"Temporary" Implies Change That Can't Be Accomodated
(Isabella Folchetti)

It is imperative to address the social and academic struggles of those in foster care that hurdle their long-term success.

(courtesy of calmatters.org)

The first day of a new school year entails excitement, anticipation, and even the fate of long-term education. The journey one will begin to trek as they enter pre-K or Kindergarten, and, for some, carry on with until they have reached the graduation stage and received their diploma. However, this trek is not an easy path for some other students. Not only is there an achievement gap between the average white student and the Latin(x) and African American body of students who are often tangled within poverty or lack of a stable home environment, there is a gaping hole that has gone virtually unconcealed. Students and children in the foster care system frequently face these social and academic struggles. Whether due to lack of proper education or access to one, lack of materials or tools to enhance learning or lack of outside or classroom support, these students and children are undoubtedly disadvantaged relative to their peers. Change often is the only constant; whether it be moving from one school to another, being taken in with a new set of guardians, etc., is temporary and non-guaranteed.

By definition, foster care is "**a temporary arrangement in which trained caregivers, including kinship or relative caregivers**, provide for the care of a child when their biological parent(s) are unable to care for them. But what this definition fails to consider is how this "temporary arrangement" affects fundamental opportunities which require a static situation. Education is arguably the most important aspect of a child's life other than social relationships, and the nature of the foster care system makes it that much more difficult to maintain. This is not because of its lack of

effectiveness but because the term "temporary" implies change. Specifically, change is difficult for educational institutions to accommodate regarding housing or transferring schools.

Prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic, which has surged throughout the nation for nearly 24 months, educational stability for youth and students in the foster care system was an oddity; according to childwelfare.gov, "decreased placement stability and subsequent school changes, exposure to traumatic experiences, and mental health challenges" coupled with lack of "comprehensive assessments needed to accurately identify and meet their educational needs" have paved an unfit pathway for these students to succeed in an academic setting. Unlike their peers, children and teenagers involved in the foster care system are "more mobile." This means that mid-year transitions from one home to another may force students to transfer from one school to another. Since not all international or inter-regionally schools have the same requirements, some students may fall behind due to a lack of credits that were not demanded in their previous school. This can mean that they may have to compensate for classes they did not take in their prior school by completing courses in their new school that they are unfamiliar with, making credit-receiving that much more difficult.

Further, because of lack of access to tools or resources that enhance learning or are required for academic success, "Students involved in foster care meet state standards in math, science, and language arts at less than half the rate of their same-grade peers (partnersforourchildren.org)."

Though often overlooked, poor mental health can also contribute to the challenges students in the foster care system face when in a school environment. Unspoken trauma, abuse, or neglect faced by young and vulnerable children is common; it may make it difficult for them to seek outside support or even perform well in a social or academic setting. Because more than 70% of those involved in the foster care system have faced some sort of mental illness as a result of their predisposed trauma, mental illness among those individuals is an endemic that contributes to poor performance in academic or social settings. This issue is only egged on by a lack of a support system, stable environment, or person to turn towards for advice. Alongside these struggles, non-accommodated or addressed, comes the stark decrease in graduation rates and continuation of education past high school. The drop-out rate for high school students in foster care is 31%, which is inflated relative to the 10% measurement for all other students. This may very well be due to instability at home, a non-safe environment to complete homework or study for tests or the simple fact that requirements for educational institutions differ everywhere.

According to recent graduate Joshua Christian (Indianapolis), who grew up in the foster care system where change was his only constant, "all school requirements and curriculums are not the same." He goes on to further state the inevitability of falling behind or recycling material for the sake of earning the credit; "Sometimes your credits don't transfer. Sometimes you fall behind in your

education. Sometimes you relearn material." This proves that foster care and its correlation with lack of academics is not linear--challenges and struggles differ from case to case/are not universal. For teenagers across the globe like himself who lived in a stable home and was able to prepare for exams, learn the material, and complete homework; simply switching from one school to another due to continued alteration in residence could be the root cause for lack of long-term academic achievement or sustainability.

The Covid-19 pandemic concerning the foster care system has further proved limited accommodation and carved a more profound achievement gap between those students with a stable home-life and the underprivileged. Remote learning had swept through the nation, specifically at the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020), when there was no surety regarding how this virus would target the health of students and their families. For many schools across the nation, there was no plan of attack. September of 2020 rolls around, the new school year begins, and for most students globally, virtual learning becomes an option. Even for those students with stable at-home environments, lack of physical communication with teachers and friends, and lack of proper materials haltered their ability to learn remotely.

