AB 97 IMPLEMENTATION FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE:
A CASE STUDY OF THREE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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Doctor of Education
In
Educational Leadership

By

Lorri Midori Capizzi

San Francisco, California

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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AB 97 IMPLEMENTATION FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE:
A CASE STUDY OF THREE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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2016

In 2013, a contract between Santa Clara County Office of Education and San Francisco State University was agreed upon between parties to complete a research study that examined how school districts approached the implementation of Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) as mandated by AB 97 to increase educational outcomes for youth in foster care. A qualitative case study of three school districts in Santa Clara County, California, focused on how administrators, school counselors, school social workers, and teachers interpreted AB 97 and implemented LCAP goals to serve the educational and personal needs of foster youth. In addition to conducting focus groups and individual interviews over a two-year period, district and county documents were reviewed. LCAP data revealed that districts and the county office had divergent interpretations of AB 97. School personnel lacked adequate knowledge and resources to serve youth in foster care. The study concluded that LCAPs present the opportunity to create new leadership practices at the county, district, and site levels in which interactions between implementing agents, existing practices and data can be analyzed to revise policies intended to assist students in foster care.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this dissertation.

Chair, Dissertation Committee

May 9, 2016
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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

In 2013, Governor Jerry Brown signed AB 97 into law, which mandates a new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) that is the largest redesign of California's finance system for K-12 education since the 1970s. The intent of policymakers is to hold school districts accountable for increasing the academic achievement of the disadvantaged student population, with students in foster care designated as one of 3 distinct and significant subgroups. With this new funding formula, school districts have more flexibility over fund allocation, but they must adhere to education code that now requires districts to provide Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) that detail how County Offices of Education and school districts plan to provide specialized services to the foster youth subgroup.

While targets and accountability are welcome advancements in school funding, the challenge becomes a question of how to implement this new legislation in a way that benefits both disadvantaged students in general and foster youth in particular (Heilig, Ward, Weisman, & Cole, 2014). Although school districts have more flexibility over funds, they are now more accountable to county and state as to how those funds are used to alleviate the educational inequalities for disadvantaged youth (Low-Income, English Learners and Foster Youth) in their school setting. When viewed in terms of both systems and capacity, the differences between the aspirations of the California lawmakers and the

reality on the ground in Santa Clara County may reveal both opportunities and challenges in the early stages of LCAP implementation.

This study seeks to shed light on the more promising practices currently underway and outlined in the LCAPs, as well as the challenges districts face in pursuing them from the perspective of the implementers (principals, school counselors, school social workers, and teachers) in Santa Clara County. The recommendations that follow require the investment of district and county resources and personnel to address the needs of youth in foster care.

Statement of the Problem and Significance

There are approximately 400,000 children living in foster care in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). 73,000 reside in the state of California; of the 1,700 who live in Santa Clara County, sixty-five percent attend K-12 schools (California Department of Education, 2015). Frerer, Sosenko and Henke (2013) determined that less than half of California's youth in foster care earn a high school diploma. Making foster youth less academically prepared (Unrau, Font, & Rawls, 2011) and less likely than any other group of disadvantaged students to enroll or complete at least one year of community college (Frerer, Sosenko & Henke, 2013). Tweddle (2007) found that this population was more likely to face substance abuse issues, mental health issues, or homelessness and continue to need government assistance as they aged out of foster care. Despite their comparatively small numbers, youth in foster care face far greater challenges than other K-12 subgroups; their inability to overcome these challenges often impacts their ability to successfully transition out of care into adulthood (Courtney & Hering, 2005). Foster youth consistently fall behind academically, are

disproportionately at risk for school failure, and are unsuccessful at transitioning into adult employment or higher education (Pecora, Williams, Kessler, Hiripi, O'Brien, Emerson,... & Torres, 2006). Many foster children do not enjoy equitable opportunities for academic achievement due to privacy laws that prevent collaborative practice between child welfare and educational systems (Day, Edwards, Pickover, & Leever, 2013). Because of their frequent moves and feelings of disempowerment (Kaplan, Skolnik, and Turnbull, 2009), students in foster care often do not access Advanced Placement courses and participate in extracurricular activities that most postsecondary educational institutions find attractive when considering a candidate for admission. *The Invisible Achievement Gap: How the Foster Care Experiences of California Public School Student Are Associated with Their Educational Outcomes* concludes that foster youth constitute a subgroup that is distinctly different from low-income students in the K-12 system (Wiegmann, Putnam-Hornstein, Barrat, Magruder, & Needell, 2014; Cox, 2013). Foster youth have the highest dropout rates of all demographics (Bender, Yang, Ferguson, & Thompson, 2015); they are five times as likely to be classified with emotional disturbances (Day et al., 2013), as well as twice as likely to be diagnosed with learning disabilities (Blakeslee, Del Quest, Powers, Powers, Nelson,...& McHugh, 2013; Kirk & Day, 2011; Geenen & Powers, 2006).

Confronted by factors associated with school failure such as poverty and disability, these students must also cope with the psychological and possible physical trauma associated with neglect and separation from family and familiar social environments. The lasting effects of incurred trauma are often compounded by the need to adjust to multiple living placements that come with changing schools, such as making

new friends and finding new adult supports (Day et al., 2013). Due to the lack of continuity in their educational experiences, students in foster care often have difficulty navigating the educational system. These students will meet with multiple school counselors who often have little to no understanding of the child's background, social history or academic abilities (Vacca, 2008).

Foster youth in K-12 schools have a unique set of needs that justify their identification as a separate at-risk subgroup apart from low-income students. With a disproportionately high level of exposure to trauma and psychiatric diagnosis, multiple home and school placements, absence of a guardian or consistent parent, delays in enrollment and credit transfer and lack of transportation to school and afterschool activities (Frerer, Sosenko, & Henke, 2013), additional social and mental health services for this population in K-12 are required. While in foster care, youth become the responsibility of the state and are placed in the care of the Department of Social Services (Child Welfare) where a connection is made with multiple providers at the state, county and district level. A child in foster care is assigned: (1) a guardian(s) or group home provider, (2) a lawyer, (3) a social worker, (4) a mental health clinician, and depending on the child's age and circumstances (5) a CASA (court assigned special advocate), and (6) a mentor. While at school, students in foster care, in theory, are connected with a school counselor, school social worker and teachers. The Foster Youth Services (FYS) programs at the county offices of education (COEs) historically have been eligible to apply for and receive grant funding from the state to deliver educational services to students in foster care to and mitigate the effects of being placed in foster care. Now,

under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), educational supports for the first time are a shared responsibility between the COEs and school districts.

Currently, little to no research is available that specifies how districts intend to support school-aged foster youth in their care. This research will highlight the challenges of policy implementation that practitioners at the school site level face as they strive to meet LCAP goals for students in foster care. In addition, this research seeks to formally identify critical components that contribute to the educational success of students in foster care within the K-12 school system. An analysis of both the LCAPs and implementation efforts through interviews and focus groups was conducted to uncover what districts are doing to comply with California mandates related to youth in foster care, as set forth in the new LCFF legislation.

Theoretical Framework

This paper utilizes a theoretical framework that synthesizes the work of Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002), Spillane, Reiser and Gomez (2006), and Honig (2003) to understand the policy implications of LCFF for students in foster care and amplify the underrepresented voices of the implementers whose contributions and efforts can lead to promising practices to improve the academic achievement of students in foster care in California. The combined theoretical lens of Spillane's (2002, 2006) distributed leadership model and Honig's (2003) adaptation of organizational learning theory are used to determine how implementing agents (principals, school counselors, school social workers, and teachers) are translating policy into practice and is also used to guide study recommendations.

Educational policy reform requires clarity of purpose, vision, and communication that emerges from the intersection of needs, resources, theory, and agency. Spillane's (2006) model of distributed leadership offers a viable strategy by which to address a problem with the experiences and contributions of implementing agents at various levels in an educational organization. Spillane et al. (2002) posit that implementation involves multiple layers of interpretation by the various agents who all have unique perspectives. The interpretation of the policy's goals and directives involves encoding from each agent's prior knowledge, beliefs, values, experiences, attitudes and assumptions. When responding to the same policy, the complex range of prior experiences often leads to multiple interpretations across policy implementers. These differences in understanding and responding to the stated policy must be researched carefully. Spillane (1998) states that a key dimension of the implementation process—and the means by which “agents” come to understand their practice—is through potentially changing their attitudes toward and beliefs about the new process. AB 97, therefore, offers opportunities for “sense-making” among principals, school counselors, school social workers, and teachers charged with directly helping foster youth succeed. This sense-making of policy does not happen in a vacuum; principals, school counselors, school social workers and teachers operate in departments, which in turn are part of a school, a district, a county and a state. Spillane's theory posits that getting agents to change their practice happens in time and depends upon the space where policy meets practice in “implementation zones.” These zones can differ from one district to another. The differences among these “implementation zones” are critical when it comes to successful policy implementation.

Spillane (2006) states that there are two important implementation zones, or situations, to consider when studying how policy is being translated into practice. The first is organizational structure, and the second is the organization's culture. Spillane (2002) argues that organizational arrangements and organizational culture influence how individuals approach new situations. Social and group interactions contribute to one's understanding by providing alternative interpretations and viewpoints. Agents can check their emerging understanding of policy ideas if they have opportunities to test, evaluate, and share their burgeoning implementation strategies.

Through the distributed leadership frame, Spillane (2006) contends that education policy and reform must move away from the heroic leader model and consider the leadership practices that encourage implementing agents--leaders with formal titles like superintendent and principal, as well as teacher leaders who have significant social capital among their peers--to evaluate and revise their daily routines, interactions, and data that comprise educational policies. He contends that leadership practices are co-performances: the interactions between leaders, leaders and followers, and leaders and situations can be optimized if implementing agents operate with "heedful interrelating." If leaders and followers share the same goals and patterns of interaction, a consistent interpretation and implementation of policy can follow. Leaders need to view themselves as architects who design new tools and practices based on these interactions and the constant flow of data from various sources.

Consistent with Spillane's emphasis on practices, Honig (2003) presents a variation of organizational learning theory that philosophically and pragmatically supports this exploratory study's efforts to build effective policy from practices that

target the educational outcomes of students in foster care as mandated by California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Using a case study of Oakland Unified School District's partnerships with outside agencies, Honig (2004) illustrates the potential of organizational learning processes for educational policy. Change comes about through a process called "organizational learning"; to the extent that a central office or County Office of Education (COE) can operate in this manner, it is capable of "searching" for information from school sites—the experiences and relevant data from school personnel and community agencies—and then "using" the information in the organization's evolving policies and collective mindset. Incorporating this new information requires several steps: (1) interpreting or making sense of the information; (2) storing the information by applying it to policies and informing resource allocation; and (3) retrieving the information to influence future action.

From a leadership perspective, Honig (2003) considers how central office agents: search and use information; interact with community/school partners to gain this information; deploy central office staff to gather information; and use both capacity and capital to build policy. Certain threshold conditions need to be in place for organizational learning to occur: an urgent incentive or warrant for change must exist, along with an awareness of past experiences that motivates a search process; intentionality to change; sustained interactions with organizations in the environment; "boundary spanners," peripheral members of the central office who can gather information due to their "heedful" interactions with sites and outside agencies; preemptive action taken against implementation challenges; and site readiness with goals and data collection. Central office administrators must have the following forms of capital to participate: knowledge

of sites and systems; connections to the sites and systems; and administrative tools (adjustable workday structure, workload, and resource allocation). This study's framework operates between Spillane's (2006) distributed leadership model and Honig's (2003) application of organizational learning first order changes—organizational structures and policies—as well as second order changes—the transformation of values and assumptions—to arrive at recommendations for county, district, and site personnel.

Central Research Question

What are Santa Clara County school districts doing to improve the educational outcomes for foster youth as mandated by California's Local Control Funding Formula legislation (AB 97)?

It is anticipated that findings from this research study will provide scaffolding to define critical resources that are needed from both county and district offices for successful LCAP design and implementation. This study also hopes to contribute to the establishment of California as a model for educational excellence in service to K-12 youth in foster care at the national level.

Organization of the Study

This implementation inquiry will explore and provide an analysis of three school districts' efforts to provide services to foster youth in Santa Clara County, California. Chapter 1 includes background information, an explanation about the significance of the research study, and the central research question. Chapter 2 provides a framework for this study, historical context, and evolution of the foster youth education reform movement. Within chapter 2, there is a literature review on established practices and a theoretical framework for this study. Chapter 3 includes methods for this qualitative study that

includes references to the case study approach, data collection, and positionality statement. Chapter 4 includes the summary of findings that will be organized into themes. To conclude, Chapter 5 will include discussion of findings, implications for practice, recommendations for district and county leaders, as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature Overview

Existing research on foster youth discusses their historical and ongoing socioeconomic challenges, which private, federal, state, and local government agencies have struggled to address. Federal legislation has focused on the protection of education rights and created policies that have been implemented without additional federal funds. Leading the nation with additional legal mandates and educational policies—including innovative programs at the district level—California has made notable efforts to improve the academic outcomes of foster youth since the passage of AB 490 in 2004 (Wiesman, 2012; Shea, Zetlin & Weinberg, 2010). The state's 2013 decision to move to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) gives districts more control over their spending, although it also mandates that districts explicitly address the needs of foster youth. This new funding formula and accountability plan offers opportunities for collaboration between the state, county, and local school districts, and provides the autonomy to address the needs of students within districts (Heilig, Ward, Weisman & Cole, 2014).

Researchers in California and across the U.S. have identified promising approaches to address the risk factors for youth in foster care. The factors that contribute to significantly lower levels of academic achievement include but are not limited to high mobility; insufficient coordination and communication between schools and other agencies; and limited support services due to inadequate staffing and professional development (Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2012).

