

**YOUTH
EXPERIENCE
SURVEY
2021**



NYC Children

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I. Acknowledgments

ACS is pleased to acknowledge the many individuals who contributed to the fourth 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 and 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, Julie Farber, 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 that contributed to the survey development, dissemination, analysis, and writing of this report including the ACS Youth Advisory Council, Allon Yaroni, Fouad Yared, Randi Rosenblum, Ina Mendez, Esther Ting, Wesley Santos, Lorna Guthrie, Kareem Forbes, Polly Mygatt, Neil Freedman, Sabine Chery, Sophonie Taylor, Virginia Johnson-Conway, Eric Brettschneider, Stephanie Gendell, and staff of the Office of Shared Response, the Senior Practice Consultants, and the APPLA Monitoring Unit. I also want to thank the ACS marketing and design team that designed this report, including John Taylor.

Thank you to Mayor Bill de Blasio for his continued support of 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.

Lastly, the COVID-19 crisis has created additional and unprecedented challenges for foster youth. I want to acknowledge the courage and resourcefulness of youth, parents, foster parents and staff at ACS and our provider agencies who are working hard to ensure that youth are safe and stable during this time.



David A. Hansell,

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 fourth 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 covered three new 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 14th, 2020 and closed on January 25th, 2021. The response rate for the FY 2021 survey was 52%; 1,192 out of 2277 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. All eligible youth were invited to take the survey online during the period between December 14th, 2020 to January 22, 2021. Of those responding, 58% were female; 57% were between the ages of 15-18; 44% identified as Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish origin; 60% identified as Black, African American, or African and 9% identified as white.

At the time they were surveyed, most respondents resided in family foster care (79%), with 25% in kinship foster homes and 54% in non-kinship foster homes. The overall NYC foster care population as of December 2020 consisted of 7,618 youth. This includes youth who were eligible and ineligible to take the survey. Ninety-two percent of these youth lived in either non-relative foster homes (49%) or kinship foster homes (43%). Just under half of respondents had spent fewer than three years in foster care, including 11% having spent less than a year in foster care. Fifty percent had spent three or more years in foster care. For 73% 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 in order 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

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.

responses on a daily basis 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.

EDUCATION:

The majority (86%) of the youth who completed the survey were in school or a vocational program.

Among this group of 1024 youth, 68% were in high school, 17% were in middle school, 10% were in college, 5% were in a TASC/GED and less than 1% were in a vocational program. Among the 168 youth not currently enrolled in school, 33% had completed at least one high school grade but had not received a high school diploma. Fifty-four percent had a high school diploma or equivalency degree, and 9% had completed some college. Forty-one percent of the youth reported having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

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, 91% plan to finish high school and 90% of youth who have started college or a vocational school plan to finish their degree. Help preparing for the high school equivalency test, help paying for needed school supplies or activities, tutoring, and help applying for school were the educational services that respondents most frequently said they needed. Over three quarters of the youth who needed these services also reported receiving them.

For youth in middle school, help with the high school application process was the most common need, and 82% of youth who needed it were receiving it.

Almost all youth responded that they currently have the equipment needed for remote learning. Due to Covid-19, in person learning has transitioned to remote learning or a hybrid approach of remote/in person learning. A question regarding remote learning needs was added to this year’s survey to assess the degree to which youth are able to manage these unprecedented demands. Eighty-nine percent reported that they have a computer or tablet and 93% stated that they have working internet. For those youth who marked that they did not have the appropriate equipment or working internet, ACS followed up with their case planning agency to provide the needed equipment.

EMPLOYMENT:

The majority of youth in foster care want to work. Sixty-six percent of respondents reported interest in obtaining employment and 15% of youth currently have a job/paid internship. Many unemployed youths reported that they were receiving help to find a job; most frequently received supports were help with getting work attire (48 %) or dependable transportation (45%), learning how to fill out a job application/ job resume (44%), and help with improving reading or math skills (44%). The most common unmet needs

for youth seeking employment were finding job openings to apply for (40%) and learning interview skills (32%).

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT:

The vast majority of youth (91%) reported that they feel very supported or somewhat 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, approximately two thirds of respondents said they had people who supported them in these ways “most of the time.” A very small group of youth (3%) 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:

The majority of youth reported using social media, spending time with friends, and engaging in outdoor activities as their primary activities during their free time. Social media use during free time was the number one reported answer by youth at 84%, followed by spending time with friends at 74%, and outdoor activities at 70%. Most youth reported having access to cell phones and the internet (87% and 91%, respectively).

HEALTHCARE AND BASIC FOOD/CLOTHING NEEDS:

About 90% of youth reported that their needs for health care, food and clothing were met. Among all survey respondents, 94% reported having their needs met as related to physical health care, and 91% for their mental/emotional health. Almost 90% of respondents reported receiving needed vision (89%) and dental (88%) care. About one fifth of respondents stated that they need care for alcohol or drug use, and 91% of those said that their needs were met. Forty percent of respondents stated that they need care for sexual health/family planning, and 91% of those had their needs met as well. Youth were also asked if they had three meals a day, appropriate clothing and shoes that fit. Ninety-seven percent of youth stated they are currently getting three meals a day and 94% have appropriate clothing or shoes that fit. For every youth who answered no to any of these questions or who reported an unmet health need, ACS conducted outreach to address the concerns.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES AND PERMANENCY PLANNING:

When asked whether they receive various types of support from their foster care agencies, more than two-thirds of youth said they got help in each of the following areas: education, job readiness, independent living workshops, housing support, and connecting with attorneys. Education (92%) and connecting to attorneys (82%) were the most frequent types of support received. When asked about their participation in permanency planning, 62% of respondents reported being involved, and 32% of those said they led the creation of their permanency plan. Youth were supported to engage in permanency planning,

most frequently by their foster care case worker (77%), foster parent (71%), and residential program staff (64%).

