



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

News Release

For Immediate Release

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New Analysis Shows New Yorkers Will Lose Chance for High School Diploma Unless State Takes Action

June 15, 2020 (NEW YORK CITY) — Today, Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) released a new [policy brief](#) calling on the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to ensure that students aging out of school this month can return to high school next year so they do not lose their chance to earn a diploma. With the school year ending in just two weeks, NYSED must take action immediately to ensure that 21-year-old students who have struggled to access remote learning do not have their lives thrown entirely off course by the pandemic.

Students in New York State have the right to continue working towards a high school diploma until the end of the school year in which they turn 21. While more than 95% of students who graduate do so in four years, a small subset of students need five, six, or even seven years to complete the requirements for a diploma. Students who need more time to graduate are disproportionately students of color. In fact, Black students who graduate high school in New York State are seven times as likely as White students to need six years to do so, and Latinx graduates are 7.3 times as likely as their White peers to finish in their sixth year of high school.

Using data obtained from NYSED pursuant to a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request, the policy brief shows that there are approximately 3,700 students in New York State who will age out of school this year. Many of these students will graduate later this month, but those who have been unable to complete their coursework—a number estimated to be between 1,000 and 2,500 students statewide—will lose their chance to earn a diploma. Some of these students did not have access to needed technology for remote learning; others had to care for younger siblings or work to support their families when their parents abruptly lost their jobs.

The students aging out in June 2020 are disproportionately students of color, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners:

- Approximately three-quarters (74%) of students aging out are Black or Latinx, though Black and Latinx students comprise less than 45% of the total high school population in New York State;
- Almost half (47%) of all students aging out have disabilities; and
- One in three students aging out is learning English as a new language.

“The young people aging out of school in two weeks are the same student populations who have been hardest hit by the pandemic itself and by the challenges of online learning,” said Ashley Grant, a Supervising Staff Attorney at Advocates for Children of New York and Coordinator of the statewide Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma. “COVID has already devastated Black and Latinx communities. It shouldn’t take away students’ chance to earn a high school diploma too.”

The brief calls on the New York State Education Department to issue guidance directing districts to allow all students aging out of school without a diploma to return to high school next year—a recommendation echoed by more than 100 organizations in a recent [letter](#). Unless the State takes action, these young adults will be forced to leave school and enter a labor market in which nearly one in five Americans without a high school degree is unemployed.

“Students who need a sixth or seventh year to graduate have struggled in the past, overcome obstacles, and want to finish high school because they know how important a diploma is for their future,” said Deanna Wallace, who graduated from Franklin K. Lane High School in Brooklyn at age 19 and now mentors middle and high schoolers who are over-age for their grade level. “After all their years of hard work, the State has two weeks to act to keep their dream alive.”

The new brief is available at:

https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/on_page/extended_eligibility_brief.pdf

About Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)

Since 1971, Advocates for Children of New York has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds who are at greatest risk for failure or discrimination in school because of their poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English Language Learner status, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. AFC uses four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents, communities, and educators and other professionals to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and compel needed reform.