



## LEGISLATIVE BRIEF

# The Bexar County Fostering Educational Success Pilot Project for Students with a History of Foster Care: Year in Review

### LEGISLATIVE FUNDING

\$1,750,000 per year | \$3,500,000 over biennium

Funded by the 86th Texas Legislature. This special appropriation is the first of its kind in the United States.

### STATE'S INVESTMENT LEVERAGED AN ADDITIONAL \$1,550,000

\$1,220,000	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development - Housing First Program
\$80,000	Family Tapestry/Department of Family and Protective Services - Supervised Independent Living
\$100,000	Impact San Antonio Foundation Grant - Early Start Experience
\$150,000	In-cash and in-kind donations from individual and corporate donors



### INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

The Bexar County Fostering Educational Success Pilot Project (“Pilot Project”) mission is to improve college enrollment, retention, and graduation rates for students with a history of foster care, by expanding the students’ emotional, social and professional networks and increasing the number of children in foster care in Bexar County who understand that attending college is achievable and expected and ensuring that they are academically and emotionally prepared to do so.

The model is a trauma-informed, strategic framework that incorporates evidence of best practices, coaching, and holistic support to meet the educational aspirations and unique needs of youth with foster care history.

The Pilot is conducting ground-breaking research on the pipeline of educational support for students who have experienced foster care. The scope and scale of the research is novel and continuation of it over the next 4 years is critical to understanding the Pilot’s impact and how our model of cross-system collaboration may be replicated elsewhere in Texas and across the United States.

For the first time, partners across child welfare, the Children’s Court, and two- and four-year colleges in Bexar County are working together for the common goal of improving educational outcomes for foster youth and alumni. UTSA serves as the fiduciary agent and led the effort to implement and ensure the success of the Pilot.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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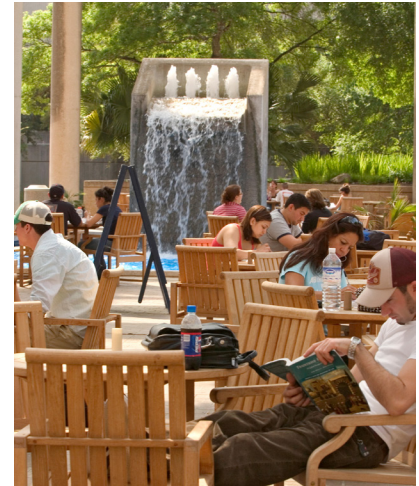
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### ACCOMPLISHMENTS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE APPROPRIATION

- » **327 foster youth and alumni received comprehensive support from the BCFESC Pilot**
  - › **200 college students** with a history of foster care received comprehensive services from the campus-based support programs established at UTSA, A&M San Antonio and the Alamo Colleges District.
  - › **27 middle and high school students still in foster care** received innovative pre-college programming.
    - **67 students still in foster care** received educational advocacy and wrap-around services through the College Bound Docket. All but one of the initial cohort of 22 high school students enrolled in college!
    - **60 students still in foster care** received pre-college support and life skill coaching including a novel program developed by the Pilot (“CLIMB”) that includes college and career readiness, and socioemotional development curriculum for 8th through 12th graders
- » **600 college students** at UTSA, A&M and Alamo with a history of foster care received targeted outreach for the first time
- » **\$80,000 in emergency funds, incentives, and other financial assistance** was provided to students for expenses such as housing, food, technology, and medical care to remove any barriers to education.
- » **52% increase in students served during the COVID-19 Pandemic.**
- » **37 new and transfer UTSA students** with a history of foster care participated in a week-long specialized orientation to give them an “Early Start” in transitioning to college. With funding, this will be expanded to A&M-San Antonio and Alamo Colleges in the 2021-2022 academic year.
- » **100 professional stakeholders** representing over 40 different government and community agencies participating in the Steering Committee and Strategic Action Groups.
- » **5 foster care alumni serve on a BCFESC Youth Advisory Board**, empowered to engage in advocacy that improves education and life outcomes and collaborate with other emerging leaders to promote systemic change.
- » **31 local, state, and national print, television and radio placements** that increased public awareness and engagement
- » **State and national presentations, conferences, and webinars**
- » **Facilitated a 5-day webinar series during Foster Care Awareness month**, which included 14 presentations on supporting foster alumni in higher education and beyond; child welfare, education research and student success; the pilot’s framework and strategic action; coaching and direct services; and youth voice and advocacy, averaging 75 participants per day.
- » In partnership with the Bexar County Blue Ribbon Task Force and the City of San Antonio presented a community wide Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) training, with over 146 participants.



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## HOUSING STABILITY

Made possible by the programs and services funded by the appropriation, UTSA is the first university in the country to develop and receive HUD funding for housing and supportive services for 30 students with a history of foster care who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This **\$1.2M grant will fund the “Housing First” program**, which builds on our existing campus-based and community resources to provide up to 24 months of market rate housing, assistance with moving costs, rent and utility deposits, childcare, mental health services, legal services and life skill development to support completion of a college degree.

