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# Achievements Unlocked Evaluation Report (2015-2021)

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## Introduction

The Achievements Unlocked (AU) program was developed by the Washoe County Human Services Agency and implemented in 2015 (originally implemented as the College and Career Readiness Program). AU is a multidisciplinary team model providing educational advocacy, tutoring, and case management to foster youth in high school in Washoe County, Nevada. All high school students in foster care are eligible for the program if they meet the referral criteria. Youth that are high risk, including those with low grade point averages, high numbers of absences or school disciplinary actions or those with credit deficiencies that make them not on track to graduate may be referred to the program.

The Achievements Unlocked Program has been funded through the Walter S. Johnson Foundation (WSJ) since its inception during the Pilot phase in the 2014-2015 school year, when a small group of professionals crafted the idea of the provision of additional educational supports for high school youth who desperately needed a leg up in realizing their goals of graduating and becoming confident, independent, productive adults. The notion was to couple private one-on-one tutoring directly in the homes of foster youth, with an educational advocate who had several years' experience as a former guidance counselor and therefore had a clear understanding of how to navigate the systems to provide effective advocacy and represent the student throughout their high school experience. The program was so successful in the pilot phase and through the first two-year grant funding cycle, a second grant was awarded to continue program services, with the goal of developing program independence and sustainability under the leadership of a local non-profit organization. Due to a one year no-cost extension in the first grant cycle reflecting program start-up and implementation, and another no-cost extension in the second cycle due to the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the AU program spanned a total of six years after the pilot phase.

Through the generous support of the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Washoe County has become an example for the state of Nevada as well as other states, on how to build collaboration to support the educational stability and outcomes of students in foster care.

## Program Goals

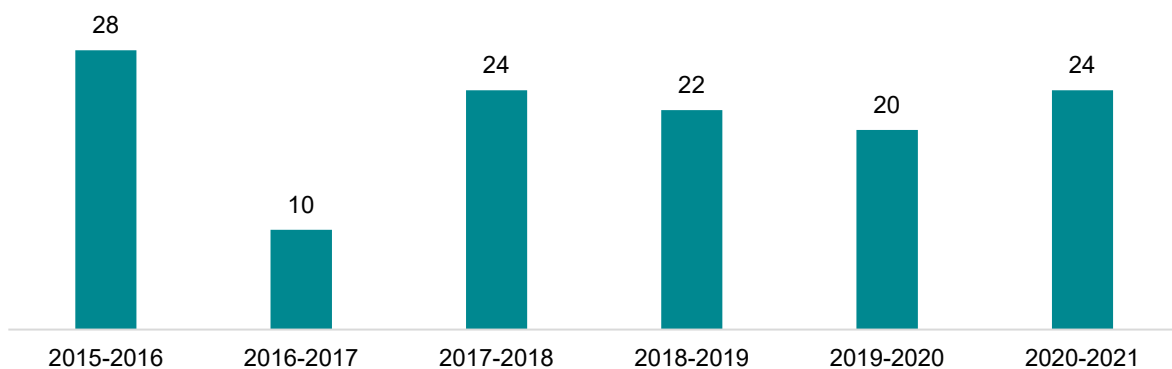
The goals of the AU program

- (1) To improve educational outcomes for youth in foster care
  - a. Increase GPA by 5%
  - b. Decrease the number of school disciplinary actions by .5 incidents
  - c. Decrease the number of times a student is late
  - d. Increase the number of credits taken and taken successfully
- (2) Improve college and career readiness
  - a. 70% of students on track for graduation by end of the project
  - b. 80% of students who graduate are accepted into post-secondary institutions/vocational training or secured full time employment
- (3) Improve experiences and case outcomes for youth in foster care
  - a. Decrease the number of placements by .5
  - b. Youth perceive the program as helpful (*this goal was added after implementation*)
- (4) Youth will be supported to secure long-term employment, through partnership with the iFoster Jobs Program

## Students Served

One hundred and twenty-eight students have been served since program inception in 2015. Entry into the program ranged from 10 new students per year to 28 new students, with an average of 21 new students entering the program per year. Multiple students were in the program for more than one school year. Figure 1 illustrates the number of students entering the program each year.

Figure 1. Number of Students Entering Program Per School Year



## **Program Evaluation History**

The AU program began in 2015. During the first two years of the program, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges conducted a process and outcome evaluation for the program and provided some data on whether the program was meeting its goals. This evaluation builds on those findings. Quantitative data from the 2-year study are included into a larger dataset for school specific outcomes. In addition, newer evaluation methods were integrated to explore outcomes.

## **Current Evaluation Methods**

The current evaluation is a multi-year multi-method effort. The evaluation focuses on the intended outcomes of the program and draws on multiple data sources. When available, data from project startup and the original evaluation (2015-2017) is integrated into the currently collected data to look at outcomes over time. Other sources of data were integrated later during program development and may only be available for a subset of program students (school years 2018 – 2021). The data sources are identified below and indicate which timeframes that data are available.

### ***Data Collection Methods***

#### *Infinite Campus*

Infinite Campus is the administrative data system for Washoe County School District (WCSD). All children involved in the program have school administrative data available on outcomes of interest such as grade point average, credits attempted and earned, primary enrollments, suspensions, and absences. WCSD information technology staff query these data fields for all youth in foster care that are enrolled in school and report them out to the program at the conclusion of the semester. These data are available from 2015-2021.

#### *Student Surveys*

Beginning in 2018, youth were invited to take a short survey at the beginning of the school semester and at the conclusion of the school semester. The survey asks about student's confidence in their academic abilities, whether persons in their life have encouraged them to continue past high school, and how their educational advocate and tutors have helped them. The survey also asks about current educational goals. In 2020 the survey was updated to include questions about the mode of education (in-person, hybrid or remote) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students were also asked at the conclusion of the semester about the challenges that COVID-19 may have caused. Survey data is available between 2018-2021.

#### *Foster Parent Surveys*

In 2021, a foster parent survey was developed and disseminated among the parents of students in the program. The goal of the survey was to gain parental perspective on the utility of the program. Foster

parents were asked their agreement on a series of statements. They were also provided an opportunity to give any feedback they had on how to improve the program.

### *Program Forms*

In 2018, multiple new forms were implemented to track data on the students referred to the AU program. These include a referral form, an intake form, an academic plan form (updated regularly) and an exit form. These forms collect data on the students' risks coming into the program, the students' current academic performance, interests, placement, educational needs and goals, and extracurricular activities. The forms also track the reasons that the student left the program. These forms were completed beginning in 2018 and evolved over the term of the evaluation.

### *Dosage Data*

Boosted Diplomas, the organization that administers the tutoring program and educational advocates, collects data on the time spent by tutors and educational advocates with each student. These data provide an opportunity to identify how many hours are spent per student and the type of help the student is getting. These data are only available for 2018 through 2021.

### **Sample**

The sample varied depending on the data collection methodology. The table below illustrates the samples for the respective datasets used in this study.

<b>Table 1. Sample Size by Data Set</b>		
<b>Data Set</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Non-Program</b>
<b>Student Survey</b>	32 Unique Students 77 Total Responses	
<b>Foster Parent Survey</b>	20	
<b>Referral forms</b>	67	
<b>Exit Forms</b>	37	
<b>Intake forms</b>	56	
<b>Academic plans</b>	178	
<b>Infinite Campus (School Terms)</b>		
<b>2015-2016</b>	32	31
<b>2016-2017</b>	28	24
<b>2017-2018</b>	30	249
<b>2018-2019</b>	35	235
<b>2019-2020</b>	14	103
<b>2020-2021</b>	29	129

### **Data Analysis**

The majority of the data for this project compares the foster youth in the Achievements Unlocked program to all other foster youth in high school in Washoe County on progress toward their academic achievement. These data are derived from WCSD Systems' Infinite Campus database. The data are reported in two ways. First, when available, descriptive data from 2015 – 2021 is reported to show trends in practice. In

addition, comparisons between program and non-program cases were made using an advanced statistical method called propensity score matching. Propensity score matching matches students on key variables of interest (suspensions prior to entry into the program, grade point average prior to entry into the grade, grade in school, on track to graduate, and gender). A statistical algorithm matches students and makes comparisons between foster students not in the program who are similar to the foster students in the program. These analyses were done for each semester in the program and are only available for data from 2017 through 2021. The findings are reported in terms of where there are statistically significant differences, indicating that the findings are not likely to occur by chance alone. Propensity score matching is only conducted for specific outcome analyses as appropriate (see findings). In addition, dosage data derived from reports provided by Boosted Diplomas is used to supplement other data and provide additional insight into the time spent by educational advocates and tutors in direct service of the students.

