Experiences and Outcomes of Foster Care Alumni in Postsecondary Education: A Review of the Literature

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Youth involved with the foster care system experience a number of challenges related to educational, employment, social, and interpersonal adjustment into adulthood (e.g., Barth, 1990; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Pecora et al., 2003). Obtaining a postsecondary degree has been shown to increase outcomes related to one’s social and financial well-being, particularly for those who come from underprivileged backgrounds (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). However, there is a lack of data about the number of foster care alumni who attend college and graduate and their long-term outcomes. It is estimated that up to 10% of foster care alumni enroll in 4-year institutions and approximately 3-5% go on to graduate (Barth, 1990; Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2010; Emerson, 2006; McMillen & Tucker, 1999; Mech & Fung, 1999; Pecora et al., 2003; Reilly, 2003; Wolanin, 2005).

Much of the research published regarding youth aging out of foster care and foster care alumni related to education focuses on elementary and secondary educational experiences prior to aging out. Although there has been an increase in studies published in the past five years, research published in the area of foster care alumni and postsecondary education is limited. This paper provides a scoping review of research regarding foster care alumni’s experiences and outcomes in postsecondary education and offers recommendations for future practice, research, and policy. This paper integrates the knowledge from relevant literature and provides an overview of the strengths and limitations of existing research. There are many terms used to describe children and youth who have experienced foster care. This article uses the term ‘foster care alumni’ to describe youth who have experienced foster care and those who have aged out of foster care. Youth in foster care and who have aged out of foster care have a range of
experiences related to time in care, individual characteristics, caregivers, legal status, and other
elements of well-being, and these experiences can influence educational outcomes and
experiences.

Method

Search Strategy

A systematic search of the literature in the databases EBSCOhost, ProQuest, PsycInfo,
Eric, and Google Scholar was conducted using varying combinations of the keywords “foster
youth, aging out, foster care, foster care alumni, higher education, post-secondary, college,
university, and scholarship.” Inclusion criteria involved studies in scholarly journals or reports
from reputable policy organizations published in English. During the search, a date range was
not specified to ensure screening of all published literature on the subject. Articles and reports of
all methodologies and designs (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, meta-analysis), and agency reports
were considered for inclusion prior to further examination. Exclusion criteria included articles
published in a language other than English, and publications not classified as reports or peer-
reviewed journal articles (e.g., dissertations, theses). All searches were conducted between
January and March 2016; the last search took place on March 6, 2016.

Article Selection and Review

The initial search generated 593 articles, and an additional 38 were identified through
manual searches of citations and the authors’ personal files. A three-stage review process was
used to determine whether the publications would be included in the review. During the first
stage, title and abstracts were reviewed and evaluated by two researchers, who are trained and
experienced qualitative researchers; during the second stage, the full texts were reviewed by the
same researchers. Finally, during the third stage, content was examined closely to determine
Researchers took extensive notes during the review and shared notes and ideas at several stages of the review. Following the first review, articles were excluded if they did not include foster youth/foster care alumni as the target population, or if they did not discuss higher education. Articles were included if they discussed higher education related to foster care alumni either as the focus of the paper, or in detail. For example, if the study discussed a variety of outcomes for foster care alumni and included postsecondary education as one domain, it was included. Following these criteria, 91 articles were selected for further review based on title, abstract and initial review. The Figure 1 flowchart outlines the complete article selection process. The authors then reviewed each article in depth and agreed to exclude an additional 40; these articles discussed foster care and higher education in the context of child welfare worker preparation and training, discussed education, but it was not the main focus of the article, or it was a duplicate. Summarized information regarding the study design, setting, sample, and key findings of the 51 articles included in the review were then inserted into a table. Themes and sub-themes across the studies were also determined to help organize the studies reviewed. The authors arrived at three overarching themes: college readiness, access, and support \((n = 13)\); postsecondary preparation and support programs \((n = 9)\); and outcomes and experiences of foster care alumni in higher education \((n = 29)\). For the purpose of this review, the third theme, the outcomes and experiences of foster care alumni in higher education are presented and reviewed in depth in this manuscript and the other two themes are examined in another manuscript.

[insert figure 1 about here]

**Findings**
Studies primarily focused on student successes, barriers, and overall experiences in higher education. The most dated article was published in 1997; all other articles and one report were published after the year 2000. While the subject appears to have received inconsistent attention prior to 2008, at least one article exploring foster youths’ outcomes has been published every year since 2008. The majority of the articles (23) employed quantitative ($n = 20$) or mixed ($n = 3$) methods. A smaller number of articles (4) and one (1) report used qualitative methods ($n = 5$). Pecora (2012) was a review of factors associated with success. Many of the quantitative studies relied on data collected from the CalYOUTH Study (Okpych, Courtney, & Charles, 2015), Midwest Study (Courtney et al., 2010), Casey National Alumni Study (Harris, Jackson, O’Brien, & Pecora, 2009; O’Brien et al., 2010; Pecora et al., 2006a, 2006b; Sim, Emerson, O’Brien, Pecora, & Silva, 2008; Salazar, 2012, 2013), or the Pathways to College Study (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005; Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, & Wyatt, 2005). Others utilized secondary data gathered by administrative bodies such as university departments or state child and family services departments (e.g., Day, Dworsky, & Feng, 2013; Day et al., 2011; Shin, 2003). The three mixed methods studies utilized in-depth interviews and a combination of questionnaires, surveys, and secondary data analyses. Of the five qualitative studies, four employed in-depth narrative or personal interviews, and one conducted semi-structured interviews. The report described findings from a study using qualitative interviews.

**Overview of publications.** The 29 studies varied in terms of sample size, age of participants, setting of data collection, and location. Overall, the sample sizes ranged from 67 to 1,068 for the quantitative studies, 14 to 216 for the mixed methods studies, and 8 to 19 for the qualitative studies. The ages of the participants in all studies ranged from 15 to 58, with 8 studies including participants older than 30. In the studies that included participants older than 30, those
participants were not outliers. In fact, the average age of participants in many of those studies was 30.5, and, in others, as much as half of the sample was between the ages of 30-49. These studies were included in the review to illustrate the long-term outcomes of foster care alumni. Many of the empirical studies used secondary data from studies such as the Midwest Study and the Casey National Alumni Study. The empirical studies that did not use secondary data collected data using phone or Internet surveys; mail questionnaires; and agency, university, school, or community settings. Only one study was conducted outside the United States. Table 1 provides details about the design and setting of each study, and demographic information about study participants.

