

**FRESNO COUNTY
FOSTERCARE AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

**ANNUAL REPORT
TO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

**REPORTING ACTIVITIES FROM
JULY 2022 THROUGH JUNE 2023**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fresno County Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee hereby referred to as "FCSOC" was created by the Fresno County Board of Supervisors in 2001. According to its bylaws, Article III-Statement of Purpose, the purpose is "To exercise oversight and review of systems and services which affect children focusing on, but not limited to, the foster care system. The committee shall:

- A. Advise and make recommendations for continuous and lasting system improvement.
- B. Provide a forum for community input related to the FCSOC purpose.

To meet its primary responsibility the FCSOC is guided by an adopted mission and vision statement.

Mission

The mission of the FCSOC is to provide oversight for and promote communication between the Board of Supervisors, the Department of Social Services (DSS), its related agencies, and the community, with an emphasis on providing information and recommendations that make the child welfare system more effective and efficient.

Vision

A community enhanced by a compassionate and responsible child welfare system that provides prevention, early intervention, and nurtures the developmental and therapeutic needs of abused and neglected children and their families.

Key Responsibilities

The FCSOC shall participate in lawfully constituted multi-disciplinary reviews when system issues and improvements are appropriate.

The primary responsibility of the Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee is to focus on the structures and functions of the local child welfare system and to represent the public interest in the delivery of services. In addition, part of the committee's mission is to improve communication through outreach and coordination with the work of other community groups. To assist in this coordination, the FCSOC has subcommittees that consist of Education and Mental Health. Other subcommittees may arise as deemed necessary.

Changes Moving Forward from 2023 to 2024

The FCSOC has evolved from its 2001 stated purpose to offering resources at regular subcommittee meetings that were deemed valuable interagency/organization communication forums. In the Fall of 2021, in response to the public spotlighting the challenge of hard-to-place children and youth in the child welfare system, FCSOC hosted a community forum consisting of elected officials, community partners and interested parties to offer insight and suggestions. In 2022 and 2023, FCSOC held an annual strategic planning session. As a result, the committee recalibrated and continued to work closely with DSS to provide support and oversight to the systemic changes identified in

the Critical Needs established in 2022 and a recent survey in 2023 to employees implemented by the FCSOC adhoc committee. Analysis of the survey results are currently being reviewed.

Committee Membership

The Board of Supervisors currently has six vacancies (37%) on the committee. The ten committee members are committed and experienced members who have enhanced representation in the areas of education, children's mental health and child advocacy. We encourage Board members to work with FCSOC to fill the remaining vacancies. The current membership list is included in this report with vacancies noted by district.

DISTRICT APPOINTEES

(Current vacancies: 6)

DISTRICT 1 APPOINTEES

Two Vacancies

Karina Perez – Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission

Jill Stepke – *(resigned)*

Wendy Yribarren – *(resigned)*

DISTRICT 2 APPOINTEES

Tracy Kashian – Lance-Kashian & Co.

Maisie Young – Supervisor of Student Support Services, District Foster Liaison,
Central Unified School District

Kevin Lisitsin – Local Business Owner

DISTRICT 3 APPOINTEES

Two Vacancies

Elizabeth Thomas – Intensive Services Foster Parent, Foster Parent Association
President

Patricia Miller – Intensive Services Foster Parent *(resigned)*

James Martinez – Fresno County Board of Education Trustee *(resigned)*

DISTRICT 4 APPOINTEES

Two Vacancies

Rosemary Alanis

Richard Bailey – Child Welfare Attorney *(resigned)*

Connie N. Waldrop – *(resigned)*

DISTRICT 5 APPOINTEES

Pamela Hancock – Director of Foster and Homeless Youth Education Services (FCSOC Vice
Chair)

Wilma Tom Hashimoto – Executive Director, CASA of Fresno & Madera Counties (FCSOC
Chair)

Edward Avila – Juvenile Justice and EOC Commissioner

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Supervisor Sal Quintero – Fresno County Board of Supervisors

Ari Martinez – Proxy, Board of Supervisors

Rocky Vang – Proxy, Board of Supervisors

2023-24 Goals for FCSOC

As established in 2002, our committee will continue to advise and make recommendations for continuous and lasting system improvement and provide a forum for community input related to the FCSOC purpose. A key responsibility is to improve communication through outreach and coordination with the work of other community groups including the Office of Office of Fresno County Superintendent of Schools Foster Care and Homeless Education Subcommittee and Fresno County Behavioral Health - Children's Mental Health subcommittee.

