

Foster care

[Family](#), [Children](#)



Approximately fifty percent of adolescents in this country's foster care system are graduating from high school each year. In NYS, less than forty-four percent of adolescent's in the foster care system graduate from high school yearly. The outcomes of youth who leave the foster care system between the ages of 18 and 21 are statistically grim; less than 50% of these youth are equipped with a high school diploma (Scannapeieco, Connel-Carrick, and Pinter, 2007), and with-in two years of leaving the system, 25% of them face unemployment, homelessness, and/or incarceration (Krinsky, 2007).

For all children, especially children in foster care, having the proper advocacy, stability, educational coordination and guidance are vital in ensuring their academic success. Unfortunately, children in foster care are less likely to receive these components to assist them in becoming successful in academia, which in turn affects their chances to live a productive adult life. The needs of the children and youth in foster care are in need of reformation across each state throughout the nation.

Since the development of foster care, the focus of intervention has and continues to be a reactive approach, instead of a tactical approach. The intervention of foster care seeks to ensure the physical safety and well-being of each child and youth, which oftentimes leads to a neglect of their emotional and intellectual needs. Studies conducted in New York, the Midwest, Chicago, Washington, and California have shown that children in foster care are particularly vulnerable to academic failure. Smithgall, Gladden, Howard, Goerge, & Courtney (2004) compared the likelihood of graduation between students in foster care versus non-foster care students.

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According to Smithgall et. al. (2004), 15-year-old students in foster care were about half as likely as non-foster care students to have graduated high school five years later, with significantly higher percentages of foster care adolescents having dropped out (55%) or become incarcerated (10%).

This study which looked at children and youth in foster care indicated that this population was behind one academic year versus non-foster care students, however, some of this is attributed to the low-performing schools that many youth in foster care attend (Smithgall et. al, 2004). Almost 50% of third to eighth grade students in out-of-home care scored in the bottom quartile on the reading section of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) test (Smithgall et. al, 2004). Studies done in the Midwest which showed that youth in foster care who completed the 10th and 11th grades, on average read at a seventh grade level (Courtney, 2004a).

Approximately 44% of them read at a high school level and few excelled in academic subjects, when compared to a national sample. This study showed that less than 1 in 5 foster care youth received an “ A” grade in the primary subjects (Mathematics, English, Science, and History). Foster care youth who attended public schools scored 16-20% below non-foster care students in statewide standardized testing (Courtney, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001). These percentages were of students in grades three, six and nine.

These nationwide studies show that many of the children and youth in foster care will continue to be unsuccessful in school and are less likely to attain a post-secondary education. For example, a longitudinal study that followed a sample of more than 700 17- and 18-year olds from Iowa, Wisconsin and

Illinois as they transitioned out of foster care, found that less than one third had completed at least one year of college by age 23 or 24 compared to 53% percent of a nationally representative sample of 23 and 24 year olds (Courtney et al. , 2010).

Research suggests that children and youth in foster care are less likely to complete their homework assignments, receiving tutoring or other academic support services, participate in college prep courses, graduate high school or go to college. The factors that attribute to these negative experiences are trauma due to the displacement from their natural homes, placement into the foster care system and subsequently leading to numerous foster home placement changes, which frequently results in school changes and possible delays in school enrollment.

These children and adolescents suffer from untreated psychological trauma, and misdiagnosis of behavioral issues. Their foster care placement often leads to loss of their education records, inconsistent responsibility and accountability for educational progress and advocacy. Finally, there is a severe lack of coordination in creating a supportive network between child welfare agencies, schools, and other service providers to create an educational plan for each student. A major cause of trauma and stress in the lives of foster children and youth is the constant instability they face daily.

According to the Children's Bureau of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, the average time spent in foster care is 29 months (the median time is 16 months), with 15 percent languishing in care for 5 years or more (Pecora, et. al, 2003). On average, children and youth in foster care

change their foster home placement two a year and these home transfers often result in a change in school placement. School mobility rates for foster children and youth are usually higher when they are first placed into care.

In 2004, 16, 000 children and youth in NYC Public School system switched schools soon after their placement into foster care. A 2003 study of 1, 087 Casey Family Programs alumni of foster care served across the country (the Casey National Alumni Study) found that over two-thirds (68%) of them had attended three or more different elementary schools and a third (33%) had attended five or more (Pecora et. al, 2003). Another important factor to be recognized is disproportion of children of color versus Caucasian children in the foster care population.

In 2005, the proportion of children of color was 58% compared to 42% of all U. S. children, with African American children comprising 32% of the foster care population (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).

Also, these children are disproportionally from low-income families and are mostly placed in low-income foster homes. Not surprisingly, then, like other low-income youth of color, children in foster care tend to be concentrated in high-poverty, underfunded, and low-achieving schools (Smithgall et al. , 2004).

The Advocates for Children of New York, Inc. 2000) study of seventy foster care children and youth found that they did not begin attending school immediately upon their entry into foster care. These children and youth (42%) were kept out of school because of lost or misplaced school records.

Nearly 45% of youth in care in the New York State study reported being retained at least once in school (Advocates for Children, July 2000).

Studies across the country have found that children and youth in foster care are significantly more likely to have school behavior problems and that they have higher rates of suspensions and expulsions from school. One third of youths in out-of-home care will age out of the system with psychological problems including “ posttraumatic stress disorder, alcohol and substance abuse, and major depression” (Krinsky, 2007, 7). One quarter of foster youth will be arrested within two years of aging out of the foster system and as many as 25% youth report being homeless within four years of release from the foster care system (Krinsky, 2007).

Nearly 60% of female foster alumni have babies within 4 years of release and in most cases without marriage (Scannapieco, et al. , 2007). There have been efforts across the country to improve the school experience for children and youth in foster care, as well as to improve the academic outcomes for the children and youth in this population.

The focus of these efforts has been in the following four areas: (1) stability of educational placement (i. e. , maintaining students in their schools of origin); (2) educational rights and opportunities (i. . , information and training on educational rights, special education, and college or workforce preparation); (3) advocacy and cross-system liaisons (i. e. , advocacy resources to assist youth and families with enrollment, suspension/expulsion, special education or other barriers); and (4) quality of educational programming (Burrell, 2003). There are federal, state and local programs that are working towards

creating policies and procedures to protect the vulnerable individuals of this population.

One such program is The No Child Left Behind Act, also known as Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was enacted in 2001 and aims to improve the quality and performance of education for children in the U. S.. This act ensures the accountability standards for states, school districts and schools are increased so as to ensure the academic needs of all children are being met. The intent of this act is to ensure that all children will be able to meet the academic achievement standards to reach their potential through improved educational programs.

Specifically, Title I (" Title One") of the No Child Left Behind Act, distributes funding to schools and school districts that serve students from low-income neighborhoods by the U. S. Department of Education. The problem with this act is underfunded at the state level and the federal government has a list of provisions they must meet in order to receive benefits or they risk losing the federal funds. Another disadvantage of the NCLB act is it encourages and rewards teaching children how to score well on the standardized state exams, rather than teaching so the children will learn.

This limits the range of information and knowledge the teachers can share with the children in their classrooms; it also ignores other vital subjects such as science, foreign languages and history. In addition, this act tends to fault schools for the failure of its students, but does not take into account other factors that affect the students' lack of achievement, such as larger class

sizes, old and damages school buildings, lack of health care, disruptive home lives and hunger.