



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS FOR STUDENTS IN THE FOSTER SYSTEM, 2024–25

This brief, which is based on data obtained from New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) by Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), updates key educational indicators from AFC's January 2023 report [Building on Potential: Next Steps to Improve Educational Outcomes for Students in Foster Care](#).

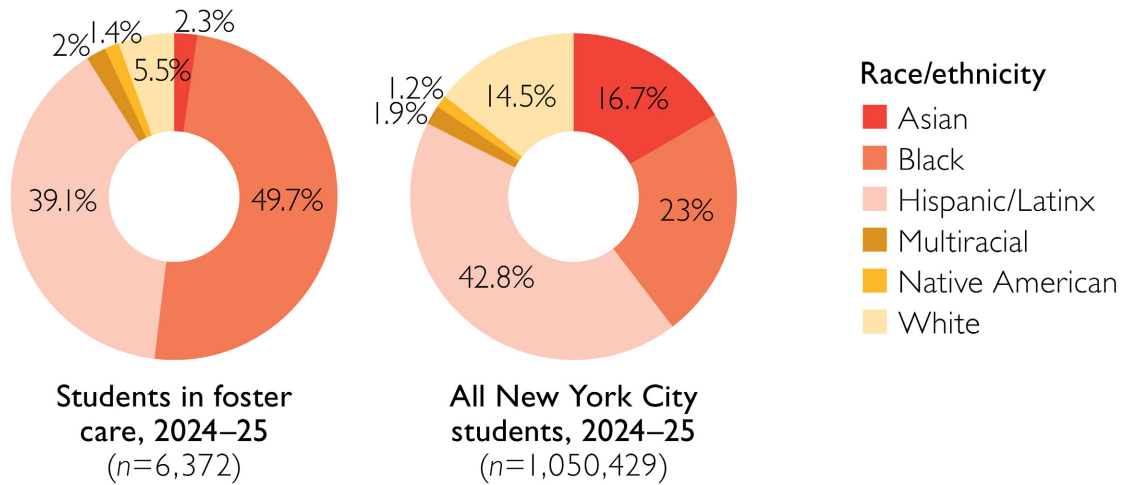
KEY INDICATORS

- » Half of all students in the foster system* have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), **more than double the Citywide special education classification rate**.
- » **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 were absent from school more often than they attended.
- » **More than one in five students in the foster system changed schools mid-year**, a transfer rate 3.5 times that of students not in foster care.
- » Only one in three 3rd–8th graders in foster care scored proficient on the 2025 New York State English Language Arts and math exams—and **students in foster care who transferred schools mid-year performed worse than those who maintained school stability**.
- » **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 in four years. 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**.

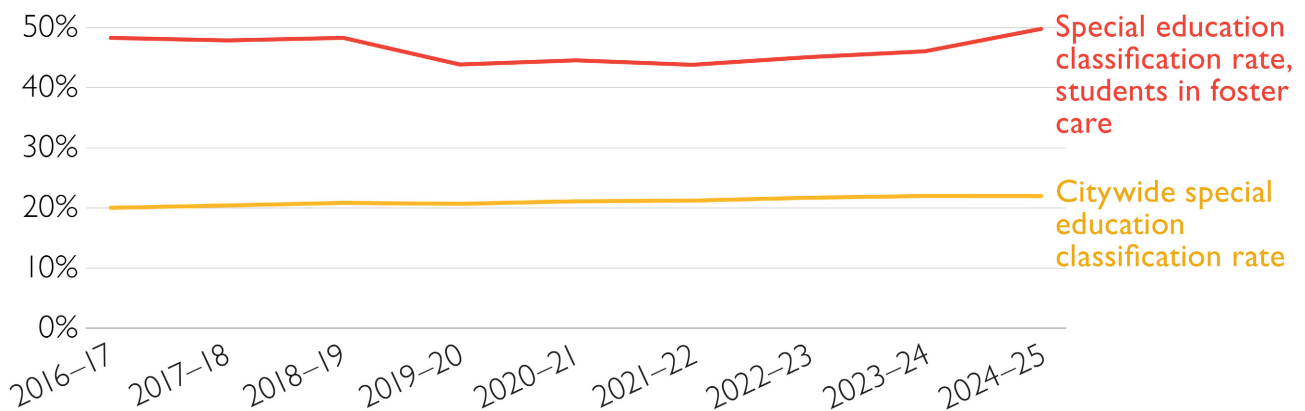
* Students in the foster system are defined as those who were actively enrolled in New York City Public Schools (inclusive of City charter schools) and spent time in foster care at any point, for any length of time, in a given school year. While students attending charter schools were excluded from the “not in foster care” population counts used throughout this brief due to differences in NYCPS business reporting rules, the small number of students in foster care and the fact that they attend charter schools at lower rates than their peers make it a fair (albeit imperfect) comparison group for purposes of assessing overall trends.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

