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Shared Accountability to Improve Educational Outcomes of Foster Youth: Examining the Conditions that Influence Evidence-Based Decision Making

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Shared Accountability to Improve Educational Outcomes of Foster Youth: Examining the Conditions that Influence Evidence-Based Decision Making

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Brian Lee Huff

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Shared Accountability to Improve Educational Outcomes of Foster Youth:
Examining the Conditions that Influence Evidence-Based Decision Making

By

Brian Lee Huff

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Christina A. Christie, Chair

Foster youth in the K-12 setting consistently perform below most student subgroups due to high rates of school transfer and psychological problems from abuse or neglect. They were largely invisible to K–12 practitioners until 2013, when California became the first state to legislate the tracking of foster student performance. Although educators are accustomed to evidence-based decision-making practices as required under federal law, foster youth present a unique set of challenges - high mobility rates impact information sharing, and foster youth require a broad set of stakeholders to inform decision-making, including social workers, psychologists and educational rights holders.

This dissertation research explored the first-year implementation of foster youth accountability legislation in the 80 school districts within Los Angeles County. Using a sequential mixed-methods descriptive approach, this study sought answers to four research

questions: (a) How do K–12 districts support the educational success of foster youth?; (b) What evidence do K–12 district leaders use to guide decision-making for foster youth?; (c) How do K–12 district leaders value this evidence?; and (d) What are the organizational conditions that influence data-informed decision-making regarding foster youth in K–12 districts?

A content analysis of Local Control Accountability Plans from all 80 school districts within Los Angeles County revealed low implementation of strategies to address the needs of foster youth. Moreover, actions and metrics articulated in the plans did not fully align with the needs of foster youth identified in the literature. A subsequent survey of 49 foster youth liaisons from across the county, along with 10 follow-up structured interviews, provided practitioner insight into the challenges of implementing foster youth policy.

Recommendations for policy-makers and practitioners include: (a) centralizing foster youth data for easier access by decision-makers; (b) aligning actions and metrics of accountability plans to research-based needs of foster youth; (c) building capacity among K–12 practitioners through training; (d) establishing regional professional networks for district staff serving foster youth; (e) increasing participation of foster youth experts in decision-making; (f) streamlining information sharing through a foster youth learning plan template; and (g) establishing mandated structures for the coordination of services.

The dissertation of Brian Lee Huff is approved.

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2015

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Current data on the educational outcomes of foster youth reveal a significant gap when compared to the general population of students. Foster youth are more likely to drop out of high school (Frerer, Sosenko, & Henke, 2013), have a higher rate of absenteeism and tardiness (Altshuler, 2003), and score lower on standardized achievement tests (Altshuler, 2003; Smithgall, Gladden, Yang & George, 2005). Furthermore, more than half have been retained at least one year in school (Parish et al., 2001). Those who graduate from high school and enroll in community college persist at lower rates than their non-foster-youth peers (Frerer et al., 2013). In some cases, including with respect to college persistence, these gaps are wider than for other disadvantaged groups of students. Underlying these statistics is the reality that foster youth have higher rates of school transfers (Altshuler, 2003), are more likely to attend poor-performing schools than non-foster youth (Smithgall et al., 2005), and are more likely to be placed in special education services (Hunt & Marshall, 2002).

Unlike other at-risk subgroups, such as English learners and socio-economically disadvantaged students, however, the educational gap for foster youth remains largely invisible to K–12 practitioners due to a confluence of state and federal policies that prevent clear tracking of their status. Accountability and confidentiality laws have historically kept practitioners from readily accessing key achievement indicators. Under No Child Left Behind (2001), "foster youth" are not identified as a significant subgroup, so states do not disaggregate their performance. Likewise, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (1974) prevents the

identification of foster youth, so school and district information systems often keep this information private.

Data on the educational outcomes of foster youth have largely come from research universities, foundations such as the Stuart Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and policy groups including the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Youth Law Center. Nationwide, local initiatives have responded with programs to support the academic success of foster youth, but in the absence of federal and state mandates to measure the progress of this at-risk subgroup in connection with accountability, the urgency of addressing the needs of foster youth in K–12 systems remains disconnected from educational accountability structures.

California's Accountability Measures to Address Needs of Foster Youth

In response to this disconnect, in 2013 California became the first state to include foster youth as a significant subgroup in accountability measures. Under California Assembly Bill 484 (Bonilla, 2013):

> The Superintendent, with approval of the state board, shall develop an Academic Performance Index (API), to measure the performance of schools and school district, especially the academic performance of pupils. A school or school district shall demonstrate comparable improvement in academic achievement as measured by the API by all numerically significant pupil subgroups at the school or school district, including: (A) ethnic subgroups. (B) Socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils. (C) English learners. (D) Pupils with disabilities. (E) Foster youth (AB 484, Section 52052, Section 1).

Furthermore, in accordance with California Assembly Bill 97 (2013), which introduced a new locally-controlled funding system, each school district must write a Local Control and

Accountability Plan (LCAP) that identifies goals and metrics aligned to eight state priorities: (a) conditions for learning; (b) academic content and performance standards; (c) parental involvement; (d) pupil achievement; (e) pupil engagement; (f) school climate; (g) access and enrollment; and (h) other pupil outcomes as decided by the local educational agency (LEA) or district.

When writing the LCAP, and in accordance with AB 484, each district must indicate how they will measure outcomes for all significant subgroups, including foster youth. The trigger threshold for measuring this subgroup is lower than other subgroups; 15 students constitute a significant population of foster youth in any school or district, versus 30 students for all other categories. Both of these thresholds demonstrate a significant reduction from the federally required 100 students, which will result in schools and districts having more subgroups included in their accountability measures. Confidentiality regulations were also amended under the Uninterrupted Scholars Act (2014, Act, Public Law 112-278), which amends FERPA (1974) to allow educational agencies to share foster youth's education records directly with an appropriate child welfare agency representative. California law was similarly amended to allow for the sharing of information (Stone, 2013a).

Data-use Policy Ahead of Data-use Practice for Foster Youth

The addition of foster youth to California's accountability system is situated in the context of federal and state education policies that increasingly require K–12 institutions to implement evidence-based practices (Coburn, Toure, & Yamashita, 2009). Policies such as No Child Left Behind (2001) and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009) codified the expectation for educators to collect, interpret, and use data to improve teaching and learning. With the passage of AB 484, as with similar legislation, the assumption among policy-makers is

that requiring these data systems will result in the effective use of data, without regard for the process related to data use (Daly, 2012). In this case, the assumption is that if foster youth data collection is mandated, schools and districts will use the data to improve outcomes. Additionally, the mandate assumes that systems are in place to share data and use it effectively.

As Coburn and Turner (2011) noted, the practice of data use in K–12 is "out ahead of research. Policy and interventions to promote data use far outstrip research studying the process, context, and consequences of these efforts" (p. 200). Farley-Ripple (2012) also noted that research on evidence-based decision-making largely focuses on the factors that influence whether or how evidence is used. What is lacking is systematic research on the conditions under which evidence is used for change and improvement (Coburn & Turner, 2011; Farley-Ripple, 2012).

Organizational Decision-making Regarding Foster Youth

The literature documents the complex nature of decision-making in organizations (March & Olsen, 1975), and the reality that no one person ultimately makes decisions (Weiss, 1988). In the case of foster youth, this concept is expanded beyond the boundaries of the K–12 system. As such, schools and districts must bring layers of foster youth stakeholders to the decision-making process, including social workers, foster care guardians, and foster youth liaisons (Kochan & Reed, 2005; Zetlin, Kimm, & Weinberg, 2004; Zetlin, Kimm, & Weinberg,2005). This broader scope of stakeholders reflects the unique needs of foster youth and the multiple sources of information required to best serve this at-risk group. It is clear that schools and districts cannot make informed decisions about foster youth in isolation. Additionally, in the context of AB 484 and AB 97, it is apparent that schools and districts are at once held accountable for high-stakes results while also recognizing the reality they cannot rely on their own resources.

Meantime, California is experiencing what Habermas (1975) called a legitimation crisis with Child Welfare Services, a key partner with K–12 schools in the education of foster youth. In December 2013, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors released an interim report (Sanders et al., 2014) of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection, established earlier that year. The report followed a history of public policy foundation reports that highlighted the need for reform in the system (Child Welfare League of America, 2004; Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, 2004), and identified issues relevant to the discussion on decision-making for foster youth. Yet, the report was also careful to acknowledge the overwhelming caseloads of social workers in the organization. Following public hearings, interviews, and focus groups with key stakeholders, the findings portrayed an organization that inhibited rather than supported the success of foster youth.

Notably, regarding the sharing and use of information, the report noted, "Communication among people and agencies is often limited by perceived confidentiality restrictions, to the detriment of child safety and well-being. Crucial access to information between appropriate entities, within County government and throughout the community, often is needlessly blocked in the name of confidentiality. Problems within the system remain hidden and often uncorrected because of secrecy around decision-making and other recurring failures" (Sanders et al., 2014, p. 4). The report continued to document findings from the qualitative data, including the experience of major disruptions to education among foster youth, lack of data-sharing among key agencies, and a perception that clients of the Department of Child and Family Services are "not treated as collaborators, but often as adversaries" (p. 7). In sum, the findings reflected the reality that the organization charged by society to care for foster youth was struggling to reach this goal.

Study Purpose & Research Questions

In the context of new accountability measures that require schools and districts in California to measure the progress of foster youth, the current study examined evidence use in the context of serving this subgroup. The literature provides insight into the challenges and best practices of supporting data-informed decision-making (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Coburn & Turner, 2011; Daly, 2012; Ermeling, 2010; Friedrich & McKinney, 2010; Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; McDougall, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2007; Slavin, Cheung, Holmes, Madden, & Chamberlain, 2013). Moreover, California is replete with districts that exhibit data-informed structures and processes. The addition of foster youth to the group of educationally at-risk students, however, provides an opportunity to analyze the unique needs of this group and to ask how the process of data-informed decision-making might be similar or dissimilar to existing practices to serve other at-risk subgroups. Furthermore, understanding the conditions that facilitate or constrain the process will guide educational leaders in making evidence-based decisions to improve outcomes for foster youth. As such, this study addressed the following questions:

1. How do K–12 districts support the educational success of foster youth?
    a. What is the nature of the activities targeted for foster youth in 2014 Local Control Accountability Plans of districts in Los Angeles County?
    b. To what extent do these activities align with practitioner knowledge of foster youth liaisons serving in these districts?
2. What evidence do K–12 district leaders use to guide decision-making for foster youth?
    a. What is the nature of evidence used to evaluate the effectiveness of foster youth activities?

b. To what extent is this evidence currently available?

c. How similar or dissimilar is this evidence compared to the evidence used for other subgroups of students?

3. How do K–12 district leaders value this evidence?

    a. According to foster youth liaisons, what evidence is especially important for guiding decision-making about programs and services for foster youth?

    b. What is the perception of foster youth liaisons regarding the quality of foster youth data?

4. What are the organizational conditions that influence data-informed decision-making regarding foster youth in K–12 districts?

    a. Which conditions constrain evidence-based decision-making?

    b. Which conditions support evidence-based decision-making?

To answer these questions, I conducted a sequential, mixed-methods, descriptive study, described in more detail in Chapter 3. First, in Chapter 2, I summarize the literature relevant to the use of data to inform decisions about how best to support the educational progress of foster youth.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

To provide context for this study, this chapter will review the literature on evidence use. First, to provide context for the study, I summarize the literature on educational outcomes of foster youth. Then, I present a conceptual framework that provides insight into knowledge use regarding these outcomes. Next, I outline studies on how K–12 stakeholders make sense of data, and then examine the research on how evidence is used to make decisions and what factors affect this use in K–12 organizations. Finally, I describe the findings from studies on information use for foster youth in K–12 settings.

The K–12 Educational Experiences of Foster Youth

Foster youth demonstrate the lowest educational outcomes of any subgroup currently monitored through federal and state accountability measures (Barrat & Belriner, 2013; Barrat, Magruder, Needell, Putnam-Hornstein, & Wiegmann, 2014; Zetlin, Weinburg, & Kimm, 2004). In a recent summary of national research, the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education (2014) found that 50% of foster youth complete high school, compared to 70% of students overall. The researchers also found that the average reading level of a 17-year-old foster student is seventh grade, foster students are 2.5 to 3.5 times more likely to receive special education services, and only 20% of foster students who graduate from high school attend college.

High rates of mobility influence low educational outcomes, with some research indicating the average foster student transfers schools one to two times per year, losing four to six months of learning with each move (Wolanin, 2005). A recent report showed foster students attend an average of eight schools throughout their foster placement (California Department of Education,

2012). The report goes on to outline barriers that foster youth face as a result of frequent changes in placement:

- loss of education records, resulting in potential loss of academic credits and time spent in school and increased risk of dropping out of school;
- loss in their continuity of education, which further exacerbates learning gaps;
- loss of health records, resulting in possible duplication of immunizations and a potential break in continuity of essential health care and medication;
- difficulties adjusting to changing care and school environments, resulting in stress and behavioral problems;
- loss of contact with persons familiar with their health, education, and welfare needs, resulting in inadequate care and inappropriate school placements;
- lack of permanent family or family-like support systems upon emancipation from the foster care system; and
- lack of pro-social bonding with peers, which can lead to higher risk of delinquency.

Existing state legislation is clear on the steps that schools and districts must take to mitigate the effects of high mobility. AB 490 (Steinberg, 2003), and a subsequent amendment in California AB 1933 (2010), attempted to establish school stability by allowing foster youth to remain in their school of origin instead of being outside of the current district boundaries. This bill also required schools to immediately enroll foster youth, even without uniforms or health and education records, and mandated transfer of all student records from the previous school within two days.

To address the need for more information sharing, AB 643 (Stone, 2013a) allowed school districts to release education records to child welfare agencies without prior consent of the

parents. This allowed social workers to make timely updates to health and education passports, which schools use upon enrollment to make decisions about educational services. AB 216 (Stone, 2013b) helped foster youth in high school achieve graduation by prohibiting schools from requiring them to meet the local credit requirement for graduation if they transfer after their second year and cannot reasonably meet the local requirements. In this case, if the foster youth chooses, the usually lower statewide graduation requirement is the only threshold that must be met in order to receive a diploma. The success of this law is dependent on schools complying with AB 490, which mandates the awarding of partial credits and inclusion of this information in the transfer of records.

Although these bills aimed to address the harmful effects of school mobility, the monitoring of educational records continues to be an issue; the California Legislative Analyst's Office (2009) found that health and education passports of foster youth are not consistently updated. As a result, it is difficult for schools that receive foster youth to make informed decisions about programs and course placement. In their review of foster youth in California schools, Barrat et al. (2014) found persistent gaps in course credits and an overall lack of connection to adults who track their educational needs.

The experience of trauma also plays a large role in the educational experience of foster youth. Twenty-five percent of adults who had been in foster care experienced post-traumatic stress syndrome, a rate twice that of returning combat veterans (Pecora et al., 2005). The majority of foster placements result from neglect, which, along with the reality of oftentimes being separated from their biological parents, influences the emotional well-being of foster youth (Racusin, Maerlender, Sengupta, Isquith, & Straus, 2005). At the national level, research shows that 48% of foster youth struggle with behavioral or emotional issues (Faer & Cohen, 2015)

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study draws on Ackoff's (1989) theory of knowledge and the life experiences of foster youth. I use both to help explain the nature of information use regarding foster youth in K–12 settings. According to Ackoff, there are four stages of knowledge development: data, information, knowledge, and wisdom. This framework reflects the stages that California districts will go through in the new LCAP process. In the first two stages, districts will bring stakeholders together to identify key goals and associated data to monitor progress. Then, during the knowledge stage, districts will analyze information for trends. In the final stage, wisdom, stakeholders seek to develop a shared understanding of knowledge and apply it to decisions and actions in future LCAP revisions.

Collaboration as a Tool to Understand the Evidence

As schools and districts begin to collect data on educational outcomes of foster youth, one strategy for making sense of it at the local level is through collaborative processes, such as professional learning communities or communities of practice. The research on this approach provides insight into conditions that support or constrain effective collaboration. I summarize the relevant literature in this section.

For decades, K-12 institutions have recognized the importance of using collaboration as a strategy for reform (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1987; The National Center for Literacy Education, 2012; WestEd, 2001). Likewise, federal and state governments include collaboration as a component of accountability frameworks and grant proposals (California Department of Education, 2012a; United States Department of Education, 2012). The research especially documents the benefits for stakeholders, such as teachers (Brownell, Yeager, Rennells, & Riley, 1997; Shachar &

Shmuelevitz, 1997). Through collaboration, teachers change instructional practice (Ermeling, 2010), grow in their general sense of efficacy, and gain confidence in fostering positive student relationships. More recent research considers the effect of collaboration on student learning. While not as numerous as the studies examining effects on teachers, this set of research finds promising connections between collaboration and increased student achievement (Ermeling, 2010; Friedrich & McKinney, 2010; Fullan, 2000; Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; McDougall, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2007).

Some studies that link teacher collaboration to achievement identify an inquiry-based approach to collaboration—or "collaborative inquiry"—and highlight the necessary components of this process (Ermeling, 2010; Gallimore et al., 2009). First, collaborative inquiry teams identify a common student learning problem and shared learning goal appropriate to their context. The problem is often broad enough—e.g., improving reading comprehension or developing critical thinking—to allow recursive study throughout an instructional period. Next, theory is connected to practice through ongoing planning and implementation of instructional strategies. This phase includes collective identification of specific techniques for instruction and agreements about when these techniques will be used in the classroom. Because ideas are put into action, collaborative inquiry is set apart from other collaborative structures, such as book clubs or discussion groups. The purpose is to test out a strategy in order to solve the learning problem.

To measure progress, teams utilize evidence of learning and reflect on results to determine next steps. The data used vary from informal to formal assessments. Several studies have documented the use of video recorded lessons as tools to examine evidence of student

learning (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Slowing down the lesson in this way allows the teacher team to dissect the lesson and discuss decisions made by the teacher throughout. Japan's lesson study approach usually incorporates this method of recording sample lessons followed by a collaborative critique of the strengths and weaknesses that the team observed (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Finally, successful collaborative teams have assistance from experts within and outside the school.

Most importantly, Ermeling (2010) and Galimore et al. (2009) asserted that framing the inquiry process is a culture of persistence. Teams that demonstrate the resolve to discover solutions to instructional problems by continuously examining evidence and trying new strategies experience increased achievement. In addition, over time, when teachers experience success through this process, they stop blaming external factors for low achievement and identify cause-effect relationships between classroom instruction and student achievement (Gallimore et al., 2009; McDougall et al., 2007).

One limitation of the studies linking collaboration to achievement is that most involve case studies. Despite the need for further large-scale studies documenting the connection of collaboration to student learning, researchers draw on existing evidence to outline the conditions needed for effective collaboration (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Ermeling, 2010; Friedrich & McKinney, 2010; Gallimore et al., 2009; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008; Wei et al., 2009). Allocating time, a pronounced barrier in U.S. schools, is a priority. Also, placing teachers in collaborative teams with job-alike peers ensures their work is relevant and connected to their teaching context. Establishing protocols to guide their time together is another key condition, since it maintains equal participation among the team and builds trust between colleagues.

Finally, developing distributed leadership is the key to sustaining ongoing teacher collaboration (Ermeling, 2010; Friedrich & McKinney, 2010; Gallimore et al., 2009; Wei et al., 2009). Site administration plays an important role by supporting teacher collaboration and applying pressure to persevere. The most effective leadership, however, comes from peers who have shared experiences and can model the courage to challenge their own assumptions or change their practice. As such, teachers are in a better position than site administrators to have credibility with peers since they can implement new strategies along with the team. Ermeling (2010) claimed the ability of scaling up collaborative teacher inquiry in large schools requires teacher leaders who can, at once, maintain rapport with colleagues and provide the structure necessary for focused inquiry. Distributive leadership, he contended, is necessary for sustaining ongoing teacher collaboration.

Copland (2003) reinforced the importance of distributed leadership for sustaining teacher collaboration in his longitudinal study of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. Developing distributed leadership, he argued, builds an inquiry-based school culture, which in turn works to sustain efforts in school reform. Over the course of two phases, Copland collected survey data from teachers and principals that showed shared leadership emerged in schools that carried out an inquiry-based theory of action. There were clear stages in the implementation of the cycle of inquiry—novice, intermediate, and advanced—with each level characterizing greater degrees of shared ownership of the learning problems among all staff. Furthermore, Copland (2003) noted, "The transition from inquiry as procedure to inquiry as stance signals a cultural shift, from teachers simply 'going through the motions' of another reform project, to a realization of their own collective power to improving teacher and learning in the school" (p. 387).

In order for the work of teacher collaboration to have a positive effect on student outcomes, schools need distributed leadership to support a collaborative approach to solving learning problems. Developing distributed leadership is key to sustaining the collaborative process. Whether it is the teacher leader, who has credibility among peers regarding instructional issues, or the site leader, who balances both support and pressure through the collaborative process, the evidence clearly places leaders in a position to help or hinder the connection to student learning. When leaders facilitate a culture of persistence in solving educational problems, student learning increases and teachers begin to shift attribution of learning to elements.

Types of Evidence Use

The literature documents three primary ways that evidence is used to influence decision-making: instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic/political. Looking at the gap between social science research and policy decisions, Caplan (1979) studied 204 upper-level governmental officials and found that 90% of self-reported instances of evidence use pertained to "day-to-day policy issues of limited significance" (p. 462). Caplan referred to this category of decision as "micro-level decision" (p. 462), which others have also described as *instrumental use*. Within the K–12 setting, educational leaders engage in instrumental use to guide program decisions.

In a 2002 study of six school districts with exemplary data use, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) (2002) found that demographic, achievement, instructional, and perception survey data had the following instrumental uses: track achievement and allow for decision-makers to act quickly when necessary; identify interventions; change attitudes toward low-performing students; support professional development; evaluate programs; create school improvement plans; and allocate resources. More recently, in their study of the varying

perceptions of evidence among different district stakeholders, Coburn and Talbert (2006) identified four instrumental uses of evidence in a school district: meeting accountability demands; informing program and policy decisions; monitoring student progress to inform placement decisions; and monitoring student progress to inform instructional practices.

The second category of evidence use is *conceptual*. In his study of government administrators, Caplan (1979) found that some applications of evidence were not as direct as the instrumental uses described above. Instead, social science research was used in tandem with other knowledge bases to influence decisions. In these cases, knowledge served the function of enlightening decision-makers (Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980).

Finally, the third category of evidence use is *political* or *symbolic*. Coburn and Talbert (2006) noted that some district staff did not view evidence to inform program and policy decisions as only instrumental, as referenced above, but rather as a way to justify an existing program or to garner support among other stakeholders for a particular decision. Sometimes referred to as "strategic" (Huberman, 1990), this category of use describes the process of using evidence to make political gains or build political support (Corcoran, Fuhrman, & Belcher, 2001).

Honig and Coburn (2008) found district office administrators sometimes used evidence to support opinions they had already formulated, strategically aligning the evidence with a position that furthered their own agendas. Knorr (1977) described this appropriation of evidence for predetermined ends as "symbolic," since the decision-maker is most concerned with advancing a particular idea. Likewise, in a review of literature, Farley-Ripple (2012) found organizational theorists noted that evidence is often used after a decision was already made.

Factors that Affect Information Use

Characteristics of Evidence

To study the process of evidence-based decision-making, it is important to clarify what the literature means by "evidence." Coburn and Talbert (2006) showed that the notion of what is valued as evidence is shaped by one's position in a school district and the end goal of the data. District administrators, for example, prefer to rely on scientifically rigorous studies, whereas teachers prefer evidence that uncovers student thinking, such as observations or other formative feedback during instruction. Teachers are closer to the instruction and therefore prefer evidence that is immediately actionable. Supovitz (2012) echoed this finding in a body of research that demonstrated how teachers use formative assessment to improve student-learning outcomes. District office leadership, on the other hand, often rely on data required through public policy, such as social science research, evaluation information, standardized student performance data, or testimonies of experts (Goertz & Massell, 2002).

Although social science research is required for decision-making by federal and state educational policies, Maynard (2006) described three reasons why practitioners and policymakers alike often disregard the findings in the context of decision-making: (a) they perceive the study as lacking credibility; (b) they perceive the findings as impractical to their context; or (c) the findings are poorly synthesized. As a result, educational stakeholders have long used various forms of evidence that fall outside of the scope outlined by policy. Called "practitioner knowledge" or "local knowledge," this type of evidence includes student surveys, parent surveys, or learning walks through classrooms to collect data on instructional practices (Honig & Coburn, 2008).

While not prescribed in federal and state policy, district and school leaders cite the importance of local knowledge as a key to introducing and sustaining school reform efforts. Since educational stakeholders—including teachers who are expected to implement school reform initiatives in the classroom—often view social science research as too far removed from their context to be relevant, district and school leaders rely on local knowledge to help make a connection between research findings and the local context. For example, findings from a learning walk that resonate with educational research findings can help situate a reform effort and build consensus on the implementation.

Characteristics of Organizational Context

The literature highlights characteristics of an organizational context that influence the use of evidence. The structure of the district's central office, for example, plays an important role in the degree to which information is disseminated, understood, and acted upon. In an analysis of district responses to a state reading initiative, Spillane (1998) found that the organizational arrangement of central office staff accounted for the wide variety in implementation of the reading program at the school sites. Because the central office departments were not vertically aligned, nor had they developed consensus on their approach to instruction, the various departments asserted their own agendas for the program, often resulting in conflicting messages at the school level.