**Barriers and Challenges Experienced by Foster Care Alumni in Postsecondary Education**

The publications reviewed explored foster care alumni experiences in postsecondary education and identify various barriers and challenges such as gender, racial, and ethnic disparities as well as factors associated with disengagement and drop-out.

**Gender and racial/ethnic disparities.** Three studies examined disparities based on gender and race/ethnicity. Kirk, Lewis, Brown, Nilsen, and Colvin (2012) evaluated gender differences among foster youth in educational expectations. Using a survey, they measured educational expectations, college efficacy, academic performance, and preparation for college. Findings indicated that women in the study were two times more likely than men to obtain a Bachelor’s degree, regardless of their race. Harris et al. (2009) compared the educational and employment outcomes of African American and White foster care alumni served by the Casey Family programs. Compared to African American participants, White foster care alumni were more likely to have income above the poverty level or three times the poverty line, and to own a home or apartment. O’Brien et al. (2010) also compared the educational and employment
outcomes of foster care alumni from the Casey Family programs, this time by focusing on American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) versus Whites. Like Harris and colleagues (2009), O’Brien et al. (2010) found that White foster care alumni had more positive outcomes than AI/AN in terms of education, employment, income, and housing. These studies discussed the need to study and develop culturally competent foster care and post-foster care supports, and to explore gender, racial, and ethnic experiences qualitatively and longitudinally.

**College disengagement.** Factors related to college disengagement described in the articles reviewed included having a history of mental health, emotional or behavioral problems; working too many hours per week; and experiencing difficulty accessing healthcare (Day et al., 2011; Merdinger et al., 2005; Salazar, 2012). Day et al. (2011) found that a history of foster care alone significantly increased the odds of a student dropping out prior to graduation, with foster care alumni being almost twice as likely to drop out compared to low income, first generation students. In another study, Day and colleagues (2013) also found that former foster youth graduated at slower rates than low income, first generation students even when they were succeeding academically in terms of grades and attendance. One factor associated with this difference related to their need to work to support themselves. In light of these findings, the authors recommended policy reforms including moving the emancipation age to 21 or 25, and giving priority to students with foster care experience in work-study programs.

**Successes and Supports in Postsecondary Education**

Twenty-one of the publications reviewed explored different aspects of educational success for former foster youth and foster care alumni’s goals and aspirations. Educational success can be defined as persistence (continuing an educational program) and graduation. Several researchers explored the factors related to college retention and graduation, and the
benefits that foster care alumni reap through academic success compared to the general population. Others focused on exploring experiences of academically successful foster care alumni with regard to the turning points in their lives and the role of resilience to learn how these young people were able to succeed despite challenges.

**Success in college.** Factors most often associated with college retention and graduation among foster care alumni were described in terms of tangible and intangible supports. Examples of tangible supports included supports such as those offered through broad independent living preparation (e.g., academic skills training, housing, employment, money management; Batsche et al., 2014; Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek, 2011; Pecora, 2012; Pecora et al., 2006a; Salazar, 2012) and tutoring/help with homework (Shin, 2003). Intangible supports included a good fit with the college, social involvement, social supports (Day et al., 2011; Jones, 2011; Merdinger et al., 2005), and active participation in extracurricular activities (Merdinger et al., 2005; Shin, 2003). Pecora et al. (2006a, 2006b) also found that positive placement history as evidenced by fewer failed reunification attempts and high placement stability reduced the odds of negative educational outcomes. Several of the authors of these studies recommended that agency workers, social workers, and the education system explicitly focus on encouraging foster youth to engage in postsecondary education (Blome, 1997; Harris et al., 2009; Okpych & Courtney, 2014; Pecora, 2012; Pecora et al., 2006a, 2006b; Shin, 2003; Sim et al., 2008).

Further, most studies suggested that tangible and intangible supports should be provided prior to and throughout the entire duration of the youths’ engagement in postsecondary program education, and not exclusively during enrollment.

In terms of the benefits associated with graduating college, Okpych and Courtney (2014) concluded that although overall education correlated with higher salaries and employment, a gap
remained between those with foster care experience and the general population, even when they had the same level of education. Okpych and Courtney (2014) found that there was no statistically significant difference in earning or employment potential between foster care alumni with a GED and those with no high school degree at all. Along similar lines, Salazar (2013) found that college graduates from foster care fared similarly to the general population in terms of individual income and employment rates. Differences were found in other areas, however. For example, former foster youth in the study struggled more than the general population in terms of mental health, job security, and overall household income (Salazar, 2013). Okpych and Courtney (2014), Pecora (2012), and Salazar (2013) concluded that policies and programs must encourage high school completion and postsecondary engagement, and support students through the entirety of their college careers.

**Turning points and resilience.** Five studies explored the experiences of academically successful foster care alumni. Hass, Allen, Amoah (2014) and Hines et al. (2005) sought to further theory development in the area of resilience by exploring the experiences of young people from foster care with a history of maltreatment as they transitioned into adulthood. Themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews conducted by Hines et al. (2005) suggested that individual attributes such as assertiveness, independence or autonomy, and persistence were critical to their success. In addition to individual attributes, family and community level attributes such as having adults in their lives willing to act as substitute parents and systems that serve as havens were integral to these young people’s success. Hass and colleagues (2014) identified similar themes through in-depth interviews. Based on these findings, Hass et al. (2014) proposed an ecological model of turning points that represents the links and interplay among the personal (autonomy) and environmental (social and instrumental supports, safe havens) factors
identified.

Lovitt and Emerson (2008) described fifteen themes related to foster youths’ outlook on life and their experiences in college that emerged from interviews with eight college graduates with foster care experiences. The only trait identified across all informants was a persistent drive to be educationally successful. The authors concluded that the participants also shared similar experiences while in foster care which may have shaped their outlook, including having an influential person in their lives who encouraged them to do well in school, living in supporting homes or having foster parents who encouraged them to attend college, and having opportunities to share their stories formally or informally (Lovitt & Emerson, 2008). The Young People in Public Care: Pathways to Education in Europe (YiPPEE) study, a multi-stage, mixed methods study that was carried out in England, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, and Hungary also found that having supportive adults, stable placements, and satisfactory accommodations served as protective factors for foster care alumni in their study (Jackson & Cameron, 2012).