Because of the implementation of a universal "hybrid" or "fully remote" model, the nation's report card, as of December 2020, has reflected nothing but a dramatic increase in failing marks for students across all grades. This was due to the several obstacles presented by virtual learning that students were unable to hurdle over. Issues include lack of access to technology and online assignments-- poor wifi or service which prohibited students from attending classes, and even lack of a stable at-home environment, influenced this stark drop in academic achievement. These challenges were only exacerbated for those students involved in the foster care system, and according to children now™, "[these] students [were/are] disproportionately impacted by school closures, since they often lack access to the technology and support they need to participate in distance learning." Not only that but because caregivers were/are often juggling several responsibilities and were therefore unable to accommodate or create a safe or suitable environment for said individuals, remote learning further disadvantaged those subjects.

All of the aforementioned challenges and issues faced by children/students in foster care warrant a more significant question; how can school districts across the nation work to alleviate the performance gap between said individuals and their peers?

One solution can lie in providing outlets or "safe places/people" for those children or students involved in foster care. This would allow them to open up, relay their trauma or abuse, and learn how to cope healthily. It is also important to accommodate those who are either unable to perform well due to lack of resources and tools or reside in an unstable home environment. In the case of remote

learning, reaching out to the student, adhering to their needs, and providing them with the tools to succeed during these trying times are ways in which a child can adequately succeed in an educational setting. This would ensure that the overwhelming statistics do not override their achievements or success.

It is not fair nor righteous for our educational system to spoil the privileged and allow them the opportunity to succeed without doing the same for those who may not have been born into those same circumstances. Punishing someone because of a situation they cannot scale down to the statistic is unforgivable. Ultimately, it highlights a lack in the system--work to resolve, rather than egg on the unresolved. Work to redefine the situation for these foster-care children, rather than re-implement those same struggles and difficulties that barrier their long-term academic success.

Sources:
- **Ifoster.org**
- **Childwelfare.gov**
- **Edutopia.org**
- **Apnews.com**
- **Children now™**

REDEFY ARTICLE OUTLINE

TOPIC: The socioeconomic struggles of children or students in foster care--lack of proper education or access to one, lack of materials or tools to enhance learning, lack of a stable at-home environment which, with the pandemic (specifically in relevance to the present day) may make it difficult for learning to occur.

OUTLINE:
1. First paragraph just discussed the list of struggles
2. Second paragraph discusses how covid has exacerbated those struggles
3. Third paragraph emphasizes why it is important to address this achievement gap, and how we can do so/what efforts have already been made

INTERWEAVE THIS SOURCE INTO YOUR ARTICLE:
https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/index.html
- (The achievement gap that goes unnoticed; how it has been exacerbated by covid conditions and remote-learning, and what statistics state MUST be done in order properly recognize said gap)--title

Issues Talked About According to Sources (These issues have only been exacerbated by virtual or remote learning during the pandemic, where children and their families have been cooped up and forced to translate an office job or education to their own living room(s). This begs the question of what we need to prioritize; the health of students in school districts amidst rising numbers, or the physical safety and proper learning environment of those who are unable to learn from home--due to neglect, abuse, or an unstable environment. It is important to consider when making a remote decision for an entire district of students):
- Unspoken trauma, abuse, or neglect faced by young (especially vulnerable children) in the foster care system; this may make said individuals less likely to open up to teachers, and/or make it difficult for them to learn in what is an unstable and non-beneficial home-environment.
    - More than 70% of those involved in the child foster care system have faced some sort of mental illness or struggle as a result of their predisposed trauma and inability to advocate or seek outside support.
    - According to wested.org, there is a clear "invisible achievement gap" that goes virtually unaccounted for in academic institutions; specific to California's education system though applicable elsewhere in other states and even countries, a study conducted in 2019 in regards to the struggles faced by those in the foster care system, highlighted the fact those students were more likely to attend multiple different schools

in the span of a year--a non-static environment, which may make it difficult to meet requirements or receive necessary credits--

- The drop out rate for highschool students in foster care is 31%, which, relative to the 10% measurement for all other students--not involved in the foster care system, is inflated; this may very well be due to instability at home, a non-safe environment to complete homework or study for tests, or the simple fact that requirements for educational institutions differ everywhere. Because the foster care system entails, for a majority of those involved, change throughout the years--whether it be moving to another area of the city, state, or country, or being placed in the home of foster parents different from their previous one, academic requirements or interests may be interfered with. According to recent graduate, Joshua Christian (Indianapolis) who grew up in the foster care system, where change was his only constant, "all school requirements and curriculums are not the same." He goes on to further state the inevitability of falling behind or recycling material for the sake of earning the credit; "Sometimes your credits don't transfer. Sometimes you fall behind in your education. Sometimes you relearn material." This just goes to prove that foster care and its correlation with lack of academic is not linear; for teenagers across the globe like himself, who lived in a stable home and was able to properly prepare for exams, learn material, and complete homework, simply switching from one school to another due to continued alteration in residence could be the root cause for lack of long-term academic achievement or sustainability.