



REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

# Foster Care Outcomes

2018

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## Executive Summary

Students in foster care face many challenges. Nationally, less than 50 percent graduate from high school and less than 3 percent graduate from college. Alumni of foster care experience a higher rate of poverty, homelessness, incarceration, early parenthood and substance abuse. Recognizing the critical role education plays, Washington state passed groundbreaking legislation aimed at improving these outcomes.

Prior to 2016, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) was required to contract with a nongovernmental agency to improve educational outcomes for foster youth. In 2016, House Bill (HB) 1999 transferred the administration of those contracts from DCYF to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and to the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC).

**Graduation Success Demonstration Site** program administration transferred from DCYF to OSPI.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction contracts with Treehouse, a nongovernmental agency dedicated to improving educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care. Together, they provide individualized, long-term education services and monitoring to dependent youth.

**Statewide Education Advocacy** program administration transferred from DCYF to OSPI.

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families still holds the contract to preserve a portion of federal funding for the program. OSPI sub-contracts with Treehouse to provide a comprehensive array of short-term educational support services to referred dependent youth.

**Supplemental Education and Training Program (SETuP)** transferred from DCYF to WSAC.

The Washington Student Achievement Council contracts with six nongovernmental agencies statewide to provide assistance to dependent youth in successfully transitioning from high school to a post-secondary plan, including college, career or service.

These changes have resulted in improved collaboration between the three state agencies and with their nongovernmental partners. Overall, the passage of HB 1999 (2016) has provided a more holistic, coordinated approach to educational success for children and youth in foster care.

## Introduction

House Bill 1999 established the goal of making Washington state the leader in the nation with respect to foster youth education outcomes, including:

- graduation rates,
- enrollment in post-secondary education, and
- post-secondary completion.

The legislation mandates the administration of three educational programs serving foster youth to transfer from the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to other agencies. Another provision of the legislation requires DCYF to share confidential child welfare information with other state agencies, or a contracted provider, for the purpose of assisting foster youth to attain educational success.

### **New Contracts and Data Sharing Agreements**

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), DCYF, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), Treehouse, and the College Success Foundation worked together to ensure the successful transfer of the Graduation Success Demonstration Site, Education Advocacy, and Supplemental Education and Training Program (SETuP) contracts by July 1, 2016. All parties developed the appropriate data-share agreements and processes for exchanging information to support improved educational outcomes for youth in foster care. The mutual data exchange was a complicated process to develop, with many unforeseen challenges. Although the exchange took longer than expected, it is now fully functional, allowing for efficient data sharing.

During the transition period, the agencies met with SETuP providers and representatives from Treehouse, DCYF, and OSPI. These meetings provided new contract managers with an understanding of the work and which implementation challenges to address. New contract language was written to ensure all legislative requirements were being met. The contracts also incorporated provider feedback regarding best practices and strategies for implementation and service delivery.

### **Graduation Success and Education Advocacy**

Treehouse reports the transfer of its Graduation Success and Educational Advocacy contracts to OSPI has resulted in a more effective and flexible partnership with an agency whose essential function aligns with their own—improving educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care. Contract requirements have been streamlined, while data collection reports now measure student-level progress as opposed to reasonable efforts. Under this new contracting relationship, the Treehouse Graduating Cohort of 2016 had an extended five-year

graduation rate of 89 percent, as compared to 82 percent for the general population and 49 percent for their peers in foster care statewide.

### **Data Exchange**

Delivering student-level data to enable service provision took 18 months longer than expected due to technical difficulties and data quality challenges. Treehouse entered the 2017–18 school year without agreements in place, or a plan for delivering the information needed to identify all eligible students in target geographies. Thanks to persistent efforts between DCYF and OSPI, Treehouse received a complete list of eligible students as well as caregiver and caseworker information in August 2018. Moving forward, this information will be updated monthly.

### **Additional Challenges**

Foster parent shortage and caseworker turnover can result in children and youth changing placements and schools frequently. Treehouse reports placement transitions impact academic performance and participation in their programs.

### **Supplemental Education and Training Program (SETuP)**

In July 2016, the responsibility of the Supplemental Education and Training Program (SETuP) was successfully transferred from DCYF to WSAC. Six nongovernmental organizations provide direct services to SETuP students.

### **Data Exchange**

In 2017, WSAC and DCYF revised their data-sharing agreement. This agreement increased the frequency of information exchanges, allowing WSAC to provide the SETuP contractors with more accurate and timely information to support outreach to foster youth. WSAC and DCYF now exchange data monthly for the auto-enrollment of foster youth into the College Bound program. To ensure student eligibility and access to the scholarship, College Bound education data is matched with OSPI records quarterly for new applicants, and weekly for previously matched students.

### **Collaboration**

The Washington Student Achievement Council and OSPI have worked with the six contractors to develop and identify roles for supporting foster youth. This work allows for smooth transitions between providers and clear expectations among partners, eliminating duplication of services for youth.

Throughout the 2017–18 academic year, WSAC worked with the College Success Foundation to develop a consortium of partners for regional meetings in Seattle, Yakima, and Spokane. These meetings brought together SETuP providers, other nongovernmental entities, and college Passport Designated Support Staff to share and discuss Passport student support practices.

Washington Student Achievement Council staff collaborated with the College Success Foundation, representatives from post-secondary institutions, and social services to refine and update the Passport participation agreement. They also created a template for institutions to use in developing a viable plan for supporting foster youth on campus, developed a resource guide for institutions, and outlined new reporting measurements. In May 2018, nearly 200 professionals received training on these new materials at the annual Passport Conference.

To aid in streamlining services for Passport students, the updated institutional participation agreement requires college Passport Designated Support Staff to connect with social services, SETuP, and Independent Living providers to ensure students from foster care receive a full range of support services and college preparation information. Additionally, SETuP contractors are required to assist participants with making connections to the Passport Designated Support Staff and financial aid office.

### **Update on Outcome Indicators**

In 2016, WSAC worked with SETuP providers to develop new contract language and reporting metrics, updating processes in place since 2007. The new reporting metrics collect student-level data, allowing WSAC to track, evaluate, and analyze the post-secondary enrollment, persistence, and completion of SETuP participants.

The metrics include tracking development of SETuP participants' education plans, participation in career-interest inventories, college campus visitations, assistance with college admissions and financial aid applications, assistance with securing housing while in college, connections to college support services, and participation in college transition programs. SETuP metrics are aligned with proven practices from the GEAR UP program, and are intended to increase academic performance and preparation for post-secondary education among low-income students.

The Washington Student Achievement Council has implemented new descriptive analysis templates in order to meet program goals. As WSAC continues serving students through SETuP, these templates will provide data to help accurately analyze the program's success.

## **Conclusion and Next Steps**

Overall, the transfer of contracts required by HB 1999 (2016) has improved collaboration between agencies. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families; the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; and the Washington Student Achievement Council—in partnership with the nongovernmental agencies providing direct services to students in foster care—meet regularly to monitor progress, provide cross-agency training to leadership and staff, and discuss the successes and challenges of the contract transition.

Moving forward, our organizations will continue to explore opportunities to further integrate and coordinate data-sharing between the state agencies and Treehouse. The agencies will work within the legal frameworks and technical constraints of our current systems to better understand and to improve the services and programs provided to foster care students.

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