The first section of this literature review describes the historical precursors of private and public programs that have influenced modern programs for youth in foster

care. The second section reviews the extent to which California has developed more effective legal mandates and programs for youth in foster care than other states in the nation. The third section summarizes current literature regarding the most significant challenges and some viable strategies that have the potential to increase academic achievement among foster youth. The historical overview and summaries described provide the reader with a comprehensive framework for understanding the goals, actions, and support services recommended in this exploratory research and their value as suggestions for how the Child Welfare division of the California Department of Social Services, Santa Clara County Office of Education and school districts can work together to improve the educational outcomes of foster youth as mandated by California's Local Control Funding Formula legislation (AB 97).

Foster Care: A Historical Perspective

Modern day foster care has been influenced by many historical efforts to have some entity, be it the state or surrogates, serve *in loco parentis* when children or youth lacked parents who could care for them on a daily basis. In countries with Judeo-Christian heritage, religious leaders paid widows a stipend to look after children who were too young to work. During the Reformation, the state assumed responsibility for orphans and developed laws regarding their welfare. Children who were old enough and physically able to work were either placed in families with the understanding that they would work to earn their keep until they were adults—indentured servitude—or be sent to the county almshouse, or poor farm, often housed in the same complex as prison farms (Guishard-Pine, McCall, & Hamilton, 2007).

The Industrial Revolution and urbanization in 19th century America, and its inherent need for cheap labor, led to the development of impersonal orphanages that offered food and shelter to limited numbers of unsupervised “street children” with the stipulation that they work to offset the costs associated with boarding them. Recognizing that these circumstances were inhumane and damaging to the children, Charles Loring Brace founded the Children’s Aide Society whose charter was to introduce these street children into a more familial setting by placing them with farming families in the Midwest and between the years 1853–1920, organized and operated a system of “orphan trains” that successfully moved and placed over 90 thousand children (Alexander, 2009; Askeland, 2006). Brace, the father of modern foster care in the U.S., saw the street children of New York City as a potential benefit to society, not an irredeemable liability. He sent them West with the belief that these children could acquire the skills and stability necessary for a productive life while helping run family farms. Brace’s thinking was revolutionary at the time because of his ardent belief that children needed to experience positive relationships and a sense of community through the family structure to thrive. He also recognized the role that free choice played in a productive life and, unlike previous arrangements, designed the relationship between the “orphan train” youth and their Midwestern families as voluntary: the youth were not thrust into the system of indentured servitude prevalent across New York City orphanages at the time, but rather, were free to leave their placements at any time (O’Connor, 2004).

The need for government involvement in and oversight of the lives of youth in foster care was recognized as a repercussion from a child abuse case involving a young orphan named Mary Ellen Wilson. Wilson, a victim of profoundly negative

circumstances, found herself an indentured ward living in an abusive home. Her plight was recognized by a neighbor who sought legal help from Henry Burgh, the founder of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). This erupted into the scandal of its day and served as the catalyst for the first children's protection agency in the US, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Founded in 1874 and modeled after the SPCA, it was primarily an investigative organization. By 1880, there were 37 societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in the U.S. In the early twentieth century, 250 societies were founded to prevent or expose child cruelty (Myers, 2006).

This was followed by more federal involvement relating to child welfare and by the early 1900s, the federal government's legislation to restrict child labor and impose compulsory education made self-funding orphanages an economically nonviable business model. Greater emphasis was placed on having youth mature in family settings. President Theodore Roosevelt hosted a White House Conference on Child Dependency that created a publicly funded volunteer organization whose purpose was to "establish and publicize standards of child care" (Axinn & Levin, 1997). Taking care of orphans was no longer an act of charity; it was seen as good public policy to be carried out by trained professionals. By 1926, 18 states had child welfare boards at the county level whose purpose was to coordinate public and private foster care with regard to placement of orphan youth into stable homes.

In parallel with Federal efforts, state governments began to develop foster care programs with features that continue today. Beginning in 1868, Massachusetts was the first state to pay foster families a stipend to help cover the cost of a foster child's board

during the winter so that the child could go to school when there was no farm work. Charles Loring Brace and other critics argued that people would take in foster children just for the money and not provide a loving home for them. The concept of having the state pay for childcare was quite controversial. The US federal government did not start reimbursing states for the cost of fostering children until 1962, when the Social Security Act was amended with Title IV-A. Title IV-A provided the states with foster care funding for neglected and/or abused children whose families were already receiving funding through the Department of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the court deemed foster care was in the best interest of the child (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). The result was an exponential increase in the removal of children from their families and placement in foster care.

Due to the high direct costs for Title IV-A foster-care funding—\$2.4 billion annually in 1976 (Crouse, Hauan, & Waters-Rogers, 2008)—and the abysmal and expensive outcomes for youth after they exited foster care—\$70 billion annually in the areas of homelessness, mental health services and adult incarceration (Moreno, 2009)—Congress began passing legislation to reform the AFDC after President Ronald Reagan was elected on a platform of less government. In 1980, Congress passed Public Law (PL) 96-272, which established the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance programs, to help reunite children with their families of origin. The unintended consequence to this was that children tended to spend more time in foster care while social workers tried to reunite youth with their families. To address this problem, in 1997 Congress passed PL 105-89 to provide timelines for permanent placement for foster youth. In the event that

there is no permanent placement for a youth in foster care, Congress passed Title IV-E funding to provide adult transitional services to foster youth.

More recent federal legislation primarily addresses a child's need for stability and permanency, reflecting academic research findings about the effects of instability on educational achievement. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (1987) gave students experiencing homelessness the right to remain at their school even if they had to move outside of its attendance area and access. Although this act addressed students who were waiting to enter foster care placement, it sought to give students unfettered educational access even if records were missing by providing an educational liaison (Shea, Zetlin and Weinberg, 2009). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Homeless Education Assistance Act and Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 continued these provisions for educational stability and immediate enrollment.

Efforts to comply with these laws were hampered by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), federal legislation designed to protect students' privacy. This Act required parental/guardian consent before educational records could be transferred between schools, an increasingly burdensome requirement that hampered the delivery of student records to the students' new placements and the delivery of special education services to qualified students. Conservative interpretations of FERPA no longer pose the same risk of delayed educational records because in 2013, the Uninterrupted Scholars Act, more commonly known as the FERPA exception, ensures that third parties like social workers, educational advocates, and caretakers have access to a foster youth's school records without the prior permission from the minor's parents.

Under this new law, schools do not need that permission to exercise the FERPA exception to comply with court orders or share educational records with welfare agencies (American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, Education Law Center, & Juvenile Law Center, 2013).

Historically, private sector efforts to assist youth in foster care provided for physical needs in response to a moral obligation. As the state began to regulate care by stressing placement with families and compulsory education, it assumed more financial responsibility for this population. These early practices provide the starting point for understanding the challenges of serving youth in foster care. Neither private nor public agency has successfully and unilaterally addressed this challenge, as will be addressed in later sections of this study. Private and public sectors must collaborate on a more comprehensive strategy to assist youth in foster care. The next section discusses the most significant barriers to academic achievement that California's political and educational leaders have attempted to address with more recent legislation and with the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

California's Educational Policies for Youth in Foster Care

Weisman (2012) hails California as a state that has been at the forefront of adopting policies to help foster youth achieve greater academic success. The state has addressed: the need to maintain current records on foster youth cases; support educational stability via entitlements relating to school of origin and immediate enrollment; the need to provide partial credits and requirement exemptions to facilitate graduation; the need for an education liaison; and increased flexibility to manage policies and funding for foster youth.

In 1989, California Senate Bill (SB) 370 in effect created the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS), a statewide database that helped county child welfare offices track foster children. When youth in care move from one county to another or change caseworkers, this database maintains a history of these events. While it holds basic information about each case and contacts for the social worker and current placement, this database does not help social workers monitor school attendance, academic achievement, and school site contacts. With the introduction of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), California has committed to make county Child Welfare Services data accessible to school districts, and school districts must make student data on CALPADS available to County and State social workers.

In 2004, Assembly Bill (AB) 490 codified educational rights of foster children in California with access to support personnel. Influenced by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (1987), this bill guaranteed: the student's right to remain at the school of origin; access to immediate enrollment in the event of a school placement change; equal access to resources and extracurricular activities; the acceptance of partial credits; and a liaison required to assist the student with enrollment, the transfer of academic records, and proper placement in courses (Shea, Zetlin & Weinberg, 2009). Most significantly, it "mandates that educators, school personnel, social workers, probation officers, caregivers, advocates, and juvenile court officers work together to serve the educational needs of children in foster care" (p. 74). Despite the legal mandate, districts have been hard pressed to fulfill the goals set by the state. A 2009 study collected data from AB 490 liaisons and found that inadequate time, resources, training, and collaboration with their local Department of Social Services/Child Welfare Agency

hampered the ability of these liaisons to perform their jobs. Because the state does not provide funding for these positions, more than 80% of respondents had other job assignments and could not devote adequate time to their duties as liaisons. The results of this study suggest greater capacity for AB 490 liaisons to facilitate registration, placement, and collaboration between agencies. Shea, Zetlin & Weinberg (2009) conclude that County Offices of Education (COEs) should invest more resources into this position and recommended that the state evaluate compliance with AB 490.

California State Graduation Exemptions

Students in foster care must overcome many obstacles to earn a high school diploma. Frequent moves, delayed transfer of records, and delayed services can result in lost credits, especially when a placement change occurs mid-semester (Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012). Gustavsson & MacEachron (2012) found several studies that showed less than fifty percent of students in foster care complete high school, twenty percent less than the general student population. While 2004 legislation allowed youth in foster care to accrue partial credits towards a high school diploma, it is a daunting task to stay on track to graduate: *The Invisible Achievement Gap: How the Foster Care Experiences of California Public School Student Are Associated with Their Educational Outcomes* found that one-third of this population repeated a grade (Wiegmann, Putnam-Hornstein, Barrat, Magruder, & Needell, 2014). In summary, the cumulative effects of mobility, abuse, limited resources, and health issues (mental and physical) make earning a high-school diploma significantly more difficult for youth in foster care as compared to their non-fostered peers.

In 2010, California provided foster youth with an alternative route to earn a diploma. AB 167, amended in 2013 with AB 216, exempts 11th and 12th grade youth in foster care from school district graduation requirements that exceed state graduation requirements. If the student, for any reason, transfers between schools or school districts after their second year of high school and is unable to complete district requirements, the school district must provide notice within 30 days to youth in care, the student's case worker, and the educational right holder about the exemption from additional district requirements, and explain the impact this option can have on post-secondary planning. Students should be encouraged to complete the district's requirements if it is feasible to earn their diploma (Armani, Arthur, Conway, Cromer, DeGarmoe, Fern,... & Quirk, 2014).

AB 97: Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)

In response to growing resistance to top-down policies and frustration with complicated, obsolete funding practices, the California Legislature passed AB 97 in June 2013 and established a new local control funding formula (LCFF) governing the way public schools receive funds. First proposed conceptually in 2003 by Richard Riordan, the Secretary for Education under Governor Schwarzenegger, the LCFF is a weighted student formula that allocates extra funding for students with high needs. A central goal of the legislation was to address the inequitable school funding system (Loeb, Bryk, & Hanushek, 2008) that was developed in the state following voter approval of Proposition 13 in 1978. The passage of AB 97 eliminated the state's revenue-limit system, which included per student funding that was quite inconsistent among districts, and it eliminated a host of "categorical" programs that tied school funding to specific district expenditures

or programs. Because of AB 97, districts have much greater flexibility to decide how to use state funds instead of having the uses specified by the state legislature.

Three types of grants make up the LCFF funding system: base grants, supplemental grants, and concentration grants. Base funding allocations for districts essentially align with the state's prior funding levels. Targeted supplemental and concentration grants provide additional funding above the student base grant for English Learners (EL), Low Income students, (LI), and foster youth.

Districts and county offices of education (COEs) are required to develop a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) that addresses the state's educational priorities. Districts must focus on: basic services (instruction and facilities); Common Core implementation; parent involvement; student achievement; student engagement; school climate; course access; and other student outcomes (e.g., A-G coursework, AP, ACT/SAT scores). COEs must prioritize the aforementioned priorities as well as the instruction of expelled students and foster youth services (Heilig, Ward, Weisman, & Cole, 2014). LCAPs need to reflect the input from all stakeholders, identify qualitative and quantitative measures, and receive approval from the county and State Superintendent's offices, respectively. In addition to restructuring school funding, AB 97 made California the first state to make school districts accountable for the educational outcomes of foster youth. Districts with 15 or more foster youth must develop foster youth education plans. To write educational plans, AB 97 also requires departments of social services to identify foster youth to school districts when a student becomes a foster youth. With the mandatory inclusion of foster youth in the LCFF, the state of California is attempting to fulfill its role of *in loco parentis* as it relates to education, instead of just

the physical needs of children, for the first time by explicitly delegating some of that responsibility to school districts.

Many layers of partnerships—local community agencies and school districts, school districts and COEs, local educational agencies (LEAs) and the state, school site stakeholders and students—must be optimized to use limited funds wisely. Initial results suggest the need for more direction, specificity, and analysis. The state expects to have accountability rubrics by October, 2016. County offices of education (COEs) will need to: evaluate district LCAPs to determine whether or not they effectively address the needs of foster youth; help districts revise LCAPs; and assist them with the data collection process to measure their achievement against the state's evaluation rubric (Humphrey & Koppich, 2014). LCFF encourages districts to scrutinize outcome data and needs so that they meet the needs of target populations. Heilig et al. (2014) concludes that LCFF is an admirable plan to encourage systemic improvements that balance fiscal accountability and measurable student outcomes.

