



ASSEMBLYMEMBER SHIRLEY WEBER, PH.D.
AB 854
Foster Youth Services/LCFF Alignment

Summary:

This bill would align the Foster Youth Services (FYS) program with the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) to ensure the effective implementation of LCFF for students in foster care. This bill would provide necessary updates to FYS statutes to align with LCFF, including but not limited to expanding the FYS eligibility criteria to all students who fall within the definition of foster youth as defined by LCFF.

Background:

Recently, additional attention has been devoted to improving the academic performance of children in foster care with the adoption of LCFF. However, inconsistencies in state statutes have prevented some children in foster care from accessing the educational opportunities that LCFF intended to provide.

The FYS program was established in 1973 as a pilot project in a handful of school districts, and expanded to County Offices of Education in 1998, with a focus on providing supplemental education services for foster youth living in group homes. The eligible population later expanded to include foster youth in foster homes and those transitioning from juvenile detention facilities. Currently, the FYS program focuses on providing direct services, like tutoring and mentoring, to students in foster care, because during its inception and growth there were no specific services available for foster youth.

In 2013, the Governor and the Legislature changed the landscape of education for students in foster care at the district and county levels with the passage of LCFF. LCFF created a new opportunity for school districts staffed with trained educators to provide more enhanced direct services to foster youth at the school and district levels, by using the new ability to identify students in foster care through CALPADS and by creating a new accountability framework that included students in foster care as a unique subgroup within LCFF.

Unlike the eligibility requirement of FYS, the LCFF definition of a student in foster care includes students living with their relatives.

Problem:

The definition of “foster youth” in LCFF includes all foster youth with an open case, regardless of the living arrangement in which they have been placed by the State. This does not match the definition of “foster youth” in California’s FYS program, a state-administered, county-run supplemental education program. This program is limited by statute to serving foster youth placed in non-relative foster care settings like group homes.

The misalignment means that many of the estimated 60,000 foster youth cannot access the services provided by FYS programs. Children living with relatives and in other similar settings are not eligible or funded to receive education services provided by FYS programs. They are denied services and equitable access to supports to improve their educational outcomes simply because of placement.

Because FYS programs are not authorized or funded to serve foster youth in relative foster care settings, an estimated 67% of California’s foster youth are not eligible to receive FYS support that has been proven to increase the educational success of students in foster care.

One of the State’s most important decisions is determining the child’s foster placement. Many times, it is in a child’s best interest to live with a relative. Relative foster placements are the preferred placement under both state and federal law. Regardless of where they are placed, foster youth – our children – need to have access to their educational entitlements to succeed in school.



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WestEd's landmark report, *The Invisible Achievement Gap (LAG) Part 1*, found that foster youth had the lowest graduation rate and highest dropout rate of any student subgroup in the state.

- 58% of 12th-graders in foster care graduated from high school
- 8% of foster youth dropped out of school over the course of a single year (three times the rate of all students)
- About a third of foster youth changed schools at least once during the school year

LAG Part 2 showed that the **educational outcomes of foster youth are similarly poor across placements**. The impacts of being in the child welfare system have created unnecessary barriers to foster youth fully accessing education programs that support their college and career goals.

Solution:

Align the definition of foster youth in FYS to match the definition of foster youth in LCFF. The State has already recognized that *all* foster youth face unique educational challenges, so *all* foster children should receive the educational supports they need. **Until the FYS program is aligned with LCFF, an estimated two-thirds of school-age foster children will not receive the educational supports they need.**

Leverage the expertise and knowledge of the county FYS program to support districts in implementing LCFF for foster youth. Allow the county FYS expert to play a key role as the child welfare-education facilitator by convening the diverse education team, which includes representatives from the child welfare agency, probation department, and juvenile court, in

addition to collaborating with school districts to provide the education case management each youth needs to finish high school and progress to a postsecondary school.

In addition to this, FYS programs may convene all key public agency stakeholders to collaborate and implement a child's education case plan while providing training and technical assistance to school districts on foster youth issues.

Sponsor:

National Center for Youth Law

Support:

Oppose:

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