As described in AFC's 2023 report, students in the foster system are not representative of the overall public school population in New York City; they are disproportionately Black, from low-income communities, and identified as needing special education services. **In 2024–25, approximately half of students in foster care were Black, though Black students comprised less than a quarter of overall enrollment.**[†]



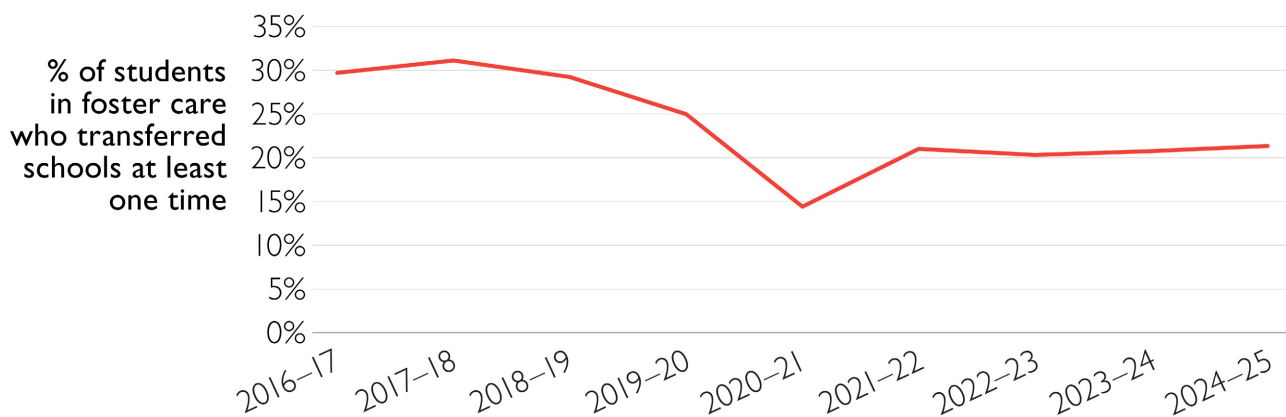
Of the 6,650 students who spent time in foster care last year, **half (49.8%) had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), more than double the Citywide special education classification rate.** This represents the continuation of a longstanding trend; in each of the last nine school years, between 44 and 50 percent of students in foster care had IEPs, while the Citywide classification rate ranged from 20 to 22 percent.



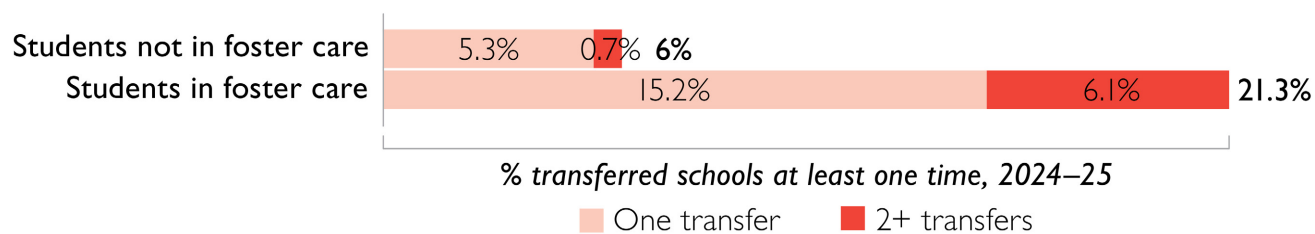
[†] Students whose race/ethnicity was unknown or missing were excluded when calculating percentages. Citywide data on student race/ethnicity and disability status come from the NYCPS [Demographic Snapshot](#) and include charter schools. While data on students in foster care are cumulative for the entire school year, student counts in the Demographic Snapshot reflect the October 31 audited register.

