana Gutierrez, Foster/Homeless Youth Liaison
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Albert Kwan, Functional Analyst

*Indicates that the district or participant either joined the network once it was already in progress, or left the network prior to the publishing date.



PARTICIPANTS DESCRIBE THE NETWORK

"From the network I learned that regional change and growth is possible on relatively short timelines where there is a well-organized, focused effort where everyone is pulling in the same direction."

Mark Rodgers, Senior Director, Specialized Student Services, Bonita Unified School District (USD)

"Being a part of this network has allowed me to express the barriers I have faced in servicing our foster youth and have learned from others as well. We have created a trust and professional collaboration with one another and as a result, have a better understanding of the hardships that foster youth encounter."

Ana Gutierrez, Foster Youth Liaison, West Covina USD

"We all have the same intentions, to serve our youth with dignity and respect but we need to be creative and continually challenge our practices to assess if we are doing the best that we can."

Susana Cortes, School Social Worker, Foster Care Unit, Long Beach USD

"The network has been a safe place: we felt safe to speak honestly. The ability and willingness of everyone to be vulnerable and transparent that built over time is what allowed us to grow."

Maureen Williams, Foster Youth Liaison, Bonita USD

THE BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

The Best Practices Guide is the result of a four-year partnership built between Network participants, as well as the experiences of Alliance for Children's Rights staff members working with youth in foster care in Los Angeles county and on systems change issues across the state.

While the [Foster Youth Education Toolkit](#) is designed to give school district staff the tools to implement an education right for an individual youth (e.g., issue partial credits to one youth), this Best Practices Guide is designed to help a district create a system and practice to consistently implement an education right for all their youth in foster care (e.g., system to identify, calculate, and issue credits to all youth in care who earn them while attending school in the district). The Best Practices Guide covers the following topics: identifying and designating foster youth in local student information systems, collecting and analyzing local data for continuous improvement, improving school stability, immediate enrollment of youth in the least restrictive environment, partial credits, and AB 167/216 graduation. The topic areas are formatted similarly and include: (1) an overview of the relevant laws; (2) exploration questions used by Network districts to explore each topic, which can guide discussions by Guide users in their district; (3) a step-by-step guide to creating a district system to address that topic; (4) additional considerations including staff training, stakeholder engagement, and working with local data within the district's student information system; and (5) policy issues and recommendations, for the local and state level, that arose from the overall learnings of the Network in the topic area. The Best Practices Guide also includes tools and practice tips to help districts implement the recommended best practices, equity issues for districts to consider, trauma concerns to be addressed by districts, and highlights from participating Network districts which demonstrate the gains that have been made by following the recommendations in the Best Practices Guide.

DATA DRIVEN

The Network and the Best Practices Guide were both continually driven by data.

Network participants wanted more accurate, sensitive, and objective ways to measure the work they were doing to improve the education outcomes of youth in foster care; they came up with five local data measures and continually tracked this data during the course of the Network to monitor their own improvement. All Network meetings included discussions on data and some meetings were solely devoted to data. Data is also utilized throughout the Best Practices Guide, including a deep dive into the data and data collection process in the final section, to demonstrate the gains that districts can make if they choose to adopt the recommendations provided.

CONSULTATION OPPORTUNITIES

The Alliance for Children's Rights remains committed to improving the education outcomes for youth in the foster care and juvenile justice systems and is exploring opportunities to continue to support districts on their journeys toward this goal.

We provide free trainings and consultation to districts, individually and in geographic collaborations, who are interested in implementing the recommendations found in the Best Practices Guide, modified as required to meet their local needs. As with the [Foster Youth Education Toolkit](#), we intend for the Best Practices Guide to continue to grow and adapt over time as we learn lessons from a diverse set of districts, as they work through implementation barriers and continue to create innovative solutions. To learn more about opportunities to partner with the [Alliance for Children's Rights](#), please contact Education Program Director, Jill Rowland, at jrowland@alliancecwr.org.

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BEST PRACTICE GUIDE 1



Identifying and Designating Youth in Foster Care in your Student Information System



Identifying and designating youth who are in foster care in your district's student information system is important to their education success because districts need to know who their youth in foster care are in order to serve them.

Further, districts are now held responsible for the education outcomes of youth in foster care under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). It is also important to have all youth in foster care designated in a district's student information system for the purpose of pulling, analyzing, and using local data on the education outcomes of youth in foster care for cycles of continuous improvement as districts change their policies and practices. For the Network, the process of improving education outcomes for youth in foster care begins, ends, and is always driven by data. Please see [Guide 6: Using Local Data to Monitor Education Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care](#), as well as the data tips provided throughout this Best Practices Guide.

There are multiple sources of information for identifying youth in foster care, each of which has different levels of accuracy for this purpose.

ENROLLMENT — Youth in foster care and the adults enrolling them in school may or may not self-identify on enrollment forms (e.g., a relative caregiver might not identify the student as in foster care since they are living in a relative home and not a stranger's home). Whether this self-identification occurs depends heavily on how the enrollment form question(s) are worded.

TECHNOLOGY DATA MATCHES — Matches through California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) or other county level matching systems are also not 100% reliable. For example, using a county matching system will miss any youth in foster care placed in a home within the residence boundaries of a district by another county's child welfare system.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

When identifying youth in foster care, determining which legal definition of 'foster youth' to use is important.

The LCFF definition of 'foster youth' includes: (1) all youth with an open foster care case (i.e., Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 300 cases), no matter where they live; and (2) youth in the juvenile justice system (i.e., youth subject to a WIC 602 petition or on probation) living in a suitable placement (e.g., foster or congregate care facility such as a short-term therapeutic placement or group home)⁷. These youth are identified through the LCFF child match system. Districts receive an updated list of these youth weekly through CALPADS. These youth's education outcomes are reported under the 'foster youth' category on your district Dashboard, and are the youth for whom districts receive unduplicated funding for youth in foster care.

The laws that create special protections and rights for youth in foster care (e.g. Assembly Bills (AB) 490, 167, and 216), utilize a broader definition of 'foster youth' which includes all youth in foster care (i.e., WIC 300) and all youth on probation (i.e., WIC 602, or subject to a 602 petition), no matter where they live. This includes youth living at home with their biological parents. Each of these youth are entitled to the education protections in AB 490 and its associated laws including school stability, immediate enrollment, partial credits, and AB 167/216 graduation.

See [Foster Youth Education Toolkit](#), for more information.

Review our [Exploration Questions](#) to see how the Network began our discussions on this topic and to see how to begin your own.

⁷ Cal. Educ. Code Section 42238.01(b).



BEST PRACTICES for Developing a District System to Identify and Designate Youth in Foster Care Within Your Student Information System

STEP 1

Decide which 'Foster Youth' Definition to use when Identifying and Designating Within the SIS

The Foster Youth Learning Network (Network) recommends identifying and designating all AB 490 youth (i.e., all youth in foster care and on probation, regardless of where they live) because: (1) knowing who these youth are is the first step in trying to meet their needs and serve them; (2) the laws and protections for youth in foster care apply to all of these youth; and (3) this allows for the collection of local data and its use in a continuous improvement cycle to improve the education outcomes of youth in foster care.

STEP 2

Identify Youth in Foster Care Through Multiple Sources

Data Matching: ★

- CALPADS — The Network found they were able to identify youth in foster care faster by increasing the frequency that they looked at and integrated their CALPADS foster youth data match from monthly to weekly and by quickly integrating this match into their student information system (SIS).◆
- County Data Match Systems — The Network recommends increasing the use of local county data matching systems (e.g., Los Angeles County Education Passport System or AB 2083 data sharing Memorandum of Understandings) to identify and designate youth in foster care faster.

Child Welfare/Probation Notification: When the home placement is changed for a youth in foster care or on probation, all county placing

★ **PRACTICE TIP** | Districts can identify youth in foster care who enter the system without being detained from their parents (i.e., youth are not showing up to enroll but are already within their enrolled student population) when they are added to the list in these data matches.

◆ **PRACTICE TIP** | Despite best efforts at accuracy, and weekly updates, CALPADS (which relies on accurate data being submitted from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS)) has been found by districts in the Network to sometimes indicate that a youth's foster care case is open, even after confirming through a local data match with the child welfare agency or through a youth's social worker that the foster care case is closed. Further, other districts have found that youth with open foster care cases, who continue to live with their biological parents, are sometimes not reported by CDSS through CALPADS as having an open foster care case.

agencies (including child welfare and probation) have a legal responsibility to notify the: (1) youth's attorney, Education Rights Holder (ERH), and court no more than one court day after making the placement decision; (2) district of the date the student will be leaving as soon as they become aware of the need to move the student; (3) district ten days prior to moving a special education student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP); and (4) district when a student is placed into Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP).⁸ If this notification is occurring consistently and within the legal timeline, it can be used to quickly identify youth in foster care.

At Enrollment: For youth living in foster or relative homes, the Network recommends utilizing an online or paper enrollment processes to ask carefully crafted screening questions to identify youth in foster care. ▲ The Network recommends using Screening Questions for Youth in Foster Care in a district's enrollment process to ensure the largest majority possible of youth in foster care are identified at enrollment. +

For youth living in Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP), the Network recommends building relationships and processes with STRTP staff such that they identify the youth living in their placement directly to a specified staff member at the district office and work collaboratively to gather all necessary enrollment paperwork (e.g., Individualized Education Programs (IEP), transcripts, etc.), at the same time as completing the normal online or paper registration packet.

The Network recommends verifying foster care status through multiple methods, when possible, to ensure the accuracy of your local data. Student information systems can be modified to include a verified/confirmed button that can be checked when the district is confident that a youth has foster care status. While awaiting confirmation, the Network recommends ensuring youth are granted access to whatever supports and resources are available to the maximum extent possible.

⁸ Cal. Educ. Code §§ Sections 48852, 49069.5(c); California Rule of Court 5.651(e).

▲ **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION** | Screening questions should be designed to avoid retraumatizing youth or the people caring for them. This will require training for enrollment staff on how to present the request for information in a sensitive way, as well as carefully worded questions. Training curriculum should also consider avoiding the use of labels (e.g., foster youth, homeless youth) because youth will often not identify with those labels and this can become a barrier to serving them. We also recommend that, when labels are necessary, utilizing 'youth first' language (i.e., youth in foster care instead of foster youth). This language humanizes the experiences of youth as people first, respects them as individuals, and defines their experiences in the foster care system as secondary to their individual identities.

+ **PRACTICE TIP** | Identifying youth at enrollment also allows for immediately addressing school stability and immediate enrollment issues and for utilizing all 30 days of the AB 167/216 notification timeline.

STEP 3

Gather Additional Information

The Network recommends gathering additional information for youth in foster care and building a [Student Information System Page for Youth in Foster Care](#) to hold this information, in addition to the information gathered for all other students. Aeries has also released a [Beta](#) on organizing information related to youth in foster care. You can also learn about what [Orange County](#) is doing with its real time data for youth in foster care in its Aeries system.

STEP 4

Designate Youth in Foster Care in your Student Information System

Choose a Designation: The Network recommends utilizing a non-descript visual icon within your SIS to clearly indicate who your youth in foster care are so they are easily identified and served. ✳ Long Beach Unified School District's (USD) Student Information System (SIS), Synergy, utilizes a blue house icon. Alhambra USD's SIS, Power School, utilizes a yellow star. Aeries, utilized by Bonita and West Covina USDs, utilizes Code 190/Foster Program. Pomona USD's SIS uses a wingding. Alhambra USD uses a descriptor, STAR Youth. 🟡

Identify Who Will Designate Youth: Network districts with a smaller number of youth in foster care (e.g., 100-250) recommend training front desk staff at schools to designate youth in foster care within the SIS at enrollment because the workload is not too burdensome. Network districts with a larger number of youth in foster care (500+) recommend designating youth within the SIS at the district level to ensure accuracy. 🟡 The Network recommends centralizing data input whenever possible as a method to increase its accuracy and reliability.

✳ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION** | The Network recommends using a nonspecific icon/label that includes both youth in foster care and involved in the juvenile justice system to ensure that youth, especially those involved in the juvenile justice system, are not easily identifiable for differential treatment at the school site level.

● **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION** | A 2015 study in Los Angeles about youth involved in the juvenile justice system found that 83% had previous contact with the child welfare system.⁹ This means that a vast majority of youth involved in the juvenile justice system have been subject to the same home instability and trauma that youth in the child welfare system experience. This also means that the same types of trauma informed education services, including positive behavior interventions, would benefit youth involved in the juvenile justice system as well as youth in the foster care system.

■ **PRACTICE TIP** | If information is uploaded directly from another system (e.g., online enrollment system) which could possibly be incorrect (e.g., if a person enrolling the child is self-identifying), districts can create a drop-down menu that allows a district staff member to indicate whether the information is confirmed as correct or not (e.g., through contact with a youth's social worker).

9 McCroskey, et. al. 2015 Crossover Youth: Los Angeles County Probation Youth with Previous Referrals to Child Protective Agencies. <<https://www.datanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/CrossoverYouth.pdf>>.

Identify Who Has Permissions: The Network recommends providing different levels of permissions for school site and district level staff due to their differing needs and uses of information including the identity of youth in foster care or involved in the juvenile justice system and other confidential information included in their student record. ★

STEP 5

Set Up Automatic Notifications

Once youth in foster care are designated within the SIS, the Network recommends using a process for notifying relevant staff once a youth in foster care is enrolled. ♦ SISs can be modified to automatically send a push notification or email to the Foster Youth Liaison so they know a new student has arrived and needs to be served, including a copy of the screening form. ▲

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Training — The Network recommends training on trauma informed practices, how to sensitively administer the Screening Questions for Youth In Foster Care, and how to appropriately designate youth in foster care in your SIS.

Stakeholder Engagement — The Network recommends engaging district Directors, Foster Youth Liaisons, and SIS staff in the creation and/or updating of processes and practices around identifying and designating youth in foster care in your SIS. Engaging community members such as your child welfare agency, probation agency, and STRTP staff can also help in the creation of a successful identification process. Finally, youth in foster care who are currently in your district, and open to self-identification and participation, should be engaged in this process as much as possible to help identify key information to ask for, how to ask it, and concerns to address.

Working with Local Student Information System

Data — The Network recommends designating all youth in foster care being served by the district within the student information system to collect

★ **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION** | Who has legitimate educational interests, within your district, to know who youth in foster care or involved in the juvenile justice system are (e.g., teachers vs. counselors vs. school site administrators)? Protecting the privacy of a youth who has experienced trauma is important to their sense of safety and security. Protecting the privacy of a youth involved in the juvenile justice system is important so they are not singled out for differential treatment. Allowing school site staff to see the icon/code so they know they need to treat the student with special care is important to address everyday issues such as behavioral incidents caused by trauma triggers or absences for court attendance. The Network recommends full access to a student's records for youth in foster care or involved in the juvenile justice system be reserved for highly trained or specialized staff such as Liaisons or School Based Social Workers. Thoughtful privacy protections for youth in foster care or involved in the juvenile justice system should weigh what information is necessary to allow different district staff to do their jobs against protecting the confidentiality rights of youth. Youth in foster care themselves should help to inform policies in this area to the greatest extent possible.

♦ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | In Alhambra Unified School District's SIS, Power School, the yellow star icon for youth in foster care is programmed to pop up on all other SIS screens so this special designation for youth in foster care is impossible to miss when looking at the student's education records.

▲ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | Pomona Unified School District's SIS, Q, automatically populates students onto the Foster Youth Liaison's computer screen immediately after they complete the online enrollment and screening process so the Liaison can begin evaluating the youths' needs.

local data to help districts better understand what the needs of their youth are and to use in allocating resources to address those needs. The Network recommends determining how many the total number of youth in foster care the district is serving throughout the course of the school year. For more on how to pull this data, see [Best Practices Guide 6: Using Local Data to Monitor Education Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care, Data Point 1: Total Number of Youth in Foster Care Served by the District Each School Year](#). This data can be helpful in identifying the personnel and resources necessary to serve this population. The CBEDS count of youth in foster care only captures a snapshot of youth who are there both on count day in October and testing days in the Spring. This does not account for the instability that youth in foster care regularly experience and often provides a vast undercount of how many youth in foster care a district is responsible for educating throughout the course of a school year (even though this is used for LCFF funding allocation purposes). Gathering local data can most accurately identify how many youth the district is serving for budget and resource allocation purposes. +

STATE LEVEL POLICY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NETWORK DISTRICTS

Probation Matching/Notification — Although AB 490 requires that youth on probation, regardless of where they live, receive all the same education rights and protections as youth in foster care, there is currently no state level method for data matching and identifying all youth involved in the juvenile justice system that a district is serving. This makes it very difficult for districts to comply with their legal responsibilities to youth on probation not living in a suitable placement.¹⁰ The Network recommends creation of state and local systems to identify all youth involved in the juvenile justice system to school districts, regardless of what their type of home placement.

Notification of Home Placement Change for Youth in Foster Care | Throughout the state, there are significant implementation issues with school districts receiving the required notification of home placement changes from the child welfare agency described above. To learn more about the status of notifications across the state, see [School Stability for California's Youth in Foster Care](#). Increasing awareness of the crucial importance of this information, systems that automate and/or simplify the notification process, and county or state level accountability around this legal requirement would ensure faster identification of youth in foster care at or before enrollment.

+ **PRACTICE TIP** | The Network recommends identifying and programming your data formulas and then setting them up to work in the moment to allow for immediately utilizing the data to drive improving student outcomes. Some examples of this might include notifications in the student information system when a student disenrolls to designated staff to ensure partial credits are issued and/or notifications in the SIS when a student disenrolls to ensure a school of origin best interest determination meeting occurs.

¹⁰ Youth on probation living in a suitable placement are included in the LCFF definition of youth in foster care and are identified in the state level match. All other youth on probation, including those living at home with their parents, at home with other family members, in congregate care facilities such as group homes or STRTPs, or in camps or juvenile halls are not currently included in the state level match.



EXPLORATION QUESTIONS

Identifying and Designating Youth in Foster Care in your SIS

It is important to identify staff that can help answer the investigatory questions posed below and make any needed changes to policies or systems. Network participants involved in this process included foster youth liaisons, student services directors, and data/technology staff. Consider whether there are additional people you need to speak with to fully explore your districts needs in this area. Some ideas of additional people that it may be helpful to engage with on this issue include LCAP drafters responsible for incorporating targeted metrics into the district's LCAP, CALPADS administrators with access to data on youth in foster care including state level matches, SIS experts who can explain the system's current capabilities, have authority to make changes to the system and/or knowledge to write queries and reports, and/or allocate funding to make changes to the SIS. If your district has a local child welfare match (e.g., through Foster Focus), the person responsible for receiving that data match may also be helpful to consult.

It is crucial to be able to identify youth in foster care as defined by LCFF and as defined by AB 490 and related laws. To learn more on these definitions, see [Foster Youth Education Toolkit](#). Identifying youth residing in your district who are in the foster care and/or juvenile justice system is important to allow districts to look at their aggregate data in order to establish baseline performance and monitor the continuous improvement process as you make program modifications.

While it is important to utilize CALPADS in identifying youth in foster care, CALPADS should not be the sole avenue for identification because: (1) CALPADS data is not always up-to-date or 100% accurate; (2) CALPADS data is not always sufficiently comprehensive as it does not include all youth in foster care as defined under AB 490, who are not also youth in foster care as defined by LCFF (i.e., probation youth who are not suitably placed); and (3) aggregate data on youth in foster

care cannot be tracked and analyzed in CALPADS. Working within your district team (including additional participants you deem appropriate), you can investigate the district's identification of youth in foster care by asking the following questions:

1. Is CALPADS regularly updated? Who is looking at it? How often? How are they using that information?
2. Does the district have a local data match with child welfare? How is that data tracked (e.g., Excel, Word document, Google document)? Which youth are included within that match? Who has access to that information? How often is that data updated?
3. Does the district have a local data match with probation? How is that data tracked (e.g., Excel, Word document, Google document)? Who has access to that information? How often is that data updated?
4. Are you effectively collecting information at enrollment that will help you identify a youth in foster care and/or in the juvenile justice system who may not be identified through data sharing measures? See [Foster Youth Education Toolkit](#) for helpful suggestions.
5. Are there additional student information systems used by the district to track information (e.g., special education system, enrollment system, other data management system)? If so, identify the purpose of the system including what information it tracks, who has access to the system, how the system could be modified to track additional information, can the information from that system be shared or uploaded to your other data systems, how often is the data compiled and to whom and how is the data reported?
6. Outside of information systems, what other data is tracked informally for youth in foster care? How?
7. Once all your youth in the foster care and/or juvenile justice system have been identified, do you have them flagged or designated within your system for easy data collection and analysis? If so, how?



DOWNLOADABLE TOOL

SCREENING QUESTIONS FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

The Network recommends including questions as part of your student intake process that are specifically tailored to identify youth in foster care or in the juvenile justice system. These questions allow districts to immediately find and begin serving their youth, without the need to wait for data matches or other means of identification that may not always flag all youth in foster care. Districts should consider which questions will yield the information that they need, and how that information will be utilized by the district.

Identifying Youth in Foster Care: Many youth who qualify as a youth in foster care may not self-identify as “foster.” Questions that ask a youth or their caregiver to self-identify whether they are in foster care often miss many youth who qualify.✳️ The Network recommends asking additional questions that can help flag potential youth in foster care as part of the standard intake questions asked of all students.

Network Members Most Commonly Use the Following Screening Questions:

• **Does the youth receive visits from a social worker or probation officer?**

• **Does the youth regularly attend court to discuss whom they will live with?**

• **Does the youth have an attorney or other representative that helps them determine who they will live with?**

• **Does the youth live in a congregate care facility (e.g., group home or short-term residential therapeutic program (STRTP))?**

• **Has the youth ever had a court appointed Education Rights Holder? 🗳️**

• **Does the youth live with someone other than their parents? 🏠**

• **Has the youth ever been in foster care or involved in the juvenile justice system? If so, when was the case closed? ⭐️💎**

✳️ **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION** | When relatives complete such questions, they often respond that the youth is not in foster care since they are not living with strangers but rather with family. Youth often choose not to self-identify for privacy reasons. Viewing these responses from a trauma-informed perspective helps us understand that youth and their relatives want to take back ownership over their lives and distance themselves from a system that has often treated them poorly. Ensure that your system does not require a youth or a family to label themselves in order to access the services that they are entitled to.

● **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION** | Districts could alternatively ask this question as “Does someone other than your biological parent hold your education rights?” but Network members believe the original question is more trauma informed.

■ **PRACTICE TIP** | Network districts find this question casts a wide net and will help identify the most difficult to find youth in foster care as well as many youth not in foster care. This creates the need for a further clarifying conversation. The Network recommends that whomever has this further conversation receives the necessary training to do this in a trauma sensitive way.

★ **PRACTICE TIP** | Network districts found this question important to ask for high school youth only as it identifies youth who may have outstanding partial credit or AB 167/216 graduation rights, even if their foster care or juvenile justice case is currently closed. For example, if a youth was in foster care last year and never received their partial credits, knowing their past foster care status will help districts work with the prior district to ensure partial credits are issued.

◆ **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION** | Network districts recommend any follow up conversations to gain further information be completed by someone with trauma training to ensure healing wounds around past involvement in the foster care and/or juvenile justice system are not reopened.

Collect Additional Contact Information: Youth in foster care have unique people in their lives that play important roles in working with schools and districts. Gathering contact information at enrollment will help schools remain connected to these people when trying to serve youth. The Network recommends asking for contact information from Education Rights Holders, social workers (and supervisors), probation officers, attorneys representing youth, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and Independent Living Program Counselors, where applicable and available. Relevant contact information to collect includes name, address, phone number, and email. This contact information, once collected, should be entered into the [Student Information System Page for Youth in Foster Care](#).

Ask Additional Historical Questions: The Network recommends that the enrollment screening questions ask for a complete school history from the youth and the adult enrolling them so that the district can begin collecting essential records (e.g., IEPs, previous courses, transcripts from all high schools). Additional information can be collected during enrollment (or at a later placement meeting) such as extracurricular activities/interests. This information can be used to integrate the youth into the school community such as connecting them to a sports coach for tryouts or helping them sign up for a club.



DOWNLOADABLE TOOL



STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEM PAGE FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

The Network recommends creating and utilizing a page (or set of fields) within your student information system to keep track of information relevant to youth in foster care. Consider what information is needed and how you will use it, who will input the information, who has access to view and/or edit the information, and what, if any, additional training might be needed for those who will input or access the information.

