

BRIDGING THE EDUCATION-CHILD WELFARE COMMUNICATION GAP: A MODEL FOR CROSS-SYSTEM COLLABORATION

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Webinar Objectives

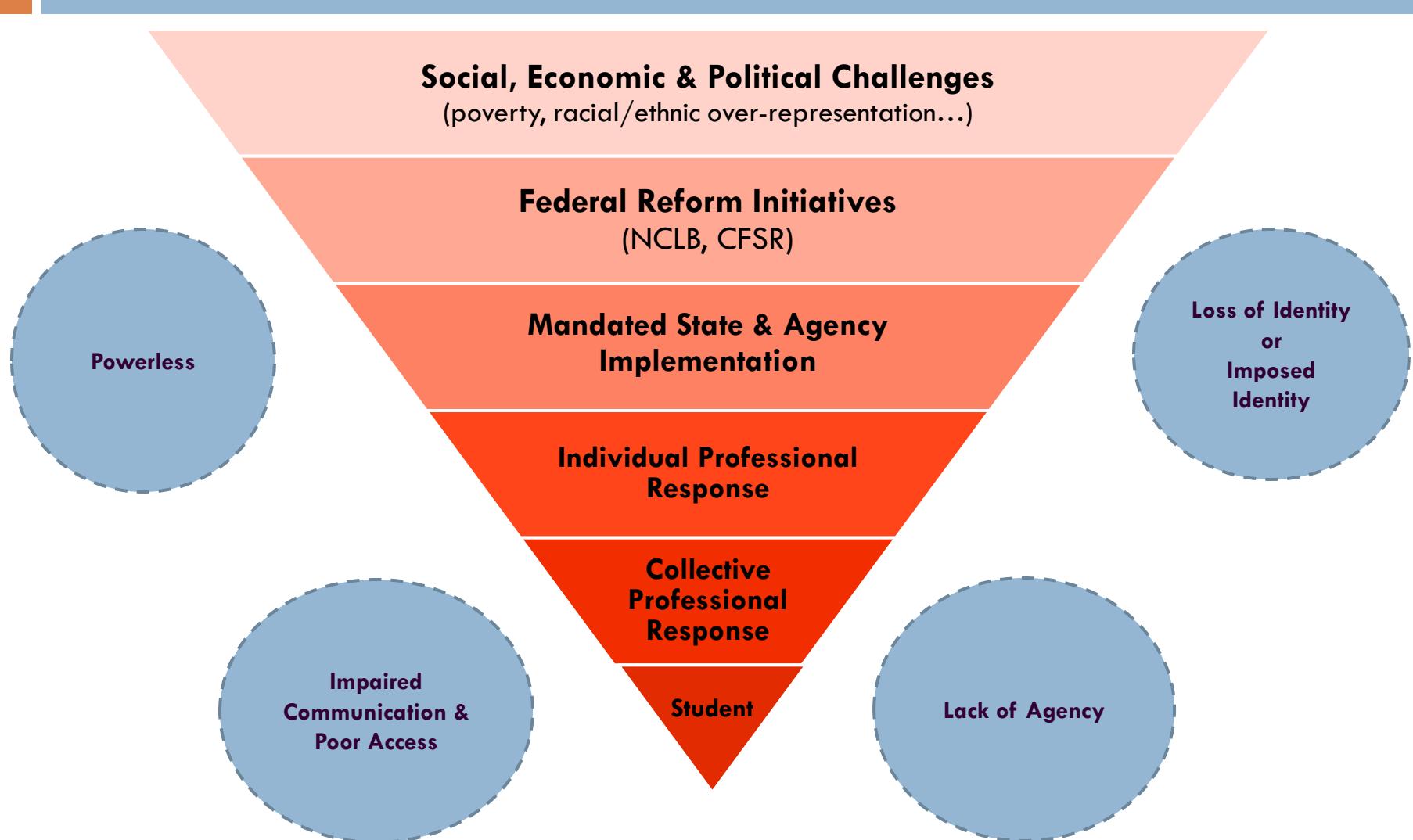
- 1. Identify barriers to school success and challenges of the current process**
- 2. Cite recent findings of the Education Collaboration Project (ECP) study, emphasizing the needs of youth, child welfare workers, and teachers with regard to educational stability**
- 3. Identify strengths and proposals for improvement to school success for students in foster care**
- 4. Describe a model for cross-system collaboration for promoting educational stability and positive outcomes for youth in foster care**