Time is another factor that influences the use of evidence. In a review of three districts' approaches to supporting data analysis with teachers, Wayman and Stringfield (2006) identified a host of necessary organizational supports needed to facilitate effective use of data, including providing time. Throughout their interviews, stakeholders emphasized the importance of setting aside time for teachers to collaborate and examine evidence of student learning.

Characteristics of Decision-makers

The research also documents how characteristics of decision-makers can influence the degree of evidence use. In a survey of Tennessee public school administrators regarding their perceptions of educational research, West and Rhoton (1994) documented that many believed available research was not accessible and did not apply to their particular contexts. Administrators who held doctoral degrees, on the other hand, expressed a higher degree of comfort with research evidence. Another aspect of the decision-maker that influences use is pre-existing beliefs. When new evidence contradicts previously held beliefs, decision-makers are more likely to discount the findings (David, 1981; Honig & Coburn, 2008)

Examining Evidence Use in K–12 Settings for Foster Youth

California is the first state to add foster youth as a subgroup in accountability measures (Bonilla, 2013). Although they comprise a relatively smaller segment of the student population, they face a disproportionately high set of academic and developmental challenges (Altshuler, 2003; Frerer et al., 2013; Hunt & Marshall, 2002; Parrish et al., 2001; Smithgall et al., 2005). Until now, the outcomes of foster youth have been subsumed within the overall population. By highlighting outcomes of this at-risk student subgroup and holding districts accountable for their performance relative to other subgroups, California is acknowledging the heightened need to provide evidence-based services to foster youth.

Challenges of Serving Foster Youth

Although limited, the extant literature on information use for foster youth in K–12 settings does provide insight into the unique needs of this group of students and the accompanying challenges regarding decision-making. Zetlin, Luderer, & Wade (2004) identified the challenges associated with the quality and availability of foster youth data due to the high

mobility of this population of students. In a review of foster youth information in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the researchers experienced a wait time of three weeks to eight months to access key records, which were oftentimes missing crucial educational information.

Several studies have approached key stakeholders through focus groups to uncover their perceptions of the most significant challenges in serving foster youth. One consistent observation has been the breakdown in interagency collaboration and the prevalence of adversarial relationships between schools and social workers (Altshuler, 2003). Foster youth liaisons, foster parents, and school staff have highlighted the lack of communication with child welfare services and a perceived lack of support (Sanders et al., 2014; Zetlin, 2012). Additional focus groups with child welfare agency representatives identified six major challenges to serving foster youth: placement instability; treatment/education programs; record transfers/database; accountability/monitoring outcomes/advocacy; interagency collaboration/coordination; and confidentiality (Zetlin et al., 2006). Taken together, these qualitative studies underscore the unique needs of foster youth and the resulting urgent need for inter-agency collaboration (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004).

Positive Effect of Educational Liaison on Foster Youth Outcomes

In response to the need to support inter-agency collaboration, two studies in particular have highlighted the success of using a designated liaison to bridge the information gap (Zetlin et al., 2004; Zetlin et al. 2005). In her evaluation of a program to increase the responsiveness of social workers to the educational needs of foster youth, Zetlin et al. (2005) conducted a document analysis of 300 case files of foster youth and administered a survey to 200 social workers. A review of the data found that social workers who had access to an educational liaison during an 18-month period demonstrated an increase in their knowledge of K–12 practices as

well as an increase in the likelihood of gathering current educational data of foster youth. A study in 2004 by the same researcher found that advocacy work of educational liaisons resulted in positive results in school performance of foster youth, specifically in reading and math results. A nested analysis of variance was used to examine pre- and post-treatment results of 120 foster youth—60 represented a random sampling who received the services of an educational liaison, and the remaining 60 served as the control group. Scores in mathematics and reading showed more improvement in the treatment group, while GPAs between the two groups demonstrated no significant difference. In both studies, Zetlin et al. (2004, 2005) highlighted the importance of an educational liaison in building the capacity of social workers to serve foster youth and their positive affect on student performance.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the relevant literature for information use regarding foster youth in the K-12 setting. A thorough body of research provides insight into how evidence is used and the factors the influence information use in a K-12 setting. In particular, we understand that characteristics of the evidence itself, the organizational context, and the decision-makers all play a role in how information is used to guide decision-making. Another body of research documents the educational experiences of foster youth, especially highlighting the significant gap between outcomes of students in foster care compared to students not in foster care. The current study aims to examine evidence-based decision-making through the lens of foster youth in the K-12 setting, an existing gap in the literature. The following chapter outlines the research methods used to conduct the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

In the context of ongoing federal and state accountability requirements in K–12 education, educators are accustomed to collecting data on subgroups, analyzing results, and taking action on their findings. As reviewed above, the literature provides insight into the challenges and best practices of supporting data-informed decision-making. The addition of foster youth as a subgroup, however, provides an opportunity to analyze the unique needs of this group and ask how the process of data-informed decision-making might be similar or dissimilar to existing practices that serve at-risk subgroups.

This chapter presents the methods used to answer the following research questions, as well as their respective sub-questions, as described in Chapter 1:

1. How do K–12 districts support the educational success of foster youth?
    a. What is the nature of the activities targeted for foster youth in 2014 Local Control Accountability Plans of districts in Los Angeles County?
    b. To what extent do these activities align with practitioner knowledge of foster youth liaisons serving in these districts?
2. What evidence do K–12 district leaders use to guide decision-making for foster youth?
    a. What is the nature of evidence used to evaluate the effectiveness of foster youth activities?
    b. To what extent is this evidence currently available?
    c. How similar or dissimilar is this evidence compared to the evidence used for other subgroups of students?

3. How do K–12 district leaders value this evidence?
    a. According to foster youth liaisons, what evidence is especially important for guiding decision-making about programs and services for foster youth?
    b. What is the perception of foster youth liaisons regarding the quality of foster youth data?
4. What are the organizational conditions that influence data-informed decision-making regarding foster youth in K–12 districts?
    a. Which conditions constrain evidence-based decision-making?
    b. Which conditions support evidence-based decision-making?

I begin with an overview of the study design, followed by a description of the setting and participants. Then, the instruments and data collection procedures are described, followed by an explanation of the data analysis methods.

Overall Study Design

The research questions sought to reveal how stakeholders use information to make decisions regarding foster youth in K–12 settings. Using document analysis, a survey, and interviews, I conducted a sequential, mixed-methods, descriptive study that occurred in two stages. The first stage included a document analysis of the accountability plans from districts in Los Angeles County, along with a survey to all designated foster youth liaisons in those districts. Based on the findings from this stage, I designed an interview protocol to administer to 10 foster youth liaisons. The interviews supplemented data from the document analysis and survey, giving a richer voice to practitioners regarding their experiences shepherding educational decision-making for foster youth.

Methods

Setting and Participants

In the first stage of data collection, I analyzed the Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP) of local educational agencies (LEA) that reside within Los Angeles County (n=80). This county educates over 1.5 million students. The size of districts in Los Angeles County range from the second largest in the nation (Los Angeles Unified School District) to smaller elementary and high school districts. Within the 80 total districts, there were 12,365 foster students enrolled as of April 2015, with 19 districts enrolling fewer than 15 foster youth (California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System, 2015).

In this first stage I also collected survey data from the population of district foster youth liaisons in Los Angeles County. California Assembly Bill 490, passed in 2003, requires local educational agencies (i.e., districts) to "designate a staff person as the educational liaison for foster children" (Steinberg, 2003, 48853.5.b) who will carry out the following responsibilities: "(1) Ensure and facilitate the proper educational placement, enrollment in school, and checkout from school of foster children. (2) Assist foster children when transferring from one school to another school or from one school district to another school district in ensuring proper transfer of credits, records, and grades" (Steinberg, 2003, 48853.5.b.1–2). In most districts in Los Angeles County, foster youth liaisons concurrently serve in other leadership roles, such as central office directors of curriculum, pupil services, accountability, or federal and state categorical programs. Their role in service to foster youth is an additional assignment. In few instances, districts assign a staff member to solely serve as the liaison for both foster and homeless children and youth. Because most foster youth liaisons also serve in other leadership positions, they have insight into the broader consequences of the new accountability measures for foster youth. The survey was

sent to all foster liaisons in Los Angeles County (n=80). A total of 49 foster youth liaisons responded to the survey. Table 1 below provides a description of their reported job titles.

Table 1

District Job Titles of Foster Youth Liaisons in Survey Sample

Title Options on Survey Item	**Number (n=49)**	**Valid Percent**
Superintendent	1	2.0
Assistant superintendent	2	4.1
Director	19	38.8
Coordinator/program specialist	10	20.4
Site administrator	0	0
Teacher on special assignment	1	2.0
Social worker	0	0
Counselor	7	14.3
Other:		
Administrative assistant	1	2.0
Child welfare and attendance	1	2.0
Child welfare and attendance officer	1	2.0
Family liaison	1	2.0
Homeless/family liaison	1	2.0
Liaison	1	2.0
Special education compliance officer	1	2.0
Checked “other” with no explanation	2	4.1

As presented in Table 2 below, the job responsibilities of liaisons who responded to the survey demonstrate that most led a variety of simultaneous projects in their district leadership roles.

Table 2

Responsibilities of Foster Youth Liaisons in Survey Sample

Responsibilities	Number (n=49)	Percent
Student services/child welfare/attendance	47	95.9
Special education	17	34.7
Accountability	10	20.4
Assessment	8	16.3
Curriculum	8	16.3
Instruction	8	16.3
Technology	3	6.1
Other:		
All (small district)	1	2.0
Court liaison	1	2.0
Enrollment	1	2.0
Family Resource Center, mental health, and much more	1	2.0
Foster and homeless youth	1	2.0
Grant director	1	2.0
Homeless population and other	1	2.0

In the second stage of data collection, I used responses from the survey data to identify foster youth liaisons from Los Angeles County to interview. To select the interview participants, I identified willing volunteers through the final question of the survey, which read, "Are you interested in participating in a 45-minute one-to-one interview about this topic?" Twelve survey participants agreed to be interviewed based on this question. All 12 worked in districts with at least 15 foster youth enrolled, the minimum threshold identified in AB 484 to trigger a foster youth accountability subgroup, and a requirement for final selection into the interview pool. From the 12 volunteers, I successfully arranged and conducted interviews with 10 foster youth liaisons. A description of the interviewees, along with the duration of interviews, is contained in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Foster Youth Liaison Interview Participants

Participant	Foster Youth Enrollment	Title	Interview Duration (Minutes)
1	100–150	Coordinator, Student Services	49
2	15–50	Assistant Superintendent, Instructional Services	44
3	200–250	Coordinator, Student Services	37
4	50–100	Coordinator, Student Services	55
5	Over 5,000	Coordinator, Student Services	43
6	15–50	Director, Special Education	49
7	50–100	Coordinator, Student Welfare	62
8	50–100	Assistant Director, Student Support	35
9	50–100	Coordinator, Student Services	43
10	100–150	Specialist, Child Welfare	52

Data Collection

Document Analysis

The Local Control Accountability Plans were an important resource for answering the first two research questions, which sought to reveal what districts are doing to support foster youth and how they are measuring success. Each local educational agency in California posted its 2014 LCAP online following the June 2014 deadline of local governing board approval. I downloaded 2014 plans for all 80 districts in Los Angeles County from their respective websites and reviewed Section 2, "Goals and Progress Indicators," to determine their stated foster youth goals and associated metrics, and Section 3B, "Actions, Services, and Expenditures," to identify foster youth actions. I used the instrument displayed in the Tables 4 and 5 to record all actions that were associated with foster youth, along with their associated goals and metrics. The purpose of the tables presented here are to provide insight into the template used to collect data. The tables contain sample data collected during the survey to illustrate the kinds of data

included. These tables here do not present the full findings, which are documented in chapter four.

Table 4

Content Analysis Protocol (Part A) for 2014 Local Control Accountability Plans from Los Angeles County

District	LCAP Section 2: Goals						LCAP Section 3B: Actions and Associated Goals from Section 2				
	Number of LCAP goals overall	Number of goals that state only "All" as the target group of students	Number of goals that target student subgroup(s), but not foster youth	Number of goals that list foster youth along with other subgroups (e.g., English learner, low income)	Number of goals that specifically and uniquely identify foster youth as the target	Number of goals that do not list "All" or any other subgroup as target population	Number of goals that are associated with actions specifically and uniquely targeted for foster youth in LCAP Section 3B	Number of those goals that are associated with actions targeted for foster youth along with other student subgroups (e.g., English learner, low income)	Number of goals that are not associated with any actions for foster youth	Number of actions addressing foster youth alone	Number of actions addressing foster youth along with other subgroups
Sample District A	32	13	6	13	0	0	5	13	19	1	33
Sample District B	7	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0
Sample District C	6	6	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	2	17
Sample District D	4	4	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	1	2
Sample District E	18	11	5	2	0	0	0	8	10	0	10
Sample District F	5	3	1	1	0	0	1	0	4	1	0
Sample District G	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	0	14

Table 5

Content Analysis Protocol (Part B) for 2014 Local Control Accountability Plans from Los Angeles County

District	Goals associated with foster youth: LCAP Section 2		Metrics associated with foster youth: LCAP Section 2	Actions and Services associated with foster youth: LCAP Section 3B		Comments
	Description of goal	Applicable pupil subgroup(s)	Metrics used to measure progress on goals associated with foster youth	Applicable pupil subgroup(s)	Actions and services identified for foster youth from Section 3B	
Sample District A	The educational outcomes of foster youth will mirror those of the general student population.	Foster	Attendance rates; school discipline rates; standardized test scores; A–G enrollment and passage rates; CAHSEE passage rates; dropout rates; graduation rates	Foster youth	Ensure LEA foster youth liaison (Ed Code 48853.5) has adequate time, knowledge, and resources (including additional staff if needed) to fully execute responsibilities.	None
Sample District B	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No foster youth goals or actions
Sample District C	Ensure appropriate systems of school support are fully operational at the organizational level	All	Williams Case compliance documentation; learning walks; campus walks; PBIS implementation fidelity assessment; annually survey students to assess satisfaction related to their school experience	Foster youth	Establish foster youth data policy to ensure SIS allows for accurate identification of foster youth that includes an MOU with county child welfare agency that specifies how data are to be exchanged and allows for tracking and monitoring of foster youth LCAP metrics.	
Sample District D	Communicate effectively with all stakeholders and continue to build relationships in the community	All	Number of opportunities for parents to interact with school staff; relationships with stakeholders and community groups; parent survey	Low-income, foster youth, English learners	Increase interaction with parents/guardians of targeted groups through technology, face-to-face meetings, and workshops intended to support parent involvement.	

Survey

Through the survey (see Appendix C), I complemented the content analysis in stage one by collecting feedback from practitioners in the field. The questions sought practitioner perspectives regarding the availability, use, and importance of foster youth data to help answer research questions two, three and four. Importantly, the survey also identified barriers to data-driven decision-making, along with an open-ended item that elicited the top three actions foster youth liaisons suggested for districts to implement to support foster youth.

The section regarding barriers used modified items from a 2010 national survey of K–12 district leadership on the barriers to data use (United States Department of Education, 2010), along with three items based on language from the LCAP that stipulated requirements of county offices of education serving foster youth. While the requirements were limited to county offices of education, I wanted to understand the degree to which all districts perceived these as barriers. Therefore, based on this language, I added the following three barriers to the survey: (a) lack of working with the county child welfare agency to share information; (b) lack of timely transfer of health and education records; and (c) lack of responding to the needs of the juvenile court system. The final list included a total of fifteen barriers to rate as "not a barrier," "minor barrier," or "major barrier." The survey concluded with a question used to identify willing participants for a follow-up interview.

To reduce the time commitment of the participants, I pilot-tested the survey to ensure a 10–15 minute maximum completion time. Three foster youth liaisons from outside of Los Angeles County piloted the survey instrument in November 2014. They provided constructive feedback that resulted in the modification of format and demographic categories. I also reduced the time needed by refraining from collecting personal information (Dillman, 2000), except in

cases where survey participants voluntarily offered to participate in subsequent one-to-one interviews. In these cases, I needed contact information to arrange the interview. The front page of the survey explained the purpose of the study, assured confidentiality, and established the usefulness of their responses towards contributing to better services for foster youth (see Appendix A). I hoped to increase the sense of reward for participation by acknowledging their vital contribution as practitioner experts.

I attempted to attain a full population survey of all 80 foster youth liaisons in Los Angeles County. To prepare for the delivery of the survey, I made announcements in two modes: by email and in person. Dr. Rachelle Touzard, Coordinator of Foster Youth Services at the Los Angeles County Office of Education, introduced my study to all Los Angeles County liaisons by email on January 16, 2015 (see Appendix E). The email included a brief overview of the study along with an invitation to participate in the online survey, administered through Qualtrics.com. On January 22, 2015, I attended the winter meeting of foster youth liaisons at the Los Angeles County Office of Education and made an in-person announcement about the study, invited liaisons to participate in the online survey, and passed out a flyer with key information about the study and how to participate (see Appendix F). At this meeting, I also brought hard copies of the survey for on-site completion.

On January 28, 2015, I emailed all foster youth liaisons in Los Angeles County and thanked everyone who had participated so far. I also included a reminder to participate and directions on how to access the survey online. At this point in the survey window, 25 of the 80 potential respondents had participated. To increase the chances of reaching a full population sample, I included the option of receiving a $20 gift card for completing the survey. I added a final question to the online survey, and created a separate survey for liaisons who had already

completed the survey and wanted the gift card. On February 22, 2015, I sent all foster youth liaisons an update on the number of respondents so far, thanked them for their participation, and reminded all non-respondents to complete the survey link provided in the email prior to the closing date of midnight on February 27.

I limited this survey to K–12 districts within the Los Angeles County region so that the data collected from the survey could be compared against the data collected from the document analysis and subsequent interviews. By drawing this geographical boundary around all of the data collection, I was able to triangulate the findings and make a stronger case for generalizability in this region.

Interviews

The fourth research question sought to reveal the conditions that facilitate or constrain the use of information regarding foster youth. Since I could not directly observe the interactions of stakeholders in their districts, I used 10 interviews with foster youth liaisons, key brokers of foster youth information in K–12 settings, to uncover their perspectives on this question. Interview data also served to supplement the data collected from the document analysis and survey in stage one.

I identified willing participants through the survey described above and conducted interviews in March and April 2015. This timeline allowed me to analyze data from stage one to inform the final questions included in the interview protocol described below. I ensured that the final interview sample of 10 foster youth liaisons represented districts that had at least 15 foster youth, the minimum threshold for determining a significant subgroup of foster youth in California accountability measures. I conducted all interviews in person at participants' district offices.

The structured interviews followed the protocol outlined in Appendix G and lasted 45–60 minutes each. Based on data collected through the content analysis and survey, the protocol was altered to address emerging themes not included in the original proposal. The final set of questions addressed the actions districts were taking to support foster youth, the nature of data used to evaluate these actions, and the organizational conditions that influenced decision-making for foster youth. The interview included questions that prompted open discussion and elicited specific examples of participants' experiences in the decision-making process.

Data Storage

All data collected were stored on a password-protected laptop and backed up using both Dropbox (a cloud-based storage service) and an external hard drive. Names of interview participants were changed to ensure anonymity; a master copy of the code sheet indicating the pseudonyms was stored on the laptop, the external hard drive, and in hard-copy format in a locked filing cabinet. The pseudonym code sheet was not stored in Dropbox to prevent online access from another party.

Credibility of Findings

One limitation of my study is the sample size. By only collecting data within Los Angeles County, the ability to make generalizations beyond this county diminishes. To address this concern, I triangulated data between all three data collection approaches and conducted member-checking on the findings of my content analysis of LCAPs. Once my content analysis was complete, I met with a foster youth liaison from Los Angeles County, as well as the coordinator of foster youth services for the Los Angeles County Office of Education. I presented a sample LCAP and my analysis of foster youth actions and coding categories for their feedback. The intent of this process was to present emerging findings and determine if they resonated with

the experiences and expertise of field experts (Creswell, 2014). Although the ability to generalize beyond Los Angeles County remains limited, these two strategies support the credibility of findings within this geographical boundary.

Data Analysis

Content Analysis

Once all foster youth actions, goals, and metrics from 2014 LCAP plans were coded and tallied in an Excel document, as displayed above, I transferred the tally spreadsheet to SPSS and ran descriptive statistics on goals and actions associated with foster youth for all 80 districts in Los Angeles County. I ran a second round of descriptive statistics taking into consideration the number of foster youth enrolled and academic outcomes as measured by the 2013 Academic Performance Index (API) provided by the California Department of Education. This was the last available year of API data given the current revision of this index.

Next, I conducted an inductive analysis of all foster youth actions and coded them according to the following emerging categories: provide appropriate support staff; establish data monitoring system; provide academic supports; coordinate services across agencies and within district staff; develop local policies and procedures; train staff on foster youth needs and policies; provide behavioral, social, and emotional support; and provide parent education and communication.

Finally, using LCAP data in Excel, I conducted a deductive analysis of the metrics associated with the actions targeted for foster youth alone. I focused on these actions during this analysis because other actions were concurrently targeted towards other subgroups such as low-income and English learners. By isolating the actions that the districts intended to implement

solely to support foster youth, I identified the metrics that were intended to measure progress on foster youth outcomes.

To code the metrics, I used the data framework provided by the Local Control Funding Formula (Blumenfield et al., 2013), in particular the eight state priorities that include sets of required data that each district must include in their LCAP. For example, one state priority is "student achievement," which includes required data such as performance on standardized tests, share of students who are college- and career-ready, number of students passing Advanced Placement courses with a score of "3" or higher, and share of students prepared for college based on the Early Assessment Program. If a district included a standardized test (e.g., Smarter Balanced Assessment in English language arts or mathematics, California High School Exit Exam) as a metric for a foster youth, I coded this metric as "student achievement." The eight state priorities included: student achievement, student engagement, other student outcomes, school climate, parental involvement, basic services, implementation of the Common Core State Standards, and course access. If a district identified metrics beyond these categories, I added appropriate categories as they surfaced during analysis. In this way, the coding of metrics was both deductive and inductive.

Survey

As noted above, I administered the survey through Qualtrics.com. I then transferred the data to SPSS for analysis. I analyzed Likert-type scale items in SPSS using descriptive statistics and reported frequencies by response category. For example, to report the results on the barriers sections, I ran frequencies for each potential barrier for each response choice—"not a barrier," "minor barrier," and "major barrier."

Since one question was open-ended and asked foster youth liaisons to identify the top three actions districts should take to support foster youth, I conducted a deductive analysis of these responses using the categories identified in the LCAP analysis above: provide academic supports; coordinate services across agencies and within district staff; develop local policies and procedures; train staff on foster youth needs and policies; provide behavioral, social, and emotional support; and provide parent education and communication. I did not need to create additional categories because all of the actions suggested by liaisons on the survey were appropriately coded using the LCAP categories.

Interviews

I recorded the interviews using an iPhone and uploaded the recordings to Rev.com for transcription immediately following each session. Using the Word document transcription from Rev.com, I transferred all responses for all ten interviewees to a common Excel document. I systematically coded the data for each question, deductively identifying categories and themes that provided insight into the findings from the analysis of LCAPs and the survey, as described above. I also deductively analyzed the responses that addressed the fourth research question regarding the conditions that support or constrain decision-making. This approach allowed me to include appropriate categories as they surfaced (Merriam, 2009).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study investigated organizational decision-making in the context of a new accountability measure for California public schools regarding the educational outcomes of foster youth. Under recent legislation entitled Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), local educational agencies in California are now required to draft Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) that outline goals, activities (e.g., actions), evidence (e.g., metrics), and funding allocations to meet the educational needs of K–12 students in their districts.

For the first time, foster youth are identified as a significant subgroup of students, and they must be included in LCAPs when the population reaches 15 at the district level. Although districts are accustomed to evidence-based decision-making practices as required under federal law, foster youth present a unique set of challenges, such as the availability, quality, and use of data to inform educational decisions. In addition, foster youth require a broader set of stakeholders to inform decisions, such as social workers, foster parents, and foster youth liaisons. As such, this study included a content analysis of Los Angeles County LCAPs, a survey of Los Angeles County foster youth liaisons, and interviews with foster youth liaisons in order to answer the following questions:

1. How do K–12 districts support the educational success of foster youth?
    a. What is the nature of the activities targeted for foster youth in 2014 Local Control Accountability Plans of districts in Los Angeles County?
    b. To what extent do these activities align with practitioner knowledge of foster youth liaisons serving in these districts?

2. What evidence do K–12 district leaders use to guide decision-making for foster youth?
    a. What is the nature of evidence used to evaluate the effectiveness of foster youth activities?
    b. To what extent is this evidence currently available?
    c. How similar or dissimilar is this evidence compared to the evidence used for other subgroups of students?
3. How do K–12 district leaders value this evidence?
    a. According to foster youth liaisons, what evidence is especially important for guiding decision-making about programs and services for foster youth?
    b. What is the perception of foster youth liaisons regarding the quality of foster youth data?
4. What are the organizational conditions that influence data-informed decision-making regarding foster youth in K–12 districts?
    a. Which conditions constrain evidence-based decision-making?
    b. Which conditions support evidence-based decision-making?

