JOHN BURTON Advocates for Youth

November 17, 2026

From Enrollment to Completion:

New Data on Community College Outcomes for Students with Foster Care Backgrounds



Housekeeping



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Webinar Materials: The webinar materials and recording will be posted at www.jbay.org following the live presentation.

Meet Your Presenters



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Meet Your Presenters



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Today's Agenda

1. Background
2. National Context
3. Findings + Next Steps
4. Questions

ABOUT US

John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY)

Improves the quality of life for youth in California who have been in foster care or homeless by advocating for better laws, training communities to strengthen local practices and conducting research to inform policy solutions.

71 major legislative and budget victories over the past two decades, transforming opportunities for foster youth and young people experiencing homelessness.

Founded by retired State Senator John Burton in 2004

OUR FOCUS AREAS

01 Housing

02 Education

03 Economic Mobility

California's Timeline of NextUp

A campus-based support program at each California community college, serving students who were in foster care on or after their 13th birthday and who enter the program before age 26.



* Some campuses have additional foster youth support programs to serve former foster youth not eligible for NextUp. The names, structure and services offered by these programs varies.

TAY-Hub
Transition-Age Youth
Research & Evaluation Hub

From Enrollment to Completion

New Data on Community College Outcomes for Students with Foster Care Backgrounds

Research Team
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Leadership
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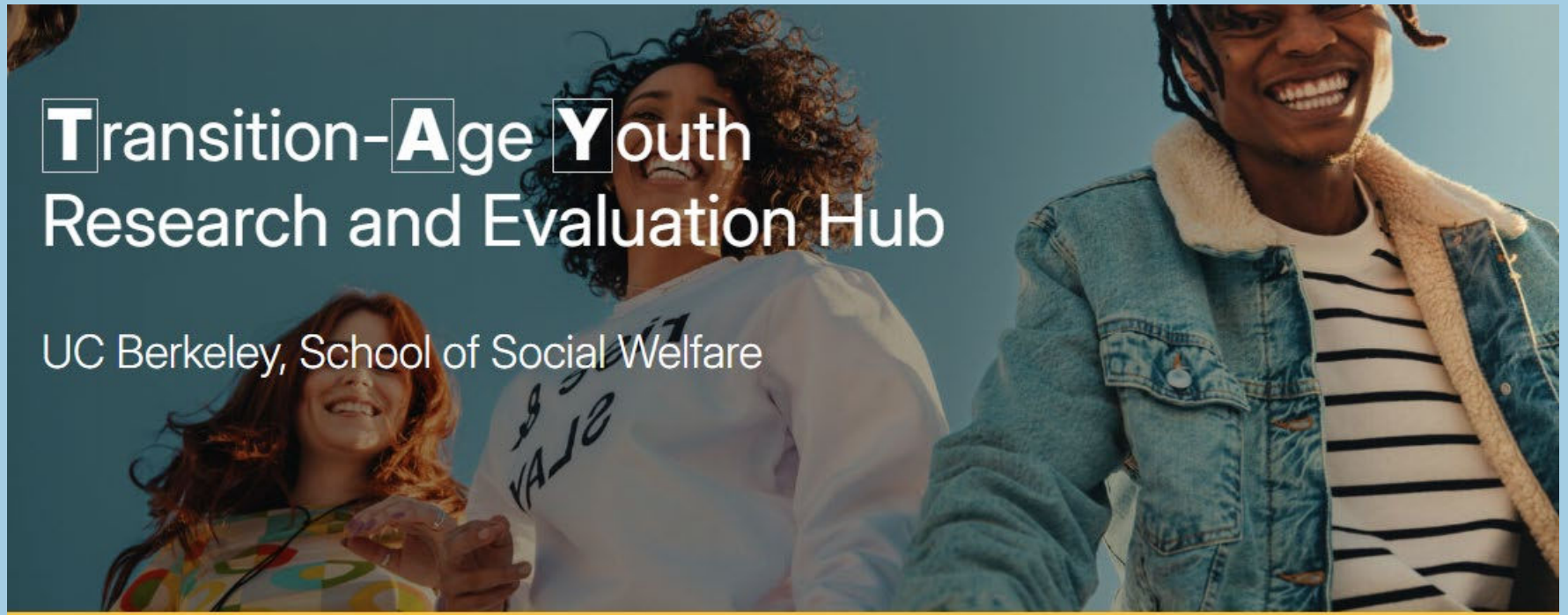


Transition-Age Youth Research and Evaluation Hub

UC Berkeley, School of Social Welfare

The **TAY-Hub** is a research collaborative committed to using data, applied research, and evaluation to inform policies and practices supporting young adults with foster care experience.

TAY-Hub
Transition-Age Youth
Research & Evaluation Hub

CCWIP
California Child Welfare
Indicators Project

Berkeley Social Welfare



TAY-Hub
Transition-Age Youth Research & Evaluation Hub

Building on the foundation created by the CalYOUTH project…

- Collaborate with the child welfare services community to identify topics for research and evaluation activities
- Conduct research and evaluation activities, and sponsor activities of third-party partners
- Engage young people and key players providing services to TAY in interpreting the meaning and implications of findings for policy and practice
- Engage the child welfare services community in dissemination of findings and the implications for policy and practice

CalYOUTH: Evaluation of the impact of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act



Findings are encouraging.

CalYOUTH documented:

- increases in: completion of a high school credential, college enrollment, employment, savings, and social support
- decreases in: receipt of need-based public food assistance, food insecurity, homelessness, arrests
- no evidence of harm associated with time in extended foster care



Research Overview

TAY-Hub research collection including peer-reviewed studies, reports, summaries, and slide decks.

