

Trends in New York City Education Outcomes

POLICY BRIEF NO. 4

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SUMMARY

This brief focuses on trends among students in New York City's (NYC) public schools to provide context for the efforts made to increase the educational advancement of NYC transition age youth in foster care. The high school graduation rate overall increased steadily over the past decade in NYC, consistent with NY State, and national trends. Additional markers of educational progress such as rates of attendance, dropping out, and college enrollment demonstrate significant improvements. Though NYC public school students have made significant progress overall, racial disparities remain.

The method used to calculate high school graduation rates for the general population is not applicable to foster youth, who often stay in foster care for short periods. As a result, NYC developed several alternate measures to track educational performance for this group over the past several years. Spurred in part by federal legislation, New York City initiated several new educational policies and services that impact foster youth. This brief touches on postsecondary outcomes such as college persistence and job readiness, which could be an additional area to explore in future briefs.

KEY METRICS

Four-year high school graduation rate | College enrollment | College persistence

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

NYC Administration for Children's Services Office of Education Support & Policy Planning | NYC Department of Education | Community-based organizations and other providers of education services for vulnerable youth

The importance of educational advancement

As the nation transitions to a knowledge-based economy, educational advancement becomes that much more important for the success of youth transitioning to adulthood. For transition age youth in foster care, educational attainment offers the chance to balance out challenges many foster youth face in garnering support from other sources, such as family members, friends, and savings accounts. As with other youth, a high school diploma and college attainment predict greater earnings for youth formerly in foster care.² These earnings gains, in turn, may help to end intergenerational cycles of child welfare involvement, as leaving poverty helps prevent child maltreatment when youth leaving foster start their own families and may be accentuated among youth of color.³

¹ Many thanks to Mike Jolley for his contributions to this brief.

² Okpych, N. J., Courtney, M. E. (2014). Does education pay for youth formerly in foster care? Comparison of employment outcomes with a national sample. *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 43, Pages 18-28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2014.04.013>.

³ Barth, R. P., Wildfire, J., & Green, R. L. (2006). Placement into foster care and the interplay of urbanicity, child behavior problems, and poverty. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 76(3), 358-366. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.76.3.358>; Hines, A. M., Lemon, K., Wyatt, P., Merdinger, J. (2004). Factors related to the disproportionate involvement of children of color in the child welfare system: a review and emerging

Measuring educational advancement

New York State and City use the high school graduation rate as a key barometer of secondary educational progress for youth. Other measures of academic performance include tests of basic skills, attendance rates, and credit accumulation. The high school graduation rate is especially useful, as the methodology used by New York is consistent with the methodology used in other states and by the federal government.⁴ Student graduation cohorts are clearly defined for the purpose of tracking and the four-year graduation rate is widely emphasized as an essential measure of success by local, state, and federal education agencies.⁵

Specifically, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) defines the four-year high school graduation rate as “the percentage of cohort members who earned a local or Regents diploma by August 31 four years after entering grade 9.”⁶ Five-year and six-year graduation rates are also tracked but the four-year time frame is emphasized heavily in school funding and accountability systems and frequently cited in the education literature and media.⁷ Other measures used by key stakeholders are associated with high school graduation such as credit accumulation, attendance, and dropout rates.

NYC, NY State, and national trends in high school graduation rates

Although still below the state and national averages, the NYC graduation rate has trended upward since the mid-2000s (see Figure 1). Most recently, in 2017, a record high of 74.3 percent of NYC’s public school students graduated with a Regents diploma or Advanced Regents diploma by August after their fourth year in high school, an increase from 60.7 percent in 2008.⁸ In addition to the overall graduation rate, the NYC DOE tracks and reports on the graduation rate for students with disabilities, current and former English language learners, and breaks down the rates by race/ethnicity. The rate for Black NYC public high school students who graduated as of June after four years of instruction increased from 44.5 percent in 2005 to 66.5 percent in 2017 and increased from 41.4 percent to 64.7 percent for Latinx students.⁹ Though disparities between Black, Latinx, and their White and Asian peers remain, the graduation rate for Black and Latinx students demonstrates a positive trend.

