Sub-strategy 1a: Education

This snapshot accompanies Child Trends' 2022 Evaluation Report for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Foster Youth Initiative. It highlights a sample of the Foundation's grantees' efforts, key data points, and ongoing barriers to strengthening educational opportunities and success for foster youth in middle and high school in Los Angeles (LA) and New York City (NYC). Snapshots are available for each of the Initiative's sub-strategies focused on foster youth and caregivers.

Los Angeles

Highlights

🏛	The 2022-2023 California state budget included a $9 billion increase to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), part of which funds transportation to school for youth in care. Several bills were also signed into law to support the educational success of youth in foster care.[i] For example, SB 532, co-sponsored by grantees **The Alliance for Children's Rights (The Alliance)** and **National Center for Youth Law (NCYL),** strengthens provisions to support certain groups of students, including youth in care, to remain in high school for a fifth year so that they can graduate.[ii]
🎒	Multiple grantees, such as **United Friends of the Children** and **NCYL** provide direct mentorship and educational support to students in foster care through high school and college enrollment, connecting students with necessary resources, and helping youth develop educational goals.
📢	**First Star, The Alliance**, and the LA County Youth Commission all incorporate youth voice and perspectives in their advocacy efforts. For example, **First Star** has engaged foster care alumni to shed light on the urgent need for increased availability of effective education interventions, especially during the pandemic.
👥	Law enforcement has been removed from school districts such as LA Unified School District, which grantees describe as helping Black and Brown students feel safer at school. Additionally, **Friends of the Children LA** provides educational mentorship to Black boys through their Fostering Resilience Project.
📊	Education remains an area that is highly data driven, with school stability data for students in foster care now publicly available on the California Department of Education website.[iii] Advocates regularly refer to publicly available data to advance their priorities.

Figure 1. 5-year cohort graduation rates for students in foster care and all students, Los Angeles, 2017-2018 through 2021-2022

Graduation rates for students in foster care decreased in 2021-2022 after pandemic-related flexibilities, such as AB 104 which prohibited students from getting a "F" grade, ended. The effects of subsequent policy changes (e.g., SB 532) remain to be seen.

Graduation rates decreased for all racial/ethnic groups in 2021-2022, aside from White youth, widening the gap between White youth and their peers of color. Rates in 2021-2022 ranged from 47.5% for youth of two or more races to 69.7% for White youth.
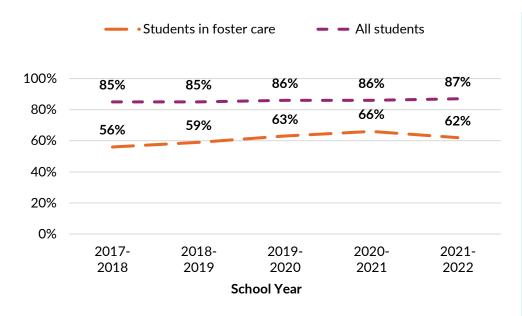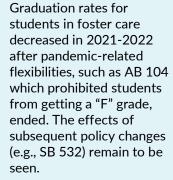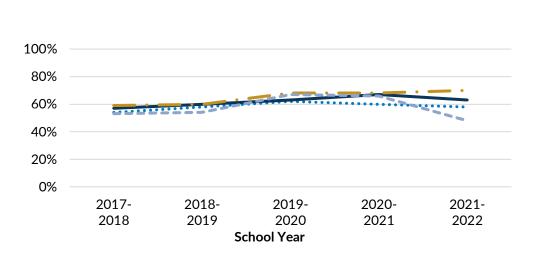
Figure 2. 5-year cohort graduation rates for students in foster care, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, Los Angeles, 2017-2018 through 2021-2022

Source: California Department of Education Dataquest[iv, v, vi, vii]

