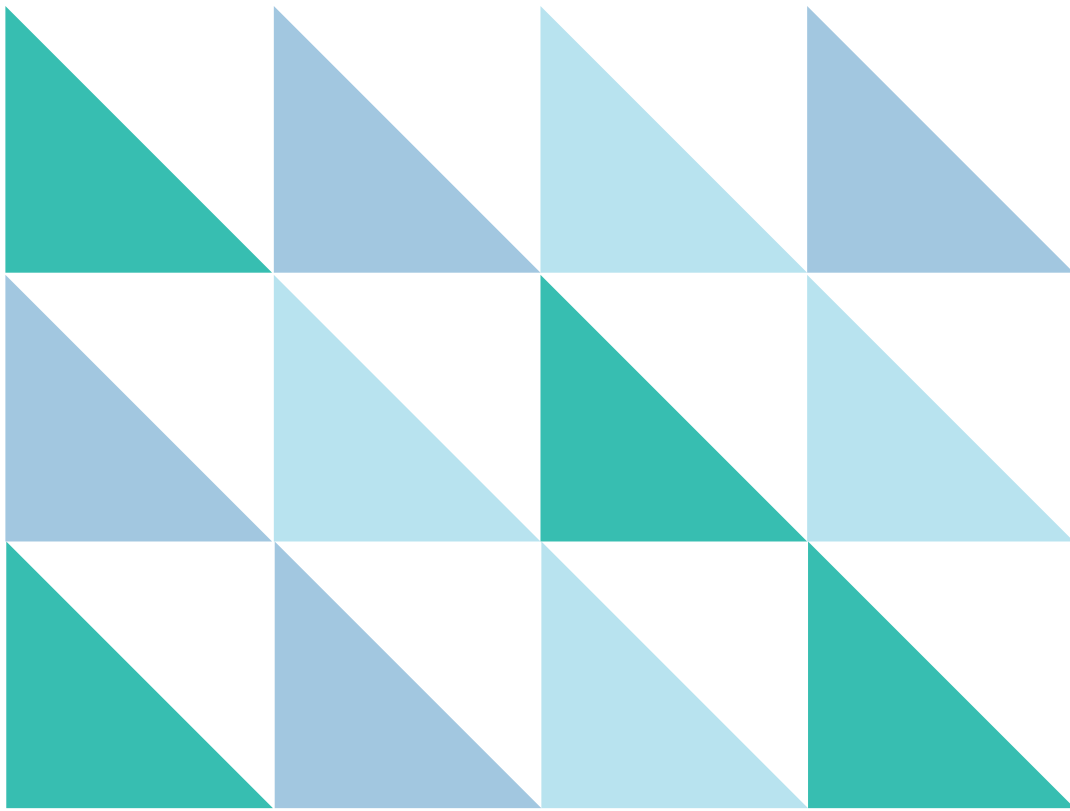


EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF NYC YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE



December 2025

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The City of New York
Mayor Eric Adams

NYC
Center for Innovation
through Data Intelligence

ABOUT

CIDI is a research and policy center located in the Office of the Mayor and reports directly to the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Initiatives. CIDI fosters collaboration with all Health and Human Service agencies to promote citywide policy change with the goal of improvement in the effectiveness of NYC government. CIDI embraces the Mayor's goal of delivering cross agency solutions to big bold problems impacting the health and well-being of the most vulnerable people in our city.

To learn more about CIDI, please visit www.nyc.gov/cidi

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With much gratitude,
Maryanne Schretzman, DSW
Executive Director
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01

Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

A high school diploma is an important achievement for young people as it opens doors to better opportunities in both employment and higher education. However, youth in foster care commonly face unique challenges that can make graduating especially difficult. A 2022 study from the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI) calculated high school graduation rates for New York City (NYC) students in foster care and identified foster care and educational characteristics associated with higher and lower graduation rates (NYC Center for innovation through Data Intelligence, 2022). This report refines those measures and updates graduation rate calculations.

METHODOLOGY

This report integrates administrative data from the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and NYC Public Schools (NYCPS) to calculate graduation rates for students in foster care over ten years of 9th grade entry cohorts, 2011 through 2020.

All graduation rates have been updated through the 2023-2024 academic year, with four-year rates updated for the 2020-2021 9th grade entry cohort. Five- and six- year graduation rates are available for students through the 2019-2020 and 2018-2019 9th grade cohorts, respectively. The sample, methodology, and measures used in the 2022 CIDI report have been updated and refined to better allow for annual updates and use as an accountability tool for City agencies.

The sample included youth who were in ACS foster care for at least seven days during high school, attended a NYCPS high school for at least one year, and were included in the official New York State (NYS) graduation calculation with a known graduation status. Building on CIDI's 2022 findings, graduation rates were calculated by foster care and educational characteristics previously associated with high school graduation.

FINDINGS

Four-year graduation rates for students in foster care have nearly doubled over the past ten years.

Among high school students in foster care who entered 9th grade in the 2020-2021 academic year, 46 percent graduated in four years compared to only 25.2 percent of those who entered in the 2011-2012 academic year.

More than half (52.7 percent) of students in foster care who entered 9th grade in the 2019-2020 academic year graduated in five years. Fifty-five percent of students who entered high school in the 2018-2019 academic year graduated in six years. The continued upward trajectory of five- and six-year graduation rates suggests that students in foster care may require more time to graduate, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Foster care characteristics associated with higher graduation rates include being in kinship care (rather than foster home care or residential care, which are other types of foster care) and experiencing fewer than one movement in care per year.

Experiencing kinship care, high school attendance, Math and ELA proficiency, and 8th grade attendance impact graduation rates.

Educational characteristics associated with higher graduation rates include attending the same high school from entry to completion, not repeating 9th grade, proficiency in the New York State 8th grade Math and English Language Arts (ELA) Regents exams, and higher 8th grade attendance.

CONCLUSIONS

The four-year graduation rate for high school students in foster care has increased from 25.2 percent for the 2011 9th grade cohort to 46.0 percent for the 2020 9th grade cohort.

This study highlights the importance of educational and foster care characteristics associated with high school graduation.

Foster care characteristics that positively impact graduation include having ever experienced kinship care and having less than one movement in care per year. Having ever experienced residential care is associated with lower rates of high school graduation.

Ongoing evaluation of ACS, NYCPS and DYCD initiatives is important to transform promising results into effective base practices.

Educational characteristics that positively impact graduation include 8th grade NYS Math and ELA proficiency, higher 8th grade attendance, and attending only one high school. Repeating 9th grade, chronic absenteeism in 8th grade, and low scores on the NYS 8th grade Math and ELA exams are associated with lower high school graduation rates.

The initiatives by ACS, NYCPS, and the NYC Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD)—such as the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), free afterschool programs, prioritization of kinship care, and specifically designed educational programs such as Fair Futures, Road to Success and in-school supports—have shown promising results for students in foster care. Continued analysis of graduation rates is warranted to understand the true impact of such programs, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent educational policy changes.

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Background

A high school diploma is widely recognized as a steppingstone to further education, employment, and success in life.

High school graduates have more options to enhance their ability to achieve, earn, and build stable lives for themselves (Sum, Khatiwada, & McLaughlin, 2009; Tamborini, Kim, & Sakamoto, 2015). Youth in foster care face barriers to obtaining a high school degree, often related to school instability, trauma, and a lack of consistent support compounded by the effects of racism and poverty (Wulczyn, Parolini, & Huhr, 2021). Despite these challenges, youth in foster care demonstrate great resilience and perseverance to achieve a high school diploma (Shpiegel et al., 2022).

High school is a critical developmental period marked by increasing independence, identity exploration, and the assumption of new responsibilities. Advances in neuroscience have enhanced our understanding of youth development, including the specific risks and protective factors that can impact learning, autonomy, and social participation during the transition to adulthood. A key protective factor is a secure attachment to a caring adult, which helps adolescents develop a balance of autonomy with connection and also fosters resilience (Jensen & Ellis Nutt, 2016). Youth in foster care often experience trauma during this critical developmental period, which can hinder their development and sense of autonomy and prevent the formation of secure attachment to a caregiver or other adult (Barnett, 2020).


Interventions and support for youth in foster care must be steeped in the principles of youth development with an understanding of the impact of trauma and personal experiences.

Fair Futures, a program designed with these principles, pairs youth in foster care in NYC with mentors who provide professional one-on-one coaching and tutoring to help those students achieve their academic, career, and personal goals. Fair Futures has reported high graduation rates and workforce participation at the agencies that have implemented the program for more than nine years (The Center for Fair Futures, 2023). The NYC Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) is another program focused on youth in foster care. SYEP gives youth the opportunity to engage in meaningful employment, thus building their autonomy and independence at a critical time in their lives.

Research demonstrates that youth with foster care experience consistently graduate from high school at lower rates than peers without foster care experience (Okpych, 2025). Inconsistent methodology and sampling have led to highly variable estimates.

CIDI puts forth a rigorous, transparent, and replicable methodology for regularly updating graduation rates for students with foster care experience during high school.

The methodology will allow for trends to be compared over time and will allow for a better understanding the impact of educational and foster care policy on students in foster care.



In the 2022 report, CIDI found that graduation rates for students in foster care were steadily improving and identified characteristics associated with higher rates of graduation (NYC Center for innovation through Data Intelligence, 2022).

In this current report, CIDI aims to answer the following questions:

Research Questions

- What are graduation rates for students in foster care during high school?
- What are the educational and foster care characteristics associated with graduation rates among students in foster care during high school?

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Methodology

SAMPLE

This study used New York City administrative data sources to calculate high school graduation rates over the past ten years for students in foster care. The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) foster care records for persons born between 1991 and 2006 were linked to New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) records between the 2005-2006 and 2023-2024 academic years.

The sample includes youth who were in ACS foster care for at least seven days during high school, attended a NYCPS high school for at least one year, and were included in the NYS graduation calculation (i.e., have a known graduation status).