### Findings: Program Descriptive Data

Findings are presented first by descriptive information about the program and then by outcomes of interest. Findings begin with data on students entering the program. Students were referred to the program by their social workers, who filled out a referral form selecting at least 2 of the 12 educational risk factors listed in Figure 3.

#### Referrals

A total of 67 referral forms were reported for the program, beginning in the fall of 2018. Of these, 61% were approved, 12% were not approved and 9% were marked as pending for the program. The remaining 18% did not have information on approval. The highest percentage of students were from the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, followed by 9<sup>th</sup> grade (see Figure 2). The referral form expected that 3% of students needed .25 service, 18% needed .5 service, and 43% needed 1 service level (the remainder were incomplete).

Figure 2. Grade of Referred Students

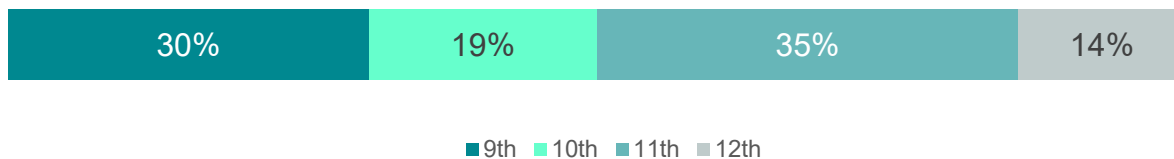


Figure 3. Risk Factors Noted for Referred Students

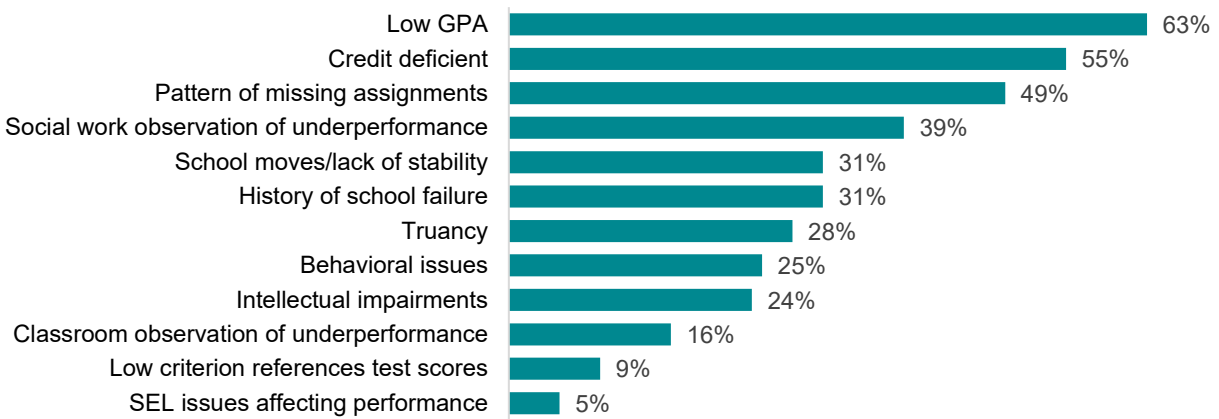
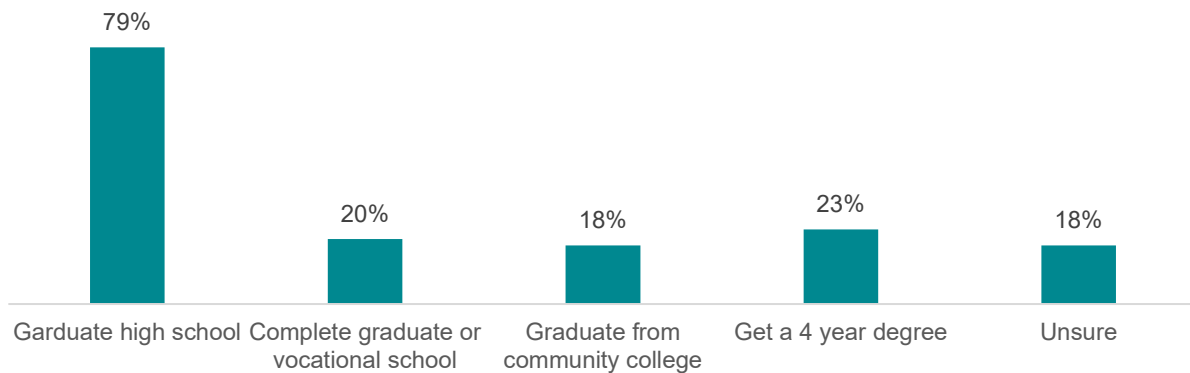


Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of students that had the risk factors. Referred students had an average of four risk factors, with a range of 0 (8%) to 10 (2%).

*Intake*

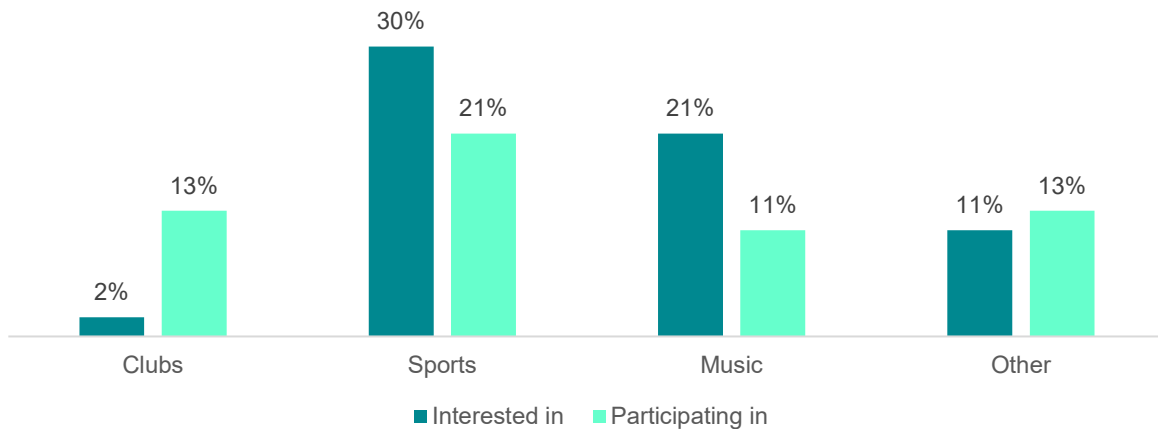
Fifty-six intake forms were documented for the program from 2018 through 2021. Students entering the program were mostly likely to be placed in foster care (46%) or a group home (45%), with 5% placed in kinship care and 5% in an “other” placement (two in adoptive homes, one listed as ATC, a local residential treatment facility). Thirteen percent of students were currently employed at intake. Forty-eight percent of students were on track to graduate at intake. Figure 4 illustrates the student’s educational goals at intake.

Figure 4. Educational Goals at Intake



The intake form asks about student’s interest and hobbies, both in terms of what they are interested in participating in and what they are currently participating in. Fifty-four percent of students were currently involved in interests/hobbies. Figure 5 illustrates student’s interest and hobbies at intake.

