

**YOUTH
EXPERIENCE
SURVEY**
2023

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I. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ACS is pleased to acknowledge the many individuals who contributed to the sixth annual Foster Care Youth Experience Survey.

We are grateful to the youth who completed the survey and shared their insights on their experiences in foster care. We are also thankful to the foster care provider agencies for their partnership and work to ensure that the voices of young people were heard.

I want to thank my team at ACS, including Deputy Commissioner for Family Permanency Services, Ina Mendez, and Deputy Commissioner for Policy, Planning, and Measurement, Andrew White, for driving improvements to the foster care system and for their leadership on this survey. Special thanks to the many other ACS staff who contributed to the survey development, dissemination, analysis, and writing of this report including the ACS Youth Advisory Council, Fouad Yared, Wesley Santos, Lorna Guthrie, Myra Soto-Aponte, Lucy Antoine, Neil Freedman, Sabine Chery, Sophonie Taylor, Raymond Singleton, Christopher Tan, Sonia Gonzalez, Stephanie Gendell, and staff of the Office of Shared Response, Permanency Monitoring Unit, and the Senior Practice Consultants. I also want to thank the ACS marketing and design team that designed this report, John Taylor and Michael Wilke.

Thank you to Mayor Adams for his commitment to bettering the lives of New York City's children and families and supporting ACS' work to improve the experiences and opportunities for children and youth in foster care. We are utilizing the findings from this report and working with our partners to continue to strengthen the foster care system and improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

As we reflect back on COVID-19 and move forward in a post-pandemic New York City, I want to acknowledge and thank those who continue to work tirelessly to ensure that youth are safe, stable, and successful.

Jess Dannhauser

Commissioner, NYC Administration for Children's Services

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS), in partnership with our foster care provider agencies, conducted the sixth annual Foster Care Youth Experience Survey in accordance with Local law 146. The legislation requires ACS to conduct an annual survey of all youth in foster care age 13 and older. The purpose of the survey is to better understand the experiences of youth in care and identify any unmet needs that may impact their safety, permanency, and well-being.

The survey questions focused on youths' experiences related to their education, employment, health care, connections to family and friends, and permanency planning. This year's survey also continued to cover these additional topic areas: the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on youth, experiences with depression, and sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE). Across the survey themes, responses reflect youth's perception of their needs and the support they receive in a variety of areas.

The survey launched on December 6, 2022 and closed on January 18, 2023. The response rate for the FY 2023 survey was 49.4%, 953 out of 1,930 eligible youth completed the survey. This is a very strong response rate for a survey of this type, which typically have a response rate of 30%–40%¹.

Youth in 24-hour foster care² for at least 90 days between the ages of 13–20 were eligible to complete the survey. Of those responding, 56% were female; 66% were age 16 years or older; 41% identified as Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish origin; 63% identified as Black, African American, or African and 8% identified as white.

At the time they were surveyed, most respondents resided in family foster care (74%), with 28% in kinship foster homes and 46% in non-kinship foster homes. Just under half of respondents (45%) had spent fewer than three years in foster care, including 14% having spent less than a year in foster care. Over fifty percent (56%) had spent three or more years in foster care. For 71% of respondents, their current placement was their first time in foster care.

The survey was voluntary and confidential; however, it was not anonymous. ACS staff could identify the youth completing each survey to follow up on any health or safety concern. Youth were informed that such follow-up would be conducted if their responses indicated a concern. ACS staff monitored responses daily and contacted individual youth and/or foster care agencies to address any critical issues or basic needs that youth reported as unmet.

As with all surveys, the findings are subject to nonresponse bias that stems from youth choosing not to complete the survey. Findings are also subject to response bias from those who may over-report "socially desirable" answers and underreport or over-report negative feedback, which may lead to a deviation of answers from their true value.

¹ Hart, N., Dykema, J., Schaeffer, N., & Stevenson, J., University of Wisconsin Survey Center. Survey Fundamentals: A Guide to Designing and Implementing Surveys. 2010.

² Twenty-four hour foster care means the youth is residing in a foster care placement; they are not on trial discharge, hospitalized, incarcerated, AWOC, or otherwise temporarily out of placement.

EDUCATION

The majority (82%) of the youth who completed the survey were in school. Among the 784 youth currently in school, 70% were in high school, 16% were in middle school, 9% were in college, and 5% were in a high school equivalency program. Among the 169 youth not currently enrolled in school, 29% had completed at least one high school grade but had not received a high school diploma. Fifty-seven percent have a high school diploma or equivalency degree, and 8% had completed some college.

Youth were interested in continuing their education and were receiving academic and other support. Among youth in high school or who left high school without graduating, 92% plan to finish high school and 88% of youth who have started college plan to finish their degree. Guidance/mental health counseling, help paying for needed school supplies or activities, help applying for school, help with applying to college programs available to youth in care, and tutoring were the educational services that respondents most frequently said they needed. At least three quarters of the youth who needed these services also reported receiving them.

For youth in middle school, guidance/mental health counseling was the most common need, and 92% of youth who needed it were receiving it.

EMPLOYMENT

Most of the youth in foster care want to work. Fifty-eight percent of respondents reported interest in obtaining employment and 24.3% of youth currently have a job/paid internship. Many unemployed youth reported that they were receiving help to find a job; most frequently received supports were help with improving reading or math skills (85%), help with creating a career goal and plan (83%) and help with improving reading or math skills (83%). The most common unmet needs for youth seeking employment were finding job openings to apply for (66%) and learning interview skills (71%).

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Most youth reported that they feel very supported by their foster parents or residential facility staff. When asked how often they have someone who makes them feel wanted, listens to them, and helps them solve problems, two-thirds of respondents said they had people who supported them in these ways “most of the time.” A very small group of youth (5%) responded “never” to all three emotional support questions. ACS followed up with these youth and contacted their foster care agencies as necessary to follow up on their emotional well-being.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Most youth reported using social media, spending time with friends, and engaging in outdoor activities as their primary activities during their free time. The most common activities youth did in their free time were use social media (84%), spend time with friends (81%) and participate in outdoor activities (74%).

HEALTHCARE

The majority of youth reported that their needs for health care were met. Among all survey respondents, 94.5% reported having their needs met for physical health care and 93.4% for their mental/emotional health. Respondents reported receiving needed vision (91.8%) and dental (88.8%) care. About one fifth of respondents stated that they need care for

alcohol or drug use, and 92.9% of those said that their needs were met. Forty-two percent of respondents stated that they need care for sexual health/family planning, and 94% of those had their needs met. For any youth who reported an unmet health need, ACS conducted outreach to address the concern.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES AND PERMANENCY PLANNING

When asked whether they receive various types of support from their foster care agencies, over two-thirds of youth reported they received help in each of the following areas: education, job readiness, independent living workshops, housing support, and connecting with attorneys. Helping youth reach their educational goals and connecting with their attorney were the top two needs foster care agencies supported youth with (93% and 85%, respectively). Youth were supported to engage in permanency planning most frequently by their foster care case worker (79%), foster parent (71%), and residential program staff (68%).

DEPRESSION

Youth were asked to report frequency of feeling down, depressed, or hopeless within the last two weeks. Sixty-one percent of male youth and 46% of female youth reported that they did not feel down, depressed, or hopeless during the last two weeks. Twenty-five percent of male youth and 41% of female youth reported that they felt down, depressed, or hopeless “sometimes” (1–5 days in the past two weeks). When compared by age, 54% of youth ages 13–15 reported that they did not feel down, depressed, or hopeless, compared to 53% of 16–17-year-old youth and 51% of 18–20-year-old youth. Among youth who identify as heterosexual, 60% did not feel depressed in the last two weeks and 40% felt depressed 1 or more days. Among youth who identify as bisexual, gay, or lesbian, 40% did not feel depressed in the last two weeks and 60% felt depressed 1 or more days. All youth who indicated that they would like someone to follow up with them were contacted by ACS staff. ACS staff automatically contacted all youth who had indicated feeling depressed every day.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION

Youth were asked about their gender identity and 49% of youth identified as a girl/woman while 41% identified as a boy/man. Three percent of youth checked the option “use another word for my gender.” One percent of respondents identified as trans or transgender. The remaining respondents indicated that they did not know, did not understand the question, did not want to answer this question, or left this question blank.

Youth were also asked a question about their sexual identity, 62% see themselves as straight or heterosexual. Thirteen percent of respondents identify as bisexual, 4% see themselves as lesbian and 2% identify as gay. Two percent of youth stated that they did not know while another 4% stated that they use another word to describe their sexuality. The most common responses to sexuality that youth shared were identifying as pansexual or queer.

BASIC FOOD/CLOTHING NEEDS

The majority of youth reported that their basic food and clothing needs were met. Youth were asked if they had three meals a day, appropriate clothing and shoes that fit. Ninety-six percent of youth stated they are currently getting three meals a day, 96% reported having appropriate clothing, and 94% stated they have shoes that fit. For every youth who answered no to any of these questions, ACS conducted outreach to address the concerns.

COVID-19 IMPACT ON YOUTH IN CARE

Youth were asked which areas of their lives were impacted by Covid-19. Twenty-six percent reported having difficulty with school and/or education, 25% indicated that they have not been able to see their friends, and 25% responded that the pandemic negatively impacted their physical and/or mental health. Seventeen percent of youth reported the loss of a loved one due to Covid-19. Seven percent of youth reported employment issues such as not being able to work or losing a job.

III. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

The New York City Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) disseminated and analyzed the responses from the FY23 Foster Care Experience Survey to comply with Local Law 166 of 2016. The law requires ACS to provide to all youth in foster care, ages 13 and older an annual survey regarding their experiences in foster care. The purpose of the survey is to better understand the experiences of youth while in foster care, especially as it pertains to their safety, permanency, and well-being. The law requires that the survey cover the following topics:

- Access to food and clothing.
- Religious practices.
- Social connectedness (i.e., relationships with foster families, biological families, and friends).
- Personal allowances (i.e., money received on a regular basis from the caregiver, or stipends for participating in agency program).
- Access to technology (i.e., internet and phone).
- Educational needs and progress; and
- Participation in extracurricular activities.

ACS collaborated with its contracted foster care agencies to disseminate the survey to all eligible youth residing in 24-hour foster care status, in all types of foster care placements (foster homes, group homes and residential treatment programs)³. All eligible youth were sent a letter with instructions on how to access the survey, and ACS worked closely with foster care agencies to implement a range of strategies to ensure that youth were aware of the survey and encouraged to complete it. Youth who completed the survey received a \$15 gift card. The survey launched on December 6, 2022 and closed on January 18, 2023. The overall response rate was 49.4%.

B. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

SURVEY DEVELOPMENT AND ANALYSIS

For the annual survey conducted in FY23, ACS used the same survey tool as the prior fiscal year 2022 Youth Experience Survey.

SURVEY DISSEMINATION

ACS launched the online survey on December 6, 2022. Foster care provider agencies were instructed to enter email addresses for all older youth in care into the New York State database, Connections. ACS sent an electronic notification of the survey to all eligible youth with an email address available in Connections. The notice explained the purpose of the survey and included instructions for youth to access the survey. ACS also sent the relevant information to each provider

³ This does not include Close to Home juvenile justice placements.

agency, including the youth names and their unique PINs⁴ to help support further engagement of youth to complete the survey. All communications included ACS staff contact information in case the youth had any questions. To encourage survey participation, youth received an electronic \$15 gift card upon completion of the survey.

ACS and the provider agencies used a wide range of strategies to follow up with non-respondents. For example, ACS provided weekly updates to the agencies showing overall response rates, along with a list of youth who had not yet completed the survey. ACS staff worked with foster care agencies to identify and resolve any completion barriers and reiterate the importance of completing the survey. Additionally, ACS responded to any questions from youth and foster care agencies through a survey help desk and offered translation services for youth who requested to complete the survey in another language. One youth completed the survey in Spanish. The remaining 952 youth completed the survey in English.

SURVEY POPULATION AND RESPONSE RATES

The survey population was comprised of all youth aged 13 or older who had been in foster care for at least 90 days as of December 6, 2022. Of the 1,930 youth eligible for the survey, 953 completed it, for a response rate of 49.4%. The response rate slightly increased from 46.2% responding in FY22 to 49.4% responding in FY23.

C. SURVEY RESPONDENT PLACEMENT TYPES & DEMOGRAPHICS

This section provides an overview of the demographic characteristics and placement types of the youth responding to the survey and the total population of foster care youth eligible to participate in the survey, based on ACS administrative data.⁵

PLACEMENT TYPE

Of the 953 youth responding to the survey, 80.5% were living either in foster homes or in kinship foster homes (Table 1). Half (51%) resided in non-relative foster homes and 22% were placed in kinship family homes. Twenty-four percent of youth were living in a congregate residential setting, and between 1 and 5 of the responding youth were in a youth reception center (a pre-placement program for teens and young adults).

Length of time in foster care. Based on information available in ACS administrative records, nearly half of the survey respondents had been in care for fewer than three years, including 14% in care for less than one year at the time of the survey distribution and 33% in care for one to under three years. Slightly more than half were in care for three years or more.

Number of foster care spells (placement episodes). Consistent with the population of youth aged 13 or older in foster care overall, 71% of the survey respondents were experiencing foster care placement for the first time, or their first spell. An additional 21% of respondents were in their second spell of foster care, meaning they had previously been discharged from care and then reentered care. The remaining 8.8% had been placed into foster care three or more times.

⁴ Each eligible young person was given a unique identification number (PIN) with which to access the survey.

⁵ Youth were eligible to participate in the survey if they were age 13 or older and had spent at least 90 days in foster care.

Table 1. Indicators of placement in foster care: Survey respondents and population eligible to respond to the survey.

Placement Indicator	Foster Care Youth Responding to Survey		Foster Care Youth In Population Eligible to Participate In Survey	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
All Youth	100%	953	100%	1,930
Current Placement Type				
(FBH) Foster Home	46%	435	43%	833
(Kinship) Kinship Family Home	28%	267	34%	649
(Residential/ Group Home) Residential Treatment Center/ Group Home	26%	251	23%	448
Other / Unknown				
Length of Time in Foster Care				
Under 1 year	14%	133	14%	276
Between 1 and 3 years	31%	291	33%	632
Between 3 and 5 years	26%	248	25%	485
Between 5 and 8 years	17%	162	16%	313
Over 8 years	13%	119	12%	223
Other / Unknown	0%	0	*	*
Number of Foster Care Spells				
One Spell	71%	675	71%	1,378
Two Spells	22%	205	21%	399
Three or More Spells	8%	73	8%	153

NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (*). SOURCES: Youth Experience Survey FY23 and ACS Administrative Records

DEMOGRAPHICS

Information on the gender and age of respondents was analyzed from ACS administrative records.⁶ Of the 953 youth responding to the survey, 49.44% were female and 49.4% were male (Table 2). Many respondents (69%) were 16 to 20 years old, with nearly one-third under age 16 (66.9%).

