



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

## News Release

### For Immediate Release

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## Disparities in Graduation Rates Show the Need to Rethink Graduation Requirements

**January 16, 2020 (NEW YORK CITY)** — Today, Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), issued the following statement in response to the New York State Education Department (NYSED)'s release of high school graduation rates for the 2015 cohort:

While we are pleased that graduation rates continue to trend in the right direction, the data released today illustrate troubling and persistent opportunity gaps across New York State. The drop-out rate for English Language Learners (ELLs) is more than four times the Statewide average: 27% of New York State's ELLs—as well as more than one in four ELLs in New York City—leave high school without earning a diploma, compared to 6% of students overall. The Statewide drop-out rates for students experiencing homelessness (17%) and students in foster care (18%) are similarly disconcerting, while four-year graduation rates for students with disabilities trail those of their general education peers by more than 25 percentage points Statewide and by a full 30 percentage points in New York City.

As the State reexamines graduation requirements over the next two years, it will be critical that the Board of Regents and NYSED keep these opportunity gaps a central focus. The increase in the number of students graduating via alternative pathways to a diploma—an increase largely attributable to greater use of the Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) Credential and the Language Other than English (LOTE) pathway—suggests there is a hunger for multiple, accessible pathways that allow students to demonstrate their skills, knowledge, and readiness for life after high school without being forced to pass multiple high-stakes exit exams.

### **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.