Figure 5. Student Interests and Hobbies At Intake

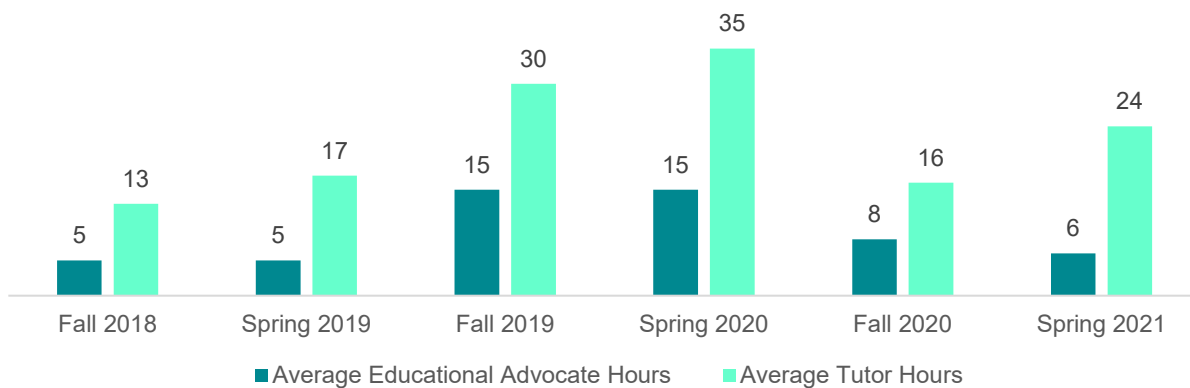


*Dosage*

Beginning in 2018, dosage of educational advocate direct service hours and tutoring hours were tracked for students. In early years, not all Educational Advocacy hours were tracked per student due to some tasks being written in notes separately when there were multiple students. Students received (in total) an average of 12 hours in the fall of 2019, 16 hours in the spring of 2020, 15 hours in the fall of 2020 and 18 hours in the spring of 2021.

\*It's important to note that the roles of the Educational Advocates differ, in that tutors typically meet with students on average one time per week and Educational Advocates meet with their students an average of one or two times per month, depending on the dynamics of the case.

Figure 6. Average Direct Service Hours





## Findings: Outcomes

The following section identifies each objective as stated in the grant proposal narrative and corresponding progress toward achieving that goal, where data are available to demonstrate progress toward attaining the objective. When applicable, data are reported both comparing AU students to comparison students (other students in foster care) and comparing the student's progress on the outcome over time.

### **Objective 1: Improved education outcomes.**

The primary goal of the project is to improve educational outcomes for the youth served. Educational outcomes can be defined in many ways. The program articulated four discrete outcomes under objective one.

- **Increase aggregate GPAs by 5% Outcome Achieved ✓**

The first measure under the improved education outcomes is increasing aggregate GPAs by 5% for the students participating in the program.

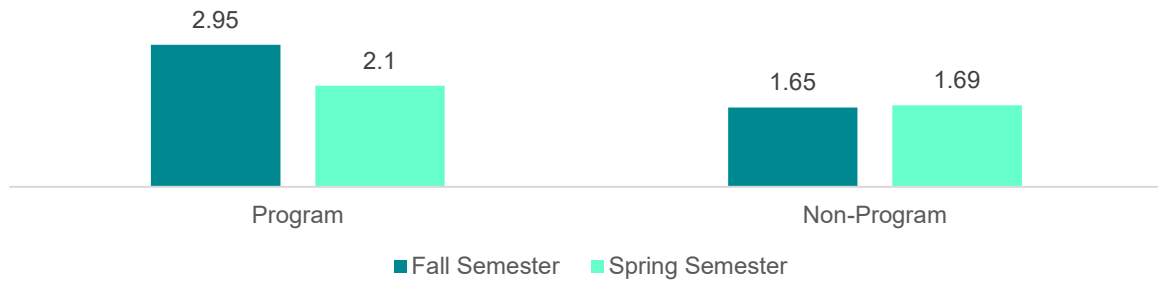
Students averaged a GPA of 1.76 coming into the program and an GPA of 1.91 in their final semester of data that were available for each student. Not all students had data for each time point. When comparing only the cases where starting GPA and last semester GPA were available, there was an average increase of .1 in GPA. *That is a 5.5% increase in GPA over time.* The program appears to be meeting its goals, although the difference between entry and exit into care was not significantly different over time. If you only focus on the student who were successful in the program (excluding those that were closed or deactivated due to noncompliance), the average GPA was 1.91 to start and 2.08 at the end for an increase of .17, *which is a 9% increase in GPA.*

- **Decrease the number of school-related disciplinary actions by .5 incidents. Outcome Achieved ✓**

Progress on the number of school related disciplinary action was tracked in two ways. First students were compared between the first term and second term of the 2018-2019 school year. In addition, students in the program were compared to other foster youth in high school to determine if they are similar or different.

*Progress.* Youth in the Achievements Unlocked program had significantly more suspensions than youth in the control condition. Suspensions for the fall semester were 1.65 for non-program students and 2.95 for program students, whereas suspensions for the spring were 1.69 for non-program students and 2.10 for program students. *This was an average decrease of .85 incidents, making the program on track for its goal of reduction.* Figure 7 illustrates the number of suspensions.

Figure 7. Average Number of Suspensions

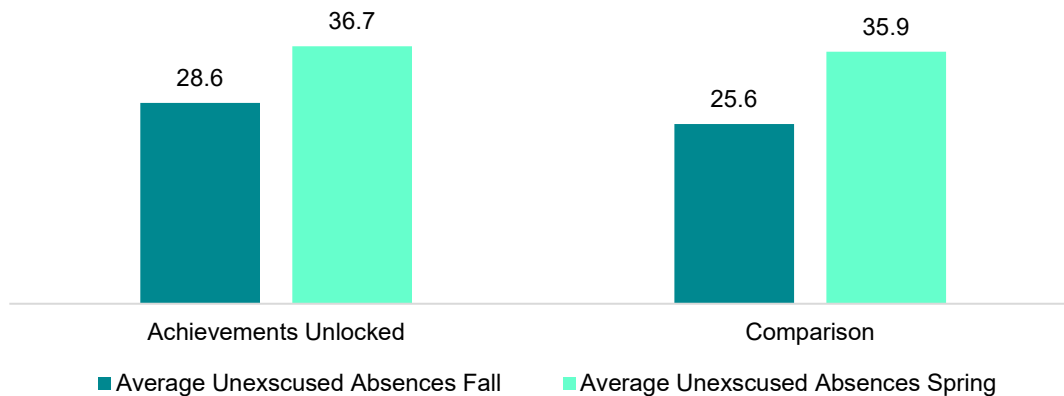


When we ran the propensity score matching to compare differences between program students and similarly suited non-program students, there were no significant differences between program and non-program students in the number of suspensions.

- **Decrease the number of times each participant student is reported late. Outcome not achieved.** The data on tardiness is inconsistent so a decision was made to focus on the number of unexcused absences as this is tracked consistently in Infinite Campus. This ensures better quality of the data.

*Progress.* Unexcused Absences increased for both groups over time. Figure 8 illustrates average number of unexcused absences.