Identifying Youth in Foster Care and Data Management

While youth in foster care are included in LCFF as a target population, the state did not address the challenges of maintaining a database for these youth and specific goals for their educational progress during the first cycle of LCAP development and approval. Data collected in January, 2015 by Humphrey & Koppich (2015) reflect the ongoing needs that schools and other agencies should be addressing to assist foster youth; perhaps the most challenging is a database that COEs and school districts can utilize to track the progress of foster youth. The Sacramento Office of Education created a Foster Focus database for this purpose. However, as of Summer, 2014 less than half of the 58

COEs were accessing it even though this database offers student demographic information as well as case worker and social worker notes (Humphrey & Koppich, 2015).

Managing foster youth records is one of the key challenges that schools, caregivers, and child welfare departments face. The 1974 Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) was designed to protect the privacy of children and families. FERPA prevents educational records from being released to third-party agencies without parental consent (Day, Edwards, Pickover, & Leever, 2013). However, current foster parents and social workers can act on behalf of these youth to request either a release of or a copy of educational records. States can authorize the sharing of information with school systems, but some school districts interpreted this law conservatively, thereby impeding the delivery of student records to child welfare workers. Now that federal legislation has amended FERPA through the Uninterrupted Scholars Act (2013), there is a balance between the priority to maintain student privacy and the need to transfer records to the necessary parties involved in the educational planning of students in foster care (Day et al., 2013). Schools no longer need parental consent or court orders to share educational records with case workers or other persons charged with the care of foster youths. Nevertheless, California still faces the challenge of sharing information in a timely manner to ensure and enhance collaboration between schools and the child welfare system.

While some states have developed robust data tracking systems, critics have felt that California has taken too long to develop useful data tracking systems to inform educational policy. A similar deficit existed within the California Department of Social

Services when, prior to 1989, counties had to manage their data. SB 370 (1989) allocated the funding to create a statewide database, the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS), that could track cases, maintain current contacts for resources, and more easily share information with child welfare services workers to comply with a federal mandate to create such a database (CA Department of Social Services, 2007). Similarly, the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) was developed in 2002 as a means for the state education agencies to collect enrollment data, test scores, teacher assignments, and other information (London & Gurantz, 2010). Until the introduction of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), these two systems operated independently of one another. Many county child welfare offices did not share their data from the CWS/CMS with school personnel, and school districts did not share the data available on CALPADS or the districts' own student information systems. Consequently, researchers have found that social workers and school personnel lack the communication to foster effective collaboration (Havalchak, White, O'Brien, Pecora, & Sepulveda, 2009). The inability to share information about caregivers, education rights holders, previous enrollments, attendance, academic achievement, course enrollment, and disciplinary events for foster youth, has created educational barriers for students in foster care. CALPADS is coordinating its data with CWS/CMS; however, this effort suffers from undercounting foster youth because CALPADS and CWS/CMS systems were still not 100% compatible as of August, 2015.

In the future, school districts will have access to more information about students in foster care due to mandates in the LCFF that require local educational agencies (LEAs) to know the number of foster youth they need to serve. The Department of Social

Services has been working to share this information. Data collected and updated on a daily basis in CWS/CMS is shared with school districts via weekly reports (California Department of Education, 2015). Considerations about access to these reports and the need for LEAs to maintain these records on-site have not been resolved. Nevertheless, this represents an important step towards collaboration among Child Welfare Services (CWS) and County Offices of Education.

Critical Educational Supports

The Need for School Stability

Current literature on foster youth indicates that residential mobility influences poor academic performance among foster youth (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004; Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012). Most children live with foster families in private homes; however, 15% of California's foster children reside in group homes or institutions. On average, children spend approximately two years (23.9 months) in foster care and ten percent of these children remain in care for five or more years (California Department of Social Services, 2013). While it is true that in care, these youths have their physical needs met, their lives are far from stable. On average, foster youth move to new homes and transfer to new schools approximately 3.1 times per year (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012). This supports Courtney, Terao, & Bost (2004) early finding that when youth enters the foster care system between the ages of 11 and 14, he or she can expect to have an average of 7 to 13 placements over the course of their time in out of home care, which translates into roughly 1 move every 6 months.

Under AB 490 (2004), which addressed the educational placements of youth in foster care, local school districts must ensure that students have access to the same resources available to all students, and that placement is in a least restrictive environment and in the best interest of the student. AB 490 states that foster youth have the right to be enrolled immediately in a new school without school records, immunization records or school uniforms. The expeditious transfer of records is the responsibility of the district. Districts must ensure proper placement and transfer of grades and work with placement agencies to ensure successful transition. Transfer of school records must happen within two business days. The language of this law also ensures that grades cannot be lowered due to absences that are caused by a change in placement, a court ordered activity, or a court appearance and ensures partial credits will be issued. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) can minimize this risk factor by working with social workers to encourage educational stability by keeping foster youth at the same school (Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2012).

The Need for Special Education Assessment

Mobility, lack of access to student records, and inadequate resources for special education services can have a tremendously negative impact on foster youth who qualify for services (Stanley, 2012). The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2005 (IDEA, 2004) provides states with funding to ensure that children with special needs receive “a free, appropriate, public education in a least restrictive environment.” It is the responsibility of the districts to include all parties that advocate on behalf of the child. *The Invisible Achievement Gap: How the Foster Care Experiences of California Public School Student Are Associated with Their Educational Outcomes* found that school districts are not

meeting this responsibility even though they recognize that this population faces greater academic and personal challenges (Wiegmann, Putnam-Hornstein, Barrat, Magruder, & Needell, 2014). Youth in foster care are more likely to qualify for special education services than students in the general population (Blakeslee et. al, 2013). One-third to almost fifty percent of students in foster care qualifies for special education services, while ten percent of the general school population qualify for such services (Blakeslee et. al, 2013; Zetlin, 2006). School transfers, however, can impede IEP (Individual Education Plan) implementation and special education services (Zetlin, 2006).

Although youth in foster care are more likely to have been assessed for services, they frequently do not receive services because of mobility issues (Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004) and often face disciplinary action by school personnel who may be unaware that the students are foster youth and/or have an IEP (Zetlin, 2006). Zetlin (2006) also found that even when schools prepare to provide services to foster youth, they experience delays if: school staff do not receive records that include the current IEP; if the IEP is outdated and the parent or education rights holder cannot be contacted in a timely manner, then the LEA does not have enough information to make an appropriate placement. Caregivers often lack information about services, so they cannot advocate for better options when placements are determined (Blakeslee et. al, 2013). Without informed advocates, some foster youth are placed into alternative education or independent study because the school site lacks the required resources. (Zetlin, 2006). Foster youth with special needs cannot optimize their educational outcomes if they do not have access to resources and supports that can help them receive the services outlined by IDEA.

The Need for Supportive Relationships

Vacca (2008) found that school personnel are often unfamiliar with the foster child's background, social history and scholastic ability. Often ill-equipped to work with this special population due to a lack of training and/or professional development, school personnel are unable to deliver the needed services and develop a plan for scholastic success. Three-fourths of former foster youth reported that they would have liked more support from their teachers (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012; Martin & Jackson, 2002). Pleck (2008) reported that students' academic, behavioral, emotional and social needs were the possible result of the lack of adult investment. According to Emerson (2007), foster youth benefit when school personnel work consistently with youth in care, provide strengths-based assessments and educational supports (Pecora, 2012). Hass & Gaydon (2009) found that former foster youth who went on to attend post-secondary education or training reported that having at least one caring and supportive adult helped to build up the resiliency they needed to overcome life challenges. Weinberg, Oshiro and Shea (2014) discovered that education liaisons could provide foster youth with the positive relationship needed with an adult. The liaison's encouragement and continued presence helped students adjust to school and develop a positive attitude.

The Need for Trauma Informed Practice

A commonality that sets children in foster care apart from other demographics is that they have been exposed to some form of trauma, whether it is the result of simply being "placed" in a new home away from familiar people and surroundings i.e., a new school and neighborhood, or the result of directly experiencing or witnessing

maltreatment. As a result of their incurred trauma, youth in foster care are more likely to develop emotional and psychological problem such as depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Pecora, 2010). In a study of high school students about the impact of witnessing violence, Berman, Kurtines, Silverman and Serafini (1996) found that all the adolescents who reported seeing a violent act also reported experiencing PTSD symptoms; study participants on average experienced five symptoms, and 34% of the participants met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. The severity of symptoms correlates with the severity of the trauma—witnessing a family member being attacked is more traumatizing than witnessing a stranger being attacked (Berman et al., 1996, p. 334).

One of the diagnostic criteria for PTSD is, “irritable behavior and angry outbursts with little or no provocation typically expressed as verbal or physical aggression towards people or objects” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). PTSD may in part explain why children who have been maltreated can display extreme responses such as physical aggression (Evans, 2009). Finkelstein, Wamsley and Miranda’s (2002) also suggest that children in foster care often experience difficulties with teachers and students in the classroom setting. Zetlin, MacLeod, & Kimm (2012) found that beginning teachers are unprepared to address the needs of students in foster care due to the lack of teacher preparation, background information on the child, school support and collaboration with the child welfare. As a result, children in the foster care system are more likely to experience academic and discipline problems at school than their peers (Scherr, 2007). Suspension and/or expulsion are often utilized to address these problems. Both methods.

however, remove the student from the classroom and may delay further academic progress.

Scherr (2007) recommends that behavioral assessment and intervention plans be used to help students in foster care successfully meet teacher expectations. This researcher recommends that PTSD must be part of the assessment evaluation, and if necessary, therapeutic intervention. In addition to a behavioral assessment, Zeitlin & Weinberg (2004) propose that schools develop policies and professional development so that teachers and other school staff can more fully understand the needs of foster youth and best practices to help them be successful in school. For example, to help foster youth adjust to a new school setting, Vacca (2008) recommends that teachers orient new students to the classroom and set clear expectations for academic success. Notifying teachers about foster youth who transfer into and out of their class can increase opportunities for a teacher to adapt assignments or provide additional help (Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2012). Both new and experienced teachers may need professional development to help them understand the impact physical and/or emotional trauma can have on a student's ability to learn, interact with others, and self-regulate in a classroom setting. Informed teachers can approach foster youth with more sensitivity and flexibility to encourage a supportive relationship at the school site.

The Need for Agency Collaboration

Several articles and studies emphasize the extent to which collaborative relationships with school personnel and social workers can be a challenge (Naccarato & DeLorenzo, 2008). Altshuler (2003) found that while both social workers and school personnel work to support youth in foster care, each focus on separate needs. Teachers

tend to focus on factors that relate to learning and social workers focus on the short and long-term safety needs separately without the exchange of information with one another. This lack of collaboration and communication between school personnel and social workers leads to inconsistencies in case management efforts to support students in foster care Altshuler (2003).

Within the last decade, researchers have conducted focus group sessions, evaluated pilot interagency cooperative programs, and even offered technical assistance to overcome these barriers. Child welfare agency liaisons in California felt that their superiors and peers within the child welfare office did not prioritize academic progress, but they also perceived that all stakeholders—caregivers, school personnel, and child welfare workers—needed to take responsibility for the care of foster youth and have more information about available resources and legal mandates to participate in a collaborative relationship (Zetlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2006; Weinberg, Zetlin & Shea, 2009).

Day, Somers, Darden, and Yoon (2015) found that Michigan school behavioral specialists (counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers) who participated in their survey lacked the usual information about foster youth, but they also did not have working knowledge of federal legislation such as the McKinney-Vento Act or the Fostering Connections to Success Act of 2008. Similar to the California focus group, Michigan school behavioral specialists felt that case workers did not understand special education services and law well enough to advocate for those services. Day et al. (2015) recommend: cross-system training for pre-service and continuing professionals by universities; professional development that fosters interagency communication and

awareness of trauma-related behavioral or learning issues; and the use of innovative practices to increase interagency involvement (e.g., the use of common forms or attending a meeting via Skype).

The previous articles identified structural and attitudinal barriers that limit collaboration between major stakeholders with entrenched roles and limitations. When Weinberg, Zetlin, and Shea (2009) undertook a multiple case study that involved offering technical assistance to child protective services (CPS), LEAs, and other agencies in several California counties, the researchers found several common factors that overcame many of those barriers. While the situations, resources, and responses to the educational achievement of foster youth varied, successful collaboration required: agencies that were interested and willing to work with school partners in recurring work groups and trainings; a plan to collect and share data; and strong leadership in one or more offices. Although existing positive relationships were helpful, the combination of strong leadership and the commitment of resources led to increased collaboration.

This literature review outlines the background of foster care in the United States and the promising directions that California has taken to improve educational outcomes for foster youth. Federal and state legislation has attempted to address how school districts can work with the county office of education as well as Child Welfare Services to provide support for foster youth. Effective partnerships can have a positive effect on academic achievement among foster youth by: maintaining school stability; coordinating communication to ensure access to special education services; and promoting supportive relationships among all stakeholders. These goals can impact the design of policies and procedures for school districts seeking to meet the objectives of LCFF. Foster youth

need implementation leaders who can improve school stability, communication, and the delivery of critical support services.

Chapter 3: Methods

Study Overview

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine how school districts approached the implementation of Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) as mandated by AB 97. Principals, school counselors, school social workers, and teachers from 6 schools across 3 school districts located in Northern California were interviewed to examine their understanding of AB97 and approaches used in their implementations of the mandated LCAP goals with the intent of answering the following research question:

What are Santa Clara County school districts doing to improve the educational outcomes for foster youth as mandated by California's Local Control Funding Formula legislation (AB 97)?