All TAY-Hub and CalYOUTH studies are included here. Studies are listed from newest to oldest. Please use the buttons to browse by topic and explore available research.

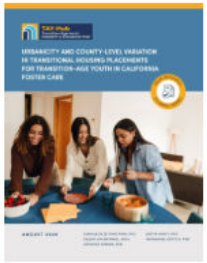
All Research | Education | Employment / Income / Assets | Experiences in Care | Extended Foster Care | Family Formation

Household / Living Arrangement | Individual / Family Characteristics | Legal Involvement | Material Hardships / the Safety Net | Physical / Behavioral Health | Romantic Relationships / Social Support

Service Systems / Context | Sexual Orientation / Sexuality | Transition Planning / Services | Victimization

Search

Reset



Urbanicity and County-Level Variation in Transitional Housing Placements for Transition-Age Youth in California Foster Care

2026 | Household / Living Arrangement | Material Hardships / the Safety Net | Transition Planning / Services

Strategies and outcomes vary widely across the child welfare system in the United States due to decentralization, yet we know little about how these practices differ for transition-age youth in foster care. This study used statewide data from California to consider



First-year and four-year community college outcomes for youth with experience in California foster care

2026 | Education | Employment / Income / Assets

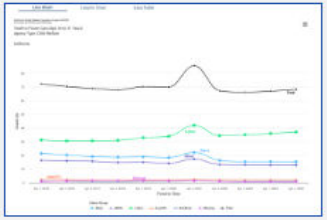
About 4 in 5 students with experience in foster care (SEFC) in California who enter postsecondary education start in community college. However, previous studies on SEFC have largely focused on 4-year institutions, which differ in important ways from community colleges. This study analyzed data on 137,717 young people who were in California foster care on [...]

Reentries



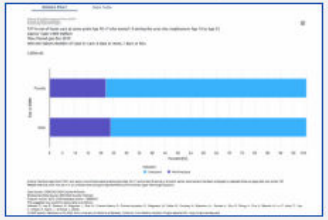
Reentries to Foster Care (Age 18 to 20 Years)

In Care



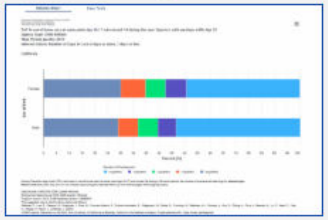
In Care—Point in Time Count (Age 18 to 21 Years)

TAY Cumulative Employment Status by Age



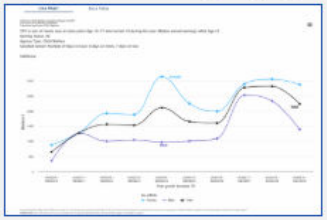
TAY in out-of-home care (at some point Age 16-17) who turned 18 during a 12-month period, employment status by selected ages.

TAY Quarters Employed by Age



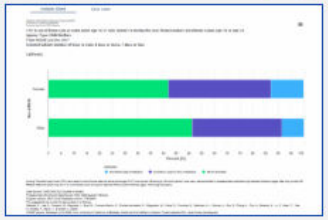
TAY in out-of-home care (at some point Age 16-17) who turned 18 during a 12-month period, the number of quarters with earnings by selected ages.

TAY Annual Earnings by Age



TAY in out-of-home care (at some point Age 16-17) who turned 18 during a 12-month period, average and median inflation adjusted annual earnings by selected ages.

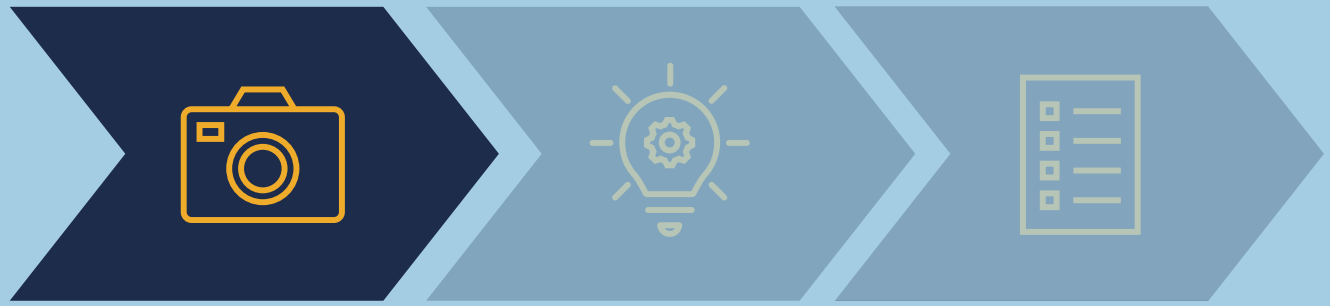
TAY Enrollment Status by Age



TAY in out-of-home care (at some point Age 16-17) who turned 18 during a 12-month period, postsecondary education enrollment status by selected ages.