1. Be a Resource to the BOS Initiatives to Improve the CWS

This also includes the creation of a county-wide campaign to address the current shortages of social workers and resource homes.

Be proactive in the joint responsibility with the Board of Supervisors to find passionate and qualified candidates to fill vacancies on the Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee.

2. Continue to Focus on the Well-being of Children in the CWS including:

- Services and resources for families who are preparing to become resource parents.
- Services and resources being provided to the youth, resource parents and biological parents.
- Provide information to the youth and public. Ie. FURS: Family Urgent Response System for current and former foster youth.
- Education-stable placement of school when transitions occur. Educational support.
- Social/Emotional Support -Mental Health
- System of Care with social worker, resource parents and school personnel for LGBTQ+ youth.
- Activities for youth during school breaks.
- Placement - Provide a system to support potential resource parents and Foster Family Agencies (FFA) to ensure homes are prepared to receive youth in foster care.
- Focus on the challenges of placing older youth and youth with complex needs in short and long-term placements. Address how youth in foster care may have priority access to local medical facilities due to the resource families or STRTP having multiple youth in foster care.

Recommendations to the Board of Supervisors

Continue to prioritize support for youth in the Fresno County Child Welfare System to achieve positive outcomes and prepare them for successful adulthood. It is recognized that more social workers are needed to be hired, more resource families are needed to safely place families, and as a community we must place the best interest of the child as a priority and communicate much needed resources to support them and to their caregivers. With 2,848 children in foster care as of August 2023, this is a community concern as we desire positive outcomes and trajectory for these children.

1. County-wide Campaign to Strengthen the CWS Infrastructure
The members of the Foster Care Oversight Committee recommend a county-wide campaign through commercials, billboards, social media, and other opportunities to promote the following:
 - A. Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers
This may include partnerships with local high schools, higher education, elected officials, and community leaders.
 - B. Recruitment of Resource Families and Promotion of Kinship Care
This may include partnership with local agencies including FFAs currently recruiting and training resource families; however, the community is to be aware of the dire need for more Emergency Placements and long-term placements for the stability of the youth and to mitigate the prolonged trauma. In addition, priority should be given to locating placement with kin and prevention of removal from families with Quality Parent Initiative implementation.

Subcommittee Update:

Goal 1: Education Committee in partnership with Superintendent of Schools Foster Youth - Executive Advisory Committee: Achieved. Six Meetings held and one culminating year-end event with community leaders, partners, and foster youth students.

Goal 2: Children’s Mental Health Subcommittee: Partially Achieved. Co-chair representative for FCSOC resigned from the subcommittee due to obligations on December 31, 2022. A replacement has been identified as of September 2023.

EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE

Background/Purpose

The purpose of the Education Subcommittee is to:

1. Enable the FCSOC oversight and communication between DSS and the Board of Supervisors.
2. Provide a network of communication about significant education issues affecting foster youth.

The Education Subcommittee is a deliberative committee that meets monthly to identify, inform and encourage resolution of issues and concerns that will improve the educational outcomes of foster youth. A report of the identified educational issues and recommendations are communicated at the monthly FCSOC Board meeting and presented for discussion with the DSS administrative team, FCSOC Board Members, and members of the community (detailed information is available in the Subcommittee and FCSOC monthly meeting minutes).

Focus of Subcommittee Activity

Although many educational issues were addressed, the primary focus of the monthly meetings was to provide the basis for information sharing. The Subcommittee serves as a sounding board to support education-focused work as well as providing community input. Standing agenda items

are addressed at each meeting followed by a discussion of any emerging issue.

School Stability

“School stability” supports the value of maintaining youth in their school of origin, unless it is in their “best interest” to make a change. It includes reviewing current legislation, advocacy efforts, and training and coordinating with the overall DSS workforce. Research indicates that when a child moves to a different school that four to six months of academic progress is lost. Research also indicates that academic success improves when a child or youth has at least one caring responsible adult in their life and maintaining school stability. The “Potential School Change Form (PSCF) is a process that supports school stability.