Graduation rates were calculated for 7,171 students in the 2011 through 2020 9th grade entry cohorts who graduated between the 2014-2015 and 2023-2024 academic years.

The number of students in foster care during high school dramatically decreased across the past ten cohorts.

The study began with students who entered 9th grade in the 2011-2012 academic year (the 2011 cohort) and extended to students who began 9th grade in the 2020-2021 academic year (the 2020 cohort) (Table 1).

Table 1. Sample Size by 9th Grade Cohort

Cohort	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of Students	1000	861	871	820	756	706	582	555	529	491

The table below describes the demographic, educational, and foster care characteristics of the sample.

Table 2. Demographics, Educational, and Foster Care Characteristics of Sample

		Number of Students (N=7,171)	Percent of Students (%)	Students in the sample
DEMOGRAPHICS	GENDER			
	Female	4,112	57.3	mostly identified as female.
	Male	3,044	42.4	
	Unknown	15	0.2	
	RACE/ETHNICITY			
	Asian	226	3.2	mostly identified as either Black/African American or Hispanic/Latina/o/x .
	Black/African American	3,748	52.3	
	Hispanic/Latina/o/x	2,756	38.4	
	White	340	4.7	
	Other	101	1.4	
FOSTER CARE CHARACTERISTICS	PRIMARY LEVEL OF CARE			
	Kinship	2,178	30.4	often experienced care in a foster home.
	Foster home	3,107	43.3	
	Residential	1,886	26.3	
	Ever in residential care	2,842	39.6	
	MOVEMENTS IN CARE PER YEAR			
	Less than 0.5	2,153	30.0	
	0.5 to less than 1	1,724	24.0	
	1 to less than 2	1,706	23.8	
	2+	1,588	22.1	
	AGE AT ENTRY			
	Less than 14	2,499	34.8	often began their foster care spell after age 14.
	14+	4,672	65.2	
EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS*	Attended more than one high school	2,782	40.2	
	9th grade repetition	2,220	33.6	
	Proficient in 8th grade Math	537	11.6	had very low Math and ELA proficiency.
	Proficient in 8th grade ELA	720	15.0	
	Chronic absenteeism in 8th grade	3,228	55.4	commonly chronically absent in 8th grade.

*Not all students have 8th grade exams or attendance records.

The sample and methodology have been refined since CIDI's 2022 report. For this report, CIDI engaged in an extensive quality assurance process and consultation with agency partners about inclusion criteria and measure definitions to ensure that the calculated rates are meaningful and actionable for both NYCPS and ACS.

The updated sample was constructed by applying several key inclusion and exclusion criteria. Specifically, students were excluded for whom there was an unknown graduation status or if their entire spell (stay) was in a Close to Home facility. The updated sample now included who entered a NYCPS after 9th grade, thereby capturing transfer students.

Overall, these methodological changes did not have a meaningful impact on the total number of students included in each 9th grade cohort. The primary purpose of these changes was not to alter the size of the sample, but to more accurately account for all high school students in foster care.

ANALYSIS OF GRADUATION RATES

All graduation rates are updated as of the 2023-2024 academic year. The four-year graduation rates were calculated for the 2020 9th grade cohort, five-year graduation rates calculated for the 2019 9th grade cohort, and six-year graduation rates calculated for the 2018 9th grade cohort.

This study examines graduation rates stratified by foster care and educational characteristics previously found to be associated with high school graduation (CIDI, 2022). Foster care characteristics includes care type, age of youth upon care entry, and movements in care. Educational characteristics include proficiency on New York State 8th grade Math and ELA tests, chronic absenteeism in 8th grade, and number of high schools attended. CIDI also examined four-year graduation rates by race/ethnicity and by gender.

DEFINITIONS

Since the 2022 report, CIDI has collaborated with NYCPS and ACS to refine the definitions of demographics, foster care characteristics, and educational characteristics to improve the City's transparency and accountability.

Graduation rates are calculated across these factors.

DEMOGRAPHICS

RACE/ETHNICITY. Student's race/ethnicity, obtained from NYCPS records. Each category is mutually exclusive.

GENDER. Student's gender, obtained from NYCPS records. Gender is a binary male or female description.

FOSTER CARE CHARACTERISTICS

SPELL. A continuous stay in foster care without being discharged.
Kinship Care. Placement with relatives, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, extended family, or family friends (ACS, 2025).

KINSHIP CARE. Placement with relatives, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, extended family, or family friends (ACS, 2025).

FOSTER HOME CARE. Placement with families who are paid to provide a home environment, with quality care where caregivers meet the child/youth's physical, emotional, and developmental needs (ACS, 2025).

RESIDENTIAL CARE. Placement in a group home or facility with other children/youth who are in foster care and are cared for by professionally trained childcare staff (ACS, 2025). This excludes preplacement, which is short-term congregate care for children prior to their foster care placement.

PRIMARY LEVEL OF CARE. The level of care – kinship, foster home, or residential – that the student spent the most days in during high school.

MOVEMENT IN CARE. A transfer to a new facility or home during a foster care spell.

MOVEMENTS PER YEAR. Number of movements in care per year for spells during high school.

AGE AT ENTRY. For foster care spells that occur during high school, the child's age when the first spell began. CIDI categorizes age at foster care entry as "younger than 14" and "14 or older" as a proxy for entering before or after the beginning of high school.

EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN 8TH GRADE. Student misses more than 10 percent of school days while in 8th grade.

8TH GRADE EXAMS. NYS-administered Math and ELA exams taken in 3rd through 8th grades. Exams are scored on a scale of 1 to 4. To be considered proficient in either subject, a student must score 3 or 4 on the exam.

NUMBER OF HIGH SCHOOLS. Number of high schools a student attends during their high school career.

9TH GRADE REPETITION. Student repeats 9th grade.

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FINDINGS

GRADUATION RATES

The sample used administrative data collected by NYCPS and ACS to determine graduation rates for the 7,171 youth who spent time in foster care during high school between the 2010-11 and 2023-24 academic years.

The following sections of the report detail graduation rates overall and by the following characteristics:

DEMOGRAPHICS

- Race/Ethnicity
- Gender

FOSTER CARE CHARACTERISTICS

- Primary level of care
- Movements in care per year
- Age at foster care entry

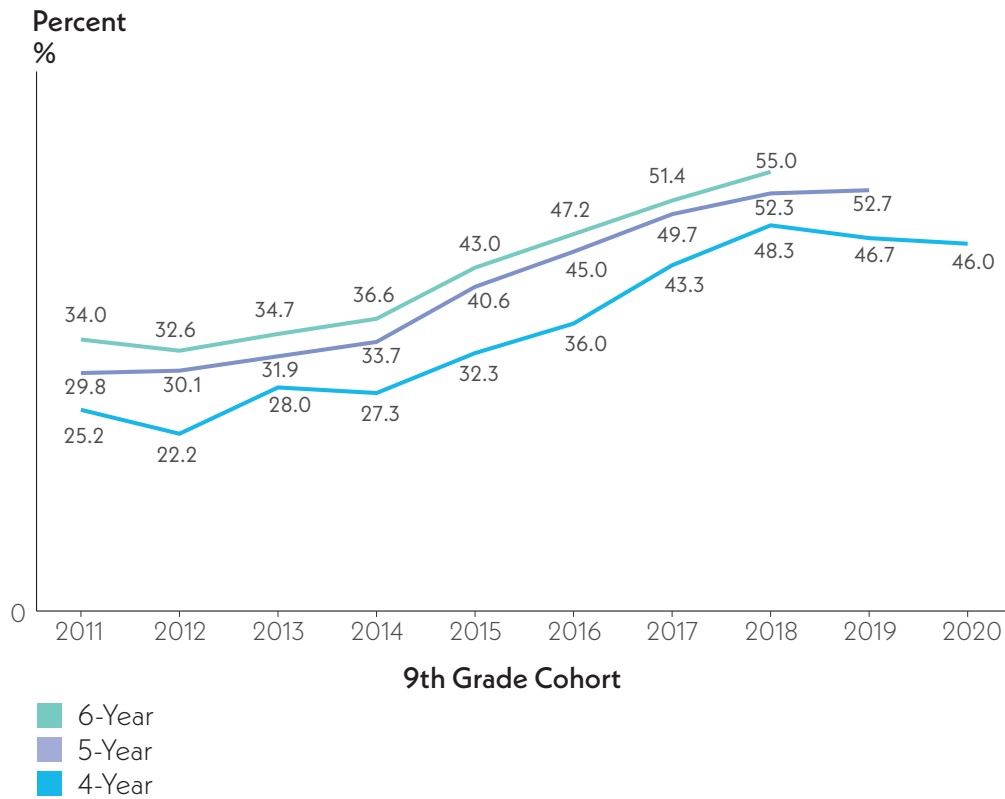
EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

- 8th grade Math and ELA proficiency
- Chronic absenteeism in 8th grade
- Number of high schools attended
- 9th grade repetition

Four-year graduation rates increased from 25.2 percent for the 2011 cohort to 46.0 percent for the 2020 cohort (Figure 1).

