UNIVERSITY of DENVER

COLORADO EVALUATION AND ACTION LAB

Colorado Lab Newsletter
May 2021

Featured in this newsletter:
- Closing the High School Graduation Gap for Youth Who Experience Foster Care
- Denver Public Schools and Colorado Judicial Branch Partner with LINC
- Sarah Jordan Joins Lab Staff

Fostering Opportunities: Closing the High School Graduation Gap for Youth Who Experience Foster Care

Barriers on the Path to Graduation for Students Who Have Experienced Foster Care

Specialist working to remove barriers

Confusing graduation requirements

Needing school supplies

Transportation issues

Career uncertainty

Credit recovery problems

School transitions

IEP process

Miscommunication with teachers

Needing a tutor

Only one in four Colorado students who experience foster care during high school graduate with their class. Most interventions aimed at improving the graduation rates of youth who experience foster care are spearheaded by child welfare

agencies or the judicial system with services typically ending when students exit the foster care system. Yet there is evidence to suggest that the risk for poor educational outcomes may increase after foster care ends. Fostering Opportunities is different because it is delivered by a school system and continues service until a student graduates or demonstrates sustained academic success.

The Fostering Opportunities program aims to close this graduation gap by better aligning child welfare and education practices. A collaborative effort of Jefferson County Public Schools and Jefferson County Human Services, the Fostering Opportunities program engages "specialists" to check in weekly with students. Specialists are typically employees of a local or state education agency and are not bound to a specific school but instead follow the students. They meet regularly with students, make sure that caregivers and child welfare case workers have timely and accurate information about students' educational progress, and they work with teachers on trauma-informed approaches to help students be successful in school. This reliable network and personalized supports are designed to help youth who experience foster care stay in school, regularly attend class, and pass their courses.
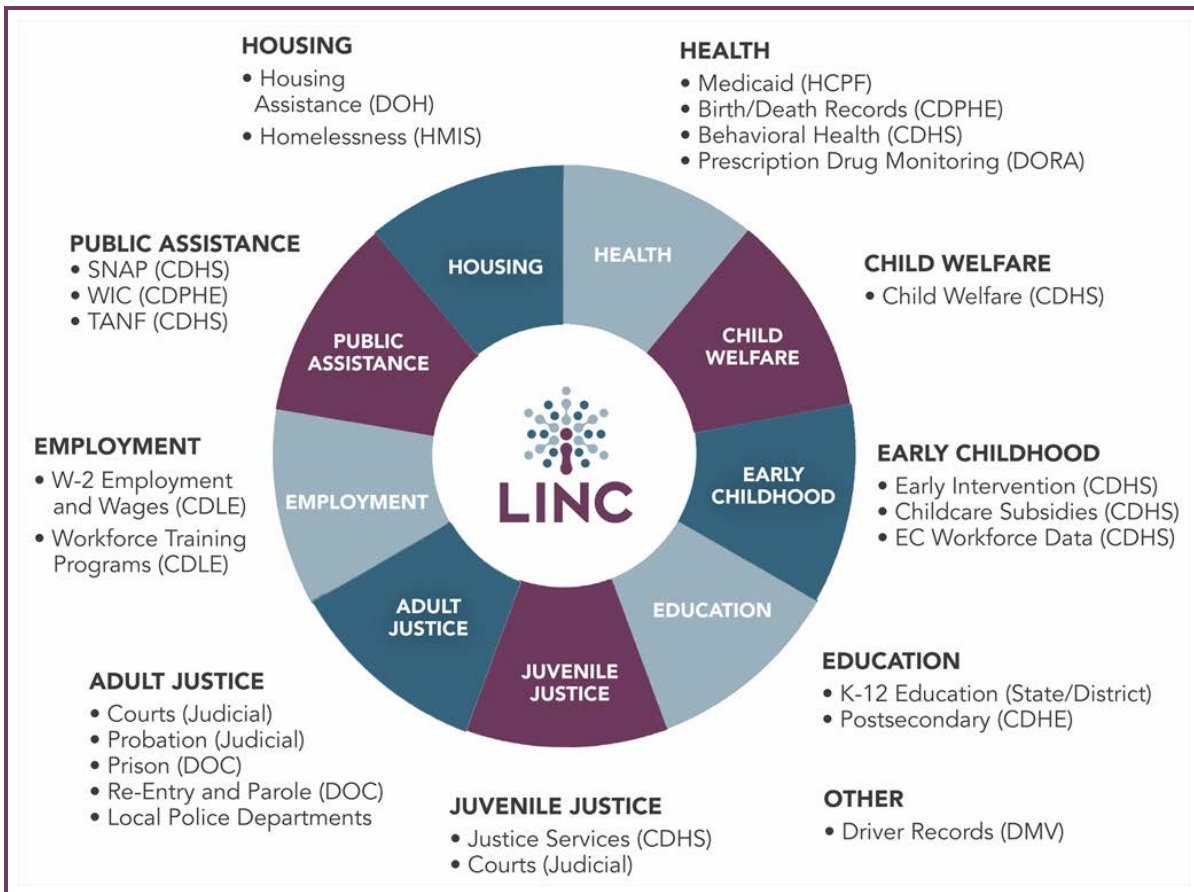
A new report, [Fostering Opportunities: Preliminary Success Measures for a Pay for Success Pilot Program](#), shares findings of the Colorado Lab's initial study of the Fostering Opportunities program. Independent evaluations are a requirement of Colorado's [Pay for Success](#) program, which funds pilot programs designed to improve on-time high school graduation rates. This innovative approach shifts the risk from traditional funders – typically a government entity – to private investors, like the Community First Foundation which provided upfront capital for Fostering Opportunities. Only if the evaluation shows that the program meets agreed-upon outcomes does the government funder repay the initial investment.