Figure 8: Average Number of Unexcused Absences for Fall Compared to Spring



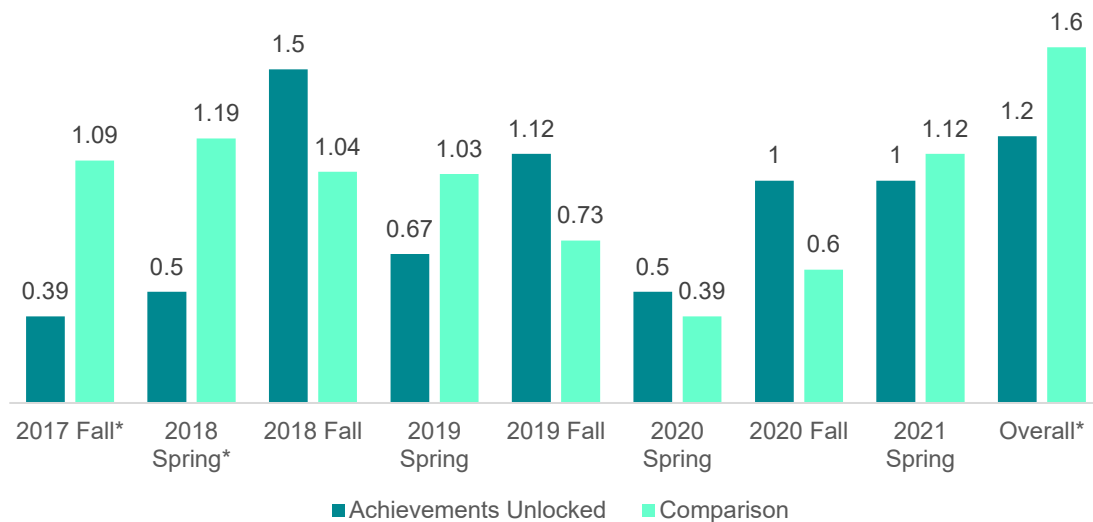
*Comparing Program to Non-Program.* We made comparisons for every school term from fall of 2017 through spring of 2021 to explore whether there were differences in the program students and the similarly suited matched comparison group. Propensity score matching showed some differences in unexcused absences. In 2017, the control group had 49 unexcused absences compared to program group 14 unexcused absences. In 2018 fall semester, there were 26 for control and 8 for program

students on average. In Spring of 2019, there were 58.6 average unexcused absences for the comparison group and 33.5 for program students. Other semesters had some differences in unexcused absences but none of these were statistically significant. There did appear to be trends in early years when propensity score matching was used to compare program students to similarly suited matched students for program students to have fewer absences. However, these differences were not present in later years. This may be due to a challenge with tracking absences when school moved to virtual distance learning in 2020.

- **Increase number of credits taken and taken successfully. Outcome achieved.** ✓

Data were explored for both the AU group and the other foster youth in high school in terms of the average number of credits attempted each semester and the average number of credits earned for each semester. A difference score was created that identified the credits failed/or credits not attained each semester. Higher numbers indicate more credits failed while numbers close to zero indicate credits earned equal to credits attempted. Differences in Figure 9 that were statistically different are noted with an \*. There was an overall difference across years between groups and the 2017-2018 school year showed significant differences. Other years were inconsistent.

Figure 9. Credits Failed (Differences Between Credits Attempted and Credits Earned)



**Objective 2: Youth will experience improved college and career readiness.**

A second goal of the AU program is that youth will experience improved college and career readiness. There are several ways to assess this as part of the project. Two discrete outcomes are explored, including whether students were on track to graduate and whether students who graduate were accepted into post-

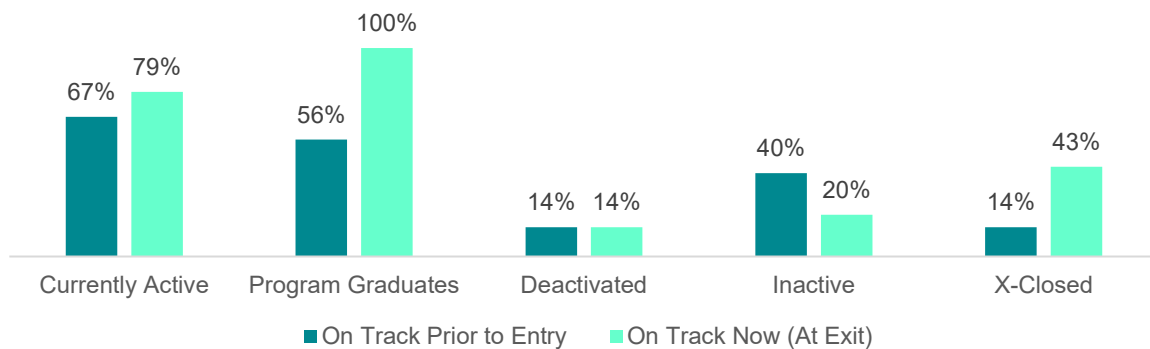
secondary education or vocational training or had secured full time employment by the end of the project. In addition, the project included a youth survey that students can complete to identify their own perceptions of their readiness for their college and career goals.

- **Seventy percent (70%) of the students are on track for graduation by the end of project.**  
**Outcome achieved (specific conditions) ✓**

A part of youth improved college and career readiness is that youth are on track to graduate. The data for on track to graduate from the Infinite Campus dataset is not always consistent. However, with an understanding that students need 22.5 credits to graduate, and an understanding of how many credits students have, it is possible to determine the percentage that is on track. For this analysis, 9<sup>th</sup> grade students should have approximately 6 credits to be on track, 10<sup>th</sup> should have 12, 11<sup>th</sup>s should have 18, and 12<sup>th</sup> should have 23. For this analysis, we would consider +/- 3 credits “on track” to graduate.

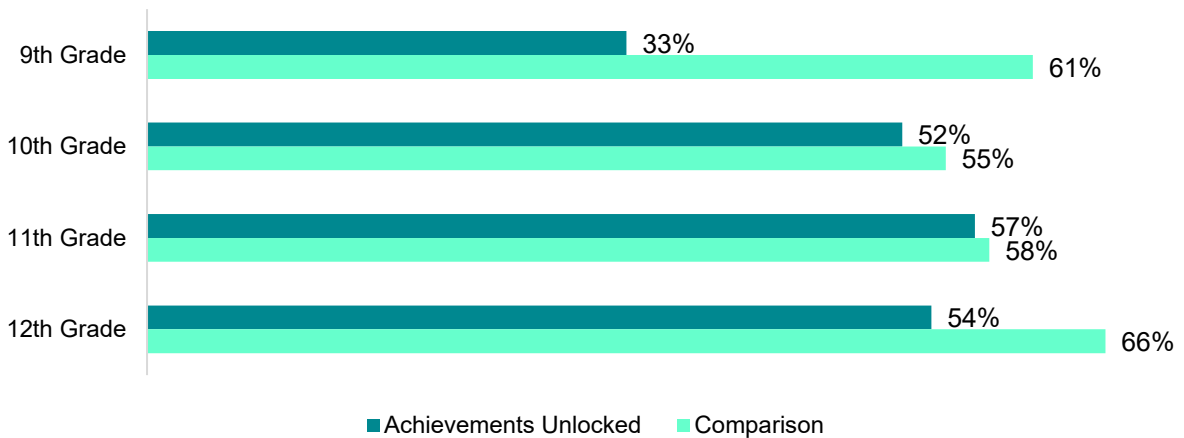
*Progress.* The first way that data were analyzed included examining whether the students were on track in the semester prior to entry. Not all students had this data (70 of 125; 56%). Data for early program years was not available to explore prior to entry into program. For students who were ever part of the program, 50% were on track to graduate prior to entry into the program compared to 67% at exit from the program/or their current year in the program. There was a statistically significant increase in on track to graduate from entry into the program until exit/current status.

Figure 10. Percentage of Students on Track to Graduate



*Comparing Program to Non-Program.* Of the students in the program, 53% were on track to graduate, compared to 59% of students in the comparison condition. The percentage of students on track to graduate is statistically similar overall to the control group. This percentage varied by grade. In 12<sup>th</sup> grade, 54% of the students in the AU program were on track to graduate compared to 66% of students in the control condition. Figure 11 illustrates that percentage of students on track to graduate (calculated by the credits they need +/- 3 credits).

Figure 11. Percentage of Students on Track to Graduate by Grade



Data were also explored based on the number of years the student has been in the program. Table 2 portrays the years in the program and percentage on track to graduate. Not all students have data.