SCHOOL SUCCESS: BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

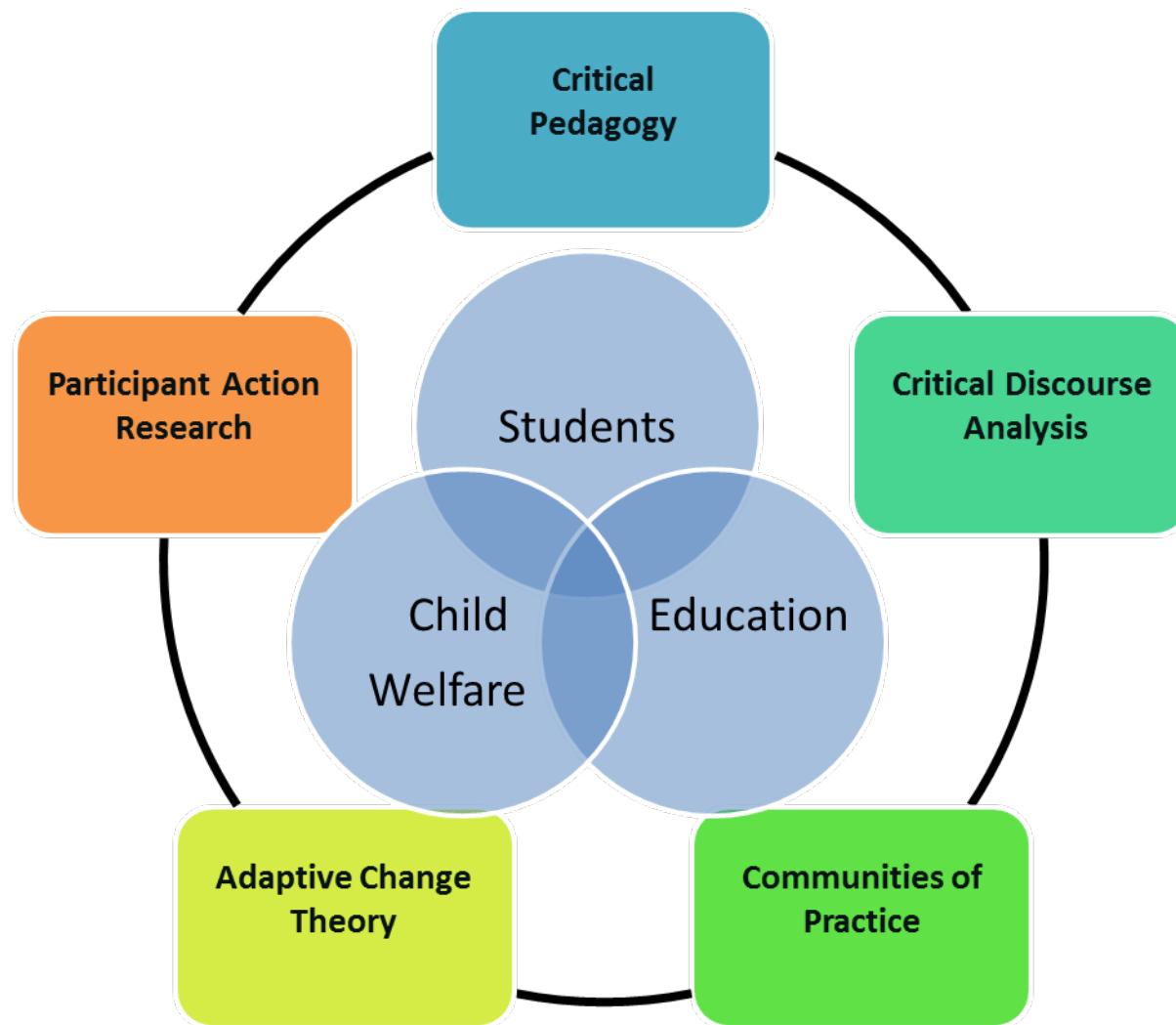
WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Observations from the Field



