

**FRESNO COUNTY
FOSTERCARE AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

**ANNUAL REPORT
TO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

**REPORTING ACTIVITIES FROM
JULY 2023 THROUGH JUNE 2024**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fresno County Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee hereby referred to as "FCSOC" was created by the Fresno County Board of Supervisors in 2001. According to its bylaws, Article III-Statement of Purpose, the purpose is "To exercise oversight and review of systems and services which affect children focusing on, but not limited to, the foster care system. The committee shall:

- A. Advise and make recommendations for continuous and lasting system improvement.
- B. Provide a forum for community input related to the FCSOC purpose.

To meet its primary responsibility the FCSOC is guided by an adopted mission and vision statement.

Mission

The mission of the FCSOC is to provide oversight for and promote communication between the Board of Supervisors, the Department of Social Services (DSS), its related agencies, and the community, with an emphasis on providing information and recommendations that make the child welfare system more effective and efficient.

Vision

A community enhanced by a compassionate and responsible child welfare system that provides prevention, early intervention, and nurtures the developmental and therapeutic needs of abused and neglected children and their families.

Key Responsibilities

The FCSOC shall participate in lawfully constituted multi-disciplinary reviews when system issues and improvements are appropriate.

The primary responsibility of the Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee is to focus on the structures and functions of the local child welfare system and to represent the public interest in the delivery of services. In addition, part of the committee's mission is to improve communication through outreach and coordination with the work of other community groups. To assist in this coordination, the FCSOC has subcommittees that consist of Education and Mental Health. Other subcommittees may arise as deemed necessary.

Changes Moving Forward from 2023 to 2024

The FCSOC has evolved from its 2001 stated purpose to offering resources at regular subcommittee meetings that were deemed valuable interagency/organization communication forums. In the Fall of 2021, in response to the public spotlighting the challenge of hard-to-place children and youth in the child welfare system, FCSOC hosted a community forum consisting of elected officials, community partners and interested parties to offer insight and suggestions. In 2022 and 2023, FCSOC held an annual strategic planning session. As a result, the committee recalibrated and continued to work closely with DSS to provide support and oversight to the systemic changes identified in the Critical Needs established in 2022 and a recent survey in 2023 to employees implemented by the

FCSOC and ad hoc committee. Analysis of the survey results are currently being reviewed.

Outcomes of the 2023 survey and results of retreat

Committee Membership

The Board of Supervisors currently has six vacancies (37%) on the committee. The ten-committee members are committed and experienced members who have enhanced representation in the areas of education, children's mental health and child advocacy. We encourage our Board members to work with FCSOC to fill the remaining vacancies. The current membership list is included in this report with vacancies noted by district.

DISTRICT APPOINTEES

(Current vacancies: 6)

DISTRICT 1 APPOINTEES

Two Vacancies

Karina Perez – Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission

Vacant

Vacant

DISTRICT 2 APPOINTEES

Tracy Kashian – Lance-Kashian & Co.

Maisie Young – Supervisor of Student Support Services, District Foster Liaison,
Central Unified School District

Kevin Lisitsin – Local Business Owner

Patricia Scoville

DISTRICT 3 APPOINTEES

Two Vacancies

Elizabeth Thomas, Resource Parent
(resigned)

DISTRICT 4 APPOINTEES

Two Vacancies

Rosemary Alanis, Chair

DISTRICT 5 APPOINTEES

Wilma Hashimoto, CASA

Pamela Hancock – Director of Foster and Homeless Youth Education Services

Edward Avila – Juvenile Justice and EOC Commissioner, Vice Chair

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Sal Quintero – Fresno County Board of Supervisors

Ari Martinez – Proxy, Board of Supervisors

Rocky Vang, Board of Supervisors

2023-2024 Goals for FCSOC

As established in 2002, our committee will continue to advise and make recommendations for continuous and lasting system improvement and provide a forum for community input related to the FCSOC purpose. A key responsibility is to improve communication through outreach and coordination with the work of other community groups including the Office of Office of Fresno County Superintendent of Schools Foster Care and Homeless Education Subcommittee and Fresno County Behavioral Health - Children's Mental Health subcommittee.

1. Be a Resource to the BOS Initiatives to Improve the CWS – Department of Social Services have improved

This also includes the creation of a county-wide campaign to address the current shortages of social workers and resource homes.