Table 2. Gender and age of survey respondents and population eligible to respond to the survey.

Demographic Indicator	Foster Care Youth Responding to Survey		Foster Care Youth In Population Eligible to Participate In Survey	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
All Youth	100%	953	100%	1,930
Gender				
Female	56%	533	56%	1,078
Male	44%	420	44%	852
Age				
13 to 15 years	33%	318	38%	738
16 to 17 years	29%	280	28%	536
18 to 20 years	37%	355	34%	656

SOURCES: Youth Experience Survey FY23 and ACS Administrative Records

The survey gathered information on the race and ethnicity of youth in foster care (Table 3)⁷. Ethnicity is reported separately from race. Youth who identified themselves as Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish Origin accounted for a substantial share of the youth responding to the survey (40%), while 5% identified as Middle Eastern or North African. Forty-three percent said they were neither Hispanic nor Middle Eastern. Ten percent preferred not to answer the question.

Regarding their race, the largest group of youth self-identified as Black, African American, or African (60%). Nine percent reported their race as White. Small percentages of youth self-identified as Asian, American Indian, or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. The rest did not report their race.

It was not possible to compare the racial or ethnic background of survey respondents with the total eligible population of youth in foster care because the survey requested that the information be reported in a different format than that used in ACS' administrative records.

⁶ Gender information was pulled from the New York State CONNECTIONS system. This data does not reflect youth's self-reported gender identities.

⁷ ACS' administrative records do not distinguish between race and ethnicity (Hispanic is reported as a race in New York State CONNECTIONS, the system of record, so data are not available, for example, about the number of youth in care who are Black/African American and Hispanic).

Table 3. Race/ethnicity of survey respondents

Demographic Indicator	Youth responding to the survey	
	Percent	Number
Ethnicity		
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	41%	391
Middle Eastern or North African	6%	57
None of the above	40%	385
Prefer not to answer	11%	103
Did not answer	2%	17
Total	100%	953
Race	Percent	Number
Black, African American, or African	63%	598
White	8%	81
Asian	5%	45
American Indian or Alaska Native	3%	27
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2%	23
I don't identify	8%	72
Prefer not to answer	16%	154

NOTE: For race, the sum of percentages is greater than 100% because youth could select more than one race. They could only select one ethnicity. Twenty-two youth did not indicate their race and twelve did not indicate their ethnicity in FY23.

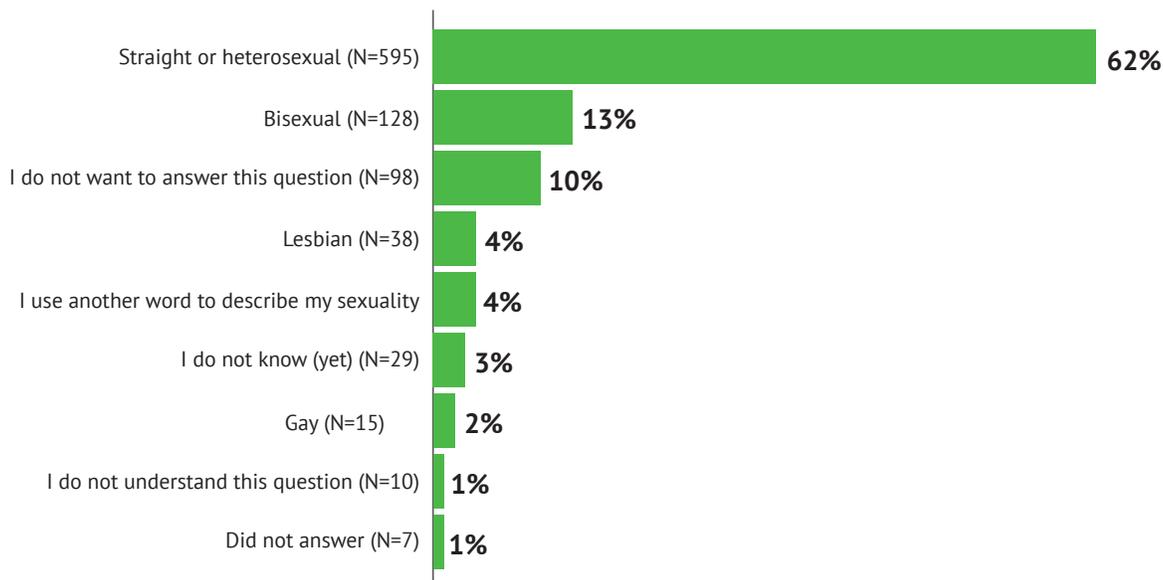
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY/ EXPRESSION

The LGBTQAI+ Action Plan⁸ reflects ACS' renewed commitment to identifying and addressing the unique needs of youth whose sexual orientations differ from cisgender or "gender conforming" that refer to roles and behaviors reflecting "binary" or "male/female" norms.

All 953 youth who completed the survey responded to the question regarding sexuality. The majority of youth (62%) see themselves as straight or heterosexual. Thirteen percent of respondents identify as bisexual, 4% see themselves as lesbian and 2% identify as gay (Figure 1). Three percent of youth stated that they did not know while another 4% stated that they use another word to describe their sexuality. The remaining 10% of youth did not understand this question, preferred not to answer, or did not respond to this question.

Figure 1. Sexual identity



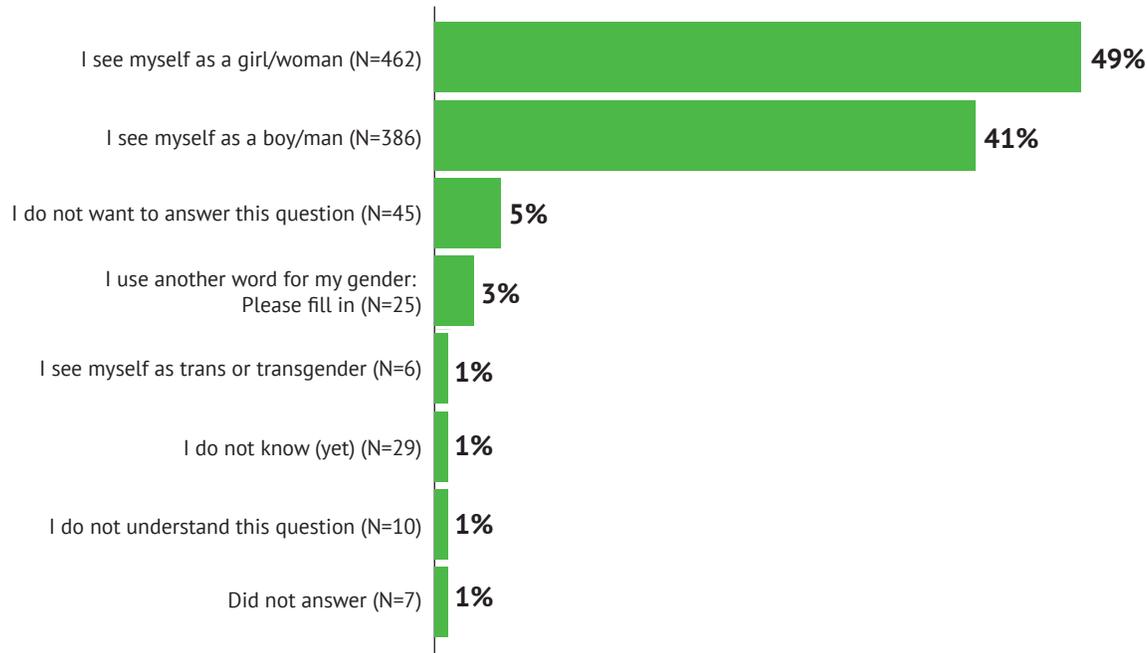
NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (*) and 0% in this chart.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

Youth were asked "When you think about yourself, do you see yourself as a boy/man or girl/woman? Or do you use another word to identify your gender?". Of the 953 youth who responded to this survey, 41% identified as a boy/man, 49% identified as a girl/woman (Figure 2). One percent stated that they did not know (yet). Three percent responded that they use another word for their gender, while the remaining 5% of youth stated that they did not want to answer this question.

⁸ ACS LGBTQAI+ Action Plan can be found at <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/about/2020/LGBTQActionPlan.pdf>

Figure 2. Gender identity



NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (*) and 0% in this chart.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

Analysis of the survey was completed utilizing the same methodology as the previous year’s survey, allowing for a comparison of the findings. This report highlights any areas where the finding from this year’s survey 10 percentage points was above or below last year’s finding. For some of the questions, a comparative analysis could not be completed due to the question being revised with new or updated response options. These instances are noted in the applicable sections of this report.

D. LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY

This survey was disseminated to a NYC population of youth ages 13 and older who had been in foster care for at least 90 days as of December 6, 2022. The survey was confidential; and no individual youth are identified in this report or in any survey data analysis shared with provider agencies. However, the survey was not anonymous; ACS followed up with the youth, or foster care provider, if necessary, if there were concerns about a youth’s health, safety, or overall well-being. As with all surveys, the findings are subject to nonresponse bias that stems from youth choosing not to complete the survey. Findings are also subject to response bias from those who may over report “socially desirable” answers and underreport or over report negative feedback, which may lead to a deviation of answers from their true value.

IV. SURVEY FINDINGS

A. HELP WITH EDUCATION

A.1 WHAT IS THE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE?

Many respondents (82%) were in school (Table 4). Of those enrolled, 16% were in middle school, 70% were in high school, 5% were in a high school equivalency program, and 9% were in college (Figure 3).

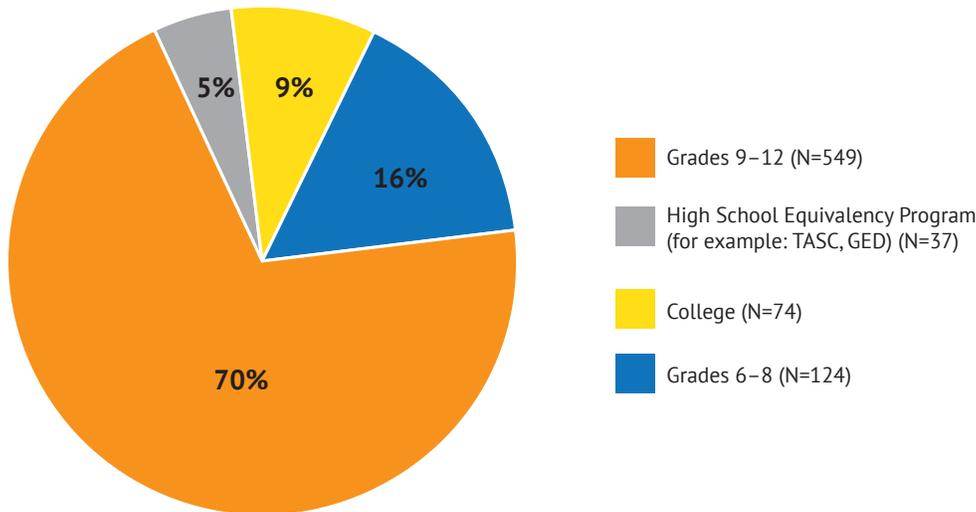
Table 4. Current school enrollment status of youth in foster care

	Yes, I am in school or in a remote learning, hybrid, or in-person program.	No, I am not in school or in a remote learning, hybrid, or in person program.
Age	% of Total	% of Total
13 to 15 years (N = 318)	98%	3%
16 to 17 years (N = 280)	97%	3%
18 to 20 years (N = 355)	57%	43%
Total (N = 953)	82%	18%

This question was mandatory, so all 953-youth answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

Figure 3. Level of education for youth currently enrolled in school (N=784)

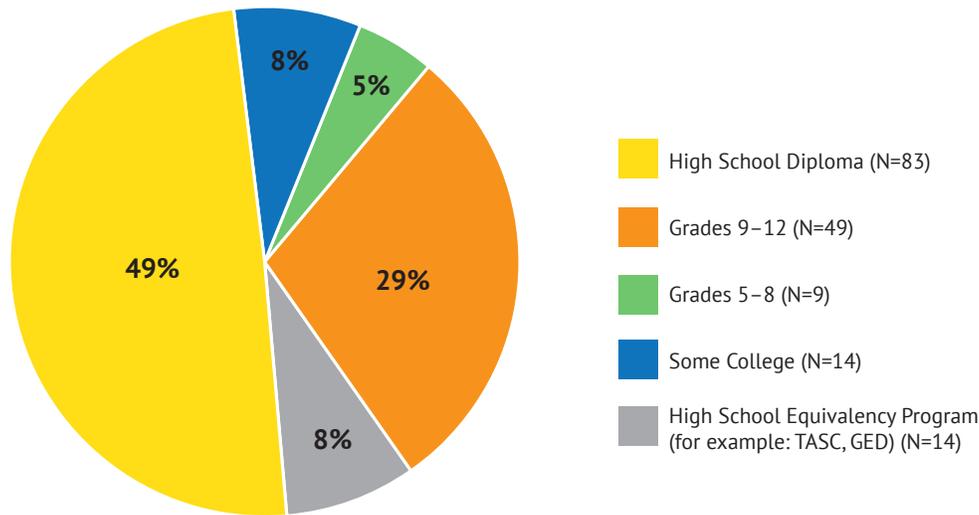


NOTE: This question was mandatory, so all 808 youth currently enrolled in school answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

Of the 169 youth not currently enrolled in school, 49% reported receiving a high school diploma, 29% stated that their highest level of education completed was a high school grade level, 8% had completed a high school equivalency program, 8% had attended some college, and 5% were in grades 5–8 (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Highest level of education completed by youth not currently enrolled in school or a training program (N=169)



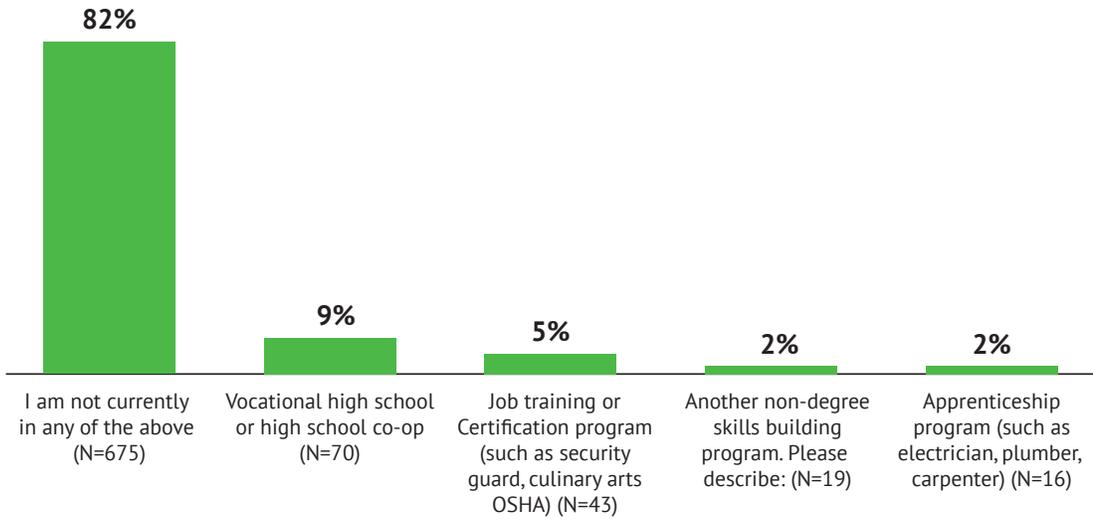
NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (*) and 0% in this chart.