SCHOOL TRANSFERS

School can serve as a critical source of stability when a child is removed from their home and placed into foster care, **yet during each of the last four school years, more than one in five students in the foster system changed schools mid-year.** While such transfer rates are lower than those seen prior to the pandemic, when they were beginning to trend downward, the City has made no further progress towards improving rates of school stability for students in foster care since the return to in-person instruction in 2021–22.

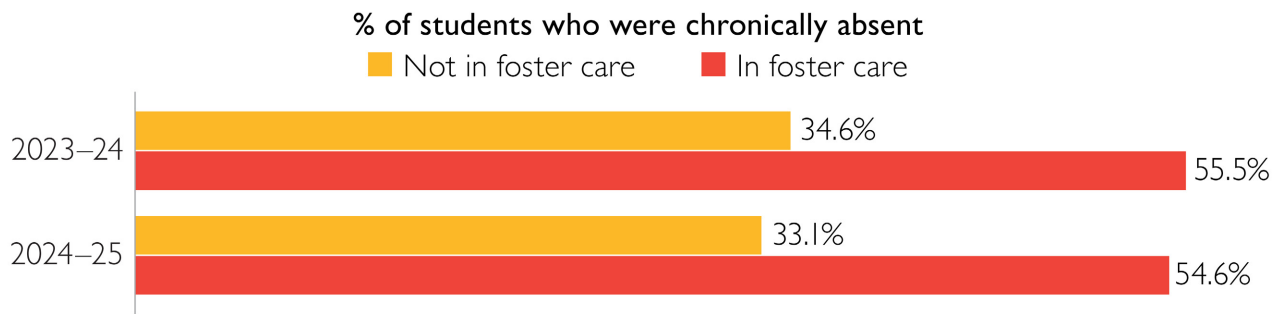


In 2024–25, the mid-year transfer rate for students in foster care (21.3%) was 3.5 times that of their peers not in foster care. Moreover, students in the foster system are dramatically more likely to change schools *multiple times* within a single school year: 6.1% of students in foster care transferred schools two or more times in 2024–25, something that was true for less than one percent of students not in foster care.



ATTENDANCE & CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

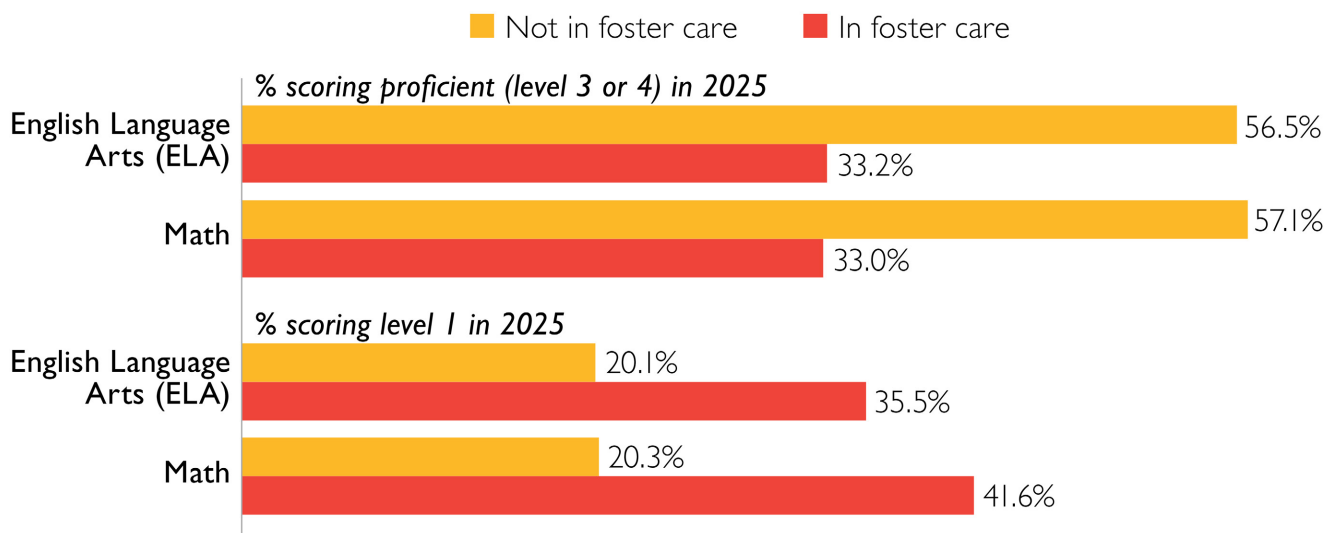
Last year, students in the foster system had an overall attendance rate of 80.8%, nine percentage points lower than the attendance rate of their peers not in foster care (89.9%). **Well over half of students in foster care (54.6%) were chronically absent** in 2024–25, meaning they missed *at least one in every ten school days*—representing a combined 65,400 days of lost instructional time, at minimum. While this rate represented a slight improvement over the prior school year, when 55.5% of students in the foster system were chronically absent, it was nevertheless twenty percentage points higher than the rate of chronic absenteeism for students not in foster care.