Okumu (2014) also discussed how foster youth transitioning to higher education describe and give meaning to their experiences, and how college environments shape those experiences. Participants described feelings of isolation and estrangement, which were at times exacerbated by the college environment and programming. Participants reported feeling lost, alone, isolated, left out, and not supported. Despite these negative emotions, the young people in the study interpreted their transition to college as empowering, giving them hope and optimism, and allowing them to conceptualize the future they wanted for themselves (Okumu, 2014). Okumu (2014) recommended that college support programs focus on fostering relationships to counter feelings of isolation and alienation. Interventions that could be used include “welcome week” events, and gatherings throughout the semester.
**Goals and aspirations.** Despite the barriers, challenges, and disparities that foster youth encounter in achieving postsecondary educational success, three studies indicated that foster youth desire to attend college. Many foster care youth also feel optimistic that they will be successful (McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003; Okpych et al., 2015; Shin, 2003). McMillen and colleagues (2003) conducted structured interviews with 262 foster youth in ILPs and measured their educational experiences including plans for future schooling, placement histories, child maltreatment histories, behavior problems, negative peer behaviors, alcohol and drug use, and future orientation using an optimism scale. Although youth in ILPs experienced a number of school-related problems, they also showed high academic aspirations. Shin (2003) found that educational aspiration was one of the most important predictors of educational attainment. Whether these aspirations served as a source of strength for these young adults, or showed the disconnection that they have from their challenges was unclear, and needs further exploration.

**Services.** Five studies focused on exploring services that could alleviate the barriers and challenges that youth aging out experience as they transition to higher education. Rassen, Cooper, and Mery (2010) conducted surveys with students and foster youth community college liaisons, and interviews with community colleges’ program staff to learn how colleges in California support their students who come from foster care. In the study, the majority of the students described resources such as Chafee grants and financial aid, and independent living programs (ILPs) as the most helpful. Most programs reported providing services such as mentorship, help filling out applications, referrals to support programs and health care providers, and locating housing. Three themes emerged that described the approaches that colleges find most successful: 1) housing the Independent Living Skills Programs on campus, 2) creating
partnerships with college departments such as financial aid and admissions, and 3) creating partnerships with external agencies such as funding sources and transitional housing providers (Rassen et al., 2010). With these three approaches, there is an opportunity to streamline programs (ILPs) and training, improve communication with other college units, increase awareness about the unique needs of foster care alumni on college campuses, and making services available to youth before and after enrollment in college.

Drawing on data from the CalYOUTH study, Okpych, Courtney, and Charles (2015) also described the services available to older foster care youths in California from the perspectives of the young people themselves and the caseworkers. When asked to rate the amount of preparation, services, or training received to prepare them for their college or job training goals, only about one third (33%) of the young people interviewed said “a lot”, though approximately forty-five percent felt that receiving support to continue their education would encourage them to stay in care beyond the age of 18. Along the same lines, less than one third of caseworkers in the study felt satisfied with the coordination with the education system to help foster youth succeed (Okpych et al., 2015).

Barnow et al. (2015) examined the educational and employment outcomes of foster youths aged 16 to 21 served by five different programs across the U.S. Outcomes measured consisted of GED or high school completion, employment status, and achieving any one of those outcomes. About one quarter of the participants had graduated high school but were not enrolled in college. The most common services provided by the five programs were job preparation, transportation, child care, educational support, counseling, and life skills. The least common services provided included parenting classes and substance abuse treatment. Receiving college preparation services was associated with an increased likelihood of enrollment in postsecondary
education, but this did not significantly increase positive postsecondary outcomes (Barnow et al., 2015).

Jones (2010) conducted interviews using an instrument developed to measure aspects of self-sufficiency to explore the educational experiences of former foster youth three years after leaving care. Findings were mixed regarding college enrollment, but overall somewhat higher than what other studies present. Jones’ (2010) study found that former foster youth in the study were more successful at 2-year institutions than at 4-year institutions, however the reasons for this are unclear. Lastly, Lee and Barth (2009) explored the potential for improving education outcomes of foster youth through residential education. As the first national study of residential education programs, the authors collected descriptive information on the students, services provided, and outcomes of program participants. About half of all program graduates were enrolled in 2- or 4-year colleges. Lee and Barth (2009) concluded that residential education delivered through a framework similar to that of boarding school as opposed to residential treatment might provide the educational stability that foster youths need to be educationally successful.

**Discussion and Implications**

This is a comprehensive review of the literature on foster care alumni and postsecondary education that focuses on foster care alumni’s experiences in higher education, and research related to educational and social outcomes for foster care alumni. A total of 29 publications were reviewed and synthesized. The focus on foster care alumni in postsecondary education settings is fairly new; the academic community has only begun to research and publish findings related to outcomes and experiences of foster care alumni in higher education in the past 2 decades. As policies designed to support foster care youth in higher education continue to be implemented,
there is a need to understand the supports and barriers that exist for youth aging out as they attempt to access and succeed in postsecondary educational settings. The following is a discussion of the research, policy, and practice implications made in the articles reviewed, as well as additional recommendations. A summary of these recommendations is presented in table 2.

[insert table 2 about here]

**Practice Implications**

It is clear from the existing research that the majority of foster care alumni aspire to attend college (McMillen et al., 2003; Okpych, 2015; Shin, 2003) and many have positive views about their college experience and success despite statistics that show that students who have experienced foster care are less likely to enroll, persist, and graduate from college than their same aged peers without foster care experience (Day et al., 2011). The studies reviewed identified several areas in which students with foster care experience continue to struggle (both prior to and following enrollment in higher education). Foster youths in higher education continued to struggle with mental health, behavioral, and emotional issues; challenges related to relationships (e.g., establishing long-term, supportive relationships); and a lack of stable housing, employment, and education. Unresolved, many of these issues (possibly stemming from childhood and traumas) followed them into adulthood, and became barriers as they attempted to engage and complete postsecondary educational programs. The articles reviewed also pointed to a number of systemic and financial barriers stemming from inadequate funding of support programs and limited access or awareness about supports available for foster care alumni (Day et al., 2011; Pecora, 2012; Pecora et al., 2006a; Rassen et al., 2010).
Authors of the articles reviewed recommended cross-system collaboration in order to promote success among foster care alumni in higher education. The child welfare and education systems need to work together to communicate, support, and provide assistance to youth aging out in all areas, including education (Day et al., 2013; Day et al., 2011; McMillen et al., 2003; Rassen et al., 2010; Salazar, 2012). In addition, counseling and mental health services need to be easily accessible to and attainable for students after they age out and while they are in higher education settings. The studies reviewed consistently found mental health to be a barrier in the educational success of foster care alumni and recommended increased attention to the mental health needs of students who have experienced foster care (Harris et al., 2009; Pecora, 2012; Pecora et al., 2006a; Salazar, 2012; Salazar, 2013).