Unique Contact Information: Youth in foster care have critical additional adults in their lives that other students typically do not have. There is typically not space on a normal demographics page to include these additional people and their contact information. However, the district is still responsible for working with these individuals. For example, some youth in foster care have a caregiver who is different than the person who holds their education decision-making rights. Which person goes into the 'parent' section? Where does the other person go? The Network recommends creating additional fields on the demographics page or adding additional demographic information on a page specific to youth in foster care to include the contact information for the following people, including name, address, phone number, and email address: ▲ caregiver, education rights holder, + social worker and social worker supervisor, probation officer, attorney representing youth in child welfare system, attorney representing youth in juvenile justice system, and Court Appointed Special Advocate. The Network recommends adding in a final field that staff can self-generate as needed for additional people supporting a specific youth (e.g., Independent Living Program Counselor). *

Identify Who Has Access and Permissions: The Network recommends that only certain people be able to input and/or edit this information (e.g., Foster Youth Liaison or counselor with specialized training, data/technology staff). All other staff members should have read only access (e.g., front desk staff). This allows for fidelity in the information which is input into the system. ●


▲ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | Long Beach Unified School District's student information system (Simplicity) allows for additional information to be noted alongside each person's contact information to identify whether that person: (1) is an Education Rights Holder; (2) can have the youth released to them; (3) lives with the youth; or (4) has legal custody of the youth. This allows multiple people to be checked for school mailings such as IEP or discipline notices, report cards, attendance calls, etc.

+ **PRACTICE TIP** | Education Rights Holder information is important to gather for multiple reasons including being able to contact them for relevant education decisions and also to send appropriate information to them (e.g., IEP notices, report cards, discipline notices). Consider including a special asterisk or other note to remind district staff about when to utilize Education Rights Holder versus caregiver.

* **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | Bonita Unified School District will soon be using the Aeries communication application which also allows for the identification of specific people to receive different telephonic and written notices from the school.

● **PRACTICE TIP** | The Network recommends adding in a date input/updated to allow for staff to see how recently the information has been added to determine whether it is current. For example, this can be the date of the Education Rights Holder order so that if later Education Rights Holder orders are received, it can be determined which order is most recent in time and therefore legally controlling.

Additional Data Specific to Youth in Foster Care: The Network recommends creating a page specific to youth in foster care in your SIS to keep track of additional relevant information. Determining what information to track (e.g., simple information multiple staff need access to such as graduation status compared to complex school stability data that only the Foster Youth Liaison is using and might be overwhelming to most staff) and how to track it (e.g., drop-down boxes, boxes to fill in notes) is dependent upon the District's purpose. Some examples include:

- **GRADUATION TRACK |** The Network recommends tracking AB 167/216 status with a drop-down box including options for: (1) Eligibility: Yes/No/Determined Eligible by Prior District; and (2) Education Rights Holder Graduation Choice: ERH Declines 216/Chooses District Graduation Requirements, 216 Graduation, or 5th year. 
- **SCHOOL STABILITY |** The Network recommends tracking whether a Best Interest Determination (BID) has been made with a drop down box (Yes/No) and then adding a BID Notes box which can include information about whether a youth is returning to their school of origin and the name of the school, what the transportation method is, and who is responsible for funding it.
- **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION THAT DISTRICTS CAN CONSIDER TRACKING INCLUDES |** whether an Education Rights Holder determined it was in a youth's best interests before they were placed at an alternative school site if districts are experiencing **disproportionality**, whether the youth receives mental health counseling, or what sports/activities a youth might be interested in participating in.

■ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT |** Alhambra Unified School District has a graduation cap icon that is visible on all SIS (Power School) screens when youth are on a special graduation track. After clicking on the icon, the date of the graduation track decision is viewable to designated staff (e.g., counselors but not teachers).



DOWNLOADABLE TOOL

DISTRICT WEBPAGES FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

A district's website is often a key place where individuals find information for students, including current, prospective, and former students. Having information easily accessible here will increase the probability that youth in foster care will know and be able to access the rights, supports, and services that the district has developed for them. The Network recommends creating both internal and external webpages for addressing the needs of youth in foster care: a public page accessible to all who visit the school or district's websites, and an internal page for information that is accessible only to employees of the district. The public page serves to give information and resources to members of the public who know their status as a youth in foster care, as well as a place for those who may not know about their status or rights to learn about them. The internal page includes all district policies and procedures related to youth in foster care and serves as a place for employees to find any information they might need for serving these youth.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR PUBLIC PAGE

Accessibility and Linkage: Since many youth in the foster care system, and their families, may not identify as such, requiring a specific search related to foster care to find the public website page (and the information contained therein) will prevent many youth from accessing the information and resources contained on that page. Therefore, the Network recommends making the page as broad as possible, to capture the attention of all youth it may apply to. The Network believes it is also helpful to create links to a foster youth page from other resource and information related pages such as mental health, tutoring, special education, and school discipline information pages.

Items to Include on Public Page:

Definitions — The webpage should include clarification of whom rights and resources apply to, for example, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, youth living in the home of a family member with an open case in the dependency/foster care court, etc.

Contact Information — Contact information, including telephone number and email, should be provided for the Director of Student Services, AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison, school-based social workers, mental health supports within the district, registrars or counselors responsible for gathering and issuing partial credits, and clerical support for gathering and transferring records.

Basic Rights Information — Information on the basic general education rights of youth in foster care should be included in language that youth and those who support them can easily understand. For an example of an Alliance for Children's Rights youth centered handout, see [this education rights flyer](#).

Policies/Procedures — All of the districts Board Policies, Administrative Regulations, and other policies, procedures, and practices related to the education of youth in foster care should be provided on this page, so that youth and families can learn and understand how the district supports the rights and needs of youth in foster care.

Links to Tools and Forms — The Network recommends providing necessary links to relevant tools and forms, where applicable. For example, when identifying a youth's right to immediate enrollment, the district can specifically link to their enrollment forms or online enrollment portal, including a clear description of which documents or portions of the enrollment process are not required for youth in care to immediately enroll. The Network also recommends creating a "What you need to know on the first day" information document or page that might include information on where to go if you need help and the most important school- or district-wide policies (not specific to youth in foster care) that impact students on a daily basis such as positive behavior intervention practices.

Additional Resources To Include | The Network has identified several key resources that should be included on a webpage, but fall outside of the typical rights of youth in foster care:

Records: Provide information (and a link to a form, if applicable) about how to request a youth's school records.

Partial Credits: Provide information about how to request an updated transcript, including partial credits.

School Materials: Provide information about how to get support to obtain materials needed for school including typical school supplies (e.g., backpack, paper, electronic device, internet connectivity), school or PE uniforms, uniforms or equipment required for participation in sports or other extracurricular activities such as music, drama, art. ★

External Resources: Provide information or links to resources for additional support that youth in foster care or their families may need such as food pantries, backpack giveaways, housing information, college resources-grants scholarships, etc.

Health, Social, Emotional, Behavioral Health Support Services: Provide information and links to resources for a youth or family's overall well-being such as free medical clinics, supports to access immunizations and vaccines, trauma-based mental health resources, etc.

Mentor and Foster Youth Peer Resources: Share any internal or external mentoring resources.


Frequently Asked Questions for All Parties — Compile a list of questions and answers most commonly heard by counselors, AB 490 Foster Youth Liaisons, and others serving youth in foster care in the district and answer them, along with links to resources as applicable.


Language Accessibility — Information should always be provided in a youth and/or family's first language and/or information about accessing free translation/

★ **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION |** The Network recommends doing whatever is required to ensure that youth in foster care get the materials that they need discreetly and without the need to publicly identify themselves or what they lack. For example, a youth may be refusing to dress for gym because they do not have a PE uniform, and may not want to admit that they cannot purchase it. The district should make needed materials easily accessible and readily available, with information online about how to access them. For example, the webpage might include contact information about who the youth could reach out to for free gym clothes if needed.


KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERNAL PAGE


interpretation services should also be provided.

The Network recommends that the internal page include the mission, or vision statement for either the district, or ideally the youth in foster care program, at the top of the page to center everyone on why they are doing this work. This page should include key resources that staff members can utilize to support youth in foster care.  This page can be useful for those staff who are regularly serving youth in foster care (e.g., AB 490 Foster Youth Liaisons) as well as those staff who serve them less often (e.g., an academic counselor) and may need to be reminded of resources, policies, and contacts when serving a particular youth.

Contacts — The internal webpage should include detailed and updated contact information and details about the role each district staff member has with respect to serving youth in foster care. 

Links — The internal webpage should include the same links to resources as the public page. The page should additionally include links to policies, procedures, checklists, and tools for implementation of the rights of youth in foster care. It should also include links to the student information system, and information about how to find and utilize data and information from that system.

 **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT |** Bonita Unified School District has an internal webpage that includes all internal policies and is utilized by all school sites to better coordinate their supports for youth in foster care at the district level.

 **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT |** Pomona Unified School District has an internal handbook detailing the role of each staff member with respect to youth in foster care.

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE 2



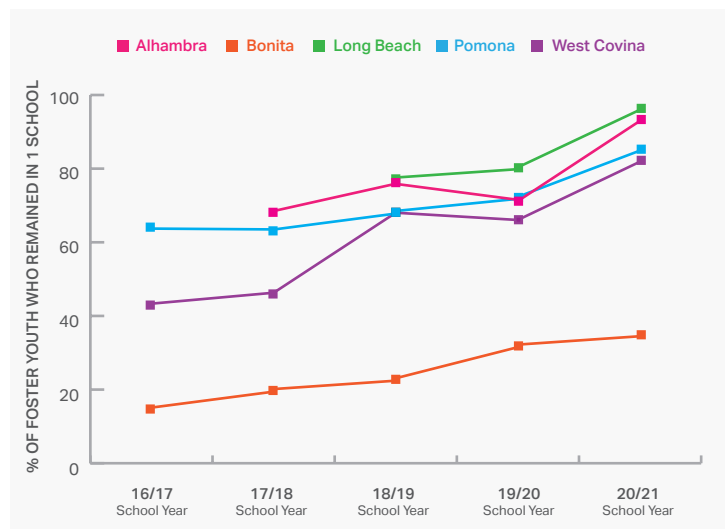
Improving School Stability



Youth in foster care change schools an average of 8 times while in care, losing up to 6 months of learning with each move.

In addition to the trauma youth in foster care suffer being removed from their parents, each home change brings the possibility of re-traumatization (e.g., orienting themselves to new foster family members, new rules, new living arrangements, new foods, etc.). If a home change is also accompanied by a school change, the youth also loses bonds built with friends, teachers, sports teams, and other extracurricular activities. School instability is also a major cause of the poor academic and social/emotional/behavioral outcomes for youth in foster care found across the state in school district Dashboards, including poor graduation rates, low test scores, chronic absenteeism, and school discipline measures.

LOCAL DATA — Percentage of Youth in Foster Care who Remain in One School For a Full School Year



[CLICK HERE FOR DETAILED DATA VIEW](#)

For more information on the importance of and how to collect this type of data, see [Guide 6: Using Local Data to Monitor Education Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care](#).

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

School of Origin as Default: Youth in foster care have a right to remain in their school of origin following a home placement change, unless their Education Rights Holder (ERH) determines it is in their best interest to change schools. In recognition of the major disruptions that occur for a youth with experiencing a school change, both California and Federal law make clear that remaining in the school of origin is the default placement when a youth moves home placements. Before making a recommendation to move a youth in foster care from their school of origin, a school district of origin's AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison must provide the youth and their education rights holder with a written explanation of why it is in the youth's best interest to transfer to a new school. Also, a youth should not be moved from their school of origin until after a written waiver of this right is obtained by the school district from the education rights holder.¹¹

Child Welfare System and Probation Notice Requirements: Child welfare and probation agencies must provide notification for home placement moves that will impact a youth in foster care's school stability. For youth in general education, the obligation is to provide notice to the child's attorney, the education rights holder, and the court within one day of making the decision to change the child's placement. For youth in foster care who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), notification must be provided to the sending school district as well as the receiving Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) at least 10 days before the change of home placement.¹²

California School of Origin Definition: California law defines school of origin as the school attended when the youth was first removed from their parents/entered the child welfare system, the school attended prior to the most recent home placement change, and any school attended in the last 15 months where the youth feels a connection. This includes matriculation/feeder pattern rights (e.g., if a youth is first removed from their home in elementary school, but wants to return to their school of origin in middle school, they can attend the middle school that the school of origin elementary school feeds into).¹³



Federal School of Origin Definition: The federal definition of school of origin, as found in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) transportation requirements, provides a limited school of origin definition and only includes the last school attended prior to a placement change. ESSA also requires school districts and child welfare agencies to develop and implement clear written procedures governing how transportation to maintain youth in foster care in their school of origin when in their best interest will be promptly provided, arranged, and funded in a cost-effective manner.¹⁴

Review our [Exploration Questions](#) to see how the Network began our discussions on this topic and to see how to begin your own.

¹¹ 20 U.S.C. Section 6311(g)(1)(e)(i); Cal. Educ. Code Section 48853.5.

¹² Cal. Rule of Court 5.651.

¹³ Cal. Educ. Code Section 48853.5(f)(4).

¹⁴ 20 U.S.C. Section 6312(c)(5)(B).

BEST PRACTICES for Developing a District System to Consistently Support School Stability

STEP 1

Gather Baseline Data on Home and School Instability

The Network recommends school districts work with their local child welfare agency to gather baseline data on how many youth in foster care moved in and out of the district each year for the past two years,¹⁵ as well as which type of home placements these youth were living in. Comparing the instability rates of youth living in foster homes versus relative homes versus Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP) can help a district target interventions where most needed to improve stability rates. # Further, **+** special consideration should be made around school stability for youth living in STRTPs since these placements are designed to be short term (i.e., six months or less). For example, considering the long-term placement plan for a youth (e.g., will be returning back to a relative caregiver after an STRTP placement) can guide the education rights holder in making decisions about a long-term education stability plan. Further, under California regulations, the transportation for these youth to their school of origin is the responsibility of the STRTP (unless other arrangements have been made in the youth's Needs and Services Plan or Transitional Independent Living Plan), not the district.¹⁶ This will be helpful in determining the level of need the district must meet in Step 3: Budget Personnel and Fiscal Resources to Meet School Stability Needs.

If you are unable to collect this data from your child welfare agency, or in addition to that data, the Network recommends that districts also collect and analyze their own local data. Within your student information system, once all youth in foster care have been designated, identify how many youth stay stable in one school for the entire school year and how many youth move in and out of a school in the district each year. Ideally, this data will match that provided by the child welfare agency and will also be helpful for allocating resources in Step 3. The Network recommends

that districts gather this data each year to monitor efforts to improve school stability over time. *

+ TRAUMA AND EQUITY CONSIDERATION

Youth who have experienced high levels of trauma are often caught in a negative cycle where their trauma leads to struggles in school and at home, often causing placement changes and less stability. This lack of stability leads to further traumatization with each school and home move. The Network recommends considering the equity needs of these youth, including what additional supports they need to stabilize in a school setting and what additional interventions are needed to support their school stability when they experience a home placement change.




* **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT |** Bonita Unified School District has closely monitored their data on school stability for the last several years, using the data to monitor the implementation of several new procedures designed to improve school stability. While a district alone cannot control all the factors related to school stability (e.g., whether youth in foster care experience home placement changes), this data has allowed them to see positive changes as a result of their new practices. For example, after ensuring that all youth were informed of their school of origin rights at enrollment and disenrollment, Bonita saw a 10% improvement in the stability of their youth in foster care.

15 See [School Stability for California's Youth in Foster Care](#) for more information on counties who are successfully gathering this data.

16 STRTP Interim Licensing Standards, Version 3 (Released 1/11/19) Section 87074(c).

STEP 2

Develop Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Transportation Plan

Federal law requires that districts work with their local child welfare agency to develop an ESSA transportation plan. The Network recommends districts include their county office of education and/or other nearby districts in developing joint plans to account for transporting youth in foster care between districts that are geographically close together and/or within the same county. This plan should contemplate how: (1) the district will be notified  by the child welfare agency when a youth has moved home placements (including what the mode of notification will be and who specifically will be responsible for sending and receiving this notice) and ensuring that the plan includes notice to the sending district and receiving SELPA at least 10 days in advance for youth in foster care with IEPs in accordance with the law, as well as clear timelines for when notice will be provided for general education youth ; (2) the district and child welfare agency will communicate during the process; (3) transportation for the youth will be initiated and funded in the short-term, while information is being gathered and a meeting is planned (since school of origin is the default placement, the youth will need a transportation plan in place immediately, while a longer-term plan is contemplated); (4) the best interest determination meeting or conversation will be initiated and facilitated, and by whom ; (5) decision making authority will be divided between the district and child welfare agency over the developmentally appropriate and most cost effective long-term transportation option (after a best interest determination decision has been made by the education rights holder), which staff at each agency will be responsible for decision making, and what factors will be considered by the agency staff in making this decision; and (6) disputes will be resolved.

Several Network districts have participated in the creation of an ESSA transportation plan with the Los Angeles County Office of Education and Department of Children and Family Services. For more information about how counties across California have addressed these issues in their ESSA transportation plans, including legal requirements, agency highlights, and sample

ESSA transportation plans, see [School Stability for California's Youth in Foster Care](#).

● **PRACTICE TIP** | The Network has found that this notification, while seemingly simple, is one of the most important steps of this entire process. Districts should ensure that they work closely with the child welfare agency to determine exactly how and when this notification will happen, otherwise the other steps of the process cannot move forward.

■ **PRACTICE TIP** | Although districts are not specifically included in the Rule of Court specifying who must receive notice within one day of a decision to change a general education youth's home placement, the court must receive a recommendation from the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison prior to a youth changing schools. The Network recommends creating a plan that includes notification to districts at the same time as other parties are provided notice for general education youth.

★ **PRACTICE TIP** | Consider the number of youth in foster care transferring in and out of your district each year for the past two years. Use this number to identify how many best interest determination meetings would be required, as well as the personnel resources and workload required to facilitate these meetings.

STEP 3

Budget Personnel and Fiscal Resources to Meet School Stability Needs

Based on the data collected in Step 1 and procedures developed in Step 2, meet with transportation experts and chief financial officer and/or assistant superintendent for business in your district to discuss the costs and liability of different forms of transportation. Consider estimates based on transportation modes currently used for any youth in foster care accessing school of origin transportation, as well as potential economies of scale if more youth were to utilize these options. Using all this information, determine: (1) personnel and staffing required for the district to adequately participate in the agreed upon best interest determination process from the ESSA transportation plan; (2) allocate funding in the district's Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) for the anticipated personnel needs; (3) appropriately hire and train anticipated personnel needed; and (4) allocate funding in the district's LCAP for the anticipated transportation costs. ♦

STEP 4

Determine Whether the District Will Conduct Best Interest Determination Meetings for Incoming¹⁷ and Outgoing¹⁸ Youth

Most ESSA transportation plans address transportation needs to school of origin for outgoing youth, which is in line with school of origin being the legal default. The law requires that the outgoing school AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison give a written recommendation to the youth and their education rights holder if they are recommending that the youth not remain in their school of origin.¹⁹ Accordingly, it makes sense for the outgoing school/district of origin to hold the best interest determination meeting prior to making any specific recommendation.

The Network recommends districts also address school of origin as a part of the intake/enrollment procedure. The Network recommends informing all incoming youth, their education

rights holders, and their caregivers about the right of the youth to return to their school of origin. The Network has found that many youth and their education rights holders did not know about their school of origin rights and had not been informed of this right on their exit from their previous school. Informing youth and their education rights holder of this right at enrollment will likely increase your school stability rates as more youth and their education rights holders may choose to utilize this option once they know about it. The Network has also found that it is helpful to inform youth of this right because even if they do not choose to exercise it when coming into the district, they will move forward in their education empowered with this knowledge and can better advocate for themselves if they are required to move home placements in the future. The Network recommends that the incoming process focus on informing the youth of their rights, as well as reaching out to the outgoing district as necessary to hold a best interest meeting, rather than attempting to complete the entire best interest process yourself. However, there is nothing barring an incoming district from leading the process.

♦ **PRACTICE TIP** | Districts are thinking creatively around transportation options. For example, Pomona Unified School District is considering a program where employees who live near the home placement of a youth in foster care can receive travel reimbursement for providing the youth with transportation to their school. These district employees could also act as mentors to the youth, helping them build additional positive connections to their school. The Network encourages districts to think creatively about possible transportation options.

¹⁷ Incoming refers to youth in foster care who are moving into your school and/or district.

¹⁸ Outgoing refers to youth in foster care who are moving home placements out of your school's catchment area.

¹⁹ Although the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison has an independent obligation to provide a written recommendation, the ERH remains the ultimate decisionmaker. 20 U.S.C. Section 6311(g)(1)(e)(i); Cal. Educ. Code Section 48853.5(f)(6).

STEP 5

Determine How to Identify When Youth in Foster Care Have Left the District

The Network recommends creating a system utilizing multiple methods of identifying when a youth in foster care leaves the district. Some examples of these methods include:

ESSA Plan Notification Process | The Network recommends that the ESSA transportation plan that the district developed with their local child welfare agency clearly indicates the ways that notification will occur, including the timeline and responsible parties.

Disenrollment | If the district is not notified about the youth changing homes (and thus the need to hold a best interest determination meeting) prior to disenrollment, the Network recommends developing a disenrollment trigger that initiates a best interest determination process. This can be done by setting up a system for the front desk staff to notify the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison upon disenrollment or through setting up an automatic notification through your student information system. ▲ Unfortunately, this will not catch all (or even most) youth in foster care since many youth are not formally disenrolled from school but rather just stop attending.

Automatic Trigger After 3 Consecutive Days of Absence | In many districts and counties, the above methods for identifying when a youth has left a school are not being consistently implemented. The Network recommends that districts create a system that automatically triggers a search for a youth in foster care after they have been absent from school for 3 days in a row. An automatic notification or email to an attendance clerk/counselor or AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison allows them to work to confirm whether the youth remains in the current home placement or the youth's new home placement by: (1) searching CALPADS for enrollment in a new school; and/or (2) contacting the attorney for the youth, the child welfare and/or probation agency, and/or the education rights holder to inquire about the status of the youth's current/new home placement. + District personnel can then coordinate with the new district to conduct

the best interest determination process. The Network recommends that if the district is unable to confirm that the youth remains in the current placement, has experienced a change of home placement, or identify the youth's new school within 2 days, the district initiates the best interest determination process, based on the available information. The best interest determination process cannot be completed until the education rights holder has made a decision in writing.

▲ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | West Covina Unified School District and Long Beach Unified School Districts have their data expert send a list of disenrolled youth in foster care to their AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison on a weekly basis so they can also catch disenrolled youth quickly for school stability purposes.

+ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION** | When developing your absence investigation and best interest determination process, consider how a youth's school stability may be negatively impacted if social workers, probation officers, and/or education rights holders do not respond in a timely manner to a district's attempt to set up a best interest determination discussion quickly. Take steps to ensure that your absence investigation and best interest determination process comes from a trauma-informed lens and does not unfairly penalize youth if one of the adults responsible for their education is not quickly responsive. For example, utilize multiple methods of attempting to discover a youth's reason for not attending, and/or potential new home placement such as contacting the youth's education rights holder, their attorney, and their social worker at the same time to gather that information. If you develop an "automatic trigger" after a certain number of days of absence, ensure that there is some flexibility in implementation of the policy so that youth who are going through a complex home placement situation, or a temporary event that prevents their attendance for a few days, are not negatively impacted by having the best interest determination process initiated and their education disrupted unnecessarily.

Receiving a Records Request from a New School | Additionally, assuming districts in your county are regularly and timely (within 2 days of enrollment) sending records requests to the prior school when a new youth enrolls, this is another way to quickly identify when youth have left your district.