Qualitative Research Study – Case Study

This study was a qualitative exploratory study conducted through a case study of three school districts which included six high schools across three school districts (two high schools per district). Merriam (1998) reports that case studies have been used to highlight educational practice for the past four decades. She describes the case study approach as an opportunity to gain in-depth understanding from multiple perspectives of individuals involved. Through this process of comprehensive investigation, insights into district implementation efforts were uncovered. Yin (2009) advised that in a case study design, multi-case studies have benefit and reports that more compelling data can be derived from more than one study alone. Semi-structured interviews with superintendents and assistant superintendents and focus groups with principals, school counselors, school social workers and teachers were conducted to explore how high level administration and practitioners on the street level interpreted the AB 97 mandate to increase educational

success of youth in foster care and what challenges these educators faced in implementing LCAP goals for foster youth.

District selection for the case study was an important component of the design for the final phase of the research study. Purposeful sampling or nonprobability sampling was used to gain the greatest amount of information (Merriam, 2009). The primary goal for the use of purposeful sampling in this study was to identify those districts that would provide the greatest amount of information rich cases and directly reflect the purpose of the study (Merriam, 2009).

Spillane et al. (2002) suggested that implementers in the primary stages of policy implementation often have a superficial understanding of the key aspects of the policy message and need a more substantive understanding in order to assimilate the process of new ideas. Therefore, in-depth, focus groups was determined to be the best approach to examine the professional knowledge, experiences, and interpretations of the new policy among principals, school counselors, school social workers, and teachers in their schools. This approach allowed the researcher to understand how various implementing agents responded to foster youth needs and the degree to which they could collaborate with others in the school, district office, COE, or outside agencies. After collecting divergent and often limited interpretations of current legislations regarding foster youth, the researcher developed the capacity to share this information with the participants as well as identify opportunities to develop a consistent and accurate understanding of foster youth resources.

Researcher in role of policy analyst

Yanow (2000) discussed that the critical methods for conducting interpretive policy analysis include interviews, observations, and analysis of documents because they provide access to “local knowledge and identifying communities of meaning and their symbolic artifacts” (Yanow, 2000, p. 31). Yanow (2000) challenges conventional policy analysis by accepting the subjectivity of both the policy analyst and implementing agents: together, they participate in the creation and interpretation of meaning with policy analyst’s position on the border of the community. The policy analyst then serves as a participant who can frame the current conditions of a policy, reveal the conflicting interpretations of a policy, and offer potential alternatives. The policy analyst takes on greater agency and has the potential to call attention to sources of tension, divergent meanings, and underrepresented voices affected by the policy.

Yanow’s (2000) approach is based on the assumption that the deployment of policy is a “text” that can be interpreted as much as the artifacts of language, objects, and acts. Like Spillane (1998), Yanow (2000) emphasizes the importance of identifying the agents who evaluate a policy within the framework of their respective experiences and values. Both reject the assumption that everyone shares the same definitions, expectations, and interpretations of a policy. The privileged position of the policy analyst who has some connection to the community (e.g., a member of a nonprofit group or outside agency) allows the analyst special access: the analyst can map out the groups of implementation agents who have common language and policy frames (linguistic artifacts). This enables the analyst to analyze the way each group conceptualizes the objectives and challenges of a policy. The policy analyst exposes multiple interpretations

of a policy by evaluating a program's daily operations, literature, and logistics of implementation (Yanow, 2000). Symbolic acts are yet another variable to be mapped and studied to gain greater insight into the stakeholders of a community. The analyst has the responsibility to promote "the voice of silenced populations" (92). Gathering their facts and sense-making supports a democratic process of policy analysis. Yanow's (2000) framework relies on a policy analyst who serves as a "translator and mediator" by encouraging the interaction of more voices in the sense-making process (91). The analyst shares Spillane's investment in the agency of all members of the community affected by a policy. Both theorists recognize the need to reveal the sources of discordant interpretations of a policy before addressing reforms.

Yanow (2000) values participants who can operate on the periphery of an organization to which they claim some membership and argues that effective reform can come about when an organization values the perspectives of those who lie outside the inner circle of sense-makers and can bridge discussion for policy implementation.

Positionality Statement

As a researcher, I bring over 10 years of experience working with students in foster care who are entering or in the process of completing degrees in post-secondary institutions. I serve at San Jose State University (SJSU) as faculty for the department of Counselor Education and also design and teach courses for emancipated foster youth for the SJSU Guardian Scholar Program. My service to the SJSU Guardian Scholar Program also extends to admissions and scholarship committees as well as on-going counseling and advising for emancipated youth. I have partnered on projects with the Superior Court of California, the Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Court and the Santa Clara Office of

Education to support various efforts intended to benefit foster youth in the county. As a collaborator with the county office on LCFF, I work closely with the director of Foster and Homeless Youth Services to design and implement relevant workshops for district personnel. I am included in technical meetings with school districts within Santa Clara County to discuss LCFF implementation and LCAP design for students in foster care. Finally, I serve as a member of the executive foster youth advisory board in Santa Clara County, an organization that frequently meets with key community leaders to discuss new legislative efforts and also serve on the California Foster Youth Task Education Force, an organization that brings experts together from more than 35 organizations and agencies to engage in cross-systems collaboration to improve educational outcomes for youth in foster care.

Research Phases

As an exploratory study into AB 97 implementation efforts of Santa Clara County school districts, data collection happened in three distinct phases that ran parallel to the legislative timelines.

Figure 1 Data Collection Timeline

Beginning in November, 2013 (phase 1), data was gathered through informal informational interviews with Santa Clara County superintendents and assistant superintendents at county office meetings; June-August, 2014 (phase 2), district LCAPs were reviewed, categorized and coded; finally in April-May, 2015 (phase 3), focus groups which included six high schools across three school districts (two high schools per district). Other data collection methods included a review of county documents that comprised policy and procedures, programmatic assessments, and annual reports for foster youth services. Observations of technical meetings hosted by the county office of education to address challenges in LCAP design were also attended.

Participant Information (Phase 1)

Participants	Years of experience in current position
Superintendent 1	2 years of experience
Superintendent 2	3 years of experience
Superintendent 3	5 years of experience
Assistant Superintendent 4	3 years of experience
Assistant Superintendent 5	2 years of experience

Table 1 Participant Information (Phase 1)

Sample Selection (Phase 2)

There are a total of 31 school districts in Santa Clara County. All 31 LCAPs were included in the review and analysis.

District Selection Information (Phase 3)

After an exhaustive review and analysis of Santa Clara County LCAPs, 16 out of 31 districts emerged with specific services directed toward serving students in foster care. From these 16 districts that described intentional services, the second criteria narrowed down districts to those that had over 50 foster youth in their districts. The final district selection (A, B, and C) was made with recommendations from the county office of education.

District Information

District (2013-2014)	Enrollment	ADA *	# of Schools
District A	26,489	22,214	23
District B	33,152	31,208	53
District C	11,786	10,852	17

Table 1 District Information (Enrollment, ADA and Number of Schools)

*Average Daily Attendance

District A, B and C Summary. (2015). Retrieved January 15, 2015, from <http://www.ed-data.org/district/Santa-Clara>

District (2013-2014)	Free & Reduced Meal Price	English Learners	Foster Youth
District A	14,055	5,258	80
District B	14,790	8,166	90
District C	6,165	3,257	64

Table 2 District Information (Free and Reduced Meals, English Learners and Foster Youth)

District A, B and C Summary. (2015). Retrieved January 15, 2015, from <http://www.ed-data.org/district/Santa-Clara>

Participant information (Phase 3)

	District A	District B	District C
High School 1	1 Assistant Principal 3 School Counselors 1 Teacher 1 Social Worker	1 Assistant Principal 6 Teachers 1 School Counselor	1 Assistant Principal 4 School Counselors 2 Teachers 1 Social Worker (Combined focus group with high school 1 & 2)
High School 2	1 Assistant Principal 3 School Counselors 2 Teachers	1 Principal 2 School Counselors 1 Teacher 1 Social Worker	

Table 3 Participant Information (Phase 3)

Instrumentation

Informational interview questions (phase 1) were developed after a review of similar policy implementation studies, input from experts who work with youth in foster care and in collaboration with the director of foster youth services at the Santa Clara County Office of Education. Table 1 are sample informational semi structured interview questions with superintendents and assistant superintendents (phase 1).

Sample Informational Interview Questions (Phase 1)

Do you have district data systems to identify students in foster care? If so, which data systems?
What challenges do you think schools within your district will face in implementing LCAP goals to serve youth in foster care?
Do you anticipate that additional resources will be needed to serve foster youth in your district? If so, what type of resources?
Do you anticipate an increase in district personnel to work with students in foster care? If so, what personnel would be hired?

Table 4 Sample Interview Questions (Phase 1)

Data from informational interviews and LCAP analysis were used as a basis for the development of focus group questions (phase 3). The LCAPs spreadsheets, notes and field notes from informational interviews were reviewed and analyzed for themes which were then used to guide the Phase 3 inquiry, narrowing in on questions that might answer the central research question.

Final selection of questions for focus groups sought to capture implementation efforts from the perspectives of practitioners with the focus on collecting additional data to examine the differences between the aspirations of the California law makers and the reality on the ground. Final questions were piloted with a select group of district personnel, experts who work with foster youth and the director of foster youth services at the county office.

Sample Focus Group Questions (Phase 3)

What is your title and position?
How long have you been in this position?
Have you had any past experience working with foster youth?
From your prior knowledge and professional experiences, in what ways do you think foster youth are unique from other students?
What additional resources do you think foster youth might need in order to help them reach their college and career dreams?
What is your interpretation of new statewide policy to increase educational outcomes of foster youth?
In what ways do you think this new policy will change your professional practice?

In your professional role, what challenges might you encounter with implementation of new policy to serve the needs of foster youth?
In your professional role, how would you approach assisting these youth personally and academically?
What additional knowledge/resources do you need to effectively serve foster youth?

Table 5 Sample Focus Group Questions (Phase 3)

Ethics and Protection of Human Subjects

All participants were given a Letter of Informed Consent (see Appendix A). Safeguards to protect the anonymity and rights of participants were disclosed as part of the interview protocol for ethical considerations (Creswell, 2013; Silverman, 2009; Bogdan & Biklin). Participants who participated in focus groups were given interview questions via e-mail one week prior to the interview date. Pseudonyms were used throughout research reports and all identifying information was promptly removed from all interview data, memos and field notes.

Data Collection

In this study, data was collected in three phases. In the first phase, (November, 2013), data was gathered through a series of informational interviews with Santa Clara County superintendents and assistant superintendents who attended county office meetings held to discuss topics related to LCFF and LCAP design. These interviews were informal yet professional and exploratory in nature. Participants were approached in a casual manner, given a study background and asked if they were willing to participate in short interviews. Participation was strictly voluntary no monetary or gift incentive was provided to participants. Interviews were captured by audio recordings and written notes.

In the second phase of data collection, (June-August, 2014), LCAPs from all districts in Santa Clara County were collected from a repository owned by Santa Clara County Office of Education. This repository was used specifically for all district LCAPs. LCAP data was collected and securely stored on a password-protected computer.

The last phase of this study, phase 3, (April-May, 2015) examined how practitioners on the ground level were making sense (Spillane et al., 2002) of AB 97 and the challenges they might be experiencing with implementation. Qualitative data was gathered by the researcher through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with district practitioners (administrators, school counselors, social workers and teachers). Data memos were written and words and phrases were highlighted after each meeting. Participants chose the location of the interviews. Interviews took place at school sites and in private offices to allow participants to speak candidly about their experiences. Focus groups lasted approximately 90-120 minutes and individual interviews lasted from 20-60 minutes. Interview protocol included room for adjustments to interview questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Due to the fact that the interviews happened on a single occasion, the extent of the rapport that was developed between participants and the researcher was limited. Data collection included six high schools across three school districts (two high schools per district).

Focus groups that included six high schools were conducted April-May, 2015. At each site, the interviews were arranged by either an administrator or school counselor. All six interviews were prearranged and interview questions were sent out one-week in advance for participants to review. Interviews were audio recorded for transcription.

During the interview process, as new topics emerged from the conversation, additional questions were added.

Artifacts such as County Office of Education foster youth documents, including policy and procedures, programmatic assessments, and annual reports for foster youth services were reviewed. Observations of technical meetings hosted by the county office of education to address challenges in LCAP design were also attended. The purpose of the reviews and meeting attendance was to get a better indication of institutional routines, supports and specific services in place foster youth at the County Office of Education. Notes and reflective memos were generated during and after artifact review. The field notes and memos included data gathered, my observations and reflections, quotes from school and district personnel, and patterns or themes that were uncovered during the process of two years of data gathering.

Internal and External Validity

The goal of conducting interviews was to accurately capture the voices of the participants and their experiences with AB 97 implementation efforts. To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility (Seidman, 2013) all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. To improve accuracy, validity and credibility (Creswell, 2013) member checking was completed during and immediately after the interviews with participants in the study. I restated and or summarized the information then questioned the participants for accuracy. To ensure authentic representation (Creswell, 2013) upon development of the findings, interview data was shared with the participants to provide feedback and interpretation of data. Inviting participants to engage in checking all data gave them the opportunity to review transcriptions and participate in the findings.

Internal validity was addressed by coding the transcripts for themes to find commonalities among participants (Bogden & Biklin, 2007).

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis that started in 2013 was iterative. Initial exploration conducted through a series of informational interviews with superintendents and assistant superintendents provided theme development through listening to the audio recordings, reviewing transcriptions and field notes (Creswell, 2013). My observation and field notes included detailed descriptions of the setting, quotes and comments, nonverbals and my own impressions and insights. Transcriptions of field notes and documents were read repeatedly through one at a time to identify key words and bracket text segments, code words were developed to minimize redundancy, and finally I reduced codes into themes (Saldana, 2013).