Be proactive in the joint responsibility with the Board of Supervisors to find passionate and qualified candidates to fill vacancies on the Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee.

2. Continue to Focus on the Well-being of Children in the CWS including:
 - Services and resources for families who are preparing to become resource parents.
 - Services and resources being provided to the youth, resource parents and biological parents.
 - Provide information to the youth and public. Ie. FURS: Family Urgent Response System for current and former foster youth.
 - Education-stable placement of school when transitions occur. Educational support.
 - Social/Emotional Support -Mental Health
 - System of Care with social worker, resource parents and school personnel for LGBTQ+ youth.
 - Activities for youth during school breaks.
 - Placement - Provide a system to support potential resource parents and Foster Family Agencies (FFA) to ensure homes are prepared to receive youth in foster care.
 - Focus on the challenges of placing older youth and youth with complex needs in short and long-term placements. Address how youth in foster care may have priority access to local medical facilities due to the resource families or STRTP having multiple youth in foster care.

- Housing – extended care.
- Court Adoptions – continuous and rational of reunifying and aging out of the system.

Recommendations to the Board of Supervisors

Continue to prioritize support for youth in the Fresno County Child Welfare System to achieve positive outcomes and prepare them for successful adulthood. It is recognized that more social workers are needed to be hired, more resource families are needed to safely place families, and as a community we must place the best interest of the child as a priority and communicate much needed resources to support them and to their caregivers. With 2,848 children in foster care as of August 2023, this is a community concern as we desire positive outcomes and trajectory for these children.

1. County-wide Campaign to Strengthen the CWS Infrastructure

The members of the Foster Care Oversight Committee recommend a county-wide campaign through commercials, billboards, social media, and other opportunities to promote the following:

A. Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers – Fresno State Partnership.

This may include partnerships with local high schools, higher education, elected officials, and community leaders.

B. Recruitment of Resource Families and Promotion of Kinship Care

This may include partnership with local agencies including FFAs currently recruiting and training resource families; however, the community is to be aware of the dire need for more Emergency Placements and long-term placements for the stability of the youth and to mitigate the prolonged trauma. In addition, priority should be given to locating placement with kin and prevention of removal from families with Quality Parent Initiative implementation. QPI and Kincare

Subcommittee Update:

Goal 1: Education Committee in partnership with Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (FCSS) Foster Youth Executive Advisory Committee: Achieved. Monthly meetings attended by Child Welfare and education partners including district and charter school Foster Liaisons. One culminating year-end event with community leaders, partners, and foster youth students celebrating students completing the Leadership Academy.

Goal 2: Children's Mental Health Subcommittee: Partially Achieved. Co-chair representative for FCSOC resigned from the subcommittee due to obligations on December 31, 2022. A replacement has been identified as of September 2023.

EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE

Background/Purpose

The purpose of the Education Subcommittee is to:

1. Enable the FCSOC oversight and communication between DSS and the Board of Supervisors.
2. Provide a network of communication about significant education issues affecting foster youth.

The Education Subcommittee is a deliberative committee that meets monthly to identify, inform and encourage resolution of issues and concerns that will improve the educational outcomes of foster youth and identify services students in foster care need. A report of the identified educational issues and recommendations are communicated at the monthly FCSOC Committee meeting and presented for discussion with the Child Welfare administrative team, FCSOC Committee Members, and members of the community (detailed information is available in the Subcommittee and FCSOC monthly meeting minutes).

Focus of Subcommittee Activity

Although many educational issues were addressed, the primary focus of the monthly meetings was to provide the basis for information sharing and review data and implement systemic changes. The Subcommittee serves as a sounding-board to support education-focused work. Standing agenda items are addressed at each meeting followed by a discussion of any emerging issue.

Education Outcomes 2023-2024

Data is the most current data released from California Department of Education*

Graduation Rates*

Fresno County graduation rate for foster youth increased 3.75% from 55.36% (2022-23) to 59.09% (2023-24). In comparison to the overall Fresno County graduation rate of 83.74% (2023-24), the graduation rate for students in foster care was 24.65% lower.

