# csba

FactSheet *May 2016*

Our Foster Youth: What School Boards Can Do

K-12 students in foster care face circumstances that are far more challenging than those faced by many of their peers. Such circumstances often make foster students' learning difficult and their futures uncertain. An important first step to changing foster youth outcomes is learning about their challenges.
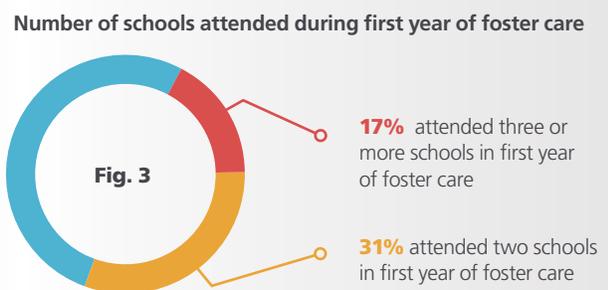
Where they are

More than 43,000 K-12 students in California schools were in foster care in 2009-10, and most California school districts serve foster youth (Figures 1 and 2).[1,2]

64% (27,178) in grades K-8

Fig. 1

36% (15,530) in grades 9-12

82% of districts serve foster youth
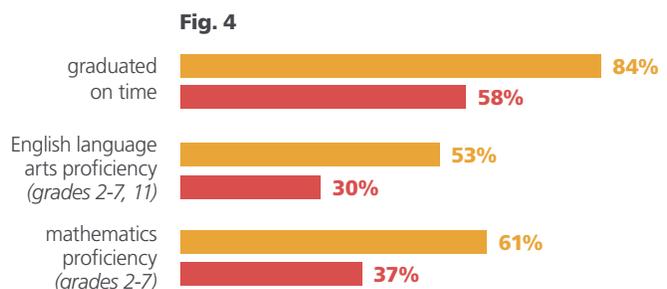
Fig. 2
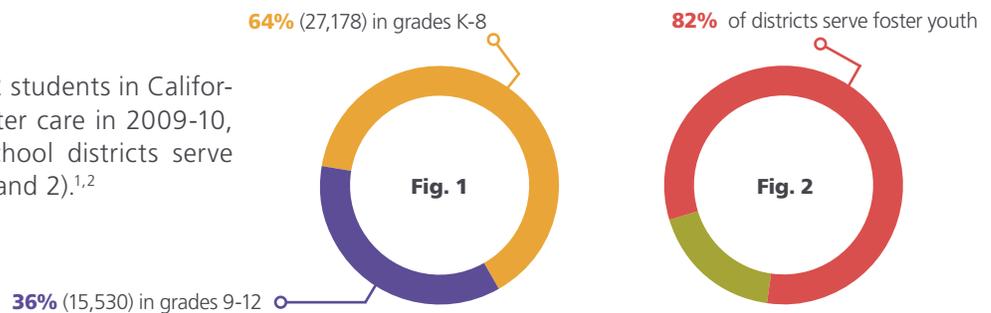
Instability is a major challenge

Almost half of students changed schools mid-year in their first year of foster care (Figure 3). 34% of 17- and 18-year-olds had attended 5 or more schools.[4] 4-6 months of learning is lost each time they change schools, and foster youth have double the absence rate of their peers, nationally.[3,4]

Number of schools attended during first year of foster care

Fig. 3

17% attended three or more schools in first year of foster care

31% attended two schools in first year of foster care

Achievement suffers

Foster youth graduation rates and the percent scoring proficient or better on state tests in 2010 were well below those of their peers (Figure 4). [1,2]

■ all students   ■ foster youth

Fig. 4

graduated on time: **84%** / **58%**

English language arts proficiency *(grades 2-7, 11)*: **53%** / **30%**

mathematics proficiency *(grades 2-7)*: **61%** / **37%**

Challenges persist after high school

A 2011 study of former foster youth[5] found that by age 26, less than 2% earned a college degree (Figure 5), 33% had incomes at or below the poverty level or had no health insurance, and 54% experienced clinical-level mental health challenges.

Fig. 5

24% earned college degree by age 26

1.8% earned college degree by age 26

■ general population   ■ foster youth
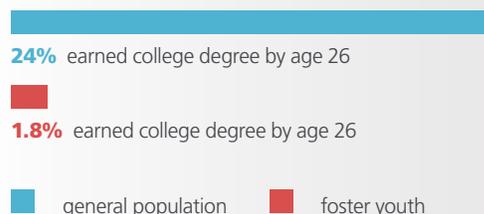
K-12 boards of education can help foster youth by aligning values, policies, goals and budgets to support the ability of staff to effectively serve foster youth through three core strategies emphasized by foster youth advocates.

Safety

Staff assist foster youth with:

1. Immediate identification and enrollment

2. Increased emotional support to cope with trauma

Stability

Staff assist foster youth with:

1. Minimizing school transitions

2. Accommodations for unavoidable transitions—Partial credit and timely transfer of records (AB 490)

3. Working productively with ERHs—those authorized to make educational decisions for foster youth

Support

Staff assist foster youth with:

1. A network of relationships: personal, professional and organizational collaborations that coordinate support

2. Encouragement and guidance for college planning and meeting A-G graduation requirements

3. Accommodations for graduation requirements (AB 167/216), if needed

Endnotes

1   WestEd. (2013). The Invisible Achievement Gap, Part 1: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in California's Public Schools. San Francisco: Barrat, V. X., & Berliner, B.

2   Wiegmann, W., et al. (2014). The Invisible Achievement Gap Part 2: How the Foster Care Experiences of California Public School Students Are Associated with Their Education Outcomes.

3   The Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2005). Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth: A Primer for Policy Makers. Washington, DC: Wolanin, Thomas R.

4   Legal Center for Foster Care and Education. (2014). Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care.

5   Casey Family Programs. (2005). Improving Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study. Washington: Pecora, Peter, J., et al. (http://bit.ly/1Rnm8Aq)

For more CSBA publications and videos on foster youth, visit www.csba.org/fosteryouth.