Five- and six-year graduation rates continued to increase since the 2011 cohort. The five-year graduation rate for the 2019 cohort was 52.7 percent; the 6-year graduation rate for the 2018 cohort was 55 percent (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Four-, Five- and Six-Year Graduation Rates for Students in Foster Care



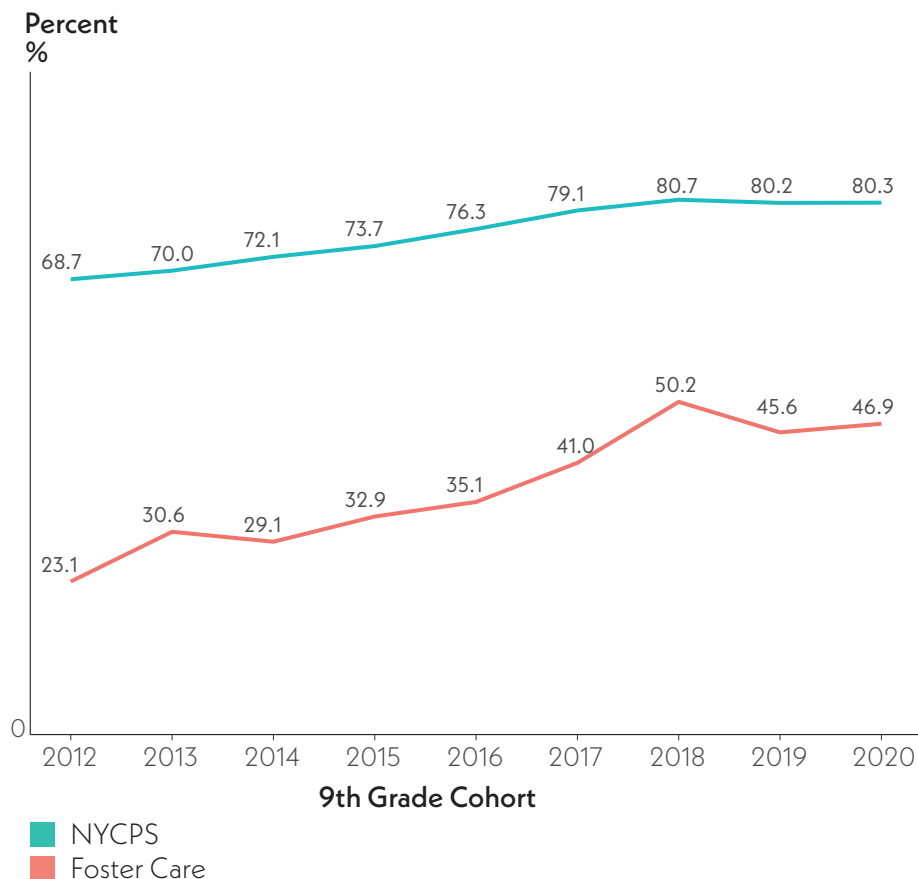
GRADUATION RATES BY DEMOGRAPHICS

Race/Ethnicity

The majority of students in foster care during high school identified as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latina/o/x. The intersection of race and foster care is explored in the following section, which compares graduation rates for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latina/o/x students in foster care to all Black/African American and Hispanic/Latina/o/x students in NYCPS.

Four-year graduation rates for Black/African American students in foster care follow a trend similar to overall graduation rates for all Black NYCPS students, peaking at 50.2 percent with the 2018 cohort and leveling out at about 46 percent for the 2019 and 2020 cohorts (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Four-Year Graduation Rates for Black/African American Students: NYCPS and Foster Care

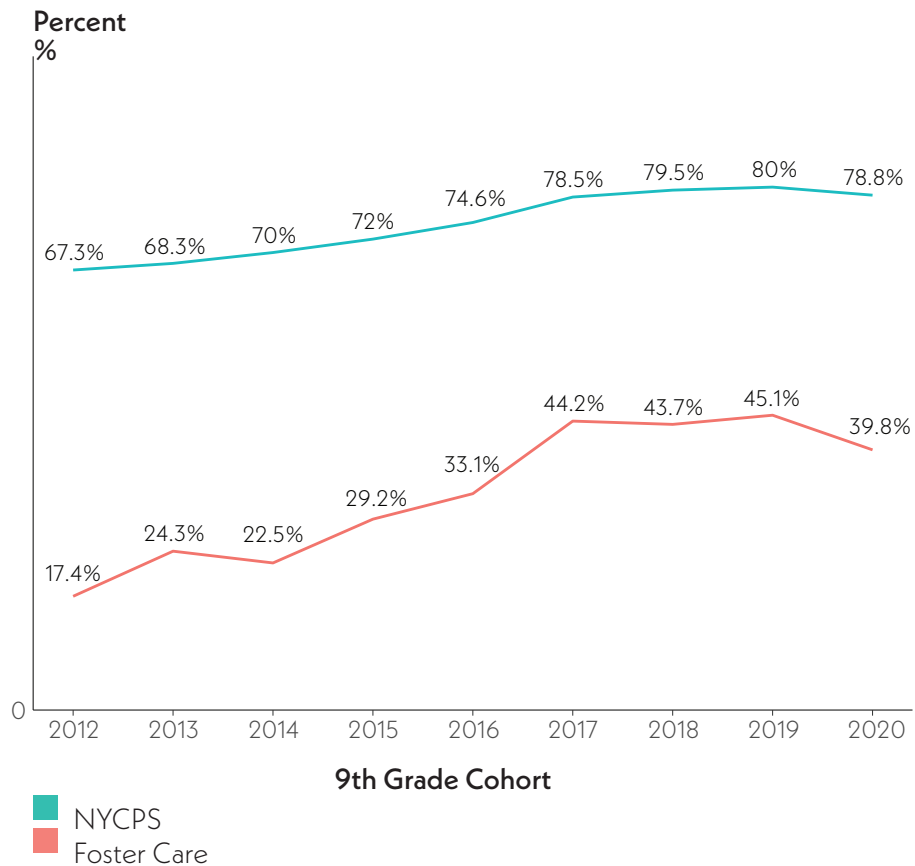


Graduation rates for Black/African American students in foster care peaked with the 2018 cohort.

The four-year graduation rates for Hispanic/Latina/o/x students in foster care increased between the 2012 and 2020 9th grade cohorts (Figure 3). Despite the overall increase in graduation rates, rates decreased from 45.1 percent for the 2019 cohort to 39.8 percent for the 2020 cohort. This was also true for all Hispanic/Latino NYCPS students whose four-year graduation rates decreased from 80 percent for the 2019 cohort to 78.8 percent for the 2020 cohort.

Graduation rates for Hispanic students in foster care peaked with the 2019 cohort.

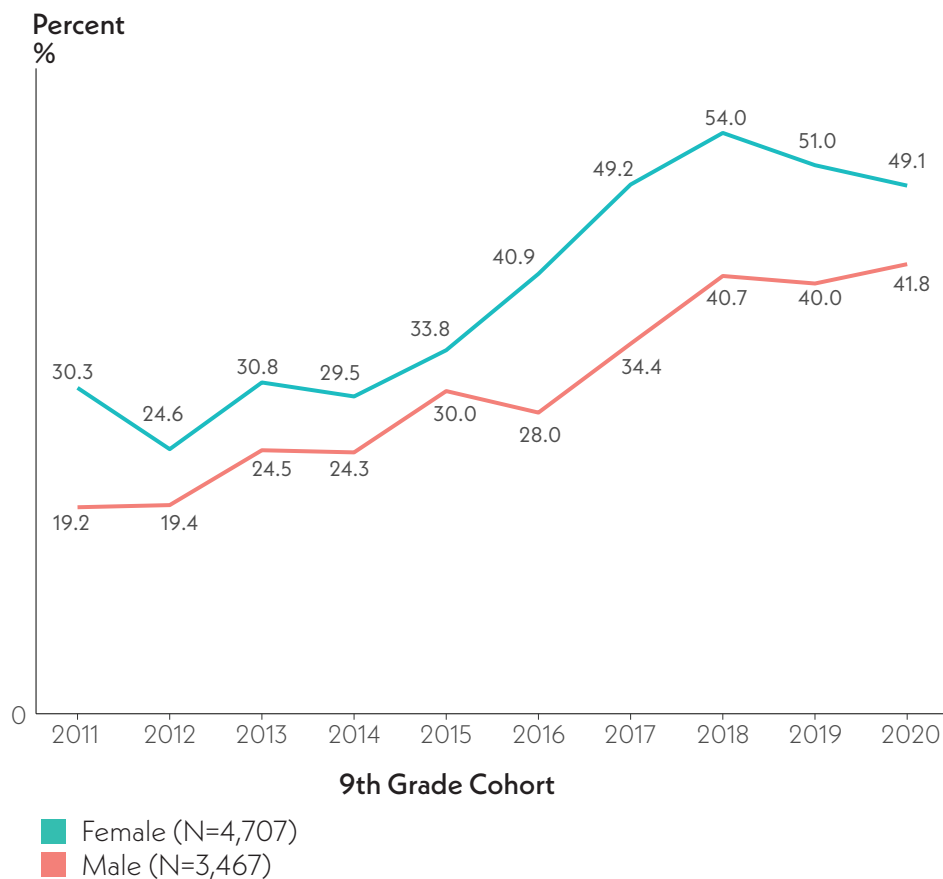
Figure 3. Four-Year Graduation Rates for Hispanic/Latina/o/x Students: NYCPS and Foster Care



Gender

Female students in foster care during high school consistently graduated at a higher rate than male students (Figure 4). The four-year graduation rates for female students increased from 30.3 percent to 49.1 percent between the 2011 and 2020 9th grade cohorts. The four-year graduation rates for male students increased from 19.2 percent to 41.8 percent during this same time period.

Figure 4. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Gender for Students in Foster Care



Graduation rates for female and male students increased between the 2011 and 2020 cohorts.

