



Colorado Lab Newsletter

February 2024

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Fostering Opportunities Final Report & Expansion



The [final report](#) on the Colorado Lab-led randomized controlled trial of Fostering Opportunities shows the groundbreaking program helped students in foster care to be successful in school and earn timely high school credentials. The program was piloted in Jefferson County (Jeffco) Public Schools.

Initial findings released last fall led to Fostering Opportunities becoming the only proven approach to improve educational outcomes for middle and high school students in foster care. This best-available evidence informed House Bill 22-1374, which appropriated state funding to support the continuation of Fostering Opportunities in Jeffco Public Schools and expanded the program to Denver Public Schools and the Adams 27J School District.

Final evaluation findings also show:

- Students passed their academic courses at a higher rate within two years of having access to the program.
- Statistically significant gains in student attendance rates.
- A statistically significant decrease in the number of student suspensions within one year of having access to the program.

More research is needed to determine whether Fostering Opportunities impacts high school graduation as there were not enough students in the study to make a causal attribution. Descriptive results do suggest that within one year, there was a 51% increase in the number of high school students who were on track to graduate.



“Just having somebody who truly cares and wants you to do better is a big factor in the graduation rate. Because a lot of us foster kids, we don’t really have that.”

Jeremy Chavez
Jeffco graduate who benefitted from
Fostering Opportunities

[Jeffco’s Fostering Opportunities video](#) features the voices of students who participated in Fostering Opportunities, foster parents, program staff, and the Colorado Lab.

The Colorado Lab is developing fidelity of implementation resources to support all partners. The Lab will also evaluate outcomes for the two expansion school districts. Companion work is underway to develop strategies to support children who have experienced foster care in attaining a college education. This effort is led by the Common Sense Institute and outlined in their report, [Untapped Potential: Economic and Social Costs of Colorado’s Foster Youth](#).

To learn more about the Fostering Opportunities Program, please contact [Dr. Elysia Clemens](#).

Plans of Safe Care Pilot Underway in San Luis Valley

Substance use during pregnancy is a growing issue that demands data-informed, family-centered solutions. Stigma about addiction and fears about child welfare involvement mean many pregnant individuals are reluctant to seek treatment and support.

Plans of Safe Care (POSC) can be used to engage a network of known, trusted organizations and providers to reduce barriers to care. POSC is an approach to connect families with prenatal substance use to resources to keep infants safely with their caregiver whenever possible. POSC are a requirement of child welfare legislation and states must use POSC for infants affected by prenatal substance use.

The plan itself is essential but not a standalone solution. POSC require an infrastructure—health care providers, community-based organizations, human service systems, informal supports—to coordinate services and implement the family’s unique plan. The Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) is resourcing a four-year pilot to develop this infrastructure and innovate opportunities to strengthen POSC delivery across systems. Guiding features of the pilot (see visual below) include starting the plan prenatally, voluntary engagement by families, continuity of care, and co-ownership of the plan across providers (see the [executive summary](#) to learn more).

A Call to Action: Why Plans of Safe Care are Needed

- 131% increase in opioid use-related diagnoses at delivery (U.S.; 2010-2017)
- 98% increase in newborns exposed to opioids prenatally (Colorado; 2012-2018)
- 2nd leading cause of maternal death is unintentional drug overdose (Colorado)
- Of the 1,578 newborns reported for substance exposure in 2022, only 39% had a POSC (Colorado)

The POSC Pilot Team includes CDHS, the Colorado Lab, Illuminate Colorado, and the Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect. Through a systematic, data-informed approach, the San Luis Valley was selected for the pilot. “The San Luis Valley offers strong benefits for this pilot,” says Dr. Courtney Everson, Senior Project Director for the Colorado Lab. “The region has demonstrable needs in the areas of substance use, the pregnant and parenting population, and child welfare involvement. They also are dedicated to providing coordinated care to diverse communities, and are excited to use this pilot as an opportunity to accelerate their long-standing work in prenatal substance use prevention and treatment.”



The Pilot Team will co-design implementation with stakeholders in the San Luis Valley to capitalize on existing investments and meet the needs of differing communities. It's anticipated the POSC pilot will begin serving families by April 2024, followed by two years of evidence building and strategic learning.

Lessons learned from the pilot will be used to strengthen POSC implementation and identify opportunities to replicate the pilot's approach across Colorado, including identifying needed investments and legislation.

For more information, please contact [Dr. Courtney Everson](#).

New Project: High Quality Family Time

The High Quality Parenting Time Task Force was established to explore and make recommendations on statutory and regulatory changes to ensure every family in Colorado has access to high quality family time when separated through a dependency and neglect case. Task Force members include the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel, the Office of the Child's Representative, the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Child Protection Ombudsman's Office, counties, service providers, and parents and youth with lived experience.

The Colorado Lab is working together with the Task Force to conduct a statewide study on family time practices (authorized by [House Bill 23-1027](#)) to inform recommendations on best practice standards and build capacity for delivery through sustainable funding structures. To learn more, contact [Dr. Courtney Everson](#).

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