STEP 6

Implement Short Term Transportation per ESSA Plan

Youth in foster care have the right to remain in their school of origin as a default, until a best interest determination is made by their education rights holder. The Network recommends creating a protocol that provides for youth to receive immediate, short-term transportation to their school of origin. This protocol should identify which agency (i.e., district or child welfare agency) will immediately take action to consider and implement a transportation plan. The Network recommends placing this responsibility on either the district or child welfare agency (but not both), with clear rules about how reimbursement will happen by the other party for whatever division of cost is agreed upon in the ESSA plan. Having a single agency responsible for arranging short-term transportation is necessitated by the speed with which this must be put into place. Ensure there are clear timelines in place for holding the best interest determination meeting as a part of this process, so that the short-term transportation does not become a long-term solution without thoughtful consideration by both agencies during a best interest discussion. This includes making sure necessary education rights holder contact information is provided to the district by the child welfare agency so that the best interest determination meeting can be quickly scheduled. The Network recommends that this education rights holder information is provided within 5 days of the school move.

STEP 7

Determine Your Best Interest Determination Process

The Network recommends creating a protocol that guides the best interest determination team

through the best interest determination process. The law does not provide clarity regarding whether a meeting must take place (compared to a discussion through a phone call or video conference) nor exactly who must attend, other than the education rights holder who must participate as the decision maker and the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison for the outgoing district who must provide a written recommendation if they recommend that the youth not remain in their school of origin.

The party tasked (in the ESSA plan) with initiating the best interest determination process should start by gathering all the team members. In addition to including the education rights holder and the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison for the school of origin, the Network recommends team members should include the: (1) youth (districts should develop and utilize strategies to authentically engage youth in this process); (2) social worker/probation officer (who knows important information about the home placement); (3) AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison from the new district and/or other potential school of origin districts (who can provide information about available programs and services to meet the youth's needs); and (4) the caregiver (e.g., foster parent or congregate care facility representative) for the youth's new home placement (to discuss their availability or legal responsibility to provide transportation to the school of origin). Additional team members that could offer helpful insight include members of a youth's special education team and any mental health providers serving the youth.

The Network recommends that the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison from the school of origin district convenes the best interest determination discussion. This requires the social worker/probation officer to provide the district with accurate education rights holder information and information about the youth's new home placement, caregiver, and potential new district, so that they can all be included in the process quickly after a home placement change.

The best interest protocol should include a form letter, to be sent to all potential team members, inviting them to the best interest determination discussion.

The best interest protocol should specify who is responsible (e.g., AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison or social worker) for ensuring the youth's education

rights holder is contacted and available to participate in the best interest discussion. The protocol should require that all potential schools of origin under California law are considered during the best interest discussion. As the team is considering the school options, it should utilize a best interest determination tool that ensures a review of all the required considerations under California law including: (1) the stability of a youth's school placement (e.g., how many times has the youth changed school placements in the past; is the youth likely to move home placements again; how long has the youth attended the school placement; what time of the school year is the move taking place?); (2) the youth's ability to access academic resources and services in each potential school (e.g., are the classes that the youth is currently enrolled in available at a new school; is the youth accessing tutoring services that may not be available in a new school?); (3) availability of extracurricular and enrichment activities (e.g., is the youth participating in extracurricular activities; is the youth connected to a community of peers or trusted adults through an activity?); (4) the impact on placement in the least restrictive educational placement (e.g., would the youth be able to access a comprehensive school placement in one district, but need to attend an alternative school in a different one?); (5) ability to access educational and developmental services and supports (including those for special education²⁰) to achieve state standards (e.g., what are the different support options that each school offers?).²¹ ✱ The Network also recommends considering the time of travel on the youth's well-being including transportation time, impact of transportation on the youth's ability to participate in extracurricular activities, and ability of the youth to complete homework after returning home from school.²²

The Network also recommends ensuring that the protocol specifies that any tool utilized for making the best interest determination include a place for the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison's written recommendation about whether the youth should remain in their school of origin and, if not, the reasons why a youth should not remain in their school of origin (to fulfill that legal obligation). As the youth's education rights holder has final decision-making authority over

whether a youth remains in their school of origin, the document/tool should also include the education rights holder's ultimate decision, in writing, including an education rights holder signature. While it is best practice to hold a meeting with everyone together, this is sometimes not possible, particularly when decisions must be made quickly. The Network recommends including room on the documentation to note the opinions from different best interest determination team members, and when and how that input was gathered. Where possible, the Network recommends including check boxes to note decisions made, while also leaving room for written notes if needed. Districts can review different best interest determination processes and tools used throughout California in the [Foster Youth Education Toolkit](#) and [School Stability for California's Youth in Foster Care](#). Additional Network district best interest determination tools include [Pomona USD BID Form](#) and [Long Beach USD BID Form](#).

✱ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION** | The best interest determination must be made on an individual basis. Each factor may look different for different youth. For example, if a youth is doing well academically in their school of origin, that could mean that they should remain there, or alternatively, it could mean that the student is highly capable and could successfully handle a school change including catching up in a new school program. If the youth is struggling with school discipline, it may mean that a "fresh start" in a new program will better serve them, or it could mean that the school of origin should continue supporting the youth to work through interventions that they are attempting, rather than having the youth continue to start over and struggle with the same discipline challenges in a new school.

20 Special education representatives may need to be present from all potential districts to speak to the availability of special education programs and services.

21 Cal. Rules of Court Section 5.651(f)(2).

22 It is important to note that the cost of transportation cannot be considered at this point in the best interest determination process. Non-Regulatory Guidance: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care, U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, June 23, 2016, Pgs. 11-12.

STEP 8

Determine Transportation Process per ESSA Plan

Once the youth's education rights holder has made the final best interest determination, if a youth is remaining/returning to their school of origin, transportation must be arranged according to the ESSA plan. Determining the most cost-effective transportation option must be a separate, and secondary, discussion from the best interest determination. The law does not clearly define the decision-maker for the most cost-effective transportation option. Federal law requires that the mode of transportation chosen be cost-effective and consider the developmental needs of the youth.

When making the decision about which transportation option to utilize, the Network recommends involving the education rights holder, caregiver, youth social worker and/or probation officer, and the district's AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison in the decision-making process, as well as anyone else who may be able to support transportation (e.g., district transportation coordinator, relative or caregiver who may be able to provide transportation). The Network also recommends the development of clear criteria to consider when making decisions between modes of transportation (e.g., if the student is under a certain age, public transportation is likely inappropriate). Ensure your ESSA plan contemplates how to address transportation for youth with IEPs, regardless of whether a youth's IEP requires transportation as a related service.

Following the process set forth in the ESSA plan for determining the mode of transportation, the Network recommends developing a clear process by which each potential method of transportation will be administered and by whom. Consider who will: (1) contact the party providing the transportation to begin the service; (2) monitor and address challenges that may arise including day-to-day issues with cancellations or the need for schedule adjustments (e.g., not regularly scheduled minimum days); and (3) pay for each potential transportation option (e.g., will there be an equal division of cost; will different parties take responsibility for different modes?).

STEP 9

If Best Interest Determination by an Education Rights Holder Decides Youth Will Change Schools, Determine Process to Award Partial Credits and Forward Records to New School

If the youth's education rights holder determines that it is in the youth's best interest not to remain in their school of origin, the sending school should immediately award any partial credits the youth has earned (see [Best Practices Guide 4: Issuing Partial Credits to Youth in Foster Care](#)), and prepare and send records to the school that the youth will be enrolling in.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Training — Districts should monitor the number of youth in foster care who are exiting the district each year. This number can be compared to the number of best interest determination meetings to ensure each youth receives a meeting. If the numbers do not match, the process for identifying youth who move and beginning the BID process should be reviewed and further training for relevant staff members considered.

Stakeholder Engagement — Districts can use the positive outcomes of youth who remain in their school of origin to advocate for continued investment in the resources needed to enable the school of origin process.

Working with Local Student Information System Data — The Network recommends designating all youth in foster care being served by the district within the SIS to collect local data to help districts collect local measures of school stability. For more on how to pull this data, visit [Best Practices Guide 6: Using Local Data, Data Point 4: Improving School Stability for Youth in Foster Care](#).

STATE LEVEL POLICY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NETWORK DISTRICTS

Uniform Notification — Notification about home changes is key to initiating the school of origin best interest determination process and ensuring that youth and education rights holders are informed of their school stability rights. However, the rules of court provide for notification to different people on different timelines: (1) for youth in general education, the obligation is to provide notice to the youth's attorney, education rights holder, and the court within one day of making the decision to change the youth's placement; (2) for youth with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), notification must be provided to the sending school district as well as the receiving Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) at least 10 days before the change of home placement.²³ The result is often great confusion and missed notifications. A 2021 survey of the California Foster Youth Education Task Force showed that this is a major barrier to implementation of school stability across the state. Respondents shared that notice is received 50% of the time or less. They also reported that, even for youth with special education needs, SELPAs only received notice about 16% of the time. When asked what might improve these poor numbers, 80% of respondents identified the need for a consistent list of which people need to be notified, with a single timeline for notification, regardless of whether the student is in general education or special education. Clarifying the rules of court to provide a single timeline (survey respondents agreed somewhere around 5 days) to a consistent list of people (respondents identified the most important individuals to receive notice: (1) AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison at the youth's school district of origin prior to a home placement change; (2) youth's education rights holder; (3) youth's attorney; and (4) SELPA for both youth in both general education and special education) would make school stability easier to implement.

Funding — The law that created the right to transportation to school of origin did not create a new funding stream to pay for that transportation.

School districts and child welfare and probation agencies need additional financial support to be able to fully fund transportation for all eligible youth. State and federal education budgets should account for the need for additional funding to support school of origin transportation, as true implementation will require significant additional expenditures.

Statewide Guidance or Policy on ESSA Plans

There has been little guidance or oversight from the state regarding ESSA school of origin transportation plans for school districts, child welfare agencies, or probation departments. This has created a wide difference across the state in the ability of different youth to exercise their school stability rights. Gaining some guidance and technical assistance from the state about the basic elements required in the ESSA transportation plan would aid consistency and coordination between school districts, child welfare agencies, and probation departments, and across county lines as many youth in foster care are placed across county lines. See [School Stability for California's Youth in Foster Care](#) for an extensive review of plans across the state and specific recommendations for future guidance to improve implementation of school stability for youth in foster care.

School Stability Data — A true school stability measure (i.e., the number of youth remaining in their school of origin after experiencing a home placement change) requires cross-agency data sharing and analysis. Support from state-level education and child welfare agencies is essential to create accountability for improving school stability by including a statewide measure on the Education and CCR Dashboards and DataQuest and providing assistance to those counties struggling to demonstrate improvements.

²³ Cal. Rule of Court 5.651.



EXPLORATION QUESTIONS

Improving School Stability

Informing Youth/Education Rights Holders (ERH) about School of Origin (SOO) and Identifying When SOO Discussions Are Necessary

1. How are youth and their caregivers and education rights holders being given information about their SOO rights (e.g., **Alliance for Children's Rights Education Rights Handout**, individual discussions during enrollment process or during 30 day intake meeting)?
2. How is the district **screening youth in foster care or in the juvenile justice system at enrollment** for a school of origin discussion?
3. How is the district identifying youth in foster care or in the juvenile justice system when they disenroll for a SOO discussion?
4. How is the district identifying youth in foster care or in the juvenile justice system who 'disappear' (i.e., are no longer attending a school but have not formally disenrolled) for a SOO discussion? After how many days of missed attendance? Does the district have a procedure or protocol for how to attempt to locate youth who have not disenrolled but are no longer attending?
5. Who on your staff is currently designated to identify youth at these points in time? Is that staffing sufficient to meet the need, based on the number of youth in foster care or in the juvenile justice system who are impacted by school instability?
6. What efforts need to be undertaken to ensure youth/CGs/ERHs know about SOO rights? How can the district most effectively identify youth in foster care or in the juvenile justice system at enrollment/disenrollment/disappearance for SOO discussions? Can the district's SIS help you do this?

Best Interest Determination Discussion with Youth/ERH

7. Do your best interest determination meetings or discussions occur in a district led meeting, a child welfare led Child and Family Team meeting, or within another context?
8. Which district staff are designated to participate in and/or convene the best interest determination meeting or discussion? Which district staff is responsible for ensuring a best interest determination meeting/discussion occurs for every youth experiencing a school change?
9. Do district staff struggle to contact caregivers/ERHs to participate in these discussions? What are your communication needs with CGs/ERHs?
10. Are child welfare/probation agency/congregate care staff invited and/or participating in those conversations? What are the barriers to including them?
11. How does the district gather information on possible schools of origin for the youth (i.e., school attended when first removed from parents, schools attended in the past 15 months where the youth feels a connection)?
12. Does the district have a tool to help guide the best interest determination conversation (e.g., **Foster Youth Education Toolkit** and **School Stability for California's Youth in Foster Care**)?

SOO Transportation

13. Do youth regularly transfer between your district and surrounding or neighboring districts? Would developing deeper relationships with those districts enable smoother coordination around best interest meetings?
14. What is your district doing around transportation to SOO for youth living elsewhere and attending a SOO in your district? What is your district doing around transportation to SOO for youth living in your district and attending a SOO in another district? Are you using existing district bussing routes to transport youth to their SOO within your district? Are you partnering with other districts to transport youth across district boundaries using district bussing?
15. Do you have other transportation funding arrangements (e.g., taxi, public transportation passes, Title I funding)?
16. How are you arranging transportation for youth with transportation as a required service in their IEP (e.g., district buses are going outside of district lines, contracting with bussing company outside of that normally provided by the district, shared bussing with other districts meeting at boundary line)?
17. Do you have a final ESSA transportation plan? How does that inform arranging transportation? Do additional conversations need to happen with child welfare/probation staff to move things toward creating a final transportation plan?
18. Who is designated as your ESSA point of contact? If it is not the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison, how will they integrate their work with that liaison?
19. What new materials, tools, trainings, buy-in etc. is needed to implement your changes?

Policy/Procedure Changes

20. Who needs to be involved in making any policy or procedure changes in your district (e.g., School Board, Superintendent, Director of Student Services or Child Welfare and Attendance, school site or other level administrators, Data/Technology specialists)?



DOWNLOADABLE TOOL

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE 3



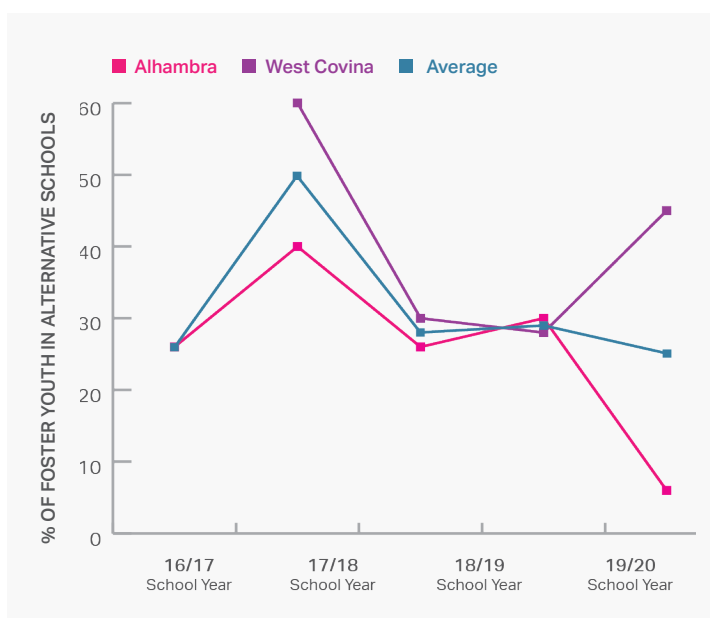
Immediate Enrollment and Educational Placement in the Least Restrictive Setting for Youth in Foster Care



Youth in foster care change schools an average of 8 times while in care, losing up to 6 months of learning with each move.

If there is a gap each time they enroll, youth miss out on even more instructional days. Due to the unique circumstances of enrolling youth in foster care (e.g., enrolling in the middle of a school year, youth with credit deficiencies or behavioral needs, youth who were previously enrolled in an alternative school), districts often recommend that youth in foster care enroll at alternative school sites. While alternative school placements offer opportunities necessary for some youth in foster care, youth can also miss out on opportunities provided by comprehensive school campuses such as increasing school engagement through participation in extra-curricular academic and social activities.


LOCAL DATA — Percentage of Youth in Foster Care Attending Alternative Schools



[CLICK HERE FOR DETAILED DATA VIEW](#)

For more information on the importance of and how to collect this type of data, see [Guide 6: Using Local Data to Monitor Education Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care](#).

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Immediate Enrollment:²⁴ If a youth's education rights holder (ERH) decides it is not in the youth's best interests to remain in their school of origin, a youth in foster care has a right to immediately enroll in their local comprehensive public school, even if they do not have any of the typically required documents (e.g., transcripts, immunization records, proof of residence, IEP).²⁵ 

Enrollment in the Same or Equivalent Classes: Youth in foster care have a right to enroll in the same or equivalent classes as those they took at their old school, even if they are transferring mid-semester. Youth cannot be enrolled in all, or a majority of, elective classes. Youth cannot be forced to re-take a class they have already passed unless their education rights holder agrees, in writing, that it is in their best interest.²⁷

Equal Participation: Youth in foster care have a right to equal access to extra-curricular activities regardless of try-outs or sign-up deadlines (e.g., sports, tutoring).²⁸

Enrollment in the Least Restrictive Environment: Youth in foster care and in the juvenile justice system cannot be forced to attend a continuation school, adult school, independent study program, or other alternative education site, even if they are credit deficient, have poor grades or behavioral problems, or are returning from a juvenile justice placement.²⁹

Involuntary School Transfers³⁰: A youth can be transferred to an alternative education placement without the consent of their education rights holder only if: (1) the youth has been legally expelled after a formal hearing and school board decision; (2) the student has been involuntarily transferred to a continuation school after a formal hearing; or (3) the student has been involuntarily transferred to a community day school after expulsion, probation referral, or by student attendance review board.

Voluntary School Transfers: A voluntary transfer to a continuation school³¹ must include: (1) informed education rights holder decision-making of whether the transfer is in the youth's best interest including a meeting where both the transferring school and continuation school staff have meaningful participation; (2) a written, consistently applied, and clear district policy on who is recommended for transfer; (3) ensuring that no group of students, including youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system, students

of color, English language learners, or special education students, are disproportionately enrolled in continuation schools; (4) prior interventions that have been attempted and failed; (5) school staff coordination to ensure prompt records transfer and enrollment at the continuation school including in same/equivalent classes; and (6) a return plan that is developed including the right to return to the comprehensive school at the beginning of the next school year. Prior to starting an independent study program³², the youth's education rights holder must sign an agreement that describes the school and/or district's independent study policies, outlines the duration and scope of the proposed independent study program, including its learning objectives, and explicitly states that independent study is strictly voluntary. Starting with the 20/21 school year, there are new [independent study rules](#).

- **EQUITY CONSIDERATION** | Youth living in Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP) and emergency shelters also have a right to attend a comprehensive campus. These are typically youth with high levels of need, who may experience higher levels of school instability and trauma than their peers in the foster care system. Equity demands that they receive the option of additional resources and supports to enable their success at comprehensive schools, rather than automatic or arbitrary placement in alternative schools.²⁶

Review our [Exploration Questions](#) to see how the Network began our discussions on this topic and to begin your own.

24 For more on the immediate enrollment rights of youth in foster care, see [Foster Youth Education Toolkit](#).

25 Cal. Educ. Code Section 48853.5(f)(8).

26 For example, while some shelters have their own schools, youth in foster care can only be placed in emergency shelter schools under very strict requirements, and for short periods of time for either: (1) health and safety emergencies; OR (2) when awaiting an ERH decision regarding whether or not to utilize school of origin ("SOO") if: (a) a SOO decision cannot be made quickly; AND (b) it is not practical to transport the youth to the SOO in the meantime; AND (c) the youth would otherwise not receive educational services; AND (d) temporary, special, and supplementary services are available to meet the youth's unique needs.

27 Cal. Educ. Code Sections 51225.2, 51228.2.

28 Cal. Educ. Code Section 48850.

29 Cal. Educ. Code Section 48432.5. Note that if a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), it may require a different placement.

30 Cal. Educ. Code Section 48432.5. For more on involuntary school transfers, see [Foster Youth Education Toolkit](#).

31 Cal. Educ. Code Section 48432.3. For more on voluntary school transfers, see [Foster Youth Education Toolkit](#).

32 For more on independent study programs, see [Foster Youth Education Toolkit](#).

BEST PRACTICES for Developing a District System to Immediately Enroll and Appropriately Place Youth in Foster Care in the Least Restrictive Education Setting³³

STEP 1

Determine Location and Method of Enrollment

The Network recommends districts consider a combination of different enrollment processes based on different home placements. ■

School Site Enrollment — Districts have found that school site enrollment works well for youth living in foster/relative homes as it is common practice for a youth's caregiver to walk into the school site to enroll a youth placed in their home.³⁴

District Office Enrollment — Districts have found that district office enrollment with an identified staff member (e.g., Director of Student Services or Foster Youth Liaison) works well for high needs students (e.g., STRTP youth, youth whose IEP requires a non-public school) as it can aid in the quick collection of records and appropriate education placement.

Online Enrollment — All Network districts are utilizing online enrollment practices where possible and appropriate to quickly gather relevant data to support immediate school placement. ★ Online enrollment can also be beneficial if data gathered online can be immediately imported to a SIS. ◆

STEP 2

Determine Records Collection Process

Determine Who Will Collect Records — The Network recommends coordination between registrars, records clerks, AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison, counselors, and special education administrators to ensure that all records are collected, and that efforts are not duplicated.

■ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION** | If a district decides to utilize different enrollment processes for youth in different situations (e.g., youth in foster homes vs. STRTPs, youth in foster care vs. youth involved in the juvenile justice system) equity demands that these processes be closely scrutinized to ensure that youth are being enrolled in schools designed to meet their needs in the least restrictive environment and that certain youth (e.g., youth in STRTPs or involved in the juvenile justice system) are not being disproportionately placed in alternative school sites. Disproportionality should be regularly monitored through data analysis.

★ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | When a caregiver fills out the online enrollment forms for Pomona Unified School District, and checks the 'foster youth' box, their SIS automatically sends a notification to the district's Foster Youth Liaison so they can assist in the immediate enrollment process, including first holding a Best Interest Determination meeting to consider the youth returning to their school of origin.

◆ **PRACTICE TIP** | Combining Enrollment Practices: Some districts recommend utilizing a combination of all three enrollment practices described here to meet the different needs of youth in foster care. For example, youth living in STRTPs often have increased trauma/mental health needs and higher levels of school instability than other youth in care. Some districts recommend dedicating additional resources to collecting their records and identifying their needs prior to making an education placement recommendation. This often leads to more successful school placements rather than identifying youth after they have failed and trying to serve their needs when they are in crisis.

33 See [Bonita USD Enrollment Flowchart Tool](#) for one example of a comprehensive enrollment process.

34 During periods of full or partial physical school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Network recommends utilizing all safety precautions during in-person enrollment and/or utilizing technology to aid in fast enrollment without necessitating in-person contact.

Determine What Records are Essential to Make a Placement Recommendation — The Network recommends attempting to collect the most recent transcript, current/most recent Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan (if any), current expulsion order (if any), education rights holder contact information, and other forms used by social workers or probation officers to share education information. The Network also recommends checking CALPADS to determine 504 plan/special education status, school of origin, and school history. ▲

Determine the Process for Record Collection — The Network recommends making **Records Requests** in writing (preferably by fax or email) and following-up with a phone call to make sure the request was received. If it will take time to gather a complete set of records, ask if the most urgent records can be sent immediately, or even if information such as previous course enrollment, can be shared over the phone. If a youth in foster care does not bring records at enrollment, and records are not immediately available from prior schools, the Network recommends asking other adults working with the youth for those records (i.e., social workers, probation officers, attorneys that represent the youth, caregivers, education rights holders, STRTP staff, etc.).

Utilize Technology to Gather Records More Quickly — County electronic records sharing systems can efficiently help districts access and share records needed for quick enrollments.

STEP 3

Determine School Placement Process

If Youth in Foster Care has an IEP, Place According to IEP Requirements — The Network recommends coordinating records collection with special education staff at your district office to ensure timely receipt of the IEP for placement purposes.

Despite meaningful coordination and planning, because of the high mobility of youth in foster care and challenges with consistent record collection, districts may ultimately find themselves in difficult situations when attempting

to appropriately enroll a youth in foster care with an IEP. When attempting to determine appropriate school placements for these youth, the Network recommends that districts develop local practices and expectations that all youth are enrolled immediately. There are certain situations where immediately enrolling a youth who has an IEP, without knowing the details of that IEP, and which would require a placement change shortly thereafter, would not be in the best interests of the youth. + These situations might include: (1) when you cannot locate the IEP despite best efforts; (2) the IEP is more than a year old; (3) the IEP is unsigned; and/or (4) IEPs for youth coming out of a hall or camp (since IEPs within a hall/camp are often changed based on the limited resources available to students while attending at the hall/camp).