School Stability*

School stability” supports the value of maintaining youth in their school of origin, unless it is in their “best interest” to make a change. It includes reviewing current legislation, advocacy efforts, and training and coordinating with the overall Child Welfare workforce. Research indicates that when a child moves to a different school that four to six months of academic progress is lost. Research also indicates that academic success improves when a child or youth has at least one caring responsible adult in their life and maintaining school stability. The Child Welfare “Potential School Change Form (PSCP) is a process that supports school stability.

According to CDE definition, school stability means staying in the same school for the entire school year and maximizing the educational success of a student. Fresno County stability rate for foster youth negatively decreased 1.4% from 61.0% (2022-23) to 59.6% (2023-2024). In comparison to the overall Fresno County 2022-23 school stability rate of 88.8%, the foster stability rate was 29.2% lower.

Chronic Absenteeism*

Chronic absenteeism means a student is absent 10% or more days they were expected to attend during a school year. The typical school year is 180 days and means a student who is chronically absent missed 18 or more days, close to missing one month of school or more. Fresno County Chronic Absenteeism rate for foster youth increased 1.9% from 35.5% (2022-23) to 37.4% (2023-24). In comparison to the Fresno County overall student School Stability rate of 21.9% (2023-24), the foster stability rate was 15.5% higher.

Potential School Change Form (PSCF)

DSS utilizes the PSCF to communicate with education rights holders and the schools in the effort to collaboratively decide on whether a school change is in a child's best interest. Child Welfare has recently trained all Child Welfare social workers on the PSCF process with the intention that social workers will utilize the process and improve school stability and improve education outcomes. In previous years, Child Welfare provided oversight data to enable discussions about reasons for school changes, and to study the effectiveness of the "*Potential School Change Form*" (PSCF) to communicate and improve stability. The on-line PSCF was fully implemented at the beginning of the 2017-18 academic year was fully utilized by social workers. Information obtained from the "reasons for school change" provided a means for discussion on improving advocacy for school stability. There is no data available to report the number of school changes or maintaining school of origin.

Summary: To understand whether there is an improvement in maintaining school of origin and increase the ability for students in foster care to have the opportunity to maximize their educational success, a tracking system for the Potential School Change Form needs to be implemented.

Foster Literacy Networked Improvement Community (NIC)

The Foster Literacy NIC is a project is in the fourth year of implementation. A NIC is intentionally designed to bring various groups together to work on a common problem and accelerate learning. Project partners are Child Welfare, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, juvenile courts, attorneys, four school districts (Fresno Coalinga-Huron, Sanger, and Selma school districts) and community-based organizations such as CASA, Live Again, EOC-Central Valley Against Human Trafficking, and has resulted in very positive outcomes. Each district has identified a student cohort and the outcomes clearly indicated better outcomes for students in foster care who are in the cohort than students who are also in foster care and did not participate in the cohort. Fresno USD September 2023 outcomes have resulted in a 77% stability rate with a 7% improvement; a 14% chronic absenteeism rate with a 32% improvement; a 6% improvement rate for the Fresno USD local literacy; a 14% improvement over the state foster student literacy rate of 33%; and 116 care coordination contacts by school personnel with cohort students, teachers and resource parents.

Child Welfare & School Foster Notification Process

The Foster Literacy NIC using systems improvement science identified the need to improve communication between Child Welfare and education in identifying students in foster care in order to keep students safe and enable schools to provide the educational rights for foster youth. The notification process is initiated by Child Welfare, is sent to the school district foster liaison who

notifies the school the child is attending that the child, and has been removed from the home. This process was implemented in October 2024. Data indicates the initial removal notifications were sent to schools 90% of the time and recently has improved to 100%. There is communication at the Education Subcommittee meetings to make continuous improvement to the system.

Early Education

There were 13 children enrolled in Early HeadStart (ages 0-2.11), and there were 59 children enrolled in HeadStart (ages 3-5) with a total of 72 children receiving early education.

District, County and Liaison Report

Child Welfare administration are committed to collaboration with school district and charter Education Liaisons and the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools that provide invaluable networking to FCSOC Education Subcommittee members and Child Welfare concerning status and issues related to education of foster youth. The designee for the Office of Fresno County Superintendent of Schools is the Chair for the Education Subcommittee. FCSS provided input on efforts and needs of foster youth in addition to services provided to students. This included applying for college, communication between districts and child welfare, and overall issues county-wide.