THE EDUCATION COLLABORATION PROJECT (ECP)

Theoretical Framework



The Education Collaboration Project

PARTICIPANTS

- **6 CW Professionals (4 family service & 2 probation; all female)**
- **4 School Professionals (1 special education HS teacher, 1 MS math teacher, 1 math coach and, 1 guidance counselor; 3 female & 1 male)**
- **4 young adults with foster care history (3 female & 1 male)**

PROCESS

- **4 individual meetings with ECP each constituent group**
- **11 collective meetings between ECP and integrated groups**

Areas of Inquiry

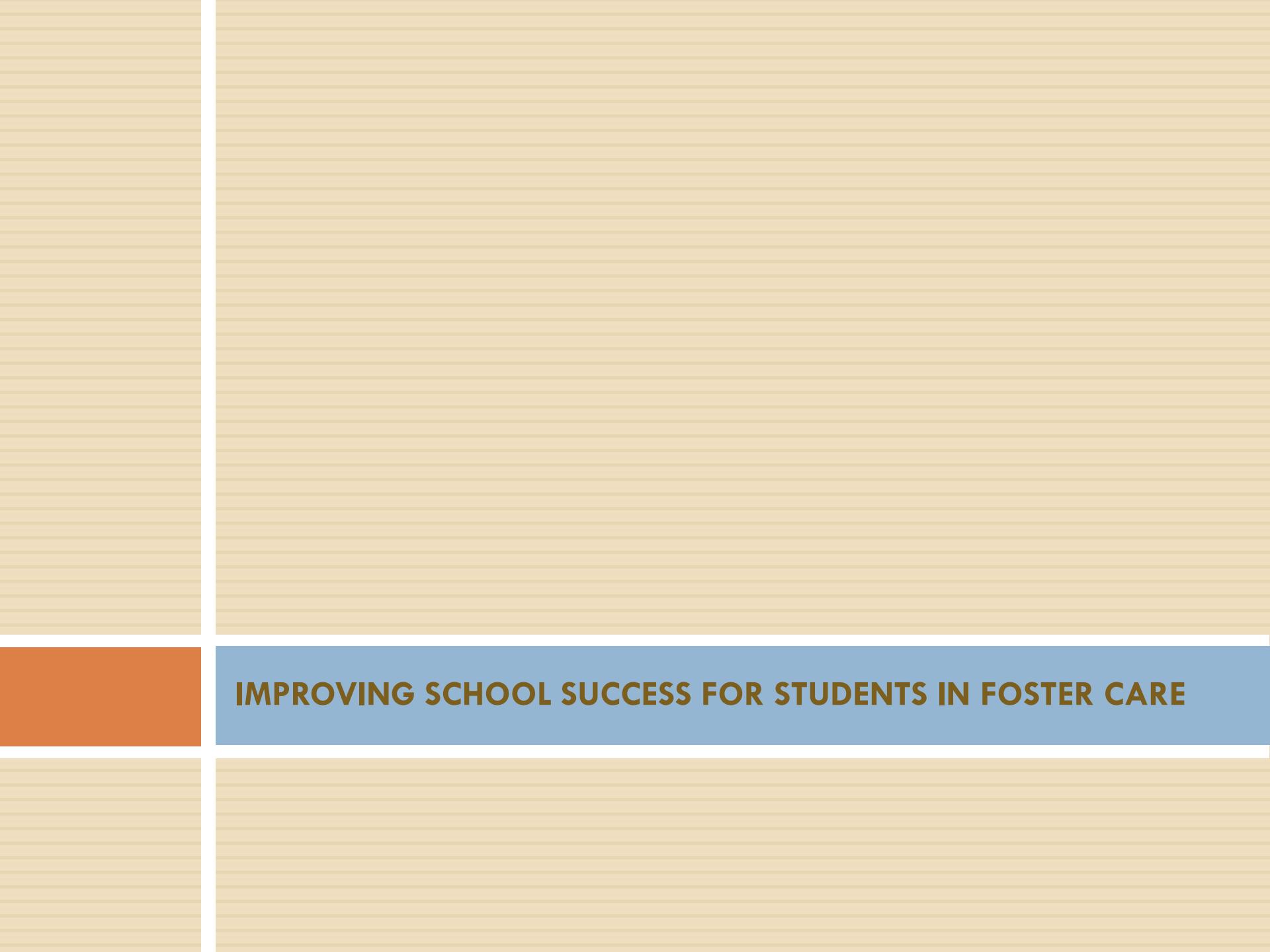
- **Do the unique experiences of the professionals & students offer valuable opportunities to understand the problem?**
- **Do these unique experiences serve as a tool to engage in a process of reciprocal education?**
- **By sharing awareness across professional and student groups, are groups able to unite around building solutions?**