This chapter begins with a review of the LCAP template and its alignment to a relevant logic model. It is important to clarify the components of the LCAP since it served as the primary data source for the first stage of data collection. Moreover, the contents of districts' completed LCAPs shaped the revisions of the survey items and interview protocol. Following this review, I summarize the findings from the survey administered to a sample of foster youth liaisons. Where relevant, I draw on the interview data to help explain the survey findings and provide

insight into the research question examining conditions that support or constrain evidence-based decision-making for foster youth.

Local Control Accountability Plans

Overview of LCAP Template

The template for the Local Control Accountability Plan contains three sections. Section 1, "Stakeholder Engagement," requires each district or local educational agency (LEA) to describe its process to engage parents, students, and community stakeholders in the development of the LCAP. In Section 2, "Goals and Progress Indicators," the LEA identifies its annual goals, along with the metrics it will use to measure progress. According to the template, "the metrics may be quantitative or qualitative, although LEAs must, at minimum, use the specific metrics that statute explicitly references as required elements for measuring progress within a particular state priority area." Goals included in this section must, taken together, address all of the eight state priority areas and "reflect outcomes for all pupils and include specific goals for school sites and specific subgroups, including pupils with disabilities, both at the LEA level and, where applicable, at the school site level." The third and final section of the LCAP, "Actions, Services, and Expenditures," requires a description of the specific actions the LEA will take to meet the goals identified in Section 2. Each action described in this section is linked to a goal identified in Section 2. In this way, the LEA indicates how each action directly supports the LCAP goals. Section 3 also includes a description of the expenditures allocated to carry out the actions.

Alignment of LCAP Components With Logic Model

To frame the components of the LCAP, I used a logic model. The model emphasizes the relationship between the different components of the LCAP and helps uncover any working assumptions regarding foster youth that are present within a district. The logic model also

frames the influence of external factors on the overall program. Just as a logic model represents the relationships between activities and outcomes of a given program, the LCAP represents the relationships between the district strategies for foster youth and their intended outcomes.

I mapped each component of the LCAP to a stage in the logic model in Figure 1 below. Resources are identified as "expenditures," activities are "actions," outcomes are described as "metrics," and impact is included as "goals" in the LCAP. Throughout my analysis, I consider the ways in which assumptions are uncovered through LCAP actions, metrics, and goals. Additionally, my analysis of the conditions that support or constrain decision-making helps explain external factors that influence the outcomes.

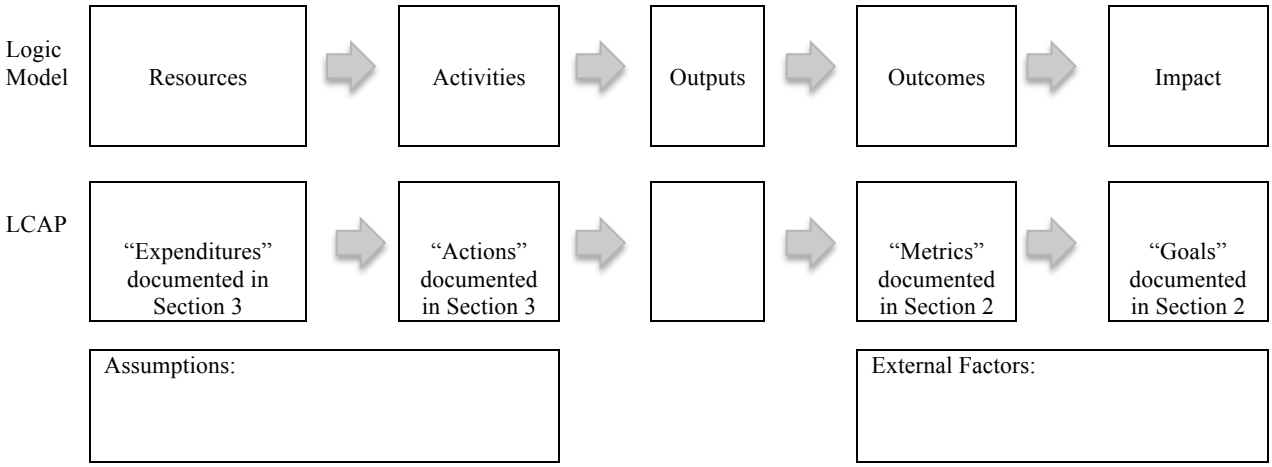


Figure 1. Alignment of logic model components to the LCAP.

Frequency of LCAP Actions that Support Foster Youth

To answer the first research question about how districts are supporting the educational success of foster youth, I analyzed the accountability plans for all 80 LEAs within Los Angeles County. I started by identifying all of the *goals* targeting foster youth, and then identified all of the *actions* targeting foster youth. As a reminder, by "actions," I refer to "activities" in the logic model. Throughout this chapter, I use "actions" to refer to this component of the logic model,

since the LCAP template uses this language. Districts used both goals and actions to articulate plans to support foster youth, but as described below, the overwhelming majority of these plans were documented in the action statements.

Foster Youth Goals

The first step of my content analysis included examining the goals of the districts in Los Angeles County. To accomplish this, I reviewed information included in three components of Section 2 of the LCAPs: (a) Description of Goal, (b) Applicable Pupil Subgroup, and (c) Identified Need and Metric. For local educational agencies in Los Angeles County (n=80), the average number of goals included in Section 2 under the column "Description of Goal" was 11.63, with a minimum of 3, maximum of 62, and mode of 5. Under "Applicable Subgroup," the template includes the following directions: "Identify applicable subgroups (as defined in EC 52052) or indicate 'all' for all pupils." Out of the total 930 goals from across Los Angeles County plans, 718 (77.2%) identified "all" as the applicable pupil subgroup.

A total of 12 goals (1.29% of the 930 goals in the county) identified "foster youth" as the only target population under the column "Applicable Pupil Subgroup." These 12 goals were associated with a total of 10 districts. There were 83 goals that targeted foster youth along with other subgroups (8.92% of 930); this includes any goal that identified foster youth along with one or more subgroups under EC 52052.

An analysis of Section 2 goals alone does not fully represent the ways in which districts articulated support for target pupil subgroups, however. For this reason, I also conducted an analysis of the actions in Section 3 and their associated goals from Section 2. In this way, I was able to more accurately identify the steps that districts articulated to support the educational success of foster youth.

Foster Youth Actions

The next step in the content analysis of accountability plans sought to understand the nature of foster youth actions. School districts used Section 3 to describe the specific actions they would take to meet the goals identified in Section 2. Within Section 3, there are two parts: Part A describes actions that "are to be performed to meet the goals described in Section 2 for ALL pupils and the goals specifically for subgroups of pupils identified in Education Code 52052 but not listed in Table 3B below (e.g., Ethnic subgroups and pupils with disabilities)." Part B of Section 3, the focus of my analysis, requires districts to identify "additional annual actions" that are

> …above what is provided for all pupils that will service low-income, English learner, and/or foster youth pupils as defined in Education Code section 42238.01 and pupils redesignated as fluent English-proficient. The identified actions must include, but are not limited to, those actions that are to be performed to meet the targeted goals described in Section 2 for low-income pupils, English learners, foster youth and/or pupils redesignated as fluent English proficient (e.g., not listed in Table 3A above).

In my analysis, I used two column headings from LCAP Section 3B to identify foster youth actions and the associated goal (i.e., "Actions and Services" and "Goals"). The instructions included under the column heading "Goals" read, "Include and identify all goals from Section 2." Using this information, I was able to identify the goals in Section 2 that connected to actions for foster youth.

Section 3B of Los Angeles County LCAPs (n=80) included a total of 149 actions that targeted foster youth alone, with a mean of 1.675, minimum of 0, and maximum of 15. A total of 33 districts did not include actions specifically targeted to foster youth. Twenty-three districts

included one action targeted for foster youth alone, and the remaining 24 districts identified between two and 15 actions each. Figure 2 displays the percentage of Los Angeles County districts associated with each number of foster youth actions included in Section 3B.

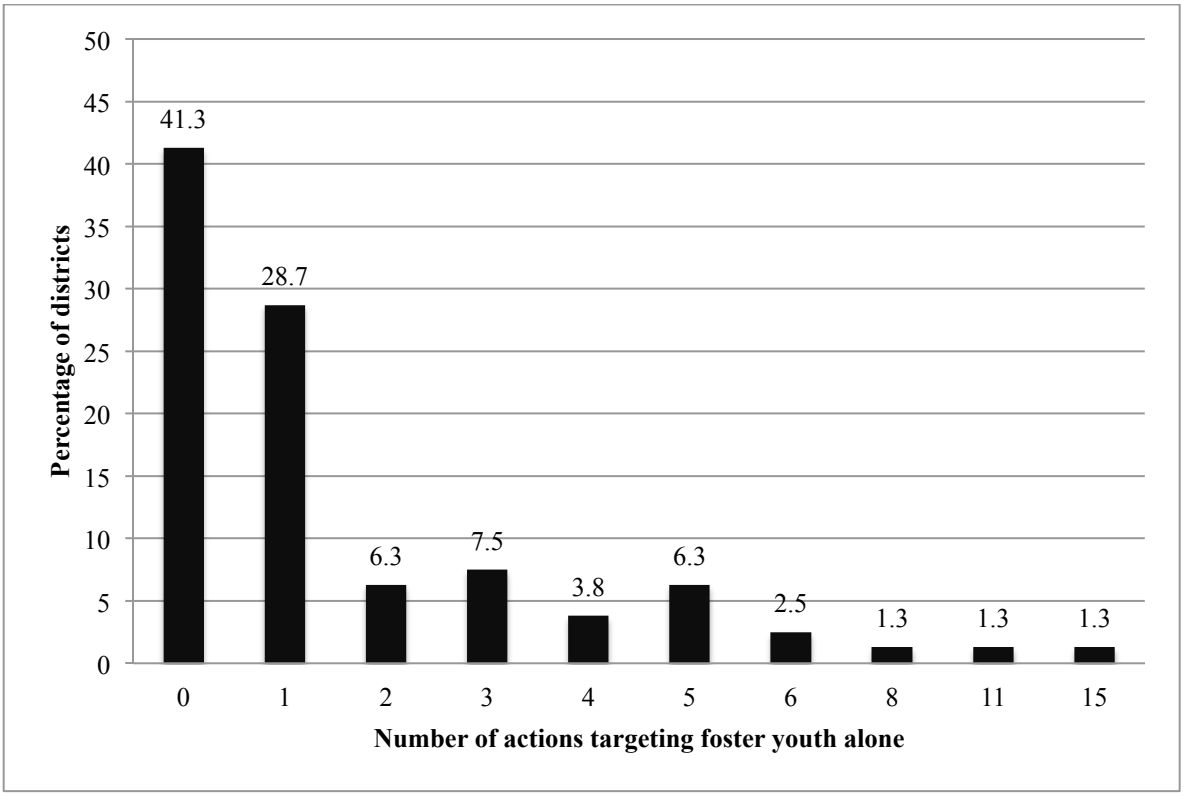
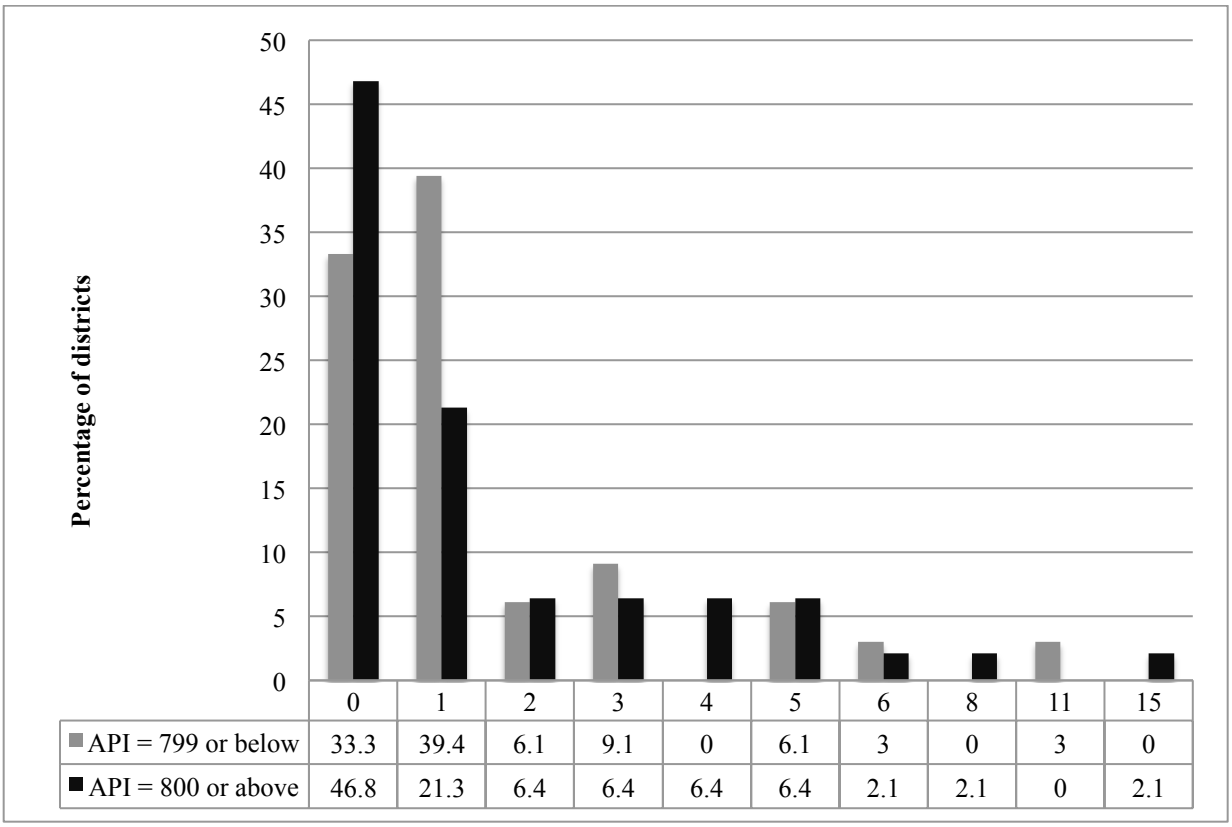


Figure 2. Percentage of Los Angeles County districts associated with the number of actions targeting foster youth alone on 2014 Local Control Accountability Plans (n=80).

Academic Performance of Districts and Actions for Foster Youth

It is also important to understand the extent to which low-performing versus high-performing districts have articulated support for foster youth in their accountability plans. Specifically, given the reality that foster youth are more likely to be placed in the lowest-performing schools and least likely to be placed in the highest-performing schools (West Ed, 2014), I wanted to understand whether academic performance affected the frequency of foster youth goals and actions.

The Academic Performance Index (API) is currently being revised, but until 2013 this index served as the state-level accountability measure that assigned a score based on state standardized tests in English-language arts, mathematics, history and social science, and science. The state identified 800 as the target for all districts. Thus, to understand this issue, I drew from the most recent report of API scores (from 2013), and sorted the districts into two categories: high performing, which included districts with API scores of 800 or higher, and low-performing, which included districts with API scores of 799 or below. When viewed in terms of academic performance, the rate of high-performing districts that did not include foster youth actions increased to 46.8%, while the rate of low-performing districts that did not include foster youth actions decreased to 33.3% (Figure 3).



	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	11	15
API = 799 or below	33.3	39.4	6.1	9.1	0	6.1	3	0	3	0
API = 800 or above	46.8	21.3	6.4	6.4	6.4	6.4	2.1	2.1	0	2.1

Figure 3. Percentage of Los Angeles County districts associated with the number of actions targeting foster youth alone on 2014 Local Control Accountability Plans. Figure compares high-performing districts (2013 API = 800 or above; n=47) to low-performing districts (2013 API = 799 or below; n=33).

Districts Without Foster Youth Enrolled

One factor that may influence the number of foster youth actions included in a district LCAP is the enrollment of foster youth. If a district has fewer than 15 students, the threshold for accountability status under LCFF, it may not deem necessary the allocation of resources towards educational services for foster youth. Indeed, in my review of LCAP plans, I found explicit justification for lack of foster youth goals and actions on the basis of not having currently enrolled foster youth.

To understand the extent to which this impacts the number of foster youth actions, I used the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) Report 5.6, "Foster Youth Enrolled," from the Los Angeles County CALPADS database (extracted on April 10,

2015). This report uses data from California Child Protective Services and the California Department of Education to identify current foster youth enrollment in each district. Based on this report, 19 districts in Los Angeles County had fewer than 15 foster youth enrolled. Among the remaining 61 districts that had more than 15 foster youth enrolled, 31.1%, or 19 districts, included no actions for foster youth.

Uncovering Assumptions about Foster Youth

Many actions in Section 3B were targeted towards multiple subgroups of students. While the analysis above focused on actions identified for foster youth alone, I also identified actions that were targeted towards foster youth together with additional subgroups, such as low-income students, English learners, and redesignated fluent English proficient students. When considering this broader set of target students, the number of actions increased—from 149 targeted to foster youth alone, to 766 targeted to foster youth plus other subgroups. Of these 766 actions, 71 addressed the needs of low-income and foster youth. Figure 4 below describes the distribution of actions addressed towards foster youth, comparing those that targeted foster youth alone with those actions that included other subgroups in the target population.

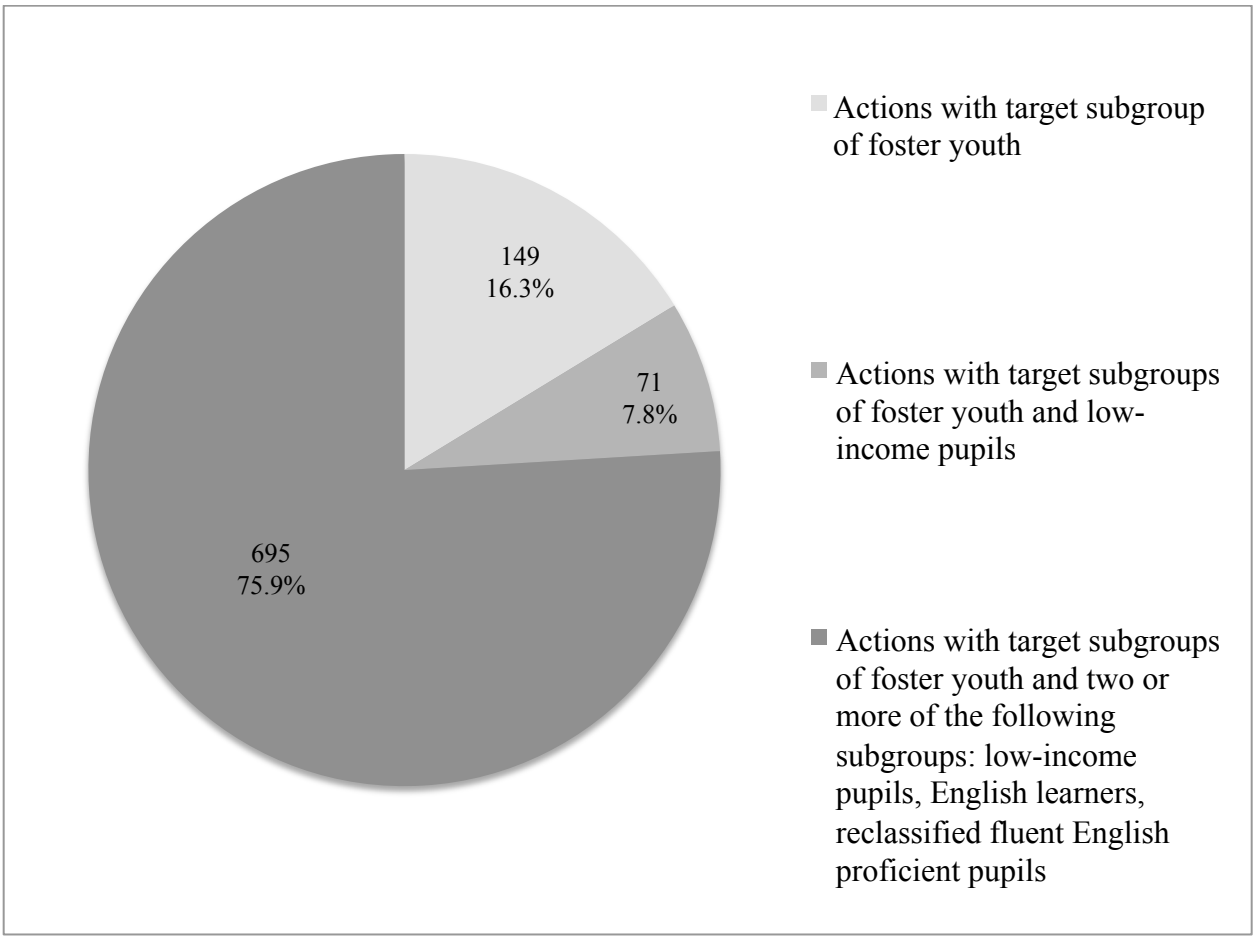


Figure 4. Subgroups included in all 2014 Los Angeles County LCAP actions targeting foster youth (n=915).

Taken together, 84% of all foster youth actions were concurrently targeted towards other subgroups, such as English learners, low-income students, and reclassified English proficient pupils. This finding uncovers the assumption among writers of LCAPs that foster youth have the same needs as other subgroups of students. With only 16% of actions targeted to foster youth alone, it appears that the assumption in the majority of districts is that foster youth do not need distinct actions for a unique set of problems.

During the interview phase of the study, when asked about the high proportion of foster youth actions lumped together with actions for other student subgroups, foster liaisons cited the possibility of low foster enrollment. As one noted, "maybe in some cases it's because many of

those groups overlap. Let's face it, a lot of the foster youth that we have that are Hispanic are probably also [English learners]." Another liaison identified a lack of knowledge as the reason for undifferentiated actions:

> They get lumped together because, in part, we don't have data to spell out in the way that I do for English learners right now. I can very easily say, "Here's a group of long term English learners, so we need to develop an intervention program that's specific to language to support them." You asked me foster youth, and part of it is lack of training for me. Part of it is I don't even know what that would look like. What kind of different services would I need, and is it okay to just say, "Well, if they're struggling with language arts or math, then they're within the same intervention programs as all other students." I think that's why they get lumped, and if there were something that was unique about the foster youth component of their life that would change what we were doing, that's where I would be like, "Just tell me and we can do it." But barring training, I would have no idea what that looks like.

Another potential reason is the primary focus on improving academic achievement. This is important and necessary for all students, regardless of accountability designation, and it is another example of the lack of understanding of the distinct needs of foster youth:

> But you lump them together because then Ed. Services [says], "Oh, we need foster youth to achieve, so that's in Ed. Services." Well it's not Ed. Services. It should be student services or the counseling; it should be in that area. The child welfare and attendance, that's what gets them into the class to take advantage of it. I think that's what it comes down to. They don't understand the real issue behind why these kids are not succeeding.

Building on the idea that foster youth cannot be treated the same as all other subgroups, one liaison emphasized the complexity within the classification of foster youth itself:

> You can't really lump them all into one group, they're very different, especially now that you're dealing with students that are in placement from probation and kids that are in placement from DCSF. And even those, the reason why they end up here, when you talk to them, it can be very different. They might have been pulled out of the home because they were incorrigible, but they might have been pulled out of the home because they experienced trauma at the hands of someone in the home. So how are you going to interact with those students the same when their backgrounds are very different? Some are far more trauma-exposed than others.

Revised Analysis of Goals Associated with Foster Youth

As a reminder, my initial analysis of goals in Section 2 of LCAPs found that 12 (1.29%) of the total 930 goals in Los Angeles County were targeted solely towards foster youth. However, after analyzing the actions in Section 3B and identifying their corresponding goals in Section 2, the number of goals targeted towards foster youth increased, as indicated in Table 6 below.

Table 6

Goals Targeting Foster Youth Based on LCAP Section 2 and Section 3B

Parameter of goals	Percentage of goals aligned to foster youth when considering only LCAP Section 2	Percentage of goals aligned to foster youth when considering action statements in LCAP Section 3B
Targeting foster youth	1.29% (12/930)	17.09% (159/930)
Targeting foster youth along with other accountability subgroups	8.92% (83/930)	33.01% (307/930)

Using this approach, the percentage of goals that target foster youth alone increased to 17.09%, and to 33.01% for goals that target foster youth along with other subgroups. By including the action statements in Section 3B, we gain a more comprehensive picture of how districts have articulated their approaches to supporting foster youth.

Alignment of LCAP Actions to Foster Youth Liaisons' Practitioner Knowledge

The next step in data analysis explored the extent to which LCAP actions targeted to foster youth aligned with practitioner knowledge. As described above, 149 actions in 2014 LCAPs from Los Angeles County targeted foster youth alone. A total of 47 out of 80 districts included foster youth actions in Section 3B.

To determine the extent to which these targeted actions aligned with practitioner knowledge in the field, I first conducted an inductive analysis of the foster youth actions from LCAP Section 3B (n=149). This analysis yielded eight coding categories: establish data monitoring system; develop local policies and procedures; coordinate services across agencies and within district staff; provide appropriate support staff; provide academic supports; provide behavioral, social, and emotional supports; train staff on foster youth needs and policies; and provide parent education and communication.

I used these eight coding categories to conduct a deductive analysis of foster youth liaison responses (n=25) to the survey item, "In your opinion, what are the three most important actions that districts and/or schools should take to support the educational success of foster youth?" Following this sequence allowed me to conduct a meaningful comparison of the two data sets to determine the extent to which their foci differed. Table 7 below describes the eight categories along with examples from Section 3B and survey responses that exemplify the coding rules.