Moreover, data from the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) show that, of students ages 5–20 who were in foster care for at least an entire month of the 2024–25 school year, many were severely chronically absent: **more than one in nine (11.8%) had an attendance rate below 50%, meaning they missed more days of school than they attended.**[‡]

READING & MATH PROFICIENCY

Only one in three 3rd–8th graders in foster care scored proficient on the 2025 New York State English Language Arts (ELA) and math exams, more than 20 percentage points lower than the proficiency rate of their peers not in foster care in both subjects. A larger proportion of students in the foster system received the lowest possible score on each exam than reached proficiency: 35.5% of 3rd–8th graders in foster care scored level 1 in ELA and 41.6% received this score on the math exam. In other words, the majority of those who did not reach proficiency were not on the cusp of passing; they were performing *significantly* below grade level.

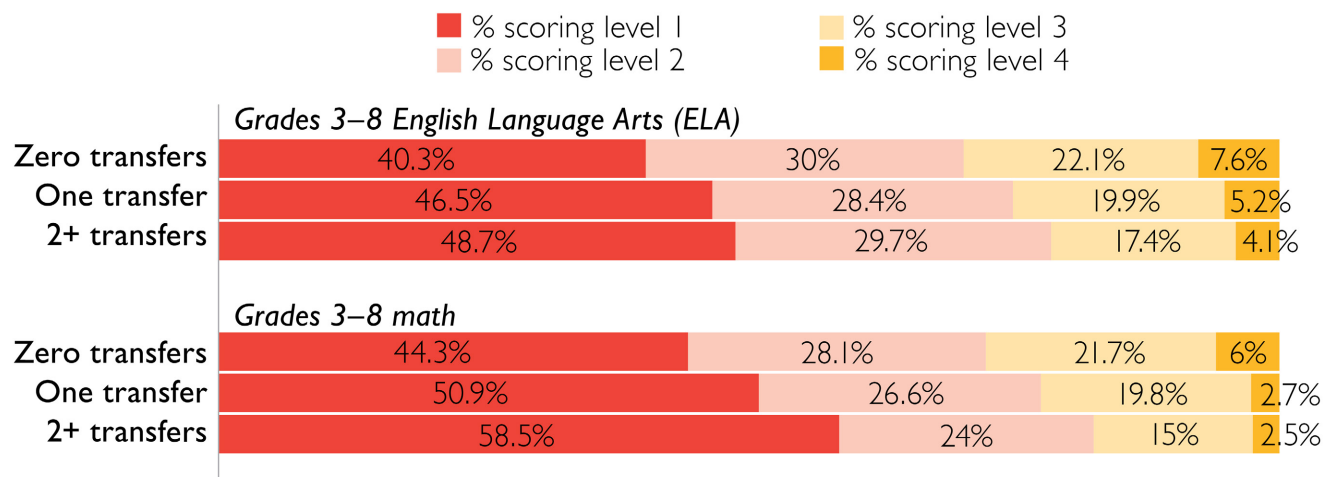


Academic outcomes, as measured by the grades 3–8 state tests, are *especially* dismal for students in foster care who change schools mid-year. Importantly, **reading and math proficiency rates**