NEW QUESTIONS IN THE FY21 SURVEY

COVID-19 IMPACT ON YOUTH IN CARE

When youth were asked which areas of their lives were impacted by Covid-19, almost half of youth reported having difficulty with school and/or education (45%) while another 43% of youth reported not being able to see friends. Twenty-seven percent of youth indicated that they have not been able to see their immediate or extended family. Twenty-three percent of youth responded that the pandemic negatively impacted their physical and/or mental health. Sixteen percent of youth reported employment issues such as not being able to work or losing a job. Thirteen percent of youth reported the loss of a loved one due to Covid-19.

DEPRESSION:

A new question was added to this year's Youth Experience Survey asking youth to report frequency of feeling down, depressed, or hopeless within the last two weeks. **Fifty one percent of youth reported that they did not feel down, depressed, or hopeless during the last two weeks.** Thirty-five percent of youth reported that they felt down, depressed, or hopeless "sometimes" (1-5 days in the past two weeks) and 8% reported feeling this way more than "half of the days" (6-11 days within the past two weeks). Seven percent of youth reported feeling down, depressed, or hopeless "nearly every day" (12 or more days). Youth who indicated feeling down, depressed, or hopeless were asked a follow up question if they would like someone from ACS to follow up with them. All youth who indicated that they would like someone to follow up with them were contacted by ACS staff. In addition, 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 54% of youth identified as a girl/woman while 38% identified as a boy/man. One percent of youth indicated their gender identity as trans or transgender and 2% checked the option "use another word for my gender." 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, 65% see themselves as straight or heterosexual. Thirteen percent of respondents identify as bisexual, 3% see themselves as lesbian and 1% identify as gay. Three percent of youth stated that they did not know while another 3% stated that they use another word to describe their sexuality. The remaining 12% of youth either selected that they did not want to answer this question, did not understand this question, or left this question blank.

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 FY21 Foster Care Experience Survey to comply with Local Law 146 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 \$10 gift card. The survey launched on December 14th, 2020 and remained open for four weeks. The overall response rate was 52%.

B. Survey Methodology

Survey development and analysis

For the annual survey conducted in FY21, ACS used the same survey tool as the prior fiscal year 2020 Youth Experience Survey with some minor modifications. Three additional sections were added to the FY21 survey around experiences pertaining to Covid-19, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression

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

(SOGIE), and Depression. From past survey feedback, youth indicated that the survey was too long and too time consuming. ACS streamlined this survey by removing questions where responses could be obtained from various sources and reframing questions to make them more precise, clear, and less redundant.

Survey dissemination

ACS launched the online survey on December 14, 2020. 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 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 \$10 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. Eight youth completed the survey in Spanish. The remaining 1,184 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 11, 2020. At the time of survey dissemination, there were 2,442 youth identified as eligible to participate. During data collection, provider agencies reported 165 youth who were no longer eligible for the survey due to being discharged from care, absent from care, incarcerated, or having serious developmental delays. After removing these youth from the sample, 2,277 youth were eligible to complete the survey.⁵

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

⁵ The cohort of potentially eligible youth changes daily as young people enter and exit foster care. To administer the survey, it is necessary to define the survey population as of a specific date. ACS pulled data on 12/11/2020, shortly before the start of the survey period, and used this to create the FY21 eligibility list.

Of the 2,277 youth eligible for the survey, 1192 completed it, for a response rate of 52%. The response rate improved 12 percentage points from 40% responding in FY20 to 52% responding in FY21. This is a strong response rate for online surveys, which typically have a response rate of 30% - 40%.⁶

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.⁷

Placement Type

Of the 1192 youth responding to the survey, 79% were living either in foster homes or in kinship foster homes (Table 1). Slightly more than half (54%) reside in non-relative foster homes and 25% were placed in kinship family homes. Twenty 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).

The overall NYC foster care population as of December 2020 consisted of 7,618 youth. This includes youth who were eligible and ineligible to take the survey. Ninety-two percent of these youth lived in either non-relative foster homes (49%) or kinship foster homes (43%). Most of the remaining 8% lived in a congregate residential setting. Less than 1% of youth lived in a different placement setting. Youth who lived in a congregate residential setting or non-relative foster home were over-represented in the population eligible to complete the survey. Youth who lived in a kinship family home were under-represented in the population eligible to complete the survey.

Length of time in foster care. Based on information available in ACS administrative records, half of the survey respondents had been in care for fewer than three years, including 11% in care for less than one year at the time of the survey distribution and 39% in care for one to under three years. Fifty percent were in care for three years or more.

Number of foster care spells (placement episodes). Consistent with the population of youth age 13 or older in foster care overall, nearly three quarters (73%) of the survey respondents were experiencing foster care placement for the first time, or their first spell. An additional 20% of respondents were in their

⁶ Hart, N., Dykema, J., Schaeffer, N., & Stevenson, J., University of Wisconsin Survey Center. Survey Fundamentals: A Guide to Designing and Implementing Surveys. 2010.

⁷ 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.

second spell of foster care, meaning they had previously been discharged from care and then reentered care. The remaining 8% had been placed into foster care three or more times.

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% | 1,192 | 100% | 2,277 |
| Current placement type | | | | |
| Foster home | 50% | 591 | 47% | 1,073 |
| Kinship family home | 29% | 345 | 31% | 699 |
| Residential treatment center/ Group home | 21% | 255 | 22% | 496 |
| Other/ Unknown | 0.1% | * | 0.1% | * |
| Length of time in foster care | | | | |
| Under 1 year | 11% | 135 | 13% | 304 |
| Between 1 and 3 years | 39% | 460 | 36% | 821 |
| Between 3 and 5 years | 23% | 271 | 25% | 574 |
| Between 5 and 8 years | 16% | 189 | 15% | 335 |
| Over 8 years | 12% | 137 | 11% | 243 |
| Number of foster care splits/spells (?) | | | | |
| One spell | 73% | 864 | 71% | 1,620 |
| Two spells | 20% | 237 | 21% | 484 |
| Three or more spells | 8% | 91 | 7% | 169 |
| Unknown | 0% | * | 0.2% | * |

NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (*). SOURCES: Youth Experience Survey FY21 and ACS Administrative Records

Demographics

Information on the gender and age of respondents was analyzed from ACS administrative records.⁸ Of the 1192 youth responding to the survey, 58% were female and 42% were male (Table 2). The majority of respondents (57%) were 15 to 18 years old, with 22% under age 15 and 21% over age 18.