▲ **LOS ANGELES COUNTY HIGHLIGHT** | The child welfare agency and attorneys that represent youth in Los Angeles both have general email addresses that districts can utilize when struggling to get quick information about a youth in foster care. The person answering the email will look the youth up in the internal system and assist districts in getting needed information and records as quickly as possible.

+ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION / TRAUMA CONSIDERATION** | There is often a need to balance between: (1) the time it takes to collect enough records to determine an appropriate, and least restrictive, education placement for a youth; (2) avoiding the added trauma of additional re-placements; and (3) the mandate to immediately enroll youth. Equity demands that districts thoughtfully balance these concerns and put practices in place to ensure that records are collected as quickly as possible, and that youth are not kept out of class longer than is necessary while waiting on records.

Ensure Policies and Practices Reflect the Local Comprehensive School as Default Placement —

Create a practice to enroll all youth in their local comprehensive school unless their IEP requires otherwise, they have a school board-ordered expulsion (verified through documentation), or their education rights holder has determined and documented in writing that placement in an alternative education program is in the youth's best interest. When enrolling a youth in foster care in a comprehensive high school, ensure they are enrolled in the least restrictive environment and in the same/equivalent classes as at their prior school. For a helpful tool, see [Youth in Foster Care Enrollment Checklist](#).

Identify Additional Placement Process For High Need Students —

The Network recommends districts determine who needs to be involved in making a district recommendation for an alternative school placement including conversations with education rights holders, youth, district administrators, and the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison.✱ Social workers, probation officers, and minor's attorneys can also provide helpful information and insight. Youth play an important role in identifying their own strengths, weaknesses, and potential need for a smaller setting to be successful.🗨 For a complete process, see [Voluntary Transfer of Students Out of Comprehensive Schools](#). The Network encourages districts to gather all transcripts and partial credits and complete an [AB 167/216 analysis](#) prior to recommending a youth attend an alternative school based on credit deficiency. For students who need it, smaller, more therapeutic school settings may be more appropriate. The Network recommends districts create a policy, placement tools, and/or a screening committee to develop uniformity regarding when and how alternative school placement recommendations are made. In order to build helpful tools, interview different school site administration staff to identify the types of resources and supports on each campus.🗨 See [Transfer Meeting Worksheet](#) for a sample tool and a list of [Best Educational Interest Considerations](#). The Network recommends districts help education rights holders make informed school placement decisions and gain written agreement before placing a youth in an alternative education placement to protect against any issues with disproportionality.✱

✱ **PRACTICE TIP** | If possible, AB 490 Foster Youth Liaisons are a helpful addition to the placement process for all youth in foster care. If a district does not have the resources to include them in all placement decisions, the Network recommends involving them in placement discussions for all STRTP youth and any other high needs youth including youth who have attended 3 or more high schools. These youth may require additional advocacy support to gather their partial credits from prior schools and/or AB 167/216 graduation eligibility analysis. Many of these youth would also benefit from developing a trusting relationship with an adult at school.

● **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION** | Youth in foster care have often not been appropriately supported in prior education settings and thus have lowered expectations of what they are able to achieve. It is essential that a youth's lower expectations of their own capabilities not become a barrier to their success in a lesser restrictive environment.

■ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION** | Youth in foster care are disproportionately represented in alternative education programs such as continuation schools,³⁵ often due to credit deficiencies or for behavioral concerns created when their past traumas are triggered. Equity demands a close review of enrollment practices to ensure that objective placement criteria do not create disproportionate outcomes and that a youth centered best interest approach is used. For example, if a district uses the seemingly objective criteria that youth X credits off-track for graduation are always placed at a continuation school, youth in foster care will likely be disproportionately placed there due to credit deficiencies caused by school instability. The Network recommends that districts create clear tools for advising a youth's education rights holder about which placement is in a youth's best interest, and ultimately applying those criteria individually to make recommendations to each youth's education rights holder about the most appropriate placement. The Network also recommends keeping track of data to see what the outcomes of those individualized decisions are and whether adjustments are needed to address significant disproportionality.

★ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION** | Although many districts are using a voluntary transfer process to place youth in foster care at alternative education sites, many education rights holders and youth report that they do not feel like they have a choice about changing the youth's school. Districts should examine their process and materials, and whether they provide the education rights holder and youth with the counseling necessary to help them identify their strengths, weaknesses, and needs, as well as their full range of options so that they can make an informed choice without making youth and education rights holders feel that they must choose any one option.

35 "Alternative schools enroll six times as many students in foster care as all schools statewide." [Alternative Education in California: A Primer for Advocates and Community Stakeholders](#); National Center for Youth Law, 2021.

Develop Practices for Contacting and Working with Education Rights Holders — Districts commonly struggle when attempting to contact education rights holders to discuss placement options. Some common best practices include:◆

Consult any available county information sharing system or your county office of education for updated education rights holder information for a youth;

Ensure your SIS for youth in foster care has the capability of including both caregiver and education rights holder contact information (for a tool to help with this, see [Student Information System Page for Youth in Foster Care](#);

Develop child welfare or child's attorney contacts to quickly inquire into contact information or status of a youth's education rights holder. For a tool to help with this, see [ERH Appointment Request Letter](#); and/or

Ask the youth for their education rights holder's phone number.

Determine Class Placement Process — Working with school counselors, determine a class placement process for youth transferring mid-year that ensures youth in foster care are enrolled in the same grade and classes as at their prior school. Ensure there is a process for allowing access for these youth to classes that are considered 'full' or at enrollment limits. This can include opening new classes or sections. If the new school does not offer the course taken at the prior school, develop a process that ensures youth in foster care are enrolled in a course that meets the same graduation requirement.

STEP 4

Build Supports for Youth in Foster Care on Comprehensive Campuses

Many youth in foster care have experienced starting a new school at a large comprehensive campus where they feel disconnected from the adults and students already there and struggle

to fit into a school environment unwilling to change to meet their needs. The Network recommends that districts consider and implement trauma informed and academic interventions to help youth in foster care achieve success on these campuses to ensure their right to receive access to the same academic resources and supports as other students. Some options include ensuring:

Appropriate trauma informed training for all school staff; ▲

Creation of a [Youth in Foster Care Enrollment Checklist](#) to ensure youth in foster care have all the necessary tips, supplies, and academic and behavioral supports they need to be successful in school;

Space for new student orientation around important schoolwide programs such as Positive Behavior Intervention Supports;

Access to credit recovery programs for youth working to make up missing partial credits; +

◆ **PRACTICE TIP** | For youth in foster care with an IEP, there are separate considerations and obligations around appointment of [surrogate parents](#).

▲ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | Bonita Unified School District has ensured all personnel at all their schools have experienced at least one trauma informed training.

+ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | Pomona Unified School District arranged for dual enrollment with a charter school so that youth can access a 7th period credit recovery class with a full-time teacher and access to online units, while also attending their local comprehensive high school.

Development of relationships between youth in foster care and staff * and peers. □ The Network recommends engaging counselors, AB 490 Foster Youth Liaisons, and teachers to introduce themselves to youth in foster care new to the school and briefly check in with them daily so that youth build connections and have a preferred adult they can go to when they need something for school or are in crisis.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Training and Implementation — The Network recommends training on trauma informed practices and on enrollment and school placement procedures including records collection.

Stakeholder Engagement — The Network recommends building a thoughtful enrollment and school placement process by engaging district Director(s) or other administrative staff who make placement recommendations including special education parallel placement decisions and administrators from alternative education programs, AB 490 Foster Youth Liaisons, and SIS/technology staff in charge of online enrollment systems. Engaging community members, such as STRTP staff and probation officers, can help in the creation of a successful enrollment process (e.g., to ensure these youth are not automatically enrolled in alternative education programs without first going through your needs identification and placement recommendation process).

Working with Local Student Information System Data — The Network recommends closely monitoring alternative school disproportionality as you modify your placement recommendation process. For more on this, see **Best Practices Guide 6: Using Local Data, Data Point 5: Proportionality of Enrollment in Alternative Education Settings**. Once all youth in foster care are designated within the district, SIS data can be pulled to determine how many youth are in an alternative education setting (e.g., continuation school, independent study program) divided by the total number of youth in foster care in the district who are eligible to be in such a setting (e.g., 16+ for continuation school) to give you the percentage of

youth in foster care who are in these settings. You can then compare this to the percentage of youth in foster care out of the total student population in your district to determine if you are experiencing disproportionality. You can also track this data regularly (e.g., each semester) as you attempt to address any disproportionality by modifying your placement recommendation process and guiding education rights holders through a voluntary best interest decision. The Network also recommends considering tracking your return rate to determine if placement of youth in foster care in alternative settings is leading to success.

* **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | West Covina Unified School District schedules “Welcome Meetings” within 30 days of enrollment for any high school aged youth in foster care. These meetings include the youth, their education rights holder and/or parent, the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison, social worker, and any teachers the youth wants to invite. In this meeting, they distribute a “Welcome Kit” including a backpack, school supplies, school spirit shirt, resource directory, and other helpful supplies for the youth. They then reconvene this group quarterly to monitor the youth’s progress, check in on grades, and achievement of the goals set forth at the initial meeting.

● **PRACTICE TIP** | The Network recommends training peer mentors that can help integrate youth in foster care into the school community such as helping them find their classes, sitting with them at lunch, etc. who can be chosen due to their leadership in a certain interest group (e.g., theater, sports, skateboarding) that aligns with the interests of the youth in foster care they are mentoring.

STATE LEVEL POLICY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NETWORK DISTRICTS

Alternative School Disproportionality on the Dashboard — Youth in foster care experience significantly disproportionate enrollment in alternative education schools, including continuation schools. Currently, the Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) provides some of the same data measures (e.g., academic achievement) plus some modified measures (e.g., 12th grade graduation measures instead of a 4 year cohort) compared to the Dashboard for all schools and districts in California. The Network recommends that disproportionate enrollment data be added to the DASS to ensure accountability for districts as they attempt to address this disproportionality.

State Level Enrollment Requirements — Typically, a youth is only enrolled in one school at a time and/or average daily attendance can only be provided to one educational placement/district at a time. Yet, some of the most innovative programs positively impacting youth in foster care allow for youth to be dually enrolled in a comprehensive campus and a credit recovery program simultaneously. This allows youth to receive equity level access to all the resources and supports available to all other students, in the least restrictive environment, while also accessing supports and services necessary to meet their unique needs caused by school instability and/or trauma. The Network recommends exploration of these and other best practices across the state to identify and educate districts on how to overcome perceived barriers to their adoption in more districts.



EXPLORATION QUESTIONS

Immediate Enrollment and Educational Placement in the Least Restrictive Environment for Youth in Foster Care



Understanding Your Current Enrollment Process

1. What immediate enrollment policy/practices are in place in your district to ensure youth are afforded their right to immediate enrollment? If these policies or practices are insufficient, who needs to be involved and consulted for modification?
2. How and when are youth identified as being in foster care or the juvenile justice system upon their enrollment into your district (e.g., see [Screening Questions for Youth in Foster Care](#))?
3. How are youth in foster care (e.g., all youth in foster care, no matter where they live, youth on probation living in suitable placements) and/or in the juvenile justice system (e.g., all youth on probation, no matter where they live) designated as such within your student information system? Does technology help you do this?
4. Are youth identified in your SIS as residing in a: (1) non-relative foster home; (2) relative foster home; (3) group home/STRTP; (4) open case legal guardianship; or (5) at home with parents? Does technology help you do this?
5. Do you have baseline or otherwise recent data about enrollment for your youth (e.g., last year, last semester) that can be used to start a continuous improvement cycle?
6. What information is gathered at intake for all students? What additional information is gathered for youth in foster care or in the juvenile justice system (e.g., see [Foster Youth Initial Education Intake Form](#))? What additional information would you like to gather (e.g., school history, education rights holder contact information)?

7. Do you have trouble accessing education records necessary for school placement decisions (e.g., grade enrollment, previous course schedule, IEPs)? For a helpful tool, see [Records Request Form](#). If so, what are the barriers?
8. What is your school enrollment process, including timelines (e.g., what steps are followed and how long does each take)?
9. What types of training do staff involved in the enrollment process have access to or need?

Understanding Your Current School Placement Process

10. Who is involved in school placement decisions (e.g., AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison, front desk staff, counselor, etc.)? What is each person's role in the decision-making process?
11. Are education rights holders involved in placement decisions? If so, how?

Where are you accessing education rights holder contact information from? How are you checking it for accuracy?

What barriers do you routinely experience in working with education rights holders (e.g., person appointed is nonresponsive to your requests to participate in the child's education, education rights holder is unknown, education rights holder contact information is unknown)?

What procedures have you put in place or could you put in place to address these issues (e.g., immediate email to child welfare education info support, close coordination with attorneys representing children in dependency or delinquency court, establishing contact with attorneys who represent biological parents in dependency court)?

What practices can you use to better engage education rights holder in the school placement process?

12. Are youth involved in the placement decisions? If so, how?

13. Do you have a default school placement (e.g., school of origin, local comprehensive school) for youth in foster care, when you do not have an education rights holder available to participate in a placement decision?

14. Do your schools experience additional barriers to immediate enrollment for youth in foster care or in the juvenile justice system based on their different court status or the different types of homes they come from? For example, a district may experience a greater lag in enrollment for youth in STRTPs if the placement takes longer to bring the youth in for enrollment, or it might be more difficult to find records for youth in foster homes.

15. What information is considered when making placement recommendations (e.g., type of placement at prior school, desires of education rights holder, desires of youth, grades, discipline, attendance, etc.)? What tools are used to help district staff make placement decisions?

16. Do you experience difficulties in ensuring youth are enrolled in the proper grade level or that high school youth are enrolled in the same/equivalent classes as they were enrolled in at their previous school? If so, what are those difficulties (e.g., lag time in getting records led to a student who was previously retained in a grade to be placed in the wrong grade based on age; highly impacted schools don't have space for a student in a specific class)? Are there any measures which could reasonably be taken to address this issue with pre-planning (e.g., saving space in highly impacted schools which also tend to have high enrollment and/or turnover of youth in foster care)? Do you know which schools typically have a higher enrollment rate for youth in foster care?

17. Does your enrollment or placement process involve any type of academic assessment to determine a youth's needs for remedial academic supports or advanced placement classes?

18. Are there additional steps that are needed to place a student with an IEP? Are additional personnel involved? Does this extend the time before a youth begins attending classes?

19. If you anticipate an influx of youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system at any of your schools (e.g., new STRTP opened in that residential area), what steps are you taking to ensure the district can meet their academic, credit, behavioral, social/emotional, etc. needs? Are you working proactively or waiting to evaluate the needs that arise? How do you consider unknown but potentially anticipated consequences?

20. What are possible strategies to use to identify when youth in foster care are first placed in their home placements?

21. How can your district track when youth in foster care are fully enrolled and actually attending classes?

22. Is your enrollment and placement policy/practice followed at each school and by each implementer (e.g., Principal/front desk staff) across your entire district? If not, which schools don't use the policy? What do they use as an alternative? What additional training might be needed by your implementers? What additional tools, technology, and/or staff supports might your implementers need? How can you roll that support out?

Understanding Your Current School Placement Process Related to Alternative Schools

23. Do you have alternative sites where youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system tend to be clustered and/or regularly placed?

What are the benefits of such a placement (e.g., trauma informed staff, ability to recoup credits quickly, small environment)?

What are some drawbacks to this type of placement (e.g., no A-G or other college prep classes, no access to sports or other extracurricular activities which help students engage in school, segregation from typical student population)?

Are district staff appropriately trained on legal requirements prohibiting disproportionate enrollment and strategies to combat it?

Do you have a process for ensuring education rights holders receive all available information about placement options and that they give informed consent? See [Voluntary Transfers from Comprehensive Schools](#).

-
24. How does your enrollment process for all students differ from that for youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system, or for youth in foster homes vs. STRTPs, particularly as it relates to enrollment in alternative placements?
-
25. Who is involved in making school placement recommendations for youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system who are not going to their local comprehensive school? What information is considered when recommending alternative school sites (e.g., type of placement in prior school, credit accumulation, behavioral problems)? What is your default placement?
-
26. What education rights holder involvement is there when placing students in alternative placements? What problems do you have with education rights holder involvement? What is your default placement when an education rights holder cannot be reached? What factors would lead you to place a student outside of their least restrictive environment, even if you cannot get education rights holder approval first? What is a youth's involvement in placement decisions?
-
27. Where/when/by whom are your youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system being placed into alternative education programs, other than at enrollment? What is your process for these transfers?
-
28. What does district data tell you about the district's disproportionality in placing youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system in alternative schools? Is your disproportionality increasing or decreasing over time? What steps are you taking to rectify any disproportionality you may be experiencing?
-



DOWNLOADABLE TOOL

YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE ENROLLMENT CHECKLIST

The Network recommends including AB 490 Foster Youth Liaisons whenever possible in the placement process for youth in foster care, while acknowledging there are often times when this is not possible. The Network recommends creating a checklist for counselors or other district staff who will be working on placement with high school-aged youth in foster care. This will ensure the unique needs of youth in foster care are always addressed and can highlight situations when it is appropriate to reach out to the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison for additional support. The Network also recommends conducting regular training on this checklist, the reasons for it, and how to be considerate of possible trauma triggers that may arise when speaking with youth as part of ongoing professional development for anyone who may be involved in the enrollment and placement process for youth in foster care.

CREDITS

- When analyzing credits needed towards graduation, collect transcripts from all high schools previously attended by the youth (this can be checked on CALPADS or your local county records sharing system), and that each transcript includes full or partial credits for all passing grades.

If the youth has attended 3 or more high schools and/or is missing credits or transcripts from a school, please contact the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison.

- After ensuring the youth has received all their full or partial credits earned from all prior high schools, determine if the youth qualifies for **AB 167/216 Graduation** according to the district's normal process. If the youth qualifies, this will impact which courses to enroll them in, and which school options are best suited for their needs. *Note that even if a youth qualifies, only the youth's education rights holder can determine if the youth will utilize the alternative graduation option.

COURSE ENROLLMENT

- Youth have the right to enroll in the "same or equivalent" courses as they were enrolled in at their previous school.

If the district offers a course that the youth was previously enrolled in, but that course is currently full, please contact the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison.

- If entering in the middle of a grading period, ensure that all teachers are aware that the youth will be receiving partial credit only for the portion of the grading period that they are present for, and that the youth may not be held responsible for or asked to make up work that was assigned prior to their enrollment.

MATERIALS

- Ensure the youth has access to all materials that they need to succeed in their classes. For example, does the youth need graph paper or a certain calculator for their math class? A PE uniform? Will the youth need computer and internet access to do homework or participate in remote learning?

If you need materials for a youth that you cannot access, please contact the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison.

- Ensure youth know how to access all portions of their school day. For example, do they need to know how to do a combination lock for PE class? Do they need to know how the lunch line works at the school?

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES/ SPORTS/TUTORING

- Youth in foster care have the right to equal participation in all school activities, just like other students, regardless of sign-up or tryout deadlines. If the youth is interested in participating in a sport or activity, connect them with the appropriate contact and ensure that the contact is aware of their right to equal try-out or sign-up opportunities as other students.



DOWNLOADABLE TOOL

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE 4



Issuing Partial Credits to Youth in Foster Care



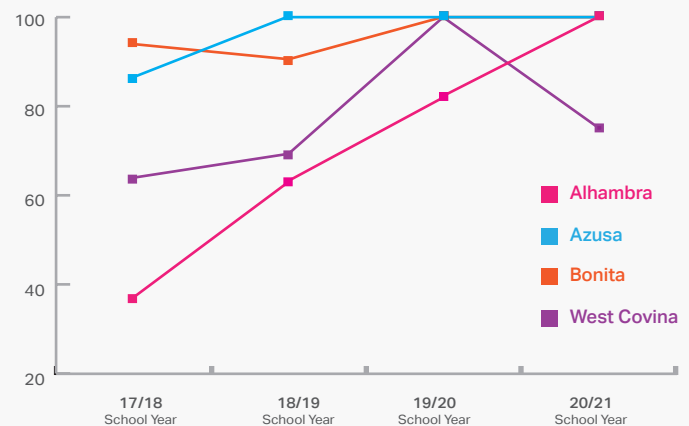
Issuing partial credits to youth in foster care who have earned them is a key factor in helping them stay on track for high school graduation.

From an equity perspective, it rewards them, just like any other student, for the work they have accomplished while attending a school. It also helps youth gain a sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence, encouraging them to stay engaged in their education, even if they will only attend a specific school for a short period of time. ☐ Ensuring partial credits are awarded and tracking data around this measure can also be used as an early indicator toward improving graduation rates.

- **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION** | When youth have experienced multiple school moves and revolving adults in their life, establishing a relationship with a trusted adult at a new school can be difficult. Issuing and ensuring youth receive their partial credits can go a long way toward building this trust.

LOCAL DATA — Percentage of Youth Who Received their Earned Partial Credits

DISTRICT AWARDED PARTIAL CREDITS TO YOUTH WHO EARNED THEM BUT LEFT MID-SEMESTER



[CLICK HERE FOR DETAILED DATA VIEW AND DATA COMPARISON TO THOSE WHO EARNED PARTIAL CREDITS AFTER ENTERING MID-SEMESTER](#)

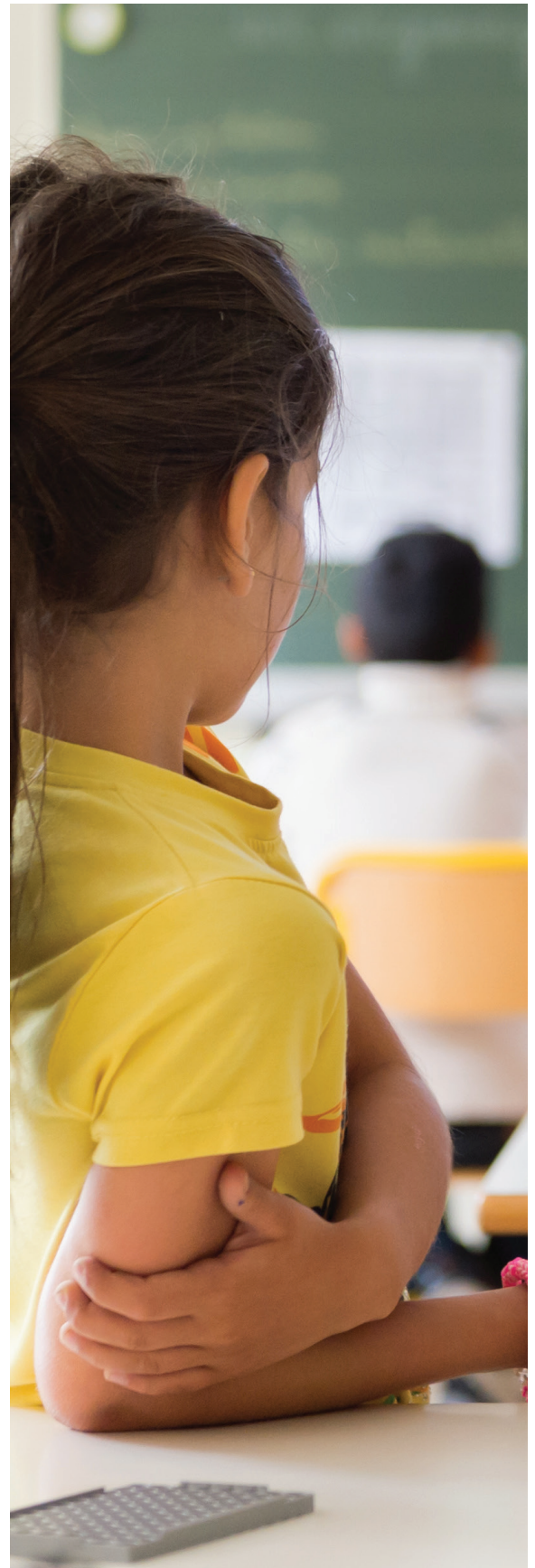
For more information on the importance of and how to collect this type of data, see [Guide 6: Using Local Data to Monitor Education Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care](#).