This question was mandatory, so all 186 youth not currently enrolled in school answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

Youth enrolled in high school, a high school equivalency program, in college, and not enrolled in school were also asked if they were enrolled in a vocational high school or high school coop, job training or certification program, another non-degree skills building program, or apprenticeship program (Figure 5). Many respondents (82%) indicated they were not in any of these programs or trainings.

Figure 5. Whether youth are enrolled in a vocational school or job training program



Forty-one percent (41%) reported having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Over 50% of youth in grades 5–8 reported having an IEP, while 42% of youth in grades 9 and above reported having an IEP (Table 5). Youth who reported having an IEP were asked if they attend after-school or weekend special education services. Most youth (70%) reported that they do not attend after-school or weekend special education services, 24% reported that they do, 4% do not know or are unsure, and 2% did not answer (Figure 6).

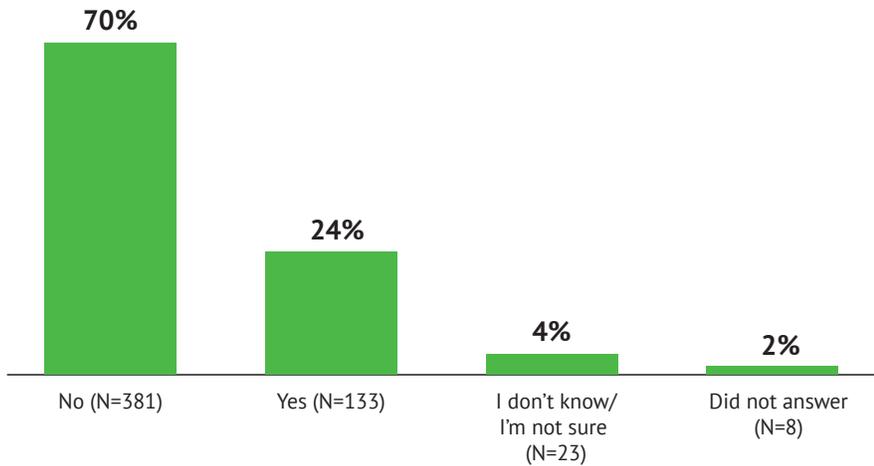
Table 5. Whether youth have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), by grade level.

	Youth in grades 5 through 8 (N = 124)	Youth in grades 9 and above (N = 660)	Total Number of youth (N = 784)
Yes	51%	42%	43%
No	30%	44%	42%
I don't know/I'm not sure	19%	14%	15%

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

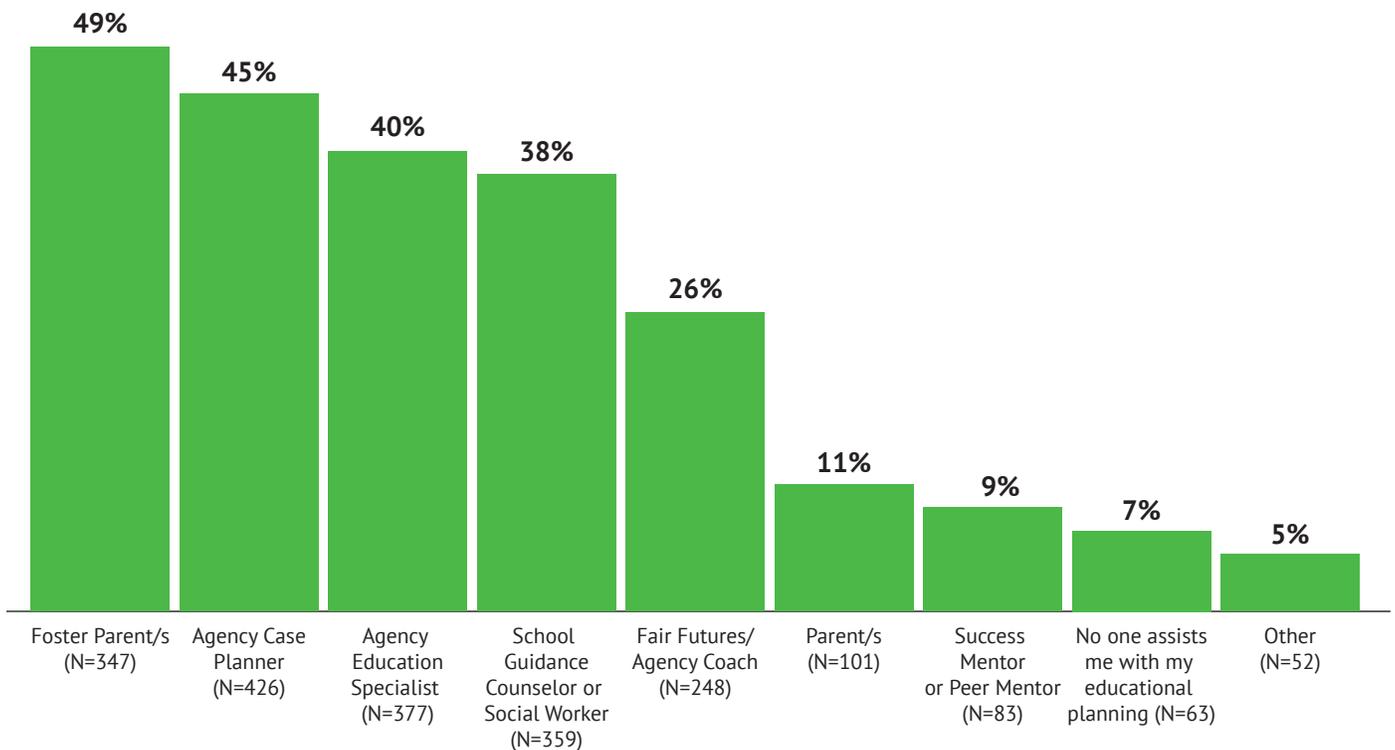
Figure 6. Whether youth with an IEP attend after-school or weekend special education services.



A.2 WHAT SUPPORT DO YOUTH NEED TO CONTINUE WITH THEIR EDUCATION?

Youth were asked who assists them with their educational planning. Half of the respondents (49%) indicated their foster parent helped them with their educational planning (Figure 7), followed by their case planner (45%), agency education specialist (40%), school guidance counselor or social worker (38%), and Fair Futures/Agency Coach (26%). A small percent of youth indicated their parent(s) (11%), others (5%), and a success mentor or peer mentor (9%) assisted them with their educational planning. Seven percent of youth report that no one assisted them.

Figure 7. Who assists youth with educational planning?



The survey asked youth in grades 9 and above whether they plan to continue with their education and the type of support needed. Response options were tailored to the youth based on their answers to previous questions. Due to this, the N's differ for plans to continue with education. For example, those indicating they were currently in grades 9 – 12 were shown the option, “I plan on finishing high school,” while those stating that they were in a vocational school or college had the option to select, “I plan on finishing my degree.”

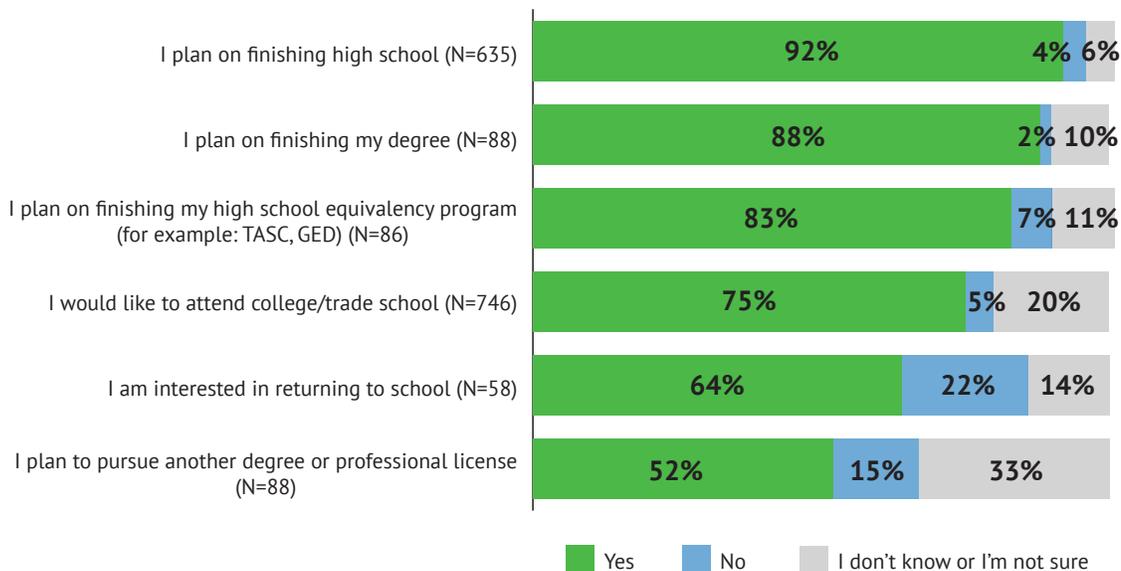
Youth shared the following regarding their desires to continue their education:

- 88% of youth who have started college or a vocational school plan to finish their degree
- 92% of youth in high school or who left high school without graduating plan to finish high school
- 83% of youth current in high school equivalency (HSE) program or who left high school without graduating plan to finish a high school equivalency program
- 75% of youth in high school or HSE program, or who whose highest level of education completes is at least 9th grade, would like to attend college/trade school.
- 64% said they were interested in returning to school.
- 52% of youth in college or vocational school plan to pursue another degree or professional license

Figure 8 shows detailed findings for each of these answer choices.

ACS' Office of Education and Employment Initiatives provides information and technical assistance to foster care agencies to ensure that they are providing support and resources to help all youth advance their education. See Section V for additional details.

Figure 8. Whether youth in grades 9 and above plan to continue with education



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by 0% in this chart.

A.3 WHAT EDUCATION SERVICES DID THE YOUTH NEED AND RECEIVE?

The survey asked youth in grades 9 and above whether they needed and received each of thirteen types of education services in the past year. Youth in grades 5 through 8 were asked whether they needed and received each of six types of education services.

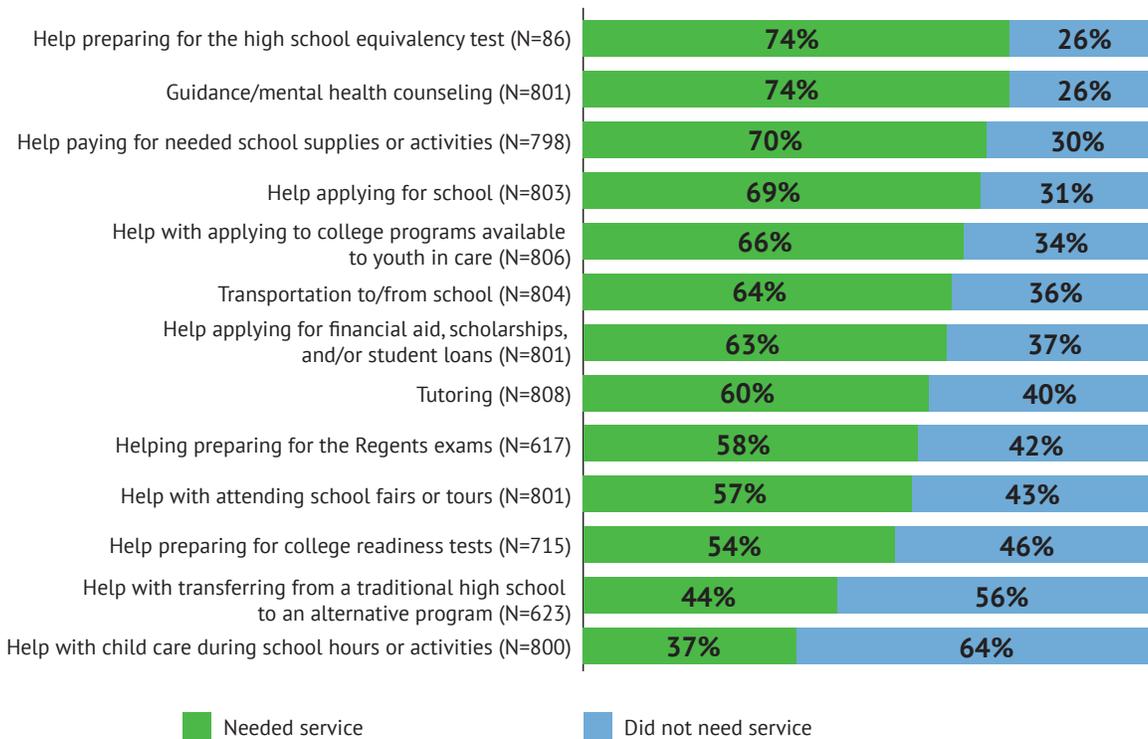
EDUCATION SERVICES NEEDED AND RECEIVED: GRADES 9 AND ABOVE

To explore whether current educational needs were met, youth in grades 9 and above were asked whether they needed and received each of the following services: help preparing for the high school equivalency test, guidance/mental health counseling, help paying for needed school supplies or activities, tutoring, help applying for school, help with applying to college programs available to youth in care, help preparing for Regents exams, transportation to/from school, help applying for financial aid and/or student loans, help preparing for college readiness tests, help attending school fairs or tours, help with transferring from a traditional high school to an alternative program, and help with children during school hours or activities.