UTSA and A&M-San Antonio have also contracted with family tapestry (DFPS) to utilize state funding for supervised independent living (SIL) programs on our campuses. Students who elect to stay in extended foster care can live in the university dorms and receive a meal plan. We have supported 12 students with SIL on our campuses in the past year.

## LOOKING AHEAD

With continued state funding, the BCFES pilot will focus on six major areas:

1. **Pre-College Pipeline:** improving identification and engagement strategies for students still in foster care
2. **Campus-Based Support:** increasing college enrollment and students served, and enriching supportive services such as housing, peer mentoring, career mentoring/employment opportunities, and childcare
3. **Racial Equity and Inclusion:** employing a targeted outreach and recruitment strategy to include direct services, mentoring, and advocacy for students of color to reduce racial disparities in education
4. **Youth Voice and Empowerment:** increasing the number of youth and young adults who engage in advocacy and action, collaborate with other youth leaders, and serve as a catalyst for change
5. **Data Sharing:** enhancing data sharing among child welfare, courts, and K-12 and postsecondary education
6. **Strategic Action:** enhancing cross-system collaboration to increase systematic change and policy reform that improves outcomes for foster youth and alumni

## PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

- » The University of Texas at San Antonio
- » Texas A&M University-San Antonio
- » The Alamo Colleges District
- » Bexar County Children’s Court
- » Child Advocates San Antonio (Court Appointed Special Advocates)
- » Family Tapestry/The Children’s Shelter
- » Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
- » K-12 Independent School Districts (Northside, Southwest, Judson, East Central, Schertz/Cibolo/Universal City, San Antonio Independent School District)
- » Jewish Family Service
- » South Alamo Regional Alliance for the Homeless/HUD
- » Thrive Youth Center
- » San Antonio Bar Association
- » BCFS
- » THRU Project

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## IMPACT

### **Israel B, *UTSA student with a history of foster care***

“I want to thank you for continuing to support students with a history of foster care especially during this pandemic. I admire and appreciate your leadership. The world needs light, especially right now and especially for those who have had to live with so much darkness. I remember what it felt like to be alone. I remember feeling like I was the cause of everyone’s problem. I remember feeling hopeless. I don’t feel alone, problematic, or hopeless anymore. You are changing so many lives including mine. Many lost souls will see light thanks to the changes you are making! Consider this a hug from a distance from a student that appreciates you.”



### **Dr. Taylor Eighmy, *President, The University of Texas at San Antonio***

“I firmly believe that as higher education administrators we have much to learn from the Pilot Project. If we learn how to best support students with a history of foster care who in many respects have the greatest hurdles before them, we should be able to translate that knowledge to how we support all of our students. I am so proud that applied research created by the Pilot will inform policy and practice in higher education in Texas and throughout the United States.”

### **Dr. Cynthia Teniente-Matson, *President, Texas A&M University-San Antonio***

“I am incredibly proud of A&M-San Antonio’s participation in the Bexar County Fostering Educational Success Pilot Project. Our students with a history of foster care have never been in greater need of support and I am so grateful that the Pilot Project is there for them during the pandemic. I often talk about my aspirations for supporting our students’ success in terms of creating ‘a conspiracy of high expectations.’ Such expectations are made achievable through partnerships among the dedicated individuals and organizations who share common goals—of course, through the remarkable efforts of these students who, against all the odds, are pushing beyond expectations.”

### **Dr. Mike Flores, *Chancellor, The Alamo Colleges District***

“I am very grateful to the Texas Legislature for funding the Bexar County Fostering Educational Success Pilot Project. Providing support services that contribute to student success is a top priority at the Alamo Colleges District. This program enhances our services for students who have come through foster care and is a step forward towards reaching our moonshot to end poverty through education in San Antonio.”

### **The Honorable Peter Sakai, *Presiding Judge, Bexar County Children’s Court***

“I want everyone to have the same educational expectations for kids in foster care that they have for their own children, and no less. Why shouldn’t we expect them to go to college? I want every kid in foster care to know what college is, that they are capable of going, and that there is a path forward to getting there. I want the colleges and universities to view kids in foster care like they do the highest performing students and blue-chip athletes. I am so grateful for our partnership with UTSA, A&M, and Alamo Colleges who are doing just that.”

### **Annette Rodriguez, *President and CEO, The Children’s Shelter/Family Tapestry***

“When the Children’s Shelter was awarded the contract for community-based care in San Antonio we committed to innovation and partnership. The Pilot Project is a perfect extension of that commitment. We feel privileged to deepen our partnership with the Children’s Court and CASA, and for the first time have committed partners in higher education.”

### **Allison Martinez, *Interim President and CEO, Child Advocates San Antonio***

“Participation in the Fostering Education Success Pilot Project is a natural fit for CASA. Our dedicated volunteers have always advocated for the educational needs of children in foster care, but the College Bound Docket allows our volunteers to play a deeper role and to see the children they advocate for over the finish line to college.”