On-campus and preparatory programs for foster care alumni should also consider youths’ gender, racial/ethnic backgrounds in creating culturally competent and culturally informed programs (Harris et al., 2009; O’Brien et al., 2010). Students may have connections to their various identities that could be further explored while in college and/or can help them become more connected to others. These possible connections can foster a much needed sense of belonging; program factors that facilitate and enhance these identity explorations should be identified. Further research is also needed to understand the intersection of sociocultural factors and foster youths’ higher education experiences and to identify culture-specific strengths and challenges.

Studies included in the review also examined students’ sources of resilience and support that help to manage the barriers and challenges associated with pursuing postsecondary education. For example, several studies described individual traits among participants to include assertiveness, independence/autonomy, persistence, and optimism as sources of resilience that
have helped them to be successful (Hass et al., 2014; Hines et al., 2005; Kirk & Day, 2011; Okumu, 2014). Based on the research regarding the barriers and successes of foster care alumni and higher education, more programs should incorporate this knowledge into program development and delivery. Programs that promote the development of the traits and characteristics described in the resilience literature should be promoted widely and be made accessible to all youth who have experienced foster care. A number of promising pre-college and college-based programs exist nationwide. While generally these programs need to undergo further rigorous evaluations, some programs that utilize a strength-based, resilience-based approach to provide wrap-around, comprehensive services have been shown to be successful (Day et al., 2013; Geenen et al., 2015; Geiger, Hanrahan, Cheung, & Lietz, 2016; Kirk & Day, 2011; Okpych, 2012; Phillips et al., 2015; Watt, Norton, & Jones, 2013). Further investigation to understand the gender and racial disparities identified by Kirk et al. (2012) is needed in order to inform the development of interventions and policies that support underserved groups, including young men from foster care in higher education. Broad independent living preparation that includes vocational opportunities and financial and housing supports should be implemented by programs supporting successful aging out and transitioning of foster youths (Pecora, 2012). Pecora (2012) and Sim et al. (2008) also discussed a need for proper assessment and evaluation of the youth prior to and during postsecondary education.

**Research Implications**

Each study reviewed brings various strengths and limitations. Given the population examined, many studies had smaller sample sizes and few were longitudinal. Few studies used a national representative and diverse sample (Lee & Barth, 2009; Okpych et al., 2015). Only some studies utilized comparison groups (e.g., Blome, 1997; Day et al., 2013; Day et al., 2011; Harris et al., 2009; Salazar, 2013) and were able to obtain the perspectives of foster care alumni and...
those who worked with this group of students (Hass et al., 2014; McMillen et al., 2003; Okumu, 2014). There was some variability across participant age and experiences which should be noted as this may influence foster care alumni’s educational experiences and outcomes. In addition, there may have been a selection bias with regard to study participants’ gender, race/ethnicity, type of post-secondary program, policies, and available support to participants.

Despite recent increased attention in the literature focused on foster care alumni and education, there continues to be much to learn about the impact of programs, policies, outcomes, and experiences of students who are foster care alumni as they prepare for and engage in higher education. In order to design and implement the best programs and policies, it is critical to learn more about how well youth are prepared for college, how we can prepare them better, and how the transition can be smoother from high school to college (2-year or 4-year). It is imperative that researchers continue to examine which supports can be beneficial to students and which services and programs are not helpful.

More longitudinal research needs to be conducted related to the long-term individual, community, and systemic outcomes of foster care alumni and higher education. More in-depth qualitative inquiry needs to be conducted with foster care alumni in higher education, community-based and on-campus based service providers, and foster care alumni’s support systems regarding their experiences (Kirk et al., 2012). This could provide additional insight into the norms and perceptions of higher education of those who have experienced foster care and those who are close to foster care alumni (Kirk et al., 2012).

Rigorous evaluation and improved dissemination efforts are also necessary. In order to do this, a national network of researchers and practitioners is being formed to share data, ideas, successes, and challenges related to program development and delivery (Geiger et al., 2016).
More data and collaboration across various sectors and systems can be helpful to inform and influence policy (Geiger et al., 2016; Okpych, 2012). Researchers and policymakers should advocate for larger, national databases to include more educational indicators and outcomes for youth who have aged out of foster care. Finally, research on community college programs and outcomes is also necessary (Geiger et al., 2016; Rassen et al., 2010; Salazar, 2012; Salazar, 2013). Very little is known about the number of foster care alumni in community college settings, their experiences, and how they fare in the short and long-term (Day et al., 2013).

**Policy Implications**

There are several policy implications noted by the authors of the reviewed studies and reports. For example, authors recommended increasing state, federal, and local funding as well as increased opportunities for grants and scholarships for youth who have experienced foster care (Blome, 1997; Day et al., 2013; Day et al., 2011; Pecora 2006a, 2006b). Additional financial and tangible supports are needed to help students prepare, enroll, and graduate from postsecondary programs. Other studies have recommended that federal or state governments provide support and/or funding for foster care alumni to attend college, either by increasing funding for existing programs and policies or through tuition and fee waivers (Benedetto, 2008; Day et al., 2011; Day et al., 2013; Okpych, 2012). In addition to being a programmatic improvement, cross-system collaboration should be promoted in policies and laws to address communication, data and information sharing, and utilization to best serve foster care alumni in their educational pursuits (Barnow et al., 2015; Day et al., 2013; Kirk & Day, 2011; Wolanin, 2005).

Financial support paired with comprehensive wrap-around support from professionals who have an understanding of the unique needs of foster care alumni in higher education can have the potential to improve short and long-term educational outcomes. Staff and faculty
working with foster care alumni should be trained in working with this population and take part in creative engagement and retention efforts that are more flexible and supportive.