Notes About the Sample

- Three credit Graduate course “Connecting School and Child Welfare Systems to Students in Foster Care”
- Drop out due to:
 - promotion, pink slip, life circumstances;
 - adults & youth had different expectations regarding attendance over the course of time
- Youth, by far, begin the process as the most insightful group

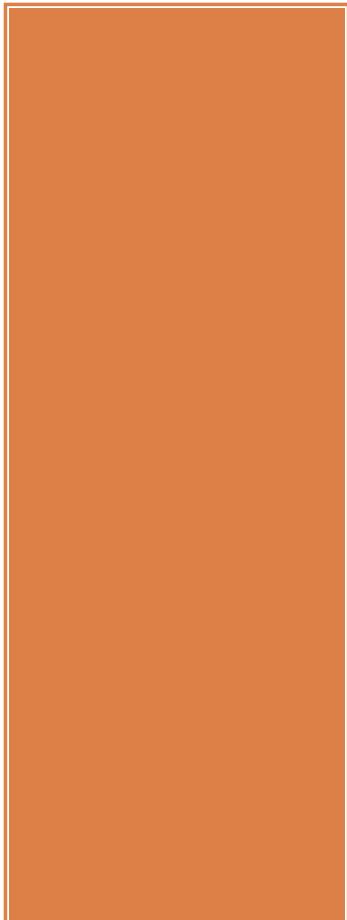
Methods

- Course delivered in three phases
 - Phase 1: Identifying group identities (weeks 1-2)
 - Phase 2: Sharing & comparing identities (weeks 2-4)
 - Phase 3: Students, school, child welfare teams (weeks 5-11)
- Data Collection
 - Survey pre/post
 - Sessions audio recorded & pictures taken of news prints
 - Transcription, coding, quantification once codes assigned
- Rigorous process, sharing with each group what the other groups said