Barriers

Despite progress in securing additional LCFF funding and publicly producing school stability data, significant barriers remain. Regarding LCFF, there is no provision currently in place or being proposed that would ensure funding is specifically used to address the needs of youth in foster care, with only 11 percent of Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) in 2021-2022 describing the services they provided specifically to youth in care and the LEA's intention to invest LCFF funding into those supports.[viii] Additionally, challenges persist with data sharing between DCFS and schools; education stakeholders expressed a desire for more accurate and timely information on placement moves. Caregivers expressed concerns that youth-serving systems (e.g., education, child welfare, mental health) are siloed and uncoordinated, and that school-based services are insufficient and improperly staffed. School districts report ongoing staffing challenges (e.g., recruiting social workers for schools and providing ongoing training as staff turnover). The COVID-19 pandemic also created barriers to academic achievement as data continue to show its impact on the educational experiences and outcomes of all students, and students in foster care in particular. For example, chronic absenteeism increased for all students between the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, but over half of students in care in grades 9-12 were chronically absent during the 2021-2022 school year.[ix,x] Finally, grantees highlighted the importance of addressing systematic inequities, such as housing insecurity or poverty, to address the root causes of inequity in educational outcomes.

New York City

Highlights

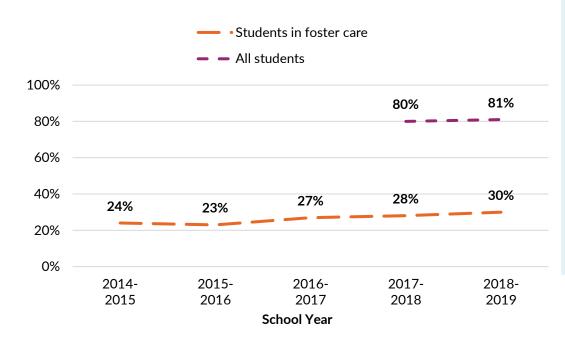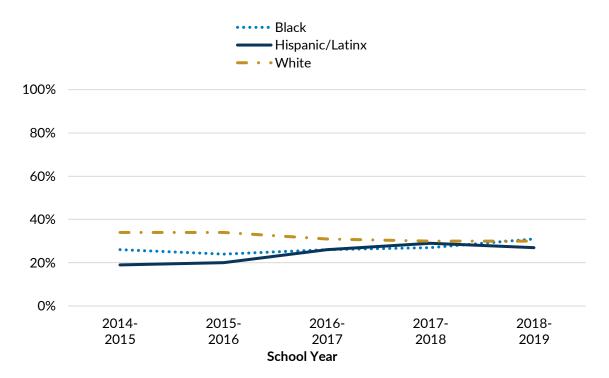|	
🏛	The NYC Department of Education (DOE) created a central office focused on supporting the needs of youth in foster care after years of advocacy by organizations such as **Advocates for Children**. **Advocates for Children** has also successfully advocated for the DOE to publish updated guidance and provide trainings for school staff on supporting school stability for students in foster care, which **Advocates for Children** has supported through technical assistance and consultation.
🎒	**Fair Futures** funding supports grantees, such as **Graham Windham, Children's Village, Heartshare St. Vincent's Services,** and others, to offer mentorship, coaching, and academic supports to youth in foster care in middle and high school.
📣	**Fair Futures'** advocacy has been fully youth led and resulted in an increase in **Fair Future's** funding to $30.7 million in FY2023, allowing the program to expand and serve young people ages 21-26.[xi] Their Youth Advisory Board regularly attends City Council meetings, coordinates with ACS, and leads other events.
👥	**The Door, Children's Village,** and **City Living NY** all provide educational support to parenting and expecting youth, including coaching and programming. **City Living NY** is piloting a program where they pay for one month of child care for parenting youth enrolled in school or working while their child care vouchers are pending. Additionally, **JCCA** tailors their **Fair Futures** programming to support Black, Latino, and LGBTQ+ students.
📊	**Fair Futures'** Care4 online platform tracks youth progress across all foster care provider agencies and has a range of automated reports to support coaches and leadership at all 26 provider agencies in NYC. The platform tracks grade promotion, high school graduation, school enrollment, among other information.

Figure 3. 5-year cohort graduation rates for students in foster care and all students, New York City, 2014-2015 through 2018-2019

Overall, the graduation rate increased for youth in care and remained fairly stable for White, Hispanic, and Black students during the 2018-2019 school year. The gap between groups has decreased since 2014-2015, but this is in part due to a decrease in the graduation rate for White youth. Updated data will not be available until late 2023, so it remains unclear how the COVID-19 pandemic affected graduation rates for students in care.