Table 7

Categories of Foster Youth Actions and Related Survey Responses from Foster Youth Liaisons

Category	**Actions (plain text) and survey responses (italics) that exemplify the approach to coding the category**
Establish data monitoring system	Monitor attendance Track foster youth LCAP metrics Establish baseline data on foster youth Implement tracking infrastructure *Monitor foster youth student cases* *Monitor academic progress*
Develop local policies and procedures	Establish foster youth policy that allows for accurate identification Develop MOUs regarding foster youth transfers Ensure educational rights are met, including AB 167 (early graduation) *Award partial credits* *Accurately identify foster youth*
Coordinate services across agencies and within district staff	Strengthen the coordination with social agencies to determine who has educational rights Regularly communicate and collaborate with foster youth's teachers, county child welfare agency social worker, Educational Rights Holder and caregiver, court appointed special advocate, and other entities providing care, support, or services to the foster youth *Make sure school sites and teachers are actively involved in supporting the needs of foster youth* *Regular communication with foster youth, case manager, ed rights holder, etc.*
Provide appropriate support staff	Hire foster youth counselors Ensure foster youth liaisons have sufficient time and resources Hire education specialists Hire social workers Hire psychiatrists *Hire designated Foster Youth Program Administrators that will focus on monitoring student cases and assisting as well as training guidance counselors, admin, and other staff on addressing FY issues in the school system* *Designate funding for personnel to support foster youth* *Increase staffing for foster youth*
Provide academic supports	Provide additional academic support Additional tutoring services and library resources Response to intervention and instruction programs will be implemented at

	every school Develop Individual Learning Plans for each student Provide intervention programs and materials *Academic planning teams* *Monitor academic progress and provide appropriate support*
Provide behavioral, social, and emotional supports	Counselors will monitor the social/emotional needs of foster youth Foster youth liaison will collaborate with sites to assist in monitoring and support of foster youths' behavioral and/or social-emotional needs to decrease suspension and expulsion rates *Connect foster youth with counselors who have specialized training in trauma-informed practice* *Social/emotional support and/or resources* Social/emotional and/or behavior intervention *Provide resources to support foster youth to ensure they have a strong school connection*
Train staff on foster youth needs and policies	Education for appropriate staff regarding current laws involving foster youth Ongoing training for counselor, school office managers, registrars, administrators, and teachers on addressing the issues and needs of foster youth Ensure that all appropriate staff members receive training regarding the enrollment, placement, and rights of foster youth *Training clerical staff and community liaisons* *Training guidance counselors, admin, and other staff on addressing foster youth issues in the school system* *Working with staff to understand the dynamics of the foster care population* *The need for staff to understand foster youth laws and how it applies to their districts*
Provide parent education and communication	Bring guest speakers and facilitators on parent education nights to address parents of foster youth on a variety of topics that will help them help their children do their best in school Improve home to school communication Provide parents/foster parents with educational/community services and resources that support student success District/school personnel will provide outreach services to parents of foster youth to ensure involvement in and success with school *Working with foster care parents on their role and their importance in the success of their foster child*

Next, to understand any difference in focus between foster youth liaisons and accountability plans, I identified the frequency of actions in the Local Control Accountability

Plans (n=47) and the survey responses of the foster youth liaisons (n=25). Table 8 displays the results in two columns. The left ranks the foster youth action category from most frequent to least frequent based on the LCAP analysis. The right column displays the rank order of categories based on survey responses from foster youth liaisons.

Table 8

Frequency of Foster Youth-Specific Actions on LCAPs versus Suggested by Foster Youth Liaisons

Local Control Accountability Plans		**Foster Youth Liaison Survey Responses**	
Actions Ranked by Frequency	**Number of Districts (n=47)**	**Actions Ranked by Frequency**	**Number of Liaisons (n=25)**
Provide appropriate support staff	21 (44.7%)	Develop local policies and procedures	13 (52.0%)
Establish data monitoring system	20 (42.6%)	Coordinate services across agencies and within district staff	10 (40.0%)
Provide academic supports	15 (31.9%)	Establish data monitoring system	9 (36.0%)
Coordinate services across agencies and within district staff	13 (27.7%)	Provide behavioral, social, and emotional supports	9 (36.0%)
Develop local policies and procedures	11 (23.4%)	Train staff on foster youth needs and policies	7 (28.0%)
Train staff on foster youth needs and policies	10 (21.3%)	Provide appropriate support staff	5 (25.0%)
Provide behavioral, social, and emotional supports	10 (21.3%)	Provide academic supports	3 (12.0%)

Provide parent education and communication	8 (17.0%)	Provide parent education and communication	1 (4.0%)

Note. Survey responses are from question, "In your opinion, what are the three most important actions that districts and/or schools should take to support the educational success of foster youth?"

Both groups identified the need to establish an effective data monitoring system as a top priority. This was the second highest ranked action on LCAPs, and the third highest ranked among foster youth liaisons. From there, the foci of the two samples diverged. On the one hand, LCAPs demonstrated a priority on hiring appropriate staff for foster youth (ranked second) and providing academic supports (ranked third). This is in contrast to the remaining top priorities of foster youth liaisons: develop local policies and procedures (ranked first); coordinate services across agencies and within district staff (ranked second); and provide behavioral, social, and emotional supports, which tied with improving data monitoring systems in the third ranked spot.

When the interviewees considered this difference in focus, a common rationale was that the ultimate goal of educational systems is to ensure that all students are learning. They argued that the role of the school district is to "focus on academics" and "close the achievement gap for all kids, regardless of what circumstances they're in outside." Another liaison pointed to the different perspectives of field practitioners and the staff who wrote the LCAP:

> I think everybody could see a test score and say, "Oh you know, you're failing or you're achieving," based on an arbitrary number that determines success or lack of it. You could point at that, you could measure that. We know, we in the trenches, we know that the reason this [foster] child cannot achieve is because the social/emotional is not being addressed. What good is it that you have the greatest teacher in the school and you have

> the greatest measurement of achievement, but the kid is not in school because he's having a melt down and couldn't make it? We know that that needs to be addressed before the testing can be reliable.

For this liaison, the relatively higher emphasis on coordination of services and social/emotional support reflects real-world experience with foster students. The liaisons recognized the end-goal of academic achievement, though they saw a different path than was articulated in most accountability plans. In addition to providing academic supports, liaisons recognized the need to uncover and address the root causes of low educational outcomes for foster youth, namely high mobility and social-emotional supports.

The discrepancy between the focus of LCAPs and foster youth liaison perceptions can be explained, at least in part, by the extent to which liaisons participated in writing the LCAPs. As Table 9 demonstrates, less than one third of liaisons who responded to this survey item had served on their district's LCAP writing team. Many of the remaining liaisons contributed information through surveys, meetings, or informal communication with district staff, but 14.29% had no involvement in the writing of the LCAP.

Table 9

Frequency of Foster Youth Liaison Participation in Development of LCAPs

Nature of participation	**Percentage (n=35)**
Served on the district team that wrote the LCAP plan	31.4% (11)
Participated in LCAP community meetings	25.7% (9)
Completed an LCAP survey	14.3% (5)
Provided information to the writing team	14.3% (5)
Did not participate in LCAP development	14.3% (5)

Note. Findings based on survey question, "What was your involvement in the writing of your district LCAP (Local Control Accountability Plan)?"

Importance on Identification of Foster Youth

The most frequently mentioned actions among foster youth liaisons fell under the category of "Develop local policies and procedures" (13 out of 25, or 52.0%). The same category of actions ranked fifth among LCAPs that included foster youth liaisons (11 of 47, or 23.4%). While the actions for this category described on LCAPs were largely broad statements about establishing foster youth policies, this category of actions among foster youth liaisons focused almost exclusively on the procedure of accurately identifying foster youth. Table 10 describes the qualitative difference between the actions described under this category.

Table 10

Foster Youth Liaison Emphasis on Identification in Analysis Category of "Develop Local Policies and Procedures"

Actions listed	Foster Youth Liaisons (n=13)	LCAPs (n=12)
Identify foster youth	10 (76.9%)	1 (8.3%)
Transfer grades and partial credits	3 (23.1%)	4 (33.3%)
Establish local policies	0 (0.0%)	10 (83.3%)
Enroll and place properly	0 (0.0%)	3 (25.0%)

Note. Findings based on open-response survey item, "In your opinion, what are the three most important actions that districts and or schools should take to support the educational success of foster youth?"

During the interviews, liaisons provided reasons for such a high number of survey responses specifically naming identification as a priority. Given the recent revision to state accountability regarding foster students, they felt an urgency to make sure foster students were appropriately and efficiently identified. The new weekly foster enrollment reports in the state database (CALPADS) provide weekly foster enrollment reports based on DCFS data, and these were a welcome change for liaisons over previous years. Yet, at the time of interviews, CALPADS was not including students on probation, and there was a significant delay in syncing with DCFS data. As one liaison described, "There's so many problems with [DCFS] as well, because they don't update it as often we wish to. They do it once a month, and hopefully the social workers have enough time to update it. That contributes to a little bit of the delay of the data. But always, [DCFS] has higher number than the CALPADS number."

As such, the identification process continues to be dependent upon collaboration with outside agencies, such as social workers and probation officers—a relationship that many

described as improved over last year: "We're trying to work more closely together. I think this has to do a lot with the LCAP and everything going on with data collection." Nevertheless, liaisons often described a situation in which the collaboration with outside agencies remained a barrier to identification:

> You try to get in touch with a social worker, social worker's not calling you back. They know that we're doing LCAP and they know that the schools are trying to do a better job of connecting with DCFS, but the ability for DCFS to actually respond back and make sure things are happening isn't happening. There's still a disconnect between that. If all these policies are being put into place and we're being told we have to do these things, then we better have a really good infrastructure to make sure that they're happening….There's a supervisor, but the supervisors oversee a ton of social workers. We could call the supervising social worker, but she's not going to necessarily have information about the case.

LCAP Foster Youth Evidence Used to Guide Decision-making

To answer the second research question—regarding the nature of evidence used to guide decision-making for foster youth—I identified metrics associated with each LCAP foster youth action. I wanted to understand how districts were measuring progress on their foster youth actions. While the 2014 LCAP template provided a straightforward way to identify foster youth actions in Section 3B, the metrics were not included in the same section. Instead, to find the associated metrics, I had to return to Section 2.

The following example from a 2014 LCAP helps illustrate the process I used to identify the metrics associated with each foster youth action. One district identified the following action in Section 3B: "Foster Youth Liaison will collaborate with sites to assist in monitoring and

support of foster youths' behavioral and/or social-emotional needs to decrease suspension and expulsion rates." Next to this action, the district identified the following corresponding goal: "School Climate: All students, Pre-K through 12, including low income, English Learners, and foster youth, will be provided with safe, positive learning environments that result in decreased student suspension and expulsion rates, increased school safety rates, and a greater sense of school connectedness for all staff, students, parents, and community."

There were no metrics included in Section 3B for actions. Therefore, to understand how districts were measuring outcomes, I returned to Section 2 and located this goal along with the following associated metrics:

> Progress toward achieving the goal will be measured by: Student suspension data by district, school, month, year, multi-year, gender and ethnicity. Student behavior referral data by school site, type of problem behavior, incident location, day, month, year, multi-year. District and school site Behavioral Response to Intervention (RtI) data, including universal screening and Tier 2 intervention data. Healthy Kids Survey data for students in grades 5, 7 and 9.

This example accurately represents the wide array of metrics assigned to one LCAP goal. Indeed, from district to district, there was not a consistent way to measure the same action, apart from drawing from the same bank of data sources. I repeated this process for all 149 actions in Section 3B that targeted foster youth alone. I limited my analysis to these actions so that I could understand how districts were measuring their progress on foster youth alone.

Once I identified all of the metrics associated with each foster youth action, I conducted a deductive analysis of the metrics using the following coding categories identified in LCFF (Bonilla, 2012) as the eight state priorities: student achievement, student engagement, other

student outcomes, school climate, parental involvement, implementation of Common Core State Standards, and course access. The state has identified required data under each of these eight categories, and this served as the codebook and guided my placement of each metric into the categories. In some cases, the metrics for foster youth did not fit into these eight categories, so I created the following additional categories: caseloads, schedules, referral counts of foster youth counselors and psychologists; mental and dental health care rate of foster youth; individualized learning plans for foster youth; number of days before transferring foster youth is enrolled, placed, and awarded credits; accurate counts of foster youth; transfer rate of foster youth. Table 11 provides an overview of my analysis of foster youth metrics. Specifically, it displays the frequency of metrics associated with each category of foster youth action.

Table 11

Metrics Used to Measure Foster Youth Actions on 2014 LCAP Plans in Los Angeles County

Foster youth action coding categories		*Metrics aligned to required data under eight state priorities*								*Metrics aligned to unique foster youth categories*					
	Total actions addressing foster youth coded in this category	No metric provided	Student achievement	Student engagement	Other student outcomes	School climate	Parental involvement	Basic services	Implementation of CCSS	Course access	Caseloads, schedules, referral counts of foster youth counselors and/or psychologists	Mental and dental health care rate of foster youth	Individualized Learning Plans for foster youth	Number of days before transferring foster youth is enrolled, placed, and awarded credits	Accurate counts of foster youth	Transfer rate of foster youth
Coordinate services across agencies and within district staff	15	2	4	6	4	6	5	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Develop local policies and procedures	16	2	8	4	3	2	1	2	4	2	0	0	0	1	3	0
Establish data monitoring systems	29	5	12	7	9	6	1	2	3	5	2	0	1	1	1	0
Provide academic supports	31	5	15	5	13	1	1	6	4	10	0	1	2	0	0	0
Provide appropriate support staff	26	2	12	6	5	6	3	1	1	3	2	0	0	2	1	1
Provide behavioral, social, and emotional supports	13	1	6	5	2	6	1	1	2	0	3	1	1	0	1	0
Provide parent education and communication	10	4	2	2	1	1	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Train staff on foster youth needs and policies	26	4	4	2	2	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	149	23	63	37	39	30	15	14	18	21	9	2	4	4	6	1

Note: Metric frequency reflects a duplicated count based on action/metric associations specified in LCAP Section 2. Each action may be associated with more than one metric.

Misalignment of Metrics to Foster Youth Actions

The assumption that foster youth are similar to other subgroups is further reflected in the metrics used to measure their outcomes. Specifically, and similar to the finding that foster youth actions are largely lumped together with actions for other subgroups, the metrics used to monitor progress are largely the same metrics used for all students.

In my analysis, the majority of foster youth actions were being monitored by student achievement metrics (n=69), such as performance on state tests, the Academic Performance Index, the Early Assessment Program, and results of Advanced Placement exams. The second category of metrics most frequently used to monitor foster youth actions was "other student outcomes" (n=39), which includes local assessments, such as quarterly benchmark assessments in core content classes. Student engagement data also ranked high as a metric used to measure foster youth actions. This data set included attendance rates, graduation rates, and dropout rates.

There were minimal additional metric categories that aligned explicitly to the foster youth actions. Indeed, the most frequently used metric in these additional categories included only nine instances and measured "caseloads, schedules, referral counts of foster youth counselors and psychologists." Considered in the context of all of the metric categories, nine instances ranks below all of the eight metric categories outlined by the state, underscoring the reality that most of the metrics used for foster youth actions were the same metrics used for all students.

One factor driving the focus on metrics for all students is the nature of the 2014 LCAP template, which guided districts to articulate metrics associated with broad goals. The goals written in Section 2 were largely written to address *all students*, with only some districts including foster youth goals. The fact that districts used the state required data for the majority of foster youth actions makes sense. For one, this is the guidance provided by the state and the

framework used by county offices of education as they guided LEAs through the writing process. Additionally, while the data were intended to be used to measure overall student performance within a district, they would also be disaggregated by subgroup.

As a result, important data for foster youth—such as suspension rates, attendance rates, and state tests—are reported for foster youth overall and in comparison to other groups. For example, on the state math test, districts might review results at many levels, including overall student population by district and school, English learners by district and school, low-income students by district and school, and foster youth by district and school. Indeed, districts are accustomed to carrying out this kind of analysis under No Child Left Behind (2001), which mandated the reporting of student performance by subgroup. The focus on using these data is in line with past practice and supports the goal of understanding the performance of foster youth compared to the general student population. But, as one liaison described, these data do not fully provide practitioners with the information they need to serve foster students:

> I think we're using the wrong metric.…Test scores, that data does not paint the full picture. I think we need a battery of assessments. A battery of data. Very similar to the special education students. You have your standardized testing but you also have classroom observations. Depending on their needs….We need different things. We need much more data, and varied data, to paint a picture of the child.

What also seemed to be missing was the inclusion of metrics that could meaningfully measure outcomes on policies specific to foster youth as well as outputs associated with foster youth actions. I explain these two issues in the following sections.

Metrics needed to address key policy actions for foster youth. Many of the foster youth actions addressed the establishment of foster youth policies reflecting current legislation. This is an important action, given the recent changes in legislation regarding foster youth education; it was reflected in eight of the 47 plans that included foster youth actions. An example of the most common phrase used for this action is, "Establish policy and data infrastructure necessary to support and monitor the educational success of foster youth." This language was most likely borrowed from the sample foster youth LCAP template from The Coalition for Educational Equity for Foster Youth/The California Foster Youth Education Task Force (2014), which was a resource provided to California districts throughout the period when districts were writing the plans.

When districts intend to "establish policy" to support foster youth, these policies would ostensibly enact recent legislation addressing issues such as school mobility, partial credits, and transfers to alternative educational settings. In the sample template, the following sample metrics were also provided for districts to use: foster youth transfer rate to continuation and other alternative schools, overall foster youth school transfer rate, number of days before a transferring youth is enrolled in school and in appropriate classes, and number of days before a transferring foster youth is awarded all credits earned.

Out of the eight districts that wrote an action addressing policy changes, only two used metrics that would measure those policy changes. The first included the following metric: "Number of days before a transferring foster youth is enrolled in school and in appropriate classes; number of days before a transferring foster youth is awarded all credits earned." And the second included, "Number of days to enroll." The remaining six districts that included actions to revise policies used data from the eight state priorities.

Need for additional "output" data. As a reminder, the framework for this analysis aligned the components of the LCAP to a general logic model, with the metrics associated with foster youth actions aligning to the "outcomes" component of the model (see Figure 1). My analysis indicates that the vast majority of metrics used to guide decision-making regarding foster youth are centered around state test scores, Advanced Placement scores, local academic assessments, attendance data, graduation data, and dropout data. As described above, this is because the goals connected to foster youth actions were concurrently goals for all students.

As depicted in Figure 1 earlier in the chapter, the missing metrics are *outputs* associated with the foster youth actions that provide a granular view of implementation. Without this component in place, districts are left with comprehensive data on outcomes (i.e., LCAP metrics) without the knowledge of what produced those outcomes (i.e., outputs). In short, the data do not meaningfully relate to the foster youth actions. To be clear, some districts have been including these kinds of data to support their decision-making around foster youth. Table 12 displays some examples.

Table 12

Examples of Metrics that Align with Foster Youth Actions

Goal	Action	Metric
Provide social and emotional support for eligible students; decrease chronic absenteeism	Monitor foster students' attendance and truancy rates, and identify social-emotional resources to support students.	Caseloads for counseling programs, chronic absenteeism rate from Aeries, attendance rate from Aeries, high school graduation rate from CALPADS, truancy rates from CALPADS
Transferring foster youth will be promptly enrolled in the appropriate school and classes and transferring foster youth will be awarded credit for all work completed, including partial credits.	Establish policy around the needs of foster youths.	Number of days before a transferring foster youth is enrolled in school and in appropriate classes; number of days before a transferring foster youth is awarded all credits earned
Social, emotional, and physical needs	Continue to provide social and emotional support as needed (foster youth)	Psychologists/mental health providers schedule, number of students referred for crisis; monthly absences/truancy/discipline/suspension reports, number of students scoring in the "healthy zone" (score of 5/6 of 6) on the state physical fitness test; California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS); district survey

Yet, as demonstrated in the metric table below, most foster youth actions described in the LCAPs are tied to broad academic data outcomes that do not provide feedback on the level of implementation of the action. Table 13 displays examples of this misalignment.

Table 13

Examples of Misalignment Between Metrics and Foster Youth Actions

Goal	Action	Metric
District will provide appropriate specialized service beyond the core academic program	Ensure that every foster youth receives educational counseling	SBAC summative and interim assessments, CAHSEE, Early Assessment Program, Reclassification rate, Career Technical Education certification
Engagement: Students will feel safe and secure at school and their parents will feel welcome	Additional counselors, administrators, and community liaisons to support and monitor foster youth	Positive ratings on parent survey; Surveys conducted on a yearly basis with each year having the same or better rating than the previous year; Parents will be more engaged and positive about their interactions with schools
(District aligned the foster youth actions to 26 of their 34 goals; each of the 26 goals aligned to a metric, all of which aligned to the eight state priority required data sources)	Ensure that all appropriate staff members receive training regarding the enrollment, placement, and rights of foster youth	Percentage of grade 11 EAP math ready for college; Percentage of grade 12 students who meet LBCC criteria for college readiness in English/math; Percentage of grade 12 students who meet CSU criteria for college readiness in English/math

It is important to acknowledge that one assumption in this analysis is that districts are including all metrics in their LCAP plans. In reality, it is likely that many are collecting ongoing data—both output and outcome—that may not be articulated in their plans. As such, there may be instances where districts are collecting output data on foster youth actions that inform their evaluations.

Availability and Use of Foster Youth Data

Given the mobility of foster youth and the relatively new legislation requiring that they be monitored, it is important to understand the extent to which data systems are responding to the top-down legislation. Throughout the study I remained aware that an LCAP might not offer an accurate picture of what is actually occurring at schools sites within a district. In terms of how districts measure progress, it was important to hear the perspectives of field practitioners on the availability and use of foster youth data, especially since this student group was never tracked in existing data systems at the district and school level. Indeed, during the formation of this study, the most pressing issue for all stakeholders I spoke with pertained to the availability and use of foster youth data.

Their perspectives provided insight into whether or not the data listed in the LCAPs were actually available, and whether or not they were actually using it. I first asked them to rank data by availability, then by degree of use. I concluded this portion of the survey by asking the foster youth liaisons whether or not they believed the data sources to be important. In addition to data categories included in LCFF, I added two categories: educational research or literature highlighting best practices; and practitioner knowledge or "local knowledge" that reflects the real-world experiences of teachers and educational staff working with foster youth. These categories reflect the broader set of evidence that practitioners consult to guide decision-making.

Perceived Availability of Foster Youth Data

The following two figures display the results based on data described as "available" or "moderately available" (Figure 5) or "unavailable" (Figure 6). It is possible respondents applied varying definitions to the term "available," such as, "available to me," "available to the district," "available to the school site."

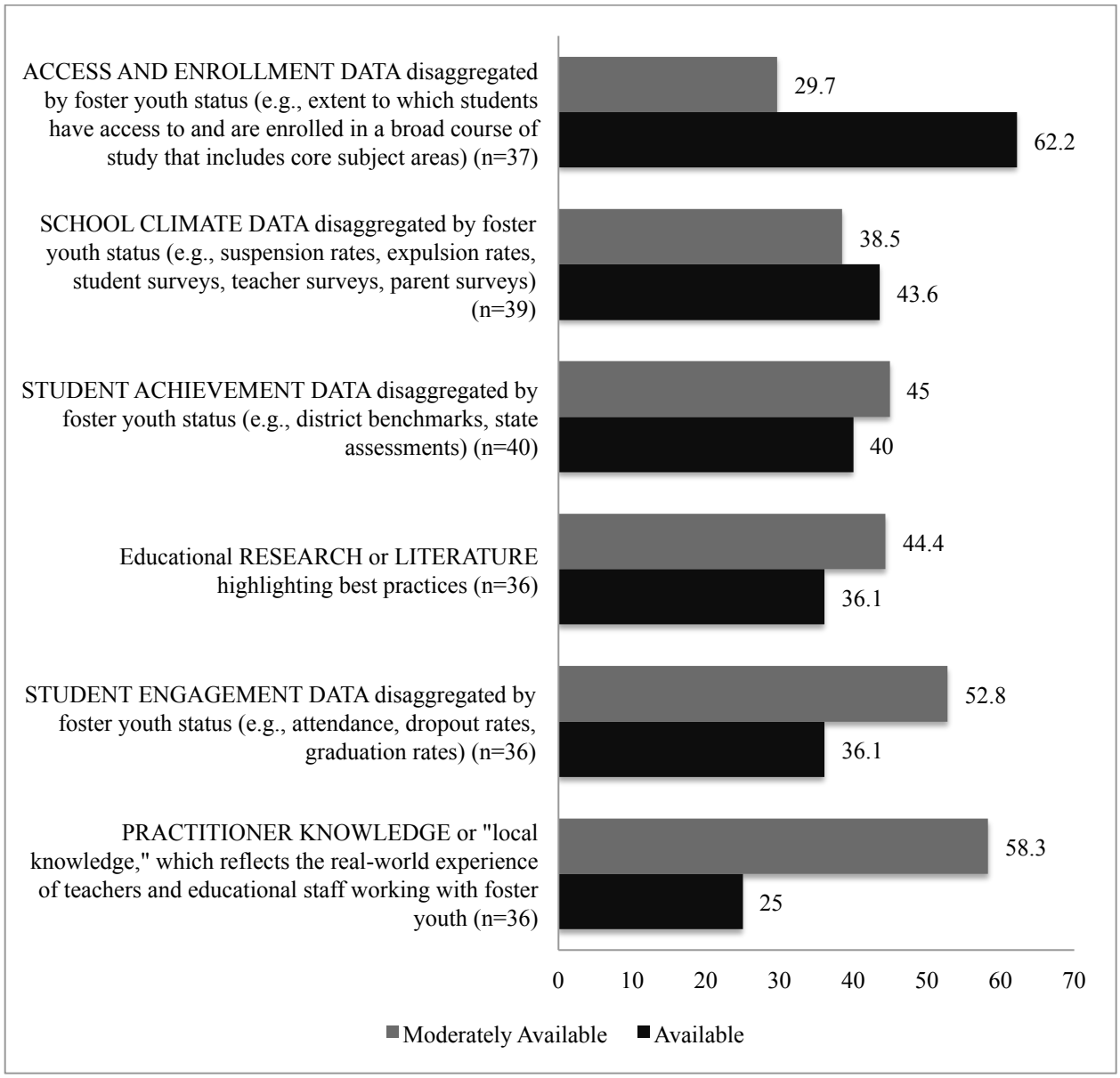


Figure 5. Percentage of foster youth liaisons indicating certain types of data are "Available" or "Moderately Available."