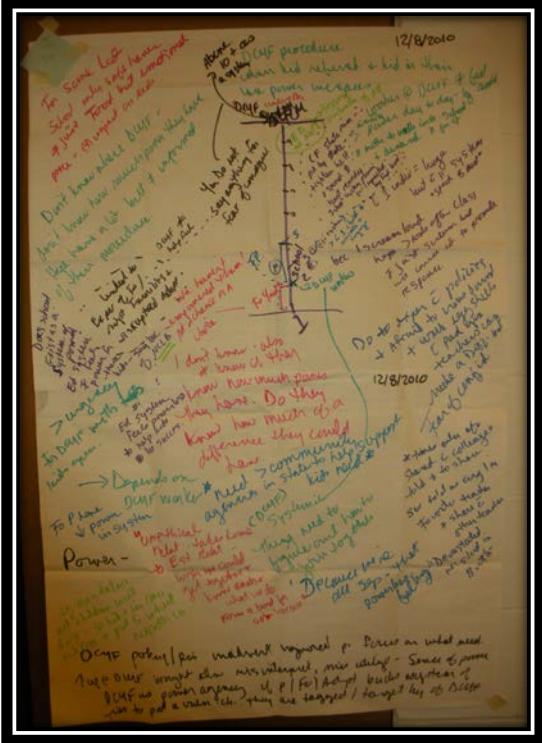


IMPROVING SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE

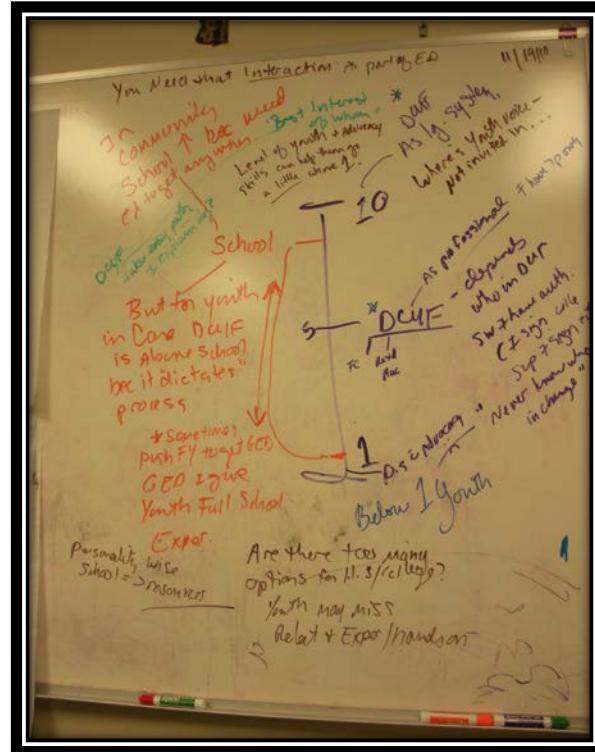
Tracy's Story



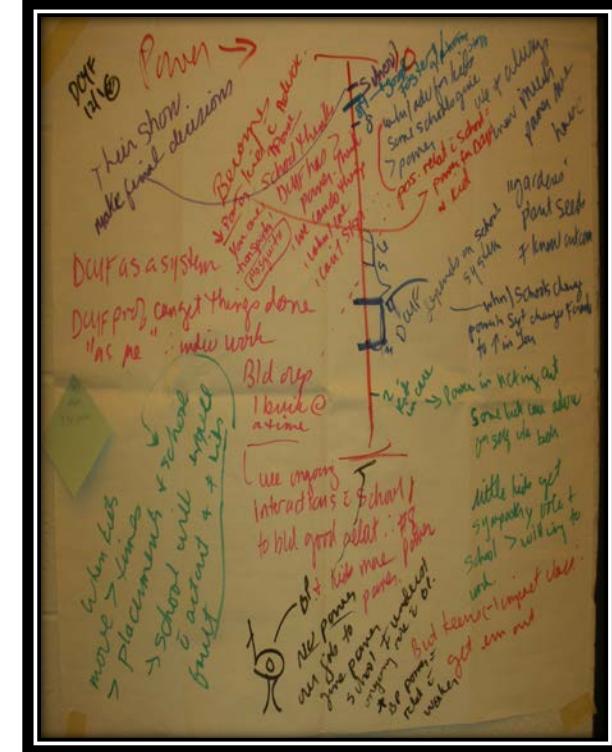
Power Newsprints



EDUCATION



YOUTH



CHILD WELFARE

Emerging Themes

- **Disempowerment of all constituent groups; youth were most disempowered (Youth in foster care are stuck living with our decisions)**
- **Need for co-education professionals from child welfare & education**
- **Need for established procedures & protocols that transfer and can be communicated across child welfare & education systems**

Emerging Themes

We all shared an uncertainty regarding professional roles and organizational positions on balancing educational needs with the emotional-social-behavioral needs experienced by students in foster care.

