NextUp Legislative Report
April 30, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: NextUp Foster Youth Program Legislative Report

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of the Board of Governors for the California Community Colleges, I am pleased to present to you the California Community Colleges report on the NextUp program, which support the postsecondary education of current and former foster youth through the establishment of the Cooperating Agencies Foster Youth Educational Support (CAFYES) program. This report is written in response to Senate Bill 1023 (Liu, Chapter 771, Statutes of 2014) and Senate Bill 12 (Beall, Chapter 722, Statutes of 2017).

In this report, the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office describes the foster youth program implementation, services and supports offered; outcome data; student perspectives; and recommendations for program expansion.

Vice Chancellor for Educational Services and Support Rebecca Ruan-O’Shaughnessy may be contacted for questions and comments. She can be reached at 916.323.6894 or rruan-oshaughnessy@cccco.edu.

Thank you for your interest in these programs and the students they serve.

Sincerely,

Eloy Ortiz Oakley, Chancellor

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Senate Bill 1023 (Liu, Chapter 771, Statutes of 2014) authorized the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office to fund up to 10 community college districts to support the postsecondary education of current and former foster youth through the establishment of the Cooperating Agencies Foster Youth Educational Support (CAFYES) program. Senate Bill 12 (Beall, Chapter 722, Statutes of 2017) expanded the program to 20 community college districts throughout the state. Currently, the CAFYES program supports current and former foster youth on 45 campuses with student centered support including: consultation and eligibility verification; service coordination and referral; counseling; book and supply grants; tutoring; independent living and financial literacy skills support; career guidance; transfer counseling; child care and transportation assistance; and referrals to health services, mental health services, housing assistance and other related services. Although legislatively known as CAFYES, the program at the college level is rebranded as the NextUp program to highlight the potential of these students. The program is housed within the existing community college programs for educationally disadvantaged students, known as Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS).

The California Community Colleges is the largest system of higher education in the United States. The state’s 116 colleges provide workforce training, offer degree and certificate opportunities, and prepare students for transfer to four-year universities and colleges. The system serves more than 2.1 million students, and about 30,000 of them are current or former foster youth.1 Foster youth are one of the most vulnerable student populations at California’s community colleges. They enter the community college system with significant barriers. A disproportionately large percentage of current and former foster youth live in poverty. Many are homeless or housing insecure once they leave the foster care system, which causes them to have greater school mobility. Challenges such as these lead to lower academic performance and credit enrollment for foster youth, which may render them more likely to be ineligible for financial aid, and compounds their challenges toward college completion and success. Therefore, without an adequate support infrastructure and personalized wraparound services, foster youth face a significant uphill battle to successfully complete their community college education and ultimately improve their social and economic mobility.

Education Code section 79226 requires the California Community Colleges Board of Governors to submit a report every two years to the Governor, the education policy committees of the Legislature, and the Child Welfare Council on its efforts to serve students who are current and former foster youth. The Chancellor’s Office is pleased to submit this report which includes key findings regarding the effectiveness of the CAFYES program, an overview of program implementation, comparative outcome data, and recommendations regarding program expansion.

BACKGROUND

As of July 1, 2019, there were 61,501 children and youth in California’s foster care system. Of these, over 15,467 are youth between the ages of 16-21. Within a single fiscal year, approximately 25% of youth in state care are of the age of traditional college preparation and matriculation to post-secondary education. Unfortunately, many foster youth experience impediments to successful preparation for entrance into college. Research on foster youth illuminates a striking pattern of academic disruption, low proficiency and school failure.

- One-third of students in foster care change schools at least once during the school year—four times the rate of the low-socio-economic status or general populations. About 1 in 10 students in foster care attended three or more schools during the school year.²

- Students in foster care fall far short of achieving proficiency in both English language arts and math. In English, 39% of foster youth test below basic proficiency as compared to 27% of students with low socioeconomic status and 20% of all students. In math, just 12% of foster youth demonstrated proficiency as compared to 23% of students with low socioeconomic status and 32% of all students.³

- The high school dropout rate for foster youth is 8%, about three times higher than the statewide dropout rate of 2.7%.⁴

- The graduation rate for all grade-12 students statewide was 84%, but for students in foster care, it was just 58%—the lowest rate among the at-risk student groups.⁵

- One in four foster youth in California are chronically absent compared to one in 10 for the general student population.⁶

Transitioning between high school and college is challenging for many young adults. This process is even more challenging for foster youth. In addition to the systemic barriers captured in the above statistics, foster youth often lack caregivers who can guide them through the complex process of submitting college and financial aid applications. They also receive less of the continuing support that leads to college success. Many non-foster college students are given continuing emotional and financial guidance including housing, transportation and financial support to cover food, supplies, and tuition. Without these supports, many foster youth struggle to stay enrolled. Foster youth are more than twice as likely to experience homelessness while attending community college as their non-foster contemporaries.