tayhub.berkeley.edu/tay-data

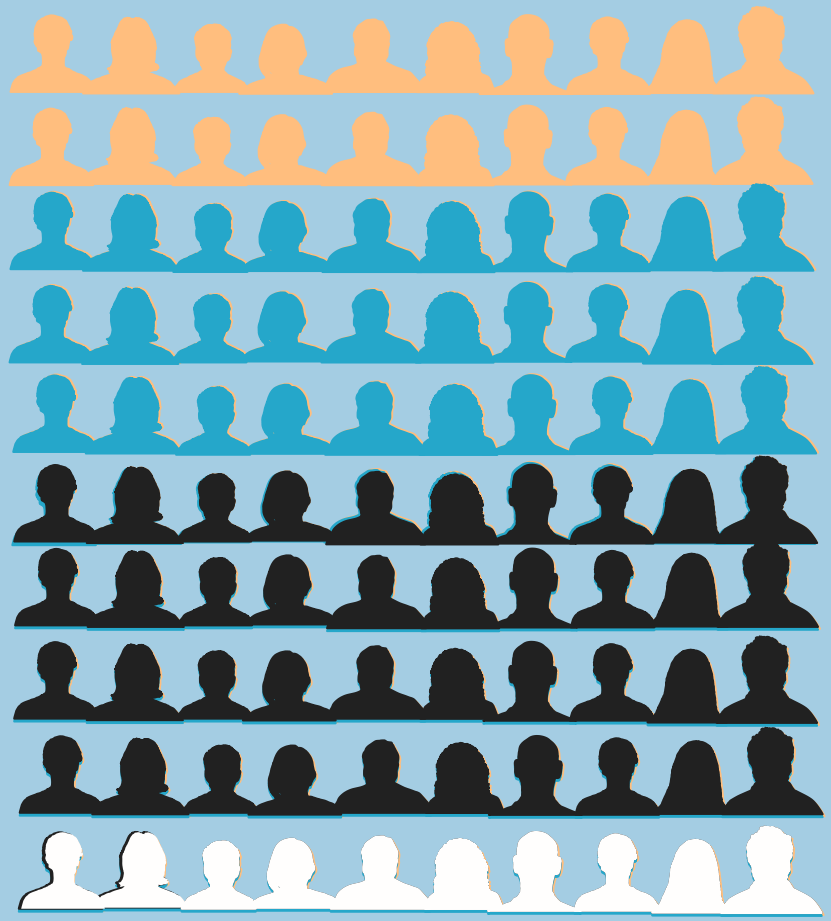
What We'll Share Today



National Context

3 Big Picture Takeaways

5 Specific Findings & Next Steps



100
Adolescents in foster care

80%
Aspire to go to college

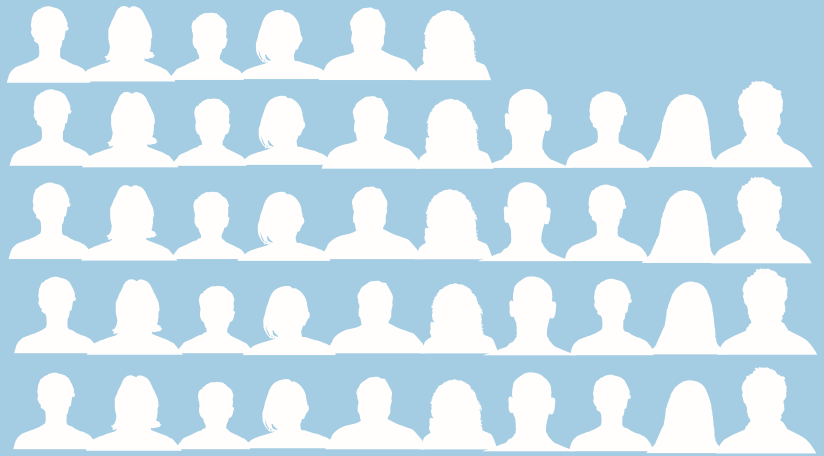
50%
Enroll by 20s
(range 29-64%)

10%
Earn 2yr/4yr degree by mid-/late-20s
(range 8-12%)

Okpych et al. (2025)