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

Overall, in 2023-24, 682 school-aged foster youth were served by FCSS. FCSS assisted 99 seniors with financial aid applications (93% completion rate), in addition to college and dorm applications and was the statewide midsize county winner for the FAFSA Challenge for the seventh consecutive year.

Leadership Academy

The Strengths-Based Leadership Academy offered by FCSS in an outdoor classroom at Scout Island Education Center is a transformative program. The program empowered 111 high school and middle school students experiencing foster care. This initiative focuses on enhancing their leadership skills and nurturing their individual strengths. This student-focused opportunity brings together students within a school district, offering a secure and encouraging setting for them to explore and develop their leadership capabilities. Through fostering self-reflection and highlighting the value of personal experiences, the program seeks to instill in students the belief that their uniqueness equips them to lead themselves, lead others, and to make significant contributions to society. Data indicated that students' belief they can effectively collaborate with others increased 41.77%; students felt their ability to set goals for themselves increased 30.42%; students felt their skills as a leader increased 26.23%; and students felt that their skills to effectively solve problems increased 10.4%.

Financial Aid, College Applications, College Support Programs

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools in collaboration with school districts and charter schools ensure that high school seniors complete and submit financial aid applications known as the FAFSA and the Chafee grant for foster youth; submit college applications to community colleges and four

year colleges and dorm applications if they qualify; and submit foster college support program applications (e.g, NextUp, Renaissance Student Program (RSP), Guardian). Of the 107 seniors, 99 FAFSAs were completed with a completion rate of 93%.

Access to Higher Education and Access to Higher Education Extreme Registration

Both annual events were a collaboration between Child Welfare, Office of Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Fresno City College, Clovis Community College, and Independent Living Program with Child Welfare. Access to Higher Education for 54 high school students provided information and activities on college, careers, college support programs, and resources. Access to Higher Education-Extreme Registration ensured that 35 senior high school students were enrolled in college classes that support paths to a degree or to a career, and ensured enrollment in the NextUp. foster college support program.

Foster Focus Database

The county-wide Foster Focus education database includes data from the California Department of Education (CDE) CALPADS database, California Department of Social Services (CDSS) that includes child welfare and juvenile probation information, and districts. The data has improved in quality with multiple districts submitting detailed education data. This information is available to social workers to access student school information. Child Welfare and FCSS trained all social workers on education rights of foster youth, students with special needs, ways to support academic success, and provided information on the services provided by FCSS.

Department of Social Services

As part of the oversight function of the Department of Social Services (CDSS) are committed to develop standards and practices to improve the lives of children, youth and families served in child welfare in the State of California. They use a model of continuous quality improvement (CQI) to develop, evaluate, and renew policies and programs. Fresno County DSS is in partnership with CDSS to meet or exceed the standards developed by CDSS for their children, youth and families and does so by completing randomly selected quarterly reviews of active child welfare cases and sharing the results with CDSS for the purpose of improving outcomes and identifying policies and programs through the California Child and Family Services Review (CFSR).The purpose of the reviews and partnership with CDSS is:

- Ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements
- Determine what is actually happening to children and families as they engaged in child welfare services
- Assist Fresno in helping children and families achieve positive outcomes.

After a CFSR is completed, each state develops a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address areas in their child welfare services that need improvement. In California each county develops their own PIP aligning with areas of needed improvement and outlining how the county will be addressing those areas to assure improvement. The county PIP's make up the State PIP for federal monitoring and

guidance. Fresno County CWS, in 2025 and going forward, will be sharing their quarterly reviews with the Fresno County Standards and Oversight Committee (FCSOC) so the committee is fully informed of the practice trends identified and corrected for improvement. The First Quarter Report will be presented to FCSOC in March 2025 and in the next annual report to the BOS a years' worth of data will be incorporated into the report. Fresno County is currently writing their 5-year performance improvement plan due to CDSS 04/30/25 that will outline the program improvements for the next 5 years and the department's plan to achieve those improvements. This will be shared with the FCSOC in May 2025 once the Fresno County Board of Supervisors has approved the plan and it has been submitted to the State

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2024/2025

Consistent with our mission, our goal is to support the Child Welfare System to be more efficient and effective through supporting adequate resources, better communication with agency partners and making recommendations for continuous and lasting system improvements. We recognize that our committee is just part of the solution, and we are guided by what is best for the local children and youth we represent.