GRADUATION RATES BY FOSTER CARE CHARACTERISTICS

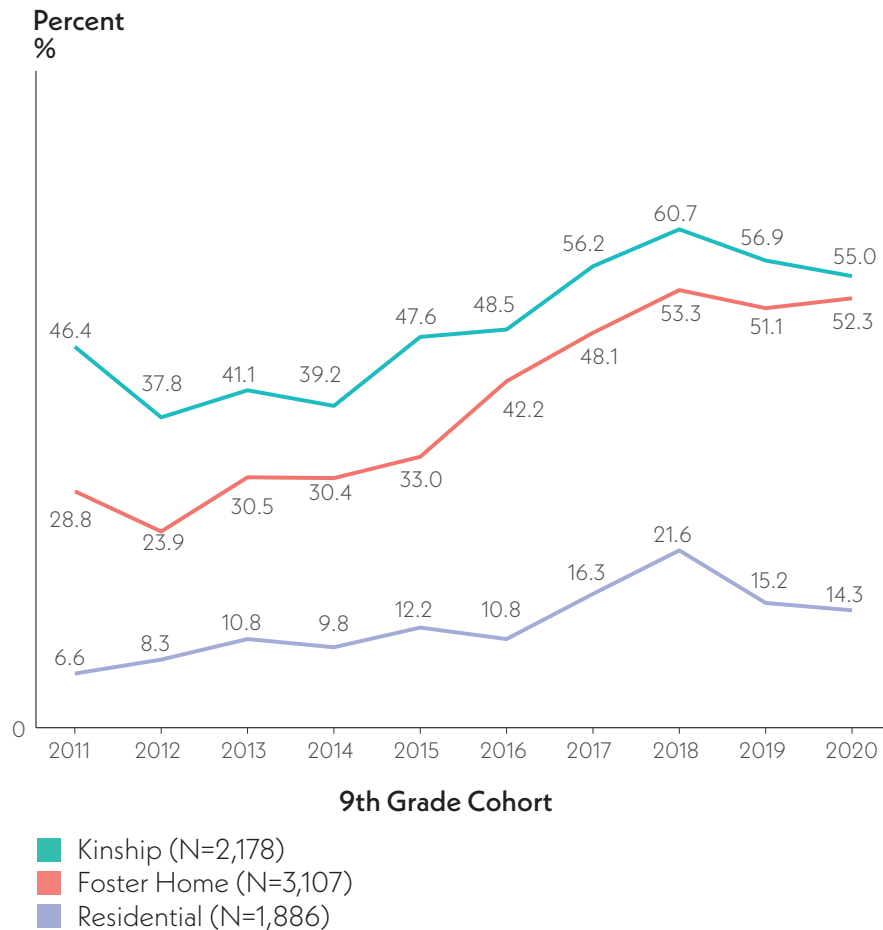
Foster care experience can vary widely from student to student. The level of care, age that the student enters care, and how frequently the student moves between different levels of care can all impact their trajectory for graduation and success. The following section examines graduation rates by foster care characteristics previously found to impact graduation outcomes.

Primary Level of Care

Students who spent the most time in kinship care or a foster home continued to graduate at higher rates than students who were mostly in residential care (Figure 5). The four-year graduation rates for the 2020 cohort were 55 percent, 52.3 percent, and 14.3 percent for students who spent the majority of their time in kinship care, foster home, and residential care, respectively.

Students who spent the most time in kinship care graduated at a higher rate than those who spent the most time in a foster home or residential care.

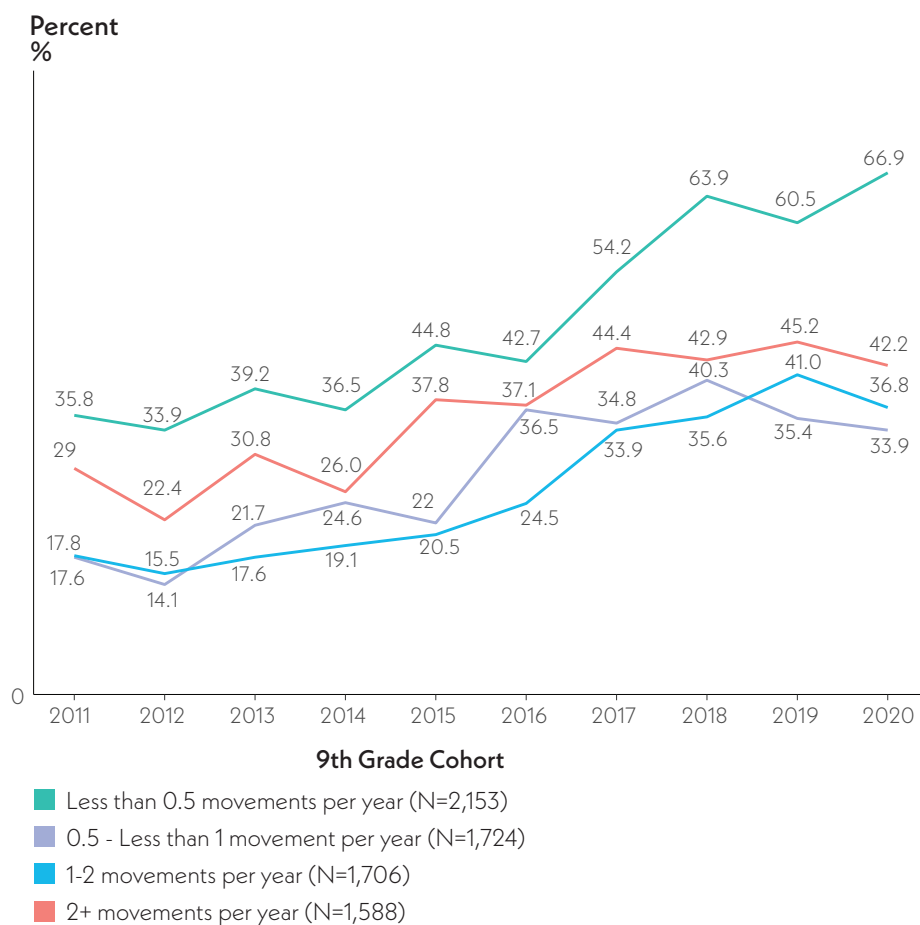
Figure 5. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Primary Level of Care for Students in Foster Care



Movements in Care

Fewer movements per year in care were associated with higher four-year graduation rates (Figure 6). The four-year graduation rate for the 2020 cohort was 66.9 percent for students with less than 0.5 movements in care per year compared to 42.2 percent for students with more than two movements in care per year.

Figure 6. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Movements in Care per Year in Care



Students with fewer movements in foster care graduated at a higher rate than those with more movements in care.

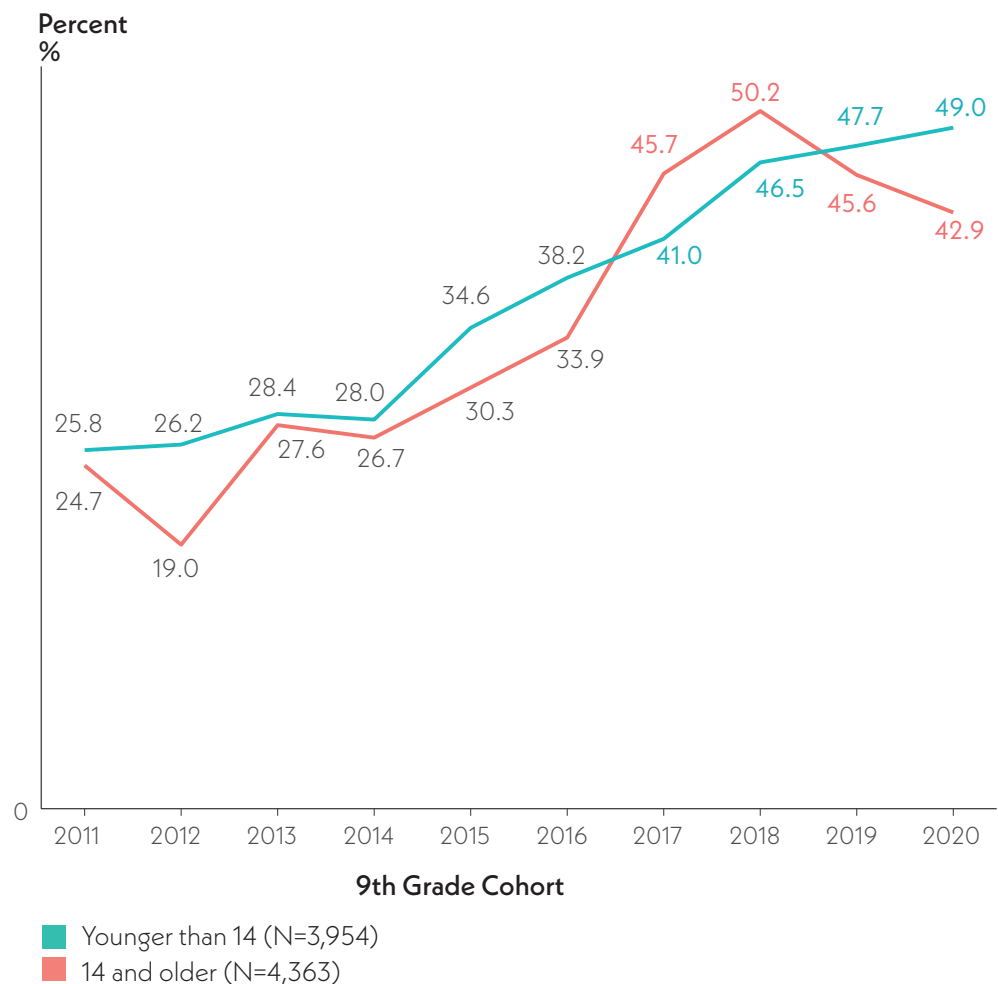
Age at Foster Care Entry

The relationship between age at foster care entry (for spells that occurred during high school) and graduation rates varied over the past 10 years of cohorts (Figure 7).

Overall, students whose spells during high school began before age 14 had higher four-year graduation rates than those whose began at age 14 or higher. For the 2020 9th grade cohort, students who entered before age 14 graduated at a rate of 49 percent compared to 42.9 percent for students who entered foster care at age 14 or later.

Students who entered foster care before age 14 have historically graduated at a higher rate than those who entered after age 14, but in recent years this trend has been interrupted.