Years in Program	1 Year (n=21)	2 Years (n=10)	3 Years (n=3)	4 Years (n=3)
<b>Percent on Track to Graduate</b>	89%	57%	50%	67%

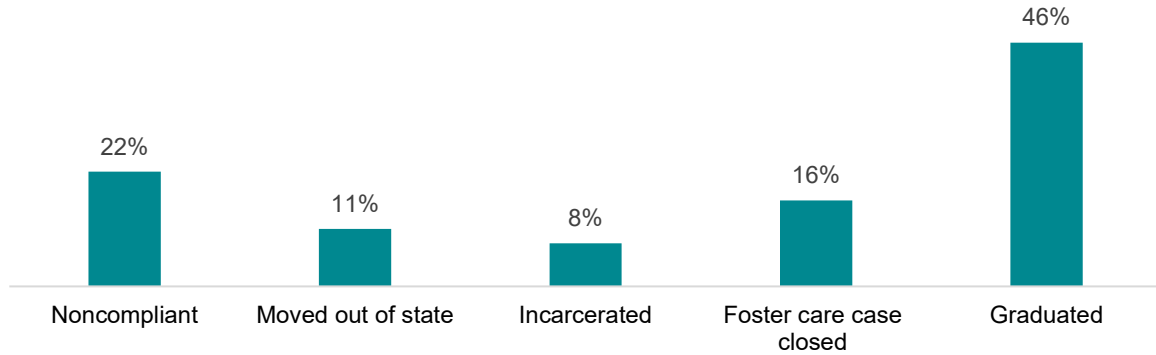
*\*It is important to note that although this outcome for the AU participants was lower than anticipated, unexpected factors such as COVID and the change in credit requirements midstream, potentially influenced student success. Additionally, considering that research from other states indicates 41-63% of students in foster care graduate by age 18<sup>1</sup>, program participants who are on track to graduate are already on a trajectory to far exceed the national average.*

- **Eighty percent (80%) of the students who graduate are accepted into post-secondary education/vocational training or secured full-time employment by end of project. Outcome achieved. ✓**

A second way to assess the objective that youth are college and career ready to identify how many youth who exit the program are enrolled or accepted into post-secondary education or vocational training or who have full employment. Beginning in year 2018, educational advocates completed exit forms for students who exited the program. Thirty-seven exit forms have been completed.

<sup>1</sup> National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2018.

Figure 12. Exit Reasons



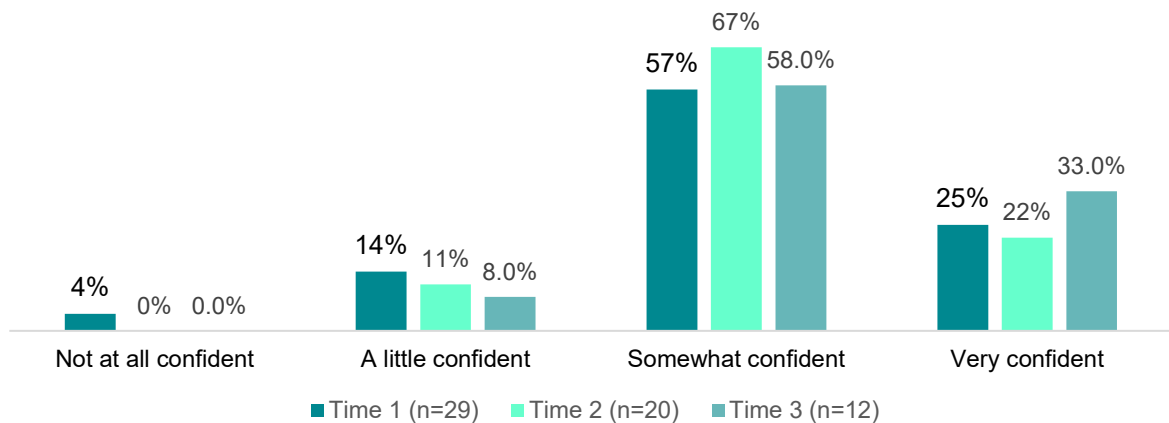
Fifty-two percent of exits were on track to graduate, 46% were currently employed, with the majority (71%) employed part time. Twenty-seven percent of graduates have been accepted to a college or vocational school. *Of the students who graduated successfully from the program 82% were either employed or accepted to college or vocational school.*

A small sample of students (n=21) had both intake and exit forms on file. We compared their educational goals at intake to those at exit. Only 9 students had an educational goal at exit. Twenty-four percent were unsure of their goal and for 33% the educational advocate did not know the student's goal. Four students had the same goals at exit (all included college), two students had additional goals of graduating vocational school, and two changed their goals from vocational school to community college.

- **Additional college and career readiness measures- confidence. Outcome achieved. ✓**

In addition to reviewing Infinite Campus for quantitative measures of the college and career readiness, a survey was developed and sent to youth at the end of tutoring sessions to allow them to answer some questions about their perceived readiness and ability to achieve their goals. Youth were asked how confident they are in their ability to achieve educational goals. Twenty-nine students completed the survey between fall of 2018 and the end of Spring semester in 2021. Most students were somewhat or very confident in their ability to achieve educational goals (see Figure 13). Twenty students took the survey at least twice (69%). There was a consistent trend toward increased confidence although not all students reported an increase over time.

Figure 13. Confidence in Ability to Achieve Educational Goals



**Objective 3: Youth will experience improved case outcomes.**

A final youth measure includes improving child welfare case outcomes for youth involved in foster care. One educational outcome for youth in foster care is the number of educational placements that the youth have. The number of educational outcomes reflects educational placement stability. There is an assumption that transferring school, especially multiple times, will lead to poorer outcomes for children and youth. As such, reducing educational placement changes will benefit the youth in excelling at school.

- **Decrease the number of education placements by .5 placements for participant students by end of project. Outcome not achieved.**

The measure of improved outcomes for this study was defined as decreasing the number of educational placements by .5 placements for students in the project. This can be explored by examining the average number of placements for AU youth compared to the comparison youth and by examining how this number of placements changes between prior to entry and entry into the program.

*Progress.* There were no differences in primary enrollment for students for the year(s) that they were not in the program, compared to the years in the program. Students averaged 1.04 placements when not in the program and 1.5 placements in the years in the program.

- *Comparison between Program and Non-Program.* Program students have an average of 1.45 enrollments compared to 1.12 enrollments for non-program students. There are characteristics among the students in the AU group that could have contributed to the increased number of school placement changes\*.

\*It is important to note that the students referred to the AU program may be considerably more vulnerable than students in the comparison group (hence the need for additional support and qualifying them for AU program services) and therefore experienced extreme educational challenges, which in

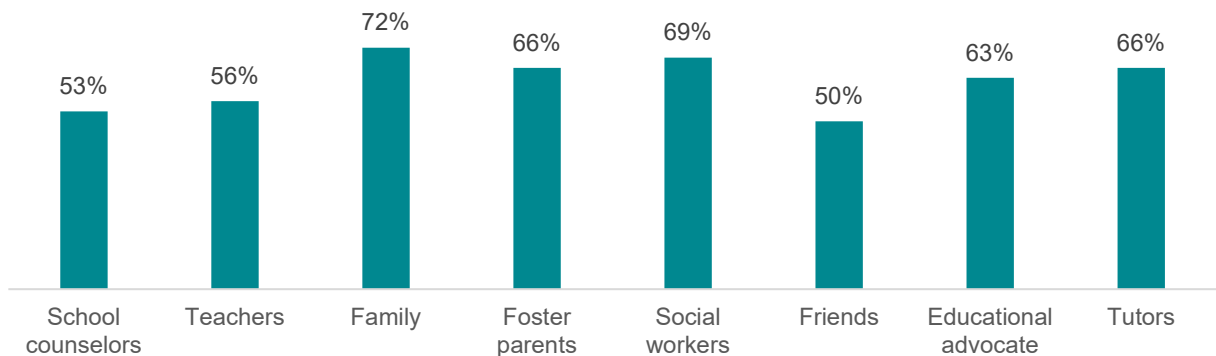
many cases were greater than those of their peers, thereby increasing the likelihood of instability in both home and school placements. Additionally, there are several scenarios in which foster youth may change school placements whereby the AU program has no way to control. Some of those scenarios include but are not limited to: Placement in a local or out of state residential treatment facilities, placement in a local emergency treatment facilities, incarceration, and reunification with parents. The additional stressors brought on by COVID also greatly affected our foster youth by exacerbating already challenging dynamics in all areas of their lives.