Phase 1, data was organized into categories and a code list from informational semi structured interviews with superintendents and assistant superintendents. Upon completion of the code list, categories and sub categories were formed. Code mapping was completed in order to transition from the first to second phase of coding (Saldana, 2013).

Phase 2, a comprehensive review of all district LCAPs in Santa Clara County was conducted to extract data relating to services directed toward foster youth. LCAPs were reviewed and analyzed with specific focus on goals and objectives, intended services, personnel designated for service delivery and monitoring, and measurement of stated goals. Data for 31 districts was categorized utilizing themes that were common among district-wide LCAPS (Creswell & Clark, 2007) and placed on an excel spreadsheet.

Themes that emerged from the investigation into district LCAPs were analyzed for patterns of repetitive topics (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Data analysis for phase 3 involved field notes, interview transcriptions, and other accumulated materials. Phase 3 analysis began with organizing audio files, field notes and materials. Notations were made on reflective journals that indicated, date, time, district, personnel, topics and themes. Analytic memoing (Saldana, 2013) was completed throughout the data collection and included in the process of data analysis. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. For the first set of coding, descriptive coding was used to summarize and describe data (Sadana, 2013) on Excel spreadsheets. Interviews were synthesized and code words were developed to minimize redundancy and were bracketed on each document. Finally reduced codes were placed into themes using a manual search to identify patterns. Coding transcriptions was a multi-step process. During this initial process, data were organized into the following discrete categories: (a) understanding policy AB 97; (b) implementation efforts; (c) understanding other educational laws (AB 490, AB 167) related to foster youth (d) resources to support foster youth; (e) supportive relationships (f) special education assessment for foster youth; (g) identifying foster youth; (g) professional development; (h) collaborative efforts with outside agencies; (i) concerns. Following the axial-coding process, a variety of themes emerged from the triangulation of the data from preliminary interviews (Phase 1, November, 2013), LCAP analysis, county document review and observations from technical meetings (Phase 2, June-August, 2014), and focus groups (Phase 3, April-May, 2015). The identification of categories began with an inductive process and moved into a deductive process (Merriam, 2009). Multiple Excel spreadsheets were used for meta-evaluation summary.

Key themes that emerged from the interview data were cross-checked against the meta-evaluation summary. Initial categories were: (a) Leadership Challenges – Policy interpretations and knowledge of LCAP goals, (b) Interagency Challenges – information sharing and collaboration, and (c) District Challenges – Lack of capacity and infrastructure. Further synthesis was conducted to disaggregate all interview data to isolate categories that were commonalities (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) among the implementers (principals, teachers, school counselors and school social workers) and placed into the following themes: (1) Understanding policy, (2) Policy to practice, and (3) Resources and capacity. The findings from the analysis of all data points are organized in Chapter 4 starting with findings from phase 1 and 2 then overall findings that include interviews from phase 3.

Chapter 4: Summary of Findings

An exploratory study of the implementation efforts related to AB 97 services for foster youth was conducted over a 2 year period through semi structured interviews with superintendents and assistant superintendents (phase 1), a review of all county LCAPs (phase 2), and focus groups that included practitioners charged with implementation services for foster youth at six high schools across three school districts (two high schools per district) in Northern California (phase 3).

The findings from the study concluded that early interpretation and implementation of AB 97 exemplify leadership challenges regarding efforts to assist students in foster care and redefine LEAs (Local Education Agencies) as dynamic and responsive agents of educational and social policies. Despite the existence of Honig's "warrant for change" imposed by LCFF and the potential to become more responsive organizations, it is clear that districts are in the formative stages of interpreting AB 97 and understanding the unique needs of foster youth as evidenced by the findings from the LCAP review and focus groups.

The findings from phase 1 conducted with 3 superintendents and 2 assistant superintendents revealed an understanding of AB 97 mandates for foster youth but highlighted unfamiliarity with the unique population. Although top-level administration reported direct involvement in writing district LCAPs, comments from all participants revealed a lack of understanding of the needs of foster youth. In fact, four out of five superintendents reported that while stakeholder input was included, sample on-line LCAP templates were also necessary to delineate services for foster youth within their districts.

"We have been thrust into writing LCAPs for a population we aren't necessarily familiar with. I had to look on-line at one of those sample LCAPs to get ideas about services we might include in our LCAP."

All 5 superintendents and assistant superintendents were able to name and specify their district data systems. However, only one superintendent out of five could report a mechanism within their districts to identify or “flag” foster youth. Finally, one superintendent expressed resistance to the allocation of limited resources to foster youth and questioned the emphasis on foster youth as a subgroup at the perceived expense of other underserved student groups in their district. Noted was the fact that, as a basic aid district, they did not receive additional funding for students in foster care.

“The point is that we have an achievement gap. California has an achievement gap, and some of that subset in that achievement gap is foster youth, but when you look statistically at how students perform, overall there’s an achievement gap not just for one population. English language learners, low income students and foster youth. If you expect different results for these young people, then you have to invest in them at a disproportionate rate because our studies have shown that if there is disproportionate funding and support for students, they can attain higher education. But we’re going through an exercise that says there is a calculation, there’s a calculation that says supplemental and concentration amount based on your socio-economic advantage and foster youth. But if you look at basic aid districts, the LCFF does not add any additional funding. In this case, no additional funding for foster youth.”

Initial findings from high-level administration in November, 2013 (phase 1) provided a context for a review and analysis of district LCAPs in June-August, 2014 (phase 2). The findings from phase 1 and 2 served as a basis for the development of focus group questions in April-May, 2015 (phase 3).

Humphrey & Koppich (2015) in their study of early implementation of Local Control Funding Formula and attention to foster youth, found that County Offices of Education and district personnel were challenged to include the needs of the LCFF target groups—English learners, low income, and foster youth—because these LEAs had smaller populations of target groups like foster youth, or they felt compelled to address

other underserved populations specific to their communities. Phase 2 findings indicated that 15 out of 31 district LCAPs from the first year submission did not include intentional services for youth in foster care. Most LCAPs did not indicate plans for youth in care; instead, foster youth were included as beneficiaries of general target population programs. Only 16 of 31 LCAPs analyzed indicated specific services directed toward serving students in foster care. Of the specific services noted, school counselors were identified as key personnel to implement services for foster youth in 15 out of 16 LCAPs. Examples of the services identified for foster youth are included in Table 6:

“Provide strategic behavioral and social emotional guidance support for all elementary and middle school students for foster youth”
“Coordinate social emotional literacy training and workshops for foster youth”
“Provide strategic behavioral and social support for foster youth”
“ Teach students [foster youth] social skills and mentoring”
“Help students [foster youth] overcome personal and social obstacles”
“Counseling and advising students [foster youth] work with teachers and the community”
“Coordinate and deliver a dropout prevention program”
“Provide counseling on discipline and suspension issues”

Table 6 Examples of counseling services listed in LCAPs

Of the 16 LCAPs that specified services for foster youth, there were 3 districts that emerged as having the greatest number of intentional services. These districts named: A, B, and C varied in their content of intentional services for students in foster care. Academic programming, improving attendance rates and family engagement with

intentional personal and academic counseling as a central focus for students in foster care was noted in all three districts. District A, B, and C also included focus on credit recovery and dropout rates. Noted on the LCAPs were commitments to closing the achievement gap and reducing the adverse effects of school mobility. District A, B, and C included individual learning plans as an action item for students in foster care.

Findings from comparisons of District A, B, and C LCAPs to the county LCAPs and a sample LCAP (2014, Feb.) developed by The Coalition for Educational Equity for Foster Youth, a Los Angeles-based organization that is comprised of former foster youth, advocates, service providers and representatives from Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services and the juvenile courts revealed that a number of critical services for youth in care were not included. The major differences noted were targeted services in the areas of workforce development, social-emotional wellness, college and career pathways, participation in extracurricular activities, coordination services, and support for expelled youth.

Themes

Theme One: Understanding of Policy

The struggle to make meaning of this new policy with limited resources has placed a significant burden on the county and district offices charged with this responsibility. County and district offices need to begin carefully with the process of policy interpretation (Honig, 2003). Spillane (1998b) cautioned that horizontal segmentation—the division of responsibilities between administrative offices—and vertical segmentation—the division of responsibilities at the district office and school site levels—can affect the interpretation of policy mandated by the state, particularly when leadership does not provide a clear “central mission” to direct agents with varying degrees of autonomy in the Local Education Agencies.

Participants from all six high schools at three school districts indicated limited perspectives on legal mandates and LCAP goals for students in foster care. Of the 33 participants in the focus groups, 15 (1 principal, 4 assistant principals, 5 teachers, 4 school counselors, and 1 social worker) reported that they were “aware” or had “heard ” that foster youth was identified as a sub group in AB97 legislation. Of the 15 that were “aware” or had “heard” of AB 97 only 9 had actually reviewed their district's LCAP (1 principal, 4 assistant principals, 2 teachers, 2 school counselors) but couldn't report on specific services for students in foster care. Overall, school personnel from Districts A, B, and C reported a lack of familiarity with the most current legislation regarding foster youth. Participants attributed their unfamiliarity with AB 97 to minimal communication between district office and schools sites.

A school counselor from Districts A and C revealed that:

“They [district office] really haven't sat the counselors down in an in-service and said, ‘we're going to go over Assembly Bill 97, the ramifications, how to implement it.’ No, that hasn't been done.”

-School Counselor, District A

“At the end of the day we make it work but it would be nice to be informed and know what the laws are. There's a lot of new stuff to know and even if this is stuff we don't deal with on a daily basis it would be nice to have the information. I'm not aware of this this law.”

-School Counselor, District B

“The only thing I know about serving foster youth are the requirements for AB167. Other than that, I really haven't gotten much feedback on LCFF and LCAP goals.”

- School Counselor, District C

School social workers from Districts A and B reports were similar:

“We have our conferences that we attend, certain workshops that talk about things like this [AB 97] that we are invited to. I haven't been to a workshop lately.”

-School Social Worker, District A

“Maybe we were given a handout, but we never had time to read it. We weren't even given the LCAP goals. We've never gone through training seminars, no.”

-School Social Worker, District B

Unfamiliarity with legal mandates regarding youth in foster care is not unique to California. Although extant research does not exist for all states, available studies indicate that both Local Education Agencies and Child Welfare Service personnel in states like Michigan and California struggle to provide services because they do not have sufficient understanding of current legal mandates (Day et al., 2015; Weinberg et al., 204; Weinberg et al., 2009). A school counselor from District A relies on tri-annual district office meetings to remain current with district goals, new laws, and her organization's routines.

“We usually have a meeting every 4 months at the district office, and then they let us know new laws, new this, new reports. Right now we haven't had one, and we usually won't have another until the end of the year.”

-School Counselor, District A

School counselor from District A was not the only example of this need to provide meetings to understand the new legislation and support students in foster care.

Like school counselors and social workers, teachers in Districts A, B, and C reported limited awareness of current legislation regarding youth in foster care and LCFF funding priorities. A teacher in District C noted that fellow teachers are learning about the law through the changes and additions to personnel at their site and other teachers are still completely unaware of the mandate.

“I don’t think people really know or are too understanding of where that money came from, but that’s why now we have a full-time social worker here, a psychologist here, because of that funding [LCFF]. I think that has changed in the school, but I don’t think people know that that’s where it is coming from.”

-Teacher, District C

“We [teachers] don’t know much about it [AB 97]. I don’t know anything about it [AB 97] and foster youth as a sub-group.”

-Teacher, District B

All 33 participants reported that they did not have involvement with the development of LCAPs, nor did they have knowledge how specific goals for foster youth were to be fully implemented. A school counselor from District A stated that, “few people understand why [a] social worker has been hired” and from reports from two teachers school policies had not yet been created as a result of AB 97.

“Our system lacks clear policy on how to support foster youth.”

- Teacher, District B

“ There is a lack of [an] explicit system of support [for foster youth].”

-Teacher, District B

A school counselor from District A reported on her district’s current priorities while sharing her lack of understanding regarding the district LCAP goals:

“We’re always busy. Until the district finally says, ‘This is what we’re going to

cover it [AB 97].’ Right now, they’re saying, ‘We want to increase the graduation rate. We want to increase A to G.’ That’s in all the memos. There is no memo that says our LCAP is to, ‘Increase the . . . what you call it [educational outcomes], for foster kids?’

-School Counselor, District A

Theme Two: Policy to Practice

Findings from District A, B, and C reflect the struggles district practitioners face as they put policy into practice. Participants from all 6 high schools echo a desire for data system modifications, increased communication and training. School counselors from Districts A, B and C explained that students in foster care could not be connected to resources or have access to classroom supports because counselors and teachers do not have a data system that has the capability to flag or identify student in foster care:

“We can’t even, I don’t think, run a report for who our foster kids are. It’s not a flag in our system. We have flags for everything else under the sun but the only way you can tell they’re a foster kid is on contact information. It’ll list their relationship as a foster parent instead of a parent. Nothing official.”

-School Counselor, District A

“There’s no process how do we identify them. There’s no way we can identify them. I think that maybe because I don’t remember them being assigned a symbol for AB 167 on the Infinite Campus when we pull up records. I think that they’re probably still in the process of trying to do that but I think our software program right now doesn’t. How I identified my kid was through the notes that the previous counselor when I took over had written on a piece of paper on his file, paper in writing, AB 167 student ...”

-School Counselor, District B

“For me the most helpful thing would be to identify the students first of all and then to work on building a relationship with them...explain to them about all the resources that we have and any additional resources that they are entitled to that they know about so they know their rights and what they are entitled to get, the different funding that they can get and things like that. But first the most helpful thing would be to identify students.”