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% | 1192 | 100% | 2,394 |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 42% | 498 | 43% | 986 |
| Female | 58% | 694 | 57% | 1291 |
| Age | | | | |
| 13 to 14 years | 22% | 264 | 23% | 521 |
| 15 to 16 years | 27% | 323 | 26% | 590 |
| 17 to 18 years | 29% | 351 | 30% | 675 |
| 19 to 20 years | 21% | 254 | 22% | 491 |

SOURCES: Youth Experience Survey FY21 and ACS Administrative Records

The survey gathered information on the race and ethnicity of youth in foster care (Table 3).⁹ Ethnicity is reported separately from race. Youth who identified themselves as Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish Origin

⁸ Gender information was pulled from the New York State CONNECTIONS system. This data does not reflect youth's self-reported gender identities.

⁹ 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).

accounted for a substantial share of the youth responding to the survey (44%), while 5% identified as Middle Eastern or North African. Forty 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.

Table 3. Race/ethnicity of survey respondents

| Demographic indicator | Youth responding to the survey | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| | Percent | Number |
| Ethnicity | | |
| Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin | 44% | 519 |
| Middle Eastern or North African | 5% | 60 |
| None of the above | 40% | 477 |
| Prefer not to answer | 10% | 124 |
| Did not answer | 1% | 12 |
| Total | 100% | 1192 |
| Race | Percent | Number |
| Black, African American, or African | 60% | 718 |
| White | 9% | 102 |
| Asian | 3% | 37 |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 4% | 49 |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 2% | 22 |
| Not ascertained (I don't identify) | 8% | 97 |
| Prefer not to answer | 18% | 217 |

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 FY21.

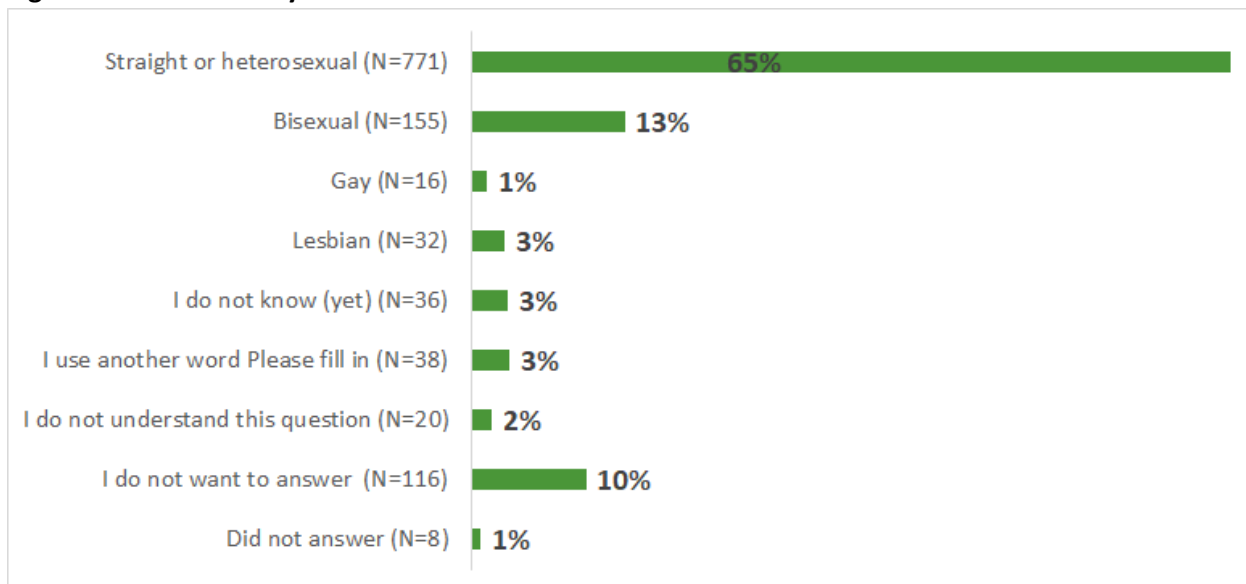
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

Sexual orientation and gender identity/ expression

The recently developed LGBTQAI+ Action Plan¹⁰ 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.

Of the 1192 youth who responded to the question regarding sexuality, the majority of youth (65%) see themselves as straight or heterosexual. Thirteen percent of respondents identify as bisexual, 3% see themselves as lesbian and 1% identify as gay (Figure 1). Three percent of youth stated that they did not know while another 3% stated that they use another word to describe their sexuality. The remaining 13% of youth did not understand this question, preferred not to answer, or did not respond to this question.