College completion rates by mid-/late-20s

49%
Nationally



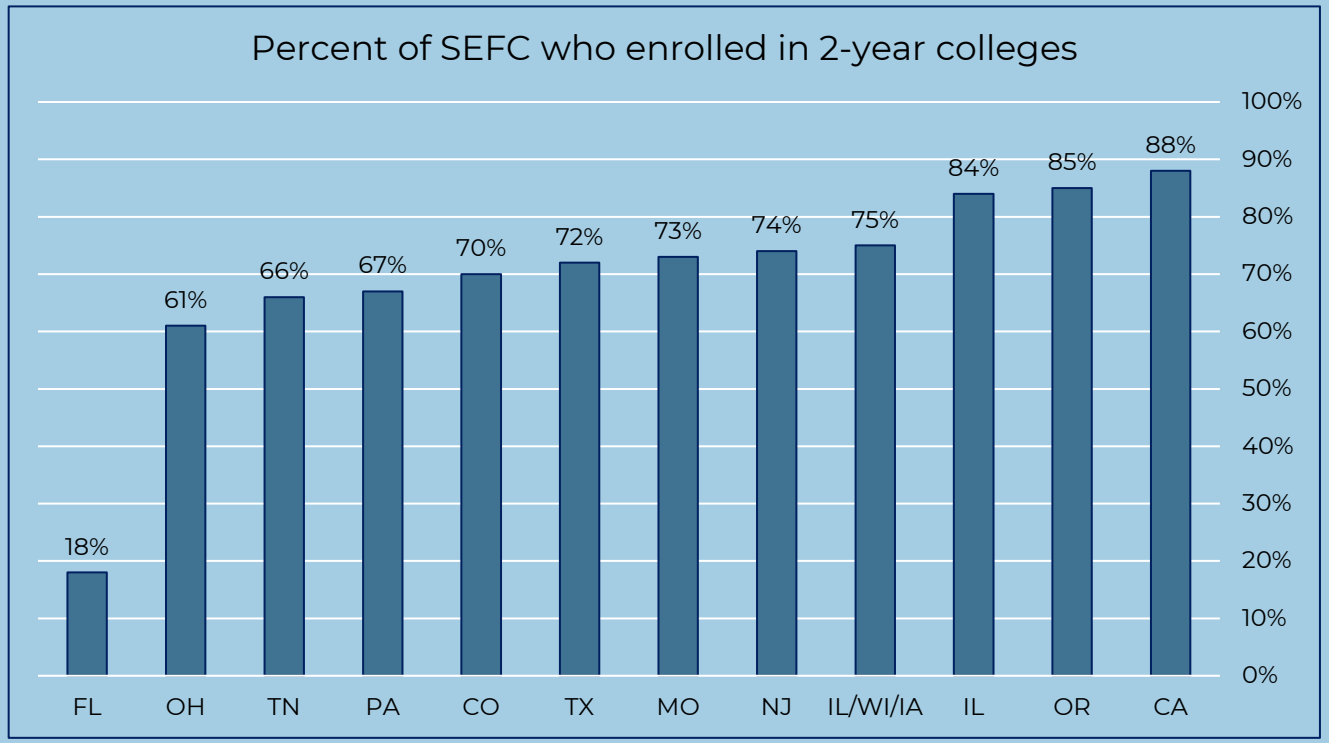
10%
SEFC



Okpych et al. (2025)

Among SEFC who go to college, most attend 2-year colleges

Findings compiled from 5 studies[1]:





[1] Hanson et al. (2022); Havlicek et al. (2021); Okpych & Courtney (2021); Okpych et al. (2022); Okpych & Geiger (in press); Watt & Faulkner (2020)

Why Do Gaps Exist?

- **Many SEFC are first-generation**
- **Many attended under-resourced schools**

- **Lasting effects of trauma**
- **Instability while in foster care**

- **Relational loss and survivalist self-reliance**
- **Family not a guaranteed safety net**

- **Economic hardships**
- **Need to work**
- **Parenting**

- **Undermatching**
- **Foster care-related benefits have strings attached and time limits**



What Can Help?

- **More time in extended foster care** (improves college entry)
- **State tuition waivers**
- **Chafee Grants** (Education and Training Vouchers)
- **Institutional integration** (academic and social spheres of college)
- **Campus support programs designed for SEFC (?)**



About Campus Support Programs (CSPs) for SEFC

- The first CSP launched in the mid-1990s at Cal State Fullerton
- More recent count shows 600+ CSPs (~52% in 4-year colleges) (https://facesnetwork.org/)
- FAAN national map (managed w/ YEFC) is a seminal resource: https://faannetwork.com/national-map/



More on CSPs

Who they serve

- Some only serve SEFC; others serve multiple student populations (e.g., homeless students)

Services offered

- Most offer: Advising, referrals, skill-building workshops, community building
- Some also offer: Scholarships, emergency funding, in-house tutoring

Funding sources

- Varies by CSP; most do not have stable funding
- Combination of one or more: foundations, private gifts, host college, state



First-year and Four-year Community College Outcomes for Youth with Experience in California Foster Care

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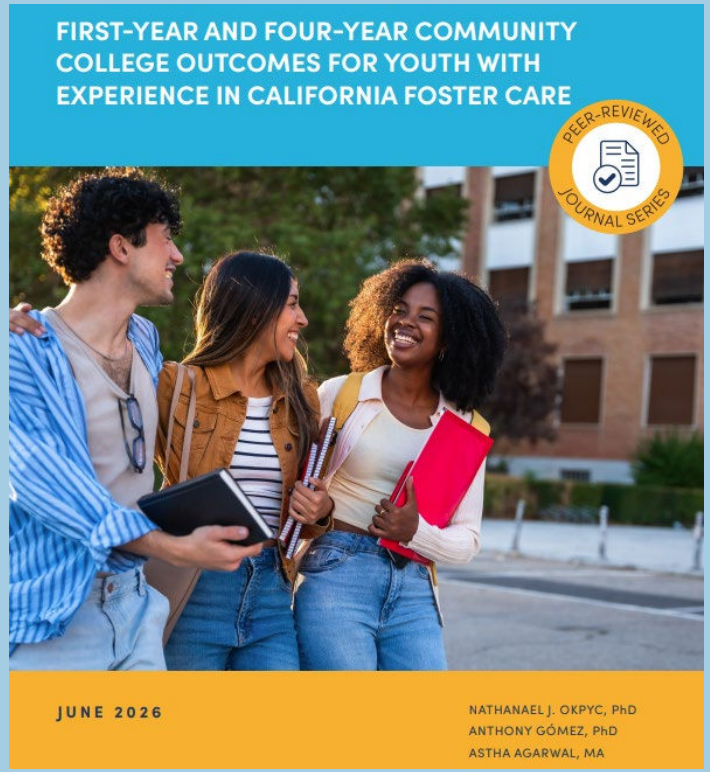
Community colleges enroll the majority of students with experience in foster care (SEFC), and outcomes are understudied. This study leveraged child welfare and community college records in California for 137,717 young people. We found 39.6% enrolled. Among these, 39.9% persisted in their first year, and 4.7% completed an associate's degree or certificate within four years. Identification of SEFC in college records improved from 43% in 2012-2013 to 60% in 2022-2023. Results highlight opportunities to strengthen identification and outreach.



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Significance

- This report investigated the community college outcomes for youth with experience in foster care (YEFC) in California.
- Community colleges are highly attended yet understudied institutions for YEFC.
- In California, more than 8 in 10 YEFC who enter postsecondary education first enroll in an in-state community college.



Significance

- **Unlike prior research that relied on self-report, this study is the first to link statewide child welfare data with data from the California Community College Chancellor's Office to accurately identify students with foster care backgrounds**.

- By following several statewide cohorts of students across more than a decade, it provides the most comprehensive view to date of both short- and long-term outcomes.

- We also examine vocational certificate attainment, an educational pathway that has been largely overlooked.



Methods

This study includes young people who had been in CA foster care on/after their 13th birthday in 2004 - 2016, and who were at least 21 in September 2024.