The Lab's study found that Fostering Opportunities met the third of four tiers of success measures for the pilot program, despite unprecedented disruptions to schooling caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings suggest that the program holds promise for improving attendance rates and reducing incidents of suspension for students who have experienced foster care during high school. The report also highlights some of the challenges of building evidence for a program during a pandemic and offers insight into how changes in grading policies may have influenced the preliminary outcomes. A second study to gain additional evidence for interventions that can support the academic success of youth who experience foster care is underway and will be reported in late fall 2022. Learn more about the [study](#) and see the companion manual, [Fostering Opportunities Program Manual - Middle and High School Version](#).

Partners participating in this project are the Colorado Governor's Office (Pay for Success); Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Welfare; Jefferson County School District; Jefferson County Human Services; and Community First Foundation (Pay for Success).

For more information about Fostering Opportunities, contact [Dr. Elysia Clemens](#).

Welcome to New LINC Partners

We are pleased to welcome Denver Public Schools and the Colorado Judicial Branch (adult and juvenile state courts) as new partners to the Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC). LINC was created through the Lab's partnership with the Colorado Governor's Office of Information Technology to help state and local government agencies harness data to inform solutions to critical social problems.

Solving complex challenges requires an understanding of the needs of people being addressed through multiple systems. Data collected by individual agencies won't tell us everything we need to know to effectively address multifaceted real-world problems, and government agencies are rarely equipped to share data.

LINC safely and securely connects anonymized data across state agencies and systems to fully inform solutions to specific societal challenges. This tailored, cross-sector data resource also encourages collaboration, leveraging the ability of state agencies to move past entrenched problems to advance new solutions, like:

- Strengthening the early care and education workforce,
- Preventing prenatal substance use, and
- Preventing homelessness among youth in foster care.

New agencies are compensated for their time contributing data to approved projects and partners have the ongoing benefit of a time-saving single data request pathway.

To learn more about LINC, how to become a partner, and about LINC projects, contact Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf.

Sarah Jordan Joins Lab Staff

Please join us in welcoming the Colorado Lab's newest staff member, Sarah Jordan. SJ, as she goes by, brings a wealth of research and program evaluation experience in Colorado's schools, health systems, and community-based organizations. Most recently, she was the lead investigator on a study that researched the impact of COVID-19 on hospital housekeepers.

Read SJ's full bio on our website.

As Staff Researcher and Project Coordinator with the Lab, SJ will apply her passion for leveraging data to advance sustainable solutions by supporting Response, Innovation, and Student Equity (RISE) Education Fund awardees in moving their programs along the steps to building evidence. SJ holds a Master of Arts in Sociology from the University of Colorado Denver and a Bachelor of Science in Education & Public Policy from Pennsylvania State University.

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