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Youth in foster care who transfer schools mid-semester have a right to receive full or partial credits, based on seat-time, for all work satisfactorily completed before transferring schools. Upon receiving notification that a youth in foster care is transferring schools, a sending school must issue check out grades and full or partial credits on an official transcript. The receiving school must accept all check out grades and credits, apply them to the same or equivalent courses, and immediately enroll youth in foster care in the same or equivalent classes as they were enrolled in at the sending school. In order to comply with the law, school districts must issue partial credits pursuant to their own calculation method or use the **Partial Credit Model Policy**.³⁶

Review our **Exploration Questions** to see how the Network began our discussions on this topic and to see how to being your own.

³⁶ Education Code Sections 49069.5, 51225.2.



BEST PRACTICES for Developing a District System to Consistently Issue and Accept Partial Credits

STEP 1

Develop a Partial Credit Calculation Formula

The Network recommends adoption of California's **Partial Credit Model Policy**. Alternatively, coordinate with districts in your county to adopt consistent calculation formulas to ensure ease of calculating partial credits owed when youth in foster care move between districts. Ensure your calculation formula accounts for different calculations if your district has **semesters of unequal length** (e.g., semester 1 is 80 days and semester 2 is 100 days) or utilizes block periods. The Network recommends districts put their partial credit calculation formula and their process for issuing partial credits on their website, in a Board Policy, and/or in an Administrative Regulation to ensure that youth in foster care, their education rights holders, and other districts can easily access it. Districts should also make publicly available their credit accumulation policies for their alternative schools.

STEP 2

Determine How to Identify When Youth in Foster Care Have Left the District

Disenrollment — The easiest way to ensure credits are issued is to create a system to identify and issue partial credits at disenrollment. This can be done by setting up a system for front desk staff to notify teachers and/or counselors upon disenrollment or through an automatic notification through the student information system. Unfortunately, this will not catch all youth in foster care leaving the district since many youth are not formally disenrolled from school but rather just stop attending. The Network recommends creating a system utilizing multiple methods of identifying when youth in foster care leave the district.

Child Welfare/Probation Notice of School Change

— Assuming your district is receiving consistent and timely notification from your county child welfare and/or probation agency when youth are moving homes, this can be another way to trigger the disenrollment process.

Receiving a Records Request from a New School — Additionally, assuming districts in your county are regularly and timely (within 2 days of enrollment) sending records requests to the prior school when a new youth enrolls, this is another way to quickly identify when youth have left your district.

Automatic Trigger After 3 Days of Absence — In many districts and counties, the above methods for identifying when a youth has left a school are not being consistently implemented. The Network recommends that districts also create a system that automatically triggers a search for youth in foster care after they have been absent from school for 3 days in a row. This system should include an automatic notification or email to an attendance clerk, academic counselor, or AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison (as determined appropriate by the district) to contact the home placement, the youth's education rights holder, and/or social worker/probation officer for a youth in care to inquire about a youth's residence status. Many Network districts recommend not disenrolling the youth from the school until after it has been confirmed that they have moved and what their new school is.

STEP 3

Ensure Exit Grades are Issued by Teachers

Teachers are required to issue check out grades 🌟 when a youth in foster care leaves a school in the middle of a grading period. 📦 ▲ This is often done on a **Disenrollment Form** which can either be facilitated by an adult on campus or can be given to a youth to take around to all their teachers at disenrollment, assuming that it is age and developmentally appropriate for each individual youth. Unfortunately, if a youth does not formally disenroll, this process is not triggered. The Network recommends that districts create an additional step in this process for youth in foster care who do not formally disenroll. Once an attendance clerk/counselor or AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison determines that the home placement of a youth in foster care has changed and they will not be returning, they can trigger an email or notification within the SIS to the youth's teachers requesting that check out grades be issued. + The Network also recommends training/guidance for counselors and front office staff so they know the requirements around issuing check out grades and partial credits so they can inform teachers to ensure that assignment and test results are regularly input into online grading systems (e.g., daily or weekly) to ensure that issuing check out grades can occur quickly once the need is identified. ✱ Develop a process to ensure that No Marks or Incompletes are never issued for these youth if they have attended the minimum seat time (e.g., 7 days) required to earn partial credits and were receiving a passing grade.

★ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION |** A youth in foster care cannot have their grade lowered due to court attendance or absences caused by court ordered activities. It is important to ensure proper training so that teachers know to excuse those assignments from the calculation of a youth's check out grade. This creates equity because youth in foster care have no control over the requirement that they attend court and court ordered activities and thus should not be punished for it, compared to typical students who do not have to participate in these activities.

◆ **PRACTICE TIP |** A similar situation also arises when a youth in foster care's class schedule is changed in the middle of a semester. For example, if a youth attends only 50 (out of a total of 90) days in a semester and is in Algebra for 20 days and Geometry for 30 days. It is essential to set up a system to also issue partial credits in this situation including ensuring teachers issue check out grades for each course and issuing credits for the correct amount of days in each course, pursuant to the district's partial credit calculation formula. This is further complicated if a youth is moving up or down in a class level. For example, if a youth moves from Spanish 1 to Spanish 2, all the credits earned can be issued for the higher class. Further, a youth can earn full credits if the teacher determines the youth has mastered the entire course, even if they do not attend the entire semester.

▲ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION |** Districts are required to create School Board regulations for notifying education rights holders (either through conference or written report) when a student is at risk of failing a course.³⁷ This policy must also be equitably applied to youth in foster care earning partial credits. Arguably, if the notification does not occur, regardless of when the youth changes schools, districts cannot issue a failing grade. Some Network districts are also choosing to not issue failing grades and partial credits on a transcript (and thus not have the failing grade count in the cumulative grade point average), under the equity argument that a typical student would have more time than a youth in foster care moving schools mid-semester to bring up their grade (for example, a chance to earn extra credit or make up missing assignments). Without an equal opportunity to bring up their grade, youth in foster care would be held to a harsher standard than a typical stable student. In these cases, districts must devise an alternative to issuing a failing grade, and also cannot solely note a No Mark or Incomplete, to signify that partial credits have indeed been calculated but not awarded as the student did not receive a passing grade. One method for doing this would be to reflect the partial credits possible on a disenrollment form or transcript, with zero credits earned and a special notation about the grading situation.

+ **PRACTICE TIP |** The Network recommends providing guidance to teachers on how to go back and finalize an exit grade, even after a youth has been dropped from their class list and may not immediately show up on their grading list. Alhambra Unified School District created an instructional video showing teachers how to access a dropped youth's grades and how to enter a final grade in their student information system.

✱ **PRACTICE TIP |** A technology-based solution would be to program the student information system to automatically pull a grade from a teacher's grade book in real time.

37 California Education Code Section 49067.

If check out grades are requested for a youth who has not been attending within the district for many days, the Network recommends teacher training and/or other processes to ensure that a youth does not receive zeros for assignments and tests that were assigned or graded after a youth was no longer attending at the school.● For example, attendance counselors could be trained to back date the disenrollment date to the last day of actual attendance or the student information system could be programmed to not count zero grades issued after the last date of actual attendance into the cumulative grade for the class.■

STEP 4

Determine Seat Time

Develop a process to ensure seat time is evaluated and, assuming a passing grade is earned, partial credits are calculated based on the district's partial credit calculation formula. This process could require a counselor or registrar to count the days of attendance★ and calculate the partial credits owed by hand.◆ The Network recommends utilizing your student information system to automatically count attendance▲ and calculate partial credits owed.⊕ This can be especially helpful if districts utilize a block class schedule as it cuts down on human error in calculation of seat time.

STEP 5

Issue Partial Credits on Transcript

Develop a process for issuing check out grades and partial credits on an official transcript. If possible, utilize your student information system to automatically issue these credits. Then, ensure there is a district staff member (e.g., counselor or registrar) identified to double check the calculation for accuracy. Student information systems may be able to calculate partial credits based on seat time but having them issued on an official transcript may be a second step in the process that needs to be programmed differently or done by a person who can perform a human check for accuracy.

STEP 6

Send Transcript to New School Within 2 Days

The Network recommends communicating with a youth's social worker or reviewing CALPADS or a local county information sharing system to identify which school a youth next enrolled in. Ensure a transcript including all check out grades and partial credits is sent to the new school within 2 days.

● **PRACTICE TIP** | The Network recommends reminding teachers that students are not responsible for any work assigned or due after their check out date, at the beginning of every semester (e.g., during a staff meeting), as well as including this information on the notice provided to teachers when asking them to issue a final grade.

■ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | To see a written procedure including a withdrawal report, teachers issuing grades, calculating attendance, and awarding partial credits, see [West Covina USD's Procedures for Awarding Partial Credits](#).

★ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION** | A youth in foster care cannot have their grade lowered due to court attendance or court ordered activities.³⁸ Equity also demands that a youth's absence caused by court attendance or court ordered activities also not be used to lower their seat time calculation for purposes of awarding partial credits. Typical students do not lose credits for absences over which they have no control and youth in foster care should be treated in an equal manner.

◆ **PRACTICE TIP** | Various student information systems use either positive (count of the number of days attended) or negative (count the number of days of absence from a total) attendance. Knowing which is used in your student information system is essential when creating an automatic calculation system within your student information system.

▲ **PRACTICE TIP** | The Network recommends ensuring a specific person at each high school (e.g., designated academic counselor with special training on the needs of youth in foster care) be tasked with ensuring this process is implemented consistently. The Network also recommends having a district staff member (e.g., AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison in coordination with SIS staff) regularly run checks to ensure that all eligible youth have received their partial credits.

⊕ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | Alhambra Unified School District has created sample [SQL Code for Power School](#) student information system which tallies attendance and calculates partial credits. They have two different tables for [Partial Credit Calculator for Comprehensive High School](#) and [Partial Credit Calculator for Alternative School](#) since the number of days of attendance/seat time to earn credits is different.

38 Cal. Educ. Code Sections 49069.5(g),(h).

STEP 7

When Enrolling a Youth, Advocate for Partial Credits from the Prior School, As Necessary

After a counselor or registrar gathers a youth's transcripts from all their prior high schools, they may determine that partial credits are owed by a prior school. The Network recommends that counselors/registrars send the [Receiving School Partial Credit Request Letter](#) to attempt to obtain those credits for a youth.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Training — Whomever is responsible at the school site (e.g., counselor/registrar/attendance clerk/teachers) for ensuring check out grades are issued, seat time/attendance is calculated, and partial credits are issued on an official transcript and sent to the youth's new school of attendance will require training to ensure they are following the district's process correctly. Reviewing partial credit implementation data by school site can assist the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison in identifying which schools might need periodic retraining on the identified process.

Stakeholder Engagement — The Network recommends having the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison, counselors/registrars, student information system experts, continuation school staff, and Directors assist in building and/or revising your partial credit policy and practices including exploration of how to use your student information system to create automatic notification and/or credit calculating and issuing processes.

Working with Local Student Information System Data The Network recommends tracking the issuance of partial credits every semester for two groups of youth: (1) youth who leave the school mid-semester; and (2) youth who enter the school mid-semester. In order to do this, all youth in foster care must be identified and designated within the student information system. For youth exiting mid-semester, the number of youth in foster care who received their partial credits is divided by the number of youth in foster care who exited high school mid-semester and passed at least one class. For youth entering mid-semester, the number of youth in foster care who received their partial credits is divided

by the number of youth in foster care who entered high school mid-semester and passed at least one class. * This equation will provide the district with the percentage of youth in foster care who received their partial credits who were eligible for them. For more on how to pull this data, visit our [Best Practices Guide 6: Using Local Data, Data Point 2: Percentage of Youth in Foster Care who Received their Partial Credits.](#)

The Network recommends pulling the list of youth who left the school mid-semester right before the end of each semester to ensure all youth have had their partial credits issued and forwarded to their next school. Similarly, pulling the list of youth right before the end of each semester who have entered the school mid-semester to remind their counselors/registrars that they cannot receive the full 5 credits per class but rather need to be issued partial credits, can be helpful to ensure youth are not issued too many credits. The Network recommends using this semester data to track whether school sites are appropriately issuing partial credits. A strength in collecting and monitoring this local data is that schools can go back and issue partial credits after they have been missed to bring this data point to 100% compliance.

▲ **PRACTICE TIP** | Districts can look even more granularly at this issue by doing this calculation by class instead of by youth. For example, by looking at the number of classes that partial credits were issued in divided by the number of classes youth in foster care in high school who transferred mid-semester had a passing check out grade in. This will give the percentage of all earned partial credits that were issued.

STATE LEVEL POLICY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NETWORK DISTRICTS

Calculating Seat Time as Enrollment Instead of Attendance — The Network recommends that ‘seat time’ in Education Code Section 49069.5 be defined to mean length of enrollment, instead of attendance. This recommendation is based on an equity analysis. Typically, students do not receive less credits based on their number of absences.³⁹ It seems inequitable to hold youth in foster care to a higher standard which lowers their credits earned based on absences. While a typical student might miss school due to illness or doctor’s appointments, youth in foster care are often required to miss school for court appearances and/or court ordered activities or are kept out of school during school changes for a variety of reasons, in addition to typical absences due to illness. Having partial credits calculated based on a definition of seat time as enrollment, in addition to the earning of a passing grade, allows for a more equitable accumulation of credits for youth in foster care. This also simplifies the issuing of partial credits because student information systems can be coded to count days of enrollment more easily than days of attendance.

Statewide Partial Credit Calculation Formula — The Network recommends that a statewide partial credit calculation formula, that allows for adaptation based on different district systems for awarding credits, be adopted to ensure consistency in implementation. This would ensure that youth in foster care receive the same number of credits based on their seat time, regardless of where they attend school in California. Further, this would also allow for easier transfer of credits between districts if the system were uniform. Finally, this would allow for efficiencies in student information system coding to aide in the automatic awarding of partial credits in those systems as a single set of code could be used in all similar student information systems across the state, instead of requiring different coding for each separate calculation formula.

Partial Credits for all Students — Another way to increase implementation of partial credits for youth in foster care would be to require that partial

credits be issued for all students in California. Once districts are responsible for doing this task for all students, they will have greater motivation to create and consistently implement a partial credit system across all their high schools.

Consider a ‘Totaling Up’ Method for Issuing Partial Credits to Youth who Enter Mid-Semester — Youth in foster care who are entering a school mid-semester have a lot at stake in ensuring they receive a total of all available credits per class for that semester (e.g., 5 credits in most districts). If they are unable to achieve this, it puts them off-track for high school graduation. Giving these youth equity access to both their education and their credits is important to consider closely as youth not in foster care do not face these types of instability barriers at the rate of youth in foster care. Some Network districts advocate for issuing credits based on seat time (either attendance or enrollment) for youth leaving a district mid-semester but using a ‘totaling up’ method for youth entering a school mid-semester. An example of this is that if a youth earned 2 partial credits at their first school attended during the semester and then left to attend a second school, the second school (after ensuring the youth achieved a passing grade and/or their teacher determined they had mastered the relevant course material) would issue the remaining credits owed (3 credits) so the youth would receive a total of 5 credits for the class for the semester, regardless of their seat time.

³⁹ We acknowledge that teachers may issue their grades based, in part, on attendance and participation in class activities. We do not intend to recommend changes to these types of local practices. Rather, the recommendation from the Network is designed to focus on the calculation of credits, by counselors and registrars, based on attendance vs. enrollment.

EXPLORATION QUESTIONS

Issuing Partial Credits to Youth in Foster Care



1. Does your district have a formal partial credit policy/practice? If no, who needs to be involved/consulted in its creation? If yes, what is your calculation formula? Are your semesters equal or of different length? If the latter, does the calculation formula take this into account? See **Foster Youth Education Toolkit** for sample calculation formulas for districts of the same and unequal length.
2. How are youth identified and designated as needing partial credits when they leave mid-semester? (e.g., does the youth have to be formally withdrawn/disenrolled from their school, does your system do an automatic withdrawal/disenrollment after a certain number of absences?) Does technology help you do this? If yes, what information system does this for you? Could it better help you do this (e.g., automatic calculation of credits)? If so, how?
3. How are youth identified and designated as needing partial credits when they enter mid-semester? (e.g., how do your staff know at the end of the semester to not award them 5 full credits?) Does technology help you do this? If yes, what information system does this for you? Could it better help you do this (e.g., automatic calculation of credits)? If so, how?
4. On your withdrawal/check out form, does it require that teachers issue a grade as of the last day of actual in-seat attendance?
5. How does your district deal with No Marks or Incompletes?
6. Is there a place on the withdrawal/check out form for credits to be calculated?
7. Are partial credits automatically issued in your student information system based on days of attendance or does someone have to issue them by hand/override the system? Can your student information system automatically calculate partial credits owed based on attendance? Based on enrollment?
8. Is your calculation formula utilized and policy/practice followed at each high school and by each implementer (e.g., counselor/registrar) across your entire district? If not, which schools don't use the policy? What do they use as an alternative? What additional training and supports do your implementers need?
9. When youth come into your district and their prior district has failed to issue them partial credits for the work completed there, do you expect your district staff to address this failure? If so, how? See **Receiving School Partial Credit Request Letter**.



DOWNLOADABLE TOOL

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE 5



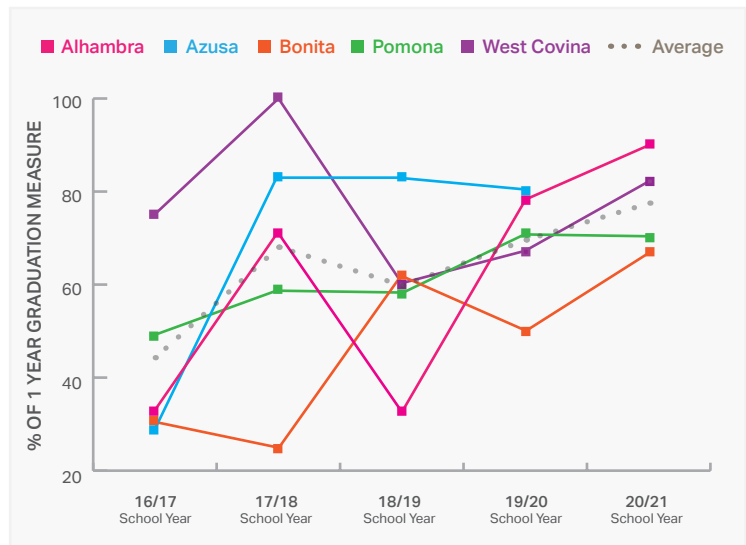
AB 167/216 Graduation



In the 2019/2020 school year, youth in foster care graduated in four years at a rate of 58.2%.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the graduation rate for all students statewide was 84.3%.⁴¹ The graduation for youth in foster care is more than 10% lower than any other at-risk student population. This data reflects that not only do youth in foster care experience the lowest graduation rates in the state, but also that current efforts geared towards improving the graduation rates of youth in foster care have been unsuccessful. Youth in foster care struggle in school and have lower graduation rates due to their significant school instability, the impact of the trauma they suffer on their learning capacity, and their increased rates of disability (nationally, these rates may be as high as 60% compared to the general population rate of 10%)⁴². While there are many factors that contribute to supporting youth in foster care graduating from high school, having appropriate systems in place to ensure timely and accurate AB 167/216 graduation certification is one important support.

LOCAL DATA | 1 Year Graduation Measure



[CLICK HERE FOR DETAILED DATA VIEW](#)

For more information on the importance of and how to collect this type of data, see **[Guide 6: Using Local Data to Monitor Education Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care](#)**.

40 Data available at <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohRate.aspx?cds=00&aggllevel=state&year=2019-20>. Report Options and Filters: Data Type Options: Program Subgroup.

41 Data available at <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohRate.aspx?cds=00&aggllevel=state&year=2019-20>.

42 National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, Negotiating the Curves Toward Employment: A Guide About Youth Involved in the Foster Care System, at 3 (2007). <https://sonoranucedd.fcm.arizona.edu/newsletter/6-2015/1255>

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

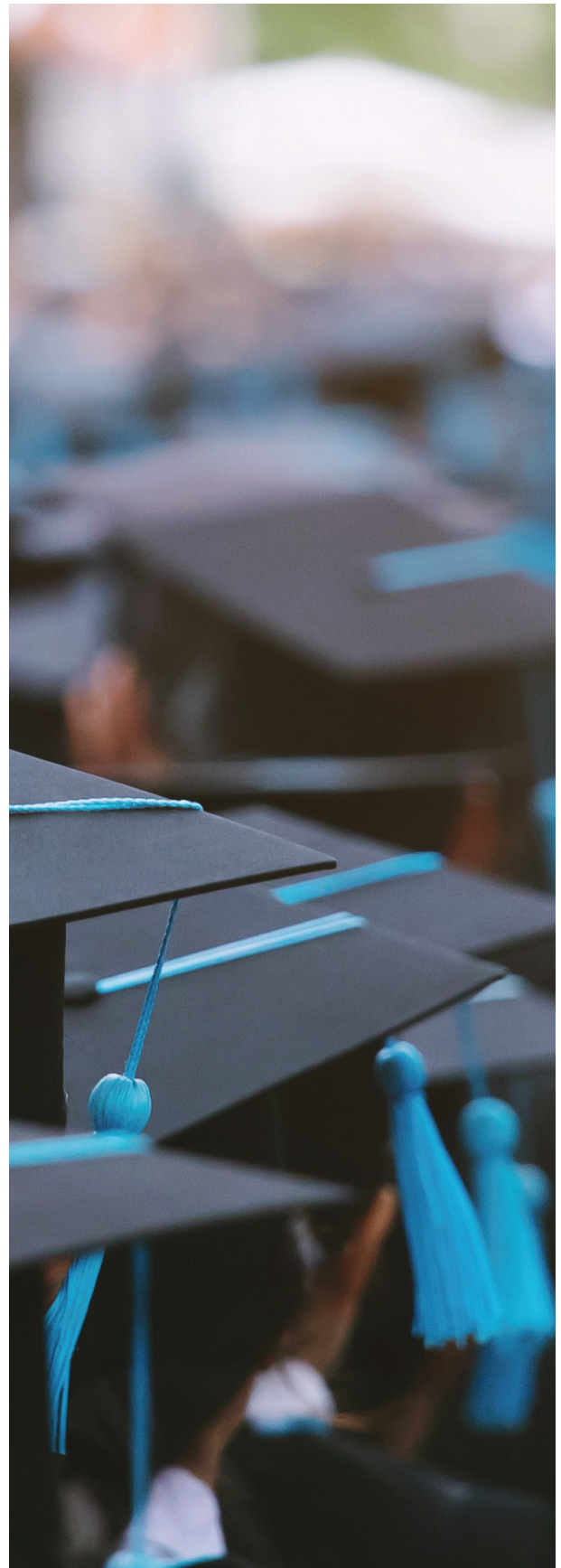
Youth in foster care who transfer high schools after completing their second year, who would be unable to reasonably complete local district high school graduation requirements within four years, may graduate using state minimum graduation requirements if it is in their **best interests**.⁴³ A district is required to certify a youth as eligible or not eligible for this graduation option within 30 days of the youth enrolling in the new school. See **Sample Notification Letter**. Once eligible, a youth remains eligible, even if their graduation circumstances change. A youth's education rights holder⁴⁴ makes the ultimate decision about whether the youth will attempt to graduate using district requirements in four years, graduate using district requirements in five years, graduate using state minimum graduation requirements in four years, or defer the decision about graduation until a later time. This graduation option applies to all schools run by a school district, including continuation and adult schools.⁴⁵

Review our **Exploration Questions** to see how the Network began our discussions on this topic and to see how to being your own.

⁴³ California Education Code Section 51225.1.

⁴⁴ An 18 year old youth will hold their own education rights and thus make their own graduation decision.

⁴⁵ California Education Code Section 51225.1.