- School Counselor, District C

School counselors and teachers are often faced with mid year placement changes and are not given access to relevant information about the foster youth. A teacher from District B

and a school counselor from District C describe these challenges with course placement and the need for communication between school faculty:

“I know students who have been bounced around between foster homes. It's a discontinuous home environment. With that, we have the students who have been transferring schools constantly. What class do we place them in when they transfer to this point?”

- Teacher, District B

“I think as a counselor, when we sit down with a student, we look at evaluating their transcript that they may have with them. That's an important piece, looking at what the graduation requirements are and placing them in those classes. Then, asking them, what are their interests? What would they like to do? What's hard, though, is when they come in mid-year, because many of our courses are year long courses. If I have someone come in, and they're interested in auto or woodshop, it's hard to place them there in the middle of the year, because they don't have all that safety and all of that. I have to talk with the teacher and advocate for them.”

-School Counselor, District C

In addition, the counselor in District C explained that when a youth from a juvenile home registered at the school site, the school counselor could contextualize the student's needs for teachers.

“I tell them, okay, this is a kid coming from a juvenile home and this is what happened. That information, part of it, is sent over to the teachers so they know what they have there. It should be done for the foster kids.”

-School Counselor, District C

Administrators had similar concerns about the difficulties surrounding information exchange within their faculty and staff. These reports included the frustration with relying on a social worker or a self-report for information on foster youth status. An assistant principal from district A commented:

“We actually had some questions about foster youth a while ago, and she [school counselor] and I were trying to figure out some things with the district, how we can actually identify those students. They have to be self-reporting, and how we can have that in the system. Right now, she's blocked out of that (frustrated). It's got to be a student who basically volunteers their information or a social worker comes in.”

-Assistant Principal, District A

From the perspective of school social workers, academics are often a secondary concern:

“The problem is that you spend so much time with their survival skills or survival techniques sometimes education gets lost. You’re concerned with how they are going to eat, how they are going to live, if there are mental health issues, getting [them] connected to . . . medication, if even you still want to take your medication. So sometimes those factors actually become more of an emphasis than education. It’s not that education is not addressed, it’s just you know.... well, you have to be mentally and physically healthy.”

-School Social Worker, District B

As a result, youth in foster care interact with teachers who rarely have any input from social workers, counselors or administrators. A teacher from District A illustrates the potential impact that this information could have on the instructional approach taken with these youth: “instead of applying rules about late work to a student overwhelmed with many academic, social, and emotional challenges, the teacher expressed a willingness to let “timeframes . . . go out the window a little bit.” Two veteran teachers who had significant experience upwards of 20 years with students in foster care also reported the need to establish school procedures to address the critical needs of foster youth in the classroom setting under AB 97. A teacher from district B stated:

“I have a student [foster youth] who has shared with me that it is very difficult to really get close because at any point it can all be taken away when I get transferred. There's a lot of emotions and feelings..... they're afraid to build friendships because they are afraid of that loss afterwards. They're afraid of making decisions that may impact their network of trust, their friends, their peers, because that can go away from one day to the next. To date I haven't heard or been a part of a training for teachers on foster youth, how to address these types of issues in the classroom.”

-Teacher, District B

A teacher from District C who vocalized a similar concern stated:

“I don't even feel comfortable contacting the foster parent. Not because the parent has an issue but just because I know that this kind of situation wasn't a good

situation for the student. I feel like there's this gap in communication. 'Can I contact the parent?' There isn't a protocol for how this works."

-Teacher, District C

These findings are consistent with recent studies that demonstrate that poor communication among agents serving foster youth limits the delivery of services.

(Naccarato & DeLorenzo, 2008).

Finally, administrators expressed their personal challenges with implementation efforts. Administrators in Districts A, B, and C reported:

"As a school, I think one of the things we've done is we've tried to bridge some of those support services for them and we're limited as to what we can offer because it's whatever the community has for us because we don't have funding to provide those services here on site. I think that's one thing that they need... how to navigate the educational system."

-Assistant Principal, District A

"With what we'd like to accomplish, resourcing efforts can be a challenge... with LCFF in particular for foster students or any students that may be having trouble at home, the academic push is going to do a whole lot of good because if they can get into a four year college, that's more stability. Once they get out of there [college], they'll be adults with marketable skills. If they're being shuffled around though it can really impact graduation and their trajectory into the academic realm."

-Principal, District B

"We had a couple of kids early last month who just transferred in who are foster youth students. We have multiple issues in just getting that communicated out to staff and making sure we have the services available. Working with the social worker on campus, making sure just that the kids are comfortable on campus, and they understand where they can go for things. The foster youth is not necessarily the cause of that, but a symptom of the larger system that they're dealing with, so we're just figuring out what we can do to help as a school."

- Assistant Principal, District C

Participants disclosed that their district offices were providing limited direction and training to put policy into motion. School personnel reported that they would like further professional development from their district or County Offices of Education to understand laws, service delivery, increase collaboration and learn more about counseling

practices. In fact, only 7 (social workers and teachers) out of 33 felt that they had training they needed to successfully assist a student in foster care.

“As a counselor right now with me being in charge of getting kids on the community college route, as far as my duties, I know that I need to get them registered, I know that I need to get them to take their placement exams and attend orientation and then they’re off to do their own thing but what else do these foster youth kids know, I wouldn’t know. I don’t know. But I want to know.”
-School Counselor, District A

“Being a new counselor, all I’m given is to know what he needs at minimum to graduate because his requirements are a little different with graduation. That’s all I can give him. I need to know that he has certain amount of classes at least, check, check, check. He’s passed the CAHSEE [California High School Exit Exam], check, check, check. He’s going to graduate. That’s all I’m giving him. I need to be able to know what other resources that he needs to make him succeed outside of his high school career.”
-School Counselor, District B

Theme Three: Capacity and Resources

Participants from Districts A, B, and C reported that their Local Educational Agencies lack the capacity to fulfill the legal mandates and urgent needs for students in foster care. The literature review provides evidence that foster youth can achieve academic success if they have supportive relationships with adults like school personnel, mentors (Tyre, 2012), or involved social workers (Emerson, 2007; Hass and Gaydon, 2009; Weinberg, Oshiro and Shea, 2014) and experience school stability (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004; Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012).

School counselors from District A, B, and C stated that their students in foster care needed “someone” who could assist with academic, career, and social-emotional needs to provide greater school stability:

“Have one person advise these kids, help them out, or just a quick check. A lot of those kids, they’re on survival. It’s every day survival. If someone has the time to consistently check with them every two, three weeks. ‘How are you doing? Are things going well? Has something happened?’ ... Sometimes, it’s hard for them to

reach out to their social worker, they're swamped. If we had someone here...even if it's just, 'Hey, how's it going?'"

-School Counselor, District A

"I think for me [school counselor]..... I don't know if it's just because I've been here for so long, there always is an underlying cause for student's behavior. There's a very good chance there's a whole lot of up and down for them [foster youth]. I think if someone stays aware of the performance, peak levels, low levels that are happening. It does say a lot to the student. We have to figure out how to accommodate those students [foster youth] because there's always something we can do."

-School Counselor, District B

"Sometimes it takes just a little extra care and building that connection and having a relationship and developing trust with one person. When you're bouncing around so much it's hard to trust adult figures."

-School Counselor, District B

"They need to feel belonging, because they've been at seven or eight schools in the last couple of years. It's like, 'Okay, I wonder how long I'm going to be here', but if every school had a support group and every school had a counselor assigned to foster kids... no matter what school they went to, they would say, 'Okay. I look forward to this one, and see how they can help me here.' Right now, it's, 'Okay, I'm here. What do they have for me? Nothing? Fine.'"

-School Counselor, District C

"I think their home environment is not stable so they need some kind of stability and for the most part that would be the school environment. I think it would be great if they were to be assigned to someone that they could go to with really anything; career, personal things that may be going on and leave a message for us to better our system."

-School Counselor, District C

School counselors from Districts A and B also expressed the need to have a dedicated person for foster youth who could:

"consistently check with them every two, three weeks . . . [because] . . . the social workers are also swamped with work. Sometimes, it's hard for [foster youth] to reach out to their social worker."

- School Counselor, District A

"an outreach counselor . . . [could provide foster youth with] someone to fall back on, at least. Every school should have one . . . [to give] . . . them a comfort zone. They need a crisis counselor to work with them."

-School Counselor, District B

Teachers from District B and C echoed a similar need for personnel who could support foster youth and take a collaborative approach to addressing their needs.

“[s]ome sort of connection to someone that will help them navigate through re-entry into school. I feel like for foster youth that would be extremely important.”

- Teacher, District B

“The new policy has made me more aware of how long services can be rendered to the student and brought to my attention that we need to have an educational advocate that will connect with the group home or foster parent.”

- Teacher, District C

A math teacher in District A discussed the importance of his role as the one supportive and caring adult for a former student in foster care:

“Our practice needs to include advocating for these kids as well. I was the math teacher but I advocated for her because she [foster youth] was in my math class. She was really shy, wasn’t doing her work, whatever. And later she told me she had all these needs. I ask her if she disclose it to her family and she go no because she is going to get yelled at if she going to say anything so I helped her and actually it worked for her. It took time for her to trust me and communicate what she needed.”

-Teacher, District A

And another veteran English teacher in District B and who had many students in foster care in her class reported:

“They need one caring adult in their life that they can trust, that they can access, that will be constantly checking in on them, that will be supportive, that will help connect them to resources, that will give them motivation, that will show them that there's a world outside of their current world. That there's hope. That they can have goals and that they can achieve those goals if they put their mind to it. That, yes, their situation is not ideal but they can rise above that. With the resources and the access, and the caring, supportive adult person in their life they can reach that. I think that a lot of times they just lose all hope.”

-Teacher, District B

An assistant principal from District A also concluded that, “school site counseling staff are overloaded” and could benefit from a foster youth service coordinator who could manage the additional needs of students in foster care and formerly incarcerated youth.

Although school counselors are presumed to be the primary source of support for students and facilitators for teachers and families, school counselors at all three districts reported that they were concerned that they might lack the time to monitor student progress and communicate with teachers about the needs of foster youth.

Both school counselors and school social workers from Districts B and C acknowledged that the needs of foster youth exceed the capacities of their existing resources:

“For our school we had over 600 referrals for the year for student support center.... Of those 600 referrals, we have 4,200 sessions--and that's group and individual.”

-School Social Worker, District B

“Every counselor has something that they're in charge of. With me being in charge of the seniors and all the college visits and whatnot, my time is preoccupied with that.”

-School Counselor, District B

“Everyone has their job. The counselors are, look. They're flooded with kids here all the time. Then, teachers are teaching their classes. You have a kid that shows up with a huge problem. You're like, ‘Let's walk over here to this social service.’ She's swamped. It's a bummer.”

- Teacher, District B

“It's endless and counselors end up being in the middle ... Anything that can't get done, ‘call the counselor. They have time.’ It's just not the case. We can't keep overloading them.”

- Teacher, District C

“Yeah, it's like wait a minute, you eliminate a counseling position then add to my caseload with others that require a lot more attention and service. It's like, ‘On top of everything else?’ Administration always wants to add, ‘one more last thing.’”

- School Counselor, District C

School sites at all three districts presented evidence that their counseling offices were overwhelmed by the existing needs of their students. It was hardly surprising that several interview subjects concluded that additional personnel are needed to address the needs of

youth in foster care. Although school counselors (13 out of 13 participants) expressed the will to serve foster youth, their administrators expressed concern about time constraints. An assistant principal from District B explained the reality of limited counseling resources and the need to have additional support:

“Just getting someone to work with the students, make sure they’re aware of where they are in their progress, and just check in with them. Our counselors have 800 plus students at this point. They’re busy.”

School counselors from all three districts reported that they were understaffed to address the needs of all their students, not just students in foster care, on a daily basis. The school counselor from District A explained the reality of budget cuts and a reduction of services for all students:

“When I first became a counselor here . . . we had eight counselors [for 3600 students]. We’ve been cut down to four. The ratio is 1:900. We don’t have time: we’re running all over this campus. It’s 103 acres. We’re always busy.” We want to help but we can’t do everything.”

A teacher from District A expressed a pressing need for resources to assist youth in foster care and described how the situation could have been avoided if there was a designated foster youth service coordinator:

“That turned into a very stressful situation for her. That could have all been avoided . . . if there was someone just maneuvering that for the student here, advocating for them, that would have been a stress avoided for that student.”
-Teacher, District A

Individual Learning Plan

Finally, in addition to the call for a site foster youth service coordinator, Districts A, B, and C also spoke at length about the need for every foster youth to have an individual learning or educational plan for district personnel to access. A teacher from district A realized that his student in foster care was traveling for two hours on a bus each

day to get to class and would have been advantageous if this student had an individual learning or education plan:

“I don't know. The place that she moved was further away. Then she was on her own. She was still allowed to come to the school. I don't know why. She was riding the bus for two hours on her own, switching in random places. I don't know. I just think that's the stuff that gets overlooked. For one, why is she still coming to this school? Who makes that call? Does she have some kind of written plan? That would have been helpful. She then switched to another school, but then she came back at the end of her senior year to this school, so there's a lot of moving around.”

-Teacher, District A

Similar comments were made by three other teachers in District B who had experience with students in foster care. They expressed a need to have a plan similar to an IEP (Individual Education Plan) for school staff to reference to help understand their students' background:

“It's kind of a hard situation because sometimes we don't know what their situations are and we are dealing with a lot of different social problems within the context of our student's lives. I think, for me though, I think what I would have liked kind of like an IEP almost, that you would see an individual learning plan for all foster youth.”