Several authors discussed the challenges that placement instability pose for youth who have aged out and who are enrolled in higher education (Blome 1997; Day et al., 2012; Okpych, 2012; Okpych et al., 2015; Pecora, 2012; Pecora et al., 2006a; Wolanin, 2005). Reducing the number of moves and placements may help youth establish positive peer relationships, relationships with supportive adults (at home, in educational settings and other supportive environments), and have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities, including sports, clubs, and other enriching engagements that will prepare youth academically and socially for postsecondary educational settings and expectations. Prior to aging out, youth need exposure to higher education settings, and to be surrounded by adults and peers who talk about college and higher education, and who are engaged in preparing for higher education.

In addition, many youth do not have access to quality and comprehensive independent living preparation programs that begin early enough (Okpych, 2015). As a result, youth may not have the opportunity to prepare for living independently. Although basic independent living skill development is necessary prior to youth aging out (e.g., homemaking, financial management, obtaining housing, employment, cooking, shopping, etc.), these programs should also focus more on education. Youth should continue to be encouraged to stay connected with the child welfare system after the age of 18 where eligible to obtain services and supports into adulthood, particularly as it relates to education. For example, Okpych and colleagues (2015) found that 45% of youth in the CalYOUTH study reported that receiving support to continue their education was the biggest reason to choose to stay in care past the age of 18.

**Conclusion**
Although research, programming, and policy related to foster care alumni and higher education is still a relatively new area of study, we have already learned a great deal about the experiences, needs, and outcomes of foster youth who engage in postsecondary education. We now know about some events in foster youths’ lives, and some traits of resilience that serve as catalysts to success. For example, when given the opportunity and support, foster care alumni have the potential to thrive and succeed in higher education. The literature has also identified a number of challenges and needs that foster youth experience as they attempt to engage and persevere through higher education, and about some disparities in the benefits that college success can bring them. Foster care alumni continue to experience challenges related to finances, past trauma and mental health, and social support. It is imperative that researchers, policy makers, and practitioners increase their advocacy efforts to promote funding, policies, and programs that help foster care youth achieve success in higher education and beyond.
References