BEST PRACTICES for Developing a District System to Timely Evaluate and Certify Youth for AB 167/216 Graduation

STEP 1

Determine How to Identify When Youth in Foster Care Enter the District After Completing Their Second Year of High School +

Identify Youth in Foster Care Has Enrolled in District — Districts must identify that a youth is in foster care when they enroll in the district. This can occur during school site enrollment, district office enrollment, or online enrollment. For more on this topic, see **Best Practices Guide 3: Immediate Enrollment and Education Placement in the Least Restrictive Environment for Youth in Foster Care**. Staff involved in enrollment procedures should have adequate training to correctly and sensitively identify youth who are potentially involved in the foster care system. Utilizing a district's **Screening Questions for Youth in Foster Care** can also assist in this goal. Assuming your district is receiving consistent and timely notification from your county child welfare and/or probation agency when youth are moving homes, this can be another way to trigger the enrollment and AB 167/216 eligibility analysis process. If there are any doubts about a youth's foster care status, the Network recommends enrollment staff contact the district's AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison who can follow up to gather more information and make a final determination of foster care status.



Identify When Youth Has Completed Second Year of High School — The Network recommends closely reviewing the enrollment of all high school youth in foster care to identify which youth have completed their second year.* The law requires districts to utilize either time of enrollment or credit accumulation, whichever is more likely to make the youth eligible.⁴⁶ ●

+ **PRACTICE TIP** | Timely completion of AB 167/216 eligibility may impact education placement recommendations (e.g., if a youth will utilize AB 167/216 graduation, they may not need to attend an alternative school placement to make up missing credits). The Network recommends quickly completing the AB 167/216 analysis so that its results can be taken into account when making a school placement recommendation.

* **PRACTICE TIP** | It is especially important to add a human check into this process as some student information systems assign students to a grade level depending on their credit accumulation, not time of enrollment. This human check will ensure that both ways to qualify have been reviewed and if the youth qualifies under either option, they are referred for further eligibility analysis.


● **EQUITY CONSIDERATION** | The Network recommends evaluating completion of the second year of high school based on when the youth first enrolled in, or should have enrolled in 9th grade, regardless of attendance. This will give all youth in foster care equity access to this graduation option and will help districts avoid analyzing difficult youth situations such as determining how to count extended absences caused by youth leaving their placements without permission, school attendance in a different country, extended time between school enrollments, etc.



46 California Education Code Section 51225.1.


Develop AB 167/216 Graduation Analysis Referral Process — Once a high school youth has been identified as involved in the foster care system at enrollment and having completed their second year of high school, the district should identify how to refer the case for AB 167/216 analysis. There is no requirement to determine eligibility based on credits or graduation status at this stage in the process. The person completing this portion of the review does not need the complete set of records or any expertise in credit analysis. This first level of referral can occur through phone calls, emails, or an automatic trigger  through the district's student identification system. 


STEP 2


Determine Who, How, and When AB 167/216 Graduation Analysis Will Be Completed


Identify Person Responsible — The district must identify and train the staff member(s) responsible for conducting the AB 167/216 analysis. The Network recommends, depending on the size of the district, that the analysis be conducted either by the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison (for smaller districts) or school-based academic counselors or registrars or in consultation with the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison (for mid-sized districts). 


Gather Records — In order to conduct a complete credit analysis, a district must gather a copy of the transcripts from all prior high schools the youth attended.  The district should determine their process, including which staff member is responsible, for requesting records within two business days of a youth's enrollment and advocating to ensure delivery of records within two business days of the request. A youth's school history can be gathered from CALPADS or other local data sharing systems. The Network recommends that transcripts from prior high schools be pursued for the entire 30-day certification timeline (and even thereafter, if necessary) until complete transcripts have been compiled.  For more on collecting records at enrollment, see [**Best Practices Guide 3: Immediate Enrollment and Education Placement in the Least Restrictive Environment for Youth in Foster Care and Youth in Foster Care Enrollment Checklist**](#).

 **PRACTICE TIP** | If an automatic trigger is used, ensure that the process also requires a human reviewing this system at some point in the process, as an automatic trigger could miss youth whose records are incomplete or inaccurate.

 **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | Pomona Unified School District uses automatic triggers in their student information system to provide immediate notification to their Foster Youth Lead Counselor whenever a high school aged youth in foster care enrolls, to begin the AB 167/216 analysis process.

 **PRACTICE TIP** | Bonita Unified School District, Long Beach Unified School District, and Pomona Unified School District all have their school based academic counselors conduct the initial AB 167/216 eligibility analysis and then the AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison checks and gives final approval to each eligibility analysis. Alhambra Unified School District also finds it helpful for school psychologists or instructional specialists to conduct the analysis during IEP meetings.

 **PRACTICE TIP** | The Network recommends collecting transcripts from each prior high school attended. Typically, youth in foster care have attended a number of high schools and it is often not accurate to rely upon the last school's transcript to capture all their credits from the numerous high schools attended. It is best practice to seek a transcript from each school to confirm the credits awarded by that school in the identified courses.

 **PRACTICE TIP** | Most Network districts have found they can typically gather all transcripts before the 30-day certification timeline expires if they work diligently on it. The Network recommends utilizing both written and telephonic communication to confirm receipt of records requests, plus emphasizing the importance of a timely response when speaking with other districts. Some districts will specifically call a prior district to request they immediately forward the documents most essential to immediately enrolling and placing the youth (e.g., a current transcript and IEP).

Review Records for Missing Partial Credits — When reviewing the transcripts and attendance records for each school, the Network recommends closely checking to ensure that the youth was issued partial credits for each period of school enrollment. For more on advocating for partial credits from a prior school, see **Best Practices Guide 4, Issuing Partial Credits to Youth in Foster Care, Step 7.**

Develop a Tool for AB 167/216 Eligibility Analysis

The Network recommends developing a tool for analyzing whether it is reasonable for a youth to complete local district requirements within four years of high school. See **AB 167/216 Graduation: Eligibility and Credit Checklist**, **Bonita 216 Graduation Tool**, and **West Covina 216 Graduation Checklist** for some examples of tools. The Network also recommends utilizing equity within this analysis. For example, youth in foster care are already experiencing trauma and the academic and social interruptions of a home and school change. Thus, the Network recommends that districts create a written definition of what course load is reasonable for a youth to complete within a semester, to ensure consistency among different staff performing this analysis. Further, this definition should ensure that youth in foster care are not expected to hold any more than a 'typical' course schedule (e.g., expecting them to take before or after school courses or dually enroll is unreasonable). * Further, even if a youth could reasonably complete the number of credits required to graduate within four years of high school, looking at the types of courses required is also essential to advance equity. For example, expecting a youth to take multiple years of the same subject in one year may be unreasonable. A youth and their education rights holder can always determine it is in the youth's best interests to complete extra courses, or multiple courses in the same subject within one year, but that should not be part of the 'reasonableness' eligibility analysis.

Develop Written Guidelines for Difficult Credit Calculation Situations: There are multiple instances in which a lack of clarity in the law can lead to difficult decisions during eligibility analysis. The Network recommends creating clear written guidelines to ensure all youth receive equity access to this graduation option by identifying and addressing difficult situations individually in a written policy. For example, when analyzing whether a youth has three years of English, are English Language Development classes, remedial academic classes, or special education English support classes counted? How are partial credits and/or A/B semester credits from different years of a course combined to make a complete year of any course? Will California State University and University

* **PRACTICE TIP** | Bonita Unified School District has created a **graduation reasonableness tool** which makes clear that youth will not be expected to earn more than 30 credits per semester or summer school.

of California 'validation' policies be applied to AB 167/216 graduation analysis, such as with math courses which require building upon a skill set? During credit recovery, if all students are allowed to test out of components of a course through demonstrating mastery on an assessment test, will youth in foster care doing this also receive credits for those components? Districts should determine how equity is implicated in each of these difficult credit calculation situations.

Determine Timeline for AB 167/216 Graduation Eligibility Analysis — Although a district has 30 days from enrollment to complete this analysis and provide written certification, the Network recommends completing at least a preliminary analysis as quickly as possible, as eligibility for this graduation option may impact enrollment options (e.g., whether it might be recommended for the youth to attend an alternative school for credit recovery purposes). For more on this, see **Best Practices Guide 3, Immediate Enrollment and Educational Placement in the Least Restrictive Setting for Youth in Foster Care, Step 3** and **Youth in Foster Care Enrollment Checklist**.

STEP 3

Develop Certification Letter

Districts can develop their own AB 167/216 graduation eligibility certification letter (e.g., **West Covina 216 Graduation Notification Letter**) or use the letter found in the Foster Youth Education Toolkit: **Sample Notification Letter**. Certification must be provided to the youth, education rights holder, and social worker/probation officer within 30 days of the youth enrolling in the new school.

It is important, in any tool, to ensure there are two separate sections. The first is the district's certification section. The second is for the youth's education rights holder to identify the graduation option that is in the youth's best interests. Certification and choosing a graduation option can occur at the same time or at different points in time. Separating the steps out in this

way allows a youth's education rights holder the ability to carefully consider the options, make a choice at a time that works best for the youth, and change their graduation pathway at any time prior to actual graduation.

The Network also recommends that districts identify a process for acknowledging a youth's ongoing eligibility if they have been certified as eligible in a prior district, since these youth always remain eligible, regardless of any change in circumstances (e.g., can complete the new district's graduation requirements within four years of high school, foster care case closes). One example of how to do this is found in the [Sample Notification Letter](#).

STEP 4

Determine Process for Counseling a Youth and their Education Rights Holder on All Graduation Options

The district should identify which district staff (e.g., AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison, counselor, registrar) is best suited to counsel youth and their education rights holders in the various graduation options the youth may be entitled to, once certification has been completed. The Network recommends districts develop guidelines on best practices and considerations for counseling sessions including but not limited to: (1) in-person vs. phone calls; (2) a youth's future goals (e.g., college vs. employment) and the skills needed to accomplish those goals; (3) keeping graduation options open by allowing an education rights holder to defer a final decision while also scheduling the youth into courses required for both graduation options; (4) scheduling required courses out over the entire time left until four years of high school have been completed (i.e., not pushing the youth to graduate early), creating space in a youth's schedule for academic remedial courses (if needed), work/study, career and technical education courses, and/or extracurricular activities; and (5) encouraging the youth to take a community college placement tests to determine a youth's required time in remedial college courses before starting Associates Degree courses.

The Network recommends that the counselor provide meaningful recommendations, while also

respecting the education rights holder's role as final decision maker based on the youth's best interests. While many youth will leap at the chance to graduate as quickly as possible, their education rights holders have been empowered by the court to take a longer view of the youth's long term best interests in making this type of decision. It is important to include the perspectives of both the youth and the youth's education rights holder in all specific conversations about the youth's eligibility for different graduation options. ■

● **PRACTICE TIP |** Most Network districts inform youth in foster care of their education rights at enrollment, including their potential eligibility for AB 167/216 graduation. We distinguish here between a conversation about a youth's education rights in general, and a specific conversation about their eligibility for different graduation options, after their credits have been compiled and analyzed. The later must always include the youth's education rights holder as they are the legal decisionmaker.


STEP 5

Modify Transcript to Reflect Graduation Option Chosen by Education Rights Holder

The Network recommends modifying your student information system to create a separate [AB 167/216 transcript definition](#) which calculates AB 167/216 graduation requirements, similar to what is done for a district's normal graduation requirements. The purpose is to ensure that there is a single page, modified transcript that reflects the requirements needed to graduate using AB 167/216 state minimum requirements, as well as which credits have been completed and which still need to be completed, all calculated within the transcript.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Training — The Network recommends that all academic counselors and registrars be trained on AB 167/216 graduation requirements and district procedures. If a district is tracking data on the timeliness of certifications and determines that a specific school site is struggling, this can point to the need for further training and support for the staff implementing there.

Working with Local Student Information System Data — The Network recommends tracking timely certifications, how many youth graduate using each graduation option,  a one year local graduation measure, and credit accumulation based on length of enrollment. For more on graduation data, see [Best Practices Guide 6: Using Local Data, Data Point 3: Graduation Measures Taking Into Account School Instability.](#)

STATE LEVEL POLICY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NETWORK DISTRICTS

Legislative clarification would make the administration of AB 167/216 graduation analysis and certification easier and more consistent across districts. Recommendations include:

Combining Partial Credits Into a Year-Long Course — Clarifying that districts must combine partial credits from different courses meeting the same graduation requirements to meet the state graduation requirements for year-long courses. While current law does not prohibit this practice, the current lack of clarity leads to inconsistent practices to the detriment of youth.

Clarification of How to Analyze AB 167/216 Courses including which classes qualify as English or Math courses (e.g., English Language Development courses, remedial reading or math courses, special education English or math support courses) and how to count repeated courses (e.g., two different semesters of English 9A).

■ **PRACTICE TIP** | Districts can create a special tag within their Student Information System for youth utilizing AB 167/216 graduation, which will make it easier to pull this data.

Adding 5th Year Graduation Using State Minimum

Allowing youth to remain in high school for a 5th year to complete minimum state graduation requirements will increase the graduation options and pathways to success for youth in foster care. While current law does not prohibit this practice, the current lack of clarity leads to inconsistent practices to the detriment of youth.

Reconsideration Requests — Clarification would be helpful on how to determine AB 167/216 graduation eligibility for youth who request reconsideration. For example, does a reconsideration analysis (done at a later point in time, often long after the transfer has occurred) look at 'reasonably able to complete district requirements within four years of high school' back at the time of transfer or currently at the time of requested reconsideration?

Creating Consistency Between Graduation Options for Youth in Foster Care and Youth in the Juvenile Justice System

— In 2017, AB 1124 created a reduced graduation criteria option for youth who are in or have been in juvenile hall or camp schools.⁴⁷ While this option is similar to AB 167/216, there are key differences that can have a major impact on youth, and that can also make implementation of graduation option analysis more complex and inconsistent for districts. The Network recommends the legislature merge differences between AB 167/216 and AB 1124 to ensure youth in foster care and involved in the juvenile justice system receive an equitable education including ensuring that only youth unable to reasonably complete local district graduation requirements within four years of high school are eligible and to ensure that youth held in juvenile halls and camps cannot have their release dates extended until they graduate from high school.

47 Cal. Educ. Code Section 48645.7.

EXPLORATION QUESTIONS

AB 167/216 Graduation



AB 167/216 Graduation

1. Who is responsible for identifying youth for eligibility determinations (e.g., does this happen at enrollment, after data matching, when a youth requests it)?
2. Once a youth is identified, what is your certification process (e.g., who, when)?
3. How do you make your reasonableness decision (e.g., what factors are taken into account, how do you do your calculation)?
4. Does your district have an AB 167/216 certification of eligibility letter? Does the letter have two separate parts (i.e., clear certification by district and then education rights holder decision)?
5. What is your AB 167/216 counseling and decision-making process (e.g., in school meeting, inclusion of education rights holders)? Do you have a counseling tool for the pros and cons of AB 167/216 graduation?
6. What do you do with youth who come in already certified from a prior district (e.g., do you redo the entire certification process, do you recertify without an analysis)?
7. What is your process when youth or education rights holders request retroactive certification?

Graduation and College/Career Readiness

8. What school-based tutoring do you provide? Do you regularly refer youth in foster care to county tutoring options? Do you have peer support/tutoring or teacher tutoring programs?

9. What remedial academic supports do you provide? How do you identify and refer youth in foster care for these programs and services?

10. What credit recovery options does your district offer and in what types of settings (e.g., alternative school vs. comprehensive school)?

11. How are youth identified and placed in A-G classes? What supports are provided to youth in these classes who are struggling? What special outreach, placement, and/or support are available for any underserved group related to A-G classes?

12. What does the district do to increase the percentage of youth in foster care enrolling in AP courses and taking and passing AP exams?

13. Does your district provide targeted support for youth in foster care related to the college application process (e.g., entrance exams for community college, SAT and other college entrance tests, assistance with application processing, completing the FAFSA, linking youth in foster care to programs to support them on college campuses)?

14. Does your district have a college and career readiness assessment? What does it measure? How do youth in foster care score on these measures?

15. What type of career technical education options does your district have? Does your district offer certification programs? How are youth in foster care recruited and supported to succeed in these programs?

16. What types of programs or partnerships does your district have with local businesses or other relevant partners to obtain work experience for youth in foster care (e.g., job shadowing, paid work options)?



DOWNLOADABLE TOOL

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE 6




Using Local Data to Monitor Education Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care




Local school district data on youth in foster care (different, and more extensive than what is available on a district's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) Dashboard) is an essential step in driving systems change and improvement. Because data is so important, we have included references to data in every section of this guide. This section is an expanded version of that information, as well as guidance on how to pull and utilize data within a district's chosen student information systems (SIS).

The Network recommends districts collect and utilize the below data points in a continuous cycle of improvement to ensure district policies and practices are leading to improved education outcomes for youth in foster care. In this era of accountability, and in pursuit of meaningful change, districts cannot merely establish policies and practices to support youth in foster care, they must also demonstrate that these policies and practices are successfully improving the education outcomes of youth in foster care.

In a continuous cycle of improvement, first, districts must collect baseline data to understand the education outcomes of their youth in foster care before implementing any changes. Second, districts can use this baseline data to identify areas of need (e.g., where outcomes for youth in foster care are worse than the general student population or otherwise warrant special attention). Third, districts can create or modify policies, practices, programs, services, etc., to attempt to address this area of need. Fourth, districts can implement their new policy, practice, program, or service for an identified amount of time (e.g., one quarter, one semester). Fifth, districts can collect new data and compare it to baseline data to identify whether the policy, practice, program, and/or service has improved the education outcomes in the targeted area. Sixth, the district can adjust the policy, practice, program, and/or service to address previously unidentified challenges to improving the outcome. Then, districts can repeat steps 4-6 until the data demonstrate that they have appropriately addressed and improved the targeted area of need. For more on the continuous improvement cycle, see the **Foster Youth Education Toolkit, Tracking Foster Youth Data to Improve Outcomes**.

Data can be utilized to identify areas of need, and to advocate for and justify the expenditure of additional resources (i.e., financial and personnel).  Data can also point to student information system improvements and innovations to aid in collecting more meaningful data for youth in foster care and to drive systems change to improve their education outcomes. Working with local data spurred innovative solutions across all Network districts. This included the creation of automatic emails or system alerts when youth are credit deficient (Alhambra Unified School District), are enrolling/disenrolling (Long Beach Unified School District), or have been absent for three continuous school days (Pomona Unified School District). Districts have also automated many functions previously performed by district staff including calculating partial credits (Alhambra Unified School District, West Covina Unified School District) and creating AB 167/216 graduation certification letters (Alhambra Unified School District).

Data can also be utilized to celebrate successes with key stakeholders such as Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) stakeholder groups, county offices of education during Differentiated Assistance/Technical Assistance meetings, and/or to positively influence the reporting of meaningful data at the state level (see Policy Recommendations below). Examples of how the Network districts have showcased their data can be found throughout this Best Practices Guide. The Network's process and data have also been highlighted by the **California Collaborative for Educational Excellence**. In the world of limited resources and budgets that all districts face, data is key in ensuring that resources are dedicated in ways that are making a positive impact on student performance.

A variety of Student Information Systems are used throughout the state. Recommendations provided in this Guide from Network districts can be used within any SIS and where available, information for specific SISs is provided. The Network recommends writing queries that can be run periodically (e.g., each semester or year), in real time to immediately improve youth outcomes, and/or building reports that can be run at the push of a button. Where possible, the Network recommends programming your SIS to send automatic notifications to relevant staff to trigger specific activities (e.g., at disenrollment, to counselor to issue partial credits and Assembly Bill (AB) 490 Foster Youth Liaison to have a school stability conversation) to increase consistent implementation of your policies and practices which will ultimately lead to positive data outcomes. Districts should also consider how to share and give access to this information to school site administrators. 

● **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT |** Bonita Unified School District has used their local data to demonstrate how youth living in Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP) within their district generally have higher needs than other youth in foster care they serve. This data allowed them to advocate with their School Board to devote new funding and build extensive new academic and behavioral support programs for STRTP youth attending their district schools. Their data has also demonstrated the effectiveness of this financial commitment and the programs and services it funded to improve the education outcomes for these youth.

◆ **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION |** Who has legitimate educational interests within your districts to know which youth are in the foster care and/or juvenile justice system (e.g., teachers vs. counselors vs. school site administrators)? Protecting the privacy of a youth in foster care is important to their sense of safety and security, a key tenant in creating a trauma-informed learning environment. Protecting the privacy of a youth involved in the juvenile justice system is important so they are not singled out for different treatment. Allowing school site administrators and/or staff to access reports and data on youth in foster care will assist them in monitoring the success of policies and practices that are being implemented at their school site. Privacy protections for youth in foster care or involved in the juvenile justice system should be weighed heavily in these considerations, and districts should share information as minimally as needed to effectively serve youth.

DATA POINT 1

Total Number of Youth in Foster Care Served by the District Each School Year

PURPOSE OF DATA — The Network recommends using local data to determine what they consider to be a truly accurate count of exactly how many youth in foster care the district is serving every year, calculated based on the total number of youth in foster care who are enrolled in the district for even a single day. The California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) system, which provides a census enrollment count, is incomplete because it only captures a snapshot of the number of youth in foster care who are enrolled at the same school on the October and Spring count days. Many districts experience youth in foster care moving in and out of their schools throughout the school year; the census enrollment count cannot capture these youth due to their school instability. If a district correctly identifies and labels all their youth in foster care in their Student Information System at enrollment (for more on this topic, see [Best Practices Guide 1: Identifying and Designating Youth in Foster Care in your Student Information System](#)), they can capture accurate data on the number of youth they are serving. This data can be used by the district to understand the number of youth in foster care they are responsible for educating and by school boards to identify budget, staff, and resource allocations needed to fully serve these youth.

- **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | Pomona Unified School District has effectively utilized their local data to demonstrate the unique needs of youth in foster care which has led to additional fiscal and personnel resources allocated to meet those needs.

DATA FORMULA — This is the total number of youth in foster care (appropriately designated within the SIS) who have an enter or exit date anytime over the course of the year within the district, or an enter date carried over from a previous year.

WORKING WITH STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (SIS)

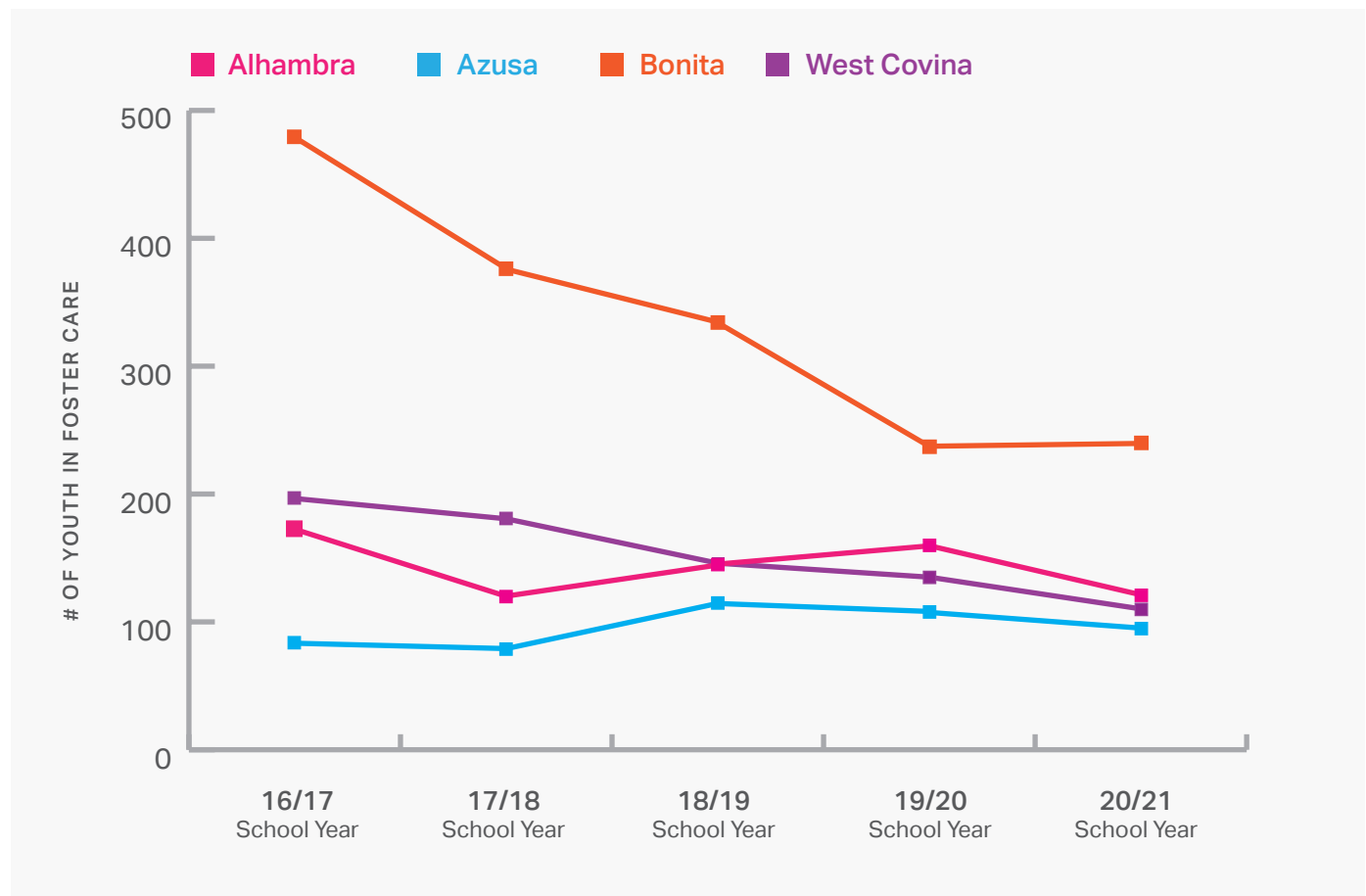
Aeries | Districts utilizing the Aeries SIS can create a 'foster youth program participation record'. This field should include a start date (i.e., the date their foster care case opened in dependency court 📅 or the date they entered the district with an open foster care case) and end date (i.e., the date their official foster care case closed with the dependency court or the date they exited the district). 📅 This field can then be queried in Aeries to pull the total number of youth in foster care served by the district each year; basically, any youth with a start date during the school year (or carried over from a previous year) or end date during the school year would be included in the count. This count will likely yield a higher number of youth in foster care being served by the district than found in the CBEDS/census enrollment count, because the former captures all youth in foster care enrolled in the district for even a single day in the school year while the latter only captures youth present on both census days, thereby only capturing youth who experience school stability during that year.