Though graduation rates improved, this finding comes with a caveat. College readiness levels, defined as a “student who does not require remediation in either math or reading before taking a college level course” and operationalized through standardized test scores, fall below the high school graduation rate in

themes, *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 26, Issue 6, Pages 507-527, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2004.01.007>.

⁴ Recently, new questions have been raised about the states’ graduation requirements as a result of new language in the Every Student Succeeds Act. See, for example, the August 25, 2017 edition of Education Week: <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/08/30/graduation-rate-rule-puts-some-states-in-a.html>

⁵ The national and state public high school graduation rates come from the National Center for Education Statistics, located within the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences.

⁶ NYSED Glossary of Terms: <https://data.nysed.gov/glossary.php?report=accountability>

⁷ For example, see NYSED guidance regarding the definition of school Adequate Yearly Progress: <https://data.nysed.gov/glossary.php?report=accountability>

⁸ Data are from the Keeping Track Database: <http://data.cccnewyork.org/data/map/121/graduation-rate#121/a/5/205/25/a>

⁹ We use the June graduation data here as race and ethnicity breakdowns are only available for that date. The overall rate for NYC students who graduated as of June after four years of instruction increased from 50.7 percent in 2005 to 71.1 percent in 2017, from 67.6 percent to 81.2 percent for White students, and from 68.9 percent to 85.0 percent for Asian students. See Keeping Track Database: <http://data.cccnewyork.org/data/map/121/graduation-rate#121/a/5/205/25/a>

NYC.¹⁰ For NYC DOE graduates, the percentage of college-ready students increased from 42 percent in 2011 to 47 percent in 2014. Some schools which serve areas where many children enter foster care have high graduation rates and low college readiness scores.¹¹ There is limited information on the impact of college readiness on college completion and the NYC DOE’s college readiness index has caused debate.