Need for services: Among youth in grades 9 and above, the most frequently reported needs were guidance/mental health counseling (74%), paying for needed school supplies or activities (70%), help applying for schools (69%), help applying to college programs available to youth in care (66%), and tutoring (60%) (Figure 9). Youth also reported needing help applying for financial aid and/or student loans (63%) and help with the Regents exam (58%). Of the youth enrolled in a GED/TASC program or those who are not currently in school, and their last grade completed was in high school, 74% needed help with preparing for the high school equivalency test.

Figure 9 shows detailed findings for each of these answer choices.

Figure 9. Youth in grades 9 and above reporting education services needed

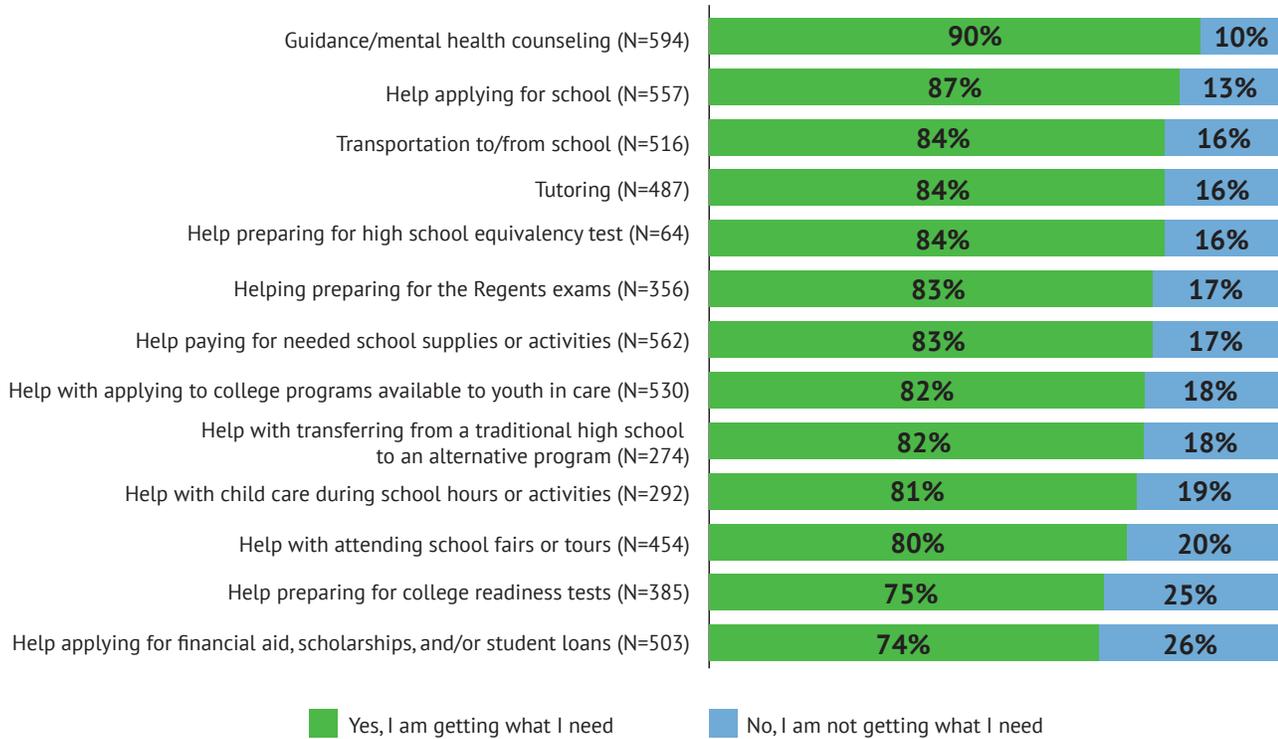


SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

Extent to which needs were met: The information presented in Figure 10 reflects the extent to which a youth's need for specific education services were met or unmet. The following results indicate the extent to which the needs of youth in grades 9 and above were met for each of the thirteen services examined from the survey.

- **Guidance /mental health counseling:** 90% of the 594 youth who reported needing this support received it (i.e., the need was met), while 10 % did not (i.e., the need was unmet).
- **Help applying for school:** 87% of the 557 youth who needed this education service reported that they received it, while 13% did not.
- **Preparing for high school equivalency test:** 84% of the 64 students in a GED/TASC program who needed help preparing for the high school equivalency test received it, while 26% did not. The percent of youth receiving this service increased by 10 percentage points, compared to 74% in FY22.
- **Tutoring:** 84% of the 487 youth who reported needing tutoring received it, while 16% did not.
- **Transportation to/from school:** 84% of the 516 youth who needed help with transportation received it, while 16% did not.
- **Help paying for needed school supplies and activities:** 83% of the 562 youth who needed help paying for needed school supplies and activities received it, while 17% did not.
- **Help with transferring from a traditional high school to another:** 82% of the 274 youth who needed help transferring schools received it, while 56% did not.
- **Help preparing for the Regents exams:** 83% of the 356 youth who needed help preparing for Regents exams received it, while 17% did not.
- **Help with applying to college programs available to youth in care:** 82% of the 530 youth who needed help with applying to college programs received it, while 18% did not.
- **Help with childcare during school hours or activities:** 81% of the 292 youth who needed assistance with childcare received it, while 19% did not.
- **Help with attending school fairs or tours:** 80% of the 454 youth who needed assistance with attending school fairs or tours received it, while 20% did not.
- **Preparing for college readiness/specialized tests:** 75% of the 503 youth who reported needing help with preparing for tests received it, while 25% did not.
- **Help applying for financial aid/student loans:** 74% of the 503 youth who needed this educational service reported receiving it, while 26% did not.

Figure 10. Youth in grades 9 and above reporting they received the education services needed



NOTE: Ns for this chart are slightly lower than the total number of youth asked. This is because a small number of youth left the question blank. “Received service needed” was calculated as youth who said “Yes, I am getting what I need” divided by the sum of youth who said either “Yes, I am getting what I need” or “No, I am not getting what I need.” Blanks were not included in this calculation.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

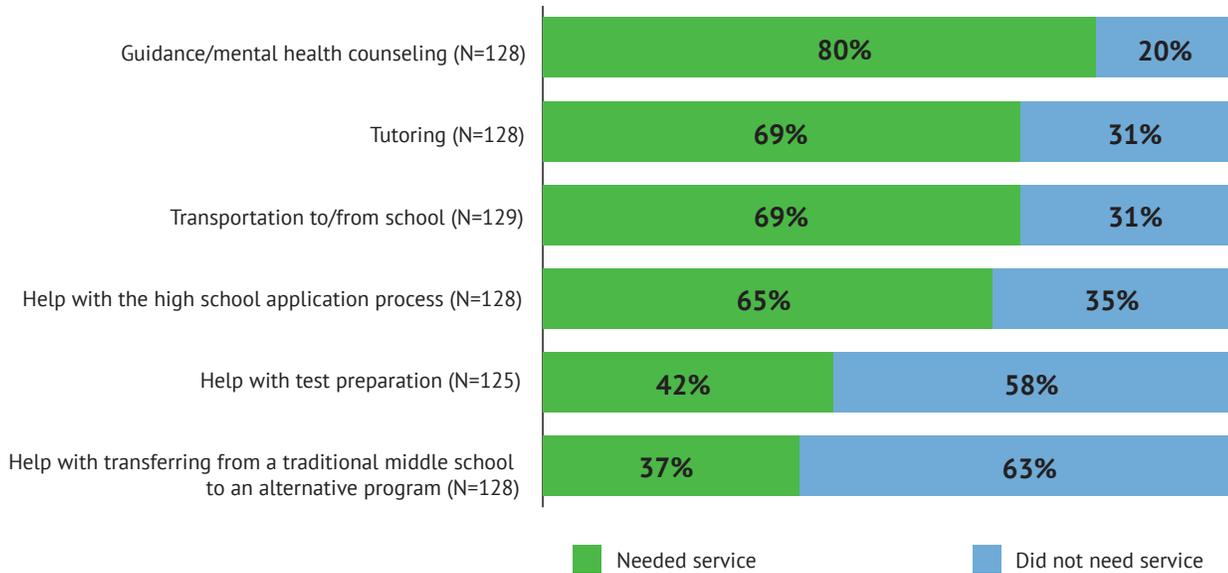
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES NEEDED AND RECEIVED: GRADES 5 THROUGH 8

Youth in grades 5 through 8 reported whether they needed and received each of six services over the past year: guidance/mental health counseling, tutoring, help with the high school application process, transportation to/from school, test preparation (PSAT, specialized high school exam), and help with transferring from a traditional middle school to an alternative program. These questions applied to 133 young people.⁹

Need for services: Eighty percent of middle school youth responded that they need guidance/mental health counseling (Figure 11). Sixty-nine percent of youth reported needing tutoring services. Sixty-nine percent reported needing transportation to/from school and 65% reported needing help with the high school application process. Forty-two percent reported needing help with test preparation and 37% reported needing help with transferring from a traditional middle school to an alternative program.

⁹ Occasionally, respondents leave a question blank, resulting in Ns for specific findings that differ slightly from this total number.

Figure 11. Youth in grades 5 through 8 reporting education service needed



Note: "Needed Service" was calculated as the sum of youth who said "Yes, I am getting what I need" or "no, I am not getting what I need" over youth who said "Yes, I am getting what I need," "No, I am not getting what I need," and "I don't need this." The number of youth who did not answer a particular item ranged from 1 to 16

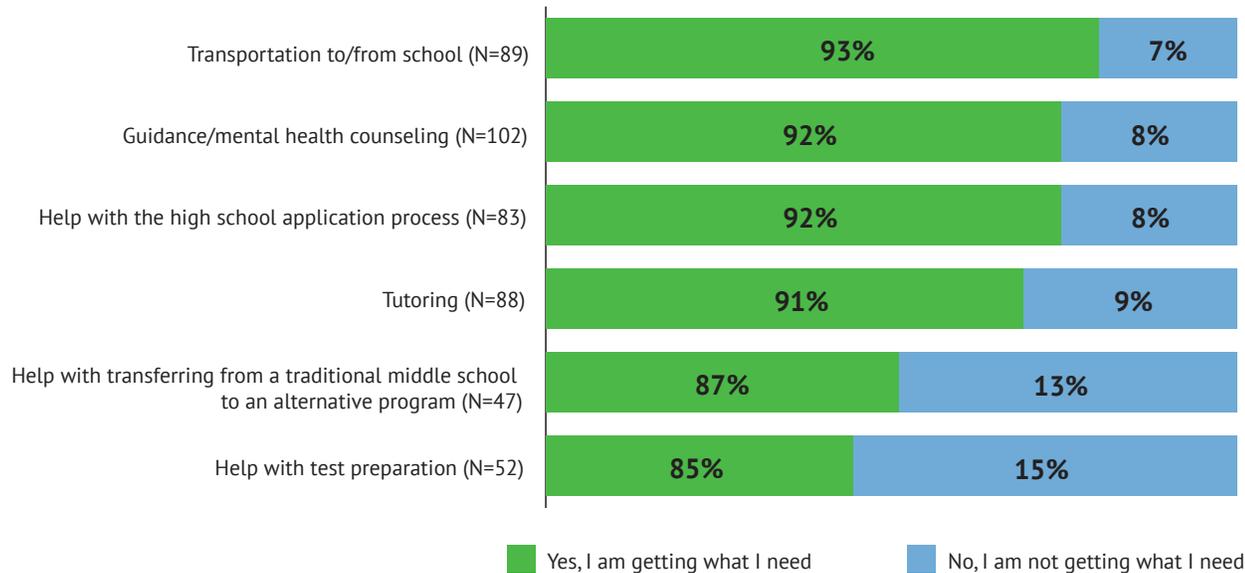
Note: The N for services needed also includes youth not in school who reported their highest grade completed as grade 5-8.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

Extent to which needs were met. Figure 12 reflects the extent to which youth's needs for specific education services were met or unmet. Overall, most education service needs were met as reported by youth in grades 5 through 8.

- **Transportation:** 93% of the 89 youth who reported needing transportation to and from school received it (services were met).
- **Guidance/ Mental Health Counseling:** 92% of the 102 of the youth who reported needing guidance/mental health counseling received it.
- **Help with transferring from a traditional middle school to an alternative program:** of the 47 youth who responded 87% received the services.
- **Help with the high school application process:** 92% of the 83 youth who needed help with the high school application process received it, while 8% had not (services were unmet).
- **Tutoring:** 91% of the 88 youth who needed tutoring services received it, while 9% had not.
- **Test preparation:** 85% of the 58 students who needed test preparation services received it, while 15% did not.

Figure 12. Youth in grades 5 through 8 reporting they received the education service they needed



Note: "Received service" was calculated as youth who say "Yes, I am getting what I need" divided by the sum of youth who said either "Yes, I am getting what I need" or "No, I am not getting what I need."

NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by 0% in this chart.

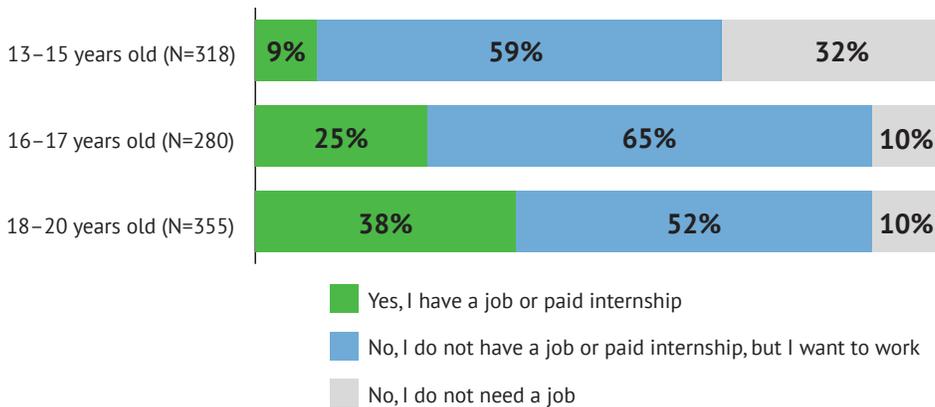
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

B. HELP WITH EMPLOYMENT

B.1 WHAT IS THE EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE?