Figure 1. Sexual identity

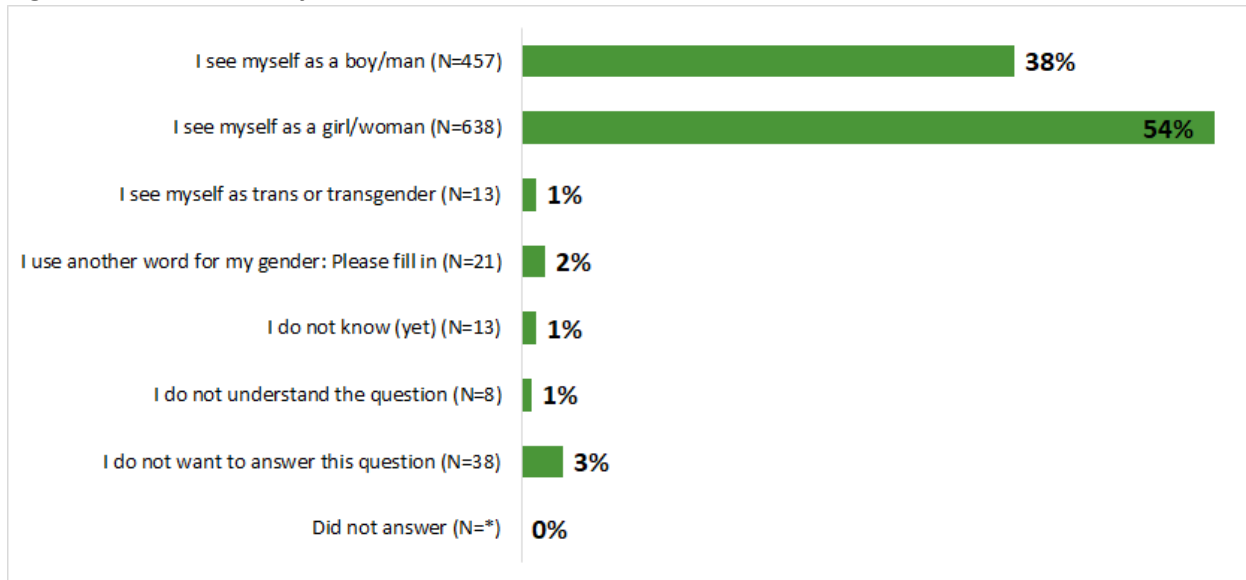


SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

All eligible 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 1192 youth who responded to this survey, 38% identified as a boy/man, 54% identified as a girl/woman (Figure 1). One percent of youth identified as trans or transgender and 1% stated that they did not know (yet). Another two percent responded that they use another word for their gender, while the remaining 3% of youth stated that they did not understand the question or they did not want to answer this question.

¹⁰ ACS LGBTQAI+ Action Plan can be found at <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/about/2020/LGBTQActionPlan.pdf>

Figure 2. Gender identity



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

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 was 10 percentage points 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 11, 2020. 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?

Most of the survey respondents (1024 youth, 86%) were enrolled in school or a remote learning, hybrid, or in-person program (Table 4). There was an increase of 13 percentage points from the previous year (FY20 73%) of youth who were currently in school. Of those enrolled, 17% were in middle school, 68% were in high school, 5% were in a TASC/GED program and 10% were in college (Figure 3).

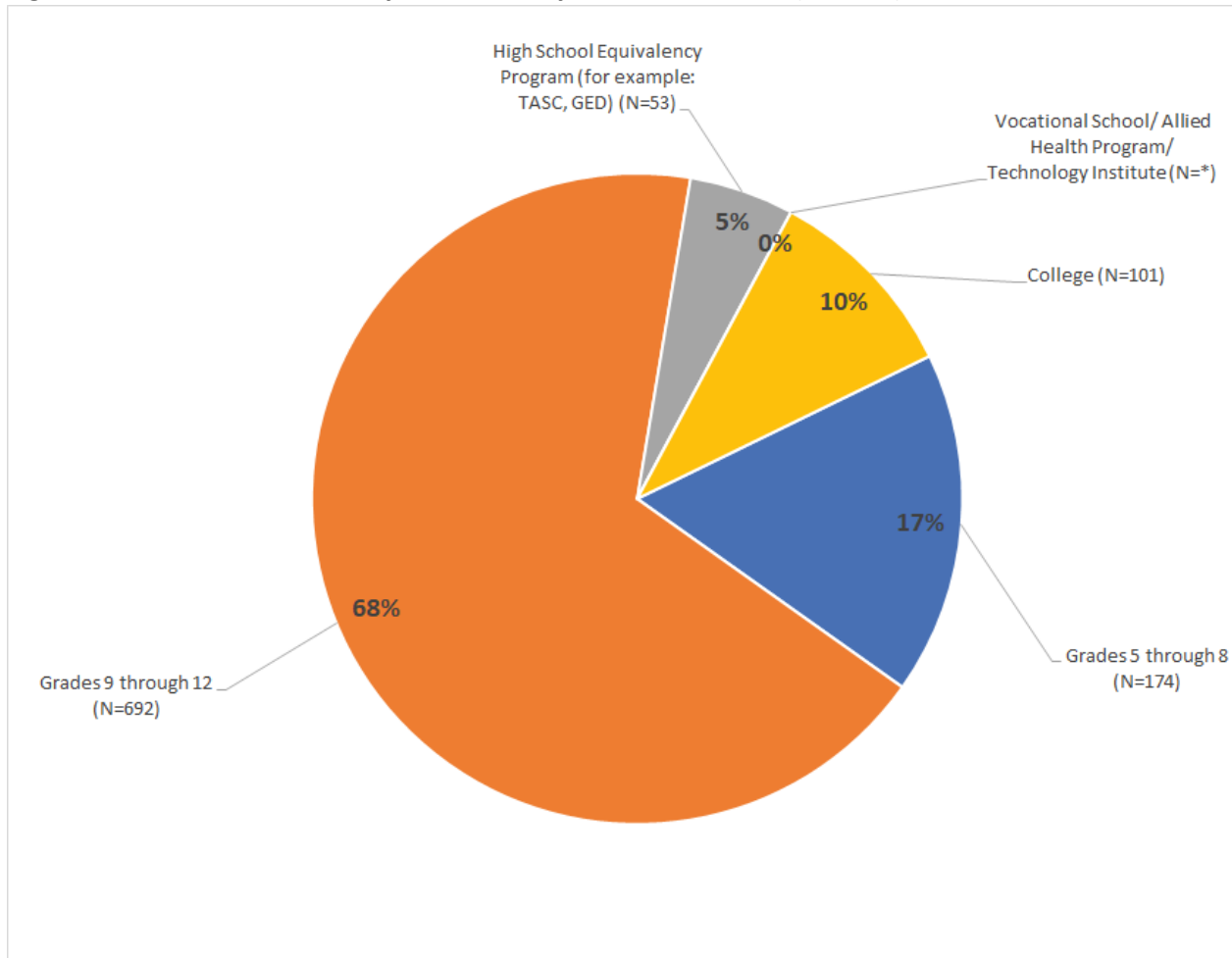
Table 4. Current school enrollment status of youth in foster care

| Question: Are you currently in school (remote, hybrid or in-person)? | | |
|--|--------|------------|
| Response | Number | % of Total |
| Yes, I am in school or in a remote learning, hybrid, or in-person program | 1024 | 86% |
| No, I am not in school or in a remote learning, hybrid, or in person program | 168 | 14% |
| Total | 1192 | 100% |