Potential School Change Form (PSCF)

DSS utilizes the PSCF to communicate with education rights holders and the schools in the effort to collaboratively decide on whether a school change is in a child’s best interest. DSS has not utilized the PSCF over the past several years. However, DSS has recently trained all DSS social workers on the PSCF process with the intention that social workers will utilize the process and improve school stability and improve education outcomes. In previous years, DSS provided oversight data to enable discussions about reasons for school changes, and to study the effectiveness of the “*Potential School Change Form*” (PSCF) to communicate and improve stability. The on-line PSCF was fully implemented at the beginning of the 2017-18 academic year was fully utilized by social workers. Information obtained from the “reasons for school change” had provided a means for discussion on improving advocacy for school stability, however, due to the pandemic, this data was not collected for the 2019-20, 2020-21, or 2021-22 school years. Below are the last reported outcomes for 2017-18 school year. School move data will be requested for the 2023-24 school year.

2017-18 Results:

- TK- 6: 62 school changes for foster children (62% at break)
- Grades 7-8: total of 25 (76% at break)
- Grades 9-11: 31 (48% at break)
- Grade 12: no changes during regular session (2 during break).

Summary: Analyzing the grade levels by groups improved the ability to study the reasons for changes and provide interventions. As a result, 2018 was the first year that all foster youth were able to remain stable throughout their entire senior year. There was a 7.5% increase in the graduation rate.

Graduation Rates

Fresno County graduation rate for foster youth for 2020-21 was 48.5%; for 2021-22 there was a 53.62% graduation rate, and for 2022-23 there was a 55.36%. In comparison to the overall Fresno County student graduation rate of 83.24%, the foster graduation rate was 27.88% lower.

Access to Higher Education-Extreme Registration

The annual event was a collaboration between DSS, Office of Fresno County Superintendent of

Schools (FCSS), districts, and community colleges and was held on the Fresno City College campus. High school seniors were fully matriculated and completed college, financial aid, and college support program applications and were enrolled in college classes for Fall 2023 semester.

Early Education

The DSS Early Education liaison position was eliminated in order to increase the number of case carrying social workers and reduce the number of cases a social worker managed. Social workers were recently trained in the process of making Head Start referrals. There is no data currently.

District, County and Liaison Report

The DSS Education Liaison positions were eliminated to increase the number of case- carrying social workers and reduce the number of cases a social worker managed. Social workers have recently been trained in education matters and processes. DSS administration are committed to collaboration with the School District Education Liaisons and the Office of Fresno County Superintendent of Schools that provide invaluable networking to FCSOC Subcommittee members and DSS concerning status and issues related to education of foster youth. The designee for the Office of Fresno County Superintendent of Schools is the chair for the Education Subcommittee. FCSS provided input on efforts and needs of foster youth in addition to services provided to students. This included applying for college, transportation, communication between districts and child welfare, and overall issues county-wide. FCSS assisted 130 seniors with financial aid applications (100% completion rate), including college and dorm applications and was the statewide midsize county winner for the FAFSA Challenge for the sixth consecutive year. In 2022-23, 668 foster youth were served. The county-wide education Foster Focus database is a county-wide database that includes data from the state education CALPADS database, districts, child welfare and juvenile probation. The data has improved in quality with the addition of districts submitting data. This information is available to social workers to access student school information. FCSS trained social workers on education rights of foster youth, students with special needs, ways to support academic success, and provided information on the services provided by FCSS. This training will be provided to all social workers in 2023-24 under the education training project collaborative of Child Welfare and FCSS.

The Foster Youth Literacy Networked Improvement Community (NIC) project that is a partnership between DSS, FCSS, districts, juvenile courts, attorneys, and community-based organizations saw positive outcomes for foster youth in the areas of attendance, school stability, literacy and overall education support for students grades 3rd-6th in Fresno Unified School District. The project will be expanded to Sanger Unified School District and Coalinga-Huron Unified School District in the 2023-24 school year.