Figure 13 shows the distribution of youth in foster care by age group who are actively employed or would like to be employed. The majority of youth across all age groups did not have a job or paid internship but would like to work. Thirty-eight percent of youth ages 18–20 years, 25% of youth ages 16–17 years, and 9% of youth ages 13–15 years reported having a job or paid internship. Ten percent of youth ages 18–20 years, 13% of youth ages 16–17 years, and 32% of youth ages 13–15 years reported that they do not need a job.

Figure 13. Employment status of youth in foster care, by age group

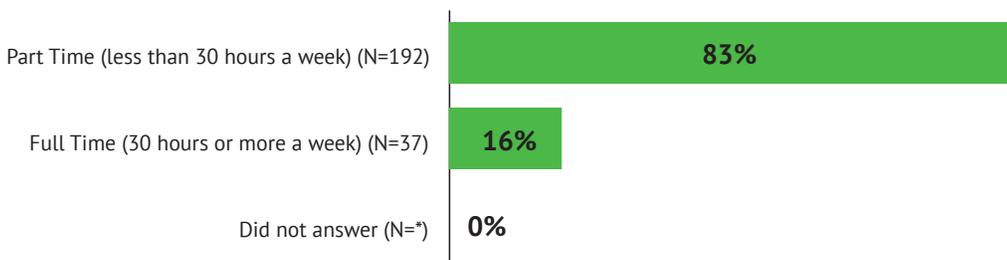


SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

The survey asked youth who were employed to indicate the number of hours worked per week (Figure 14). Of the 192 youth actively working, 83% of youth were working part time (less than 30 hours a week) and 16% of youth were working full time (30 hours or more a week).

The survey asked youth who were employed to indicate the number of hours worked per week (Figure 14). Of the 192 youth actively working, 83% of youth were working part time (less than 30 hours a week) and 16% of youth were working full time (30 hours or more a week).

Figure 14. Youth reporting whether their job or internship is full time or part time week (N = 232)



NOTE: Data in this figure are based on the number of youth who reported they had a job. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (*) and 0% in this chart.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

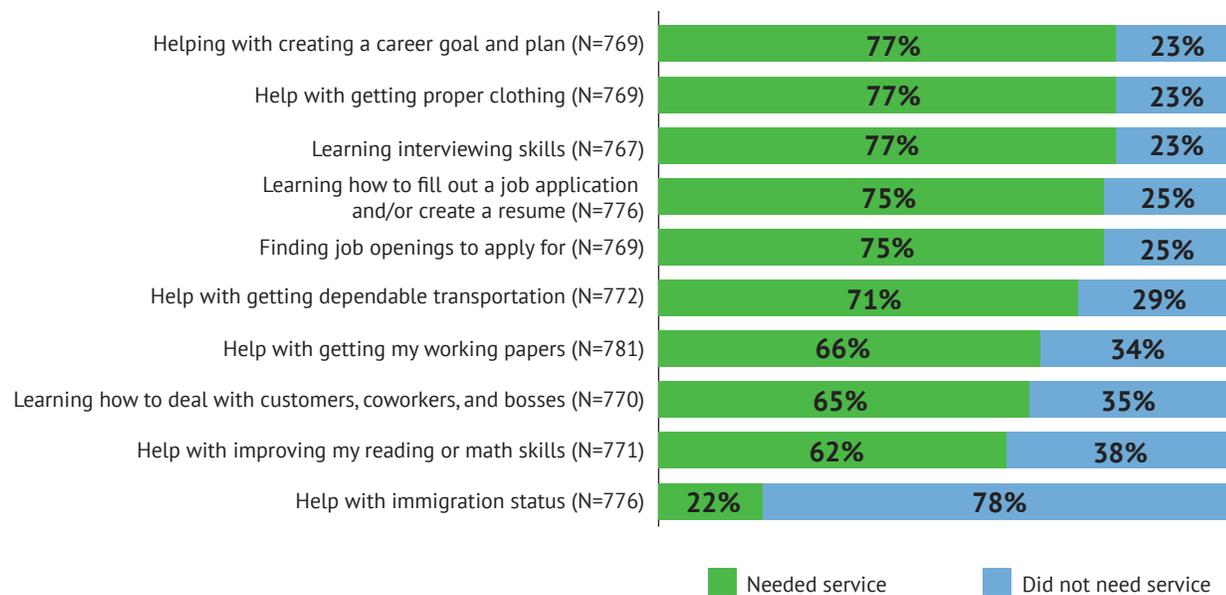
B.2 WHAT HELP DID YOUTH NEED AND RECEIVE TO FIND A JOB?

Help needed in finding a job. The top five employment-related needs were: help with creating a career goal and plan (77%), learning interviewing skills (77%), help with getting proper clothing (77%), and learning how to fill out a job application and/or create a resume (75%). Seventy-five percent needed help with learning what jobs to apply for. Seventy-one percent of youth reported that they need help with transportation. Sixty-six percent of youth also reported needing help with getting working papers. Sixty-five percent of youth also reported needing help with learning how to deal with customers, coworkers, and bosses. Twenty-two percent of youth reported needing help with their immigration status.

See Figure 15 for details.

ACS’s Office of Immigrant Services and Language Affairs (ISLA) is dedicated to assisting all youth in foster care who have immigration needs. Please see Section V for more information.

Figure 15. Youth reporting the help they needed to find a job

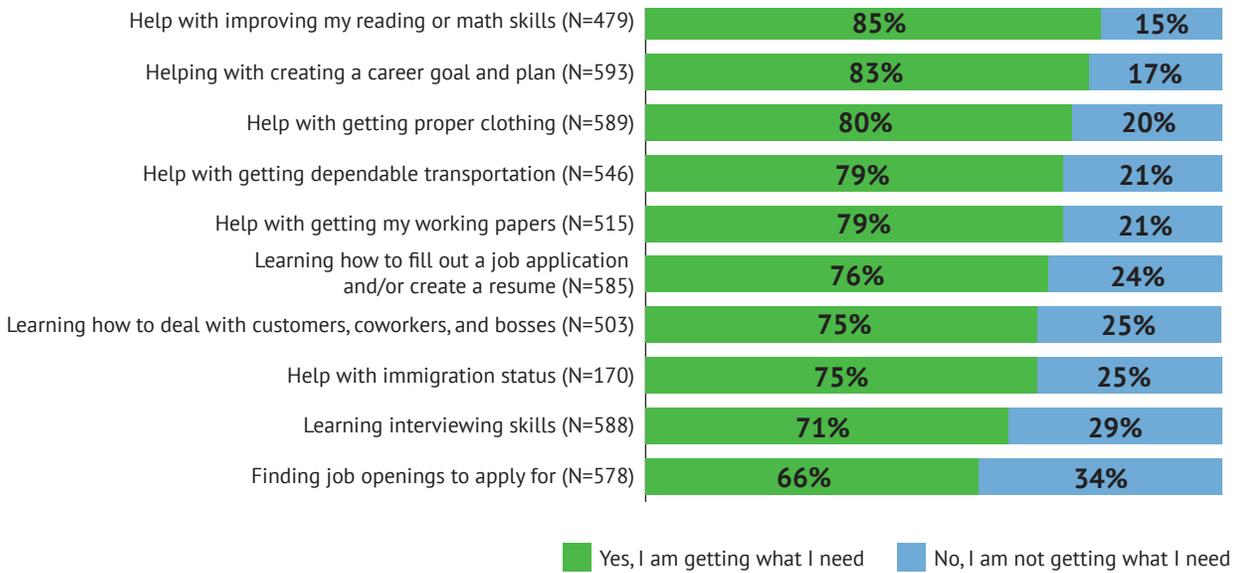


NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

Help received in finding a job. For every type of job support, most of the youth who needed a specific job support received it (Figure 16). By percentage, the best-met need was for help with improving reading or math skills; 85% of youth said they were getting their needs met in this area. This was followed by creating a career goal and plan (83%). Of those who needed it, eighty percent reported receiving help getting proper clothing. Seventy-nine percent received help with getting working papers and dependable transportation. Seventy-six percent of youth also reported they received help with learning how to fill out a job application/create a resume. Seventy-five percent reported receiving help with immigration status and seventy-five percent of youth received help with learning how to deal with customers, coworkers, and bosses. Compared to the responses from last year, youth receiving help to get their working papers increased by 11 percentage points (from 68% in FY22 to 79% in FY23) and youth receiving help to learn about what jobs to apply for increased by ten percentage points (from 56% in FY22 to 66% in FY23).

Figure 16. Youth reporting the help they received to find a job.



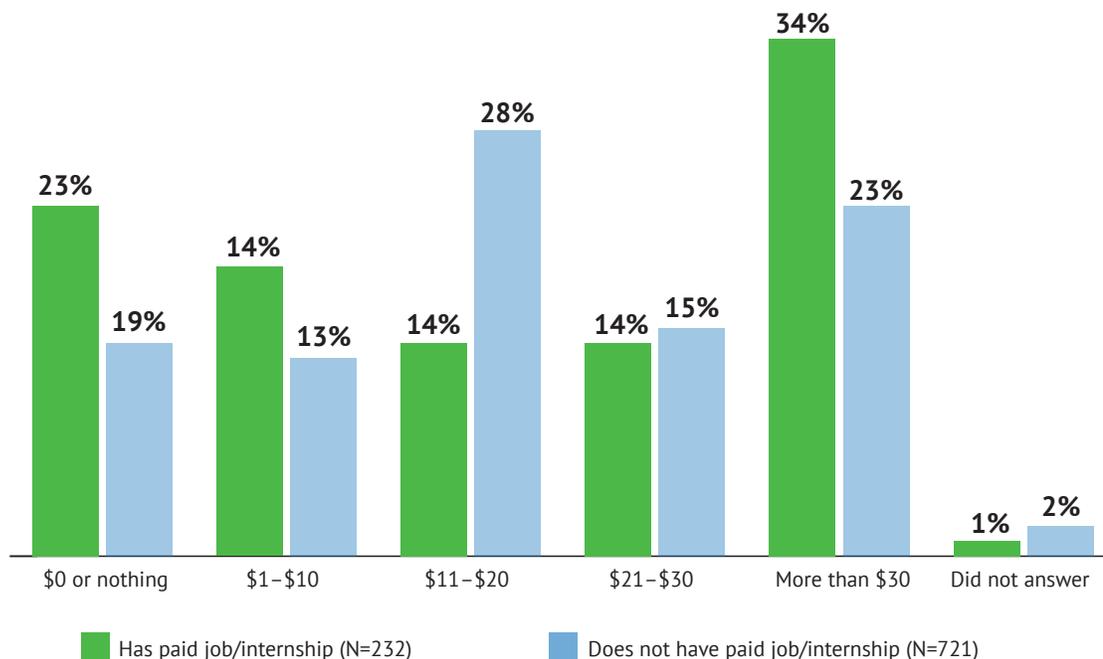
NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
 SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

B.3 HOW MUCH WEEKLY ALLOWANCE DO YOUTH RECEIVE? DO YOUTH HAVE BANK ACCOUNTS?

The survey asked youth about the allowance they receive weekly. Approximately 78% of youth reported receiving an allowance. Figure 17 shows the amount of allowance for all youth by employment status, youth with a job or paid internship and those without a job or paid internship.

One-third of youth with a paid job or paid internship (34%) receive a weekly allowance of more than \$30; 14% receive \$21–\$30; 14% receive \$11–\$20; 14% receive \$1–\$10; and 23% do not receive an allowance. Of those without a paid job or paid internship, (23%) reported they receive an allowance of more than \$30; 15% receive \$21–\$30; 28% receive \$11–\$20; 13% receive \$1–\$10; (19%) do not receive an allowance.

Figure 17. Weekly allowance by employment status of youth in foster care



NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

The survey asked youth to indicate if they have a bank account. Reflected in Table 6 are youth responses broken down by age. More than half of youth ages 18 and older (62%) stated that they have a bank account, while 30% of youth between the ages of 16–17 and 20% of youth between the ages of 13–15 stated that they have a bank account.

Table 6. Youth reporting that they have a bank account.

Do you have a bank account?	Yes	No	I'm not sure or I don't know	Did not answer
13–15 (N=318)	20%	69%	11%	0.3%
16–17 (N=280)	30%	65%	5%	0%
18–20 (N=355)	62%	34%	4%	0%

NOTE: A total of 953 youth were asked this question; Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

C. SUPPORT FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS

C.1 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOUTH FEEL SUPPORTED BY FOSTER/KINSHIP PARENTS AND RESIDENTIAL FACILITY STAFF?

The survey asked youth to indicate which individuals in their lives they could turn to when they needed help (Table 7). Specifically, youth in foster or kinship homes were asked if they felt supported by their foster parents. Of the 702-youth responding, over two thirds (72%) said they felt “very supported,” and another 22% felt “somewhat supported.”

Youth in residential care and group homes were asked if they felt supported by program staff, and the majority said yes; 53% felt “very supported” and 34% felt “somewhat supported.” The remaining 12% of youth in residential care did not feel supported by staff.

Table 7. Youth reporting the extent to which they feel supported by foster parents or residential facility staff.

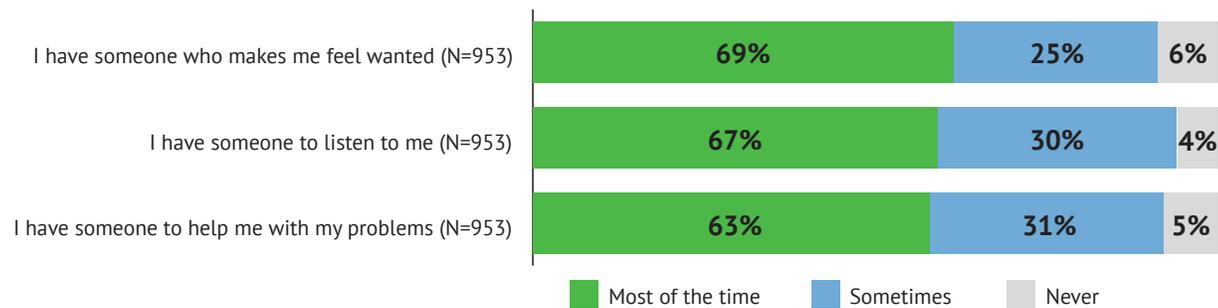
In general, do you feel supported by your foster parents or residential facility staff? (Total N = 953)		
	Foster Parent (N=702)	Residential Staff (N=251)
Yes, very supported	72%	53%
Yes, somewhat supported	22%	34%
No, not very supported	5%	8%
No, not supported at all	2%	6%

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

C.2 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOUTH RECEIVE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT?