★ **PRACTICE TIP** | It is important to connect a youth's foster care status in your SIS to a youth's formal foster care court case being opened and/or closed as this gives them legal education rights as youth in foster care. Many youth may live with a caregiver other than their biological parent and do not have an open foster care case or have been returned to their biological parents without having their foster care case closed as the court may monitor the safety of that family for six months during reunification. Connecting a youth's foster care status to their legal foster care case allows districts to correctly identify which youth are legally in foster care.

◆ **PRACTICE TIP** | Network data experts recommend districts use a start/end date instead of a yes/no for status in foster care as it provides more complete information. For example, having a foster care exit date vs. a 'no' allows a district to know that a youth was formerly in foster care (vs. was never in foster care); this youth would still have education rights under the law (e.g., ongoing school stability rights after case closes; AB 167/216 eligibility after a case closes).

DATA OUTCOMES:

Total Number of Youth in Foster Care Served by the District



District	16/17 SY	17/18 SY	18/19 SY	19/20 SY	20/21 SY
Alhambra	173	120	145	160	121
Azusa	84	79	115	108	95
Bonita	479	376	334	237	240
West Covina	197	181	146	135	110

DATA POINT 2

Percentage of Youth Awarded Partial Credits

PURPOSE OF DATA — Tracking whether partial credits are issued to all youth in foster care who have earned them (i.e., by receiving a passing grade in the course and attending enough days) helps to ensure they stay on track for high school graduation, increases the percentage of youth in foster care who graduate high school, and can also be used as an early indicator showing progress your district is making toward improving your district's graduation rates for youth in foster care. It also allows districts to track their own compliance with the legal rights of these youth, and avoid adverse legal actions. It allows a district to align with LCFF's equity goals for youth in foster care by ensuring they earn credit for work completed, just like any other student. The Network recommends collecting and analyzing partial credit data every semester to track whether school sites are appropriately issuing partial credits. Periodically running and analyzing data on the percentage of partial credits awarded to eligible youth each semester will ensure any youth who has not received their partial credits but is entitled to them is identified so that partial credits can then be awarded retroactively, ★ and so that the district can ensure they are tracking their overall practices and improving in their provision of partial credits as a

district as a whole.

DATA FORMULA — The Network recommends tracking the issuance of partial credits every semester for two groups of youth: 1) youth who leave the school mid-semester; and 2) youth who enter the school mid-semester. + In order to do this, all youth in foster care must be identified and tagged within the SIS. For more on this topic, see **Best Practices Guide 1: Identifying and Designating Youth in Foster Care in your Student Information System**. For youth exiting mid-semester, the number of youth in foster care who received their partial credits is divided by the number of youth in foster care in high school who exited mid-semester and passed at least one class. * For youth entering mid-semester, the number of youth in foster care who received their partial credits is divided by the number of youth in foster care in high school who entered mid-semester and passed at least one class. □ These equations will provide the district with the percentage of youth in foster care who received their partial credits who were eligible for them. □

★ **PRACTICE TIP** | The Network recommends utilizing semester data to go back and issue partial credits after they have been missed to bring this data point to 100% compliance.

+ **PRACTICE TIP** | The Network recommends that districts focus first on ensuring youth leaving the school mid-semester are awarded their partial credits because these youth often receive zero credits. Once a system has been built to address those youth's needs, a district can focus on ensuring youth entering a district mid-semester are awarded their partial credits, since those youth are more likely to receive the full number of credits per class, even when they were not in a district for the entire semester. While the latter situation can lead to a youth receiving more credits than they earned, and possibly more than the maximum number of credits that can typically be earned per class in a single semester, this situation is less dire than youth who are being awarded zero credits even though they earned them, entitling them to receive partial credits.

* **PRACTICE TIP** | Bonita Unified School District looks even more granularly at this issue by tracking their data by class instead of by student. By looking at the number of classes that partial credits were issued in, divided by the number of classes a youth in foster care had a passing check out grade, Bonita is able to calculate the percentage of all earned partial credits that were issued in order to track their ability to consistently issue partial credits to all eligible youth in foster care.

● **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | Azusa Unified School District can demonstrate through their local data that they have issued 100% of the partial credits earned by their youth, including one student who received their diploma as a result of getting their partial credits who would not have graduated otherwise.

■ **PRACTICE TIP** | The Network recommends pulling the list of youth who have left the school mid-semester right before the end of each semester to ensure all youth have had their partial credits issued and forwarded to their next school. Similarly, pulling the list of youth who have entered the school mid-semester right before the semester ends, to remind their counselors/registrars that they should not award the full number of credits per class but rather need to issue partial credits, can be helpful to ensure youth are not issued too many credits.

WORKING WITH STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS ★

The Network recommends creating an automatic notification after a youth has missed three consecutive days in school, in order to locate and re-engage youth in foster care. After an appropriate search (see [Best Practices Guide 4: Issuing Partial Credits to Youth in Foster Care, Step 2](#)), if the youth has left the district, partial credits should be calculated and issued, assuming the youth earned a passing grade. The Network recommends creating an automatic calculation system, 🗲️ based on attendance, 📅 within the SIS to cut down on human error in counting seat time. The Network also recommends that a counselor or registrar perform a double check on the credits calculated by the automatic system, before entering them on a transcript, again assuming the youth earned a passing grade.

In Aeries, a query can be run for: (1) all designated youth in foster care; (2) who are in high school; (3) with an enter or exit date that is not the first/last day of the semester; (4) with a 'null' value for any youth who did not receive a grade (passing or failing) for every class they were enrolled in; and (5) with a 'null' value for credits, excluding any youth with a failing grade. ➕ The number of youth which meet all these criteria can be divided by the total number of youth in foster care in high school who have an enter or exit date in the district that is not the first/last day of the semester. This will provide the percentage of youth who did not receive their partial credits who were eligible for them. Districts can turn this into a positive number (i.e., the number of youth who did receive their partial credits who were eligible for them) by subtracting it from 100. ✳️

Districts can similarly write queries to pull transcript information out of their SIS, including course name, grade, and credits issued. This query can be input into excel, where formulas can be written to look for an A, B, C, or D value in the grade column and a 0 in the credit column. This will allow for a further look into those youth's transcripts to ensure partial credits are issued when the youth earned a passing grade. A formula can also be written to look for a 0 in the grade column to find youth who did not receive an exit grade. The Network recommends building this process into the SIS so that a query there can provide the list of youth who have not received a grade or credits for further examination, instead of requiring this two-step process. Smaller districts can pull a query of all high school aged youth in foster care who left in the middle of the semester or entered in the middle of the semester. The AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison or designated counselor or registrar can then check youth by youth to ensure they all received their check out grades and partial credits. Smaller districts can also hand count their partial credit percentages although the Network recommends automating and/or writing queries wherever possible.

★ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT |** Alhambra Unified School District increased the percentage of youth in foster care who were awarded their earned partial credits (i.e., received a passing grade) from 66% to 83% after implementing changes to their SIS to make the issuance of partial credits automatically calculated.

◆ **PRACTICE TIP |** In Aeries, a SQL 'read only' table can provide a list of the youth's classes and days enrolled/absent.

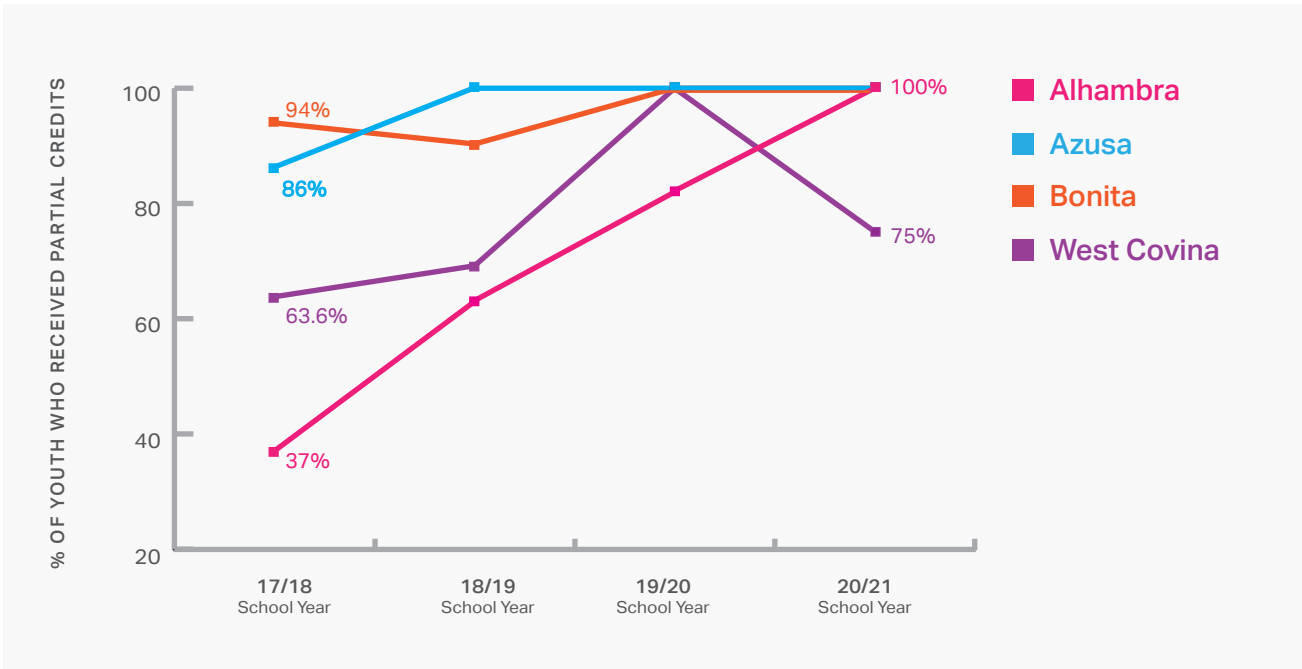
▲ **PRACTICE TIP |** In calculating seat time (different from evaluating whether a youth passed a course), if a district's SIS counts positive attendance (i.e., days present), these can easily be summed up and input into a calculation formula within the SIS. If a district's SIS counts negative attendance (i.e., days absent), the calculations are more complex. The calculation formula has to take into account a youth's enter and exit dates, sum up the total number of days of enrollment/possible attendance, and then subtract their days of absence to find their total days of attendance/seat time. Some SISs, such as Aeries, allows for either positive or negative attendance, with schools individually choosing which one to use. If this is the case, multiple calculation formulas have to be written within the SIS to address both types of attendance.

+ **PRACTICE TIP |** Districts can use these null values to go back and ensure check out grades and partial credits are issued, and thus raise their partial credit issuance rate to 100%.

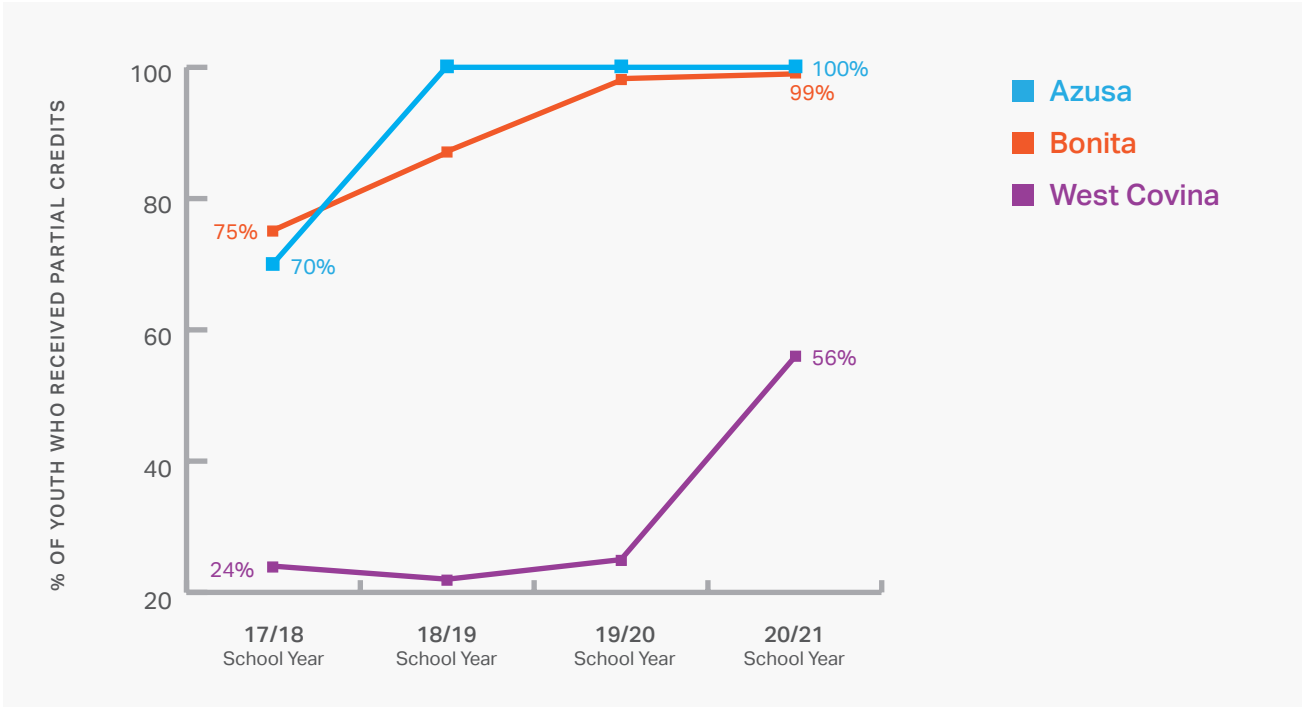
✳️ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT |** Alhambra Unified School District has written a report that allows for their AB 490 Foster Youth Liaison to push a button in their SIS, Power School, to identify all their youth who received partial credits. They are currently working to filter this report to check for zeros (i.e., no credits issued) to identify and address any youth who did not receive their partial credits who earned such credits by receiving a passing grade in the course.

DATA OUTCOMES:
Percentage of Youth in Foster Care Who Received their Earned Partial Credits

DISTRICT AWARDED PARTIAL CREDITS TO YOUTH WHO EARNED THEM BUT LEFT MID-SEMESTER




DISTRICT AWARDED PARTIAL CREDITS TO YOUTH WHO EARNED THEM AFTER ENTERING MID-SEMESTER



DATA POINT 3

Graduation Measures Taking Into Account School Instability

PURPOSE OF DATA — The California School Dashboard provides data on a four-year graduation cohort for all students, measuring what percentage of youth graduated from high school within four years of entering 9th grade. While this data is very meaningful, its application can become convoluted when applied to unstable student populations. For example, if a youth in foster care has attended ten different high schools, spending no longer than four months at any one school, it is understandable if they do not graduate high school within four years. Unfortunately, whichever school/district they last attended, even if only for four months, will have this failure to graduate in four years reported against them. California's relatively new five-year graduation cohort goes further to provide meaningful graduation data for unstable youth but still attributes youth to a district based on wherever they last attended.

Importantly, this negative attribution may hide all the efforts undertaken by that district to support the youth's graduation including ensuring that the youth received all their earned partial credits, received extra tutoring and mental health supports, participated in a credit recovery program, etc. Ultimately, to identify meaningful graduation measures for youth in foster care, who are often not present in any one school for a significant portion of their high school years, it is important to balance the need to attribute each youth's graduation status to a specific school/district, while also creating a fair data and accountability method to evaluate what districts are doing to support the increased graduation rates of youth in foster care. 

- **EQUITY CONSIDERATION** | It is essential to reward the significant efforts undertaken by districts to create and deliver meaningful programs and supports to youth in foster care to improve their graduation rates. This can be done through accountability that recognizes the efforts districts are making to support youth in foster care's improved graduation, even if graduation is not an immediate outcome (e.g., creating credit recovery programs at comprehensive high schools that allow youth to make up credits without losing access to the wealth of supports and services available at those sites, even if that expenditure does not lead to a youth in foster care graduating within 4 years of high school). This rewards and encourages continued efforts to create equity for youth in foster care.



The Network recommends utilizing local data to measure one, or a combination, of the following additions to the four-year graduation cohort measure.

The Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) 1-Year Graduation Rate holds much promise as it is already specifically designed to address the needs of high-risk and highly mobile students (i.e., youth only have to attend for 60 days to count in this measure). ■ This is a 1-year graduation measure for all students enrolled in the 12th grade. The Network recommends utilizing a 1-year graduation rate for youth in foster care.

Districts can also meaningfully measure their ability to promote and support the graduation of youth in foster care by tracking their credit accumulation based on the length of enrollment. ★ This would measure whether a youth in foster care passed all their classes and earned all possible credits (including partial credits) they were entitled to based on the amount of time they were enrolled in the district. Youth would either earn full credits for the period of enrollment, measuring that the district timely advanced their graduation prospects, or some percentage of the credits they could have possibly earned.

Districts may also find it meaningful to collect and report data on which types of graduation options youth in foster care utilize including district graduation in four years, AB 167/216 graduation in four years, and district graduation in five years.

Early indicator local data can also be used to report movement that will eventually support improved graduation rates, even if graduation rate data is not immediately increasing. This includes how many youth were timely certified for AB 167/216 graduation. Reporting how many youth are timely certified opens up additional graduation options for youth in foster care and should ultimately lead to improved graduation rates.

■ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION |** Despite the benefits of this type of measure, there are still reasonable concerns. For example, if a youth does not spend 60+ days in any school placement, which does occur for extremely high needs youth in foster care, where would these youth be counted? How would we measure our highest needs youth, if they aren't attributed to anyone? Where would we find the accountability for child welfare agencies in these cases of high instability? Is county level data, not by school district, more meaningful to use for accountability purposes? Does this also implicate the county child welfare system in having a part in the solution?



★ **EQUITY CONSIDERATION |** An additional benefit of using this graduation measure would be promoting the importance of issuing partial credits. This would help youth in foster care by linking district graduation rates to a district's ability to consistently issue partial credits to eligible youth. This also increases equity as all youth would receive the benefit of the work they have done.

DATA FORMULA — In order to calculate meaningful graduation measures taking into account the school instability of youth in foster care, all youth in foster care must be identified and designated within the SIS. For more on this topic, see [Best Practices Guide 1: Identifying and Designating Youth in Foster Care in your SIS.](#)

A 1-year graduation measure would calculate a percentage based on the number of youth in foster care who graduated anytime during their 12th grade year divided by the total number of youth in foster care who attended a district in the 12th grade. This can be calculated including 4th and 5th year seniors. This measure could be further narrowed to only include the youth in foster care physically present in the district on graduation day to clearly attribute to that district only those youth who they could possibly graduate, or even youth in the district for a majority of their 12th grade year.

Measuring Progress Towards Graduation as Credit Accumulation: This is a new and experimental idea being explored by the Network. The purpose here is to measure whether a youth in foster care earned all possible credits they could have earned over their time of enrollment; put another way, did the youth pass all their classes? This allows a district to measure whether the interventions and services they provided to youth in foster care, while they were enrolled in the district, advanced their progress towards graduation. This data can be reported as a percentage: the number of high school youth in foster care who earned all possible credits (based on enrollment) over the total number of high school youth in foster care. Districts can further analyze the negative data (the percentage of high school youth in foster care who did not earn all possible credits) by looking at specific intervals (e.g., what percentage earned 75% or 50% of possible credits).

- Credit accumulation can be calculated by doing an individual analysis of each youth's enrollment dates (start and exit) compared to their credits earned (did they earn all credits available during their enrollment period). A simple example of this would be whether a youth earned 30 credits after being enrolled for a complete semester. This is more complicated when a youth is enrolled for only part of a semester and would require calculating what partial credits a youth would be eligible to earn based on their enter and exit dates compared to what credits they actually earned during that shortened time period.

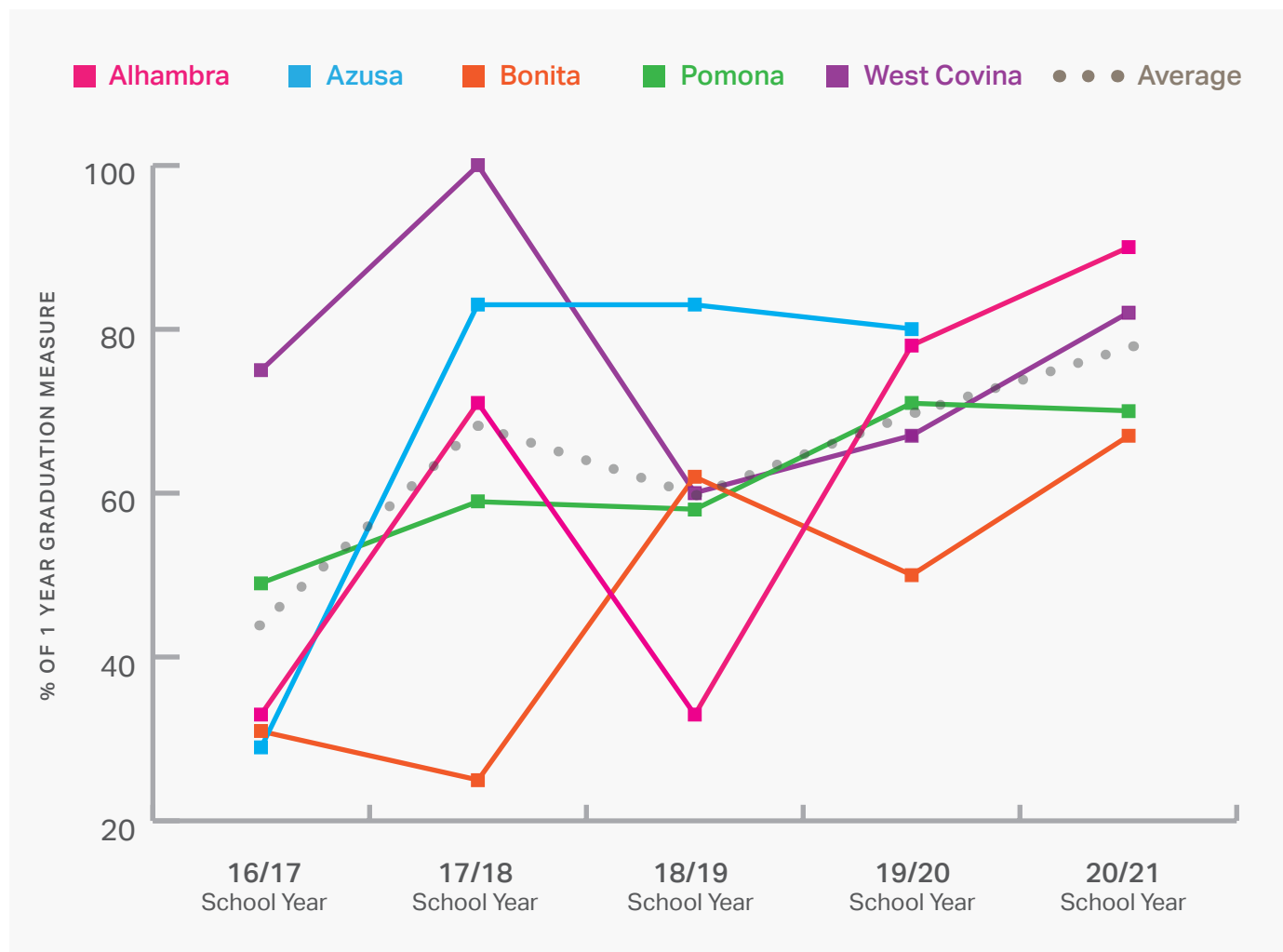
- This can also be calculated by looking for 'null' credits, as described above in Data Point 2.
- Districts can also compare 'attempted' versus 'earned' credits, although this would require that districts correctly calculate attempted credits, including partial credits based on enrollment dates.