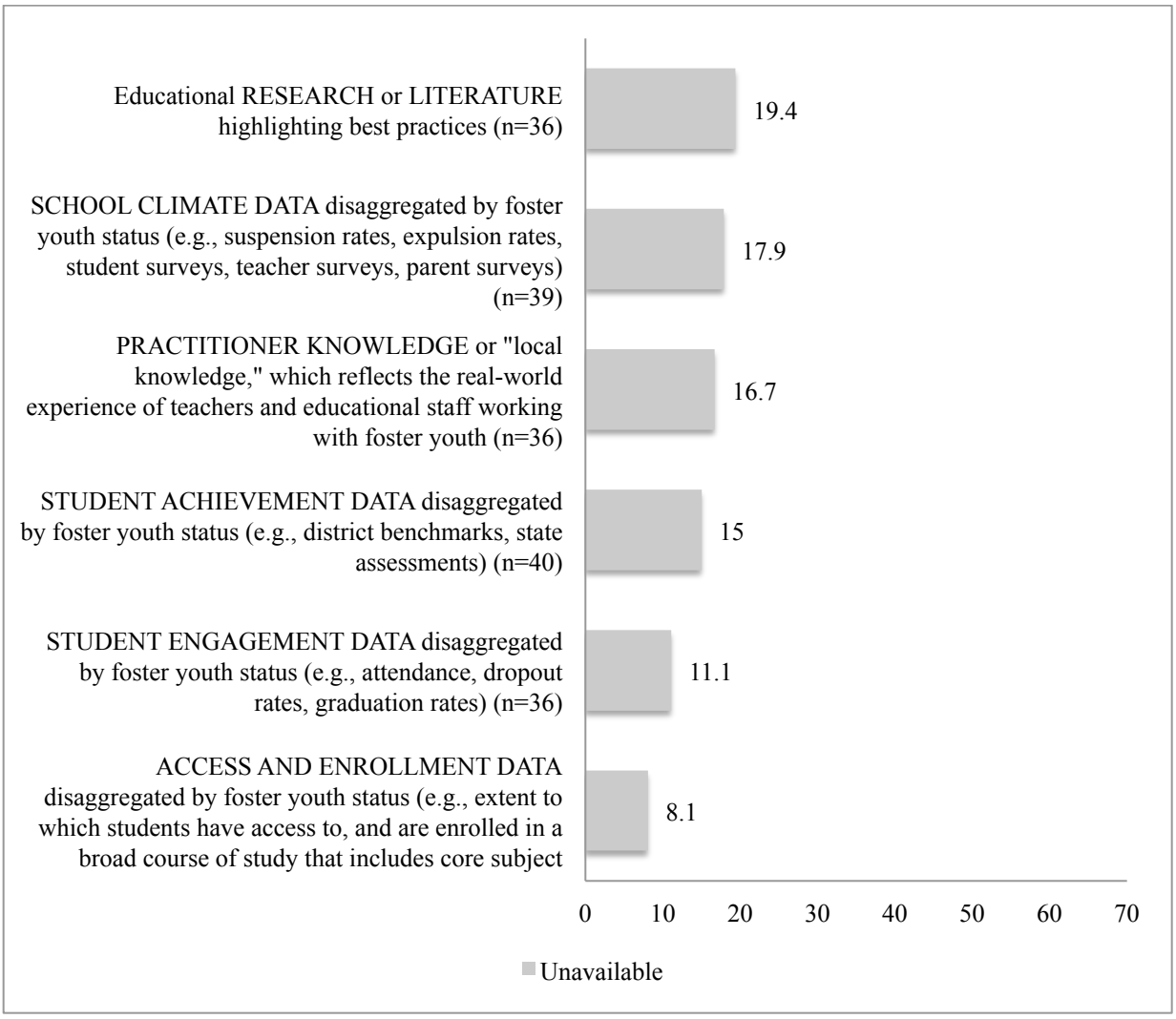


Figure 6. Percentage of foster youth liaisons reporting certain types of data are "Unavailable."

These results suggest that foster youth data are widely available at the local level. When the categories of "available" and "moderately available" are combined, no category results in fewer than 80.6% of respondents. A slightly more nuanced story emerges when these categories are disaggregated by response category, with only 25% of respondents describing practitioner knowledge as available, which supports the earlier finding that liaisons call for more robust training among stakeholders on the needs of foster youth. This category of data is ranked first (58.3%, n=36) when described as "moderately available," suggesting liaisons were not prepared

to describe practitioner knowledge as "unavailable," but not confident enough to describe it as "available."

The unusually high ranking of access and enrollment data leads me to believe the survey respondents interpreted the category as synonymous with enrollment data alone (i.e., which students are foster youth). This category, in fact, was intended to describe the extent to which foster youth are enrolled in courses that provide strong chances of graduation and college readiness. It is quite possible the liaisons interpreted it as such, but the unusually high ranking relative to the other categories, which all cluster together in availability, leaves open the possibility that it was misinterpreted.

The highest-ranking data category described as "unavailable" was "educational research and literature highlighting best practices" (19.4%, n=36). Again, this result agrees with the liaisons' recommendation to include more training on the needs of foster youth for all stakeholders. There was a strong sense in the interviews that the lack of knowledge among teachers, counselors, and site administrators about the experiences and research behind foster youth was a top priority. One liaison emphasized the need to extend the training beyond the district leadership and include teachers in the process of understanding the unique issues that foster youth face, and the potential impact on classroom behavior:

> All the educators know that it takes a student three months to adapt to a new setting. Well, what if one student has moved twice within those three months? Imagine that on top of the personal damage, emotional distress that he came or she came from. I think if they knew that and understood that and it was somehow ingrained, they would allow them the time to cool off. Kind of, "You're angry, okay, let us give you some time."

Use of Foster Youth Data

Using the same data categories, I asked liaisons to describe the level of use of data regarding foster youth. The figures below display the results based on data described as "often used to make decisions" or "sometimes used to make decisions" (Figure 7) and "not used to make decisions" (Figure 8).

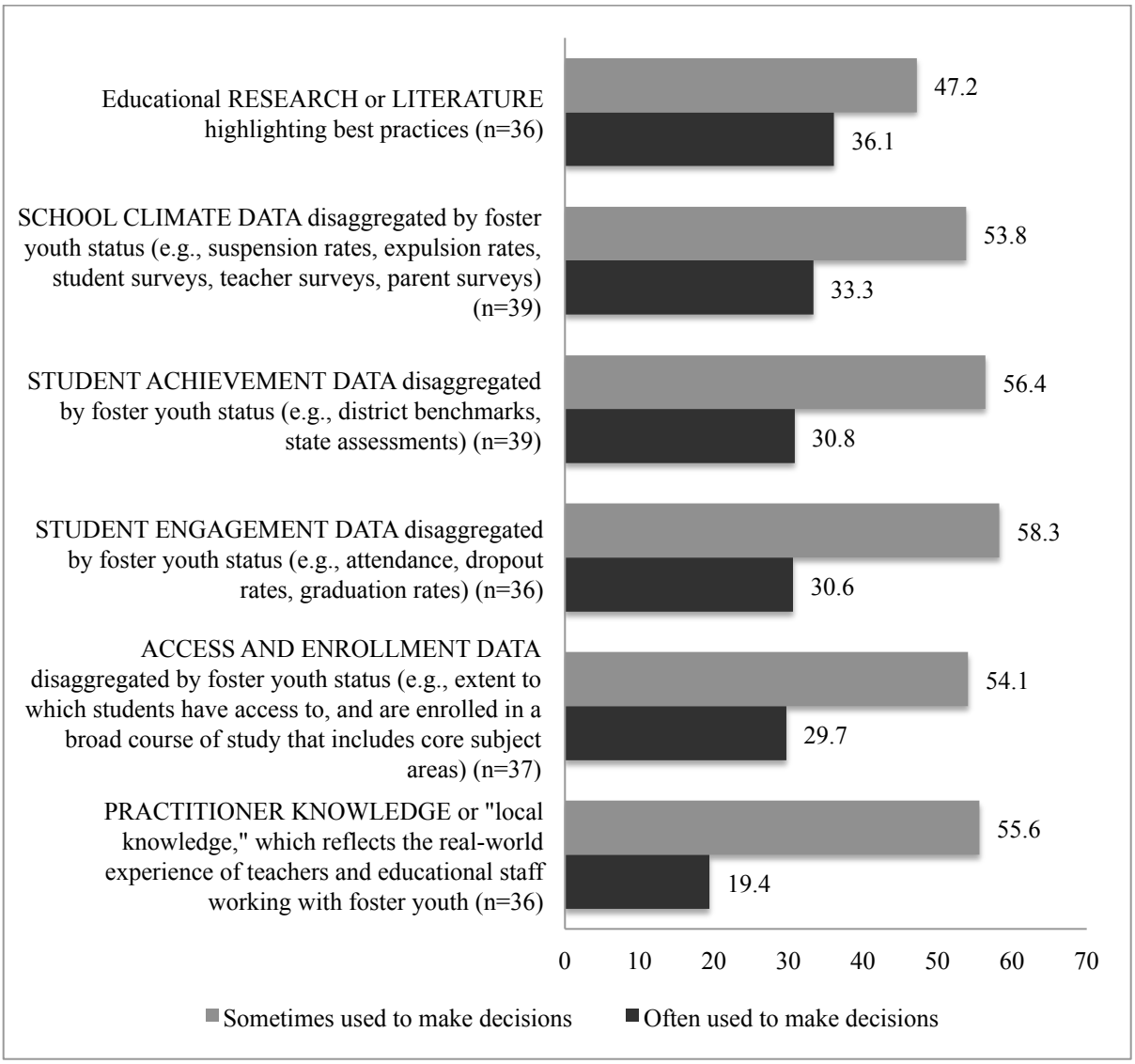


Figure 7. Percentage of foster youth liaisons reporting that certain types of data are "often used" or "sometimes used" to make decisions.

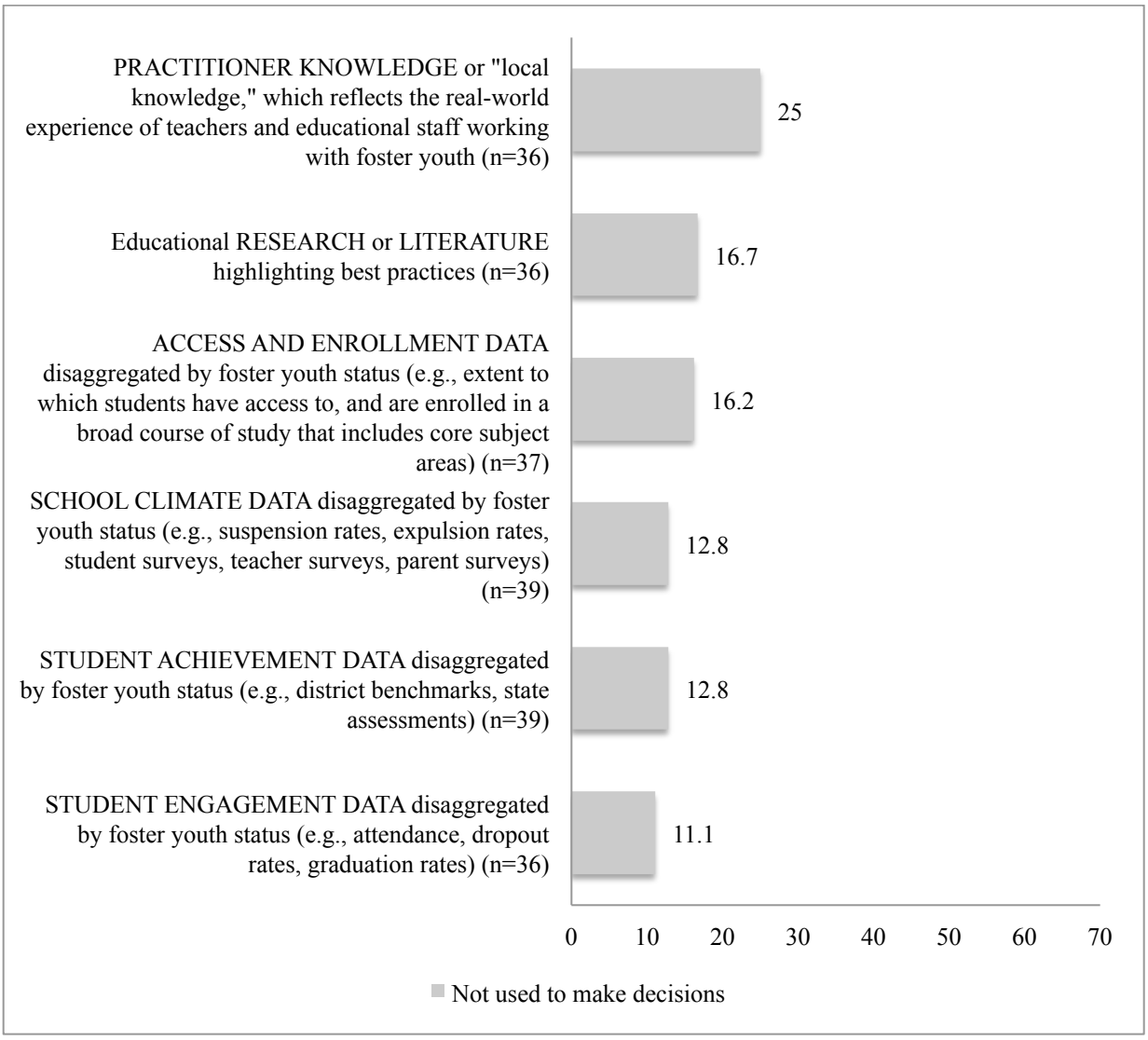


Figure 8. Percentage of foster youth liaisons reporting that certain types of data are "not used to make decisions."

Compared to relatively high levels of availability, the reported use of foster youth data was low, with the most frequent descriptor ("often used to make decisions") only reaching 36.1% (n=36). This is in contrast to liaisons' descriptions of the availability of data, with the top three percentages being 62.2%, 43.6%, and 40.0%. Data described as "sometimes used to make decisions" was higher in all categories—47.2% or above. This overall trend suggests that these types of data are available but not widely used.

The liaisons reported the category of data used most often to guide decision-making was "educational research or literature highlighting best practices" (36.1%, n=36). Recall that the survey population included district leaders who likely had backgrounds in educational research. Thus, while research and literature was the highest ranked "not available" category of evidence for foster youth, this finding indicates they were using what resources they did have.

Finally, again in support of the finding that stakeholders need training in the needs of foster youth, the evidence category of "practitioner knowledge" was ranked lowest in terms of "often used to make decisions" (19.4%, n=36), and most frequently described as "not used to make decisions" (25.0%, n=36).

Perceived Importance of Foster Youth Data

To understand how foster youth liaisons valued these data sources, I asked them to mark each category with one of the following descriptions: "I believe this is very important," "I believe this is important," or "I do not believe this is very important." Predictably, the overwhelming majority of liaisons ascribed importance to all data categories. Out of all respondents, only one described the data as not very important. Figure 9 below displays the results, which demonstrate the high value liaisons placed on these data to guide their decision-making.

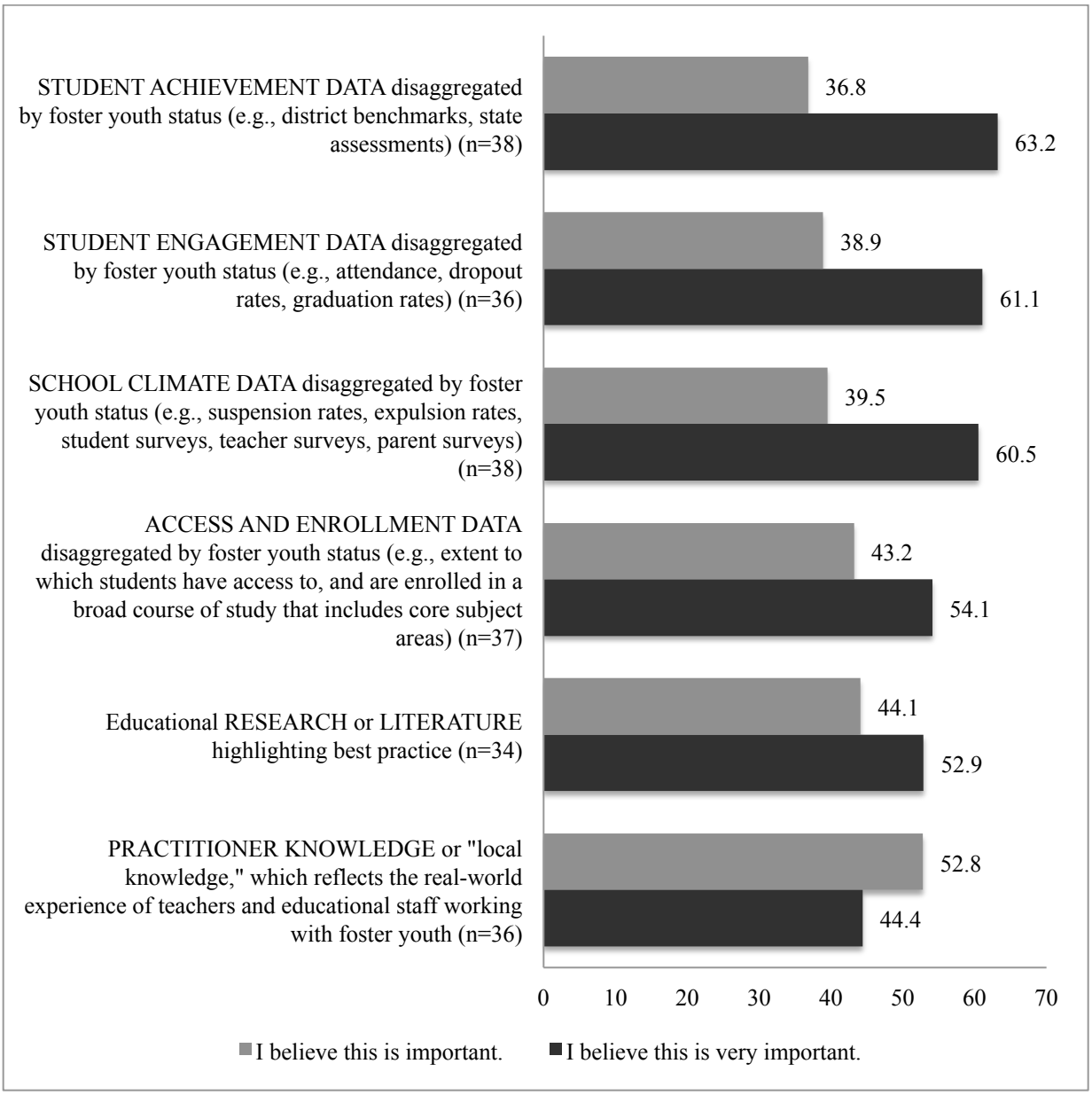


Figure 9. Percentage of foster youth liaisons saying certain types of data are "very important" or "important."

Of note is the difference in how liaisons described data categories with "I believe this is very important." Specifically, data regarding student achievement, student engagement, and school climate all ranked in the top three, with practitioner knowledge and research and literature ranking relatively lower. It is difficult to make claims regarding these data other than that the survey respondents clearly valued all of it.

Conditions that Constrain and Support Decision-making for Foster Youth

The next stage of data analysis focused on understanding the conditions that support or constrain data-informed decision-making for foster youth. I viewed these conditions as aligning to the "external factors" component of the logic model, since they informed how these conditions might interact and influence the process of decision-making.

Barriers to Evidence-based Decision-making

Using questions from a national survey of district leadership on data use in K–12 settings (United States Department of Education, 2006), I asked foster youth liaisons to indicate whether each of 13 potential types of barriers to data-driven decision-making was "not a barrier," a "minor barrier," or a "major barrier." The categories were modified from the original survey to explicitly address foster youth data. Figure 10 provides an overview of the results of barriers described as "major" and "minor." One assumption in the administration of this survey item is that K-12 practitioners possess a common understanding of the term "data-driven." Under federal accountability policies, K-12 educational practitioners are accustomed to using data to inform decisions about programs in schools. While practitioners may implement varying systems to collect, analyze, and use data to inform future action, the assumption of this item is that all survey recipients apply a similar understanding of "data-driven" given their experience in the K-12 public education setting.

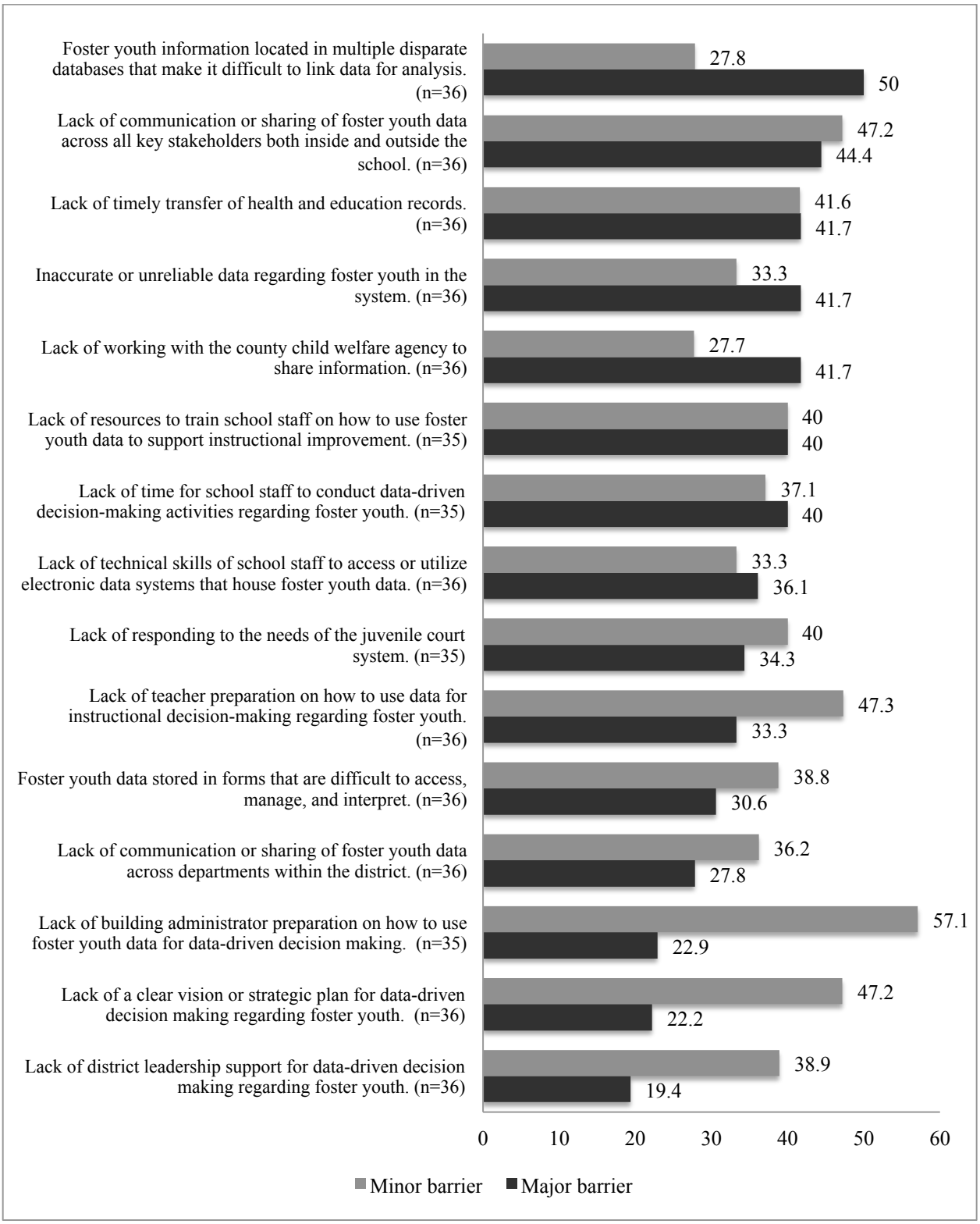


Figure 10. Percentage of foster youth liaisons reporting particular issues as major and minor barriers to data-driven decision-making.