³ The Invisible Achievement Gap, Part 1
⁴ The Invisible Achievement Gap, Part 1 (p. 67)
⁵ The Invisible Achievement Gap, Part 1 (p. 85)
⁶ https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr17/yr17rel88.asp – CDE Dataquest
Despite these barriers, however, the overwhelming majority of foster youth want to attend and complete college: at age 19, more than 93% of California’s foster youth aspire to complete college. The disparities between what young people in the foster system want and the opportunities for success they are offered are a driving force behind this legislation.

**METHODODOLOGY**

This report is informed by mixed-method data. Quantitative data describes the outcomes for CAFYES students reported by colleges. These data are complemented with qualitative data from a CAFYES student survey.

**Quantitative Data** were collected from campus-reported data. All community college campuses are required to submit data on their student population annually through the Chancellor’s Office Management Information Systems (MIS). The data collected and analyzed to complete this report are drawn from those entries. The 45 California community colleges that offered services under the CAFYES Program were extracted from the larger dataset in order to assess the status of their foster youth students. For comparison purposes, this report also analyzed data on foster youth from campuses who did not receive funding under this program. This enables the data to clearly demonstrate the difference the program is making. It also creates a more relevant comparison. Foster youth take significantly fewer courses and are much less likely to be enrolled fulltime compared to their non-foster youth peers. These differences in enrollment status are critical to the interpretation of these data. Foster youth are likely to take substantially longer to complete their degree or certificate, and be slower to transfer to four-year colleges. This means that the outcomes under CAFYES must be measured over a long period to fully demonstrate their effect. The preliminary data presented here indicate that the program is working as intended, but there is a need to obtain additional longitudinal data to understand the long-term cohort effects of the funding.

**Qualitative data** were collected through a student survey delivered to 224 current CAFYES-supported students. Developed by the Chancellor’s Office, this survey was designed to assess the degree to which students felt the program was providing timely, relevant and appropriate supports. It measured the value students attribute to various program components, including identifying which program services were most frequently accessed and which were perceived to be most helpful.

7 Pipeline

8 As required by statute, campus-by-campus information can be found on the Chancellor’s Office website by going to this link: [http://datamart.cccco.edu/DataMart.aspx](http://datamart.cccco.edu/DataMart.aspx). Data are also presented in Appendix A

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION
Given the myriad challenges foster youth have to overcome to succeed in college, the CAFYES Program has focused on developing a comprehensive support system to meet these students where they are.

OUTREACH AND MATRICULATION SERVICES
Support from CAFYES starts with significant outreach to ensure that youth whom are preparing to exit high school are aware of the program and can receive support during the transition between K-12 and college. This includes coordination with local K-12 schools; foster family agencies; alternative schools and local county child welfare agencies.

Following the initial outreach, program staff conducts eligibility determination and subsequently provides eligible students with required matriculation services, including college orientation and development of an Education Plan. Education Plans are linked to increased credit completion and higher GPAs and are a key strategy for helping foster youth achieve first-year success. Developing a meaningful Education Plan involves working closely with the youth to understand their career aspirations, reconciling and accounting for any previous college coursework that could apply to their current completion goals, and understanding external factors that could potentially impact the student’s success. Monitoring and supporting the youth as they work through their Education Plan is an in-depth process designed to identify if the youth is academically on track, and, if not, to determine what combination of wraparound supports are necessary to assist the youth to succeed.

“They have helped me succeed. I can say without them I think I would have dropped out of college already. They are my biggest support and help.”
NextUp student

ONGOING ACADEMIC AND PROGRAM SUPPORT
Throughout the semester, youth meet with both program staff and academic counselors at least four times. Many participating youth meet with program staff and academic counselors multiple times throughout the semester. These regular appointments allow students to receive the support they need to navigate both their academic progress and to address other life domains that may impede their academic success. Regular meetings also provide staff an opportunity to closely monitor their students’ academic progress and intervene as needed. These interventions can take many forms, including the provision of tutoring, personal mentoring, assistance navigating a personal or health crisis, or financial assistance.