Districts should be able to track and report the types of graduation options youth in foster care utilized (i.e., district graduation in four years, AB 167/216 graduation in four years, district graduation in five years) by dividing the total number of youth in foster care who graduated by the number of youth using each graduation option, which can be pulled from the different types of transcript formats used and the youth's grade level.

Reporting timely AB 167/216 graduation certification would require tracking the enrollment and certification dates of all high school aged youth in foster care who have completed the 10th grade and then dividing the number of youth timely certified by the total number of youth evaluated for eligibility.

DATA OUTCOMES:

1 Year Graduation Measure




NOTE: Data omitted for 2020-2021 school year for Azusa Unified School District due to small sample size.

District	16/17 SY	17/18 SY	18/19 SY	19/20 SY	20/21 SY
Alhambra	33%	71%	33%	78%	90%
Azusa	29%	83%	83%	80%	-
Bonita	31%	25%	62%	50%	67%
Pomona	49%	59%	58%	71%	70%
West Covina	75%	100%	60%	67%	82%

DATA POINT 4

School Stability

PURPOSE OF DATA — The most recent school stability data was reported ten years ago in the [Invisible Achievement Gap](#). Yet, any educator working with youth in foster care knows that their school instability is a major factor negatively impacting their education.  Currently, there is no state level measure of school stability or instability publicly available or reported on the California School Dashboard.⁴⁷ Thus, districts who want to monitor school stability must utilize a local measure. Having reliable local data measures on school stability and instability is essential to understand how to improve their rates of school stability and therefore the overall education outcomes of youth in foster care.

A true school stability measure (i.e., number of youth remaining in their school of origin after experiencing a home placement change) requires cross-agency data sharing and analysis. This can occur at the state level through coordination between state-level education and child welfare agencies to create accountability for improving school stability by including a statewide measure on the LCFF Education and CCR Dashboards and DataQuest. The Network believes that this type of data is and would create, for the first time, including accountability for both districts and child welfare agencies to improve school stability.

Until these types of data can be generated and reported at the state level, the Network recommends that districts utilize local measures. Local measures can mirror what was reported in the Invisible Achievement Gap report: the percentage of youth in foster care who remained stable in a single school for an entire school year, regardless of home placement stability or instability. The benefit of this data is that it can be pulled from a SIS. The drawback of this data is that it cannot be analyzed in relationship to home placement instability, unless a county is utilizing AB 2083 or another mechanism to share and analyze data between districts and county placing agencies.

◆ **TRAUMA CONSIDERATION** | Although there are many ways that school instability negatively impacts a youth in foster care's educational achievement (e.g., academic achievement, engagement in the school community), the trauma caused by instability cannot be understated. When a youth in foster care changes schools due to a home placement change, they have either been recently removed from their parents (and/or siblings), which is a traumatizing event in itself, or they are experiencing the next in any number of home moves, each move causing additional trauma. Every home placement change requires a youth to become accustomed to a new living environment, new caregivers, new foster siblings, a new place to sleep, new food to eat, new rules and responsibilities, a new neighborhood, etc. Each school move requires a youth to experience new teachers, curriculum, classrooms, campus, school expectations, peers, sports, clubs, extracurricular activities, etc. All of this amounts to significant impact on a youth's ability to successfully navigate their education and their world and often causes significant trauma.

⁴⁷ As of the date of publication, the California Department of Education is working on development of a school stability data measure; however, this is not currently available, nor is there a set date when it will be available.

There are a variety of appropriate reasons why youth in foster care change schools other than due to a home placement change including but not limited to: (1) their IEP team, with education rights holder agreement, determines that a youth's disability related education needs would be better served by a different school placement; (2) a youth and their education rights holder determine that placement in charter school or an alternative education program, such as a continuation school, would best meet the youth's needs; and (3) a youth and their education rights holder determine that placement at a different school site would meet other needs of the youth such as placement with siblings, safety reasons such as to move away from a bully, to avoid gang violence, or to avoid the risk of being exposed to commercial sexual exploitation, or to access necessary mental health services and/or a trauma-informed school environment. The Network believes that these reasons can help explain and understand rates of school instability. Once data on school instability rates is collected, it can then be further analyzed as to the cause of the instability (i.e., school changes effectuated by an education rights holder as in the youth's best interests vs. school changes for other reasons).

Data Formula: In order to calculate school stability and instability rates, all youth in foster care must be identified and designated within the SIS. For more on this topic, see **Best Practices Guide 1: Identifying and Designating Youth in Foster Care in your SIS.**

Instability Rate: The number of youth in foster care with an enter date that is not the first day of the school year and/or an exit date that is not the last day of the school year divided by the total number of youth in foster care served by the district over the entire course of the year. How to calculate the latter data point can be found in Data Point 1 above.

Stability Rate: The number of youth in foster care with an enter date on the first day of the school year and an exit date on the last day of the school year divided by the total number of youth in foster care served by the district over the entire course of the year. ▲

▲ **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT |** Bonita Unified School District, who has 3 of the largest congregate care facilities for youth in Los Angeles County and thus an extremely high rate of school instability, increased their school stability from 15% to 25% of foster youth remaining stable over the course of a school year by changing their enrollment and disenrollment practices and ensuring that school of origin rights were invoked whenever appropriate and possible. This new enrollment process also led to a drastic reduction in the number of youth in foster care placed in alternative schools.

A district's instability rate and their stability rate should add up to 100%. The Network recommends running both numbers and performing this validity check to ensure the data is accurate.

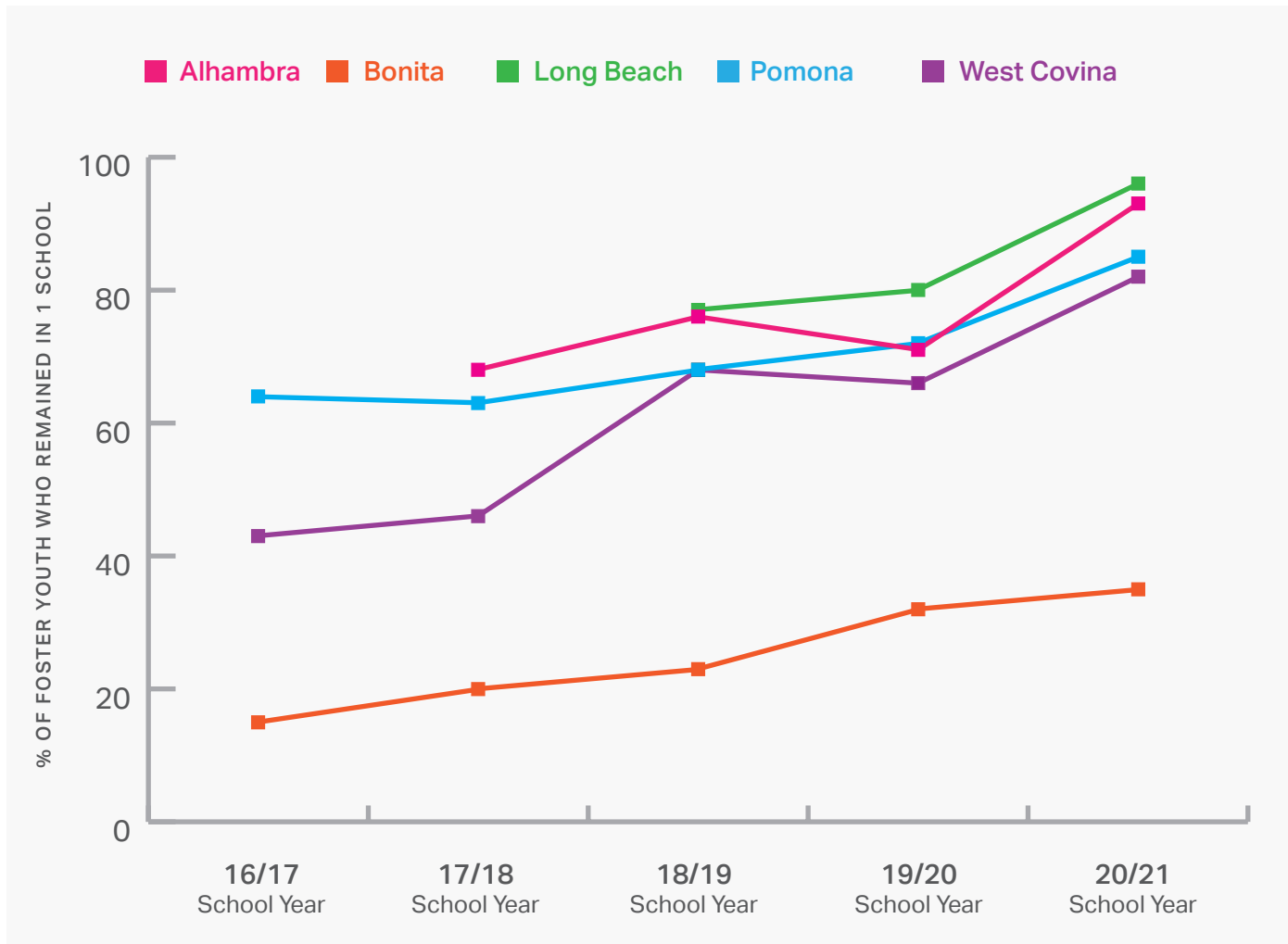
The Network recommends additional data that analyzes school stability rates by type of home placement (e.g., foster home, relative home, short term residential therapeutic placement). This will allow the district to understand how school instability impacts youth in different types of foster care placements differently and can lead to targeted allocation of resources to address and improve school stability. This data can be pulled if the district characterizes (and inputs into their SIS) the home placement of youth in foster care by these different placement types. This information can be gathered from the adult enrolling the youth or through local data sharing agreements with the county placing agency.

WORKING WITH STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Within the Aeries SIS, address change longitudinal information can be used to track when a home placement changes but school enrollment does not.

DATA OUTCOMES:

Percentage of Youth in Foster Care Who Remained in One School for a Full School Year



NOTE: Data is unavailable for the 2016-2017 school year in Alhambra Unified School District.

Long Beach Unified School District did not join the network until the 19/20 school year but was able to generate baseline data for the 18/19 school year.

District	16/17 SY	17/18 SY	18/19 SY	19/20 SY	20/21 SY
Alhambra	—	68%	76%	71%	93%
Bonita	15%	20%	23%	32%	35%
Long Beach	—	—	77%	80%	96%
Pomona	64%	63%	68%	72%	85%
West Covina	43%	46%	68%	66%	82%

DATA POINT 5

Proportionality of Enrollment in Alternative Education Settings

PURPOSE OF DATA — Under California law, districts must “strive to ensure that no specific group of pupils...is disproportionately enrolled in continuation schools...”⁴⁸ Historically, youth in foster care have been disproportionately enrolled in alternative settings due to credit deficiencies, mid-semester enrollment, behavioral issues often caused by trauma, and simply their status as youth living in congregate care facilities and/or involved in the juvenile justice system. Even when districts design their alternative education settings to be responsive to the needs of youth in foster care, including providing credit recovery programs, trauma informed educators, smaller class sizes/campuses, etc., disproportionality should be evaluated regularly given the many supports, services, and extracurricular activities that are often not available at alternative education settings. +

DATA FORMULA — In order to calculate the percentage of youth in foster care who are enrolled in alternative educational settings, all youth in foster care must be identified and designated within the SIS. For more on this topic, see [Best Practices Guide 1: Identifying and Designating Youth in Foster Care in your SIS](#). Alternative education settings can include continuation schools, independent study programs, and other educational placements that are not at comprehensive school sites (e.g., community day school).⁴⁹ The number of youth in alternative education settings divided by the total number of youth in foster care in the district who are eligible to be in such settings (e.g., 16+ for continuation school) will give the percentage of youth in foster care who are in these settings. * Districts should then compare this to the percentage of youth in foster care out of the total student population in your district to determine if you are experiencing disproportionality. □

+ **EQUITY HIGHLIGHT** | Youth in foster care have the right to attend school in the least restrictive environment. When developing special programs and supports, consider whether they can be implemented on comprehensive campuses, rather than requiring enrollment in alternative programs to access them.

* **DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT** | West Covina Unified School District reduced their alternative school disproportionality from 60% to 28%.

● **PRACTICE TIP** | The Network recommends tracking this data regularly (e.g., each semester) to address any disproportionality by modifying the district’s placement recommendation process and guiding education rights holders through a voluntary best interest decision. The Network also recommends tracking the return rate⁵⁰ to determine if placement of youth in foster care in alternative settings is leading to success.

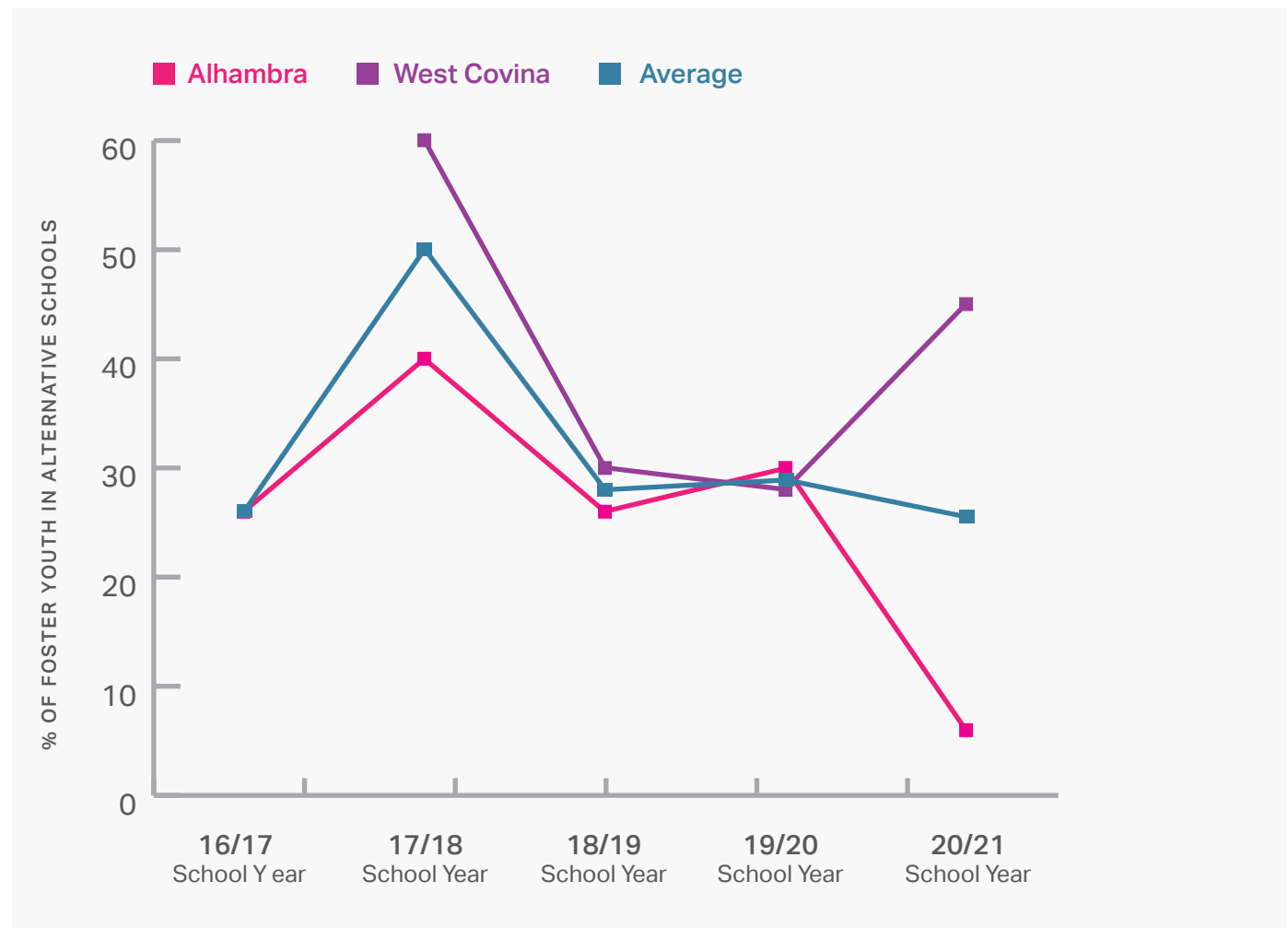
48 Cal. Educ. Code Section 48432.3(b)(2).

49 We do not include alternative school sites specific to special education (e.g., non public schools, special education campuses) in our definition of alternative education settings.

450 Return rate is the number and percentage of students who return to a comprehensive campus after attending an alternative school site.

DATA OUTCOMES:

Percentage of Youth in Foster Care at Alternative Education Schools



NOTE: Data is unavailable for the 2016-2017 school year in West Covina Unified School District.

District	16/17 SY	17/18 SY	18/19 SY	19/20 SY	20/21 SY
Alhambra	26%	40%	26%	30%	6%
West Covina	—	60%	30%	28%	45%

STATE LEVEL DATA POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NETWORK DISTRICTS


Using an Accurate Count of Youth in Foster Care for LCFF Funding Purposes: As discussed in [Data Point 1: Total Number of Youth in Foster Care Served by the District Each School Year](#), the CBEDs count, utilized for LCFF unduplicated count and funding purposes, significantly undercounts the number of youth in foster care served by a district every school year. The Network recommends developing a method to count youth in foster care that takes into account their school instability and more accurately reflects the supports necessary to stabilize them in school and appropriately serve them. This count method would more accurately reflect the total number of youth in foster care districts serve each year and should be used for LCFF funding purposes.


Using a Duplicated Count for LCFF Funding Purposes: As discussed throughout this Best Practices Guide, youth in foster care experience significant trauma and inequities, leading to their education outcomes being the poorest of any at-risk student population in the state. For example, only 58% of youth in foster care graduate from high school, compared with 85% for the general population. In an unduplicated LCFF funding formula, all youth in foster care are also counted as low-income youth, since the income of their parents is tallied at zero. Yet, the education needs of youth in foster care are significantly different than low-income students. In the current LCFF unduplicated count formula, districts receive zero extra dollars to serve youth in foster care. The Network recommends that LCFF funding formulas utilize a duplicated count to provide districts with designated funding to be generated by and used solely for the unique education needs of youth in foster care. As recommended above, such a count should be an accurate reflection of the number of youth in foster care served by the district over the course of a school year, taking into account that youth are moving into and out of districts regularly, and thus require extra supports and services due to that instability (e.g., best interest determination meetings to discuss school stability, issuing of partial credits, etc.).

Take School Instability Into Account in all LCFF Dashboard Reported Education Data: While state reported data measures are important to show how youth in foster care are performing when compared to their peers at the state level, many of the data measures are challenging to utilize when considering how to meet the needs of students at the individual district or school level because they fail to take into account the fact that a given student that is attributed to the school or district for state data purposes may not have been served by them for a significant amount of time due to high mobility. This leads to districts becoming frustrated and feeling helpless to improve their data in this area, discouraging investment of meaningful resources to address the needs of youth in foster care. One category of such problems is how youth in foster care are attributed to a specific district. The four-year graduation cohort can create invalid results when a youth is attributed to the last district they attended in 12th grade, even if they spent 95% of their education at a different district, or attended ten different high schools. For more, see [Data Point 3: Graduation Measures Taking Into Account School Stability](#) above. Another example occurs when a youth in foster care is attributed to District A, where they spent the first part of a school year, and District A receives the accountability ding for suspensions that occurred at District B. Another category of issues is when the data does not account for the lived realities of youth living in the foster care system. For example, chronic absenteeism rates are currently unable to account for absences required for court appearances or other court ordered activities, things a youth must miss school for by law. Finally, there is a category of meaningful data that is not reported at all, yet would be very meaningful for youth in foster care. School stability rates top this list and is discussed in more detail below. Other things on this list would be the rate of partial credit issuance and disproportionate enrollment of youth in foster care in alternative education programs.

Identification and Data Reporting for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System: Although youth involved in the juvenile justice system have all the same general education rights as youth in foster care, and districts have the same duties to meet the

51 Data available in Dataquest: <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohRate.aspx?cds=00&aggllevel=state&year=2019-20>.

needs of those youth, there is currently no system for the consistent identification of these youth at the state or local level. This leaves this group of at-risk youth invisible to districts who are unable to then address or meet their needs. The Network recommends the state develop a data matching system, similar to that used for youth in foster care under LCFF, to assist districts in identifying these youth. District will then have greater accountability to meet their needs. The Network also recommends that the education outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system as an at-risk subgroup be reported on the LCFF Dashboard, in line with the recommendations found here for youth in foster care. 

 **EQUITY CONSIDERATION** | Greater dissemination of information about which youth are involved in the juvenile justice system offers great value in serving those youth. However, that value may be lost if youth are discriminated against based on this status. As this data becomes more readily available, districts will also need to ensure that they provide adequate training and support to ensure staff understand what this status means, and how to use it to support, rather than discriminate against youth.

Calculation of Partial Credit Seat Time Based on Enrollment Instead of Attendance: The Network recommends that ‘seat time’ in Education Code Section 49069.5 be redefined to mean length of enrollment, instead of attendance. This recommendation is based on an equity analysis. Typical students do not receive less credits based on their number of absences. It seems inequitable to hold youth in foster care to a higher standard which lowers their credits earned based on absences. While a typical student might miss school due to illness or doctor’s appointments, youth in foster care are often required to miss school for court appearances and/or court ordered activities, or are kept out of school during school changes for a variety of reasons, in addition to typical absences

due to illness. Having partial credits be issued based on enrollment, plus earning a passing grade, allows for a more equitable accumulation of credits for youth in foster care. If this legislative change occurs, Network districts report that it would be much easier to automatically calculate partial credits within SISs based on enrollment dates and not having to further manipulate SISs to use attendance data.

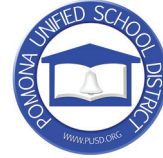
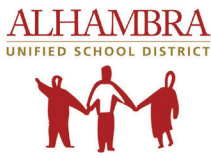
1-Year Graduation Cohort: The Network recommends that, similar to the DASS 1-Year Graduation Rate, graduation rates for youth in foster care also be reported as 1, 4, and 5-year graduation cohorts. Further, the Network recommends deeper consideration of the attribution of youth in foster care to specific districts, possibly based on length of enrollment, rather than district of last enrollment. This will allow for a fuller picture of the graduation status for youth in foster care.

Create and Report School Stability Data on the LCFF Dashboard: In a recently published report, **School Stability for California’s Youth in Foster Care**, data provided after a Public Records Act request demonstrated only 20% of agencies were able to report local data on school stability, suggesting that a statewide measure of school stability is essential to create transparency on the current rates of school stability, as well as accountability for its improvement. An early measure could mirror that found in the Invisible Achievement Gap report, looking at the rate of youth in foster care who remain in a single school all school year long. Later, more complex measures should compare child welfare and education systems to report the rate of youth in foster care who remain in the same school after experiencing a home placement change.

Create Transparency in Alternative School Disproportionality: Youth in foster care have historically been disproportionately overrepresented in alternative education programs, such as continuation schools. The Network recommends that the LCFF district Dashboard include a proportionality rate of all at-risk student populations enrolled in alternative schools, in relationship to their overall representation in the school district, including youth in foster care.

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