



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

News Release

For immediate release

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New Data Drive Home the Need to Ensure Timely Transportation for Students in the Foster System

June 22, 2026 (NEW YORK CITY) — Today, Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) released a new brief highlighting key educational indicators for the 6,650 New York City students who spent time in foster care during the 2024–25 school year. The data, which were obtained from New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) by AFC, show stark disparities between students in the foster system and their peers and illustrate the critical importance of school stability for this population.

Some key findings from the brief include:

- 55% of students in foster care were chronically absent last year, missing at least one in every ten school days. More than one in nine had an attendance rate below 50%, meaning they *missed more days of school than they attended*.
- More than one in five students in the foster system changed schools mid-year, a transfer rate more than triple that of students not in foster care.
- The more times a student transfers schools, the less likely they are to score proficient on the state English Language Arts (ELA) and math exams, and the greater the odds they receive the lowest score on the exam. Overall, only one in three 3rd–8th graders in foster care scored proficient in each tested subject in 2025.
- Students in the foster system drop out of high school at more than triple the rate of their peers not in foster care, while only 40% graduate on time. Outcomes are particularly bleak for students in foster care who change schools while in grades 9–12; of students in the class of 2025 who transferred schools one or more times, only 28% earned a diploma in four years.

While students in the foster system have complex educational needs and face a multitude of barriers that lead to these grim outcomes, one contributing factor is the City's longstanding failure to provide timely transportation to students when they enter foster care or change foster homes. Under both state and federal law, the City is required to provide transportation to students in foster care so they not have to switch schools while simultaneously dealing with the trauma and uncertainty of being separated from their home and family. In practice, however, it can take weeks or even months for NYCPS to arrange bus service. In the interim, the City offers a prepaid rideshare option, but this alternative only kicks in after students have been waiting for a bus for at least ten school days — at which point they may have missed two weeks of instruction. And even

then, rideshare is not always feasible, as it requires an adult to accompany the student, something that is often impossible for foster parents who have jobs or other children attending schools in different neighborhoods.

“School can be a safe haven for students in foster care at a moment of enormous stress and instability in their lives — but only if they have a way to get there,” said Maria Odom, AFC’s Executive Director. “Busing might appear to be a minor logistical matter, but for students in the foster system, it’s a lifeline.”

More than [two dozen organizations](#), including AFC, are calling on Mayor Mamdani and the City Council to build on the recent efforts of NYCPS’ Foster Care Office to ensure students in the foster system can access a quality education by investing \$3 million in the FY 2027 budget to provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting yellow bus service. The City could, for example, use mini-vans owned by current school bus companies for students in foster care; expand the use of existing Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) or city-owned vehicles; or contract with transportation providers that use vetted drivers and do not require chaperones.

“It’s painful to watch children miss weeks of class, be forced to leave familiar teachers and friends behind, or endure unnecessary changes in foster care placements simply because they have no way to get to school from their foster home,” said Erika Palmer, Director of AFC’s Project Achieve, which focuses on the educational needs of students in the foster system. “The City has a responsibility to ensure that children in its custody have uninterrupted access to school.”

The new brief is available at <https://advocatesforchildren.org/policy-resource/foster-system-educational-indicators-2025>.

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.