*\*It is also important to note that nationally 31% - 75% of students in foster care change schools when first entering care and 34% of 17–18-year-olds in care have experienced 5 or more school changes.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, although the program did not meet its goal, the outcomes reflect a lower incidence of school changes as compared to the national average*

- **Youth perceive the program as helping them with their goals. Outcome achieved.** ✓

In addition to the quantitative infinite campus measures of outcomes, the study takes into account youth perceptions. Students (starting in 2018) were given opportunities to complete a survey twice a semester about their perceptions of the program. Youth reported high levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their academic and career goals (See Figure 4). In addition, youth were asked about who encouraged them to attend school beyond the high school. Since students were able to respond multiple times, these findings are for the most recent time the student responded to the survey. There were 32 unique student IDs entered into the survey.

Figure 14. Who Encouraged You to Continue Education Past High School

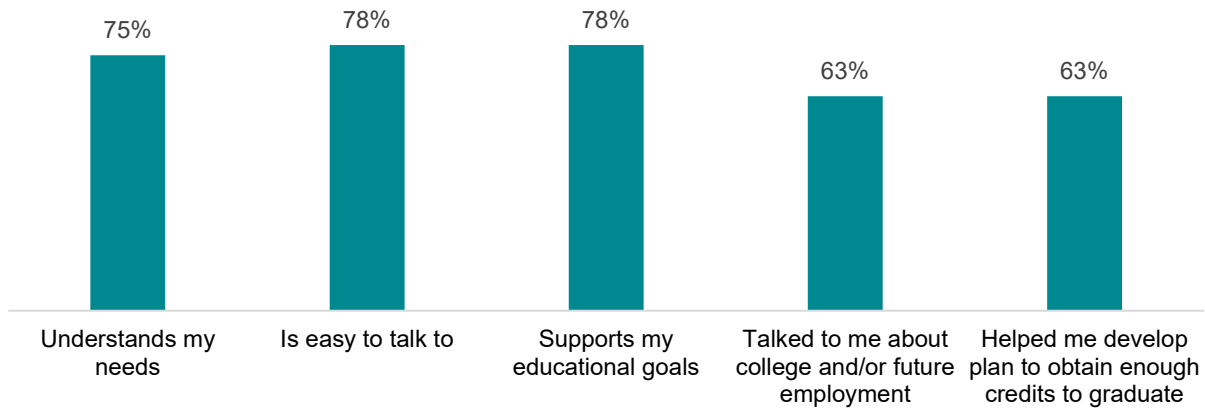


<sup>2</sup> *Fostering Success in Education: National Data Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Students in Foster Care.* National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2018. [http://fostercareandeducation.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?portalid=0&EntryId=2100&Command=Core\\_Download](http://fostercareandeducation.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?portalid=0&EntryId=2100&Command=Core_Download)



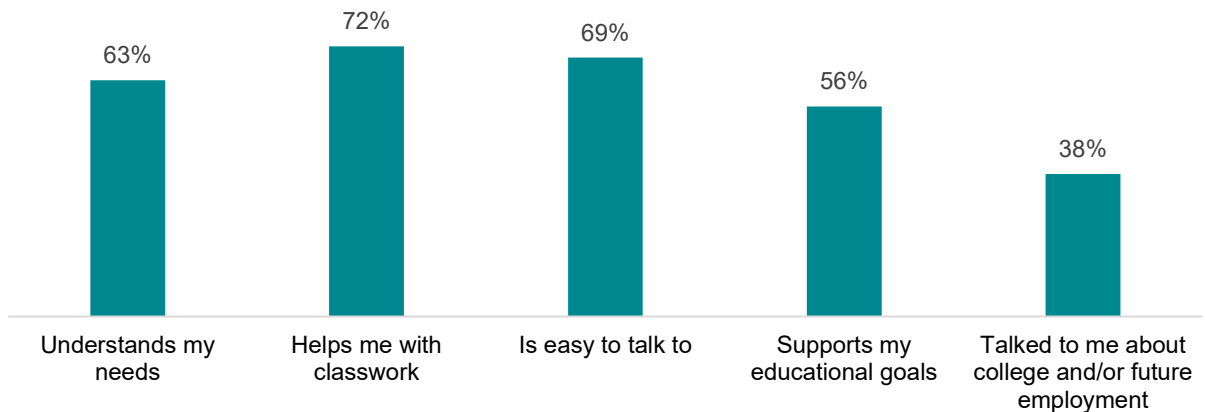
Students were also asked about their perception of educational advocates and tutors. Students were asked to check all that apply on a list of items. Seventy-eight percent of students felt the EA supported their educational goals (See Figure 15).

Figure 15. Percentage of Students Responding to "My Educational Advocate..."



Students were asked to respond to a list of items (check all that apply) about their tutor. Figure 16 illustrates their responses. The majority felt their tutor helped them with classwork and 56% felt they supported their educational goals.

Figure 16. Percentage of Students Who Responded to "My Tutor..."



Students had an opportunity to provide additional comments about the program. Very few added additional comments, but all the comments were positive. These included:

*"The program has helped and there is nothing I can think of to help [improve the program]."*

*"The service was 1000/10"*

*"My experience has been great with [Educational Advocate]"*

***Objective 4: Youth will be supported to secure full-time long-term employment through partnership with the iFoster Jobs Program.***

**Initiate planning strategies with iFoster to engage local employers and community partners to raise awareness of the dynamics and benefits of the iFoster Program.**

In our Interim Report after the completion of Year 1 of this grant, we reported that initial planning strategies were underway as collaboration with the iFoster Jobs Program took place at multiple levels. Meetings and site visits took place to discuss implementation of the iFoster Jobs Program within Washoe County Human Services Agency/Adult Services Division. Further discussions were on hold with this prospect pending grant funding outcomes across similar job training programs that support the adult population.

Additionally, a coordinated site visit took place between iFoster and Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) to explore the potential for dual programming that would provide each iFoster cohort an opportunity to earn a TMCC Skills Certificate and iFoster job training concurrently. The advantage to this combination of programming is that in a short period of time, the students would become employable at thriving local organizations such as Tesla and Panasonic. Since the coursework is stackable, students would then have the opportunity to progress forward to earn a Certificate of Achievement and on to an associate's degree in the same field; thereby improving their odds to successfully promote and build a future in local cutting edge industries.

Although the funding did not come through for the WCHSA/Adult Services Division and supplemental funding has not yet been identified to support this project, we remain optimistic that in the near future opportunities present themselves. Currently, there is new legislation to support iFoster's presence in Clark County, so we are hopeful that this support will open the door to additional funding to launch iFoster in Washoe County.

Through a generous emergency grant from WSJ, Washoe County Human Services was also able to partner with iFoster to provide laptops to 28 foster youth to support distance learning and tutoring activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This made a significant difference in the ability of our foster youth to access learning during a time when the school district was unable to access additional laptops due to the global supply chain production and shipping crisis.

**Identify local organizations to outsource the tutoring component of the project in an effort to leverage resources required to support the training component of the iFoster Jobs Program.**

The program successfully identified and contracted with Boosted Learning, a local organization that had operated within a similar model by providing one-on-one tutoring services in the home for several years. The first year of partnership demonstrated the potential and capacity for Boosted Learning to acquire and administer the entire Achievements Unlocked program within by the end of the grant cycle. Also, during the first year, Boosted Learning applied for and received 501(c)3 status and moved the AU program contract under the new nonprofit arm called Boosted Diplomas. During the second year, Boosted demonstrated the

strength, leadership and capacity to continue the mission of the program. Boosted leadership also participated in discussions with iFoster and expressed their interest and intent to facilitate the iFoster Jobs Program under their scope of service, to help provide services through the continuum of the foster youth's journey into adulthood. The additional benefit to adding this service to Boosted's repertoire, would allow for a more longitudinal approach to service provision as the program would be able to follow the youth as they aged out of care and progressed to their next level of adulthood.