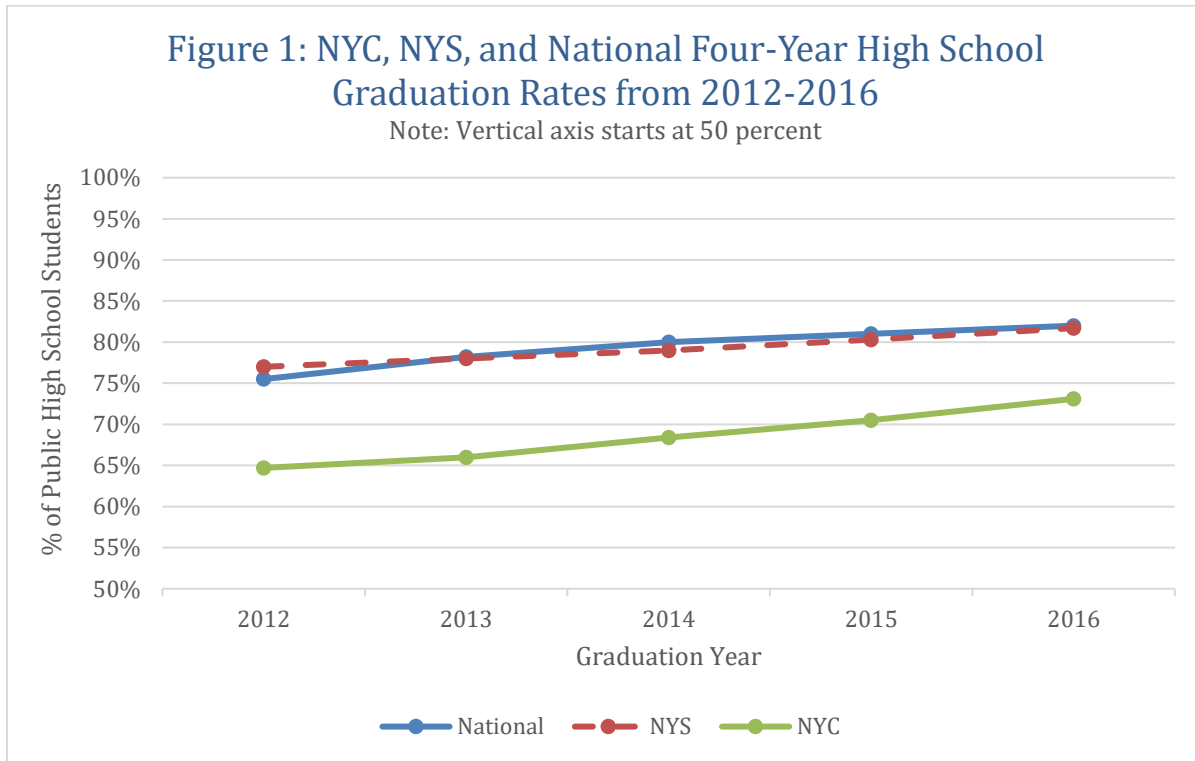


Figure 1: Four-year high school graduation rates (by August of their fourth year) in NYC, NY State, and nationally from 2012 to 2016.^{12 13 14}

NYC has also seen improvements in attendance and dropout rates from 2008 to 2017 (see Figure 2). The rate of NYC public high school students who had dropped out as of June after four years of instruction decreased from 13 percent in 2008 to 8 percent in 2017. Likewise, average school year attendance rate for NYC high school students increased from 83 percent in 2008 to 86 percent in 2014. This three percent improvement translates into an extra school week of instruction per year per student.

¹⁰ See https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/diploma-disparities-high-school-graduation-rates-in-new-york-city/#_edn5; See “The State of College Readiness and Degree Completion in New York City”: <http://www.graduatency.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GNYC-Report-Brief-2.pdf>

¹¹ See <https://nypost.com/2017/02/05/high-graduation-rates-no-guarantee-kids-are-ready-for-college> last accessed August 31, 2018.

¹² For National rates: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_coi.asp

¹³ For NYS rates: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_219.46.asp

¹⁴ For NYC rates: https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/diploma-disparities-high-school-graduation-rates-in-new-york-city/#_edn2

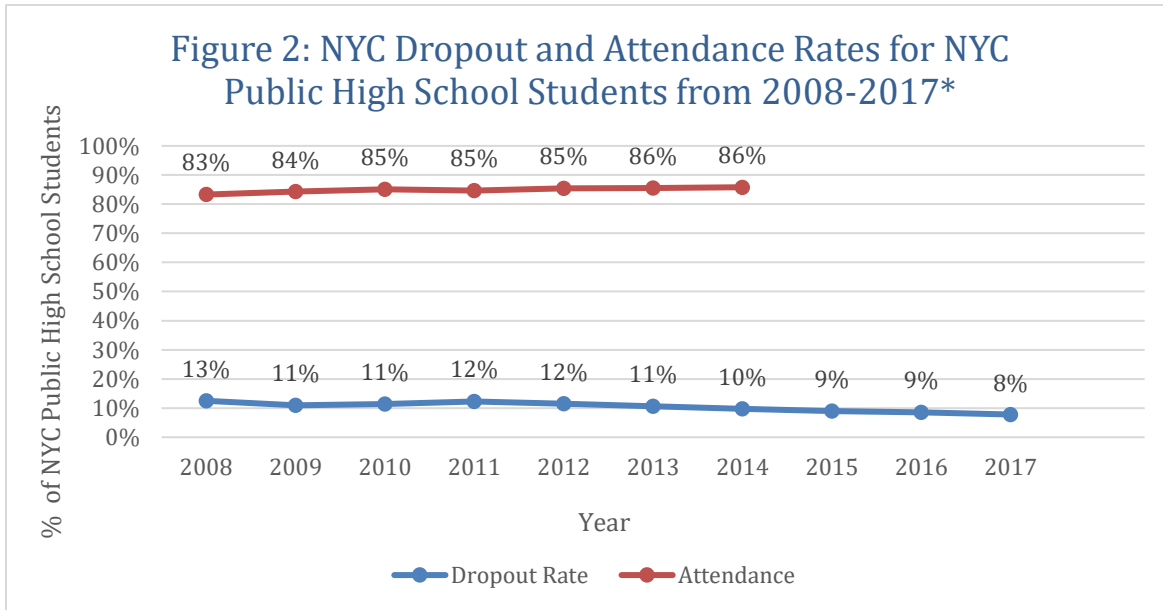


Figure 2: NYC public high school students who had dropped out as of June after four years of instruction and average school-year attendance rates.¹⁵

*Data for average school-year attendance for NYC public high school students are not available for 2015-2017.

