



**INSTITUTE *for* EVIDENCE-BASED CHANGE**  
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**For Immediate Release**

**The Institute for Evidence Based Change (IEBC) Completes Final Report of Landmark Foster Youth Study That Reveals Low Educational Outcomes**

*The study is the first time longitudinal data on foster youth education outcomes have been compared to other at-risk student populations*

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**San Diego** – Each year in California, over 7,000 youth between the ages of 8 and 13 are removed from their home due to abuse and neglect and placed into foster care. For many of these youth, challenges associated with the family environment and entry into an out-of-home placement may serve as a turning point and alter academic performance trajectories.

To better understand the educational experiences of foster youth, the Institute for Evidence-Based Change and the Center for Social Services Research at the University of California, Berkeley conducted a study of California foster youth and produced two reports: (1) Foster Youth Transitions, A study of California foster youth high school and college educational outcomes; and (2) Foster Youth Stability, A study of California foster youths' school and residential changes in relation to educational outcomes. The research was made possible with funding from the Stuart Foundation.

According to Brad Phillips, PhD, President and Chief Executive Officer of IEBC, the Foster Youth Transitions research sampled data on approximately 11,300 youth in foster care during grades 9-11. The Foster Youth Stability research sampled data on approximately 8,500 foster youth in grades 2-7, beginning with school year 2003–04 to 2006–07 (i.e., baseline year), and following foster youth for three years.

The Foster Youth Stability research examined the relationships among education risk factors, child welfare case characteristics, and residential and school changes in relation to academic performance over time. School performance was assessed through the California Standards Test (CST) in English and math.

Greg Rose, Deputy Director, Children and Family Services Division, California Department of Social Services, stated, "The shared data was critical information that added to our understanding of foster care programs and our potential to design and implement policy in California. In particular, we found the work of IEBC and CSSR in linking two massive data bases - California's education and social services data sets - to be of tremendous value."

Among the key findings of the study were the following:

- A higher proportion of foster youth transferred schools compared to the matched control students. Three out of four foster youth, for example, experienced a school transfer in the year they entered foster care compared to 21% of the comparison group.
- Overall, approximately 95% of foster youth experienced some type of school change, either transition moving from one school to a different level, such as elementary to middle school, or transfer to a different school in year one compared to 37–38% of the matched comparison students. In year two, 72% of foster youth changed schools compared to 47–49% of the non-foster youth sample. Most school movement was from school transfers.
- In English, foster youth did not perform as well over the three year time period as the matched sample of students. Although half of all youth who scored at the far below basic level in the baseline year increased in CST level by year three, a significantly higher proportion of foster youth did not change levels compared to the control group (31% versus 22%). Fewer foster youth who started at the below basic level increased (31% versus 43%) performance levels and a greater number decreased (25% versus 18%) in relation to comparison students.
- In math, significantly fewer foster youth experienced an increase in CST level (16% versus 28%) and a greater number experienced a decrease in CST level (42% versus 28%) compared to the matched comparison students.
- Foster youth with a documented disability (i.e., special education) were at increased risk for poor performance over time, tending to fare poorly on both the English and math portions of the CST.

“We determined a great deal from our ability to link complex data bases for this study,” said Dr. Phillips. “For example, educational risk factors such as participation in the National School Lunch Program or English Language Learner designation that exist prior to entry into foster care placement are better predictors of academic performance over time than the majority of child welfare case characteristics such as foster youth status or abuse or neglect as the reason for removal from the home.” In addition, Dr. Phillips noted that the study found that school and residential changes were associated with lower academic performance and that foster youth who were poor, non-white, and with disabilities (i.e., special education status) struggled on standardized tests more than others.

“Being in a low performing school,” noted Dr. Phillips, “even if it reduced the number of school changes, may not be in foster youths’ best interest for long-term academic achievement.”

He added, “This California study is a strong indicator of what can be accomplished through linking diverse data bases. It’s important to note that the IEBC model is replicable and can be used by other states to explore the combination of social services and education data to

improve the knowledge base concerning foster youth, the challenges facing them, and the opportunities to address them.”

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**THE INSTITUTE FOR EVIDENCE-BASED CHANGE (IEBC)**

The Institute for Evidence-Based Change is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving academic success for all students. IEBC is nationally recognized for leadership and innovative approaches in working with educators and education stakeholders to access, organize and use the data already at their disposal, as well as data from other systems and institutions. IEBC is equally skilled in forming collaborative solutions that lead to improved student success. The organization provides hands-on leadership and facilitation skills in consensus-building conversations with a wide range of stakeholders. Its process leads to in-depth conversations that are geared toward increasing understanding and generating solutions that ultimately result in greater student success. Learn more about IEBC at [www.iebcnow.org](http://www.iebcnow.org).