



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

SUPPORT STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE

Approximately 6,000 New York City students are in foster care each year. Students in foster care are disproportionately Black and come from NYC's poorest communities. They are among the most likely to repeat a grade, be chronically absent, or leave high school without a diploma—and were impacted particularly hard by the closure of schools. Yet **the FY 2022 Executive Budget does not include any additional targeted support for students in foster care. The final budget should include:**

- » **\$5 million for bus service for students in foster care to increase school stability;** and
- » **\$1.5 million to establish a small Department of Education (DOE) office focused on supporting students in foster care.**

ENSURE BUS SERVICE FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE (\$5M)

SCHOOL INSTABILITY When students are removed from their homes and families and placed into foster care, school is often the only source of stability in their lives. Unfortunately, during the 2019-2020 school year, nearly **one out of five NYC students had to change schools upon their initial placement in foster care.**

THE NEED FOR TRANSPORTATION Federal law requires the DOE and the Administration for Children's Services to create a plan to provide, arrange, and fund transportation so that students can remain in their original school when they enter foster care or change foster homes, unless it is in their best interests to transfer to a new school. However, the City does not guarantee bus service or comparable transportation to students in foster care. **The City only provides bus service to students in foster care who require special education transportation and those who may be easily added to existing routes.** As a result, students who cannot travel on their own are forced to transfer schools.

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON STUDENTS Having to transfer schools mid-year means that students must adjust to unfamiliar peers, teachers, routines, and curriculum, while experiencing the trauma of being separated from their parents, and often from their siblings and communities as well. Research shows that students who change schools frequently have lower test scores, earn fewer credits, are more likely to be retained, and are less likely to complete high school than students whose school placements are stable. Without guaranteed transportation, foster care agencies have had difficulty finding homes for some children and have had to move some children from one home to another.



School Stability
Student remains with familiar faces during the traumatizing separation from family and home.

Improved Educational Outcomes

The FY 2022 budget should include \$5 million for bus services for students in foster care. As students return to in-person school following the disruption of the pandemic, the City must ensure they can get to their original schools. No student in foster care should be forced to change schools due to lack of transportation!

FUND A DOE OFFICE FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE (\$1.5M)

According to the most recent data available, in New York City:

- » Only 42.2% of students in foster care graduated on time in 2020, the lowest graduation rate of any student group and 36.6 percentage points lower than the rate for students not in foster care.
- » More than half of students in foster care have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).
- » Only 16% of 3rd–8th grade students in foster care score proficiently in reading.
- » The average student in foster care misses the equivalent of one-and-a-half months of school each year, and one out of every ten students in foster care has an attendance rate of less than 50%.

The DOE does not have a senior-level leader or a single staff member at any level focused solely on students in foster care. As a result, the DOE has not developed and implemented needed policies to assist students in foster care.

In March 2018, the City's Interagency Foster Care Task Force recommended that the DOE establish an office to focus on students in foster care. Given the laws and policies that apply to students in foster care and the barriers they face, we urge the City to move forward with this recommendation and hire a central manager and policy advisor to work across agencies to develop policies that better serve students in foster care. The central staff would also oversee a team of borough-based regional managers who can:

- » Train and support school staff on the needs and rights of students in foster care and their families.
- » Communicate and monitor implementation of policies related to students in foster care—for example, ensuring parents' rights to participate in their children's education are protected, and that students' needs are met when their parents can't be involved.
- » Serve as a point person for schools, families, and child welfare professionals with questions about students in foster care.
- » Track and improve educational outcomes for students in foster care.

As students in foster care return to school following the pandemic, the DOE should have staff looking out for them and working to get them back on track. We recommend that the FY 2022 budget include \$1.5 million to establish a small DOE office focused on students in foster care. For more details, [see our recent report](#).

ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NEW YORK

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