Table 1
*Foster Care Alumni Postsecondary Outcomes and Experiences (n=29)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors (year)</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Sample and Setting</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barnow, Buck, O’Brien, Pecora, Ellis, &amp; Steiner (2015)</td>
<td>Longitudinal evaluation of education and employment outcomes of transition-age adolescents from foster care served by programs in 5 U.S. cities</td>
<td>1058 transition-age foster care youth and alumni</td>
<td>Logistic regression identified longer participation in a program, and receiving job preparation and income support services as significant predictors of positive employment and educational outcomes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Interviews conducted at time of entry into programs and quarterly</td>
<td>• 42% entered the program while in high school, 26% had graduated from high school but had not entered postsecondary education, 22% were high school dropouts, and 8% were enrolled in postsecondary school</td>
<td>• Receiving college prep services did not increase post-secondary education outcomes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 95% were age 17 or older, and 87% were African American</td>
<td>• Implications discussed supporting programs that impact educational and employment outcomes.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Programs in Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, and NYC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Batsche, Hart, Ort, Armstrong, Stozier, &amp; Hummer (2014)</td>
<td>CBPR study</td>
<td>27 youth ages 18-25 enrolled in postsecondary programs</td>
<td>Four themes identified through a priori coding: money management, work, parenting, and transportation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cross-sectional interviews to determine perspectives of students regarding elements of KnowHow2Go and program fit to prepare them for postsecondary education</td>
<td>Participants were 13 females, 13 males, 1 transgender student; 19 were African American, 5 Caucasian, 1 Asian, 2 were Hispanic</td>
<td>Findings revealed attributes youth identified as factors at the individual, family, and system level that contributed to their resiliency</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Foster care alumni from urban areas in Southeastern U.S.</td>
<td>Discussed implications for post-emancipation support for the transition into postsecondary education for foster care alumni; factors that helped and hindered youths’ success in postsecondary setting</td>
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<td>167 foster care youth and 167 youth living in intact homes</td>
<td>Foster youth were more likely to drop out of high school and significantly less likely to obtain a GED. They also received significantly less financial assistance from parents or guardians, had less monitoring related to homework, and were significantly less likely to be in a college prep track despite similar grades.</td>
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<td>Secondary analysis of a longitudinal dataset</td>
<td>U.S. high school sophomore and senior students from 1989 to 1986</td>
<td>Recommendations were related to foster parent training, careful reflection by workers about their biases and expectations, and efforts to provide foster youth with stability.</td>
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<td>Study Authors</td>
<td>Study Details</td>
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| Day, Dworsky, & Feng (2013)   | - Case control study using longitudinal data from records of a large, Midwestern university  
- Explored whether FCA and low income first generation students graduate at the same rate  
- 444 undergraduates who identified as former wards of the court on FAFSA compared with 378 low-income, first generation students from Michigan State University  
- 365 participants were White, 320 African American, 120 Other  
- 493 participants were female and 319 were male  
- Discrete time hazard models showed that students from foster care graduated at a slower rate than the comparison group even after controlling for race and gender. Also, a history of foster care had a negative impact on the graduation rate of students in good academic standing.  
- Policy and practice implications related to the unique needs that foster youth have upon enrolling and throughout their educational experience is discussed. These include social support, housing, and work-study.  
- Logistic regression results showed that undergraduates from foster care were more likely to drop out of college before the end of the first year and prior to degree completion than low-income first-generation students.  
- Race was associated with dropping out but only at the bivariate level and for non-foster care students.  
- Discussed need for campus-based programs that provide wraparound services and long-term supports for FCA.  
- At the age of 21, foster care alumni from Illinois were twice as likely to have attended college and completed at least 1 year of college as their Iowa and Wisconsin counterparts. 11 had an associate’s degree; none had bachelor’s degree.  
- At age 23/24, 6.2% of study participants had completed college (bachelor’s or associate’s degree). However, only 16% who had completed a year of college at 21 had graduated by age 23/24.  
- Logistic regression results showed that race/ethnicity was a significant factor that increased the odds for three adult outcomes: White foster care alumni having income above the poverty level or income three times the poverty line, and owning a home or apartment when compared to African Americans.  
- Implications for foster care and transition support services discussed include educational encouragement and post-foster care supports from caregivers and communities. |
| Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek (2011) | - Case control study using administrative data collected from the Registrar’s Office, the Admissions Office, the Financial Aid Office, and the Budgets and Planning Office  
- Same sample as above  
- Population stratified by year of enrollment  
- Michigan State University  
- Logistic regression results showed that undergraduates from foster care were more likely to drop out of college before the end of the first year and prior to degree completion than low-income first-generation students.  
- Race was associated with dropping out but only at the bivariate level and for non-foster care students.  
- Discussed need for campus-based programs that provide wraparound services and long-term supports for FCA.  |
| Dworsky & Courtney (2010)      | - Policy brief examining the impact of extending foster care beyond age 18 on postsecondary educational attainment  
- Study used longitudinal data from the Midwest Study  
- 732 youth from Illinois (state offering extended foster care) and Iowa and Wisconsin (states not offering extended foster care)  
- Compared outcomes of youth at age 21 and 23/24  
- At the age of 21, foster care alumni from Illinois were twice as likely to have attended college and completed at least 1 year of college as their Iowa and Wisconsin counterparts. 11 had an associate’s degree; none had bachelor’s degree.  
- At age 23/24, 6.2% of study participants had completed college (bachelor’s or associate’s degree). However, only 16% who had completed a year of college at 21 had graduated by age 23/24.  
- Logistic regression results showed that race/ethnicity was a significant factor that increased the odds for three adult outcomes: White foster care alumni having income above the poverty level or income three times the poverty line, and owning a home or apartment when compared to African Americans.  
- Implications for foster care and transition support services discussed include educational encouragement and post-foster care supports from caregivers and communities. |
| Harris, Jackson, O’Brien, & Pecora (2009) | - Case records from the Casey National Foster Care Alumni study used  
- The Casey study collected information via cross-sectional interviews and record reviews  
- Examined disproportional adult foster care outcomes (e.g., education and matched-group design using a subsample of 708 Casey National Foster Care Alumni Study participants from 23 U.S. cities  
- 134 African American and 574 whites foster care alumni  
- Age ranged from 20-49 years old  
- National study  
- Logistic regression results showed that race/ethnicity was a significant factor that increased the odds for three adult outcomes: White foster care alumni having income above the poverty level or income three times the poverty line, and owning a home or apartment when compared to African Americans.  
- Implications for foster care and transition support services discussed include educational encouragement and post-foster care supports from caregivers and communities. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hass, Allen, &amp; Amoah (2014)</td>
<td>Phenomenological qualitative study using semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>19 youth who were removed from their biological parents were asked to discuss their “turning point” experiences that led them to complete a post-secondary</td>
<td>Three themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data: a sense of autonomy, social and instrumental supports, and environmental supports.</td>
<td>The authors present a conceptual model based on the findings of how turning points lead to better outcomes.</td>
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<td>Hines, Merdinger, &amp; Wyatt (2005)</td>
<td>Cross sectional, mixed methods study using in-depth interviews and self-administered questionnaires (SAQ)</td>
<td>14 youth identified through purposive sampling methods</td>
<td>Grounded theory methods used to analyze the qualitative data, and descriptive statistics used for the SAQ data. Factors at individual, family, and community level help explain process that helps participants succeed.</td>
<td>Individual attributes such as assertiveness and persistence, and family level attributes such as maintaining contact with biological family members emerged as important factors associated with the process through which maltreated FY achieve academic success despite adversities.</td>
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<td>Jackson &amp; Cameron (2012)</td>
<td>Multi-country, multi-stage, mixed-methods study. Findings from all countries combined</td>
<td>Foster youth in all 5 countries had similar experiences of aging out.</td>
<td>Low educational expectations from the foster care system, lack of interest by foster care workers, and lack of financial and personal supports described as main challenges.</td>
<td>Recommendations include foster care explicitly focusing on promoting higher education for foster care youth.</td>
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<td>Jones (2010)</td>
<td>Longitudinal cohort study of the experiences and outcomes of foster youth alumni from residential education programs</td>
<td>Sample of 106 foster youth collected through a rolling process by which new successive cohorts were interviewed at six months, and at one-, two-, and three-year intervals after discharge</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics identified that 33% of respondents were enrolled in college at all data collection points despite 80% expecting to be enrolled. Another 10-15% were enrolled in vocational programs. Overall, those enrolled in 2-year colleges were more likely to remain in school than 4-year college attendees. The study also found a sharp increase in substance use or abuse. Less than 1 in 6 participants reported use or abuse at the 6-month interview, compared to 40% at the 2-year interview. Recommendations included financial supports to ensure FCA could work less while enrolled in school, and tracking of educational achievement by the FC system to identify needs of those who drop out.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jones (2011)</td>
<td>Longitudinal cohort study of former FY Followed for 3 years to examine adaptation to adulthood Interviewed four times in 3 years</td>
<td>16 former FY Ages ranged from 16-19 56% were African American, 38% White 69% were female All but 2 had a high school degree</td>
<td>Data analyzed qualitatively (some quantitative tabulations provided). Concepts of connectedness (e.g., schooling, work) and risks (e.g., substance abuse) used to classify youths’ adaptations. 3 years after discharge, 50% of participants had drug/alcohol problems, and did not have savings or health insurance. Despite FC problems, resilience was noted regarding their struggle to continue school Factors that facilitated success included good support systems, and commitment to furthering their education.</td>
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<td>Kirk, Lewis, Brown, Nilsen, &amp; Colvin (2012)</td>
<td>Longitudinal study Baseline and follow up data from the foster care participants of the college access program used to examine gender differences in educational expectations, college efficacy, academic performance, and college preparedness</td>
<td>Sample of 383 racially/ethnically diverse 6th to 12th graders. Kansas Kids @ GEAR UP (KKGU) 54% were female 59% were White, 19% African American, 9% Hispanic (7% at follow up), and 8% two or more races</td>
<td>Statistically significant gender gaps in the expectations for educational attainment and academic performances were found. Males in the sample were at increased risk for underachievement. Discussed the need for further exploration of the identified disparities and urged for the application of findings to interventions and policies to support foster care men in higher education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Sample Description</td>
<td>Analysis and Findings</td>
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| Lee & Barth (2009)         | Cross-sectional survey of residential education programs conducted by the Coalition for Residential Education (CORE) | 52-item survey was developed and pilot tested prior to data collection            | The survey was administered online to 67 program Executive Directors or their designees  
• National survey  
• 85% of programs served males and females  
• Age groups served ranged from under 5 to over 18. Over 90% served youth between the ages of 11-18+  