Major barriers. Two of the top five "major barriers" indicated on the survey pertained to the nature of foster youth data. The highest ranked major barrier addressed the coherence of data systems: "Foster youth information located in multiple disparate databases that make it difficult to link data for analysis (i.e., lack of interoperability)" (18 of 36, or 50%). As one interviewee described, "I think for us, one of the major barriers is that we don't have a case management tool or system in place. As I mentioned, we're getting data from here, there, everywhere." This comment echoes the foster youth liaisons' emphasis on establishing better identification procedures, described above.

Despite the state's improved accessibility of foster youth data, liaisons reported frustration with the number of data sources they had to navigate to find key information. One described the work necessary to aggregate foster youth data from multiple data sources in the absence of a centralized data warehouse:

> When we receive the weekly DCFS reports, we have a system where the lead counselors take the information. They sort everything based on the CALPADS, the at-risk report from our district office, and also the DCFS data match. They take all three of those and put them into one Excel document. The sites then have all of that for each of their students. They're able to see that data. It's a lot of work. I ask them to do it once a month and provide it to the school counselors at least once a month. I mean, it would be quite time consuming to do it on a weekly basis.

While some districts were taking full advantage of the recently linked data reports in CALPADS, some interviewees indicated a lack of knowledge of how to access the new information: "We have to look for it or they have to look for us. They'll say, 'Yes, it exists; all

you have to do is XYZ.' Well, what is XYZ? Where's the link? It isn't something automatic." Another liaison knew about the report, but did not know how to access it:

> I know there's a way now, I haven't tried it but I think, as of this year, CALPADS, there's a different way that they're talking. Maybe that'll address some of it. The thing is, liaisons, we have to know that it's available and how to access it.

Another barrier that was frequently ranked as a major barrier pertained to the quality of data. "Inaccurate or unreliable data regarding foster youth in the system" was identified by 15 of the 36 liaisons (41.7%). While districts were receiving weekly lists from the Department of Child and Family Services, along with reports in CALPADS that included students with open cases from Child Welfare Services, many of the liaisons who participated in the interviews reported discrepancies among the reports, significant lag time in accuracy, and the continued reliance on local district efforts to ensure that new enrollees self-reported.

The remaining three major barriers that placed in the top five overall pertained to information sharing: "Lack of communication or sharing of foster youth data across all key stakeholders both inside and outside the school, including social workers, foster youth guardians, counselors, teachers, etc." (16 of 36, or 44.4%); "Lack of working with the county child welfare agency to share information." (15 of 36, or 41.7%); and "Lack of timely transfer of health and education records." (15 of 36, or 41.7%).

Due to the high mobility rate of foster youth, providing proper services requires timely delivery of information. Indeed, AB 490 mandates the transfer of records within two school days of moving. This legislation relies on school staff and social workers to provide timely transfers of health and education records when foster students transfer schools. However, this

often does not happen in a timely manner. One interviewee provided insight into challenges she has faced in supporting her schools to provide timely service to foster youth:

> Some of the barriers specifically with regards to foster youth is probably that they're so transient. Even the services provided to them and working with the social workers, I often tell the school sites to always include the social worker or the probation officer. They're the ones who are going to be able to tell you where they've been and what they've done. But the social workers are always changing. Sometimes we have a social worker's contact information, but most of the time it's actually somebody else. We will call and they say, "Oh, that case has been transferred." I don't understand it. To me that's a huge barrier.

The same liaison went on to describe an improved relationship with DCFS over the last year regarding the amount of response time, but she also emphasized the difference between the experience at the school site and her own experience as a district administrator with established connections at DCFS:

> We don't have all the information we always need to be able to provide the best services we can for our foster youth. Sometimes the sites tell me, "Okay, I have this social worker, but she's not answering my call." I say, "Okay, let me check on it." So then I have my contacts that I'll email, and they get back to me so quickly. I can't complain. It's become easy for me to get that information. But still, the school will have a different experience. And how long did it take for the sites in trying to contact that social worker's information, you know?

Minor barriers. Several of the categories most frequently described as minor barriers pertained to the lack of local knowledge around the needs of foster youth. The highest ranked minor barrier was "Lack of building administrator preparation on how to use foster youth data for data-driven decision-making" (20 of 35, or 57.1%), followed by "Lack of teacher preparation on how to use data for instructional decision-making regarding foster youth" (17 of 36, or 47.3%), and "Lack of clear vision or strategic plan for data-driven decision-making regarding foster youth" (17 of 36, or 47.2%).

The remaining two in the top five minor barriers echo those identified as major barriers above: "Lack of communication or sharing of foster youth data across departments within the district" (17 of 36, or 47.2%), and "Lack of timely transfer of health and education records" (15 of 36, or 41.6%). The reiteration of the barrier of communication and collaboration is evident. However, the focus shifts from communication with outside agencies as a major barrier above, to challenges related to the knowledge level of district staff.

Non-barriers. Survey respondents also had the option to describe categories as "not a barrier" to data-driven decision-making for foster youth (Figure 11). The most frequent category with this description was "Lack of district leadership support for data-driven decision-making regarding foster youth" (15 of 36, or 41.7%). Another category that ranked high as "not a barrier" was "Lack of clear vision or strategic plan for data-driven decision-making regarding foster youth" (11 of 36, or 30.6%). Together, these findings characterize a confidence in district leadership and vision regarding foster youth.

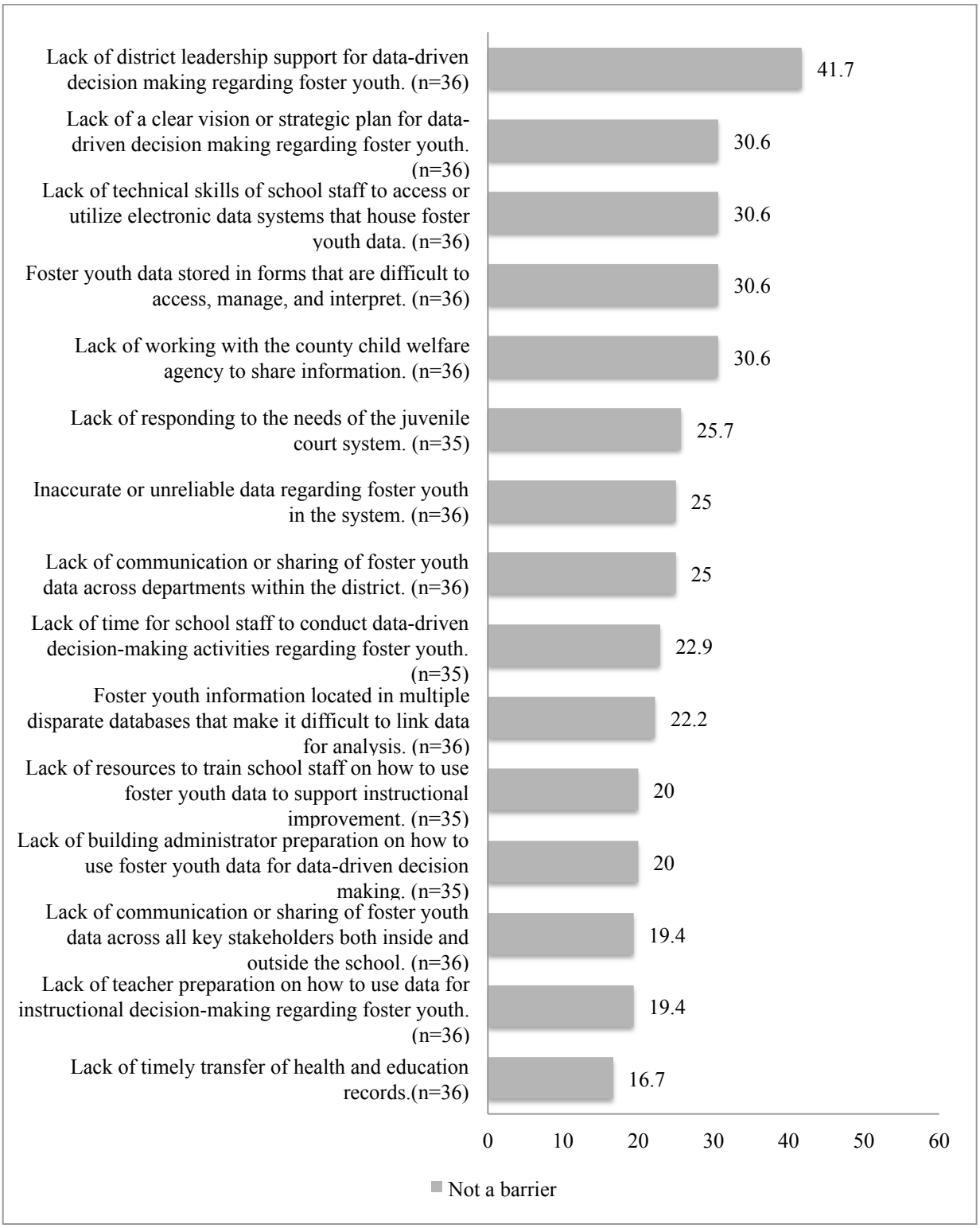


Figure 11. Percentage of foster youth liaisons reporting particular issues as "not a barrier" to data-driven decision-making.

Two additional items that placed in the top five most frequently described as not being barriers pertained to the accessibility of foster youth data: "Foster youth data stored in forms that are difficult to access, manage, and interpret" and "Lack of technical skills of school staff to access or utilize electronic data systems that house foster youth data" (each indicated by 11 of 36, or 30.6%). Whereas survey respondents clearly identified the interoperability of foster youth databases to be the highest ranked major barrier above, this finding seems to suggest confidence in their ability to access and interpret the data. These results also support the findings described above that foster youth liaisons reported high availability of foster youth data in every category.

The final category in the top five most frequently described as "not a barrier" provides contradictory evidence regarding the ability of districts to collaborate and communicate with outside agencies: "Lack of working with the county child welfare agency to share information" (11 of 36, or 30.6%). Based on interview data, it appears that this contradiction reflects the evolving perception among K–12 staff regarding the Department of Child and Family Services. As one liaison described, "We can't serve [foster students] as best as we could until we know what they've been through….I feel like with DCFS, it's definitely improved, but there's more we can do there." While liaisons recognized the improvements over the last year in communication with social workers, they also recognized the key role they played in ensuring a seamless provision of services to each foster student. Although the saw change, there was a sense that much more could be done to improve service from social workers.

Uniqueness of barriers related to decision-making for foster youth. Under current federal and state accountability measures, districts are accustomed to using data to inform decision-making. Thus, it was important to understand if the barriers expressed above were unique to foster youth decision-making, or rather reflective of the conditions they have faced in

all areas of using data. In both survey and interview data collection, the majority of foster youth liaisons agreed that the barriers around foster youth decision-making have been greater than what they had experienced in other areas.

Directly following the survey item above regarding the description of barriers, I asked foster youth to choose one of two statements that best described the barriers in their district: "The ratings I marked regarding barriers are mostly unique to foster youth data. We do not have the same barriers in other areas of decision-making" or "The ratings I marked reflect the same degree of barriers in other area of decision-making in our district." Out of 28 foster youth liaisons who responded to this item, 64.3% (n=18) chose the first statement, indicating the barriers were unique to foster youth decision-making. The remaining 35.7% (n=10) chose the second statement.

Conditions that Support Evidence-based Decision-making Regarding Foster Youth

The interviews helped uncover conditions that support decision-making for foster youth. I asked each liaison, "In your experience, what needs to be in place for a district to make better data-driven decisions for foster youth?" Table 14 below summarizes three key themes that emerged.

Table 14

Foster Youth Liaisons' Perceptions of Conditions that Support Data-driven Decision-making for Foster Youth

Category	Frequency
Increased coherence and alignment of data for identification and tracking	8/10
Collaboration and coordination of district staff and outside agencies	7/10
Development of shared understanding of foster youth needs and legislation through training	6/10

Note. Data are derived from responses to interview question, "In your experience, what needs to be in place for a district to make better data-driven decisions for foster youth?"

Increased data coherence and alignment. Eight of 10 interviewees said that a more centralized and aligned data system was necessary to support better decision-making for foster youth. The liaisons recognized state efforts over the last year to provide updated lists of foster youth to the districts. The weekly updates in CALPADS provided timely, albeit sometimes inaccurate, information (for the liaisons who were aware of the new report). As indicated by survey results, liaisons reported a high level of availability of and access to foster youth data. However, the challenge of streamlining the data into a coherent, unified system remained. Many compared their experience of tracking foster youth to their experiences with special education students, whose records exist in a statewide data system containing all educational records. One liaison reflected the sentiment of many interviewees, that a similar system should house all of foster youth information:

> I think the county needs to streamline. They need to take this as an urgent crisis, a burning issue, and somehow streamline the process. There are some very simple things.

> Every single special education student is in a database across the state on SEIS. It's easy. We can look it up. Is he enrolled? We can look it up. I think we can do something similar with foster youth.

Beyond the need to streamline data, liaisons also called for a tighter alignment between foster youth needs and the types of data being used to measure progress. They questioned the nature of data currently used for foster youth, with the focus on test scores, and the ability to provide the nuanced feedback necessary to make better decisions for foster youth services. As one liaison described, "We keep on saying, 'He failed a test, maybe he ought to try harder.' I don't think that data, the same data we use for general education students, says anything." Another echoed this sentiment: "Right now, with the data we have, it doesn't tell us anything about our students other than we need something else. The funny thing to me is, we all know that. We're all educators."

Indeed, in many of the interviews, the liaisons expressed a personal disconnect between what qualifies as data for foster youth and their own experiences with what is important:

> If it's data-driven, I think that's where I had kind of have a conflict with it. It's like, we're using data to make decisions about people. That's where my skepticism was. I don't care about the data. I want to know who the people are, and what's going on with them. I'll get out to every single site, and I'll go back and check on those kids. That's it.

In the view of this liaison, the data were disconnected from her work with foster youth; they did not correlate with the needs she found in the field, nor did they provide information about how to improve her services. Rather, more useful information came from her contact with foster students and the gathering of ongoing data that were not reflected in the current system.

As a solution, many liaisons recommended a standardized foster youth portfolio that would include a broader set of data to inform the decision-making process. As one liaison described:

> It's a sort of tool to measure the needs of the child, whether it's academic, whether it's social-emotional. I don't like being reactive; I like to be proactive. If we had some sort of tool, some sort of assessment that allowed us to gauge his needs, as far as social-emotional, or academics. Again, I don't know what that would look like. But then we'd have those pieces of the puzzle in place for him and be more supportive.

Other liaisons reiterated the need for a "learning plan" or a "foster youth portfolio" that would be standard across the state and provide a template of information that aligned to both academic and social-emotional needs. In fact, this kind of plan is currently being implemented in Los Angeles Unified School District and several other districts within Los Angeles County.

In the liaisons' view, a standard portfolio would allow them to make more informed decisions about the holistic approach needed to support foster youth and provide insight into the factors underlying lower academic performance. They believed this approach would assist them in ensuring continuity in the educational supports they provided for a highly mobile student group:

> If you know from studies that have been done that it takes kids to adapt this much, and this long for a kid to adapt to its new environment. And then on top of it you know what trauma does to a child, and then you throw them in [a new classroom] and a week later you're like, "He's not succeeding; let's give them more language arts supports," or whatever. That's not the issue. The issue is all these things. If they come in with a

learning plan, at least there's some consistency or something where you can say, "This is where he came from, this is what he has, let's run with it."

Increased collaboration among all stakeholders. The second most frequently identified need to improve data-driven decision-making for foster youth was increased collaboration, both within and outside of the organization. Seven of 10 interviewees described different types of collaboration that would support the decision-making process. One liaison described the need to ensure field practitioners were part of the team that sets LCAP goals, reviews metrics, and makes district-level programmatic decisions, "recognizing the fact that those who do the work need to be part of the solution." This addresses the survey finding that only 31.4% of foster youth liaisons, who are the designees who receive county training on foster youth needs and resources, are part of the team that writes LCAP foster youth goals and actions.

At the school level, the interviewees identified a broad range of stakeholders who must be part of the decision-making process, from the time a student is enrolled and placed into the appropriate educational program, to the time of exit with transfer of records. The liaisons identified teachers, principals, social workers, probation officers, and foster parents as necessary participants. They recognized the crucial role each person plays in the success of foster youth, the unique information each stakeholder brings, and the need to explicitly structure the interaction and communication.

The liaisons also describe the need to put collaborative structures in place for them to share best practices among liaisons from other districts. As one liaison described:

I really definitely think that it's having more collaboration and communication, not just with the social workers, but with the foster care providers. This work, it doesn't come

cheap. You have to seek out the information so when someone has the information, you have the protocols in place to be able to share it.

Throughout the interviews, many described their own lack of knowledge, particularly given the relatively new status of foster youth as an accountability subgroup. Thus, they pointed to the ongoing need to "connect with other foster liaisons and knowledgeable people because in the end, they're all our kids." In their view, sharing best practices would support the reality that foster youth move from district to district. Consistency in practice would improve their own systems and provide continuity for foster youth services.

In some instances, their call for collaboration addressed the quality of interaction with contacts from outside agencies, such as social workers and probation officers. While they expressed a clear improvement of interactions with the Department of Child and Family Services over the past year, they often found it difficult to contact social workers. One liaison also described the need for more collaboration with probation officers: "Anytime we try to reach out and work with them, I feel like we get attitude, or we don't speak the same language. I'm asking for forms and definition, and I don't feel like I'm getting what I need, because they speak a totally different language than we do and I don't understand it." She recognized her own gap in knowledge and the role that collaboration could play in mitigating this need; however, the quality of interaction obstructed the process.

Improved and increased training. In six of the interviews, liaisons identified the need for training to improve the data-driven decision-making process. In their view, the stakeholders making decisions must be equipped with knowledge of the research and legislation that apply to foster youth. One compared her level of knowledge to her expertise on English learners, a long-standing subgroup under federal and state accountability :

> If you asked me "What are the specific needs of an English learner?" I could go on for three hours about the differences among English learners, whether they're a refugee, whether they're literate in their primary language, or not literate in their primary language, or what are the implications if they started schooling at age seven. If you asked me, foster youth, I'm like "I don't know." I would imagine disrupted schooling, I would imagine the emotional impact of things that are going on and how that interferes with learning, just based on what I know generally about having a safe place and safe environment, and how the brain works chemically when there's high anxiety. To me, it's a glaring area of lack of information that's readily available.

She reinforced the reality that despite ample research on the needs associated with foster youth, the lack of accountability status has kept this knowledge from being widely disseminated among K–12 practitioners. With the urgency now under LCFF, stakeholders want information about the needs and best practices to support foster youth.

Liaisons identified a wide range of stakeholders who should be trained, including teachers, site administrators, foster caregivers, and classified staff, who are often the first points of contact for foster youth. One liaison, for example, described the importance of training the attendance clerks and bus drivers who see the students daily and can reinforce the understanding among foster youth that adults in the school care about them: "Sometimes they're the only positive contact a student has with an adult who actually does miss them." Describing the training she had provided, she said she asks them, "Why would the kid want to come back again? You don't know what's going on in their home life that's kept them from school."

Summary

This chapter reviewed findings from a content analysis of all 2014 LCAPs from Los Angeles County (n=80), a survey of foster youth liaisons from the same region (n=49), and ten follow-up interviews from the survey population in order to answer four research questions regarding information use for foster youth in the K-12 setting. The findings reflect the reality that foster youth accountability measures are new and many districts are unaccustomed to implementing support plans for this subgroup of students.

Many districts did not articulate plans to support foster youth, and those that did included actions that were concurrently targeted for other at-risk subgroups. Among the foster youth actions included in the 2014 LCAPs, there was a qualitative difference in focus when compared to foster youth liaisons, considered field practitioners in this study given their experience with implementing foster youth legislation. Both data sets emphasized the need for improved data infrastructure, but foster youth liaisons emphasized the root causes of low academic performance – high mobility and social-emotional issues.

Foster youth data is widely available, according to liaisons, but not widely used. This, in part, is explained by a lack of interoperability among multiple data sources, and the ongoing issue of sharing information among key stakeholders, such as social workers and the educational right holder. The barriers to evidence-based decisions-making for foster youth focused on data infrastructure and information sharing within the district and with outside agencies that serve foster students.

In the following chapter, these findings are reviewed in the context of the relevant literature and used to identify recommendations for the field.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This concluding chapter provides a summary and discussion of the current study, which sought to reveal how K–12 public school districts in Los Angeles County have responded to new state accountability measures requiring the monitoring of foster youth educational outcomes. In the sections that follow, I begin with a review of the findings and a brief discussion of the limitations of the study. I then offer recommendations for practice and areas for future research.

Review of the Findings

The results of this study should be viewed in the context of a state accountability system in the midst of reform. With the implementation of AB 484 in 2013, California became the first state in the nation to require local educational agencies to count foster students as a subgroup in the same way that English learners, low-income students, students from certain racial and ethnic groups, and students with disabilities are measured for educational outcomes. While this was a significant step forward in supporting foster youth, districts did not have the same tools at their disposal to write plans targeting foster youth as they did for other subgroups—namely, longitudinal data or professional experience. In fact, in many accountability plans reviewed for this study, districts explicitly wrote "no baseline data" into their plans regarding foster youth; the survey and interviews confirmed the need for training district staff on foster youth needs.

Furthermore, the implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the accompanying Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) shifted the locus of control to local educational agencies, with new mandates to include broad stakeholder participation in the writing of goals and actions. District leaders concurrently navigated new legislation and stakeholder feedback to write goals, actions, and evaluation metrics aligned to the following

eight state priorities: student achievement, student engagement, other student outcomes, school climate, parental involvement, implementation of Common Core State Standards, and course access.

Taken together, these factors position this study in the context of an accountability system undergoing significant change. On multiple occasions during interviews, foster liaisons qualified their plans as being generated in an environment different from any previous process they experienced. As such, the findings from this study should be viewed as a baseline that can inform future discussions and research.

Disconnect Between Policy and Practice

Daly (2012) noted that federal and state policy-makers often assume that simply requiring accountability data systems will result in the effective use of data, without regard for the processes related to data use. The findings of the current study illustrate this assertion. Although new legislation in California requires the inclusion of foster youth as an accountability subgroup, 41.3% of districts (n=80) included no actions addressing foster youth in their LCAPs. This number decreased to 31.1% after controlling for districts with fewer than 15 foster youth (the threshold for accountability status); however, all 80 districts studied enrolled at least one foster youth. These results underscore the danger in assuming that top-down legislation will result in immediate, meaningful implementation at the local level.

Foster Youth as a Distinct Subgroup

The research is clear that foster students face a unique set of educational challenges compared to other subgroups currently monitored through federal and state accountability measures (Barrat & Belriner, 2013). Yet, the current study found that among the total 915 foster youth actions articulated in 2014 Los Angeles County accountability plans, only 16.3% (n=149)

were uniquely targeted for foster youth. The remaining 83.7% (n=766) foster youth actions were concurrently targeted to other subgroups, such as low-income students and English learners.

Furthermore, the approaches to measuring foster youth outcomes did not fully correspond to their specific needs: Among the 149 actions uniquely targeting foster youth, only 13.4% (n=20) identified a metric that aligned to the specific action. The remaining 86.6% (n=129) of foster youth actions identified the same metric used for all other goals, with an emphasis on student achievement and student engagement data. The relative absence of distinct actions for foster youth highlights the current assumption among writers of accountability plans in Los Angeles County that foster youth have the same set of needs as low-income students, English learners, and other accountability subgroups that have traditionally been monitored.

This finding is further supported by a report from Public Counsel released earlier this year that analyzed how districts are responding to school climate and attendance requirements for foster youth in their LCAPs. Specifically, in their analysis of LCAPs from California districts with 150 or more foster youth, Faer and Cohen (2015) found few districts that identified unique goals and actions targeted for foster youth; among their sample of 65 districts, only two identified foster youth attendance goals or actions, one identified foster youth suspension goals or actions, and one identified a goal or actions to reduce foster youth expulsions.

Misalignment of Actions to the Needs of Foster Youth

In my qualitative analysis comparing LCAP foster youth actions to foster liaison survey responses, I found a difference between which actions were prioritized. While both data sets emphasized the importance of improving the data infrastructure regarding foster youth outcomes and coordinating services, the accountability plans focused on hiring additional staff and

providing academic supports. On the other hand, foster liaisons focused on establishing better identification procedures and providing social-emotional supports.

The relatively greater emphasis on academic supports in accountability plans is not surprising, given the documented achievement gap of foster youth and that the primary purpose of accountability plans is to improve educational outcomes. The writers of accountability plans are focused on closing the achievement gap of under-served populations. The focus of foster liaisons, however, reflects an understanding of the root causes of low achievement among foster youth, namely student mobility and social-emotional needs. Interviews with foster liaisons confirmed their belief that academic achievement of foster youth will not improve unless districts enact comprehensive, holistic approaches that foster youth need to succeed, including more effective information sharing among key stakeholders and the implementation of strategies to address social-emotional needs of students who often experience neglect and abuse.

Barriers to Evidence-based Decision-making for Foster Youth

The research revealed important barriers that stand in the way of effective evidence-based decision-making in the interests of foster youth. These barriers can be discussed in terms of two types of data use: instrumental and conceptual. I discuss the obstacles to each in turn.