Two thirds of the youth responding had someone who makes them feel wanted “most of the time” (69%), 25% of youth felt that they had someone who makes them feel wanted “some of the time”, and 6% reported that they have someone who makes them feel wanted “never.” Sixty-seven percent of youth felt that they had someone to listen to them most of the time and 63% of youth indicated that they have someone to help them with their problems most of the time (Figure 18). ACS followed up with the youth who reported “Never” for all three items to see what additional support and resources they needed.

Figure 18. Youth reporting various situations that are true for them (N = 953)



This question was mandatory, all 953 youth answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

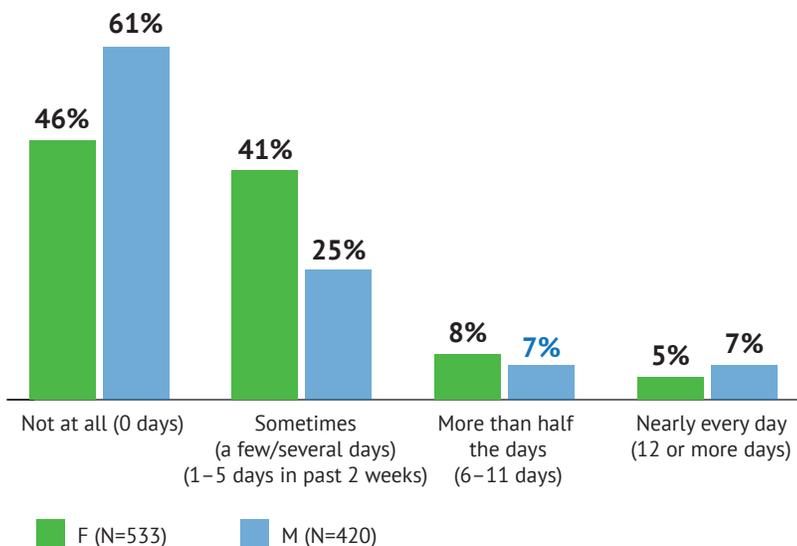
D. YOUTH REPORTING OF FEELING DOWN, DEPRESSED OR HOPELESS

The findings from the question “How often have you been bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless over the past two weeks” has been disaggregated by sex, age, and sexuality and is included in Figures 19, 20, and 21. This question was mandatory, so all 953-youth answered it.

Male and female youth reported the following frequency of feeling down, depressed, or hopeless within the last two weeks (Figure 19):

- 61% of male youth reported “Not at all” (0 days).
- 46% of female youth reported “Not at all” (0 days).
- 41% of females reported “Sometimes” (1–5 days).
- 25% of males reported “sometimes “ (1–5 days).
- 8% of females report “More than half of the days” (6–9 days).
- 7% of females report “More than half of the days” (6–9 days).
- 5% of females reported “nearly every day” (12 or more days).
- 7% of males reported “Nearly every day” (12 or more days).

Figure 19. Youth reporting feeling down, depressed, or hopeless over the last 2 weeks by sex



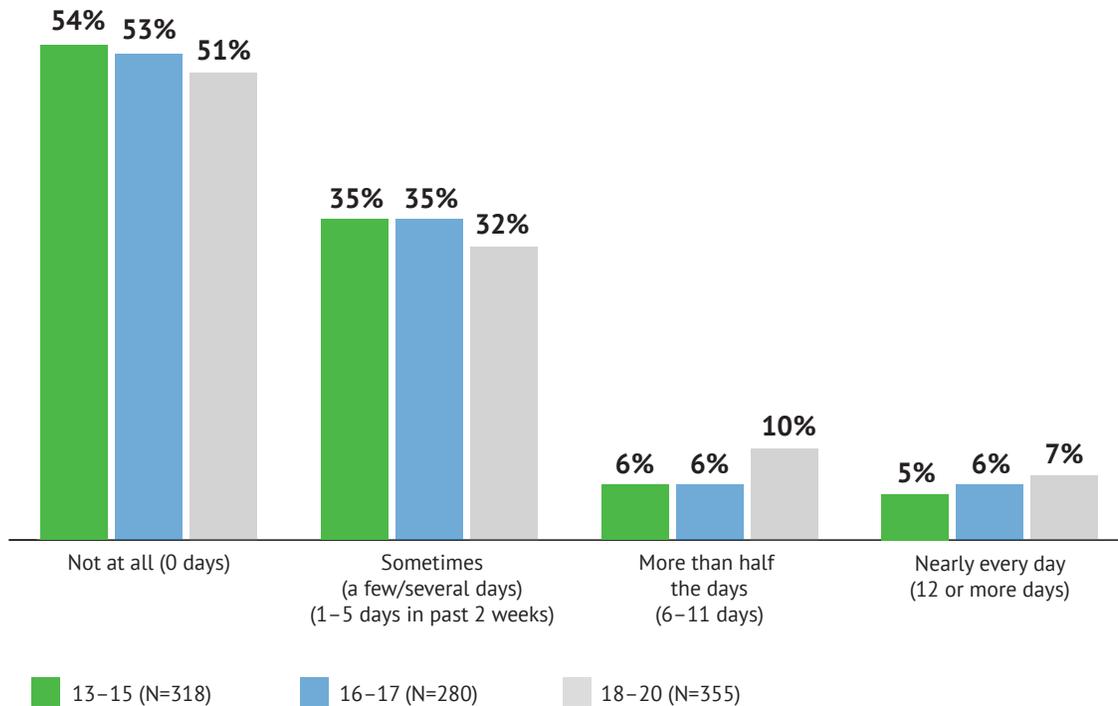
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

The findings by age group indicated the following frequency of feeling down, depressed, or hopeless within the last two weeks (Figure 20):

- 54% of youth ages 13–15, 53% of youth ages 16–17, and 51% of youth ages 18–20 reported “Not at all” (0 days).
- 35% of youth ages 13–15, 35% of youth ages 16–17, and 32% of youth ages 18–20 reported “Sometimes” (1–5 days).
- 6% of youth ages 13–15, 6% of youth ages 16–17, and 10% of youth ages 18–20 reported “More than half of the days” (6–9 days).

- 5% of youth ages 13–15, 6% of youth ages 16–17, and 7% of youth ages 18–20 reported “Nearly every day” (12 or more days).

Figure 20. Youth reporting feeling down, depressed, or hopeless over the last 2 weeks by Age Group



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

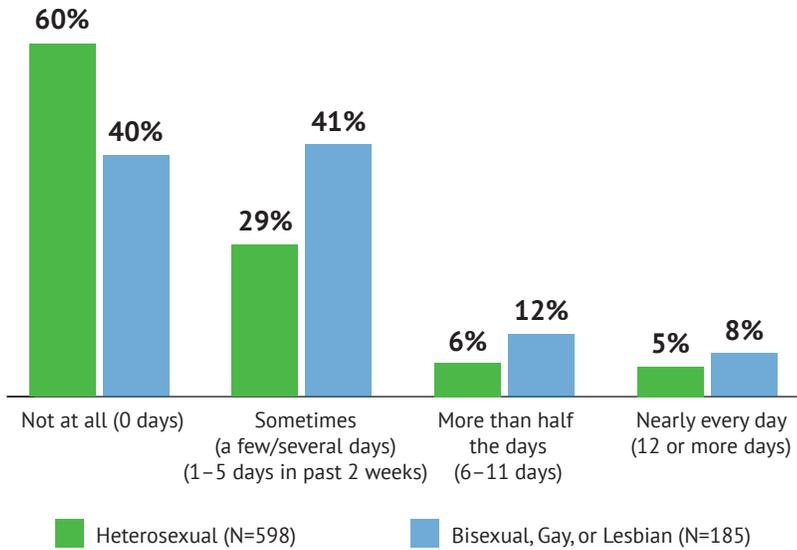
All youth who responded feeling down nearly every day were contacted by ACS for a follow up. For youth who checked “sometimes” or “more than half the days”, an automatic follow up question was prompted asking if youth would like someone from ACS to reach out.

There were 62 distinct youth who were contacted by ACS senior staff for depression-related follow-up. Results of the follow up are such:

- 38 youth were already getting their needs met
- 16 youth indicated their provider agency is now addressing the concern
- 3 youth don’t have any concerns
- 3 youth have other outcomes¹⁰
- 2 youth were discharged from care

¹⁰ Other outcomes include refusal for follow-up, discharge from care, temporarily felt depressed but no longer feeling depressed, agency to follow-up to determine needs, receiving mental health services but wanting additional support, and youth declining mental health services.

Figure 21. Youth reporting feeling down, depressed or hopeless over the last 2 weeks by Sexuality



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

The findings by sexuality indicated the following frequency of feeling down, depressed or hopeless within the last two weeks (Figure 21):

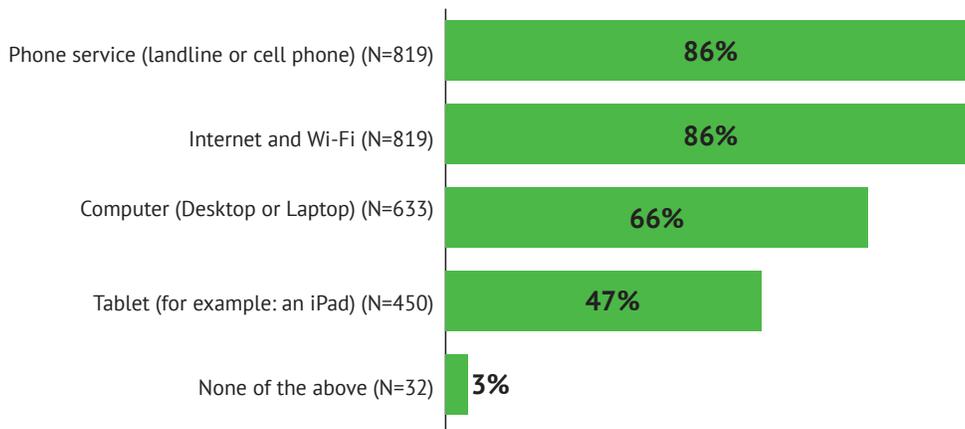
- 60% of youth who identify as heterosexual and 40% of youth who identify as bisexual, gay, or lesbian reported “Not at all” (0 days).
- 29% of heterosexual youth and 41% of bisexual, gay, or lesbian youth reported “Sometimes” (1–5 days).
- 6% of heterosexual youth and 12% of bisexual, gay, or lesbian youth reported “More than half of the days” (6–9 days).
- 5% of heterosexual youth and 8% bisexual, gay, or lesbian youth reported “Nearly every day” (12 or more days).

E. SOCIAL INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION

E.1 DO YOUTH HAVE ACCESS TO COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY?

Most youth in foster care reported they have access to internet and phone service (86% for each) (Figure 22). In addition, most youth (66%) reported they have access to a computer (desktop or laptop), and half of youth (47%) indicated that they have access to a tablet.

Figure 22. Youth access to communication technology (N=953)

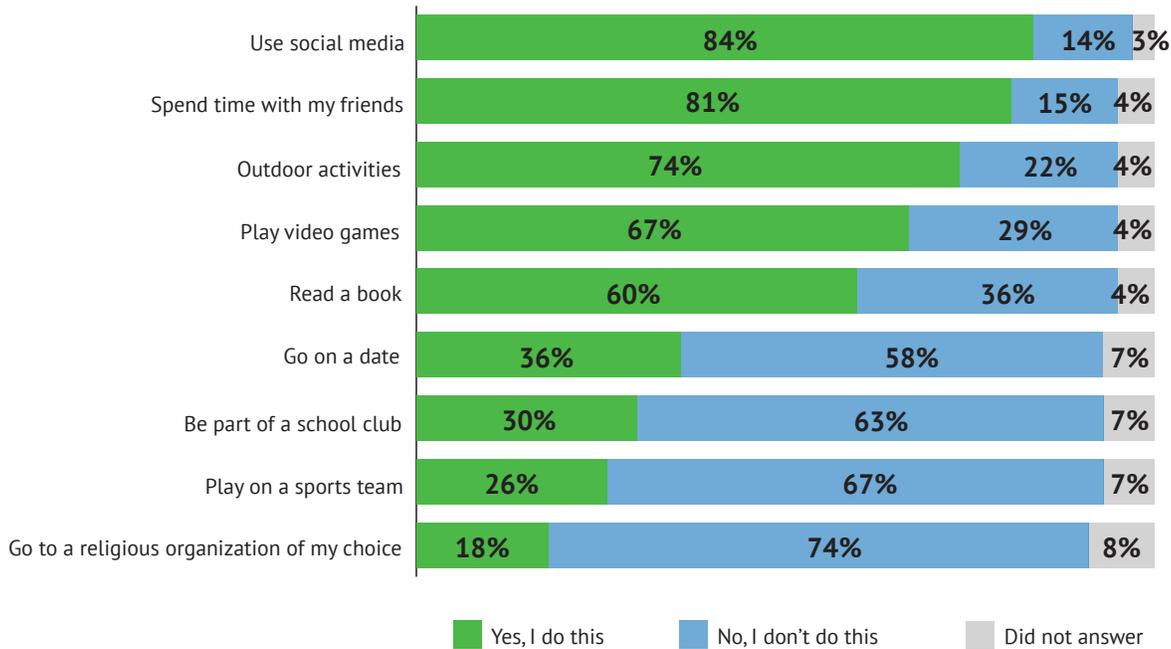


SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23.

E.2 WHAT DO YOU DO IN YOUR FREE TIME?

Using social media and spending time with friends were the two most popular activities identified by the respondents (Figure 23). Other activities youth frequently reported participating in were outdoor activities, playing video games, and reading books. Thirty-six percent of the youth stated that they go on dates. The least common activities were playing on a sports team (26%), being part of a school club (30%), and going to a religious organization (18%).