Figure 7. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Age at Foster Care Entry for Spells during High School



GRADUATION RATES BY EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

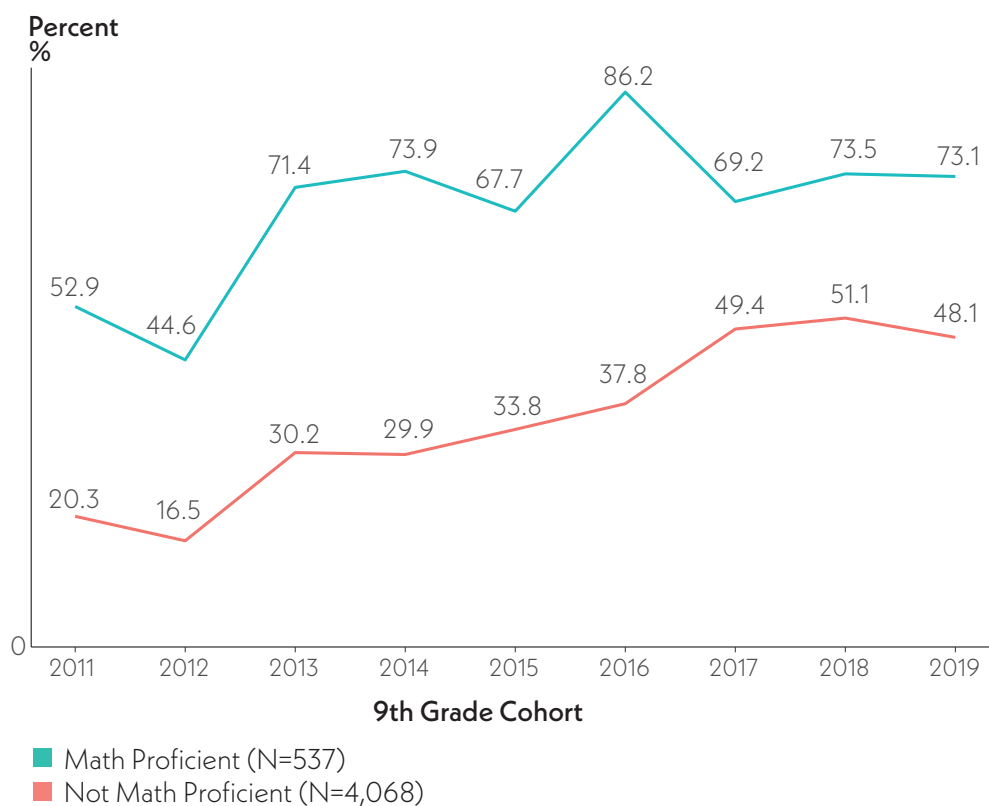
The following section examines graduation rates by educational characteristics such as 8th grade Math and ELA proficiency, chronic absenteeism in 8th grade, school stability (measured as the number of high schools a student attends during their high school career), and 9th grade repetition.

Note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, NYS Math and ELA exams were not administered in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years. Exam scores are therefore unavailable for the 2020 cohort.

Math Proficiency

Students in foster care who were proficient in 8th grade mathematics (scores of 3 or 4 on the NYS Math exam) had higher graduation rates than those who were not proficient (scores of 1 or 2) (Figure 8). The most recent four-year graduation rate (for the 2019 cohort) was 73.1 percent for students with proficiency in 8th grade math compared to 48.1 percent for students who were not proficient. Given that the number of 8th grade students who were proficient in math was very low (537 across nine cohorts), the year-to-year trend in graduation rates among those who were proficient should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 8. Four-Year Graduation Rates by 8th Grade Math Proficiency for Students in Foster Care



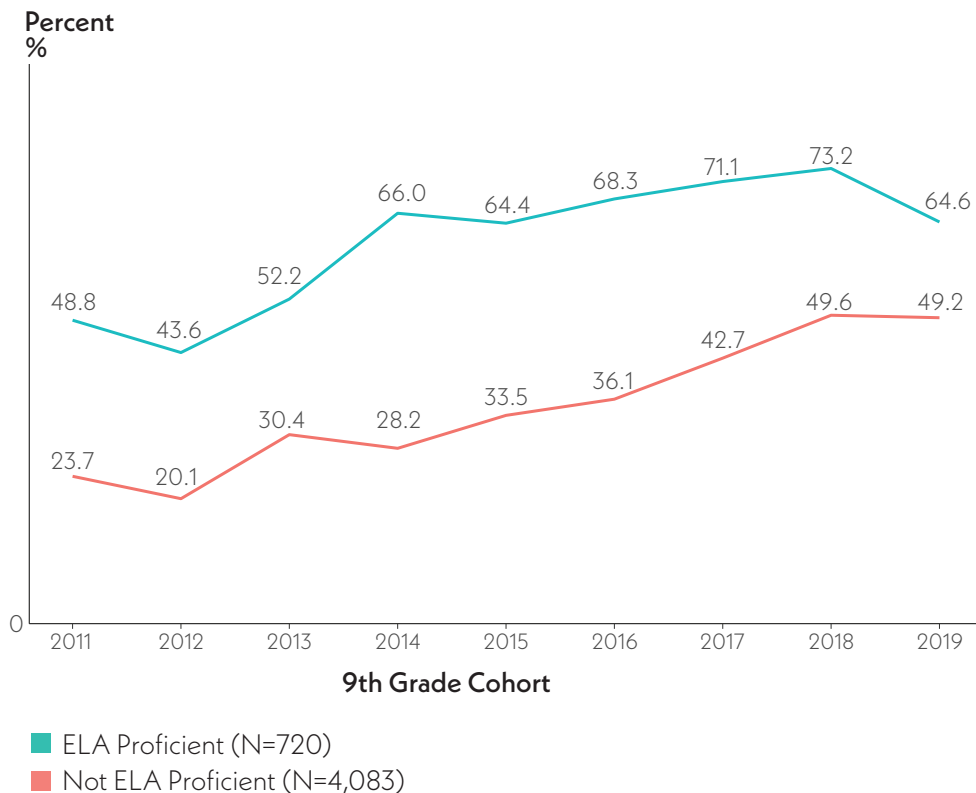
Students in foster care who were proficient in Math graduated at a higher rate than those who were not proficient.

English Language Arts Proficiency

Students in foster care who were proficient in 8th grade ELA graduated at a higher rate than students who were not proficient (Figure 9). The most recent four-year graduation rate (for the 2019 cohort) showed 64.6 percent with proficiency in 8th grade ELA (scores of 3 or 4 on the exam) compared to 49.2 percent for those not proficient (scores of 1 or 2). Similar to math proficiency, very few students were proficient in 8th grade ELA (720 over nine cohorts). Year-to-year trends in graduation rates among students proficient in 8th grade ELA should be interpreted with caution.

Students in foster care who were proficient in ELA graduated at a higher rate than those who were not proficient.

Figure 9. Four-Year Graduation Rates by 8th Grade ELA Proficiency for Students in Foster Care

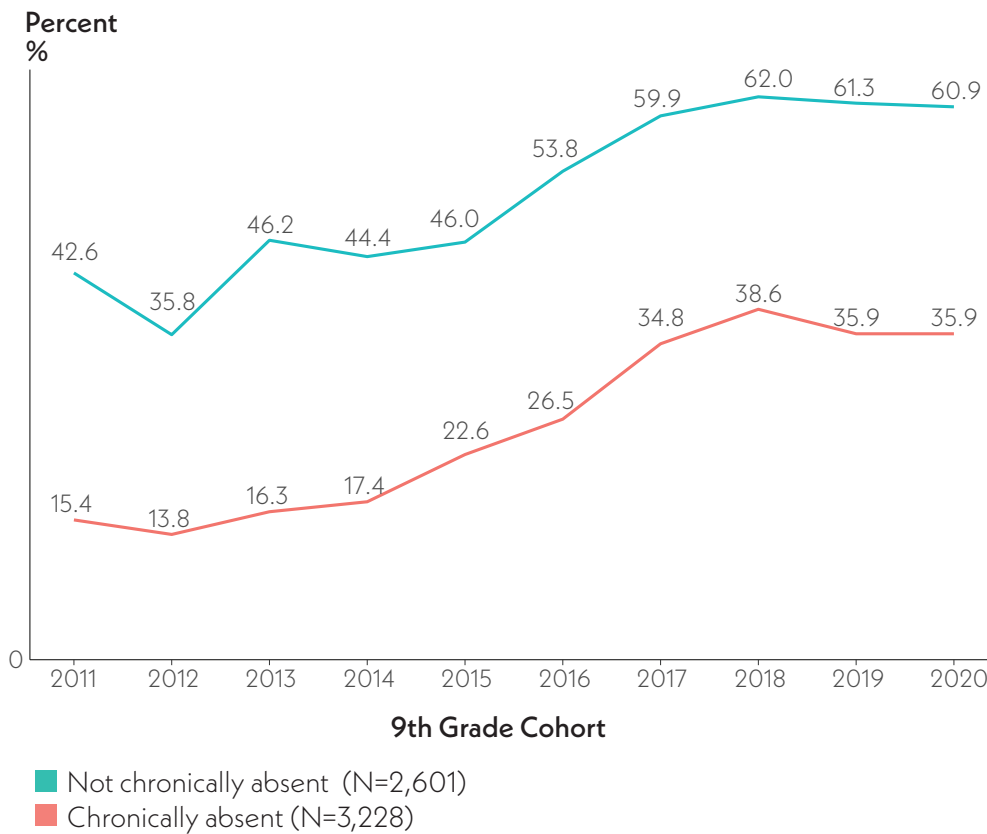


Chronic Absenteeism

Students who were not chronically absent in 8th grade graduated at almost twice the rate of chronically absent students (Figure 10). Among students in the 2020 9th grade cohort, four-year graduation rates were 60.9 percent for those who were not chronically absent in 8th grade and 35.9 percent for those who were.

Figure 10. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Chronic Absence in 8th Grade for Students in Foster Care

Students who were not chronically absent in 8th grade graduated at a higher rate than those who were chronically absent.