- Teacher, District B

District C school counselors all concurred that having a plan much like an IEP that faculty and staff could access would be valuable for students in foster care.

“We've [school counselors, social workers and teachers] all worked with the same student but I don't know what they've [school counselors, social workers and teachers] said or services they provided. Where this student has been? Like I'm getting a student as a senior now. Where do I start? I think if having a grouping of people working to support a plan much like an IEP, would be a benefit. These students move around a lot.”

- School Counselor, District C

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

The analysis of the findings presented in Chapter 4 highlights the dynamic process of interpreting and implementing AB 97 and other legislation designed to support youth in foster care from the perspective of school district personnel. The intent of the research was to understand how implementing agents--principals, school counselors, school social workers, and teachers--interpreted and approached this new legal requirement to serve youth in foster care. The findings illuminate the challenges and opportunities practitioners are facing in their response to the new legislation.

Despite considerable extant literature that underscores the academic underachievement of youth in foster care--due to high mobility, psychological and/or physical trauma, or failure to provide legally mandated services--the district offices of Santa Clara County and their leadership approached AB 97's mandate with divergent interpretations of this new policy and in a number of districts, were challenged to distinguish youth in foster care from other at-risk groups. This case study found that faculty and staff charged with implementing the mandates contained in AB 97 often lacked the resources and/or knowledge necessary to be effective in their efforts to assist the foster youth in their charge.

The results from the initial LCAP reviews confirmed this lack of understanding. While all LCAPs specified services targeted toward at-risk youth in general, few addressed the problems faced specifically by youth in foster care. In the area of resources, or lack thereof, the literature goes a long way toward explaining this by stating that school personnel, social workers, and educational liaisons lacked the systems knowledge necessary to effectively connect their clients with interagency resources.

Policy analysis must also consider the values and perspectives that inform policy frameworks, artifacts, and interpretation of meaning among the communities (Yanow, 2000). In this exploratory study, the communities are: the Department of Education (DOE), legislators, County Offices of Education (COEs), Department of Child and Family Services (DFCS), district office personnel, and site practitioners. While all of these agents have a commitment to serving California's youth, the implicit values of LCFF assume that COEs, DFCS, districts, and site practitioners are prepared to share the state's desire to assist students who face severe academic and socioeconomic challenges by allocating finite resources to the comparatively small subgroup of foster youth. This report states that COEs will need to: inform district staff on the services available to foster youth; facilitate collaboration between various agencies to develop the next LCAP; provide comprehensive support for foster youth through foster youth site coordinators; and develop and disseminate information on 'professional development' and 'guidance in promising practices' to create a supportive school environment for foster youth.

This new vision holds great promise for the future of foster youth in California assuming implementing agents focus on a mutually agreed upon set of goals and use LCFF to identify specific practices to achieve the state's objectives as they relate to youth in foster care. All stakeholders need access to accurate information about current legislation in order to revise existing practices to better serve youth in foster care. LCFF offers COE and district offices the means by which to become more efficient, more responsive, and better equipped to deliver higher levels of service while minimizing impact on limited resources.

Discussion of Findings

With the passage of AB 97 in 2013, California became the first state to hold school districts accountable for the educational outcomes of students in foster care. While this is an important step forward, districts do not yet have adequate capacity and resources needed to deliver intentional services for youth in foster care. The findings of this study also revealed the extent to which school districts may struggle to access available interagency resources. Finally, this study confirmed that targeted services and programs for foster youth designated on LCAPs may lack capacity and resources for full implementation to meet the intentions of the legislation. Interview participants across the county echoed the need for an agent who can provide consistent academic and emotional support to foster youth and an individual learning plan for all students in foster care. Inadequate knowledge of foster youth legislation, poor data management, and excessively high counselor-student ratios pose significant obstacles to successful implementation of AB 97 and other legislation designed to increase the academic achievement of foster youth.

Vague standards and nonexistent accountability rubrics for LCAPs exacerbate the potential for incompatible and/or inadequate interpretations of policy. While the state provided all county offices of education with LCAP templates and priorities to identify needs and allocate resources, it did not provide LEAs with LCAP rubrics to assess compliance and success at the county or district levels. LCAP rubrics are still forthcoming.

Although the findings of this study must be viewed within the context of flux during reform, the three themes that emerged from this research-- (1) Understanding policy, (2) Policy to practice, and (3) Capacity and resources—should be viewed through Spillane's (1998) theory of distributed leadership, Honig's (2003) model of organizational learning, and Yanow's (2000) system of interpreting organizational artifacts to broaden implications for policy reform.

Implications

This exploratory study enacts Yanow's (2000) model of research and policy reform by examining the achievement gap of a traditionally underserved population in California's public schools: foster youth. While students in foster care have been the focus of Local Educational Agencies, the Department of Education, and social welfare agencies, these youth have not received consistent and meaningful district support due to divergent interpretations of policy mandates and the inability to identify foster youth within their respective districts. The state's restructured funding formula (LCFF) provides County Offices of Education (COEs) with the opportunity to empower district "implementing agents," i.e., school personnel at all levels, to improve the lives of students in foster care. Despite the challenges of developing and implementing the LCAPs in uncertain political and economic climates, LCFF provides COEs and districts with the vehicle that can be used to generate the necessary dissonance (critique of their current practices) that can lead to fundamental changes in their organizations' schemas and a paradigm shift that can improve collaboration. This study recommends four strategies to improve educational outcomes for foster youth. (1) The first recommendation is for the County Office of Education to reach out to school districts and assist them in developing a more consistent interpretation of policy so as to improve interagency collaboration between school, districts, county, and the state and to improve understanding of AB 97 legislation and students in foster care. (2) The second recommendation for elementary, middle and high schools is to identify, designate and compensate a foster youth service coordinator at every school site. (3) The third recommendation is to mandate the use of the Foster Youth Toolkit created by the state of

California to develop Individual Learning Plans for every student in foster care. On-site foster youth coordinators should be charged with facilitating this endeavor with each student in their care and completion of these plans should carry the highest of priorities.

(4) Finally, it is recommended that the state expand the CALPADS database to provide for a Foster Youth Profile for each student in foster care that would, at minimum, include data gathered from the Foster Youth Toolkit process (e.g. Individual Learning Plan). The intent behind this would be to provide a level of continuity to address issues associated with multiple school placements to provide not only horizontal continuity (i.e. transfers between schools), but vertical collaboration (district, county and state) as well.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 Implications for Practice

With the passage of AB 97, school districts are now accountable for the educational outcomes for students in foster care with critical focus on LCAP services, goals, metrics, and outcomes. This will necessitate the development of collaborative educational practices between County Offices of Education (COEs), school districts, individual school sites, Child Welfare Services, and also involve input from the community. COEs are now faced with the new challenges of assisting districts in their efforts toward building successful infrastructure to manage the LCAP process and support youth in foster care while at the same time working with an adhoc process to deliver mandated results while the infrastructure is being built.

This would go a long way toward explaining the fact that despite the prevalence of evidence-based and data-driven approaches to K-12 curriculum, assessment, and spending, the scant attention paid to students in foster care found in most LCAPs reflects

minimal practitioner input and underscores a need to make significant changes at the organizational level so that Local Educational Agencies can become more collaborative and responsive to the needs of their most at-risk students.

While central offices are familiar with systems knowledge and have the authority to implement policy changes, they often lack the site knowledge that could inform more appropriate policies; meanwhile, site personnel face the challenges of implementing policy based on their personal and professional experiences, but lack the systems knowledge that would allow them to implement the policy as intended.

This circumstance offers a significant opportunity to transform the organizational routines of the County Office of Education, district offices, and school sites to become more effective organizations that can address current and emerging challenges for youth in foster care as well as other at-risk subgroups through a combination of approaches to policy implementation as described in the works of Honig (2003) and Spillane (1998).

There are two recommendations under implications for practice: (1a) Interagency collaboration and (1b) Professional Development.

Recommendation (1a) proposes that the interaction between adjacent levels of the educational hierarchy (State to COEs, COEs to Districts, Districts to individual schools) should be enhanced to include clear protocols and procedures that not only provide for the dissemination of top down information, but also allow for the examination and inclusion of meaningful feedback from implementers. Spillane et al. (2002) encouraged the examination of how the differences in a person's, or "agent's," life history and professional role can affect the way he or she interprets and consequently, implements, a new policy. Agents in the same county office, same district office, and even same school

site can have different views of the same policy; interactions based on these divergent views can hamper successful policy implementation. If Local Education Agency personnel lack relevant personal histories and professional roles, these agents struggle to understand the policy implications and the implementation of AB 97. If district, school, and Child Welfare Services personnel lack familiarity with AB 97, AB 490, AB 167, and other legal mandates, they do not have schemas and tools to address the needs of students in foster care. It is a critical to begin discussion between agencies to jointly interpret AB 97 legislation and what it means to improve educational outcomes for foster youth.

Honig (2003) stresses the importance of organizations creating environments that facilitate interaction so that meaning can be created socially, rather than in isolation. Developing consistent infrastructure first requires a consistent interpretation of policy at all levels among all stakeholders. Spillane's (1998, 2006) conceptualization of the subjective experience of the practitioner and distributed leadership provide the framework by which to redesign leadership practices and educational policies. Honig's (2003) model of organizational learning echoes Spillane's (2006) position that organizations need to become more dynamic and attentive to the data and best practices collected by practitioners.

To begin this process, this study recommends that the County Office of Education share networks, policies and procedures with districts so that implementing agents can combine available systems knowledge with their own site knowledge and render a more accurate implementation of policy goals. School staff--principals, registrars, school counselors, school social workers and attendance clerks--must be aware of the requirements for the proper enrollment, placement, individual learning or education

plans, and transfer of records for students in foster care so as to enhance coordinated collaboration between the county placing agency, social services and advocates and the work they do on behalf of foster youth in their districts.

Recommendation (1b) proposes that the County Office of Education offer professional development at district sites. Findings indicate that only 7 out of 38 participants felt that they had training they needed to successfully assist foster youth. Over 50% of the teachers interviewed in this study stated that they would like more information regarding their students in foster care. Generally, district personnel requested professional development to understand laws, learn more about promising practices and assist with the development of sound protocols. Specifically, teachers, school counselors and administrators expressed the desire for explicit training to understand the impact trauma can have on the educational experiences of foster youth and training on implementation of LCAP goals. To alleviate this “knowledge gap” professional development topics could include: (A) legal mandates (AB 167, AB 490), (B) interpretation of new laws AB 97, (C) LCAP workshops that include the review of county LCAP and sample LCAP developed by The Coalition for Educational Equity for Foster Youth, a Los Angeles based organization that is comprised of former foster youth, advocates, service providers and representatives from Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services and the juvenile courts and (D) district wide information on trauma informed care and practice.

Recommendation 2 Increase District Capacity

The problem cited most often from implementers (teachers, school counselors, school social workers and administrators) across all districts was the lack of a “go-to

foster youth coordinator.” Findings revealed that, this “go-to foster youth coordinator” would be a person at the school site who would be the single point of contact for all things related to students in foster care enrolled at their schools. This on-site foster youth service coordinator would be responsible for staying current on all aspects of educational policy as it relates to students in foster care and serve three agencies: the District Office, school staff, and the students themselves.

The on-site foster youth service coordinator would interact with the District Office in areas of policy. This would include negotiating policy issues, collecting and providing statistical data to inform policy decisions, and coordinating policy implementation.

To the school staff, the on-site foster youth service coordinator would be responsible for answering all questions related to the legal, logistical and educational aspects of supporting students in foster care.

Finally, to the students, the on-site foster youth service coordinator would act both in loco parentis and as a counselor knowledgeable of and sensitive to the very specific rights and needs of this vulnerable subgroup.

The necessity and utility of this type of position in environments like the California Educational System is well documented in the literature by both Honig (2003) and Yanow (2000). Honig (2003) refers to the position as a “boundary spanner” while Yanow (2000) labels it “facilitator-researcher”. Both researchers call out the need for a local facilitator whose main function is to occupy the position between groups of stakeholders, understand the needs and mandates of each, and represent each group to the others.

Also of note is the fact that this type of position is not without precedent within the California Educational System. In 2003, California legislators passed legislation requiring District Offices to designate someone on staff as a “District Office Foster Youth Liaison” whose role in the system is defined as follows:

Effective as of January 1, 2004, after the passage of AB 490, The Educational Rights and Stability Act, districts are required to designate a staff person as a District Office Foster Youth Liaison in accordance with the Education Code 48853.5 (Troia, Woodward, Bussiere, & Ramiu, 2006). Current education code 48853.5 requires districts that operate a foster youth services program to include the district liaison to facilitate the enrollment, placement, and transfer of foster youth (CSBA Sample Board Policy, 2009). The District Office Foster Youth Liaison’s primary duties are to ensure and facilitate the proper educational placement, enrollment in school, and checkout from school of students in foster care (Education Code 48853.5; CSBA Sample Board Policy, 2009). To accomplish this, an educational liaison must ensure proper transfer of credits, records, and grades when students in foster care transfer from one school to another or from one district to another (Education Code 48853.5, 48645.5).

At present time, the legislation above requires one liaison per district. These district liaisons are responsible for student enrollment, guaranteeing that a student’s special education needs are assessed and met, ensuring that each student receives school-based services appropriate to their needs as well as monitoring the educational progress of students in foster care in the district and reporting back to the superintendent (or designee) and the Governing Board on their progress as a group.