California child welfare records were linked to CCCCO student records.

The sample includes 137,717 YEFC.



National Context

3 Big Picture Takeaways

5 Specific Findings & Next Steps

Takeaway 1:
Identifying SEFC

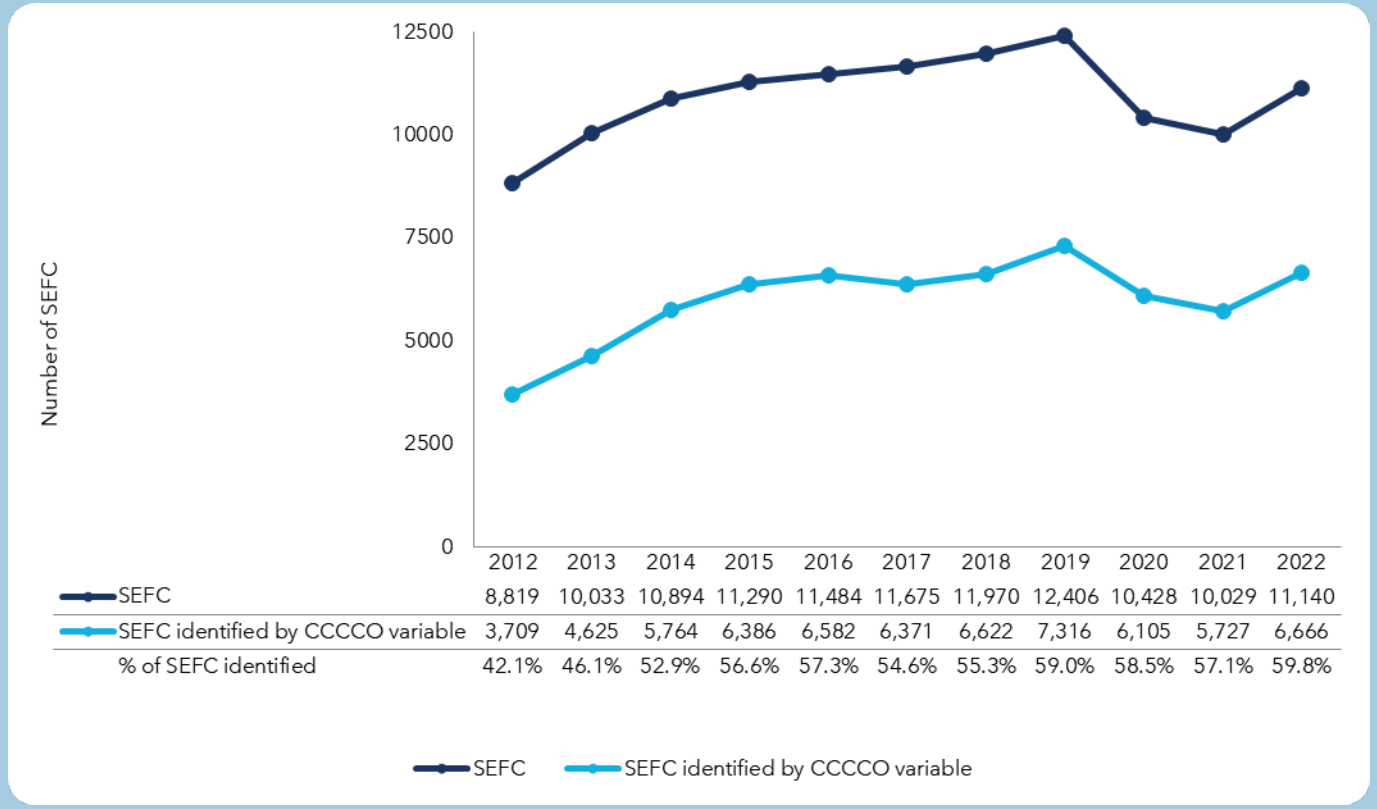
In 2012-13 , less than half (42%) of students with experience in foster care (SEFC) were identified by the CCCCO foster youth data element.

The percentage of identified SEFC improved, reaching 60% coverage in AY 2022-23.

- **This means that nearly two in five SEFC on campus are not identified.**



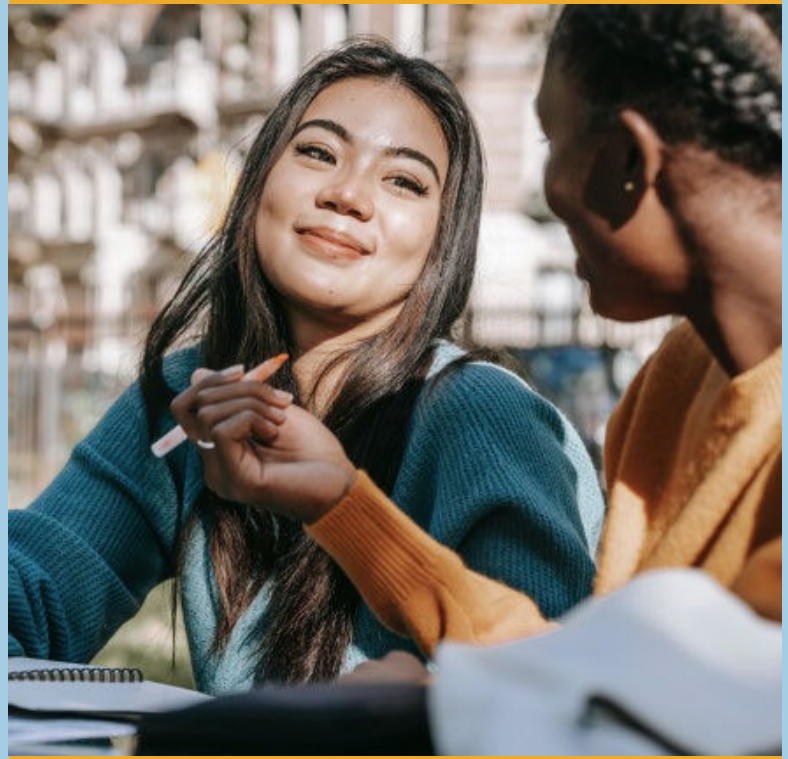
SEFC enrolled in CA community college vs. SEFC identified by CCCCO foster youth variable