This question was mandatory, so all 1192 youth answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

Figure 3. Level of education for youth currently enrolled in school (N=1024)



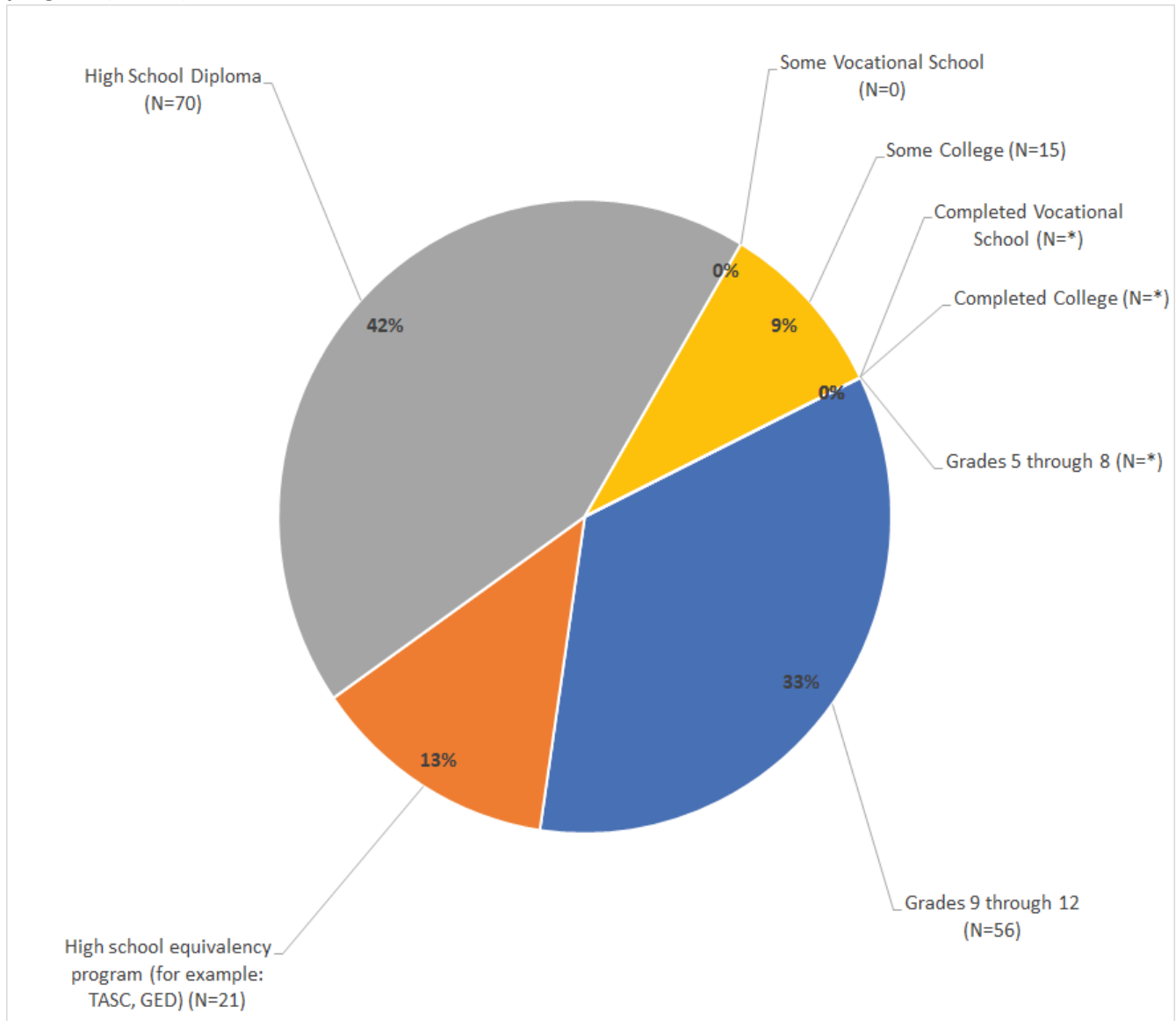
NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (*).

This question was mandatory, so all 1024 youth currently enrolled in school answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

Of the 168 youth not currently enrolled in school, 42% reported receiving a high school diploma, 33% stated that their highest level of education completed was a high school grade level, 13% had completed a high school equivalency program, and 9% had attended some college (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Highest level of education completed by youth not currently enrolled in school or a training program (N=168)



NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (*). This question was mandatory, so all 168 youth not currently enrolled in school answered it.
 SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

Close to half (48%) of the youth between grades 5-8 reported having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) while 41% of youth grades 9 and above reported having an IEP (Table 5).

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

| | Youth in grades 5 through 8 (N=174) | Youth in grades 9 and above (N=850) | Total number of youth (N=1024) |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Yes | 48% | 41% | 42% |
| No | 35% | 43% | 41% |
| Don't know/ not sure | 17% | 16% | 16% |
| Did not answer | 1% | 0% | 1% |

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

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

A.2 What support do youth need to continue with their education?

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. 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.”