Figure 23. Youth reporting the activities in which they participated during their free time

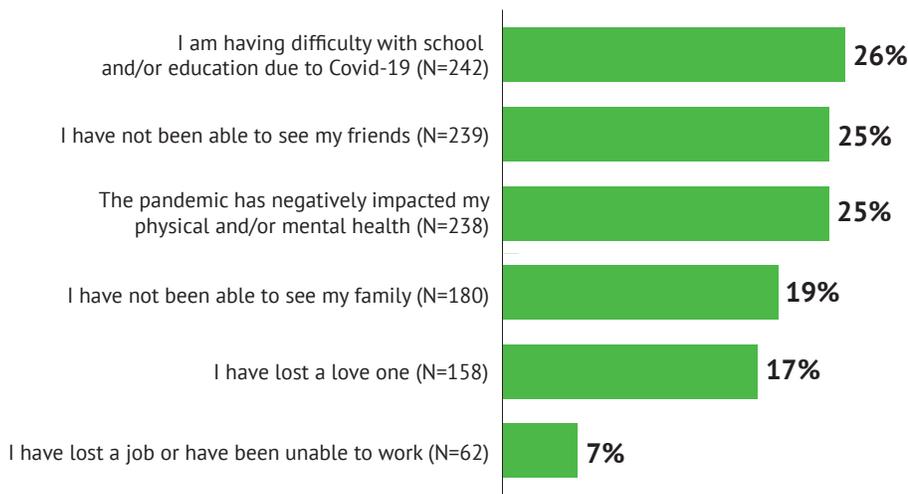


NOTE: All 953 youth were asked this question; SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

F. IMPACT FROM COVID-19

The survey included a question around the impact of Covid-19. Youth were asked to check all applicable areas of their lives that were affected by Covid-19. Twenty six percent of youth stated that they are having difficulty with school and/or education due to Covid-19 (Figure 24). Twenty-five percent of youth reported not being able to see friends. Twenty-five percent of youth reported that the pandemic has negatively impacted their physical and/or mental health. Nineteen percent of youth reported that they have been unable to see their family (immediate and/or extended). ACS has issued updated visiting guidance to foster care agencies with the goal of ensuring frequent parent child contact in person whenever possible and safe, and otherwise virtually. Seventeen percent of youth have lost a loved one due to Covid-19. Seven percent of youth have lost a job or have been unable to work due to the pandemic.

Figure 24. How Covid-19 has affected youth



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

G. ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE, HYGIENE INFORMATION, BASIC NEEDS AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

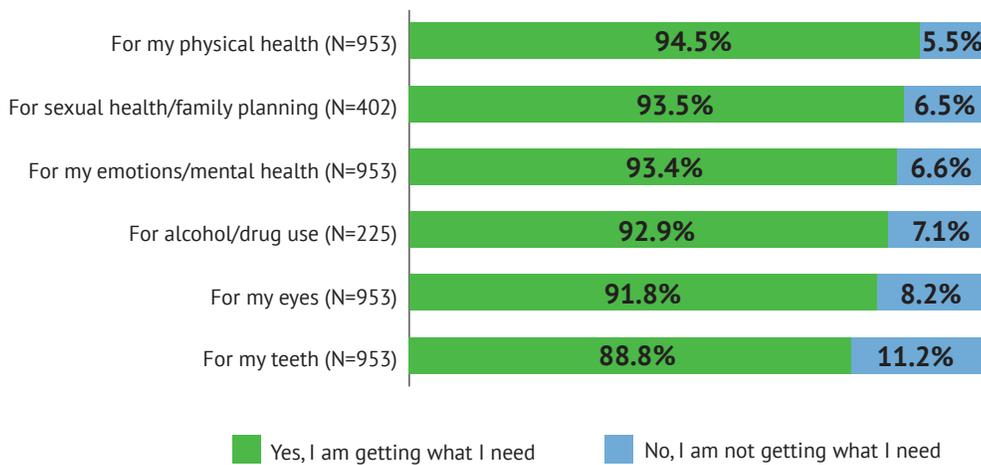
G.1 WHAT HEALTHCARE SERVICES DO YOUTH NEED AND RECEIVE?

The survey asked youth whether they are getting the healthcare they need for physical, dental, emotional, vision, sexual health, and alcohol or drug use. For each of the healthcare services examined, responses from the youth were used to create two indicators: whether the youth needed the service and whether they received what they needed.

The information presented in Figure 25 reflects the extent to which health care services were received in six health areas. Almost all youth (94.5%) reported having their physical health met and 93.5% reported having their sexual health/family planning needs met. Ninety three percent of youth had their emotional and mental health needs met, 92.9% reported having their alcohol/drug use met, 91.8% had their eye needs met, and 88.8% of youth reported their dental care needs were met.

In-depth follow-up was conducted in each case where a basic need was reported as unmet. ACS senior-level staff spoke to youth directly and/or to provider agency staff. For the 666 follow-up items related to Health Care (Emotion/Mental Health, Vision, Physical, Sexual Health, Dental, and Alcohol/Drug Use), the follow-up conversations indicated that the need had already been met for 37% of the youth contacted. Thirty-eight percent of the youth contacted reported their provider agency is now addressing the concern; 8% of the youth reported no concerns; 16% reported other reasons¹¹; and 1% were already discharged from care.

Figure 25. Youth in foster care reporting whether they received various types of health care



This question was mandatory, all 953 youth answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

G.2 DO YOUTH NEED MORE INFORMATION REGARDING SELF-CARE AND HYGIENE?

The question: “Currently, do you receive support in learning about self-care (for example, putting on deodorant, using feminine products, health and wellness)?” was included based on the advice of the ACS Youth Advisory Council, who reviewed the survey questions and provided feedback. Table 8 provides the details of youth responses.

Table 8. Youth responses regarding information on self-care and hygiene

Response	Percent	Total
Yes, I am getting what I need	74%	708
No, I am not getting what I need	3%	26
I don't need this	23%	219
Total	100%	953

This question was mandatory, so 953 youth answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

¹¹ Other reasons include incorrectly answered the question, youth declined follow up, youth missed scheduled appointments, appointments have been scheduled, unable to reach the youth

For the 26 youth who reported an unmet need, the survey asked if they would like ACS to contact them regarding information on self-care and hygiene. Eleven youth said yes and were contacted. Results from the follow up with the 11 youth who were contacted:

- 8 youth - indicated their needs were already met
- 2 youth - ACS/provider agency is now addressing the concern
- 1 youth - reported “other” (e.g., misunderstanding the question)

G.3 CAN YOUTH PRACTICE THEIR RELIGION WHERE THEY LIVE?

To assess if youth can stay connected to their faith traditions, the survey asked if youth could practice their religion where they live. Forty-four percent responded yes; 3% responded no; 17% stated that they have a religion but do not practice; and 37% said that they do not have a religion (Table 9). Youth who answered that they were not able to practice their religion where they lived (N=26) were asked if they would like someone from ACS to follow up with them. Nine youth stated that they would like someone to follow up with them. Responses to follow up with the nine youth were as such:

- 1 youth - indicated their needs are already being met
- 3 youth - provider agency now addressing this concern
- 4 youth - reported no concern
- 1 youth - reported other (e.g., didn’t understand the question)

Table 9. Youth responses regarding ability to practice their religion where they live right now (N=953)

Response	Percent	Total
Yes	44%	415
No	3%	26
I have a religion, but I do not practice	17%	162
I do not have a religion	37%	350
Total	100%	953

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

G.4 ARE BASIC NEEDS FOR FOOD AND CLOTHES BEING MET?

The survey included questions regarding basic needs for food, clothing, and shoes. ACS monitored youth’s responses to these questions daily during data collection. When a youth reported that any of these basic needs was unmet, ACS immediately contacted the youth to assess well-being and any necessary action steps. Additional follow up was conducted with foster care agencies, youth, and foster parents as appropriate.

Ninety-six percent¹² of youth in foster homes reported they were provided with three meals per day; 94% stated that they have appropriate clothing (which means the clothing is clean, fits and has no holes), and 94% reported they have shoes that fit (Figure 26). ACS followed up with all the youth reporting that they had fewer than three meals per day, did not have appropriate clothing and did not have shoes that fit:

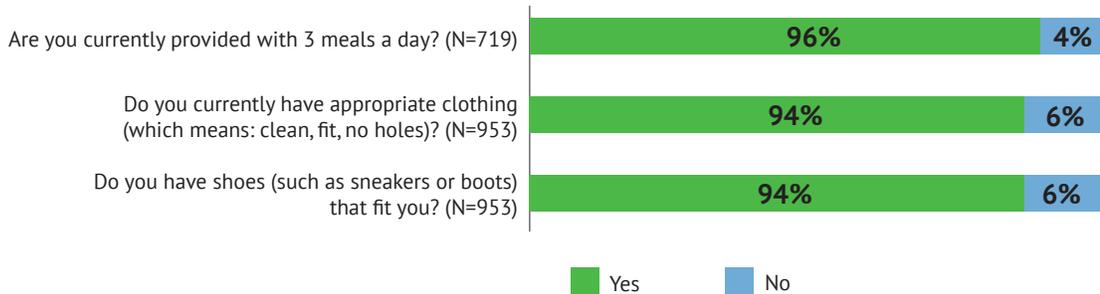
¹² In FY23, the survey did not include this question for youth in residential care.

Below are the results from the follow up with the youth:

- Meals: 16 youth indicated concerns about receiving 3 meals a day, the follow up conversations indicated:
 - 6 youth already had their needs met
 - 3 youth indicated their provider agency is addressing the concern
 - 5 of youth indicated no concerns
 - 1 other
 - 1 youth discharged from care
- Clothing: 59 youth indicated concerns around clothing, the follow up conversations indicated:
 - 25 youth stated that needs already met
 - 17 youth indicated provider agency is addressing the concern
 - 15 youth indicated no concerns
 - 2 youth reported other
- Shoes: 57 youth indicated concerns around shoes, the follow up conversations indicated:
 - 17 youth already had their needs met
 - 20 youth indicated their provider agency is addressing the concern
 - 16 youth indicated no concern
 - 3 youth reported other
 - 1 youth was discharged from care

Examples of “other” include: misunderstanding the question, youth declining follow up, youth could not be reached due to unrelated hospitalizations and clothes/shoes that were ill-fitting.

Figure 26. Youth reporting provision of basic needs



NOTE: This question was mandatory, all 953-youth answered it.

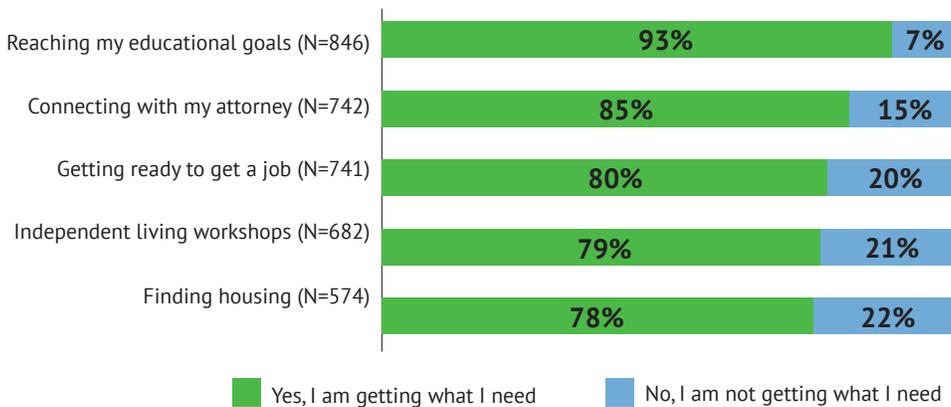
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

H. SUPPORT FROM FOSTER CARE AGENCIES

H.1 WHAT SUPPORT SERVICES DO YOUTH NEED AND RECEIVE FROM FOSTER CARE AGENCIES?

Youth were asked what types of support they receive from their foster care agencies. Among those who said they needed each type of support; Figure 27 shows how many reported receiving it (The N shown in the figure is the number of youth stating that they need this type of support). The most needed and most often received type of support was helping to reach educational goals; of the 846-youth stating they needed this, 93% reported receiving help from their foster care agency. Eighty-five percent of youth who reported needing support to connect with their attorney received it and 80% of youth who needed support with getting ready to get a job received it. Seventy-nine percent of youth who needed independent living workshops received it and 78% of youth who reported needed help with finding housing received it.

Figure 27. Youth reporting types of support they receive from foster care agencies.

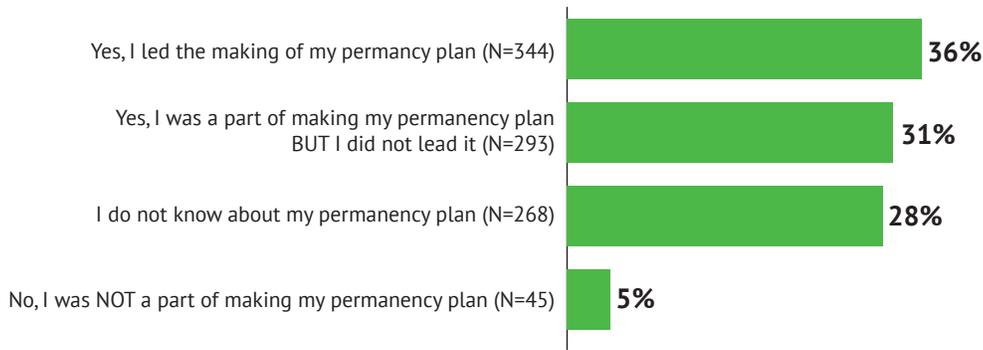


SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

H.2 TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOUTH INVOLVED IN PERMANENCY PLANNING?

Figure 28 shows the distribution for various levels of youth involvement in their permanency planning. Thirty-six percent of youth reported that they led the making of their permanency plan. Another 31% were involved in planning. However, 30% said they did not know about their permanency plan and 5% of youth had not been a part of creating it.

Figure 28. Youth reporting on their involvement in their permanency plan



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

H.3 WHO SUPPORTS THE YOUTH IN THEIR PERMANENCY PLANNING?

The 637 youth who were involved in the making of their permanency plans also noted who specifically supported them in permanency planning. The most frequent supporters were foster care case workers, followed by foster parents and residential staff. Table 10 shows the detailed findings.

Table 10. Youth reporting whether various individuals supported them in their permanency planning.

Response	Percent	Total
Case worker at my foster care agency	79%	507
Foster parent	71%	311
Residential staff	68%	138
My lawyer	51%	324
Parent	27%	174
Friend	19%	123
Teacher	10%	67
No one supports me in my permanency planning	2%	13

NOTE: The total N (number of people asked) was 618 for most items, 664 for foster parents, and 184 for residential staff). Table 10 does not include youth who reported “I do not know about my permanency plan.”