While the NYC graduation, attendance, and dropout rates are all moving in a positive direction, concerns remain. The NYC graduation rate falls below the graduation rate in the rest of the state and the nation. And while attendance has improved, “chronic absence” remains an issue.¹⁶ One study, albeit examining data from 2013-2014, found that 28 percent of NYC children met the chronic absence threshold of missing 15 days or more of school in a year.¹⁷ The NYC rate was twice the national rate of 14 percent.¹⁸ The majority of New York City high schools have chronic absence rates over 30 percent, and a fifth have a rate over 50 percent.¹⁹ Chronic absenteeism can be a negative predictor of graduation rates and has been linked to negative life outcomes, such as poverty and involvement in the criminal justice system.²⁰

Trends in college and postsecondary enrollment

Another measure of educational advancement is immediate college and postsecondary enrollment. The immediate college enrollment rate refers to the annual percentage of high school completers, including those who received a Graduate Equivalency Degree (GED), ages 16 to 24 who enroll in two- or four-year colleges in the fall immediately following high school completion. Nationally, the immediate college enrollment rate increased from 63 percent in 2000 to 70 percent in 2016.²¹ Earlier this year, Mayor de Blasio announced that 57 percent of the graduating class of 2016 enrolled in a postsecondary option (college, vocational, or public service program).²² Though this figure cannot to be compared to the national average because it also includes vocational and public service program enrollment, it is a two

¹⁵ For more information, see <https://www.ccnyork.org/data-reports/keeping-track-database>.

¹⁶ The 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). See <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/Page?t=d&eid=31194&syk=8&pid=2278>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See US Department of Education: <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html?src=pr#four>

¹⁹ See <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports-and-policies/school-quality/school-quality-reports-and-resources>.

²⁰ See US Department of Education: <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html?src=pr#four>.

²¹ See https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cpa.asp

²² See <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/085-18/mayor-de-blasio-record-high-graduation-rate#/0>

percent increase from the previous year, indicating a positive trend. In 2014, 77 percent of NYC DOE high school graduates enrolled in college within six months of graduating, compared to 73 percent in 2010.²³

Measuring educational attainment among foster youth

Nationally, studies show that foster youth educational outcomes lag their non-foster peers.²⁴ Neither the NYC Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) nor the NYC Department of Education report four-year graduation rates for children in foster care in a manner comparable to NYC and NY State education agencies. Methodological concerns are one reason: determining who counts as a youth in foster care for purposes of a four-year graduation rate is complex. Many youth stay in foster care for short periods—often less than 45 days. It’s reasonable to assume that neither ACS nor provider agencies want to be held accountable for the graduation rates of youth with whom they have had only a short time to interact. In a city with an aggressive media and a litigious advocacy community, publishing a foster youth graduation rate can have significant consequences.

There are, however, many ways that NYC keeps track of educational performance among foster youth, encouraged in part by federal laws. The NYC DOE now has a data-sharing agreement with ACS as mandated by amendments to the Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).²⁵ As a result, ACS receives a monthly report on school attendance for all youth in care. That report includes the school’s unique identifier on the child level, which allows ACS to monitor school transfers. In 2016, the NYC City Council passed Local Law 147,²⁶ which resulted in ACS generating an annual report on the high school graduation of foster youth in care at the end of the school year, as well as data on the rate of foster youth who are on track to graduate in four and five years. ACS also conducts matches with CUNY enrollment data, with youth consent, to assess college enrollment and persistence. At the state level the NY State Education Department and the state agency that supervises child welfare and juvenile justice—the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)—now match data across the two agencies to more fully understand educational needs.²⁷

These administrative data are believed to be more comprehensive and more accurate than the Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) survey that ACS conducts for 17- to 21-year-olds with a goal of APPLA. While the PYA survey is useful, case planners complete the survey with youth. The case planner turnover rate, widely believed to be around 40 percent each year, raises concerns about accuracy and completeness.