Fresno Unified School District: The FUSD *Foster Youth Round Tables* were attended by Subcommittee members. Feedback of the needs of foster youth was disseminated as was the success of foster youth students. Based on Community and Subcommittee input, FUSD has staffed and funded 22 Clinical School Social Workers and two Academic Counselors dedicated to Foster and Homeless Youth. Clinical School Social Workers provide ongoing social/emotional services to students K-12 and Academic Counselors provide targeted academic interventions to youth grades 8-12. FUSD was the first district to partner in the Foster Literacy Networked Improvement Community project with FCSS and the community.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE

Background/Purpose

The focus of the Children's Mental Health Subcommittee is on issues of mental health that affect all children in Fresno County including foster youth. It consists of members from the community, DSS, the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), and local community agencies. This subcommittee ensures the availability of psychiatric and inpatient treatment, school-based services and other access to mental health services are met to service children in foster care.

This is a joint committee with the Behavioral Health Mental Health Board, which allows us the opportunity to explore services provided to all children with behavioral health needs. The committee meets bimonthly. The committee receives updates from the Department about the services that it provides to children. The Committee functions with co-chairs representing one from DBH and FCOSC. The following report focuses on the Foster Care system. This dedicated group of volunteers and those employed strive to advocate for children in the Foster Care system. While the committee does not make policy, it is informed on matters related to children's mental health, receives county statistics and partners with them to better meet the needs of children in our community.

CHILDREN'S COMMITTEE REPORT 2022 FRESNO COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH BOARD

Co-Chairs: Mary Lou Brauti-Minkler and Wilma Tom Hashimoto

The Children's Committee of the Behavioral Health Board is a joint committee of the Behavioral Health Board and the Foster Care Standards and Oversight Mental Health Committee. It meets bimonthly and in 2022 the meetings were held on **Web Ex** on the fourth Thursday of the month at 9:00 am to 10:30. The co-chairs alternate facilitating the meeting.

Each meeting includes introductions by each attendee and an update by the Department of Behavioral Health, Children's Services Department Division Manager Lesby Flores.

The meeting format also includes a speaker from a children's services agency in Fresno County. The meeting months were **February, April, June, August, October, and December**.

February 24, 2022: Speaker: Kyra Zimmerman, City Without Orphans

Topic: Challenges faced by foster youth as they enter adulthood: criminal justice involvement, mental illness and/ or substance use disorders, homelessness, human trafficking and poverty. These youth often have challenges from multiple traumas, lack of consistent education and many disruptions in their care.

April 28, 2022: Speaker: Dr. Amy Parks, Fresno County Network of CARE—Adverse Childhood Experiences--ACEs.

Topic: ACEs and the benefits of being ACEs aware. Plan of building, through community-based organizations and community health workers, increased capacity to provide trauma-informed care through a curriculum of resilience, education and training in the use of screening tools to assess.

June 23, 2022: Speaker: Rob Martin, Fresno Mental Health Adolescent Program.

Topic: New Mental Health Program for youth ages 12-17.

August 25, 2022: Speaker: Prodigy Healthcare Inc.

Topic : Adolescent Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Services.

October 27, 2022: Speaker: Rodney Lowery, Fresno Resiliency Center

Topic: The Center has two programs: 1) The Rise Program is contracted with 25 schools in the Fresno Unified School District. A curriculum on resiliency skills is taught to students weekly on self-esteem and emotional regulation. 2) Early Intervention Services is for youth 18 and younger who have committed crimes within the city of Fresno and have experienced trauma and would benefit from the program.

December 15, 2022: Speaker: Robert Dutile presented an overview of the River Vista Behavioral Health complex that is being built next to Children's Hospital in Madera.

Topic: Universal Health Systems (UHS) is scheduled to open between April and June 2023 and will provide services for children, adolescents, adults and older adults on an inpatient, partial and outpatient basis. It will provide treatment for mental illnesses, substance use disorders, eating disorders, autism-spectrum disorders, trauma including PTSD, and neuropsychiatry.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2023/24

Consistent with our mission, our goal is to support the Child Welfare System to be more efficient and effective through supporting adequate resources, better communication with agency partners and making recommendations for continuous and lasting system improvements. We recognize that our committee is just part of the solution, and we are guided by what is best for the local children and youth we represent.