	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
SEFC	8,819	10,033	10,894	11,290	11,484	11,675	11,970	12,406	10,428	10,029	11,140
SEFC identified by CCCCO variable	3,709	4,625	5,764	6,386	6,582	6,371	6,622	7,316	6,105	5,727	6,666
% of SEFC identified	42.1%	46.1%	52.9%	56.6%	57.3%	54.6%	55.3%	59.0%	58.5%	57.1%	59.8%

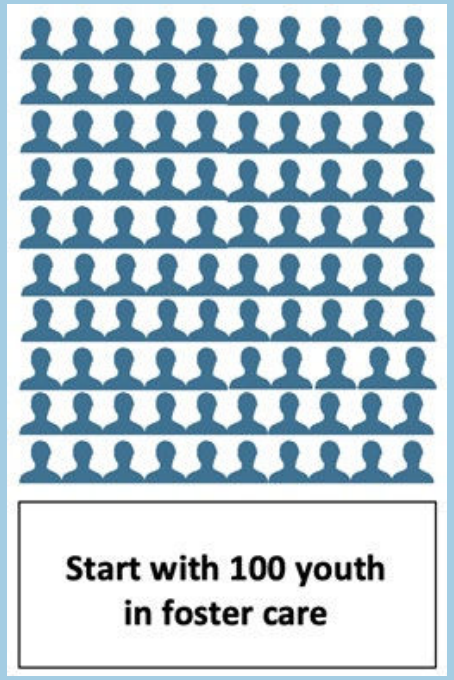
Takeaway 2:
Enrollment & Completion

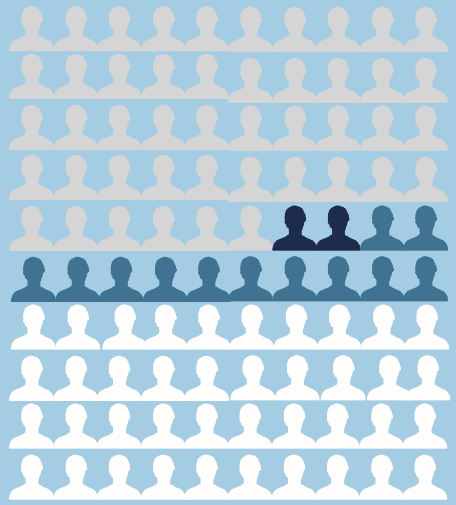
- **40% of YEFC enroll in a California community college.**
- Enrollment has steadily increased from 2012 just before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Among those who enrolled, about 5% completed a credential within 4 years.**



Note: These figures do not capture transfers to four-year schools, enrollment at other types of colleges, and awards earned at those schools.

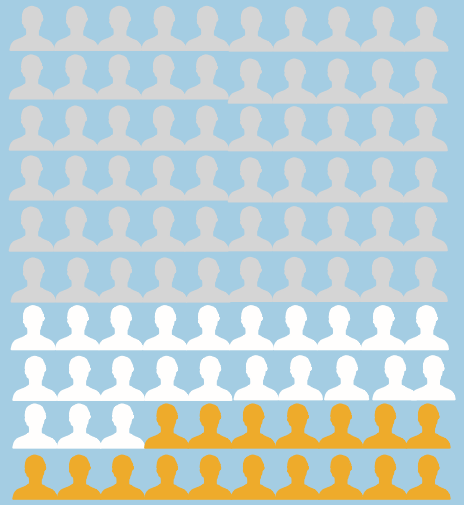
Bird’s eye view of pathway into and through community college





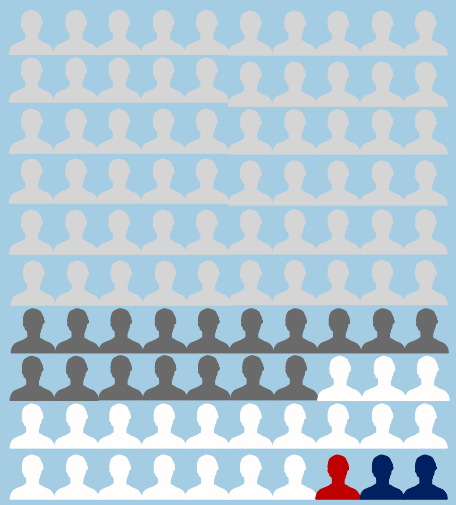
Enrollment

- Never enrolled (46%)
- Enrolled K-12 only (2%)
- Enrolled, not in census (12%)
- Enrolled, in census (40%)



First-Year Persistence (among enrolled)

- Did not persist (60%)
- Persisted (40%)



Four-Year Completion (among enrolled)

- Not enrolled years 2-4 (45%)
- Enrolled years 2-4 no credential (50%)
- Certificate (0.8%)
- Associate's degree (3.9%)

***These figures do not capture students who enrolled in, transferred to, or completed certificates/degrees at colleges outside of CA community colleges.**