• 51% served white youth, and 29% served African Americans  
• Bivariate analyses and descriptive statistics used to describe the programs and services offered, and suggest increase in interest in these programs given that the number of applications exceeds the available enrollment spots.  
• Findings also suggest that youth from these programs go on to obtain higher levels of educational attainment than their peers in other settings.  
• Implications related to policies to support the programs and research around the cost effectiveness of the programs are discussed. |
| Lovitt & Emerson (2008)    | Qualitative interviews conducted by the Casey Foundation                     | Explored perspectives on how they overcame the odds and obtained a degree despite barriers  
• Explored supports that could help others achieve similar outcomes.  
• 8 former FY who graduated college  
• Participants included 5 females and 3 males; 4 were African American, 2 Caucasian, 1 Asian American, and 1 was Hispanic.  
• All graduated from four-year universities  
• 15 themes emerged and included, among others, using support services and wishing there were more, having a plan and someone to count on, and being involved in extracurricular activities. |
| Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, & Wyatt (2005) | Descriptive findings from the Pathways to college study presented.  
• The multiphase and multimethod study explored internal and external factors related to the educational experiences of emancipated foster youths using a non-probability purposive sample | 216 emancipated foster youths from 11 large state, 4-year universities  
• Almost 77% were female  
• Ages ranged from 18-58  
• 39% of the sample was white, 22% African American, 22% Latino, and an additional 33% considered were multiethnic  
• Descriptive statistics and 2-way ANOVAs used to analyze the data.  
• Large number of foster youths did not feel prepared to live on their own.  
• 31% of the sample reported using mental health services. Participants reported that having support and receiving preparatory classes and financial aid information were important factors that influenced their decision to attend college.  
• Stable school attendance, a challenging high school curriculum, social supports, and participation in organizations and groups were identified as contributing to resilience.  
• Authors highlight the importance of continued ILS for older foster care adolescents. |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Study Description</th>
<th>Methodology Details</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, &amp; Thompson</td>
<td>• Descriptive study exploring the educational experiences and aspirations of foster youths</td>
<td>• Cross-sectional, one hour structured interviews</td>
<td>• Older youth in independent living preparation programs reported high numbers of school problems and high academic aspirations  &lt;br&gt; • The authors discuss the need for remedial education and tutoring.  &lt;br&gt;  - Using bivariate chi squares and logistic regressions, the study found that compared to White FC alumni in the sample, AI/AN had lower academic and employment success.  &lt;br&gt; - Compared to AI/AN alumni, White alumni were more likely to graduate high school, graduate college, be employed, own property, have a household income above the poverty line or three times the poverty line, never have depended on public assistance since leaving the foster care system, and not have a household member receiving assistance.</td>
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<td>O’Brien, Pecora, Echohawk, Evans-Campbell, Palmanteer-Holder, &amp; Roller White (2010)</td>
<td>• Explored the educational and employment outcomes of American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) foster care alumni from the Casey National Alumni Study.</td>
<td>• Cross-sectional interviews</td>
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<td>Okpych &amp; Courtney (2014)</td>
<td>• Secondary analysis using longitudinal data from the Midwest Study to examine the employment status and annual earnings of foster youth.</td>
<td>• Midwest Study Wave 5 data, collected from October 2010-May 2011. Data from 564 foster youth included  &lt;br&gt; • Age range for participants in Wave 5 was 25-26 years old.  &lt;br&gt; • 58% were female, 59% were African American  &lt;br&gt; • Participants from Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa  &lt;br&gt; • 32% had some college, and 30% completed high school  &lt;br&gt; • 48% were employed  &lt;br&gt;</td>
<td>• Degree attainment was associated with income and employment increases.  &lt;br&gt; • Logistic regression findings indicated that completing a high school diploma yielded earning benefits over not holding any credential or holding a GED.  &lt;br&gt; • Implications related to encouraging high school completion as opposed to credential (GED) completion discussed.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Okpych, Courtney, &amp; Charles (2015)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Secondary analysis using data from the Adoptions and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the NYTD Services File.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Descriptive analysis of the Chafee services received by foster care youth</strong></td>
<td><strong>131,204 foster care youth aged 16-21 in the U.S.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>59% were female</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>46% of sample described themselves as Hispanic, followed by 17% White, 17% African American, and 15% multiracial</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Most were from urban (20%) or largely urban areas (74%).</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>More than 70% enrolled in high school</strong></td>
<td><strong>About half of the sample received at least one of the thirteen types of Chafee services.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Females were more likely to receive more of the service types, and young people with disabilities or medical/psychological conditions were more likely to receive services.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>African Americans and particularly those from urban areas were less likely to receive many of the services.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Youth in urban areas generally received fewer services than youth from other areas.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Gender differences emerged in nearly all service types.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Implications for future studies exploring the gender and racial disparities were discussed.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Okumu (2014)</strong></td>
<td><strong>In-depth interviews to explore the college transition meaning-making dynamics of foster care alumni attending college</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Constructivist-grounded theory analysis</strong></td>
<td><strong>Purposeful and theoretical sample of 8 FC alumni enrolled in college</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Participants include 4 females, 3 males, and 1 gender queer</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>3 described themselves as African Americans, 3 as White, and 2 as biracial</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>4 first year, and 4 sophomore students</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>6 attended 4-yr colleges, and 2 attended 2-yr community colleges.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primary theme related to feelings of isolation and estrangement, which were at times exacerbated by the college environment.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Participants reported feeling lost, alone, isolated, left out, and not supported.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Participants interpreted their transitioning into college as empowering, giving them hope and optimism, and allowing them to conceptualize a preferred identify and sense of direction.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Pecora (2012)</strong></td>
<td><strong>The author describes factors that have been shown to contribute to educational success among youth in foster care and foster care alumni for 3 studies: The Casey National Alumni Study, The Northwest Alumni Study, and Salazar’s (2011) Study of College Completers</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Casey National Alumni Study provides a model for which factors together predicted high school completion (e.g., age at first placement, time in family foster care, tutoring, independent living training).</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>The Northwest Study outlines the aspects of services delivery that will help educational success (e.g., placement history, resources upon leaving care)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Salazar’s (2011) Study of College Completers identified several predictors of postsecondary retention and success: (1) institutional commitment, (2) social involvement, (3) independent living stability, (4) tangible support</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>The author makes several recommendations for policy and program strategies.</strong></td>
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<td>Study</td>
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<td>Pecora, Kessler, O’Brien, Roller White, Williams, Hiripi, English, White, &amp; Herrick (2006a)</td>
<td>Longitudinal study, Case record review and interviews with foster care alumni</td>
<td>Examined the relationships between foster youths’ educational and financial outcomes and the experiences while in foster care, with a focus on experiences that agencies have some control over. 659 foster youths were interviewed</td>
<td>A disproportionate number of foster care alumni completed high school via a GED compared to the general population. FC alumni also completed postsecondary education in lower numbers. One third of the sample of FC alumni had household incomes at or below the poverty level, had no health insurance, and more than one in five experienced homelessness after leaving care.</td>
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<td>Pecora, Williams, Kessler, Hiripi, O’Brien, Emerson, Herrick, &amp; Torres (2006b)</td>
<td>Data from case records and interviews used to explore educational achievements of older foster youth alumni</td>
<td>1087 foster care alumni served by the Casey Family Programs between 1966 and 1998 across 23 U.S. cities 86% had a high school diploma, 10% had a Bachelor’s degree or more, and 16% were enrolled in a program 54% were female, 35% were people of color, and the age ranged from 10-51 years.</td>
<td>High school graduation and college enrollment rates of FCA in the sample were like those of the general population, but more alumni completed high school via GED. Logistic regression results identified fewer placement changes, more extracurricular activities and participation in ILP as predictors of high school completion.</td>
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<td>Rassen, Cooper, &amp; Mery (2010)</td>
<td>Mixed methods study, Surveys and interviews</td>
<td>Explored experiences and needs of FC in higher education 74 respondents throughout 37 community colleges Respondents included college staff and foster youths 12 community colleges with various campuses across California</td>
<td>Findings detail the need for improved data collection and program evaluation, as well as continued needs of students. Needs include assistance with financial aid and housing, a broad network of supports, and program resource development. Authors recommend building networks of support across departments, gathering resources, and utilizing a case management approach.</td>
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<td>Source</td>
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<td>Findings/Results</td>
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| Salazar (2012)    | Cross-sectional online survey of Casey Family Program scholarship recipients                      | - Respondents (n=329) were from 43 states across the country  
- National study with representation from 43 states  
- Almost 74% were female  
- 44% were White, 27% Black, 12% mixed, and 7% Latino  
- 67% had a Bachelor’s degree, 14% a Master’s, and 1% a Doctorate. An additional 7% had no college degree  
- Bivariate and multivariate analyses revealed factors that were associated with disengaging from college.  
- Needing to work and emotional/behavioral problems were associated with non-completion/disengagement  
- Factors associated with degree completion included academic skills, satisfaction with college (fit), and social involvement/support. |
| Salazar (2013)    | Survey of Casey Family Program scholarship recipients                                             | - Compared the post-college outcomes of 250 foster youth to those of two general population samples (GSS, n=195; PSID, n=644)  
- The two groups differed significantly on gender, race, age, and relationship/household makeup. Compared to the general population of Bachelor graduates, the foster care alumni with a Bachelor’s degree were predominantly female (75% vs. 52%), non-White (55% vs. 21%), and unmarried (74% vs. 59%)  
- ANCOVAs and logistic regression analyses conducted.  
- Former foster youth who graduated college had similar outcomes to the general population sample in terms of individual income and rates of employment, but FCA graduates continued to struggle in terms of mental health needs, job security, and lower household income. |
| Shin (2003)       | Survey design used to explore predictors of reading ability of older adults in foster care        | - Random sample of 400 youth ages 16.5-17.5 selected from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Service database  
- 49% male and 51% female  
- 64% African American  
- 34% of youth had been placed in a special education class  
- Regression analyses results identified educational aspirations as one of the most important predictors of educational attainment and was associated with reading proficiency.  
- Author discussed the need to design strategies such as mentoring to promote educational aspirations of youth in foster care. |
Sim, Emerson, O’Brien, Pecora, & Silva (2008)