[‡] Calculated using data from ACS’ [Local Law 142 report](#) for 2024–25. Only includes students for whom attendance data are available (n=4,792 students in foster care).

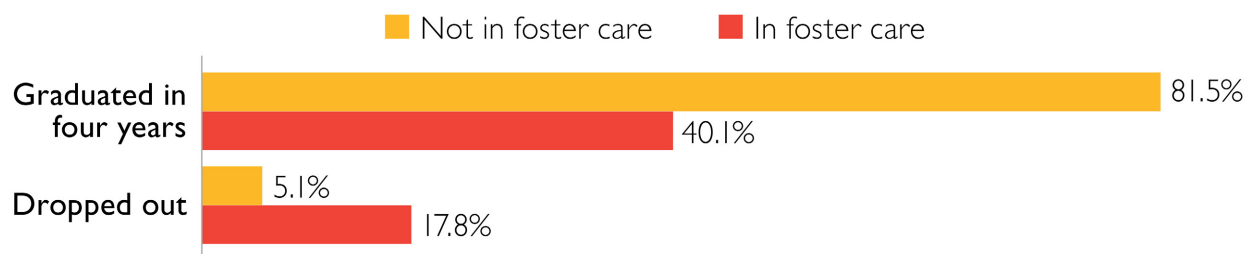


decline—and the percentage of students scoring level I grows in tandem—the more times a student transfers. For example, combining results from the last three school years,[§] the proportion of students in foster care who were proficient in math fell from 27.7% for those who remained at the same school for the duration of the year in which they were tested, to 22.5% for those who changed schools one time, to just 17.5% for those with two or more transfers. Likewise, the proportion scoring level I in math rose from 44.3% (zero transfers) to 50.9% (one transfer) to 58.5% (two or more transfers).



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION OUTCOMES

In 2025, the four-year August graduation rate for students who spent time in the foster system while in high school was just 40.1%, less than half that of their peers who were not in foster care.** More than one in six students in the foster system dropped out of high school last year, more than triple the rate at which students not in foster care left school without earning a diploma.