- **Impaired or Non-existent Communication**
 - Within and across organizations and with students in foster care
 - Impacts, delays support for school success for students in foster care
- **Lack of power/voice**
 - When communication isn't productive & when organizations/people feel overwhelmed, individuals feel disempowered
 - Feeling disempowered prevents us from knowing & understanding each other & from working together
- **Challenges to communication & empowerment negatively impact how we perceive & interact with each other**
 - Don't understand or know how/why other organizations/people work - results in negative image of CW and other professionals' roles related to school success

Emerging Themes Cont'd

- **Professionals in child welfare & education are often uninformed about**
 - Relevant practices & procedures within their own organizations
 - Each other's roles and organizations
 - The needs of students in foster care
- **Students in foster care often feel**
 - Voiceless regarding their education, living situation & future
 - Unsure about their relationships with & obligations to professionals from child welfare & education

These combined challenges alienate professionals & exacerbate the struggles of students in foster care as they strive for school success.

Constituent Voices before the ECP Process

Youth

- What I think is that foster kids get judged almost immediately—irresponsible—arrogant—troublesome—unsuccessful...
- That's exactly how I felt like..., in care they just make your plans and DCYF they make it seem as though they involve you but they really don't.

Education Professional

- ... I'm uneducated on exactly what they [DCYF] do. And I'm sure most colleagues in the building feel the same way. Cause you know, everything is content, content, standards, content, standards, highly qualified. But you know we don't hear any of this other stuff. We don't have professional development on this stuff.
- ...you've interacted or had experiences with them [DCYF] and they're [DCYF] not good. There are some, but when the bad outweigh the good... That's when it sticks...

CW Professional

- I'm frustrated by the low number [of youth in foster care] going to college...[schools] have no expectations for our kids [youth in foster care] ...
- the school wants to sit on the phone and talk... We really don't have time to talk...communication is a struggle...it's not like we don't want to give information, we don't have time to be on a phone...



PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL STABILITY AND POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Model for Cross-System Collaboration

□ Defining group identities

- Group members must be given the opportunity to define who they are and how they are impacted
- Validation of individual experience

□ Sharing & comparing group identities

- Group members individual identities are shared across groups to insure a co-informing of each group by each group
- These distinct realities reinforce the uniqueness of each group and highlights similarities of each group
- Relationships begin to form to counter *Us & Them* attitude and to support a collective identity

□ Creating a student, school, child welfare team

- The emerging collective identity contributes to co-ownership of the issue
- Co-ownership leads to shared action
- Shared action leads to change

Constituent Voices After the ECP Process

Youth

- It has opened my mind to the impact miscommunication has on the whole system not only the youth.
- I could go on and on for days telling someone what it takes to promote school success for foster youth, but the things I find most important are telling the students foster care status to the educational professionals that work with them...

Education Professional

- [how would you describe this process] Rigorous – one that has broken barriers and changed how we feel about the different systems.
- I have realized that most [DCYF] have the student's best interest at heart. It's communication and policies that sometimes prevent us from reaching that goal. I have made friends and found people in other branches/systems that are just as passionate about children as I am.

CW Professional

- ...we have a responsibility to safety, permanency, and well-being. However, as professionals who have the opportunity to better the lives of children in our care, we need to value education as a priority.
- I think as a group of professionals and former foster care youth, everyone had an equal voice during the process. It is hopeful that some of the changes, suggestions, and improvements will be utilized in the near future.

Tips to Support School Success...

WITHIN ENTITIES

- **Systems need opportunities to co-inform & co-problem solve**
- **Organizational cultures must be adapted to celebrate diversity within systems & promote the value of each professional entity**

EDUCATION & TRAINING

- **Provide educational professionals the opportunity to learn more about the foster care population**
- **Provide child welfare professionals the opportunity to learn more about the educational roles & influence of education on the lives of foster youth**

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