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY23

V. ACS INITIATIVES SUPPORTING OLDER YOUTH

ACS is currently implementing a range of programs and initiatives to improve youth experiences, outcomes, and well-being through the Foster Care Strategic Blueprint and new foster care contracts. While the survey reflects that many youths are progressing well in terms of their educational achievements and social connections, more work must be done to support the mental health, school and work readiness, and other ongoing needs of youth in care.

YOUTH VOICE

To further engage youth and ensure their voices inform practice change, ACS formed a **Youth Leadership Council (YLC) to bring youth and adult leaders together to work in partnership on youth-related areas of policy and practice.** The ACS YLC launched in March 2019 and includes both youth currently and previously in foster care and/or the juvenile justice system. The goals of the Youth Leadership Council are to develop the leadership skills of youth, advocate for changes and improvements in policies and areas of mutual concern, establish a youth voice in the foster care community, and build a positive social network. The YLC has developed a strategic plan focused on system improvement and its goals include identifying potential paid and internship opportunities for youth at ACS; recruiting additional youth for the YLC and developing materials to train staff on building healthy relationships and respectful, supportive communication with youth in care.

IMPROVING PERMANENCY OUTCOMES

ACS continues to work aggressively to improve permanency outcomes for youth in foster care. **As outlined in the Foster Care Strategic Blueprint Update, ACS is implementing several initiatives** to improve reunification, adoption, and kinship guardianship outcomes for children and youth in foster care. These include the new Enhanced Family Foster Care (EFFC) program, increased therapeutic resources, partnership with Parent Advocates with lived experience and increased resources for Family Time (a.k.a. visiting), and increased resources to support kinship care, among other initiatives. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted permanency outcomes for young people in foster care, but ACS continues to work closely with the Family Court to achieve safe and timely Reunification, Adoption, and Kinship Guardianship.

HIGH QUALITY PLACEMENTS FOR YOUTH

ACS has been highly successful in increasing foster home recruitment while simultaneously improving kinship placement and support for caregivers in recent years. This citywide effort emphasizes effective recruitment practices and strong customer service to support kinship and foster families so that children are safe and receive the highest quality of care. From FY 2017 to FY 2022, ACS and its foster care agency partners increased the proportion of children in foster care placed with kin from 31% to 43%. While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to significantly impact foster home recruitment, ACS continues to actively partner with the foster care agencies to implement strategies for recruiting foster parents who are committed to caring for youth in foster care.

SUPPORTING THE WELL BEING OF LGBTQAI+ YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

In January of 2021, ACS began to implement its LGBTQAI+ Action Plan. The goal of the plan is to improve the experiences and outcomes of LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care. Key parts of the plan include:

- Revised the ACS LGBTQAI+ Staff training, *Include, Empower, Affirm: Policy, Best Practices, and Guidance for Serving LGBTQAI+ Children and Youth Involved in the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice System*, which was launched in 2021. This learning program prepares learners to apply the policies and best practices that promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of LGBTQAI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Asexual, Intersex, and many more) youths involved with ACS and contracted providers.
- ACS will continue to provide a LGBTQAI+ mandated training to foster parents. With the support of Planned Parenthood of Greater NY, foster care agencies will roll out a new version of this training in the fall of 2023.
- ACS funds the Ackerman Institute and The LGBTQ Center to train clinicians that work with ACS involved families on best practices for engaging LGBTQAI+ families. Through this program, youth in foster care and parents/caregivers are directly referred to family therapy and trans youth group therapy services.
- ACS is also working with foster care agencies to expand foster parent recruitment and training that is focused on serving LGBTQAI+ youth. As part of this work, foster care agencies will partner with LGBTQ organizations to engage the LGBTQAI+ community as potential foster parents.
- Family Permanency Services is utilizing the Office of Equity Strategies expertise in the placement of LGBTQAI+. The Office of Equity Strategies has been participating in placement conferencing and case planning for the population in care.
- The Office of Equity Strategies has disseminated a comprehensive LGBTQAI+ Resource Guide to all foster care agencies.
- The Youth Leadership Council's LGBTQAI+ Sub-Committee has been active since February of 2021. The group plans various activities and engagement events, such as youth Pride events, and a few selected members will be participating in the review of the draft of a developing policy for LGBTQAI+ youth in ACS care.
- The Office of Equity Strategies is drafting a new LGBTQAI+ youth in care policy. The draft of the policy is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2023.

HEALTH SERVICES FOR YOUTH

Health Care: ACS partners with foster care providers to ensure that children and youth in foster care have access to the full array of health care services. This includes Health Homes and Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waiver services. A Health Home is a program that helps support the child/youth and their family by providing care management services. A Health Home Care Manager works as a team with the child/youth, their family and service providers to help a child/youth receive coordinated care and services. All children in foster care with chronic health, medical, and/or mental health conditions requiring a doctor's care are eligible for a Health Home. By enrolling in a Health Home, children/youth can receive HCBS waiver services if they are found to be eligible. HCBS services are designed to offer support and services to children/youth in non-institutionalized settings that enable them to remain at home and in the community or for children/youth being discharged from an institutional setting who require these services to safely return to their home and community. HCBS services assist children/youth to succeed in a home/community environment to avoid higher levels of care and out-of-home placements.

Mental Health Services. ACS is working closely with its contracted foster care providers to ensure that children and youth in foster care have access to the full array of mental health services. This includes accessing all mental health and other services available through Medicaid programs, including Child and Family Treatment and Support Services (CFTSS). Children and Family Treatment and Support Services (CFTSS) are standalone mental health and substance use services that support children/families. CFTSS services can be provided at home or in the community. CFTSS services include:

- Other Licensed Practitioner (OLP)
- Crisis intervention
- Community Psychiatric Supports and Treatment (CPST)
- Psychosocial rehabilitation
- Family peer support services
- Youth peer support and training

ACS has partnered with the **NY State Office of Mental Health (OMH) to obtain an ACS Access View for PSYCKES**, a web-based application designed to support quality improvement, care planning, and clinical decision making for the Medicaid Behavioral Health population. ACS clients are automatically linked to this access view, through which designated ACS staff can access information including diagnosis, medications, medical and behavioral health outpatient and inpatient services and home health care coordination. These designated ACS staff can run certain reports through the PSYCKES system (currently related to concurrent review criteria) and are working with OMH to expand reporting capabilities in the near future.

DOHMH AND ACS HAVE COLLABORATED TO FACILITATE ACCESS TO THE NURSE-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

DOHMH and ACS have implemented strategies to increase the utilization of the Nurse-Family Partnership Program for expectant and parenting youth, children and families involved in the child welfare systems. These included partnering to conduct virtual outreach and provide marketing materials to all ACS Divisions, Foster Care and Preventive agencies to increase awareness of the Nurse-Family Partnership; sharing data to track pregnant youth in foster care being referred and enrolled with Nurse-Family Partnership; and ongoing meetings to identify trends and opportunities for additional outreach. Nurse-Family Partnership has adapted their practices to virtual tele-health due to the challenges of the pandemic.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES

The ACS Fair Futures Program launched in December 2019. To date, a total over 430 staff consisting of Coaches, Specialists, and Case Planners have been on-boarded and trained. In year 1, Fair Futures was funded at \$10M. Currently, the program is funded at \$35M, and the model has expanded to serve youth 21- to 26-years-old as well as youth served in ACS juvenile justice programs. During year 3, 211 youth ages 18-26 have been served through the Fair Futures expansion. In total in year 3, 3,172 youth received 1:1 coaching and supportive services.

The DOE's Foster Care Education Office has been working closely with the ACS Education Team and foster care agencies throughout the 2022-2023 school year to provide education support for children and youth in foster care. They have

advocated for policy changes at the DOE to expedite school transportation for students newly entering foster care or changing foster care placements, have helped foster care agencies identify students who are experiencing education challenges and collaborated with agency staff to reach out to schools to obtain the services and assistance that's needed for those students. They are also training social workers to become more familiar with the experiences and challenges faced by students in foster care, in order to facilitate more appropriate services for students at schools across the DOE.

Through data-sharing arrangements with DOE and DYCD, ACS and foster care agencies continue to identify students in foster care who would benefit from targeted educational services and programs. Every month, ACS coordinates with the DOE to send detailed education-related data reports to individual foster care agencies for the students in their care. The ACS Education Team also convenes professional development forums each month on important education issues for foster care agency staff, and provides trainings and technical assistance on how to use education data to provide appropriate, targeted supports. ACS has also been partnering with the DOE Foster Care Education Office to identify students who should be prioritized for enrollment in Summer Rising and providing enrollment assistance where needed.

Launched in 2022, the College Choice Program makes significant enhancements to several college initiatives such as, **Fostering College Success Initiative** (the “Dorm Project”), The **Fostering College Success Stipend Program** (FCS), and College Room and Board (CRB). The purpose of these enhancements is to give college youth more flexibility and options around what types of support they need while attending college, including where they can live. Participants enrolled in the College Choice Program can access, coaching, tutoring, career counseling, and related support provided online and in-person by The New York Foundling. Youth attending a college/university in New York City can choose to live in housing sponsored by that college or university, or in one of six housing options offered by the College Choice Program. Youth attending a college or university outside of New York City can live in housing sponsored by that college or university, or in safe and appropriate private housing. ACS will pay for tuition and mandatory fees that are not covered by financial aid awards. In addition, youth can receive a daily stipend, to cover food and other living and college-related expenses, while they attend school and six months afterwards. The College Choice Program currently supports 300 college youth.

ACS continues to implement key strategies to improve employment outcomes for youth. ACS first established an office dedicated to improving employment outcomes for youth in foster care in 2016. Today, the **Office of Education and Employment Initiatives** develops services, initiatives and partnerships that build capacity within the foster care system to connect youth to college support and workforce development programs throughout NYC. Opportunities made available by the Office include paid internships, career readiness programming, mentoring, vocational training, and employment. The Office's initiatives support youth development for educational and career planning, mentoring, work-based learning, employment, and career advancement.

ACS is partnering with New Yorkers for Children (NYFC) and Youth Villages (YV) to implement LifeSet, an evidence-based program for young adults ages 17–22 who have been involved in the foster care, juvenile justice and/or mental health systems as young adults. The LifeSet model uses specialists to provide youth with intensive community-based support consisting of both clinical and skill-building interventions. The goals of LifeSet are to support youth to maintain stable and suitable housing, participate in educational/vocational programs, find, and sustain employment, remain free from Court involvement, develop healthy relationships, build a strong and permanent support system, engage with youth's families and social supports, strengthen mental health stability, and develop fundamental life skills.

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PROGRAMS INCLUDE:

- The **Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers** (YA WORC) curriculum. YA WORC is an evidenced informed career readiness program that provides professional development training to foster care agency staff to provide comprehensive, developmentally appropriate career readiness programming to youth in foster care ages 14–21. In addition, the agencies receive technical assistance and training to develop an on-site career club that provides peer-to-peer experiential learning and instruction on how to develop educational and career plans, resumes and cover letters, and decisions based on labor market information.
- In partnership with DYCD, the **Advance and Earn Plus** was revamped to offer a paid internship program for young adults ages 16–24 with foster care experience who are not in school and not working. Called. **This program built upon the** former YAIP+ initiative, the program's career pathways approach offers a continuum of education and employment services, aiming to accommodate youth at different stages of skill development and provide them the skills and tools necessary to achieve long-term career success.
- **Summer Youth Employment Program.** ACS partners with DYCD to support the City's SYEP, 1,000 youth were supported during the application process and 700 enrolled. ACS also continues to provide the **VCRED initiative**, a vocational training and apprenticeship program that provides professional opportunities to youth, ages 16 to 24, in foster care and with juvenile justice experience. As part of the program, youth participate in training for professional certification through courses offered by Kingsborough Community College, participate in paid internships/ apprenticeships, and have opportunities for employment with the employer hosting the internship. V-CRED focuses on five career pathways: 1) Information Technology, 2) Electrician's Helper, 3) Allied Health (e.g. Certified Nursing Assistants, EKG Technician), 4) Pharmacy Technicians, and 5) Building Trades.
- ACS continues to partner with the Pinkerton Foundation to support a **Mentored-Internship Program** (MIP) across twelve foster care agencies. The MIP program provides technical assistance and training to foster care agency staff through the Workforce Professional Training Institute (WPTI) at Columbia University to agency staff. Through the community-based styled training, staff learn to develop on-site internships within the infrastructure of their agencies. With supervision and mentoring **provided by agency leadership and staff, youth participate in paid internships that offer 10 hours of work per week over a six-month period during the academic year. The program targets youth in foster care between the ages of 16–21 years old.** Since FY18, MIP has provided funding to train over 200 foster care staff who coordinated paid internships for over 700 youth.
- Over the past 18 months, ACS has held a series of **Virtual Career Fairs and smaller recruiting events.** The purpose of the fairs and events is to offer youth an opportunity to connect to jobs with career pathways and a safe, supportive work environment. In total, 300 youth have benefitted from the fairs and events.

IMMIGRATION SERVICES

ACS's Office of Immigrant Services and Language Affairs (ISLA) is dedicated to assisting all youth in foster care who have immigration needs, including those eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. Through the Immigration Services for Youth in Care Program, ISLA oversees and coordinates collaboration between foster care providers, approved immigration legal services providers, and ACS divisions to identify immigrant youth in ACS care and assist them to obtain immigration relief.

VI. CONCLUSION

ACS has multiple initiatives specifically geared towards improving the safety, permanency, and well-being of youth in foster care that align closely with ACS' Core Collective Priorities:

1. Meet the Present Need: Creating the capacity to accept and care for children and youth with complex needs entering care.
2. Focus on Family: Provide respectful and responsive practice leading to timely permanency
3. Create Safety and Stability
4. Ensure Success and Improve Well-Being: Increasing access to therapeutic supports, educational opportunities, Fair Futures and other services.

The FY23 ACS Youth Experience Survey provides valuable information regarding the experiences of youth between the ages of 13–21 in foster care. The findings from this survey continues to be used to inform ongoing ACS' service planning and programming for older youth in the areas of permanency, education, employment, emotional supports, child welfare staff training and other key identified areas.

ACS is reviewing the results with the Youth Leadership Council and other key internal departments to identify and prioritize approaches for supporting older youth. As in past years, these findings are reviewed with provider agency leaders and other stakeholders to strategically align efforts that support the well-being of older youth.

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