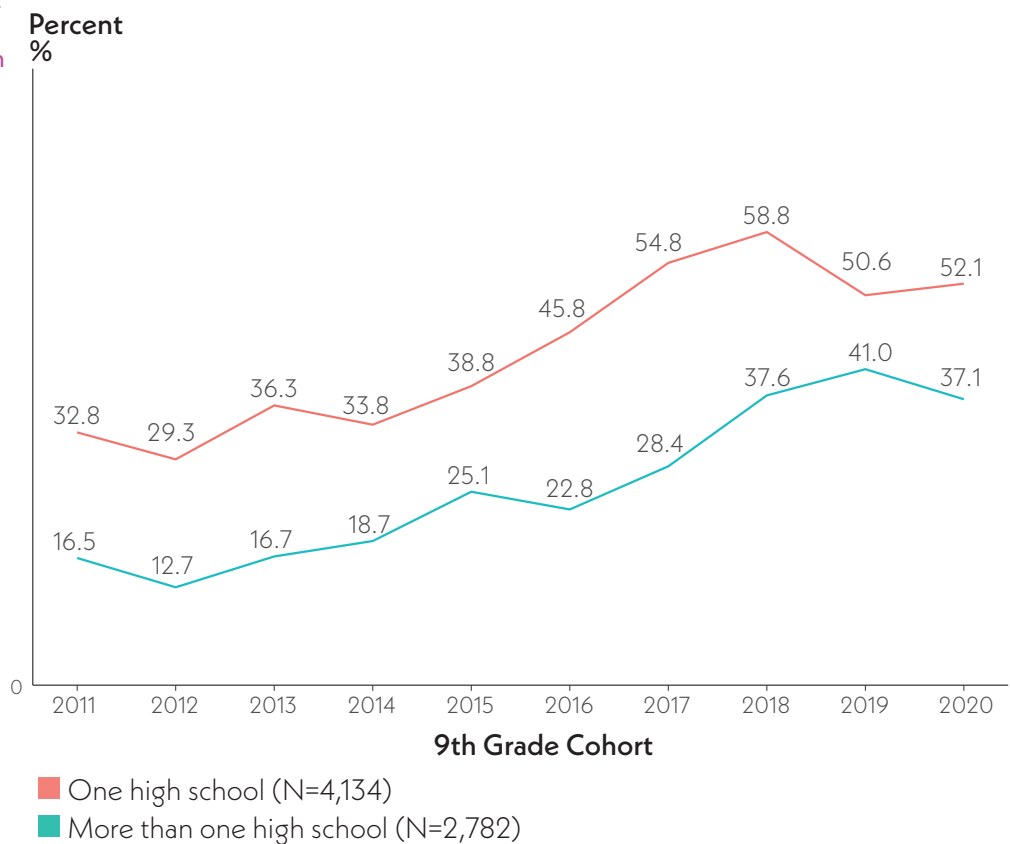


Number of High Schools Attended

Attending one high school (a proxy for school stability) is associated with increased graduation rates (Figure 11). The four-year graduation rates for the 2020 cohort show that 52.1 percent of students who attended a single high school graduated in four years compared to 37.1 percent of those who attended more than one high school.

Students in foster care who attended only one high school graduated at a higher rate than those who attended more than one school.

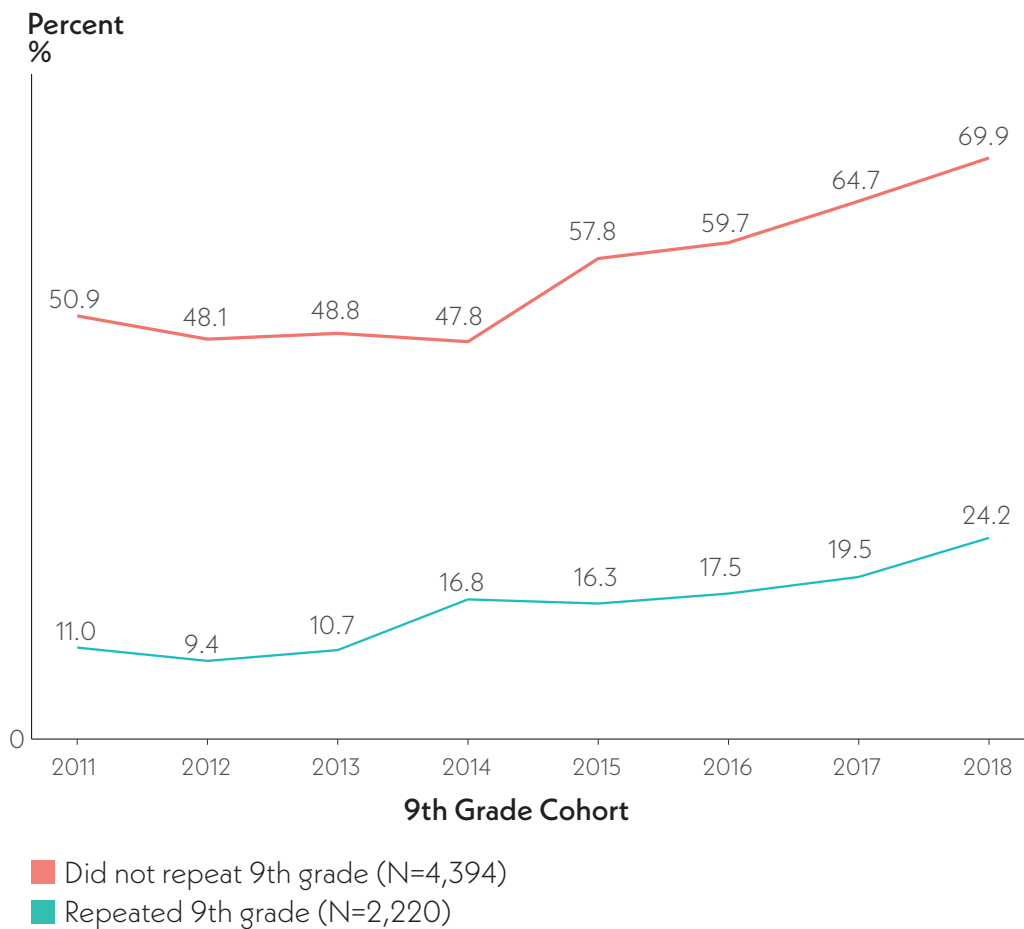
Figure 11. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Number of High Schools Attended by Students in Foster Care



Six-Year Graduation Rates by 9th Grade Repetition Status

Students who did not repeat 9th grade graduated at a consistently higher rate than those who repeated 9th grade (Figure 12). For the 2018 cohort, nearly 70 percent of students who did not repeat 9th grade graduated within six years. However, among students who repeated 9th grade, only 24.2 percent graduated.

Figure 12. Six-Year Graduation Rates by 9th Grade Repetition Status for Students in Foster Care



Students in foster care who did not repeat ninth grade had a six-year graduation rate that was higher than those who did repeat ninth grade.

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CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This research study about educational outcomes for NYCPS students in foster care identified the following characteristics associated with positive and negative impacts on high school graduation:

Foster care and educational characteristics **associated with higher graduation rates** include:

- Proficient 8th grade Math and ELA scores
- Higher 8th grade attendance
- Attendance at only one high school
- Spending most time in kinship care
- Experiencing less than one movement in care per year

Foster care and educational characteristics **associated with lower graduation rates** include:

- Low scores on 8th grade Math and ELA tests
- Chronic absenteeism in 8th grade
- Repeating 9th grade

IMPLICATIONS

This study highlights the importance of type of care, stability, and educational intervention to ensure the academic success of students in foster care. The graduation rates reported must also be considered in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which graduation requirements were modified, remote education became more common, and unmeasured learning loss occurred. Inter-agency initiatives to support students in foster care are important to ensuring the future success of these students.

Type of Care and Stability Matter

Students who spent most time in kinship care, had fewer moves in care, or attended only one high school were more likely to graduate from high school in four years. Recent efforts by New York City and New York State to utilize kinship care and maintain school stability for students in foster care have had a positive impact on graduation rates.

Kinship care has been associated with fewer behavioral problems, better well-being and mental health, and less disruption in placement (Winokur, Holtan, & Batchelder, 2016). Additionally, students in kinship care have better educational outcomes than students in foster homes (Pecora, 2012). In New York City, the ACS prioritizes kinship care when placing children in foster care (NYC Administration for Children's Services, 2025). In New York State, the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP), operated by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), provides financial support and medical coverage for children in kinship care who are permanently placed with their foster parent after six months of foster care (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2025). The efforts by NYC and NYS to increase kinship care and permanency may lead to improved outcomes for youth in foster care. The findings in this report demonstrate that more and more students are being placed in kinship care over other types of placements—and that those in kinship care are more likely to graduate from high school.

Students who spent the most time in residential care graduated at a much lower rate than students in kinship care or a foster home. Efforts by NYC and NYS to prioritize kinship care have led to lower utilization of residential care in the city and may contribute to better outcomes for students in foster care. Placement stability has been associated with educational achievement and overall well-being (Clemens et.al, 2018; Fawley-King et al., 2017). This study

shows that students with more stable foster care placements and fewer high school transfers graduated at a higher rate than those with more frequent movements in care or those who attended more than one high school. NYCPS works closely with ACS to ensure that students who change placements are able to stay at their original schools by providing transportation and other supports. ACS's goal is to achieve stable placements as soon as possible by prioritizing kinship care and foster homes.

Educational Intervention Prior to High School Is Critical to Graduation

The pathway to high school graduation often begins before a student enters 9th grade. Students who are chronically absent in 8th grade, not proficient in 8th grade Math and/or ELA or repeat the 9th grade are less likely to graduate high school. Ninth grade marks the first year where social promotion is not in effect for students; they must pass classes and NYS Regents exams in order to move on to the next grade and stay on track to graduate on time. Students who are not proficient in 8th grade Math or ELA will likely have a more difficult time passing 9th grade. The NYCPS Office of Students in Temporary Housing and Foster Care and Fair Futures (a program that pairs middle and high school students with mentors and tutors) both support students in foster care before they enter high school.

