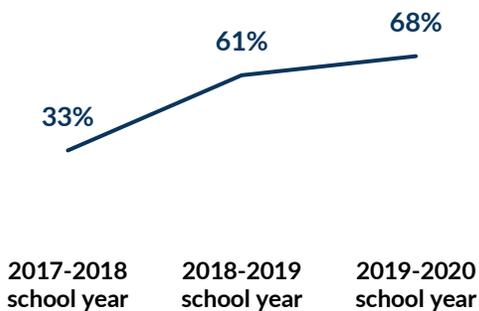# Postsecondary Education

To support foster youths' attainment of postsecondary credentials, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Foster Youth Strategic Initiative supports efforts to increase foster youths' access to postsecondary education and vocational programs, as well as efforts to support their persistence and completion of their education.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many of the systems with which postsecondary students in foster care interact. Offices and campuses have closed to protect the safety of staff, faculty, and students, impacting students' housing options, access to campus-based support programs, and the ways they engage with academic instruction through remote learning. Incoming students have had to navigate changes to application processes and have had to engage with prospective campuses remotely rather than attending on-campus tours and informaton sessions.
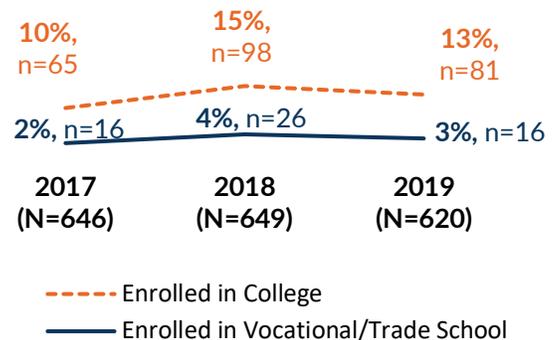
The percentage of high school seniors in foster care who completed the FAFSA more than doubled over three years, exceeding the statewide average for all high school seniors.[i]

Percentage of LA high school seniors in foster care who completed the FAFSA | *Los Angeles, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020*

33%

61%

68%

2017-2018
school year

2018-2019
school year

2019-2020
school year

The number and percentage of youth who aged out of foster care in NYC and were enrolled in postsecondary education decreased in 2019.[ii]

Percentage of NYC foster youth ages 18-20 who aged out of care who were enrolled in college or vocational/trade school | *New York City, 2017, 2018, 2019*

10%,
n=65

15%,
n=98

13%,
n=81

2%, n=16

4%, n=26

3%, n=16

2017
(N=646)

2018
(N=649)

2019
(N=620)

----- Enrolled in College

——— Enrolled in Vocational/Trade School

Accessible postsecondary education options

Before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, grantees and public agencies worked together to support youth applying to and entering postsecondary institutions. For example, in **LA, John Burton's Advocates for Youth (JBAY)** worked with the child welfare and education agencies, school districts, and community-based campus support programs to hold virtual orientations for students attending 26 colleges in fall 2020. **First Star** and **JBAY** collaborated to host a webinar about postsecondary and housing options. In **NYC, First Star** will support their current cohort of students for an additional year as they enter postsecondary programs and navigate the impacts of the pandemic.

Stakeholders in **LA** and **NYC** also revised policies and procedures to address lack of access to key documents and other prerequisites caused by the pandemic. For example, many colleges in both cities created online submission tools and processes for financial aid purposes during office closures. Unrelated to the pandemic, **JBAY** and **OYC** worked with the child welfare agency to revise state-mandated forms to help caseworkers facilitate individual college and workforce preparation sessions with youth. The process and tools built on the work done by grantees' college counseling programs (e.g., **United Friends of the Children**).

The pandemic has exacerbated concerns about the availability of career technical education programs for foster TAY. While some programs have successfully shifted parts of their programs to virtual platforms, many could not transition to virtual because of the hands-on nature of their curriculum.

The uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic has also posed challenges for youth making decisions about postsecondary enrollment. **JBAY** administered a survey in August 2020 among campus support programs serving foster youth in California colleges, and respondents identified multiple factors contributing to student learning loss and/or disenrollment from postsecondary education during the pandemic. These factors included difficulty with online learning, inability to meet basic needs, and experiences of anxiety and isolation.[iii]

Targeted supports in service of postsecondary completion

Grantees and stakeholders provided a myriad of supports to foster TAY attending postsecondary institutions. To alleviate some of the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, grantees provided financial, technological, and programmatic supports to students in need. For example, in **LA, iFoster, JBAY**, and other grantees, as well as private and public agency partners, collaborated to purchase and issue devices to college students in need. **First Place for Youth** worked individually with youth to keep them connected to campus support programs and stay enrolled in college. **Children's Aid** in **NYC** also purchased laptops for the youth they serve, while the Foster Youth Success Alliance offered virtual support meetings, tutoring services, and mental health resources to youth. **CUNY** created an online resource hub at the beginning of the pandemic to help students access resources, including food, employment/Medicaid benefits, and technological equipment.

Because of the pandemic, postsecondary institutions in LA and NYC modified academic and housing programs and policies to support students. **CUNY** changed academic policies related to academic probation, course credits, and pass/fail grading options. In **LA**, schools implemented policies that allowed

> **Spotlight:** Stakeholders prioritize financial aid for foster youth
>
> New legislation in CA, SB 860, enacted in September 2020, requires each county office of education to develop and implement a plan to ensure foster youth complete the FAFSA and requires each county to report the number of students in foster care who complete the FAFSA or California Dream Act Application. This codifies the work that **JBAY** supports through its FAFSA Challenge.

students to drop classes in spring 2020 due to the pandemic. Grantees also partnered with stakeholders to address the financial needs of foster youth in college. **JBAY** partnered with the California College Pathways to create a COVID-19 safety net fund—the Rapid Response Program—and the **Coalition for Responsible Community Development** partnered with the City of LA to distribute more than $1 million in financial assistance to LA residents , including foster TAY, facing financial hardship.

Looking ahead

In both jurisdictions, public agencies, including child welfare and education agencies, and grantees are exploring new and expanded data sharing agreements. Additionally, stakeholders and grantees will expand reporting disaggregated data to better understand the experiences and outcomes for youth by race and ethnicity to drive systemic solutions. For example, this year FAFSA completion rates in **LA** will be tracked across different demographics, including race and ethnicity.

> For more information on progress made toward accomplishing all the Initiative's objectives in 2020, see the Foster Youth Strategic Initiative 2020 Evaluation Report.

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[i] John Burton Advocates for Youth (2019). Join the California Foster Youth FAFSA Challenge. https://www.jbaforyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Join-the-California-Foster-Youth-FAFSA-Challenge-Webinar-Slides-1.pdf; John Burton Advocates for Youth (2020). In historic first, foster youth outpace peers in college aid applications. https://www.jbaforyouth.org/fafsa-pr/

[ii] Among other data sources, this report uses Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) data which is youth- or caseworker-reported and not verified, along with more reliable administrative data. These data should be interpreted with caution. Sources: New York City Administration for Children's Services. (2020). Report on Youth in Foster Care, 2019. https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2019/ReportOnYouthInFC2019.pdf; New York City Administration for Children's Services. (2018). Report on Youth in Foster Care. https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2018/ReportOnYouthInFC2018.pdf; & New York City Administration for Children's Services. (2017). Report on Youth in Foster Care. https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2017/YouthInFosterCare2017.pdf

[iii] Source: John Burton Advocates for Youth (2020, September 10). Memorandum: Findings from campus survey on technology, enrollment, funding, and retention. Email correspondence.