Instrumental use of data. Coburn and Talbert (2006) identified four instrumental uses of evidence at the district level: meeting accountability demands, informing program and policy decisions, monitoring student progress to inform placement decisions, and monitoring student progress to inform instructional practice. These categories accurately describe how LCAP data is used to inform decisions about educational programs. Yet, based on the findings from this study, certain barriers to evidence-based decision making for foster youth prevent districts from effectively carrying out these categories of data use.

The most prominent barriers to instrumental use that were revealed in this study focus on data coherence and information sharing. On the one hand, the survey results demonstrate that foster liaisons perceive a high level of access to multiple forms of foster youth data, and interviews confirmed this finding. The issue, however, is not the amount of foster youth data currently available, but the coherence and manageability of these data. Furthermore, systems are not in place to support effective sharing of information across key stakeholders, both within and outside the school system. Existing laws provide the necessary framework to address the issue of student mobility among foster youth and the consequential lack of information sharing, but in practice the framework is not always implemented. McLaughlin (1990) described this discrepancy between policy and local capacity or will, noting that "change continues to be a problem of the smallest unit" (p. 12). Current legislation outlines a path to mitigate the issues of foster youth mobility, but this study reiterates the findings of other recent studies (e.g., Barrat et al., 2014) showing current practice has not reflected this law's potential.

Another component to effective information sharing is collaboration with outside agencies. Foster youth liaisons indicated that interactions with outside stakeholders, such as social workers and probation officers, remain a barrier to providing timely, accurate information to make educational decisions for foster students. Some liaisons reported improvement in services over the past year, but a consistent theme was the lack of communication with assigned social workers, which hindered their ability to efficiently provide services to foster youth.

Current data systems and processes for sharing information reflect the needs of students that schools are accustomed to serving, namely subgroups who do not experience high levels of mobility. The findings of this study emphasize the need to rethink both data infrastructure and

processes for information sharing in ways that align with the foster student population, which is distinct in mobility, academic needs, and social-emotional needs.

Conceptual use of data. Caplan (1979) found that evidence is also used to develop conceptual understanding of an issue, which, over time, shapes the development and implementation of policy. The current study demonstrates the existing gaps in knowledge related to foster youth among K–12 practitioners. Survey results highlight the need for access to research on foster youth, and in their interviews, the liaisons identified district staff training as a high priority. The disconnect between policy and practice described above, along with misalignment between actions and needs, further exemplifies the value of using social research to develop conceptual understandings of the life experiences of foster youth and their challenges in the educational setting. This will influence the content of subsequent accountability plans addressing this particular subgroup.

The current study demonstrates the need to expand this type of knowledge beyond district leadership to include a broad base of stakeholders, such as teachers, site administrators, office staff, and foster parents. Indeed, Saunders et al. (2009) described the importance of including a content expert in the collaborative inquiry approach to solving student learning problems. As teacher teams meet to examine student work around a mathematical concept, for example, they must include a content expert in math to guide the development of inferences and possible strategies to address the learning gap. In the same way, as teams assemble at the school and district level to review information and make decisions about foster youth programs and services, they need individuals with knowledge of foster students to guide an appropriate course of action. The lack of this conceptual understanding diminishes the ability of the team to provide evidence-based solutions.

Limitation

This study identified the population of foster youth liaisons based on two rationales: (a) each district in California must appoint a foster youth liaison who ostensibly has the knowledge necessary to guide foster youth services; and (b) most districts assign the foster youth liaison role to an existing district-level leader with multiple responsibilities, which gives them insight into the broader context of their district. In reality, however, there are likely others within any district who could shed light on the research questions. As such, limiting the survey and interview data collection to foster youth liaisons precluded additional voices such as classroom teachers and leadership at the school, district, county and state levels. A broader representation of perspectives will add to future research on this topic. Nevertheless, the findings do point to several important recommendations for practice and future inquiry. I turn to these next.

Recommendations for Practice

The recommendations for practice that emerge from the study findings fall into two broad categories. I first discuss changes that will make relevant foster youth data more accessible and meaningful to practitioners in the K-12 setting. I then discuss changes designed to build capacity to allow practitioners and stakeholders to transform data into knowledge and wisdom.

Make Data Accessible and Meaningful

The Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom hierarchy (Ackoff, 1989) helps frame the process that K–12 districts use to make decisions about foster youth. Data lead to information, which leads to knowledge, which subsequently leads to wisdom. In the context of the new state accountability measure considered in this study, the first level of the hierarchy—data—poses unique challenges. As described above, the availability and use of foster youth data are influenced by the high mobility and social/emotional needs of this subgroup of students. LCFF

requires districts to establish goals and evaluate their own effectiveness, which requires the transformation of data into information, knowledge, and finally wisdom that can guide future action. However, before K–12 districts can advance through the hierarchy into informed practice, issues at the data level need to be addressed. The following recommendations focus on improving the foster youth data infrastructure and establishing better alignment between the needs of foster youth with the services they receive.

Centralize data infrastructure. The foster liaisons interviewed for this study recognized the marked improvement in data access compared to a year ago. The weekly reports available on CALPADS provided them with timely, though not always accurate, updates on the enrollment of foster youth in their districts. Indeed, survey results emphasized the high level of access to a variety of foster youth data. The issue was not quantity or availability of data, but manageability of data from multiple sources, such as Child Welfare Services and previous districts.

Given the current legislation, when a foster youth transfers schools, the social worker must provide health and education records, and the district liaison must work with the previous school to provide records within two days. This was not happening with regularity, which can impact the quality of service that schools provide to foster students. Thus, the liaisons acknowledged the need to increase the scope of data included in a centralized database.

To mitigate this issue, California could perhaps expand the current foster youth data infrastructure in such a way that removes reliance on social workers or previous school sites to provide crucial educational and health records that guide educational placement decisions when a foster student transfers. Instead of waiting for the educational records to arrive, districts need a centralized electronic system that houses the full spectrum of health and educational records.

Indeed, liaisons repeatedly emphasized the need for a standardized, electronic portfolio similar to the current system used for special education students.

Align actions and metrics to the needs of foster youth. It was not surprising to find a misalignment between what foster youth need, what districts are providing, and how they are measuring effectiveness. California is the first state in the nation to require the inclusion of this subgroup in accountability; the process to develop a Locally Controlled Accountability Plan was novel and, by all accounts, harried. While 2014 LCAPs articulated academic supports for foster youth, they largely did not address the underlying root causes of achievement gaps, including school mobility and social-emotional well-being.

To increase the alignment of district actions and metrics to the needs of foster youth, the state could expand the list of required data to include metrics that reflect the needs of foster youth, including the issues associated with school mobility and social-emotional well-being. The current set of required data was thoroughly represented in 2014 accountability plans; expanding on this existing list could leverage alignment of metrics with foster student needs. Additional metrics might include: transfers to alternative educational agencies, academic counseling contact hours, number of days required to enroll foster students, number of days to award partial credits, number of days to receive educational and health records from social workers, and number of days to receive records from previous school, suspensions and expulsions disaggregated for foster youth.

The state could also provide a set of recommended foster youth actions to include in accountability plans, further establishing coherence with evidence-based needs and consistency across districts. The challenge in this recommendation is establishing a system of technical assistance that balances the autonomy of local educational agencies prescribed in LCFF with the

expressed need for guidance on writing plans that meet the needs of foster students. Under current legislation, each district decides what actions to include in their accountability plans. County and state support staff would need to broker an understanding of foster youth to inform local actions in a legislative context that offers final control to the local district.

Build Capacity to Transform Data into Knowledge

Using the Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom hierarchy (Ackoff, 1989) to continue the discussion on the implications of this study, it is helpful to consider how data and information are transformed into knowledge, and eventually wisdom. In the context of this study, developing wisdom regarding how to effectively serve foster students requires the capacity of district staff to use research regarding foster youth as well as information collected through local processes.

Develop shared understanding through training. Findings from this study demonstrate the need for extensive training on the unique needs of foster youth. The research is available, but it is not widely understood among K–12 practitioners. Furthermore, laws exist to mitigate the effects of foster youth mobility, but they are not always implemented. As districts consider ways to implement training with staff—e.g., teachers, office clerks, counselors, and principals—as well as foster parents, it is helpful to consider the existing literature on evidence use to develop a shared understanding of a problem. Insights from this body of research can guide the effective implementation of training regarding foster youth.

As described in the literature review in Chapter 2, there are a host of reasons why some K–12 staff may discount social science research (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Supovitz, 2012), including the perception that it is irrelevant to their context (Maynard, 2006). These factors could inform district and county leadership as they consider ways to build a shared

understanding of the research on foster youth. Honig and Coburn (2008), for example, found that developing "local knowledge" or "practitioner knowledge" among district staff helped raise awareness of the issues. By conducting learning walks in schools and experiencing first-hand what is documented in the research—i.e., developing "practitioner knowledge"—districts were more successful at sustaining reform efforts.

In the same way, as districts embark on training staff, leaders could focus on developing practitioner knowledge of foster students in their districts through student surveys, focus groups, or district data on foster youth. Bringing in foster student voices and local data can help to close the perceived gap between what the research shows and everyday experiences in the classroom or school. By developing a shared understanding of the experiences of foster youth that attend the local school, leaders can situate foster youth reform efforts in their respective districts and build consensus on effective implementation.

Develop shared understanding through regional communities of practice. In this study, liaisons referenced the quality of support from the county office of education. The ongoing training provided effective guidance to liaisons during the first year of implementation of the new foster youth accountability measures. Building on this successful model, regional communities of practice for foster youth liaisons in neighboring districts could extend the training provided by the county into ongoing peer-led networks. Developing collaborative structures for regional districts could help county and state leadership support the implementation of new requirements and provide a community of job-alike peers for district liaisons. Regional communities of practice for foster liaisons could also establish common evidence-based practices among neighboring districts, which would provide additional consistency for transferring foster students.

Embed foster youth experts in the decision-making process. The literature on collaborative problem-solving in the K–12 setting recognizes the importance of distributive leadership in sustaining reform (Ermeling, 2010; Friedrich & McKinney, 2010). Developing the capacity of all district stakeholders to understand the needs of foster youth is especially important in bottom-up accountability structures such as California's new LCFF, which places responsibility on local leadership to collaboratively articulate educational strategies in accountability plans. While this approach may engender broader ownership of local plans, one potential consequence, as demonstrated in this study, is that lack of knowledge could result in gaps between evidence-based needs of foster youth and the strategies actually articulated in accountability plans. As districts move forward in the implementation of foster youth accountability, leaders should consider how to embed foster youth experts into the decision-making process at both the school and district levels.

Currently, each district identifies one foster liaison who attends to the enrollment and placement needs of foster youth. In Los Angeles County, these liaisons receive ongoing training and support from the county office of education. The knowledge they bring is invaluable to the ongoing evaluation of the local accountability plans at the district level. The current findings suggest district leadership should take steps to ensure their voices inform the annual revision of foster youth actions, especially since their daily field experiences give them unique insight into the effectiveness of current LCAP actions.

In addition, to support decision-making processes at each school site, each district foster liaison could oversee a cohort of foster youth experts. Identifying one person from each school to serve as a foster youth expert would build capacity across the district to ensure foster students receive the support they need. The site expert could be responsible for facilitating collaborative

processes that ensure key information regarding foster students is located, considered, and used to make effective decisions on program placement.

Streamline information sharing through a foster student learning plan template. In this study, foster liaisons perceived constrained information-sharing to be a key barrier to making evidence-based decisions for foster youth. Foster youth data were located in disparate databases, and oftentimes the information was outdated or missing. They recognized improvements over the prior year, and indeed Los Angeles County is currently developing a county-wide system that will streamline multiple databases into a single system for easier access to educational and health records, along with contact information for social workers and child welfare services case numbers.

Even so, the liaisons interviewed for this study expressed a desire for a common template of information that would travel with a student and contain a broader set of information to guide decision-making around academic and social-emotional programs. Indeed, several districts reviewed for this study developed their own "individual learning plans" for foster youth; districts that undertake this approach could share their models to inform the development of a common template. Establishing a statewide "foster youth individual learning plan" template that contains information beyond the basic educational and health passport currently used would assist school and district leaders in the appropriate placement of foster youth upon enrollment.

Additionally, establishing a system in which foster youth have access to this portfolio through electronic means would further empower students to advocate for themselves during multiple school transfers. This approach would also diminish the reliance on social workers to provide timely access to education and health passports.

Establish structures for coordination of services. Looking ahead into the next stages of implementing LCFF, we expect the foster youth data infrastructure will be improved and district staff will develop an understanding of foster youth needs and legislation through training. If, however, teams of key stakeholders do not meet to review the data and apply evidence-based strategies, reform efforts could not meet the intent of the new legislation. In fact, Wayman and Stringfield (2006) identified lack of time as a key barrier to effective collaborative problem-solving in the K–12 setting. Furthermore, Friedrich and McKinney (2010) recognized teams that do not have a protocol in place are not effective in the process of reviewing data, identifying strategies to address needs, and reflecting on their success. Both of these findings—i.e., the need for a set time to meet, and the need for an established protocol—inform the implications of the current study.

One possible solution is establishing a window of time—10 days within enrollment, for example—during which all key stakeholders for the foster student must meet to review all educational and health records and to establish a plan in the new K–12 setting. Current legislation requires the transfer of all records from the previous school within two school days, and social workers must present the education and health passports upon enrollment. Thus, 10 days would allow site staff to arrange a meeting that would accommodate stakeholder schedules, and it aligns with a timeframe already used for expulsion hearings. The key stakeholders would include the student him/herself, foster parent, social worker, teacher(s), site administrator, site counselor, and district foster liaison. Establishing such a required meeting for every foster student upon enrollment would position the team in a proactive stance of supporting the individual needs of each foster student rather than waiting for academic and behavioral issues to emerge over time.

Directions for Future Research

This study serves as a baseline study in the area of information use for foster youth in the K–12 setting. Future studies can and should build on the knowledge established here to generate discussion on how districts are evolving in response to new accountability measures for foster students. These studies may extend the current research through longitudinal research and diverse stakeholder input. They may also take a broader view, such as examining changes at the national level. Additional studies could also take a more micro-level view, exploring the distinct experiences of foster students with varied backgrounds and characteristics.

Longitudinal Research

As the first state in the nation to enact foster youth accountability legislation, California provides insight regarding the challenges associated with evidence-based decision-making for foster students. This study provides a snapshot of the inaugural year of implementation; 2015 LCAPs currently under review by local governing boards of education will likely reflect significant changes. Subsequent plans will, in turn, reflect further modifications to the approach to supporting foster students.

Using this study as a baseline, longitudinal research on the geographical region examined in this study – Los Angeles County – would reveal evolving approaches to supporting foster youth in the context of state accountability measures. Documenting these changes, along with implications for practice, would inform other states and districts as they embark on similar service to foster youth. The research could solidify, reject, or add to the set of current recommendations.

Shared Accountability

The process to develop the LCAP required broad participation of district and community stakeholders. Likewise, the effective service of foster youth in K-12 settings involves support from a variety of stakeholders – social workers, teachers, site principals, counselors, foster youth liaisons, county and state offices of education staff. Future research should consider the current research questions through the lens of stakeholders not included in this study. Participants to consider are policy-makers, advocacy groups, social workers, teachers, foster parents, county and state office of education leadership, school site administration, school counselors, school psychologists. Including these voices would build on the insight provided through the content analysis of 2014 LCAPs, and the surveys and interviews of district foster youth liaisons.

Federal Implications

At the time this research was conducted, California was the only state with legislation requiring the tracking of foster youth as an accountability subgroup. During the writing of this chapter, however, the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions approved the Every Child Achieves Act, a bill expanding the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to include foster youth as a federal student subgroup. For the first time, every state will be required to track the achievement data of students in foster care.

Future research might explore the ongoing implementation of foster youth accountability in various geographical contexts, situating this study—conducted in the county with the largest foster youth population in the United States—in reference to other regions with varying levels of foster youth. Topics to examine include the degree of alignment between accountability plans and evidence-based needs of foster youth, the conditions that constrain the use of information to

support foster youth in K–12 settings, and the conditions that support the effective sharing of information among K–12 stakeholders that serve foster youth.

Differentiated Support Systems

During this study, one interviewee explained her frustration with not understanding the needs of foster youth by juxtaposing her in-depth knowledge of English learners. As she described, within the English learner subgroup there are distinct groups with distinct needs: newcomers, normatively progressing English learners, long-term English learners, reclassified fluent English proficient. The support a school provides to these groups will depend on the category of English learner; a newcomer will need a vastly different academic program than a long-term English learner. As the interviewee explained, however, she did not always possess this nuanced understanding of the needs of English learners. Instead, it developed over time, with training and experience.

In the same way, future research should build an understanding of the various subgroups within the foster youth population, along with how districts might provide differentiated support. One potential area to examine is the group of foster youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ). While this research was being conducted, the Williams Institute (Wilson, Cooper, Kestanis, & Nezhad, 2014) released a study that found youth living in foster care in Los Angeles County were 1.5 to 2 times as likely to identify as LGBTQ when compared to youth not living in foster care. Out of around 7,400 youth aged 12–21 who were in out-of-home foster care, 19.1% (or about 1,400 of these youth) identified as LGBTQ. Furthermore, 12.9% reported being treated poorly by the foster care system, compared to 5.8% of non-LGBTQ youth. Future research could view the questions of the current study through the lens of

supporting LGBTQ youth in the K–12 setting, and perhaps extend the inquiry to examine ways districts provide social-emotional support to foster youth who also identify as LGBTQ.

Final Remarks

The current study examined information use in the context of new foster youth accountability measures in the K–12 setting. The study provides insight into how districts have responded to new requirements to track foster students, a group traditionally not included in federal and state accountability. The findings point to implications regarding organizational conditions to support effective evidence-based decision-making for foster students, and to worthwhile areas of future study.

This research highlights the importance of improving the capacity of K-12 practitioners to provide timely, evidenced-based supports to foster students, who historically perform lower than all other student subgroups on most educational indicators. Although the legislation requiring tracking foster youth represents a step in the right direction, and the first of its kind in the nation, this research reveals how far we have to go before fully realizing the comprehensive support system that foster students need to successfully navigate significant life challenges in order to reach their full potential.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES
STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

Shared Accountability to Improve Educational Outcomes of Foster Youth: Examining the Conditions that Influence Data-Informed Decision-Making

Brian Huff, from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you serve as a Foster Youth Liaison for your district. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to better understand the ways schools and districts can make informed decisions to improve educational outcomes of foster youth.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in an online survey via Qualtrics.com

You will also have the option to participate in a one-to-one interview. If you choose to participate in a one-to-one interview, you will provide contact information at the end of the survey. This contact information will not be associated with your survey responses. I will use this contact information to contact you and arrange an interview.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of about 8–15 minutes to complete the survey.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

- The opportunity to reflect on the ways schools and districts can improve services to foster youth.
- The opportunity to share the challenges you face while serving foster youth in your district.

- The information you share could potentially influence the practice of other educators serving foster youth.

Will I be paid for participating?

You will not be compensated for completing the survey.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms when writing up the results of the study, codes rather than names will be used on documents, and deletion of any files that identify individual participants.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. If you participate in the one-on-one interview process, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. You will have the opportunity to view and edit the transcription and erase tape recordings if you choose to. You may also opt out of having the interview recorded if you so choose.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

- **The researcher:** Brian Huff – bhuff@ucla.edu, (213) 369-1093
- **Dissertation Chair:** Christina Christie – tina.christie@ucla.edu, (310) 825-0432
  UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):
  If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

  UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
  11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
  Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES
STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

Shared Accountability to Improve Educational Outcomes of Foster Youth: Examining the Conditions that Influence Data-Informed Decision Making

Brian Huff, from the Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you serve as a Foster Youth Laiason for your district. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to better understand the ways schools and districts can make informed decisions to improve educational outcomes of foster youth.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in a one-to-one interview

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of about 30-45 minutes to complete the interview.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

- The opportunity to reflect on the ways schools and districts can improve services to foster youth.
- The opportunity to share the challenges you face while serving foster youth in your district.
- The information you share could potentially influence the practice of other educators serving foster youth.

Will I be paid for participating?

You will not be compensated for participating in the interview.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms when writing up the results of the study, codes rather than names will be used on documents, and deletion of any files that identify individual participants.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. You may opt out of having the interview recorded if you so choose.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

- **The researcher:** Brian Huff – bhuff@ucla.edu, (213) 369-1093
- **Dissertation Chair:** Christina Christie – tina.christie@ucla.edu, (310) 825-0432
- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
  If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

  UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
  11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
  Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant | Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Name of Person Obtaining Consent | Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent | Date

APPENDIX C

FOSTER YOUTH LIAISON SURVEY

Survey Background: Brian Huff, from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you serve as a Foster Youth Liaison for your district.

Why is this study being done? The purpose of this study is to better understand the ways schools and districts can make informed decisions to improve educational outcomes of foster youth.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study? This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of UCLA. You can read the full study information sheet here. [link provided to the survey consent form provided in Appendix A]

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

> The researcher: Brian Huff – bhuff@ucla.edu, (213) 369-1093
> Dissertation Chair: Christina Christie – tina.christie@ucla.edu, (310) 825-0432
> UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP)

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to: UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694.

Q1 Do you consent to participate in this study by completing this survey?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q2 My current position is (select all that apply):
- ❑ Superintendent
- ❑ Assistant Superintendent
- ❑ Director
- ❑ Coordinator/Program Specialist
- ❑ Site Administrator
- ❑ Teacher on Special Assignment
- ❑ Social Worker
- ❑ Counselor
- ❑ Other _____

Q3 My responsibilities include (select all that apply):
- ❑ Accountability
- ❑ Assessment
- ❑ Curriculum
- ❑ Instruction
- ❑ Special Education
- ❑ Student Services/Child Welfare and Attendance
- ❑ Technology
- ❑ Other _____

Q4 Please indicate whether you serve as the district liaison for foster youth:
- ❍ Yes, I am the designated foster youth liaison for my district.
- ❍ No, I am not the designated foster youth liaison for my district.
- ❍ I am not sure.

Q5 Approximately how many students are enrolled in your district?

- ❍ Less than 5,000
- ❍ 5,000–7,000
- ❍ 7,001–10,000
- ❍ 10,001–12,000
- ❍ 12,001–15,000
- ❍ 15,001–20,000
- ❍ 20,001–30,000
- ❍ 30,001–40,000
- ❍ 40,001–50,000
- ❍ 50,001–60,000
- ❍ 60,001–70,000
- ❍ 70,001–80,000
- ❍ 80,001–90,000
- ❍ 90,001–100,000
- ❍ 100,001–150,000
- ❍ 150,001–200,000
- ❍ 200,001–250,000
- ❍ 250,001–300,000
- ❍ More than 300,000

Q6 What is your best estimation of the total NUMBER of foster youth in your district?

Q7 Choose the statement that best represents the status of identifying foster youth in your district:

- ❍ District and school staff have access to data that identifies which students are foster youth.
- ❍ District and school staff DO NOT have access to data that indicates which students are foster youth.
- ❍ I'm not sure.

Q8-10 Answer the questions below about foster youth data in your district. Please select one bubble in each column for each type of data.

	How available is this data?			How often is this data used?			How important is this data?		
	Unavail-able	Moderately Available	Available	Not used to make decisions	Sometimes used to make decisions	Often used to make decisions	I do not believe this is very important.	I believe this is important.	I believe this is very important.
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g., district benchmarks, state assessments).	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g., attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates).	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g., suspension rates, expulsion rates, student surveys, teacher surveys, parent surveys).	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q11-13 (CONTINUED: Answer the questions below about foster youth data in your district. Please select one bubble in each column for each type of data.)

	How available is this data?			How often is this data used?			How important is this data?		
	Unavail-able	Moderately Available	Available	Not used to make decisions	Sometimes used to make decisions	Often used to make decisions	I do not believe this is very important.	I believe this is important.	I believe this is very important.
ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g., extent to which students have access to and are enrolled in a broad course of study that includes core subject areas).	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Educational RESEARCH or LITERATURE highlighting best practices.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE or "local knowledge," which reflects the real-world experience of teachers and educational staff working with foster youth.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
OTHER DATA: If your district collects additional data not mentioned above, please describe it in the box below.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q14 To what extent do the following serve as barriers to data-driven decision-making regarding foster youth in your district?

	Not a barrier	Minor barrier	Major barrier
a. Inaccurate or unreliable data regarding foster youth in the system.	❍	❍	❍
b. Lack of working with the county child welfare agency to share information.	❍	❍	❍
c. Lack of timely transfer of health and education records.	❍	❍	❍
d. Lack of responding to the needs of the juvenile court system.	❍	❍	❍
e. Foster youth data stored in forms that are difficult to access, manage, and interpret.	❍	❍	❍
f. Foster youth information located in multiple disparate databases that make it difficult to link data for analysis (i.e., lack of interoperability).	❍	❍	❍
g. Lack of resources to train school staff on how to use foster youth data to support instructional improvement (e.g., providing data analysis specialists, professional development funds).	❍	❍	❍
h. Lack of teacher preparation on how to use data for instructional decision-making regarding foster youth (e.g., data interpretation skills).	❍	❍	❍
i. Lack of technical skills of school staff to access or utilize electronic data systems that house foster youth data (e.g., technical proficiencies).	❍	❍	❍

Q15 (CONTINUED: To what extent do the following serve as barriers to data-driven decision-making regarding foster youth in your district?)

