



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

News Release

For immediate release

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Report Urges Next Administration to Improve Educational Opportunities for Court-Involved Youth

November 17, 2025 (NEW YORK CITY) — Today, ahead of this afternoon's City Council hearing on educational access in NYC's juvenile detention centers, Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) released a new report, [*Reconnecting to Opportunity: Advancing Educational Equity for Court-Involved Students*](#). The report offers a review of data issued by New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) and the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) on educational programming for young people in Passages Academy, the school serving young people in juvenile detention or placement, during the 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years and makes key recommendations for how the incoming Mayoral administration can better support these students.

In total, Passages Academy served 810 young people between the ages of 13 and 20 at some point during the 2023–24 school year and 1,040 students over the course of 2024–25. The majority of students served by Passages belong to demographic groups that have historically faced barriers to education. For example, more than 60% are Black, though Black students comprise only about a quarter of overall NYCPS enrollment; around half have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs); and in 2023–24 nearly a third were students in the foster system, a group of students who make up less than one percent of the overall student population in New York City.

Other key takeaways from our analysis of the data include:

- Youth in juvenile detention or placement in 2023–24 and 2024–25 were almost twice as likely as their peers to have learning disabilities and *more than 17 times* as likely to be labeled as students with emotional disabilities.
- At least half of students in juvenile detention or placement scored at the fifth percentile or below in reading upon entering Passages in 2023–24, meaning they performed *worse than 95% of their grade-level peers*; in 2024–25, at least half of students were reading at the twelfth percentile or below upon enrollment.
- One in six students with disabilities did not receive their *legally required* Special Education Plan within 30 school days of enrolling at Passages.
- Over half of students who transferred to an NYCPS school or high school equivalency program after being discharged from detention or placement missed more days of school than they attended after transitioning back to the community.

“The findings confirm what families and advocates have long known—that the City is failing to meet the needs of students with behavioral and mental health challenges long before they become involved with the court system,” said Maria Odom, Executive Director at AFC. “The City should invest in expansion of school-based mental health clinics, hire behavioral specialists, and create more school programs designed to serve students with the most intensive behavioral challenges. We know that these essential services can help prevent young people with behavioral and mental health challenges from being funneled into the juvenile or criminal legal system in the first place.”

Based on our work with court-involved students and their families, as well as our analysis of the available data, the report calls on the City to take several critical steps to better support students—before they enter detention or placement, while enrolled in Passages Academy, and as they return home:

- **Provide students with critical behavioral and mental health services and reading intervention in their school communities with the added goal of preventing future contact with the juvenile or criminal legal systems, including by:**
 - Ensuring every school has a school-based mental health clinic or a partnership with a community-based mental health provider.
 - Hiring at least one behavioral specialist per district.
 - Creating more therapeutic school options and specialized programming within NYCPS for young people with behavioral or emotional challenges and expanding the number of schools and grade levels served by PATH, an existing specialized program that provides intensive social, emotional, and behavioral support for students with disabilities.
 - Ensuring all middle and high school students struggling with reading receive one-on-one or small group intensive support.
- **Ensure students are able to regularly attend school during their time in detention or placement and receive the special education services or English as a New Language instruction they need.** For example, the City should hire additional school psychologists, related service providers, and special education personnel to ensure students with disabilities receive timely special education plans, evaluations, and services.
- **Improve the transition process for students coming out of detention or placement to afford students access to appropriate educational programs and support their reengagement in school upon their return to the community.** To this end, the City should increase the number of transition specialists in secure detention facilities and train staff in NYCPS Family Welcome Centers—which are responsible for matching students with schools—on the unique needs of court-involved youth and the full range of educational options available.

“Around half of students in detention and placement have disabilities, and attendance data show that too many young people do not return to school after coming home,” said Rohini Singh, Director of AFC’s School Justice Project. “The City needs to increase the number of school psychologists and service providers to identify and meet students’ special education needs while they are in secure facilities and provide ongoing support before and after students return home to ensure they reenroll in school and get the instruction and services they need to succeed.”

The report is available at: <https://advocatesforchildren.org/policy-resource/reconnecting-to-opportunity/>

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.