Figure 4. 5-year cohort graduation rate for students in foster care, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, New York City, 2014-2015 through 2018-2019

Source: New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence provided to Child Trends (students in foster care)[xii, xiii] and New York State Department of Education (all students)[xiv]

Barriers

Despite the funding increase for **Fair Futures**, the program needs at least $50 million annually to be fully funded and provide support to youth in the desired age range of 6th grade to age 26; there is currently not enough public funding to cover the full cost. Additionally, while the Fair Futures Care4 database provides increased data capacity, staff at provider agencies must enter data into multiple systems, including Care4, their agency's database, and ACS' Connections database. Finally, there are challenges with delivering services to foster youth within schools, such as grantee-provided tutoring and counseling. Schools are reluctant to share information on students in foster care with service providers, which means not all students are informed of and referred to available services. Moreover, parental consent is needed to provide services to all minors, including those in foster care, but it can sometimes be difficult to obtain that consent for youth in care. When the parent cannot be located, a surrogate parent can provide that consent, but school staff are often unfamiliar with that process.

Endnotes

[i] Fensterwald, J., & Burke, M. (2022, June 28). Gov. Newsom strikes deal on state budget: Big increase for K-12, plan to expand Cal Grant, too. *EdSource*. https://edsource.org/2022/gov-newsom-strikes-deal-on-state-budget-big-increase-for-k-12-maybe-for-cal-grants-too/674680

[ii] For more information on SB 532, see:
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB532

[iii] Publicly available administrative data from California Department of Education DataQuest, Stability rates. https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/DQCensus/StbStudentReport.aspx?agglevel=County&cds=19&year=2021-22

[iv] Indicator data presented for LA and NYC are not directly comparable, as each jurisdiction has different measurement approaches and policy contexts.

[v] Publicly available administrative data from California Department of Education DataQuest, Five Year Cohort Outcomes. https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/Coh5YrOutcome.aspx?agglevel=county&year=2021-22&cds=19

[vi] "The five-year cohort graduation rate is a determination of the high school outcomes for the non-graduates in the corresponding four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) from the preceding year. [. . .] information about student group statuses (i.e., English learner, students with disabilities, socioeconomically disadvantaged, migrant, foster, and homeless statuses) is based on a determination for each student indicating that they belonged to the student group at any point during the four-year cohort outcome period." (Source: California Department of Education DataQuest, Five Year Cohort Outcomes, see Report Glossary). Data include foster youth under the jurisdiction of a tribal court and those who entered care through a voluntary placement agreement; foster youth who experienced emergency removals are only included if the student is in placement for more than 7 days (Source: California Department of Education Foster Youth in California Schools, Foster Youth Definitions). The five-year cohort graduation rate includes regular high school graduates and non-graduate completers, which includes Adult Education High School Diploma Completers, CA High School Diploma Completers, CA High School Proficiency Exam Completers, GED Completers, Special Education Certificate of Completion.

[vii] California Department of Education published the 2021-2022 school year data after we completed our qualitative data collection activities. We include this data for reference and will discuss with grantees, stakeholders, and Advisory Board members in 2023.

[viii] Children Now (2021). 2021 Child welfare policy year in review. Email correspondence.

[ix] Publicly available administrative data from California Department of Education DataQuest, Chronic Absenteeism Rate. https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/page2.asp?level=County&subject=Attendance&submit1=Submit

[x] "Students are determined to be chronically absent if they were eligible to be considered chronically absent at the selected level during the academic year and they were absent for 10% or more of the days they were expected to attend." (Source: California Department of Education DataQuest, Chronic Absenteeism Rate, see Report Glossary)

[xi] The Center for Fair Futures (n.d.). *A case study: The NYC Fair Futures story*. https://www.fairfuturesny.org/about/case-study.

[xii] Indicator data presented for LA and NYC are not directly comparable, as each jurisdiction has different measurement approaches and policy contexts.

xiii New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence. Five-year cohort graduation rate includes GEDs, Local Diplomas, and Regents Diplomas. Students who were in foster care for seven or more days during their high school years were included in the analysis. Related data and additional findings presented in: NYC Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence's (2022) Educational Outcomes of Youth in Foster Care Report.
xiv New York City Department of Education. Graduation Results. https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/academics/graduation-results. Graduation rates for all students in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 include GEDs, Local Diplomas, and Regents Diplomas.