COVID-19 Pandemic Learning Loss and Policy Changes Affect Graduation Rates

During the pandemic in New York City, all NYCPS students pivoted to remote learning in the spring of the 2019-2020 academic year and were mostly hybrid or remote for the entire 2020-2021 academic year. Students without a stable environment and access to the necessary technology or supplies disproportionately struggled with the shift, which contributed to additional learning loss (Dorn et al., 2020).

The four-year graduation rates for the 2020 cohort, comprised of 8th and 9th grade students during the pivot to remote learning, decreased slightly compared to the 2019 cohort (46 percent and 46.7 percent, respectively). While the five- and six-year graduation rates for the 2020 cohort have yet to be calculated, a continued upward trend of rates for the 2018 and 2019 cohorts could imply that students in foster care may have just needed more time to make up for pandemic-related learning loss to graduate.

All NYS exams were paused during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years, including the Regents exams needed for graduation. New York State waived Regents exam requirements for students with passing course grades. The students in the 2020 cohort were therefore only able to waive exams they would have taken freshman year; they were still required to pass all other Regents exams required for graduation. Pandemic-related learning loss may have impacted a student's ability to pass more advanced exams and led to a decrease in graduation rates for students in foster care.

Inter-Agency Collaboration Impacts Students in Foster Care

This study highlights the powerful intersection between child welfare practices and educational outcomes for high school students in foster care. From a child welfare perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of placement stability, increased use of kinship care, and reduced reliance on residential placements. From an educational standpoint, the research identifies chronic absenteeism and low academic performance on 8th grade standardized assessments as early warning indicators that strongly predict later high school outcomes. Taken together, these insights establish a comprehensive framework for understanding risk and targeting timely interventions to improve educational success for students in foster care.

Inter-agency collaboration to support students in foster care is essential to ensuring the future success of these students. Youth in foster care benefit from prioritized access to DYCD programs such as the Summer Youth Employment Program, which provides youth with meaningful employment opportunities. Afterschool programs operating within NYCPS, including the Beacon Youth Programs, provide academic support, career counseling and social-emotional learning to encourage positive youth development. Fair Futures and Road to Success, models that include professional one-on-one coaching and tutoring to help youth in foster care achieve their academic and life goals, are specifically designed to improve high school graduation rates for students in foster care. In addition, multiple pathways to City University of New York (CUNY) colleges and other schools, trades, and employment are continually addressed by ACS's Office of Child and Youth Initiatives and the NYCPS Office of Students in Temporary Housing and Foster Care.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Limitations

A key limitation is that the sample is drawn exclusively from NYCPS and does not include students from charter and private schools. The pandemic's timing introduced two limitations to the report: 8th grade attendance data includes periods of remote learning, and students in the 2020 cohort did not take the New York State standardized exams.

Future Directions

CIDI will continue to calculate graduation rates for students in foster care and examine how the pandemic and specific student supports affect graduation rates going forward. Future directions for research include performing a sequence analysis to better understand the patterns, duration, and timing of foster care experiences to identify further points of intervention.

Students in foster care have unique needs that require innovative solutions. Every student deserves the opportunity to pursue their dreams, and this report supports the City's efforts to make that goal a reality. While growing up is challenging for any young person, it is especially difficult for youth in foster care. We believe all students—regardless of background, experience, or family support—deserve access to multiple pathways to learning and success. As we work to build equitable and responsive programs, CIDI's commitment to rigorous, data-driven research reflects our compassion, accountability, and dedication to these students.

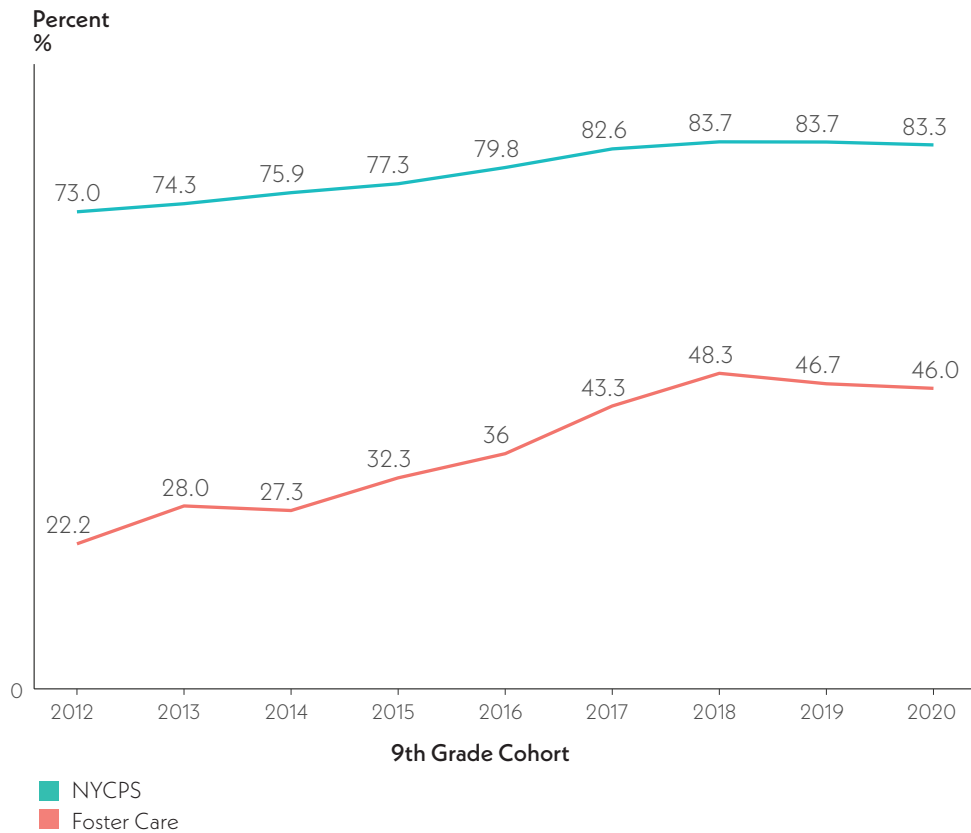
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APPENDIX & REFERENCES

APPENDIX A

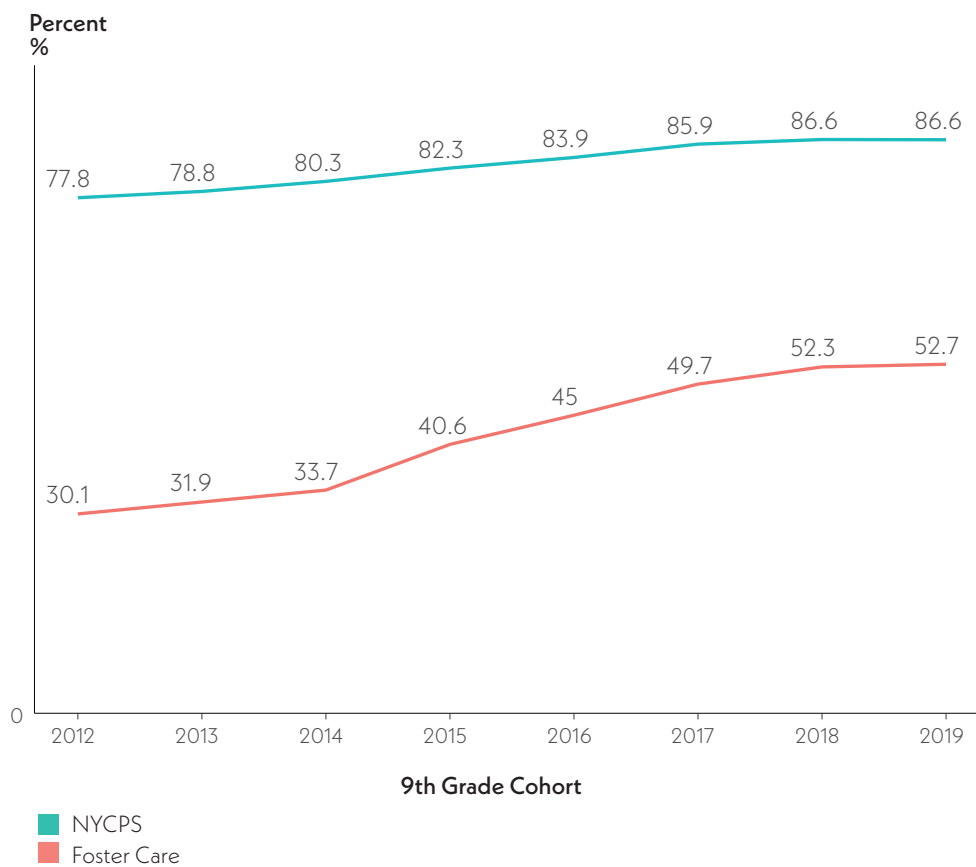
Compared to all NYCPS students, those in foster care during high school graduated at a much lower rate. However, the most recent trends in four-year graduation rates for all NYCPS students and students in foster care are similar: a small decrease for the 2020 cohort (2023-2024 academic year) (Appendix Figure 1).