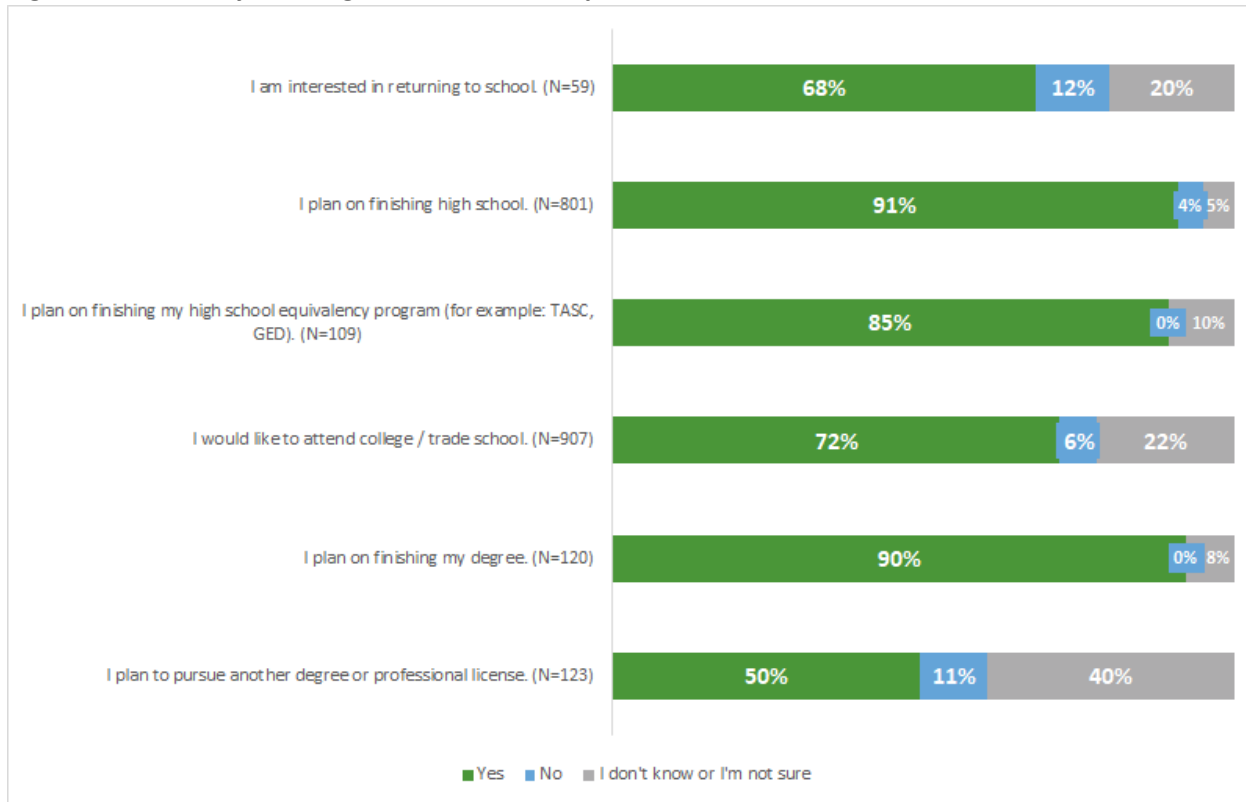
Youth shared the following regarding their desires to continue their education:

- 91% of youth in high school or who left high school without graduating plan to finish high school
- 85% of youth currently in a high school equivalency (HSE) program or who left high school without graduating plan to finish a high school equivalency program
- 72% of youth in high school or a HSE program, or whose highest level of education completed is at least 9th grade, would like to attend college/trade school
- 90% of youth who have started college or a vocational school plan to finish their degree
- 68% said they were interested in returning to school.
- 50% of youth in college or vocational school plan to pursue another degree or professional license

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 5 shows detailed findings for each of these answer choices.

Figure 5. Whether youth in grades 9 and above plan to continue with education



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

NOTE: Response options were shown based on youth’s answers to previous questions, so Ns differ. E.g., the group of youth in high school was larger than the group in college or vocational school, so the N for “I plan to finish high school” is larger than the N for “I plan on finishing my degree.”

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 nine types of education services in the past year. Youth in grades 5 through 8 were asked whether they needed and received each of three types of education services. In this year’s survey, an additional education service (activities and help paying for needed school supplies) was added to this question. This topic was in previous iterations of the survey, but in separate questions.)

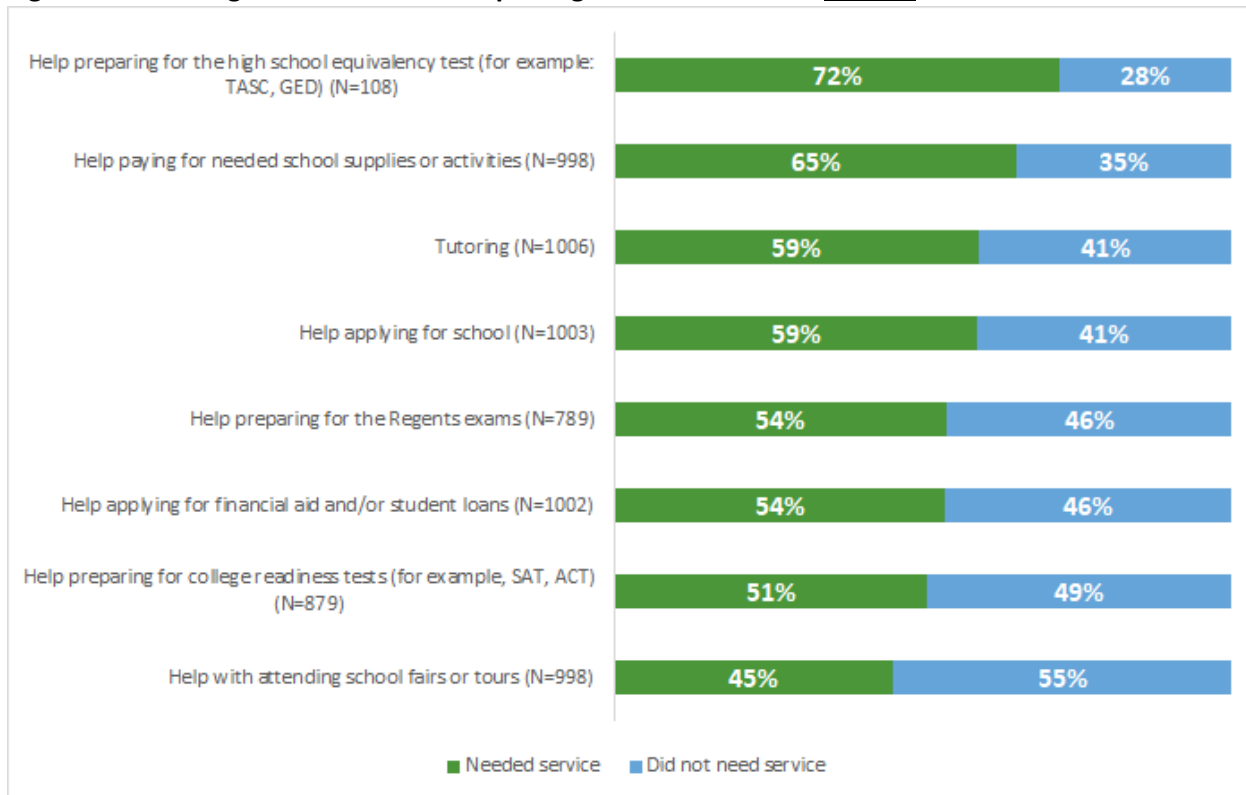
Education services needed and received: Grades 9 and above

