

County of San Diego: 2021 CSAC Challenge Awards Executive Summary

TITLE OF THIS ENTRY: Fostering Academic Success in Education (FASE)

OVERVIEW: To help improve educational outcomes for foster youth, Fostering Academic Success in Education was piloted in August 2020.

CHALLENGE: In San Diego County, 48% of foster youth graduate compared to 82% of the general population. Children and youth involved in the foster care system tend to achieve at lower levels academically and are at higher risk of dropping out of school. While all children may encounter adverse childhood experiences, youth in foster care disproportionately face complex or developmental trauma. In some cases, social skills or mental health issues may be preventing the child from making educational progress.

SOLUTION: The County of San Diego (County) collaborated with the San Diego County Office of Education and the Sweetwater Union High School District to develop the three-year Fostering Academic Success in Education (FASE) pilot. Between the collaboration of the different agencies, FASE was developed to support the foster youth at one middle and one high school. This ongoing partnership was formalized through the development of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that outlines the goals and responsibilities of each agency. Child Welfare Services (CWS) recruited and selected an educational social worker to work closely with school staff, resource parents, and primary CWS social workers to help remove any barriers and support the youth in their education. The educational social worker attends Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, helps address transportation barriers, assists the youth with college applications and tutoring, and provides technical assistance to youth and caregivers in navigating multisystem agencies.

To support the efficacy of the program, the County has collaborated with San Diego State University to conduct an evaluation of the program. Part of the evaluation will include interviews and survey results with resource parents and participants of the FASE program. The evaluation will provide necessary steps to improve the project.

INNOVATION: FASE shifts to a proactive engagement of partnering agencies and schools to support youth in their communities. Foster youth students received a range of supports and services through the

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program which makes it unique for child welfare jurisdictions. Typically, the foster youth will have one assigned social worker to focus on case management needs. FASE allows one social worker to focus solely on the educational components to ensure educational success.

RESULTS: After one academic year, the outcomes are promising, particularly since most of the academic year students were distance learning. The most notable outcomes observed thus far:

- 100% of credit evaluations were completed, which includes a comprehensive assessment of students' credits and classes to make sure they are on track to move to the next grade
- 85% of the students improved their GPA
- 35% of the students increased their GPA to 4.00
- All seniors graduated
- 95% of the seniors graduated with 4.00 GPA
- 95% college enrollment
- 95% of youth had no placement changes during the academic year, helping to stabilize placement and education success.

REPLICABILITY: The results achieved after one school year have shown that having dedicated social workers support the educational needs of foster youth works and would be considered best practice. Other counties can learn from San Diego County implementation, barriers and successes, and dedicated positions to focus on educational support and outcomes.

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