10 Pipeline
“What I have experienced with NextUp was that when I get confused, whether with the location of the meeting or with a homework assignment, I get help from my academic counselor and the staff members who work at NextUp.” NextUp student

During these regular meetings, program staff work with the youth to ensure that they are accurately completing the California community college application and college applications when they are ready to transfer to four-year colleges and universities. Support with admissions processes help youth avoid paying out of state tuition and delays with the registration and course enrollment. Program staff also assist the students to understand and manage Satisfactory Academic and Progress status at the college. Maintaining Satisfactory Academic and Progress status includes maintaining a minimum grade point average and completing a minimum percentage of overall units attempted each semester. Regular meetings between staff and youth are also an opportunity to discuss post-college plans and ensure alignment between academic strategies and future plans.

“It was an amazing experience for me to be part of the program they help me with class enrollment and they tell me what classes I need to take to get to my career goal. As well the services they provide.” NextUp student

Alongside educational planning support, program staff provide guidance to youth in accessing financial aid, priority registration, and navigating admissions and records processes. The financial aid process is complicated and for most young people coming out of care, it is often the only means through which they can attend college. Access to ongoing, non-loan based financial aid is essential for youth to be successful. Program staff provide this support to ensure that youth are correctly completing all necessary paperwork, including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, the California Promise Grant application and the Chafee grant application, as well as available scholarship applications. This support is regularly coupled with financial literacy education and loan default prevention services.

Priority registration is another significant benefit that youth are eligible to receive. Program staff work with the youth to ensure that they understand the course pattern that will be required in order to reach their educational goals and that they are aware of and leveraging their access to early registration.

“This program has successfully helped me be on track to transfer within a two-year period. The support of the counselor and students has made a tremendous impact in my life.” NextUp student
FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

Colleges offering the program have great flexibility regarding the types and level of direct aid provided to their students. Any direct aid provided to students is closely coordinated with the campus financial aid department. With support from the program staff, youth can work directly with financial aid staff to ensure that they are receiving the maximum, non-loan based financial aid possible. However, generally the amount of available financial aid is simply not enough to cover the full cost of attending college. Students who attend four-year colleges generally receive the cost to cover room and board as a part of their financial aid package. Unfortunately, students attending California community colleges are responsible for the costs of their room and board. Many community college students can rely on their families and community networks to assist in resourcing these costs. Unfortunately, many foster youth do not have access to these resources.

“This program has been the best program I have ever been to. I am a dream act student with no financial aid help and this program has provided so much to me that I am so grateful for. The people on this campus exceed themselves when helping us or reaching out to us. They make us feel appreciated and honestly it’s just a great program overall.” NextUp student

The CAFYES Program can fill in some of the economic gaps for participants. Participating youth receive food stipends, transportation vouchers and assistance with housing costs when necessary. They are eligible for funds to cover the costs of textbooks as well, ensuring they have access to all necessary materials in advance of course commencement. In emergencies, they are eligible to receive emergency “need” grants for vehicle repairs or for unexpected childcare needs. The CAFYES Program also includes access to childcare subsidies for youth with dependents, assistance with housing navigations services for youth who are or who have become homeless, and, in some instances, access to legal services when needed. Many students report that the personal support and direct aid has made the difference between staying in college or dropping out.

“It’s important. Those like me who didn’t know a thing about most means of financial independence or health care or anything similar need this program in order to learn the things that we need to be independent.” NextUp student

HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Many current and former foster youth experience challenges with their mental and physical health as a result of the trauma of having been removed from their biological families and negative experiences they may have while in the foster care system. Youth participating in the CAFYES Program are offered health and mental health services. Program staff support students in immediate crisis and then refer them to both on and off campus mental and physical health services. In some instances, youth can access direct aid to address emergency dental, health and mental health services.
“It’s motivated me to pursue an education when I felt that I had no other options or couldn’t “hack” it. And to be able to not only socialize with other students from similar backgrounds but a chance to be an advocate for other students to come...it’s an opportunity that is too enticing to pass up.” 
NextUp student

OTHER CAMPUS SERVICES
The majority of colleges offering the CAFYES Program provide dedicated space on campus where youth can study, access computers and printers, access food and snacks, and develop comradery with other youth. These “hubs” create a space on campus where youth can relax between classes, access supplies and, most importantly, receive support from the program staff. In testimony from youth currently participating in the program we learn that having a safe place on campus and having the opportunity to develop trusting relationships with their peers and with program staff are essential for college success.