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, help paying for needed school supplies or activities, tutoring, help applying for school, help preparing for Regents exams, help applying for financial aid and/or student loans, help preparing for college

readiness tests, help attending school fairs or tours, and help with children during school hours or activities.

Need for services: Among youth in grades 9 and above, the most frequently cited needs were help preparing for the high school equivalency test (72%), paying for needed school supplies or activities (65%), tutoring (59%), and help applying for schools (59%). Two new options were added to this year’s educational need question: “Help paying for needed school supplies and activities” and “Help with childcare during school hours or activities”. Sixty-five percent of the 998 youth reported that they needed help paying for needed school supplies or activities (Figure 6). Approximately 54% of youth also said they needed help applying for financial aid and/or student loans and help with the Regents exams. 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, 72% needed help with preparing for the high school equivalency test.

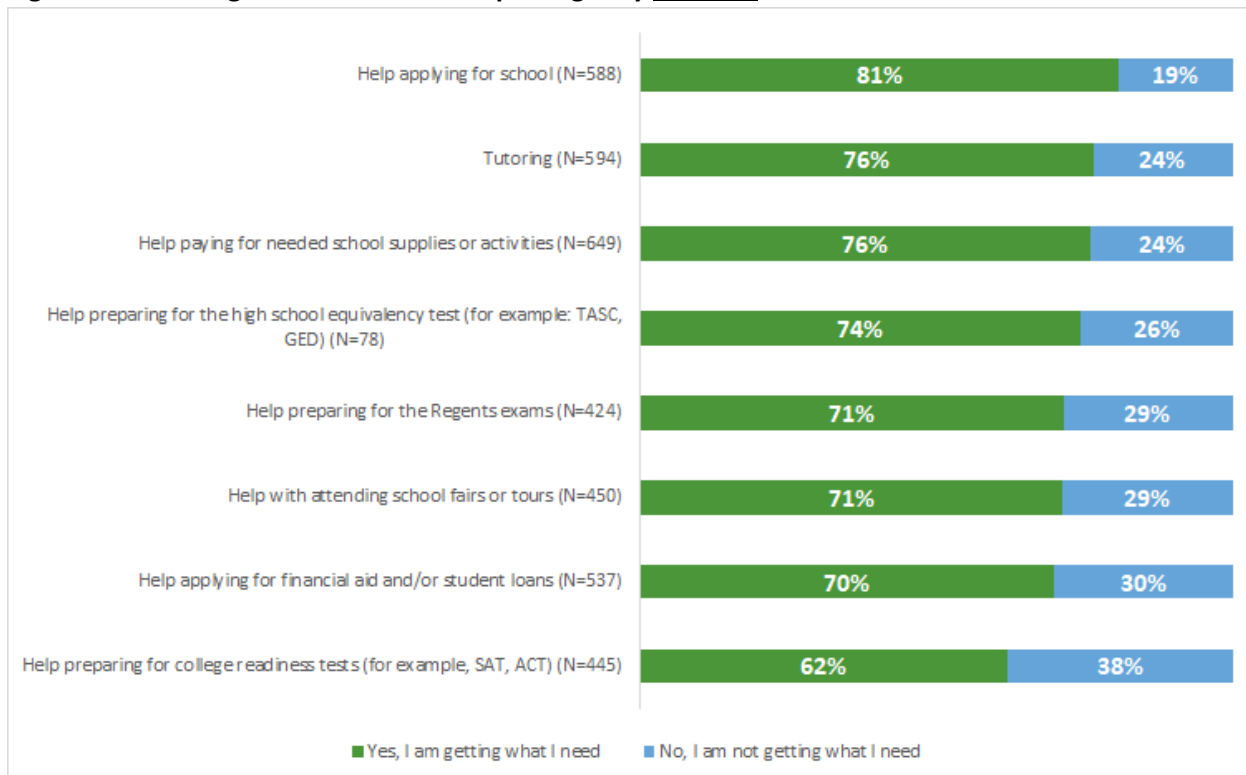
Figure 6. Youth in grades 9 and above reporting education services needed



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

Extent to which needs were met: The information presented in Figure 7 reflects the extent to which a youth’s need for specific education services were met or unmet. The Total N, which includes youth who did not answer specific items in this question, was 1,015 for most items. 108 youth were asked about the high school equivalency test, 801 youth were asked about the Regents exam, and 892 youth were asked about college readiness tests. "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. Blanks were not included in this calculation.

Figure 7. 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" 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 FY21

Specifically, the following results indicate the extent to which the needs of youth in grades 9 and above were met for each of the six services examined from the survey.