	Not a barrier	Minor barrier	Major barrier
j. Lack of building administrator preparation on how to use foster youth data for data-driven decision-making.	❍	❍	❍
k. Lack of time for school staff to conduct data-driven decision-making activities regarding foster youth (e.g., to reflect on or use data, for teacher collaboration).	❍	❍	❍
l. Lack of a clear vision or strategic plan for data-driven decision-making regarding foster youth (e.g., as part of a systematic approach to continuous improvement).	❍	❍	❍
m. Lack of district leadership support for data-driven decision-making regarding foster youth (e.g., explicit norms and expectations regarding data use).	❍	❍	❍
n. Lack of communication or sharing of foster youth data across departments within the district.	❍	❍	❍
o. Lack of communication or sharing of foster youth data across all key stakeholders both inside and outside the school, including social workers, foster youth guardians, counselors, teachers, etc.	❍	❍	❍

Q16 How do the answers you provided about barriers compare to overall practices in your district? Choose the statement that best describes your district.

- ❍ The ratings I marked regarding barriers are mostly unique to foster youth data. We do not have the same barriers in other areas of decision-making.
- ❍ The ratings I marked reflect the same degree of barriers in other areas of decision-making in our district.

Almost done! This is the last page! Thank you for taking time to contribute your expertise.

Q17 What was your involvement in the writing of your district LCAP (Local Control Accountability Plan)?

- ❍ Participated in LCAP community meetings.
- ❍ Completed an LCAP survey.
- ❍ Served on district team that wrote the LCAP for my district.
- ❍ Other: _____

Q18 In your opinion, what are the three most important actions that districts and/or schools should take to support the educational success of foster youth?

Q19 Are you interested in participating in a 45-minute one-on-one interview about this topic?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Please enter your information below so I may contact you to schedule an interview. This data will not be associated with your survey responses.

Name
Email address
Phone number
Best way to reach you

Thank you for taking time out of your extremely busy schedule to complete this survey. We look forward to sharing the results at an upcoming LACOE meeting.

APPENDIX D

SURVEY DATA

1. Do you consent to participate in this study by completing this survey?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		60	100%
2	No		0	0%
	Total		60	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	1
Mean	1.00
Variance	0.00
Standard Deviation	0.00
Total Responses	60

2. My current position is (select all that apply):

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Superintendent		1	2%
2	Assistant Superintendent		3	5%
3	Director		19	32%
4	Coordinator/Program Specialist		10	17%
5	Site Administrator		0	0%
6	Teacher on Special Assignment		1	2%
7	Social Worker		0	0%
8	Counselor		16	27%
9	Other		9	15%

Other
CWA
Homeless/Foster Liaison
Liaison
CWA Officer
Family Liaison
Administrative Assistant
SPED. Compliance Officer

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	9
Total Responses	59

3. My responsibilities include (select all that apply):

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Accountability		12	21%
2	Assessment		10	17%
3	Curriculum		9	16%
4	Instruction		9	16%
5	Special Education		20	34%
6	Student Services / Child Welfare and Attendance		55	95%
7	Technology		4	7%
8	Other		11	19%

Other
Family Resource, Center, Mental Health, and much more
Homeless Population and other
Protecting the educational legal rights of foster youth
Court Liaison
Foster and homeless youth
Grant Director
ALL small district
enrollment
Foster youth

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	8
Total Responses	58

4. Please indicate whether you serve as the district liaison for foster youth:

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes, I am the designated foster youth liaison for my district.		49	83%
2	No, I am not the designated foster youth liaison for my district.		9	15%
3	I am not sure.		1	2%
	Total		59	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	3
Mean	1.19
Variance	0.19
Standard Deviation	0.43
Total Responses	59

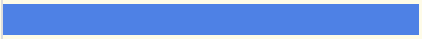
5. Approximately how many students are enrolled in your district?				
#	Answer		Response	%
1	Less than 5000		10	23%
2	5,000-7,000		4	9%
3	7,001-10,000		9	20%
4	10,001-12,000		2	5%
5	12,001-15,000		5	11%
6	15,001-20,000		1	2%
7	20,001-30,000		10	23%
8	30,001-40,000		0	0%
9	40,001-50,000		0	0%
10	50,001-60,000		0	0%
11	60,001-70,000		0	0%
12	70,001-80,000		0	0%
13	80,001-90,000		0	0%
14	90,001-100,000		1	2%
15	100,001-150,000		0	0%
16	150,001-200,000		0	0%
17	200,001-250,000		0	0%
18	250,001-300,00		0	0%
19	More than 300,000		2	5%
	Total		44	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	19
Mean	4.68
Variance	17.29
Standard Deviation	4.16
Total Responses	44

6. What is your best estimation of the total NUMBER of foster youth in your district?
Text Response
200
800
15
80
2,000
62
10
114
50
41
100
100
496
47
I work for Los Angeles County. The above number should actually read approximately 1.5 million students.
20
35
786
10
45
400
300
800
1,500,000 Los Angeles County
100
100
10000-11000
47
10,900 this is a rough guess.
61
400
16
100
52
less than 10
15
5000
40
100
0
15
10000
700
85

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	44

7. Choose the statement that best represents the status of identifying foster youth in your district:

#	Answer		Response	%
1	District and school staff have access to data that identifies which students are foster youth.		41	87%
2	District and school staff DO NOT have access to data that indicates which students are foster youth.		2	4%
3	I'm not sure.		4	9%
	Total		47	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	3
Mean	1.21
Variance	0.35
Standard Deviation	0.59
Total Responses	47

8. How available is this data?

#	Question	Unavailable	Moderately Available	Available	Total Responses	Mean
1	STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. district benchmarks, state assessments)	6	19	18	43	2.28
2	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates)	4	20	15	39	2.28
3	SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. suspension rates, expulsion rates, student surveys, teacher surveys, parent surveys)	7	17	18	42	2.26

Statistic	STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. district benchmarks, state assessments)	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates)	SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. suspension rates, expulsion rates, student surveys, teacher surveys, parent surveys)
Min Value	1	1	1
Max Value	3	3	3
Mean	2.28	2.28	2.26
Variance	0.49	0.42	0.54
Standard Deviation	0.70	0.65	0.73
Total Responses	43	39	42

9. How often is this data used?

#	Question	Not used to make decisions	Sometimes used to make decisions	Often used to make decisions	Total Responses	Mean
1	STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. district benchmarks, state assessments)	5	23	14	42	2.21
2	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates)	4	22	13	39	2.23
3	SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. suspension rates, expulsion rates, student surveys, teacher surveys, parent surveys)	5	24	13	42	2.19

Statistic	STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. district benchmarks, state assessments)	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates)	SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. suspension rates, expulsion rates, student surveys, teacher surveys, parent surveys)
Min Value	1	1	1
Max Value	3	3	3
Mean	2.21	2.23	2.19
Variance	0.42	0.39	0.40
Standard Deviation	0.65	0.63	0.63
Total Responses	42	39	42

10. How important is this data?

#	Question	I do not believe this is very important.	I believe this is very important.	Total Responses	Mean
1	STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. district benchmarks, state assessments)	0	27	27	3.00
2	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates)	0	25	25	3.00
3	SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. suspension rates, expulsion rates, student surveys, teacher surveys, parent surveys)	0	25	25	3.00

Statistic	STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. district benchmarks, state assessments)	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates)	SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. suspension rates, expulsion rates, student surveys, teacher surveys, parent surveys)
Min Value	3	3	3
Max Value	3	3	3
Mean	3.00	3.00	3.00
Variance	0.00	0.00	0.00
Standard Deviation	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total Responses	27	25	25

11. How available is this data?

#	Question	Unavailable	Moderately Available	Available	Total Responses	Mean
1	ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. extent to which students have access to, and are enrolled in a broad course of study that includes core subject areas)	3	12	26	41	2.56
2	Educational RESEARCH or LITERATURE highlighting best practices.	8	18	14	40	2.15
3	PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE or "local knowledge," which reflects the real-world experience of teachers and educational staff working with foster youth.	7	23	9	39	2.05
4	OTHER DATA: If your district collects additional data not mentioned above, please describe it in the box below.	3	3	8	14	2.36

OTHER DATA: If your district collects additional data not mentioned above, please describe it in the box below.
Casemanagement of foster care cases
Attendance Data
N/A
At-Risk Reports

Statistic	ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. extent to which students have access to, and are enrolled in a broad course of study that includes core subject areas)	Educational RESEARCH or LITERATURE highlighting best practices.	PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE or "local knowledge," which reflects the real-world experience of teachers and educational staff working with foster youth.	OTHER DATA: If your district collects additional data not mentioned above, please describe it in the box below.
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	3	3	3	3
Mean	2.56	2.15	2.05	2.36
Variance	0.40	0.54	0.42	1.03
Standard Deviation	0.63	0.74	0.65	1.01
Total Responses	41	40	39	15

12. How often is this data used?						
#	Question	Not used to make decisions	Sometimes used to make decisions	Often used to make decisions	Total Responses	Mean
1	ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. extent to which students have access to, and are enrolled in a broad course of study that includes core subject areas)	6	22	12	40	2.15
2	Educational RESEARCH or LITERATURE highlighting best practices.	8	18	13	39	2.13
3	PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE or "local knowledge," which reflects the real-world experience of teachers and educational staff working with foster youth.	11	21	7	39	1.90
4	OTHER DATA: If your district collects additional data not mentioned above, please describe it in the box below.	3	4	7	14	2.29

OTHER DATA: If your district collects additional data not mentioned above, please describe it in the box below.
Casemanagement of foster care cases
Attendance Data
N/A
At-Risk Reports

Statistic	ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. extent to which students have access to, and are enrolled in a broad course of study that includes core subject areas)	Educational RESEARCH or LITERATURE highlighting best practices.	PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE or "local knowledge," which reflects the real-world experience of teachers and educational staff working with foster youth.	OTHER DATA: If your district collects additional data not mentioned above, please describe it in the box below.
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	3	3	3	3
Mean	2.15	2.13	1.90	2.29
Variance	0.44	0.54	0.46	0.98
Standard Deviation	0.66	0.73	0.68	0.99
Total Responses	40	39	39	15

13. How important is this data?

#	Question	I do not believe this is very important.	I believe this is important.	I believe this is very important.	Total Responses	Mean
1	ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. extent to which students have access to, and are enrolled in a broad course of study that includes core subject areas)	1	18	22	41	2.51
2	Educational RESEARCH or LITERATURE highlighting best practices.	2	17	19	38	2.45
3	PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE or "local knowledge," which reflects the real-world experience of teachers and educational staff working with foster youth.	2	20	18	40	2.40
4	OTHER DATA: If your district collects additional data not mentioned above, please describe it in the box below.	2	6	6	14	2.29

OTHER DATA: If your district collects additional data not mentioned above, please describe it in the box below.
Casemanagement of foster care cases
Attendance Data
N/A
At-Risk Reports

Statistic	ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT DATA disaggregated by foster youth status (e.g. extent to which students have access to, and are enrolled in a broad course of study that includes core subject areas)	Educational RESEARCH or LITERATURE highlighting best practices.	PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE or "local knowledge," which reflects the real-world experience of teachers and educational staff working with foster youth.	OTHER DATA: If your district collects additional data not mentioned above, please describe it in the box below.
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	3	3	3	3
Mean	2.51	2.45	2.40	2.29
Variance	0.31	0.36	0.35	0.84
Standard Deviation	0.55	0.60	0.59	0.92
Total Responses	41	38	40	15

14. To what extent do the following serve as barriers to data-driven decision making regarding foster youth in your district?

#	Question	Not a barrier	Minor barrier	Major barrier	Total Responses	Mean
1	a. Inaccurate or unreliable data regarding foster youth in the system.	11	13	16	40	2.13
2	b. Lack of working with the county child welfare agency to share information.	13	11	16	40	2.08
3	c. Lack of timely transfer of health and education records.	7	17	16	40	2.23
4	d. Lack of responding to the needs of the juvenile court system.	10	16	12	38	2.05
5	e. Foster youth data stored in forms that are difficult to access, manage, and interpret.	12	16	12	40	2.00
6	f. Foster youth information located in multiple disparate databases that make it difficult to link data for analysis (i.e. lack of interoperability)	9	11	20	40	2.28
7	g. Lack of resources to train school staff on how to use foster youth data to support instructional	7	16	15	38	2.21

	improvement (e.g., providing data analysis specialists, professional development funds).					
8	h. Lack of teacher preparation on how to use data for instructional decision-making regarding foster youth (e.g., data interpretation skills).	7	20	12	39	2.13
9	i. Lack of technical skills of school staff to access or utilize electronic data systems that house foster youth data (e.g., technical proficiencies).	12	15	13	40	2.03

Statistic	a. Inaccurate or unreliable data regarding foster youth in the system.	b. Lack of working with the county child welfare agency to share information.	c. Lack of timely transfer of health and education records.	d. Lack of responding to the needs of the juvenile court system.	e. Foster youth data stored in forms that are difficult to access, manage, and interpret.	f. Foster youth information located in multiple disparate databases that make it difficult to link data for analysis (i.e. lack of interoperability)	g. Lack of resources to train school staff on how to use foster youth data to support instructional improvement (e.g., providing data analysis specialists, professional development funds).	h. Lack of teacher preparation on how to use data for instructional decision-making regarding foster youth (e.g., data interpretation skills).	i. Lack of technical skills of school staff to access or utilize electronic data systems that house foster youth data (e.g., technical proficiencies).
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Mean	2.13	2.08	2.23	2.05	2.00	2.28	2.21	2.13	2.03
Variance	0.68	0.74	0.54	0.59	0.62	0.67	0.55	0.48	0.64
Standard Deviation	0.82	0.86	0.73	0.77	0.78	0.82	0.74	0.70	0.80
Total Responses	40	40	40	38	40	40	38	39	40

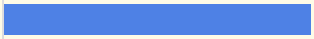
15. (CONTINUED: To what extent do the following serve as barriers to data-driven decision making regarding foster youth in your district?)

#	Question	Not a barrier	Minor barrier	Major barrier	Total Responses	Mean
1	j. Lack of building administrator preparation on how to use foster youth data for data-driven decision making.	9	20	9	38	2.00
2	k. Lack of time for school staff to conduct data-driven decision-making activities regarding foster youth (e.g., to reflect on or use data, for teacher collaboration).	10	13	15	38	2.13
3	l. Lack of a clear vision or strategic plan for data-driven decision making regarding foster youth (e.g., as part of a systematic approach to continuous improvement).	12	18	9	39	1.92
4	m. Lack of district leadership support for data-driven decision making regarding foster youth (e.g., explicit norms and expectations regarding data use).	17	14	8	39	1.77

5	n. Lack of communication or sharing of foster youth data across departments within the district.	11	17	11	39	2.00
6	o. Lack of communication or sharing of foster youth data across all key stakeholders both inside and outside the school, including social workers, foster youth guardians, counselors, teachers, etc.	9	13	17	39	2.21

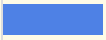
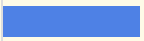
Statistic	j. Lack of building administrator preparation on how to use foster youth data for data-driven decision making.	k. Lack of time for school staff to conduct data-driven decision-making activities regarding foster youth (e.g., to reflect on or use data, for teacher collaboration).	l. Lack of a clear vision or strategic plan for data-driven decision making regarding foster youth (e.g., as part of a systematic approach to continuous improvement).	m. Lack of district leadership support for data-driven decision making regarding foster youth (e.g., explicit norms and expectations regarding data use).	n. Lack of communication or sharing of foster youth data across departments within the district.	o. Lack of communication or sharing of foster youth data across all key stakeholders both inside and outside the school, including social workers, foster youth guardians, counselors, teachers, etc.
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	3	3	3	3	3	3
Mean	2.00	2.13	1.92	1.77	2.00	2.21
Variance	0.49	0.66	0.55	0.60	0.58	0.64
Standard Deviation	0.70	0.81	0.74	0.78	0.76	0.80
Total Responses	38	38	39	39	39	39

16. How do the answers you provided about barriers compare to overall practices in your district? Choose the statement that best describes your district.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	The ratings I marked regarding barriers are mostly unique to foster youth data. We do not have the same barriers in other areas of decision-making.		20	65%
2	The ratings I marked reflect the same degree of barriers in other areas of decision-making in our district.		11	35%
	Total		31	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.35
Variance	0.24
Standard Deviation	0.49
Total Responses	31

17. What was your involvement in the writing of your district LCAP (Local Control Accountability Plan)?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Participated in LCAP community meetings.		8	21%
2	Completed an LCAP survey.		4	11%
3	Served on district team that wrote the LCAP for my district.		11	29%
4	Other:		15	39%
	Total		38	100%

Other:
Not involved in the writing of the LCAP.
None, I asked to participate and was told I was not needed.
Offered opinions to administrator writing LCAP
none
NA
Minor advisor for LCAP - limited input.
None
Not Involve
I did all of the above including writing the LCAP
give information to Coordiantor
Provided Superintendent with data and anecdotal information
No participation
Assisted the Assistant Superintendent who prepared the LCAP, along with other administrators
Not involved

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	4
Mean	2.87
Variance	1.36
Standard Deviation	1.17
Total Responses	38

18. In your opinion, what are the three most important actions that districts and/or schools should take to support the educational success of foster youth?

Text Response
Hire designated Foster Youth Program Administrators that will focus on monitoring student cases and assisting as well as training guidance counselors, admin, and other staff on addressing FY issues in the school system.
Making sure school sites and teachers are actively involved in supporting and meeting the needs of foster youth.
Counseling, Career tec and opportunities for grade 13 or post high school goals and mentors
Accurate and timely identification. Identification of supports needed. Simple way to share information with appropriate staff.
Work hard to maintain stability for the student including making sure partial credits are accounted for so students are not repeating classes. Working with foster care parents on their role and their importance in the success of their foster child. Working with staff to understand the dynamics of the foster care population.
1) Identify the foster youth and inform stakeholders (teacher, principal, liaison). 2) Provide resources to support foster youth to ensure they have a strong school connection. 3) Continue to monitor new enrollments to ensure foster youth are identified once they have enrolled in school.
-communication to teachers about foster status -insure foster youth receive all services they need
Continue to seek accurate counts of foster youth in conjunction with county and state entities.
1. Identification of foster youth 2. Assessment and linkage to support services for successful transitions 3. Regular communication with foster youth, case manager, foster parent, ed rights holder, etc.
Identification of foster youth ,
Honestly, the greatest barrier these children face is the lack of understanding of how being in foster care impacts a child's ability to focus, attend, participate, sleep, ...eat.... live. You won't find this honest answer in the stats, or the numbers. The lack of understanding how crippling this is in a child's world is the greatest barrier facing these poor victims. They live in fear and confusion. The inability to understand the trauma of complete powerlessness causes them to shut down or act out.....neither well understood nor tolerated.
1. Accurately identifying students 2. Monitoring academic progress 3. Providing the appropriate resources and supports to be successful
Train teachers on accommodations, Increase staffing for foster youth, More accurate data on success/transiency for foster
Academic Planning Teams Social/Emotional Support and/or Resources Communication between school staff and social workers
Liaison/Counselor for the youth Community Resources Positive School Climax
1) Keep accurate records 2) Stay abreast of recent legislation 3) Understand the traumatic experience of foster youth and respond accordingly.
1. share data with district & collaborate with DCFS, probation, and county offices of ed 2. connect foster youth with counselors who have specialized training in trauma-informed practice 3. award partial credits
Trained Staff Direct contact with the Students Suport

Have an accurate data collection of who is a FY Accurate records of all FY and timely turn around times of releasing their records. Ensure FY are given check out grades and partial credits to give to the next school they will attend.
Designate funding for personnel to support foster youth Set goals for foster youth engagement and achievement
Develop a system for identifying foster youth and collecting data for each student
Know who they are, analyze data to support placement in programs and for support, and work with other agencies to care for all needs.
Provide a wide range of activities. Develop partnerships with agencies. Improve the ability to gather data on foster youth
The need to identify foster youth The need for staff to understand foster youth laws and how it applies to their districts The need for staff to understand the unstable placement of the foster youth population and to not take it out on the victim.
I am relatively new to my position and still learning about the identification and needs of foster youth. I think districts need a clear understanding of the definition of foster youth and the resources available for the students. I recently discovered that foster youth are identified by dcfs and the data is put into Calpads. If a student is then adopted, they are still considered foster youth in Calpads and the district is unable to update records even when court documents are presented. I discovered another family in our district where the children are with their biological parents, but they are marked as foster youth for family management. These are gray areas for me, and I will be seeking more information to fully understand the system and identifcation.
1. Identify students 2. Recognize the special circumstances surrounding foster youth 3. Implement systemic change to address these circumstances
1.Communication between stakeholders. 2. Collaboration DCFS and school districts. 3. Accurate data.
Do not allow foster parents ed. rights make all legal representation of special ed. disputes pro bono Provide records in a timely manner
1. Identification of the Foster Youth ; 2. Training of all clerical staff; 3. Training the community liaisons

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	28

19. Are you interested in participating in a 45 minute one-on-one interview about this topic?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		12	31%
2	No		27	69%
	Total		39	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.69
Variance	0.22
Standard Deviation	0.47
Total Responses	39

20. Please enter your information below so I may contact you to schedule an interview. This data will not be associated with your survey responses.

21. Thank you for taking time out of your extremely busy schedule to complete this survey. We look forward to sharing the results at an upcoming LACOE meeting. As a gesture of our gratitude, we are offering a $20 gift card for your feedback. To receive this gift card, please leave your email address below.

Email address:

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	25

APPENDIX E

RECRUITMENT LETTER

From: Rachelle Touzard
Sent: Friday, January 16, 2015 12:20 PM
To: Los Angeles County Foster Youth Liaisons Group Listserv
Subject: Request for Foster Youth Liaison participation in an online survey

Greetings Foster Youth Liaisons,

Please take a few minutes to read the email below and take a survey created by Brian Huff, a graduate student at UCLA. He is interested in the perspective of Foster Youth Liaisons and how to best meet the needs of Foster Youth in LA County. Brian will be sharing the results of his study, which can inform our work. Thank you and good day,

Rachelle Touzard, Ph.D.
Coordinator II, Foster Youth Services
Division of Student Support Services
Los Angeles County Office of Education
Office: 562.922.6234
Fax: 562.922.6781

From: Brian Huff
Sent: Monday, January 12, 2015 12:33 PM
To: Rachelle Tozard
Subject: Foster Youth Liaison Input

Dear Foster Youth Liaisons,

I am working on a study at UCLA that examines ways to improve educational decision-making for foster youth. As the foster youth liaison in your district, your insights are invaluable. Please take a moment to complete an ONLINE SURVEY.

It should take about 8–15 minutes to complete. We're aiming for a high response rate of 80% of foster youth liaisons so that we can do our best to address the needs of foster youth in LA County public schools. Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Kind regards,

Brian Huff, Graduate Researcher
UCLA Graduate School of Education
Phone | 213.369.1093
Email | bhuff@ucla.edu

APPENDIX F

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Students in foster care are some of the most educationally at-risk students in California. Their academic achievement gap is similar to English learners and students with disabilities, even being outperformed by low-SES students.
(West Ed, 2013)

BACKGROUND: We are studying ways to improve the educational system for foster youth. As a foster youth liaison, your voice is invaluable. Please join us!

SURVEY: On January 16, 2014, Dr. Rachelle Touzard, Foster Youth Services Coordinator, sent you an email with a link to the online survey. Please take a moment to complete the questions. It should take 8–15 minutes. We're aiming for a high response rate of 80% so that we can do our best to address the needs of foster youth in LA County. We will send follow up reminders over the next few weeks with a link. You can also fill out a hard copy at the January 22 foster youth liaison meeting at LACOE.

OPTIONAL INTEVIEW: The survey will ask if you are willing to also participate in an interview. If willing, we will set up a time and location that is convenient for you.

Thank you for your hard work with foster students
and for considering participation in this study.

Los Angeles County Office of Education

Questions or comments about the study?
Brian Huff, Graduate Researcher
UCLA Graduate School of Education
Phone | 213.369.1093
Email | bhuff@ucla.edu

UCLA Ed & IS

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Questions:

- On the survey, I asked foster youth liaisons to list the top three actions districts should take to support the educational success of foster youth. Half of respondents cited "identification of foster youth." What might be the reason so many liaisons listed this particular action?

- One third of respondents identified "training" district staff (such as counselors, teachers, administration, and support staff) on foster youth. What kinds of training would be particularly important?

- When I compare the actions on the LCAP plans against those suggested by liaisons, there are clear similarities and differences. Both identify the importance of improving foster youth data infrastructure. However, from there, the priorities diverge. The next two most frequently listed actions in LCAP plans are (1) the hiring of additional foster youth staff, and (2) providing academic supports. Foster youth liaisons, however, list (1) establishing local policies and procedures, (2) supporting the emotional needs of foster youth, and (3) coordination of services. What do you think explains this difference in focus?

- A recent study found that most California districts are lumping foster youth actions into actions with other significant subgroups, such as low-income students. My analysis of LCAP plans confirms this. Can you provide insight into why this might be the case?

- Describe your district process in writing LCAP actions for foster youth. What were some of the challenges? What resources did you find helpful?

- What data do you think is especially important to use when making decisions about the effectiveness of educational services for foster youth?

- The state has made some progress in foster youth data since LCAP plans were written last year. How has this impacted the way your district uses data and shares foster youth information among district staff?

- What is the process for using data in your district? Who is involved? When does it occur? What does it look like?

- In what ways is this process similar or different when using foster youth data?

- Describe some of the barriers you face when using data to make decisions about foster youth services.

- In your experience, what needs to be in place for a district to make better data-driven decisions for foster youth?

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