When one considers the size and breadth of the population spread over an entire district, the list above would seem to be more than enough responsibility for any single staff member. However, there are a number of details incorporated into the law that add to these responsibilities in significant ways. As examples:

In the area of enrollment, the liaison must guarantee immediate student enrollment “even if he/she has outstanding fees, fines, textbooks, or other items or monies due to the school last attended or is unable to produce records, such as academic or medical records, proof of residency, or clothing normally required for enrollment (Education Code 48853.5)” (CSBA Sample Board Policy, 2009).

Regarding special education, these liaisons have the responsibility of recognizing that special education might apply and then making all appropriate referrals to ensure that students in foster care receive any necessary assessment and delivery services related to their special education needs (Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973).

The liaison’s responsibility toward school-based services requires that he or she not only know and understand the needs of the student, but also all resources available at each school within the district. A partial list of these resources will include: supplemental instruction, counseling, and after-school services, but might include more options as each school has different curriculum.

The act of monitoring and reporting on foster youth in the district will usually involve communicating and collaborating with all appropriate staff, including, but not limited to, each principal, school registrar, and attendance clerk at each school in the district to ensure the rights of foster youth regarding enrollment and placement are maintained.

While the creation of the District Office Foster Youth Liaison and the efforts of those who occupy the role have gone a long way toward the goal of providing students in foster care with much needed stability in their educational experience, the combination of policy, workload and proximity tends to overlook the most important people in the equation: the students and those most invested in supporting them.

Students in foster care need direct and convenient access to a person who represents their interests to the school system while at the same time, can represent the school system to them. Given their level of alienation caused by all factors previously discussed, they need a face that they can trust to get them moving and keep them moving toward graduation and beyond. This is the goal of AB 97 and the consensus of a majority of educators across 3 school districts suggests that implementation of an on-site foster youth service coordinator is a key to achieving it. While this aspect of the equation is definitely significant, the role of on-site foster youth service coordinator, and the ground level expertise that it embodies, would also serve both the system in the area of policy development and refinement as well as provide a knowledgeable resource to school personnel in need of information, guidance and support when attending to issues related to foster students in their charge.

Therefore, given the nascent nature of the AB 97 implementation, the confusion and adversity that accompany an endeavor of this magnitude, and the need to both support youth in foster care in person and represent their circumstances accurately, it is recommended that the district offices hire or appoint an on-site foster youth service coordinator at every elementary, middle, and high school.

Recommendation 3 Mandate State Resource Toolkit as a Template for an Individual Learning Plan

Noted in district A, B, and C LCAPs were goals to create an Individual Learning Plan for students in foster care. District personnel interviewed in this study concurred that an educational or Individual Learning Plan for every foster youth would benefit both the students and school personnel. This study recommends the use of the state developed Foster Youth Toolkit as a template for an educational and career plan for all foster youth. Data from the Toolkit will provide access to current academic information and future plans for all who serve youth in foster care across the state.

County and district offices need state guidance to develop LCAPs that appropriately address and fund services for youth in foster care. The literature review identified the challenges of writing an LCAP without the benefit of a state rubric which led to inadequate county proposals in the first round of LCAP specifications. A suggested state policy recommendation is to mandate the use of a template to provide schools with information guidelines to better serve their students in foster care. Released on April 16, 2015, The Foster Youth Education Toolkit was created by the following organizations: the Alliance for Children's Rights in collaboration with the California Department of Education, Child Welfare Council, the Association of California School Administrators, California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, and the County Welfare Directors Association. This guide is the first of its kind and focuses on the most crucial needs of foster youth. Instead of relying on the limited experiences of school personnel, State or COEs can train district personnel to use the Foster Youth Education Toolkit as a starting point for professional development and organizational procedures regarding youth in foster care.

This Toolkit is a template for school districts to ensure that district and school site personnel have all the relevant information on foster youth to ensure that they fulfill the LCFF promise to protect their educational rights while working to close the invisible achievement gap for these youth. The Toolkit includes comprehensive information, procedures and implementation tools such as sample notification letters, records requests and helpful checklists. This toolkit addresses best practices for handling topics such as how to complete education evaluations, assisting youth with immediate enrollment or remaining in their school of origin, awarding partial credits, supporting youth through high school graduation, and disciplinary challenges (Foster Youth Tool Kit, 2014).

Findings from the study suggest that all students in foster care have a written Individual Learning Plan that can travel with them when they change schools to inform personnel at the new school what support needs have been identified. A written Individual Learning Plan will help ensure that a foster youth's educational rights are not unintentionally neglected because school personnel do not know what services the student has already been screened for, thereby ensuring appropriate class placement. The foster youth Individual Learning Plan recommended by this study is analogous to an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) for special education services in the "least restrictive environment." An educational plan specific to foster youth provides safeguards to protect their educational rights as outlined in AB 490, AB167 and AB 97.

The on-site foster youth service coordinator (see Recommendation 2 in this study) is modeled after the Educational Liaisons at the district level and should be responsible for the coeducational plan of each of the foster youth he or she serves. This coordinator may be responsible for gathering input from every entity that provides services to the

foster youth and disseminate best practices or information that can shape the services offered to their students.

The hope is that the Foster Youth Education Toolkit “will further equip school districts throughout the state with the tools they need to take next steps in implementing LCFF for foster youth and improving their education outcomes” (Alliance for Children’s Rights, California Department of Education, Child Welfare Council & Association of California School Administrators, 2015). The Toolkit can be used as a template to create an Individual Learning Plan for each student in foster care, to identify and support students’ educational rights, and to identify academic barriers to achievement. This recommendation ensures that the current educational policies and legal mandates for students in foster care can be interpreted and implemented with a greater degree of accuracy and consistency in every county. The toolkit can inform and direct school personnel as to the best practices in support of achievement among youth in foster care, as well as influence the development of future district LCAPs based on the results of changes that are implemented.

Recommendation 4 Expand CALPADS Database to Link Foster Youth Toolkit Data

A final suggestion for state policy is to expand the CALPADS database to provide for a Foster Youth Profile for each student in foster care. This area of the database would contain, at minimum, the education and career plans collected via the Foster Youth Toolkit. Foster youth data previously collected through the CBEDS is now collected through two data systems: CBEDS-ORA (California Basic Educational Data System - Online Reporting Application), and the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS). CALPADS is a longitudinal data system used to maintain

individual-level data including student demographics, course data, discipline, assessments, staff assignments, and other data for state and federal reporting. All California public K-12 schools are required to participate in CALPADS. Parents and legal guardians have the right to view their child's CALPAD data (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/cl/calpadsfaqs.asp#faq5>).

CALPADS is in the process of resolving several issues regarding students in foster care. Many foster youth are not identified because CALPADS can only match students from the file provided by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). CDSS currently only recognizes foster youth under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and does not include students whose families are “voluntarily” receiving services. “Voluntary” children/youth are maintained in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS), have been assigned Client and Case IDs, but are not included in the file sent to CALPADS; therefore, they are not in CALPADS (CALPADS Information Meeting PPT, April 2015, [http://csis.fcmat.org/Pages/April-21,-2015---CALPADS-Information-Meeting-\(CIM\).aspx](http://csis.fcmat.org/Pages/April-21,-2015---CALPADS-Information-Meeting-(CIM).aspx))

As previously noted in this study, “implementing agents” (i.e., administrators, teachers, school counselors and school social workers) from all districts (A, B, and C) reported that they lacked access to a student's foster youth status or academic progress. If implementing agents do not know who the foster youth are, they cannot provide them with the additional services they need. COEs can help school personnel identify foster youth by adopting/implementing systems that can flag students as members of the foster youth community. Fully integrated data systems that can give social workers access to

grades and attendance are more likely to increase interagency collaboration and communication, as well as improve the delivery of services to foster youth.

Therefore, this study recommends that COEs begin an effort of open ended expansion of the CALPADs database to allow for the inclusion data related to youth in foster care. Initially, and limited by the focus of this study, foster care status and Individual Learning Plan for each student represented in the database would be the most helpful. However, the design of this extension should allow for future additions to further improve collaboration between state, county, district and school site for the benefit of youth in foster care, or more generally, underserved populations or all students in the California educational system.

Implications for Future Research

The researcher-facilitator can follow Honig (2003) and Yanow's (2000) conceptual models to analyze data and facilitate communication among the communities as they implement the recommendations of this study. This informed boundary spanner can identify and mediate each community's policy frames, local knowledge, and values as they work through the ongoing challenge of serving youth in foster care. The researcher-facilitator may serve as a policy analyst to the LEAs and COEs by evaluating the discrepancies between policy and daily practice to challenge assumptions and shape future actions. Revisions to the annual LCAP as well as a longitudinal study of the aforementioned recommendations can benefit all implementing agents and youth in foster care.

The limitations of the current study have implications for future research. This study focused on three school districts in a single county. A larger study that involved urban, suburban, and rural districts and counties across the state could yield results that would determine whether or not the recommendations of this study could be implemented across California, as well as in other states that do not have educational liaisons nor accurate and accessible student data management systems. Spillane (1998) contends that district-level leadership helps "agents" make sense of and construct an understanding of state policy. Therefore, the extent to which the county and district offices provide professional development and support for these new policies should be examined in the future to identify best practices in the sense-making process. Additional studies can evaluate on-site foster youth service coordinators' training and support services to determine future revisions to the job description and LCAP goals.

Further, the findings from this study also yield implications for future research and contributions to the school counseling profession. Research into the school counselor's role in increasing educational outcomes for foster youth in K-12 under this new legislation can be investigated and should include key variables, such as counselor-student ratio and interagency collaboration. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to conduct a quantitative study to gauge the effects of these reforms and their impact on foster youth educational outcomes over the next 5 years. In addition, a study should also be undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of the on-site foster youth service coordinator. Finally, it would be valuable to identify promising practices at the district level that have the most impact on graduation rates for youth in foster care.

Conclusion

Triangulating the needs of foster youth between Spillane's (1998) theory of distributed leadership, Honig's (2003) model of organizational learning, and Yanow's (2000) research model of interpreting organizational artifacts leads to broad implications for education policy reform and leadership. While the implementation of this theoretical model holds great promise for students in foster care in California, it also provides a new model for addressing the future needs of California schools.

The achievement gap facing foster youth justifies structural and cultural changes to the county and district office organization that move towards an inclusive, data-driven, and collaborative model of educational leadership that is encouraged by the Local Control Funding Formula. In the case of youth in foster care, it takes much more than a village to educate a child; one could argue that it requires: a state government willing to prioritize an underserved constituency by providing clear standards of care and data management; county and district offices that can promote effective collaborative leadership practices; and informed liaisons and school site personnel who can implement the policies developed to address the academic and social obstacles that foster youth face in California today. A dynamic learning organization will be more successful at implementing change if it can maximize all sources of agency and knowledge by: regularly collecting and assessing data; facilitating communication between all members by clarifying the meaning of its artifacts and their underlying values; and including all stakeholders in the process of implementing and revising policy. The recommendations of this study—collaborative leadership practices that support consistent policy interpretation (professional development; interagency collaboration), liaisons working at

the school site, redesigned routines (LCAP rubrics; LCAPs that address the needs of foster youth) and tools (Individual Learning Plans and CALPADS data expansion)—will enable all the agencies involved with foster youth to maximize their shared knowledge and close the achievement gap for youth in foster care. Organizations that can learn and interrelate with other organizations have the capacity to build better policies for students who face overwhelming obstacles to reach their academic goals and transition into adulthood. Effective state, county, and district collaboration can contribute to the academic, socio-economic, and personal self-efficacy of youth in foster care.

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Appendices

San Francisco State University
Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Closing the Achievement Gap for Youth in Foster Care
An Inquiry into AB 97 Implementation Efforts for Students in Foster Care:
A Case Study of Three School Districts

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study was to examine how school districts approached the implementation of Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) as mandated by AB 97 to increase educational outcomes for youth in foster care.

The researcher, Lorri Midori Capizzi, is a graduate, doctoral candidate in the department of Educational Leadership at San Francisco State University.

You are being asked to participate in this qualitative study because you are at least 18 years of age and you are a participant in one of the districts being studied.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this research, the following will occur:

- You will be contacted via phone and an appointment will be scheduled.
- Time commitment will be 60-90 minutes.
- The interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements.
- The interview will take place at a time and location convenient to you.
- The researcher may contact you within four months after the interview

A. **RISKS**

There is a risk of loss of privacy. However, no names or identities will be used in any published reports of the research. Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the research data. There is a risk of discomfort or anxiety due to the nature of the questions asked; however, the participant can answer only those questions he/she chooses to answer, and can stop participation in the research at any time.

D. **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The researcher will practice strict adherence to confidentiality throughout your participation in the research. The faculty advisor, in a locked file cabinet, in a protected locked office, will keep the research data. Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the data. The faculty advisor, in an encrypted document on a password-protected computer will store all research data. Your name and the name of the college will not be included in the report

of the study. Both audio-recorded data and data that is transcribed into written format will be destroyed three years following the study, which is the minimum policy storing requirement enforced by the California State University (CSU) system.

E. DIRECT BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefits to the participants.

F. COSTS

There are no costs to participants.

G. COMPENSATION

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

H. ALTERNATIVES

The alternative for you is not to participate in the research or opt out any time during the research.

I. QUESTIONS

You have spoken with Lorri Midori Capizzi about this study and have had your questions answered. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the researcher by email at lorri.capizzi@mail.sfsu.edu or via phone at (408) 924-3829. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Robert Gabriner at gabriner@sfsu.edu.

Questions about your rights as a study participant, or comments or complaints about the study, may also be addressed to the Human and Animal Protections at (415) 338-1093 or protocol@sfsu.edu.

J. CONSENT

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this research, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will have no influence on your present or future status at San Francisco State University.

Signature _____
Research Participant

Date: _____

Signature _____
Researcher

Date: _____