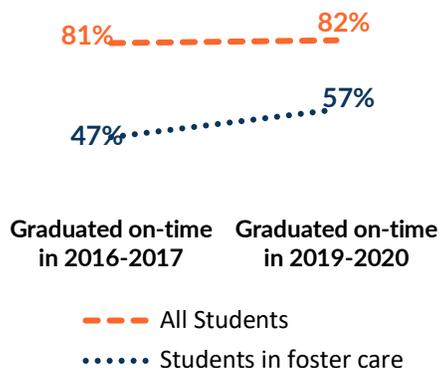# Education (Grades 8-12)

To support educational opportunities and success for foster youth in middle and high school, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Foster Youth Strategic Initiative funds efforts to increase school stability and improve high school graduation rates.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted how schools educate students. School districts in LA and NYC shifted to remote learning in early 2020 in response to the pandemic and continued to use distance learning as needed throughout the 2020-2021 school year. Students in foster care faced distinct challenges related to their access to technology and educational supports and services.


Data show improvements in high school graduation in LA.[i]

Percentage of LA foster youth graduating within four years | *Los Angeles, 2016-2017 & 2019-2020*

81% - - - - - - 82%

47% 57%

Graduated on-time in 2016-2017   Graduated on-time in 2019-2020

- - - All Students
...... Students in foster care

NYC foster youth experienced a slight increase in school stability in 2018-2019.[ii]

Percentage of NYC foster youth (ages 14-20) remaining in school of origin 90 days after placement transfer | *New York City, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, & 2018-2019*

88%   86%   87%

2016-2017 school year   2017-2018 school year   2018-2019 school year
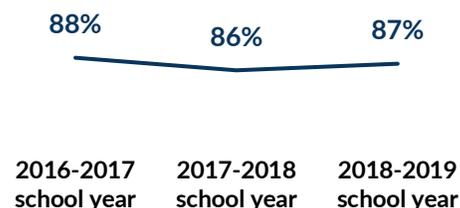
Promoting school stability

While grantees and stakeholders have maintained a focus on school stability, more progress is needed. Building off a successful pilot project, an outreach coordinator with **LA's** Office of Child Protection engaged 33 school districts serving a majority of foster youth to sign MOUs for a long-term Every Student Succeeds Act school stability transportation plan. Advocates and grantees identified opportunities to strengthen school stability policy and implementation, including advocating for more regular engagement of education rights holders in the decision-making process. For example, the **Alliance for Children's Rights**, **Children Now**, and **Children's Law Center** issued recommendations to improve Child and Family Team meetings, including inviting the youths' education rights holder to these meetings in certain circumstances

and reviewing school of origin when placement changes are planned. Additionally, data on school stability are not publicly reported in LA across all school districts, which limits identifying problems and targeting solutions to improve school stability for foster TAY. The Foster Youth Education Task Force, a collaboration in which several LA grantees participate, has made school stability a key issue on their agenda, and grantees such as **FosterEd** are working to track and reduce school mobility among the youth they serve. In **NYC**, COVID-19 delayed finalizing policies and public agency guidance related to school stability at the city's child welfare and education agencies and at the state level.

Increasing high school graduation rates

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, grantees and public agencies continued to provide academic supports to students in foster care and shifted many of their services to virtual platforms. **LA** grantees, including **Children's Law Center,** and child welfare and education agencies provided tutoring services to students in need, including students in foster care. The county also pivoted a trauma-informed mental health arts education support pilot program to a virtual platform. Several grantees made recommendations to better support students in foster care during distance learning, including **FosterEd**, **First Star**, **United Friends of the Children**, **Alliance for Children's Rights**, **Children Now**, and **Children's Law Center**. In **California**, new legislation requires schools to support students' educational continuity and success during the pandemic, including requirements that schools provide safe, socially distanced, in-person learning for small cohorts of students based on their needs.

In **NYC**, **Fair Futures** coaches provided virtual, individualized supports to youth with foster care experience in middle and high school, helped ensure youth had access to the technology and tools needed to engage in distance learning, and helped students deal with challenges due to the pandemic. Grantees and stakeholders advocated to reverse planned cuts to **Fair Futures** funding, resulting in the program receiving 20 percent more funding than anticipated. **Children's Village** used their college interns to provide tutoring services to students with foster care experience. **New York Foundling** received funding from the Initiative to provide one-on-one, free tutoring services to middle and high school students in foster care, serving youth at all 26 provider agencies.

Looking ahead

Public agencies in both jurisdictions, including the education agencies in both cities, are reexamining their work and looking for opportunities to further focus on racial equity within their agencies and programs. Though not foster TAY-specific, LA Unified School District (LAUSD) voted to cut $25 million from its school policing budget and reinvest those funds in staff support for students of color, specifically Black students.[iii] Though grantees in LA and NYC have worked to support foster TAY with distance learning, concerns remain about the impact of the pandemic on the quality of education and short and long-term outcomes. In a report published by **Children Now**, students enrolled in LAUSD who were in foster care or experiencing homelessness were less engaged in distance learning and participated in fewer weeks of

> **Spotlight:** Coordinated responses to youths' technology needs promote educational continuity
>
> Grantees and public agencies in **LA** and **NYC** collaborated to ensure youth had the technology needed to continue their education. In **LA**, the education and child welfare agencies, philanthropic and programmatic partners, and grantees worked together to ensure foster TAY had the technology they needed throughout the pandemic. **iFoster** played a central role in these efforts, and several grantees also issued technology to the youth in their programs. In **NYC**, schools, provider agencies, and the NYC Department of Education worked together to administer technology to the students in foster care who needed it. Many grantees, including **Advocates for Children, HeartShare St. Vincent's, Children's Village**, and **First Star** worked to to distribute technology to the youth they serve.

distance learning on average compared to all students.[iv] Grantees and stakeholders continue to actively engage around this issue.

For more information on progress made toward accomplishing all the Initiative's objectives in 2020, see the Foster Youth Strategic Initiative 2020 Evaluation [Report](#).

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[i] Among students who entered high school in 2013-2014 and 2016-2017. Data for cohorts entering high school before 2013-2014 excluded due to changes in methodology. Sources: California Department of Education. (n.d.) 2016-17 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Outcome: Los Angeles County Report. https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohOutcome.aspx?agglevel=county&year=2016-17&cds=19&ro=y & California Department of Education. (n.d.) 2019-20 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Outcome: Los Angeles County Report. https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohOutcome.aspx?cds=19&agglevel=County&year=2019-20&initrow=&ro=y

[ii] Data include youth who were 14 to 20 years old at time of placement or transfer. Source: Educational Continuity of Children in Foster Care, School Years 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 (By Age) provided by New York City Administration for Children's Services.

[iii] Burke, M. (2020). "Los Angeles Unified cuts school police budget by $25 million following weeks of protests". *EdSource.* https://edsource.org/2020/los-angeles-unified-cuts-school-police-budget-by-25-million-following-weeks-of-protests

[iv] Children Now (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on Students in Foster Care. https://www.childrennow.org/portfolio-posts/impact-of-covid-19-on-students-in-foster-care/