“When I’m feeling depressed, just walking into the EOPS office makes the weight a little lighter. You see a warm smile and they tend to know when you’re having a bad day therefore, they go out of the way to make sure you feel comfortable and safe.” NextUp student

In addition to the dedicated space on campus, youth participating in the program often have opportunities to participate in independent living skill development activities. These types of skills are traditionally acquired by young adults through their families and their community networks. However, because so many youth coming from foster care lack these types of supports, it is critical for them to have support in developing these foundational skills. Examples of independent living skill development activities include developing budgets; managing financial aid disbursements; career assessments and skills inventory; job search and retention skills; learning how to access public benefits for themselves and their dependents; and understanding documents, including lease agreements, student loan contracts and other legally binding documents.

“I would like to say that Jason is my awesome magnificent counselor I have right now. He helps me through whenever it is urgent, like with my bike tires when I was not able to go anywhere. I did meet awesome staff there as well; they are super friendly and positive and always been open to others.” 
NextUp student
OUTCOME DATA
This section of the report presents and contrasts 2018-2019 data for foster youth participating in the CAFYES program versus foster youth not participating in the CAFYES program. It includes data on course enrollment and retention; course completion by unit and by topic; and receipt of financial aid. Across multiple student success metrics, foster youth participating in the CAFYES program are outperforming foster youth not in the CAFYES program. In fall of 2018, a key partner, the John Burton Advocates for Youth, conducted a student survey of youth participating in the NextUp program. In the survey responses, students overwhelmingly reported that the program is supporting their academic progress and having significant impact on their success. Ninety-seven percent of students rated the overall effectiveness of the program as “helpful” or “very helpful”; overall satisfaction was 4.8 out of 5.0. MIS data from the previous academic year are showing significant improvements in outcomes that predict the successful achievement of degrees, certificates, and transfer to four-year institutions of higher education. Student perceptions of program effectiveness confirm this finding.

“It’s definitely made me feel like people care and gives me reassurance that I won’t slip through the cracks.” NextUp student

CREDIT ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION
Current and former foster youth participating in the CAFYES program are enrolling in credit bearing courses and retaining semester over semester at much higher rates than foster youth not participating in the program.

Graph 1: Foster Youth in Credit Courses

Graph 2: Foster Youth Retention
ENROLLMENT AND COMPLETION OF NINE OR MORE UNITS

Foster youth are less likely than non-foster youth students to be enrolled full time (15 units a semester). They are more likely to have to work, and less likely to have support from caregivers. To be eligible for CAFYES, however, students must be enrolled in at least nine units.

Graph 3: Foster Youth Enrolled in Nine or More Units

CREDIT ENROLLMENT AND COMPLETION: ENGLISH AND MATH

Students participating in CAFYES are also completing core courses in English and math at higher rates than foster youth not participating in the program. These critical courses are required for degree and transfer completion. Nearly twice as many CAFYES students are enrolled in credit English compared to foster youth not participating in the program. Math enrollment and completion are also significantly higher for CAFYES students.

Graph 5: Foster Youth Enrolled in Credit English

Graph 6: Foster Youth Completing Credit English
**FINANCIAL AID RECEIPT**

Financial aid is critical for foster youth to enroll and complete community college. CAFYES students receive intensive program counseling to support access to financial aid. CAFYES students are receiving financial aid more consistently than foster youth not participating in the program across multiple aid programs.
STUDENT PERSPECTIVE
The quantitative data demonstrate that the program is having its intended effects on foster youth student enrollment and retention. To complement these data a student survey was conducted with CAFYES recipients. A total of 224 participants completed the survey.

PROGRAM REFERRAL
Respondents were asked how they found out about the program. In this sample, about half of students heard about the CAFYES/NextUp program because of its affiliation and synergy with EOPS.

After EOPS, respondents reported that they had learned about the program from a county-based social worker (38%) or as a result of direct outreach from CAFYES staff on their campus (28%).

ACADEMIC SUPPORTS
Students overwhelmingly reported academic benefits from the program: 99.5% reported that the program helped them academically. Two-thirds of respondents cited the program as helping them pass their courses and a similar number said that the program helped them maintain full time enrollment.

When asked how much CAFYES contributed to their ability to stay enrolled and succeed in classes, 96% expressed that the program made a difference with 84% citing it as a significant factor in their success and a full 51% saying that they would not have been able to succeed without the program. The most commonly reported academic supports and services included enrolling in the correct classes (90%); accessing priority registration (87%); and staying enrolled in college (83%).