Appendix Figure 1. Four-Year Graduation Rates for Students in Foster Care and All NYCPS Students



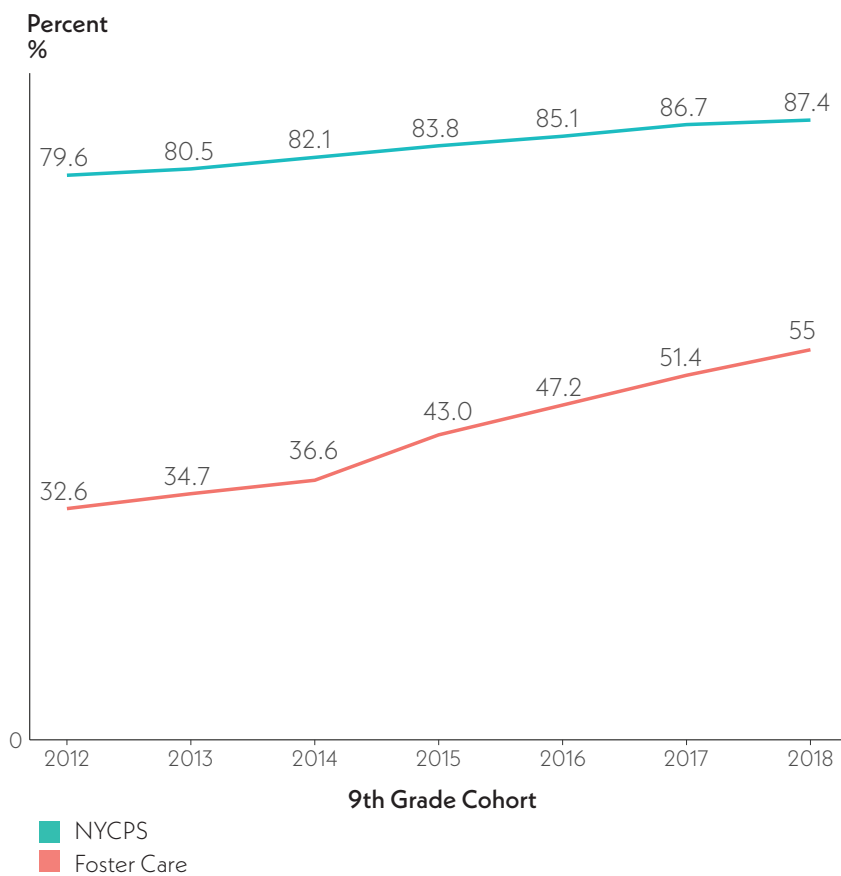
While five-year graduation rates for all NYCPS students held steady the last two cohorts in the figure, graduation rates for students in foster care continued to increase slightly (Appendix Figure 2).

Appendix Figure 2. Five-Year Graduation Rates for Students in Foster Care and All NYCPS Students



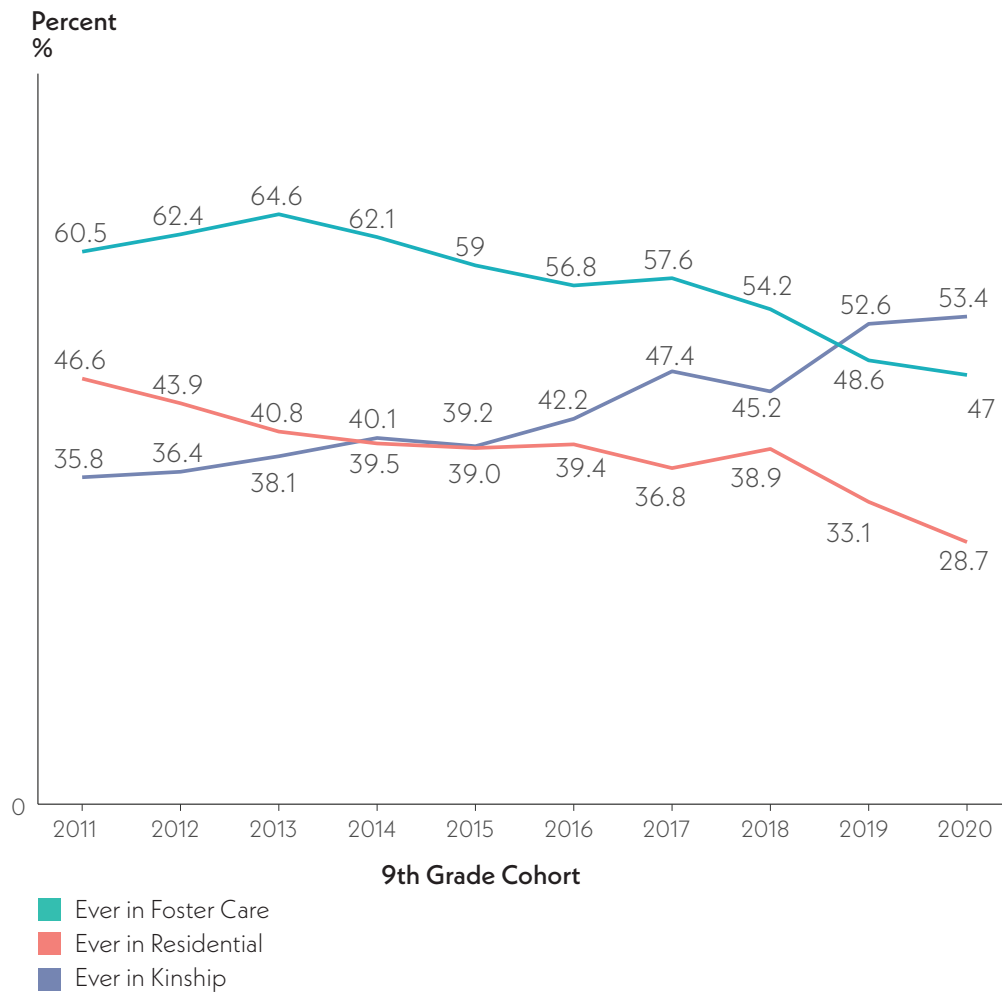
Six-year graduation rates increased slightly for all NYCPS students over the past seven years shown in Appendix Figure 3, from 79.6 percent for the 2012 cohort to 87.4 percent for the 2018 cohort (Appendix Figure 3). Meanwhile, students in foster care in the 2018 cohort graduated at a much higher rate than those in the 2012 cohort (55 percent compared to 32.6 percent).

Appendix Figure 3. Six-Year Graduation Rates for Students in Foster Care and All NYCPS Students



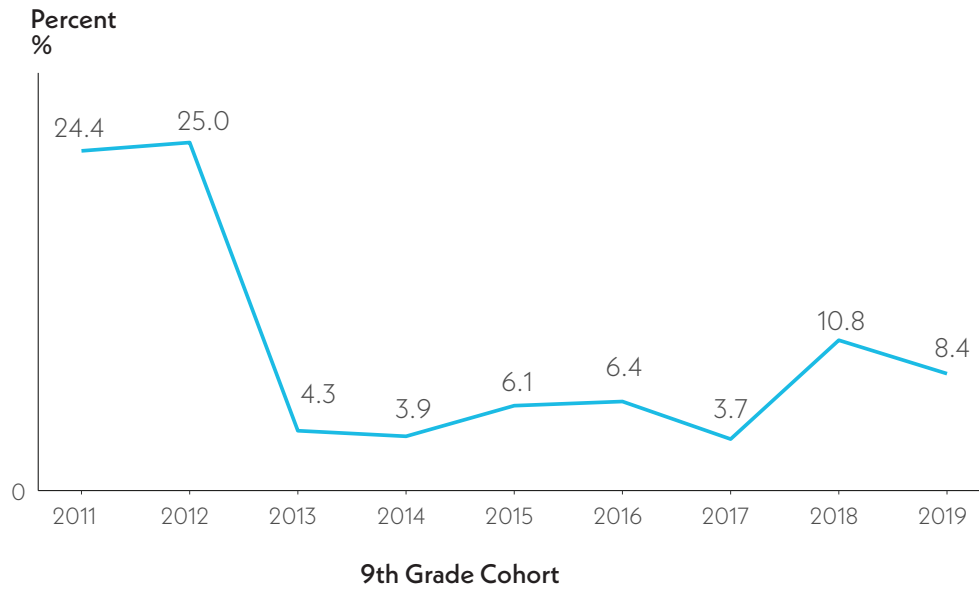
Over the past 10 years shown in Appendix Figure 4, more students experienced kinship care and fewer experienced residential care (Appendix Figure 4).

Appendix Figure 4. Type of Care Ever for Students in Foster Care



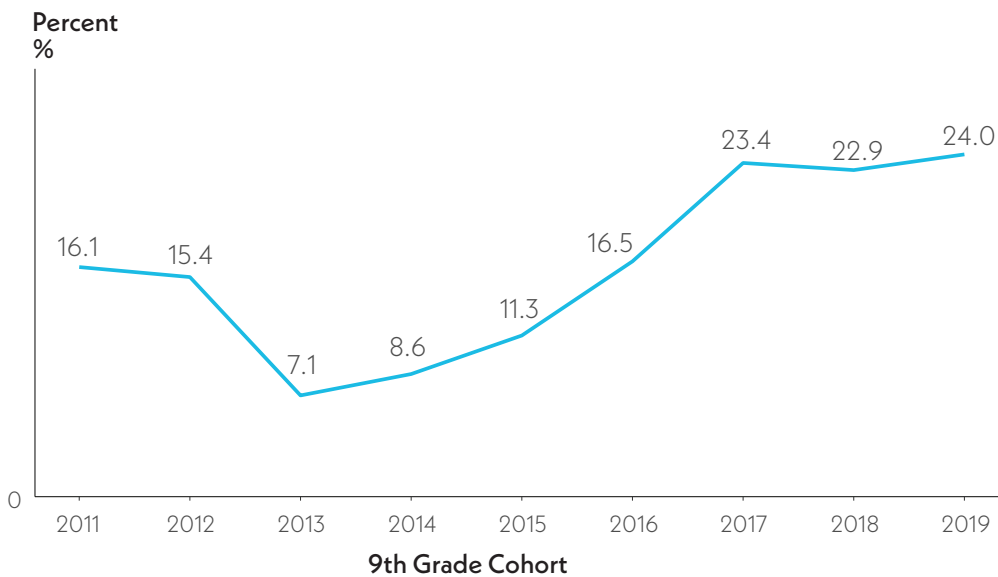
A very low percentage of students in foster care score proficient on the NYS 8th grade Math exam, with only 8.4 percent of the 2019 cohort scoring 3 or 4 (Appendix Figure 5).

Appendix Figure 5. 8th Grade Math Proficiency of Students in Foster Care



A small proportion of students in foster care test proficient in the NYS 8th grade ELA exam, with only 24 percent of the 2019 cohort scoring 3 or 4 (Appendix Figure 6).

Appendix Figure 6. 8th Grade ELA Proficiency of Students in Foster Care



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