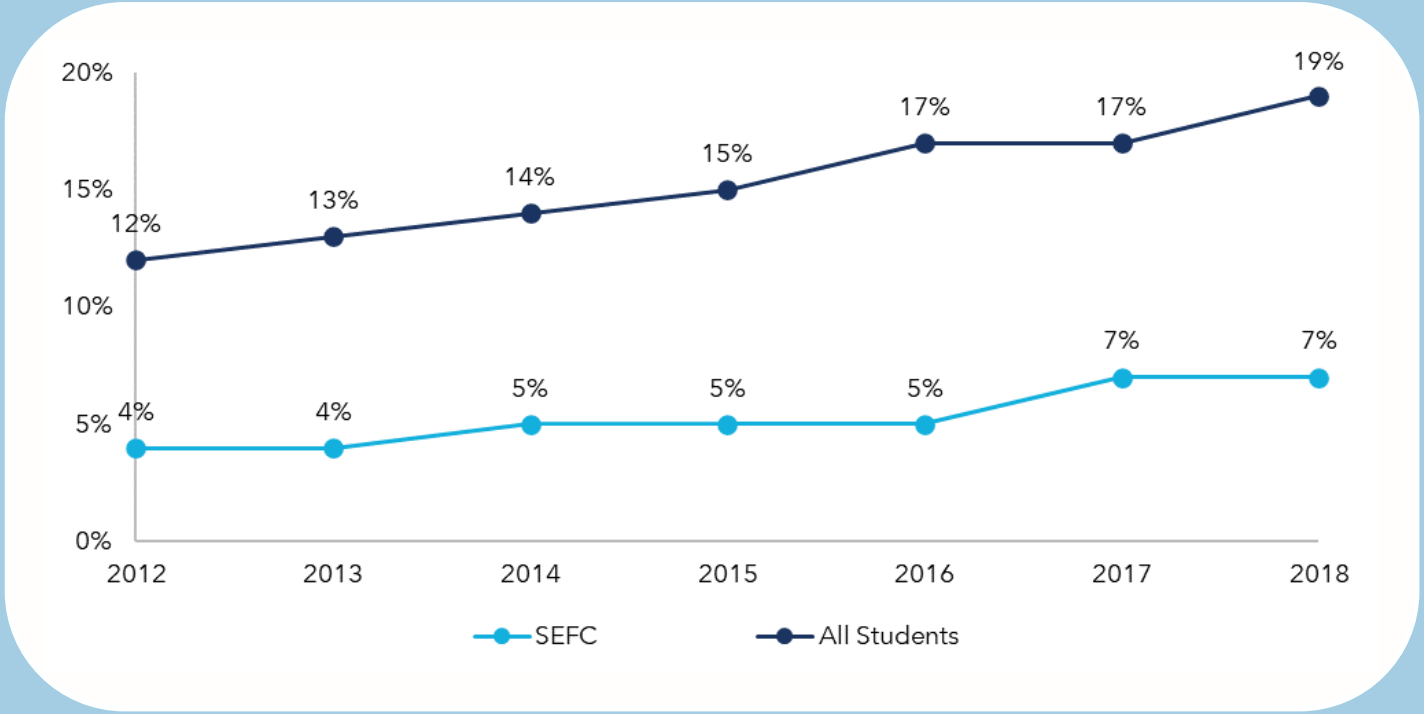
Takeaway 3:
Disparities in Completion

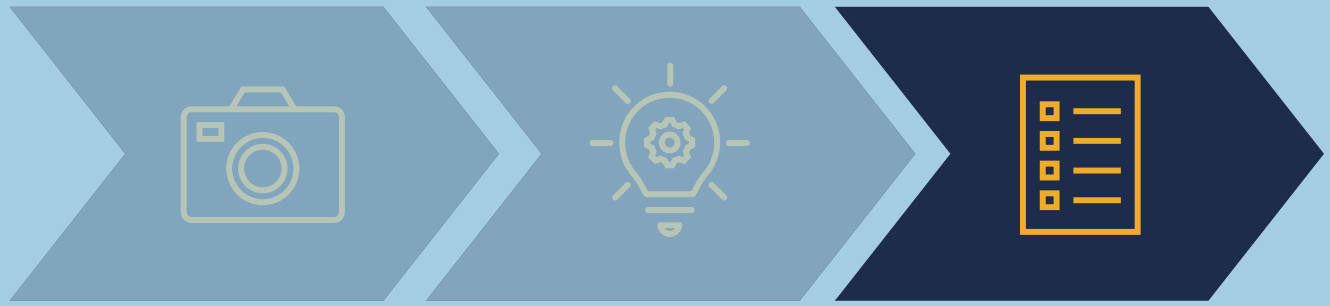
Within colleges, the credential completion rate was about 5%, but varied by campus.

Completion rates for SEFC were only about one-quarter to one-third those of all community college students.



Figure 3. Comparison of 4-year credential completion rate for SEFC vs. the population of CA community college students





National Context

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Finding 1:
1st-year Outcomes

GPA

- The average 1st-year GPA was 1.43.
- Slightly more than 1 in 3 SEFC (37%) earned a GPA of 2.0 or above.

Course-taking

- On average, SEFC took 5.4 courses in their first year.
- But most youth (60%) withdrew from/dropped at least one course.



Finding 2:
Behavioral Health

- One-fifth of YEFC had a behavioral health concern documented by their child welfare worker.

- These youth enrolled in college at rates similar to their peers, but fared worse academically.



Finding 3:
Demographics

- Females were more likely to enroll, earn higher GPAs, persist, and graduate.
- Latine and Native American youth enrolled at the lowest rates.
- Native American and Black students had the lowest persistence rates, GPAs, and award completion rates.
- Students who first enrolled younger tended to fare better academically.



Finding 4:
Financial Aid

- Most SEFC received financial aid (82% in 1st year).
- SEFC who received financial aid fared better academically than those who did not.
- However, about 1-in-5 SEFC received no aid during their 1st year in college.