Non-diploma credentials, educational programs, and alternate pathways to a secondary education credential

New York City stakeholders place less emphasis on metrics related to other secondary education credentials and placements. These other credentials and placements include non-diploma options like the High School Equivalency (HSE) diploma and alternate pathways to earning a traditional diploma. Both

²³ See <http://www.graduatennyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GNYC-Report-Brief-2.pdf>.

²⁴ See “Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care April 2018” by the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education

²⁵ See Page 4 of “Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care April 2018” by the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education

²⁶ New York City Administration for Children’s Services website: “In compliance with Local Law 147 passed by the New York City Council in 2016, ACS submits an annual report on high school graduation rates of youth in foster care to the Council. This report is also required to be posted on the ACS website.”:

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/data-analysis.page>

²⁷ See the December 12, 2016 NYSED presentation to Board of Regents:

<https://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/P-12%20-%20HE%20Foster%20Care%20Deck.pdf>

NYSED and the NYC DOE track and share some data on these non-diploma credentials²⁸ but emphasize the four-year high school graduation rate in their goals and strategic priorities.

With many foster youth likely to experience an interrupted education, however, alternative pathways to a secondary education credential are particularly important for this population.²⁹ According to the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, “Because of grade retention, children in foster care are more likely to be old for their grade and under-credited compared to their peers who have not been involved with the child welfare system.”³⁰ Over the past few years, NYC has developed several alternative programs and made changes to the GED track, now known as High School Equivalency (HSE).

NYC DOE operates several educational programs, most of which are housed administratively in “District 79,” for youth who are over-aged/under-credited. These programs are often conducted in partnership with CBOs and businesses. The Pathways to Graduation program, for example, has locations in each borough and prepares students ages 18-21 years for the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC), which leads to an HSE diploma. The NYC DOE also operates transfer schools that are specialized full-time high schools intended to re-engage youth ages 16-21 who have dropped out or who need credit recovery to earn a traditional diploma. These schools include a small school environment, access to academic and social/emotional supports, and an attached “Learning to Work” programs at many sites. Finally, the Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs) offer academic programming and related services outside of traditional school hours for under-credited students who are in their fifth year or more in high school.

The NYC DOE reports publicly on some District 79 programs and outcomes for different student populations through the broader school quality reporting system but does not produce a separate report focused on foster youth. This system includes the annual School Quality Snapshots, School Quality Guides, and an interactive School Performance Dashboard³¹ as well as other tools for understanding student and school performance. While these programs and non-diploma credentials are well positioned to meet the needs of NYC transition age foster youth, over 90 percent of NYC foster youth who earn a secondary credential receive a traditional diploma as opposed to an alternative credential.³²

CONCLUSION

Over the last decade, the NYC four-year high school graduation rates have seen a steady increase, though still below the state and national averages. There is not yet data available to assess whether these improvements are reflected among youth who experience foster care and there are challenges in developing consensus methods for measuring progress. Still, NYC, with prompting from federal laws, has made considerable progress in developing educational monitoring protocols for youth in foster care. These advances set the stage for more comprehensive assessments of the educational experiences of transition age foster youth.

²⁸ See <https://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/ACCES%20-%20HSE%20Update%20-%20National%20External%20Diploma%20Program-College%20Credit-TASC.pdf>

²⁹ For example, see “Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care April 2018” by the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education

³⁰ See page 7 of “Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care April 2018” by the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education

³¹ <https://tools.nycenet.edu/dashboard/>

³² See ACS’s “High School Graduation Rates of Youth in Foster Care Annual Report 2017”: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2018/graduationrates.pdf>