FINANCIAL SUPPORT
Students valued the financial supports this program provides to them. When asked which program component most supported their ability to stay in school, 68% chose “direct financial aid.” Eighty-five percent of students reported that they had received direct financial support under the program. About the same percentage of students reported that getting or keeping financial aid had been an important program benefit. The program was also adept at responding to their emerging needs: 70% accessed resources such health care, food, or legal assistance. The program also acted as a safeguard between students and homelessness. Almost one-third of students got help finding or keeping housing.

HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH
Current and former foster youth may have been exposed to trauma, many of them repeatedly. Trauma exposure destabilizes mental health, and increases the risk of experiencing a mental health crisis. More than half of respondents had leveraged program staff to help them resolve personal situations. Just under half had sought help addressing a crisis situation and 43% received mental health support.
OTHER SUPPORTS

Students received support based on their unique needs and circumstances, including guidance on how to plan for the future. Seventy-one percent received help planning for what they will do after college. Students also relied on supports provided under the program to develop the higher thinking skills needed to achieve academic success; 70% developed new learning, communication or study habits. Skill development was supported by facilitated access to academic resources, including computer and printer labs, which students identified as critical to their ability to stay in school. The program also offered the opportunity to meet and interact with other foster students. Almost two-thirds of students participated in activities through the program that connected them to other students who had been in the foster system.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM EXPANSION

Statutory language requires the legislative report to include recommendations regarding program expansion. The Chancellor’s Office recommends: 1) removing the cap on the number of participating districts to allow strategic expansion and innovation of the CAFYES program across the California Community Colleges system; and 2) broadening CAFYES program eligibility criteria by including students who have been in foster care on or after their 13th birthday. Both of these recommended changes would require changes to the Education Code.

As illustrated in the data provided above, foster youth receiving support through the CAFYES program are performing at better rates than foster youth not receiving these services. Currently, CAFYES programs and services are available at 45 of the 116 California community colleges. The Chancellor’s Office recommends removing the cap on the number of participating districts to allow for the strategic addition of programs throughout the state to provide greater access to students. This increased flexibility will allow colleges to combine funding sources to provide holistic services to support the foster youth population throughout the California Community Colleges. Current MIS data shows that 11 California community colleges that do not currently receive CAFYES funding enroll significant numbers of self-identified foster youth students. Removing the cap will allow the Chancellor’s Office to use data to determine where best to expand the program to increase access for students. The Chancellor’s Office could then evaluate how existing CAFYES funds could be used strategically to serve the target population while leveraging other system resources and programs. This would broaden opportunity for innovation across student support programs including mental health services, the Foster and Kinship Care Education program, and the CCC Homeless and Housing Insecurity Pilot program.

Additionally, the Chancellor’s Office recommends expanding the age criteria for CAFYES eligibility. Currently to qualify for CAFYES services, a student must have been in foster care on or after their 16th birthday. Campus staff administering the CAFYES program have recognized that students with experience in foster care at ages younger than 16 often present with challenges as great or greater than those in foster care later in life. Many existing programs for foster youth, including federal and state financial aid programs, in recognition of this reality, allow participation by youth who experienced foster care on or after their 13th birthday. In order to increase access to students the Chancellor’s Office recommends amending Education Code 79222 to modify the CAFYES age eligibility from having been in care on or after their 16th birthday, to having been in care on or after their 13th birthday.
CONCLUSION
The California State Legislature has recognized and responded to the vulnerabilities of current and former youth. The Cooperating Agencies Foster Youth Educational Support (CAFYES) program funding enables these campuses to deliver intensive services to current and former foster youth. The initial CAFYES outcome findings are promising. By meeting diverse student needs and providing flexible and individualized wraparound services to these students academically and personally, CAFYES plays a critical role in the success of their lifelong learning journey.

With the program still in its infancy, there is still much to learn about how to maximize the impact of the program, including how to expand equitable access to those in need, how to leverage our efforts and resources to provide integrated services to our students, how to improve service delivery, and how to articulate impact through data and research. Therefore, the Chancellor’s Office recommends changes to relevant section of the governing Education Code to expand access, create more flexibility and spur innovation to better serve the former and current foster youth that are in the California Community Colleges.
### APPENDIX A: COLLEGES AND FUNDING AMOUNTS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office would like to acknowledge and thank those individuals who have made significant contributions to this report.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley
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Career Education
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