- Exploratory, cross-sectional study using telephone survey (some mailed in) to examine group differences regarding service usage and provider
- 115 foster care alumni enrolled in Casey Family Programs’ Continuing Education and Job Training programs were interviewed
- 23 were freshmen, 16 sophomores, 14 juniors, 14 seniors, 21 completers, and 27 non-completers
- 61% were female and 39% male
- 20% were African American, 7% American Indian, 7.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, 56% Caucasian, and 8% Hispanic
- The average age of current students was 21 years and former students was 23 years
- ANOVAs were conducted to identify group differences.
- Findings indicate that completers reported using fewer academic supports than current students and non-completers. Students reported using Casey staff most frequently.
- Four-year college students reported using school and friends as supports more than 2-year college students.
- Completers reported using friends as providers of support less than students and non-completers.
### Table 2
**Summary of Practice, Research, and Policy Recommendations**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice Recommendations</th>
<th>Research Recommendations</th>
<th>Policy Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Improve cross-system collaboration</td>
<td>• Conduct research to evaluate programs</td>
<td>• Advocate for improved health and mental health policies for FCA</td>
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<td>• Ensure mental health services are accessible and available</td>
<td>• More longitudinal research on student outcomes</td>
<td>• Financial support through tuition and fee waivers, scholarships, and awards</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Offer financial assistance to students for postsecondary education and training</td>
<td>• Examine impact of postsecondary education for FCA</td>
<td>• Support wrap-around services</td>
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<td>• Develop and support on-campus and preparatory programs for FCA</td>
<td>• More in-depth qualitative inquiry of FCA experiences before, during, and after postsecondary education</td>
<td>• Address placement instability for older youth in foster care</td>
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<td>• Focus on resilience and strengths of FCA</td>
<td>• Improved dissemination of research findings</td>
<td>• Improve opportunities for independent living programs for older youth in foster care</td>
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<td>• Advocate for policies that will promote cross-system collaboration</td>
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Figure 1. Flowchart of study selection protocol. *Themes 1 and 2 presented elsewhere.