Additionally, through a generous \$40,000 donation from the Monroe Schuler Foundation, the program was able to expand services to extend college and career support to youth aging out through the age of 21. This expansion provided momentum to strengthen efforts focused on improving outcomes for youth transitioning out of foster care.

### COVID Challenges

In March of 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic drastically impacted schools. In Washoe County, the schools were shut down for a couple weeks and then struggled to transition to online learning. In the Fall of 2020, school was setup so that students would have a choice about the mode of education, including in-person, distance learning, or a hybrid mode. Of the 27 responses regarding mode of learning, 19% indicated they did distance learning (Edgenuity), 7% did distance learning through a different platform, 48% did full time in-person, and 11% chose the hybrid mode of instruction.

We asked students how the mode of learning was affecting their academic progress. Twenty-four students responded to this question. Only two students noted struggles with their mode of learning, one was through distance learning and one was in-person. The other felt their mode was helpful. Several noted the hybrid model was helpful and that full distance was harder. Students were asked about challenges due to COVID. Many noted that it slowed their progress. They also noted that it interfered with their life and that they disliked masks. Other unique factors during the pandemic (2020-2021 school year) include reduced resources due to existing and further exacerbated resources, such as reduced transportation available to maintain students in their schools of origin, further complicated by insufficient numbers of foster homes, creating the need for existing homes to take on more youth and making it more challenging to provide the desired level of educational support to each youth in their home. Additionally, the labor shortage greatly affected the ability to provide enough tutors to meet the needs of the youth.

#### COVID Comments from Students

*"It has ruined my life"*

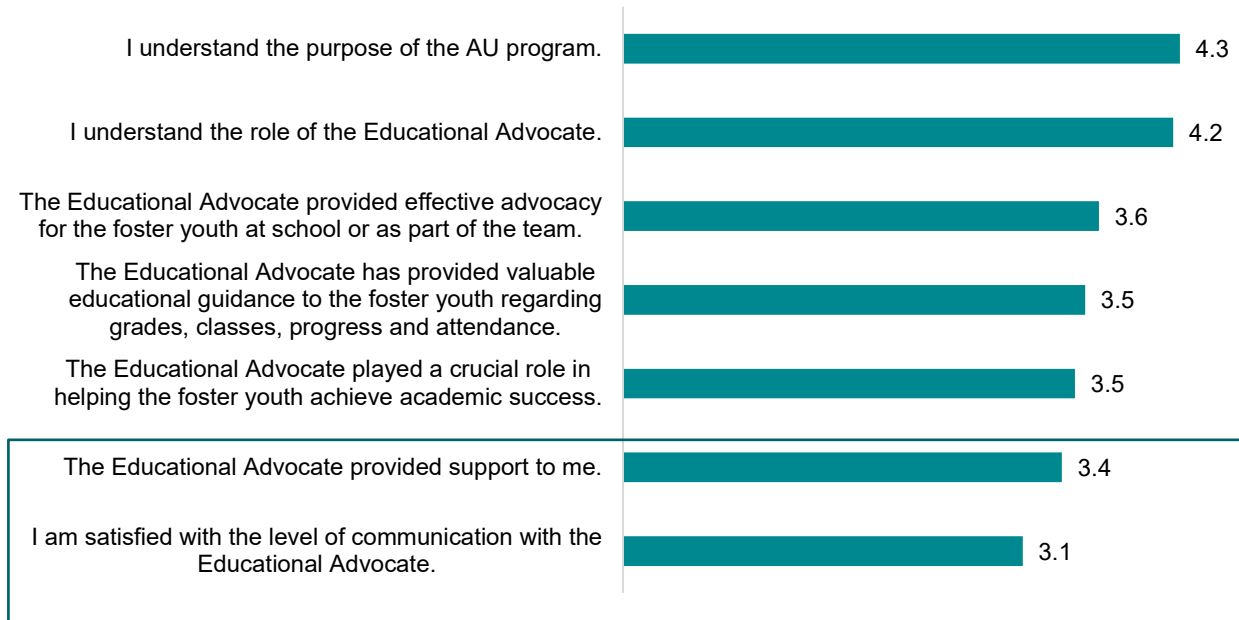
*"It has slowed down a lot of my plans  
but hasn't stopped anything"*

*"[COVID] put me behind in school"*

## Foster Parent Attitudes

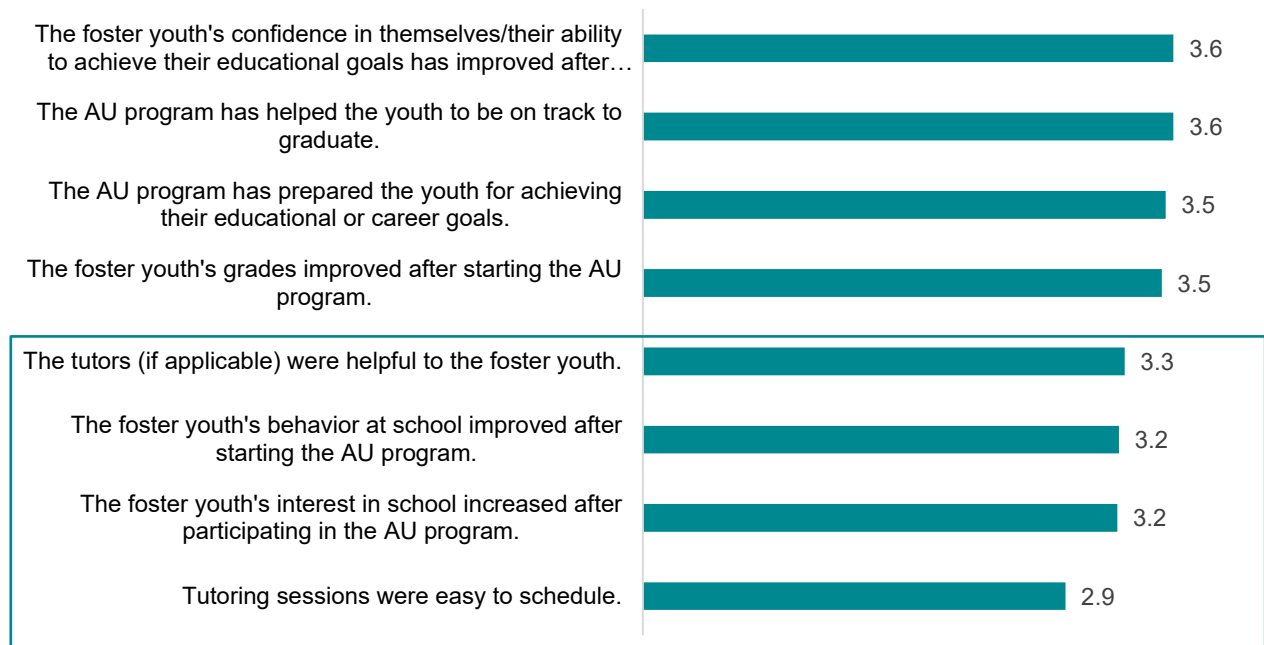
In 2021, foster parents were surveyed at the end of the semester to get their perspective on the program. Foster parents were asked to respond their agreement to a series of statements on a 5-point scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items close to 3 indicate neutral to the statements. Figure 17 and 18 note the foster parent's agreement. The neutral or disagreement items are highlighted in boxes.

Figure 17. Foster Parent's Agreement to Statements



Foster parents were most likely to be neutral about whether the educational advocate provided support to them and satisfaction with the level of communication with the EA. Foster parents were also neutral about the ease of tutoring sessions, foster youth behavior improving, foster youth interest increasing, and tutors being helpful to students.