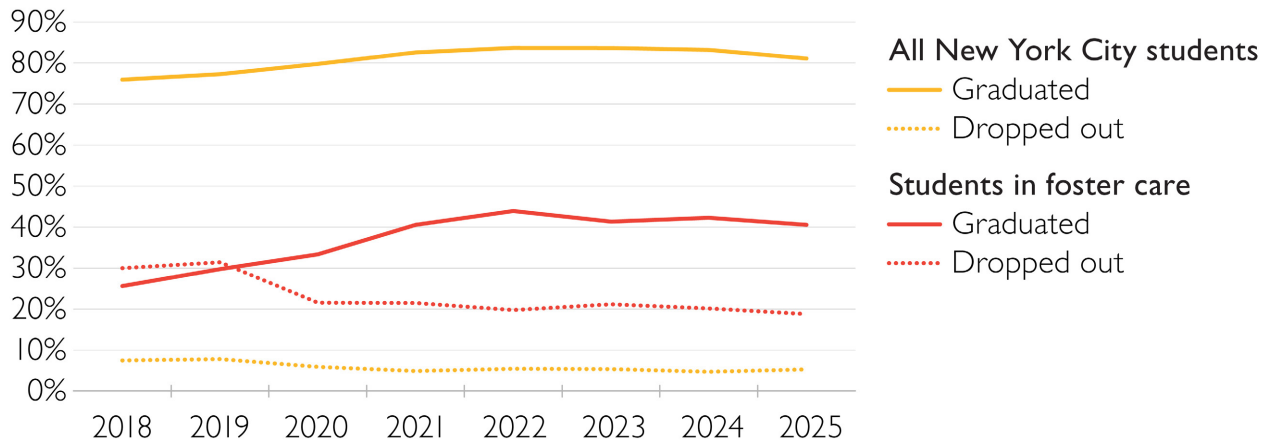


[§] Given the relatively small number of tested students in each category in any given year, the chart combines results from the 2023, 2024, and 2025 test administrations. For ELA, n=5,299 students in foster care, 737 of whom transferred once and 195 of whom transferred two or more times; for math, n=5,028 students, of whom 711 transferred once and 200 transferred two or more times.

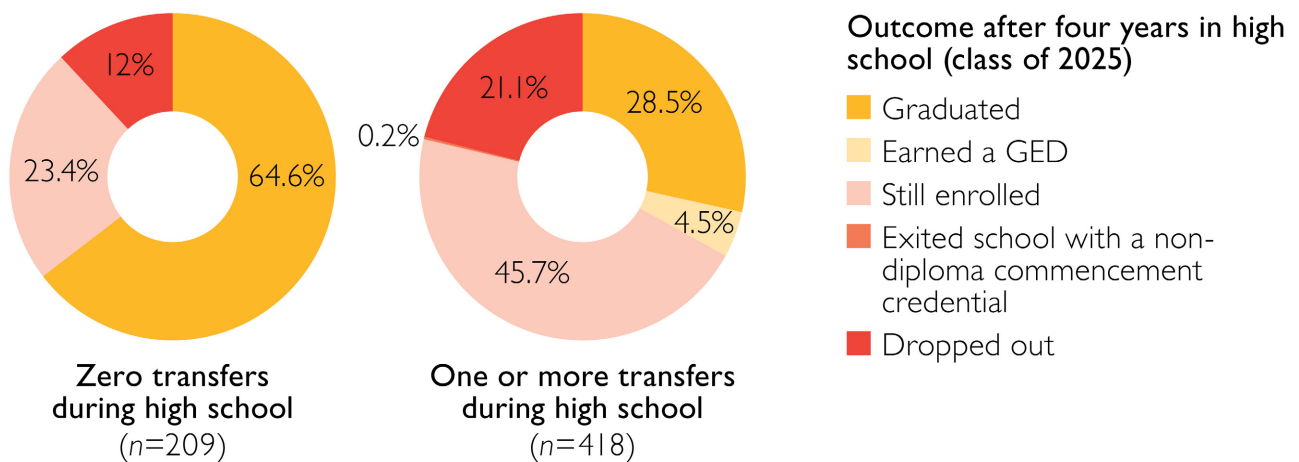
** These rates differ slightly from those publicly reported by NYCPS, as our data include students who were in foster care at any point while in high school as well as students attending charter schools (n=634 students in the cohort). The historical data for both students in foster care and all New York City students shown on the following page come from NYCPS' public [report](#) and reflect outcomes for a smaller cohort of students (e.g., for the class of 2025, n=565 students in foster care).



While the graduation rate for students in foster care has fallen slightly in recent years, mirroring Citywide trends, it remains significantly higher than prior to the pandemic, when less than a third of students in the foster system graduated in four years. Moreover, the rate at which students in foster care dropped out of high school *also* declined last year, even as the Citywide dropout rate rose by roughly half a percentage point from 2024 to 2025.



Outcomes are especially bleak for students who do not attend the same school for all four years of high school. Last year, **only 28.5% of students in foster care who transferred high schools earned a diploma in four years, while more than one in five such students in the class of 2025 dropped out.**^{††} By comparison, students in foster care who did *not* change schools while in grades 9–12 had a graduation rate of 64.6%. In other words, while students in the foster system who attend the same school for the duration of their high school career are still significantly less likely to graduate than students not in foster care, they have better odds of post-secondary success than their peers in foster care who lack a stable high school placement.



^{††} Outcome data are missing for seven of the 425 students in foster care in the class of 2025 who transferred schools; these students were excluded from the denominator when calculating percentages.