Finding 5:
EOPS & NextUp

- Between 2016-2021, 13% of SEFC received EOPS, and 13% received NextUp.
- 1st year persistence rate was almost double for NextUp/EOPS participants.
- NextUp/EOPS participants were more likely to complete a credential.



Note: This report is not a program evaluation. EOPS/NextUp participants and nonparticipants likely differ in important ways that affect their outcomes.

Takeaways

- Enrollment has steadily increased, reflecting improvement in access
- SEFC face significant challenges in persistence and award completion, with lower rates than peers
- Early identification and support during the first year are critical for success
- Participation in specific programs shows promise but requires more research to identify causal factors and best practices



Implications

- **Stronger identification and outreach are needed in the first year**
  - Identifying SEFC is an important first step in connecting them to financial aid, campus support programs, and other resources
- **Expand financial aid access and eligibility**
  - Ensure implementation of SB 12
  - Adjust eligibility criteria to SEFC circumstances
- **Bolster capacity of NextUp**
  - Invest in student engagement



Research on the Horizon

- Link CCCCO data with National Student Clearinghouse to track YEFC across all postsecondary institutions and employment development data.
- Investigate factors predicting 1st-year outcomes and four-year degree/certificate attainment
- Rigorously evaluate impact of NextUp and EOPS
- Explore how different types of financial aid (e.g., Pell, CACP) affect academic outcomes
- Examine academic outcomes for students with documented mental health challenges, and whether receiving DSPS helps



Translating Research to Practice



Identify best practices

Study campuses with high rates of SEFC identification, NextUp participation and student success, and financial aid receipt to understand the practices, policies, and partnerships that promote positive student outcomes.



Engage leadership

Deliver workshops and presentations to engage CCCCO leadership to build buy-in and support the implementation of evidence-based best practices.



Spread the word

Develop practitioner-friendly briefs, workshops, and resources to disseminate best practices for supporting SEFC across all California community colleges.

Thank you!

The findings reported herein were performed with the permission of the California Department of Social Services and the California Community College Chancellor's Office. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the authors and should not be considered as representing the policy of the collaborating agency or any agency of the California government.

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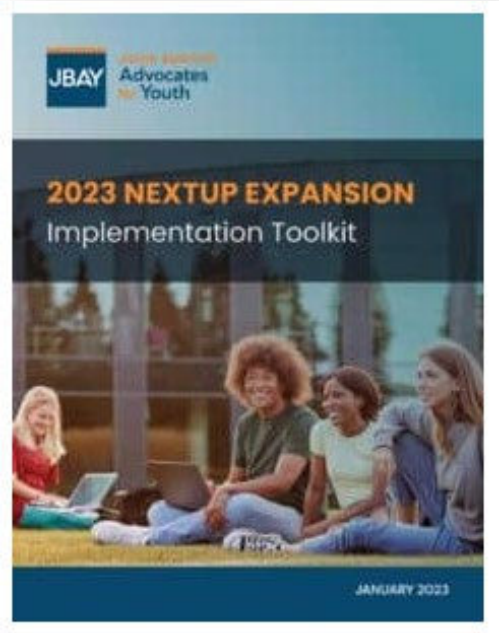
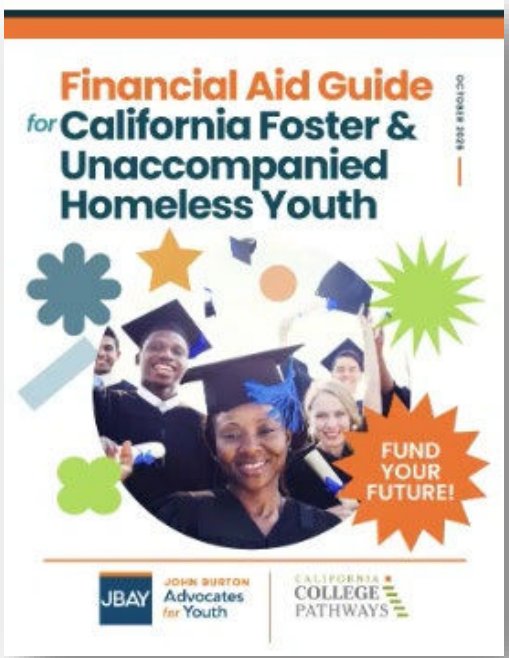
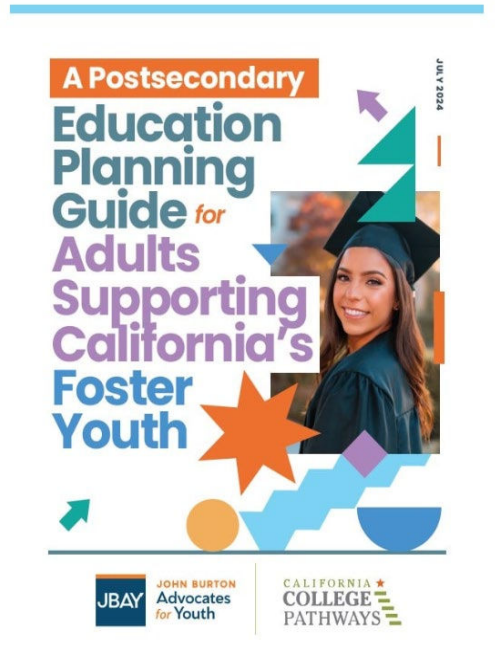
JBAY Resources



[NextUp Implementation Resources]



[Financial Aid Guide + More!]



[Foster Youth Postsecondary Education Planning Resources]

Visit cacollegepathways.org



Click “Find Support” to look up the contact information of California’s campus-based foster youth support programs

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