Figure 18. Foster Parent's Agreement to Statements



Foster parents were asked if they had any ideas on how to better engage youth in tutoring. Nearly half of the foster parents did not answer this question. Of the ones who did, three noted that it would be helpful to have an Educational Advocate or have more contact with the Educational Advocate. Responses included *“for the parent to know the advocate in some form, email or periodic notes home on how they assist the student”*, *“getting the word out so it is clear what Educational Advocate you can call to get help if needed”*, and *“I asked for an Educ Advocate but never heard from anyone re that... or how to engage or proceed.”*

Foster parents also noted that they didn't know if any tutoring was available to their students. For those who did know about it, they suggested in-home or in-person tutoring would be most helpful and that scheduling was a barrier. They also recommended enhanced online efforts, noting that *“the online tutorial has been unsuccessful...”* or that *“access to and training with advanced applications of Zoom, or other tools Etc in order to better engage kids in online learning”* would be helpful. They felt an introduction to the online system would be helpful. Few foster parents elected to provide additional information about their experience with tutors or educational advocates. The ones that did had positive things to say.

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*It was extremely helpful to have the guidance of [Educational Advocate]. Her experience in the WCSD and her ability to develop relationships with WCSD staff made the likelihood of our youth's success far more likely. He did graduate high school.*

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## Conclusions

The Achievements Unlocked program has been operating in Washoe County since 2015. It has served approximately 21 new students each year. The program was evaluated using multiple forms of data collection. Where available, robust statistical analyses were used to make comparisons between program youth and non-program youth. Overall, the program appears to be effective in meeting most of its goals. There are still opportunities to enhance practice. Some of the outcome achievement is only for specific groups.

Table 3: Summary of Outcomes Achieved	Outcome Achieved	Outcome Not Achieved
<b>Goal 1: improve educational outcomes for youth in foster care</b>		
Increase GPA by 5%	√	
Decrease the number of school disciplinary actions by .5 incidents	√	
Decrease the number of times a student is late		√
Increase the number of credits taken and taken successfully	√	
<b>Goal 2: improve college and career readiness</b>		
70% of students on track for graduation by end of the project	√	
80% of students who graduate are accepted into post-secondary institutions/vocational training or secured full time employment	√	
<b>Goal 3: improve experiences and case outcomes for youth in foster care</b>		
Decrease the number of placements by .5		√
Youth perceive program as helpful to them	√	
<b>Goal 4: Youth will be supported to secure long-term employment through partnership with the iFoster Jobs Program</b>		
Goal partially met	--	--

The program did appear to meet most of its goals. Students appeared to show progress over time on the outcomes of interest. In particular, they improved GPA over time, had few disciplinary actions over time and were more likely to be on track to graduate after successful time in the program. Students did not show improvements in absences over time and there was not a difference in educational placements for youth in program compared to non-program youth. The most pronounced differences were in comparing program students over time (they demonstrated progress in the right direction). However, there were few differences between the program students and the comparable non-program students on most measures.

The data also indicated that there is opportunity to enhance Educational Advocacy and Tutoring practices. If a goal of the program is that these persons encourage youth to continue their education, and support these goals, not all students noted them as a support or as encouraging additional education. Foster parents were also neutral about the program in several areas including whether they feel like it was improving educational and behavioral outcomes for youth. It is important to consider these findings to identify if there are opportunities to improve practice.

## Lessons Learned

**Data** - Data collection had some challenges. Forms were developed during the process as the need for more and better data arose. This meant that there was not consistent data across the life of the project (as new forms were created in year 3). Further, the forms were not always completed in their entirety (e.g., fields left blank), which meant that there was missing data when it came time for analysis. The forms created an additional opportunity for extra data; however, all the forms were on Word and that also required an additional data entry step to use the data in any analysis. This was time consuming and could lead to additional errors in the data evaluation. In future evaluation efforts, it will be important to monitor the completeness of the data more closely during the project period so that missing data won't impede analysis.

Another challenge was that the Infinite Campus data pull which provided the majority of the outcomes for the students, did not always match all the students in the program. When possible, requests were made for the additional student data. It is unclear why some students were missing, but this may be related to the foster care tab that identifies this population of students and how that is captured in this system. The missing data was an important lesson learned and will impact data collection efforts in the future (see comments in sustainability section).

Finally, a big data challenge was collecting surveys from the youth. It was challenging to get a sufficient sample and to ensure that youth completed the survey at multiple points in time to examine changes over time. Part of the challenge was that originally the plan for data collection was not specific. Tutors and educational advocates were asked to ask youth to participate at the beginning and end of the semester. Later in the data collection, specific timeframes were set for data collection to ensure that this was not a burden on the youth as well as to make it easier on the professionals asking youth to participate.

**Labor shortage** - The challenges experienced through the rare incidence of a global pandemic, are quite extensive. The job market has been and remains crippled affecting the ability to recruit both tutors and advocates. This situation continues to cause delays in students' abilities to regain learning hindered by the fall out of COVID-19 and its variants. Both families and staff remain cautious and apprehensive about in person tutoring yet understand the importance and benefits of "in person" learning and overall human interaction. This type of labor shortage is something the program has never experienced, and therefore has pushed the need for additional creativity and increased outreach and recruitment activities.

**New partnerships** - This grant cycle has been exciting as a new partnership was formed with Boosted Diplomas, a subcontractor organization and Data Savvy, the program evaluator. Boosted is very technologically advanced in its processes from scheduling to time keeping and reporting, resulting in a great improvement to the program as far as accurate record keeping, data collection and documenting clear outcomes. In addition, the program brought on a new evaluator, Data Savvy which is exponentially improving process and evaluation consistency and quality. Data Savvy is lead by one of the original evaluators from the inception of the project, and therefore has a very good understanding of the dynamics of the program. She also has a wealth of knowledge and experience in Child Welfare, so the program is

lucky to have her on the team! The transition to both Boosted Diplomas and Data Savvy has allowed the program to learn from previous years and implement new strategies and processes for data collection and reporting.

**Communication, education and training across agencies and staff at multiple levels** – The program continues to seek ways to increase communication among child welfare workers, schools, educational advocates, and tutors. While we are making great strides with process improvement, we know that improving communication channels will ensure that the students receive consistent messaging and better follow-through as they step forward into adulthood.

The program is exploring ways to create outreach opportunities to better engage and inform both foster parents and their students about resources available to them through participation in the AU program. It is important that we find better avenues to engage program participants, so they clearly understand what is available to them. By adding face to face discussion, opportunities will be created to better explain the dynamics of the program, answer questions and clarify expectations.

### **The Future: Sustainability... and beyond**

As discussed under Objective 4, the program identified a strong partner in Boosted Diplomas to outsource the tutoring/advocacy component and support implementation of the iFoster Jobs Program, at some point. Boosted Diplomas, has shown the strength, leadership and capacity to continue the mission of the AU program. Boosted Diplomas also has the potential and intention to expand services to every high school foster youth in Washoe County, increase its scope to serve middle and elementary school foster youth, and strives to eventually provide a resource for all “at risk” youth in Washoe County and ultimately across the entire State of Nevada.

Boosted Diplomas has secured funding through a combination of public and private sources, which will lend to a solid foundation of sustainability and growth as it is expanding its reach through increased partnerships both locally and across Nevada. Boosted will also be utilizing the same organization “Data Savvy, which will support consistency and program integrity through third party evaluation. Boosted has already made great progress in the creation of a more extensive Excel database to house all the information that is currently collected on various electronic forms and from Infinite Campus. The new database will hold all the information on process and outcomes needed for the evaluation and will have functionality to query specific data fields to make reporting and monitoring (for continuous quality improvement efforts) easier. This will streamline the evaluation process and allow for live snapshots of program progress at any given time.

Washoe County Human Services Agency is very optimistic in the continued partnership with Boosted Diplomas and has secured an MOU to move forward with clear programmatic goals and data sharing practices. WCHSA looks forward to continued referral and collaboration with Boosted Diplomas to increase the scope and reach of critical educational supports to our community’s most vulnerable youth.



*Overall, the program demonstrates trends of improved student outcomes over time.*