- **Help applying for school:** 81% of the 588 youth who needed this education service reported that they received it, while 19% did not.
- **Tutoring:** Of the 594 youth who reported the need for tutoring, 76% received it, while 24% did not.
- **Help paying for needed school supplies and activities:** 76% of the 649 youth who needed help paying for needed school supplies and activities received it, while 24% did not.
- **Preparing for high school equivalency test:** Of the 78 students in a GED/TASC program who needed help preparing for the high school equivalency test, 74% received it (i.e., the need was met), while 26% did not receive the service (i.e., the need was unmet).
- **Help preparing for the Regents exams:** 71% of the 424 youth who needed help preparing for Regents exams received it, while 29% did not. It is important to note that Regents exams were cancelled due to Covid-19 during 2020.
- **Help with attending school fairs or tours:** While 71% of the 450 youth who needed this assistance reported that they received it, 29% did not.
- **Help applying for financial aid/student loans:** While 70% of the 537 youth who needed this educational service reported receiving it, 30% did not.
- **Preparing for college readiness/specialized tests:** Of the 445 youth who reported needing help with preparing for tests, 62% received this service, while 38% did not.

Educational services needed and received: Grades 5 through 8

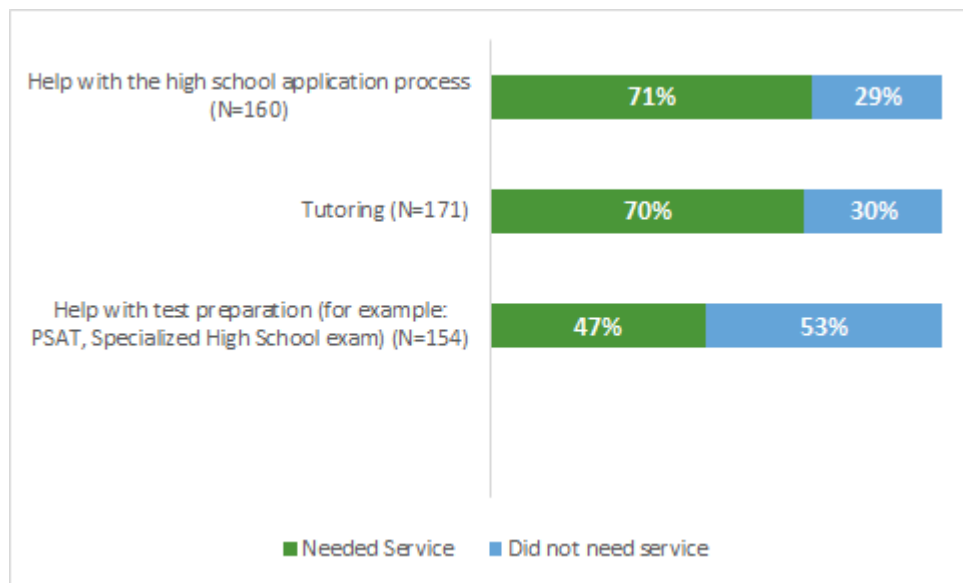
Youth in grades 5 through 8 reported whether they needed and received each of three services over the past year: tutoring, help with the high school application process, and test preparation (PSAT, specialized high school exam). These questions applied to 177 young people.¹¹

Need for services. Approximately three-quarters (71%) of middle school youth said they need help with the high school application process. Two-thirds (70%) reported that they need tutoring, and 47% said they need help with test preparation (Figure 7). Compared to FY20 the need for test preparation fell 16

¹¹ Occasionally, respondents leave a question blank, resulting in Ns for specific findings that differ slightly from this total number.

percentage points (From 63% of youth needing it in FY20 to 47% needing it in FY21). Due to Covid-19, there were cancellations and delays of the PSAT and specialized high school exams.

Figure 7. Youth in grades 5 through 8 reporting education service needed

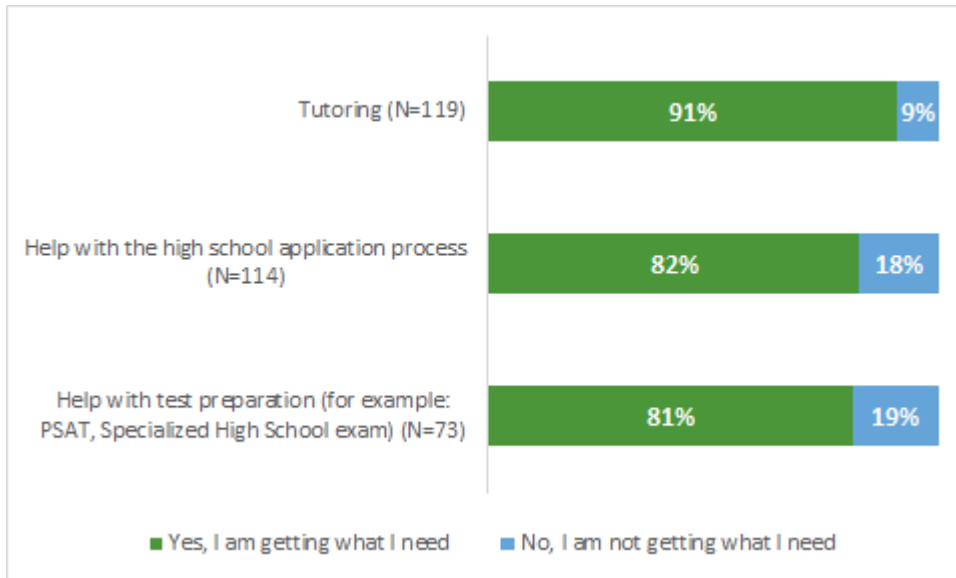


“ Needed Service” was calculated as the sum of youth who said “Yes, I am getting what I need” or “no, I am not getting what I need” over youth who said “Yes, I am getting what I need,” “No, I am not getting what I need,” and “I don’t need this.” The number of youth who did not answer a particular item ranged from 1 to 16
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

Extent to which needs were met. Figure 8 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.

- **Tutoring:** 119 students noted that they needed tutoring; of these, 91% received it and 9% did not. There was a 16-percentage point increase for youth in grades 5-8 who received tutoring. Seventy-five percent of youth received it in FY20 and 91% received it in FY21.
- **Help with the high school application process:** Of the 114 youth who responded that they needed this service, 82% had received it while the remaining 18% had not.
- **Test preparation:** Of the 73 students who needed this education service, 81% reported they have received it and the other 19% stated that they did not.

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



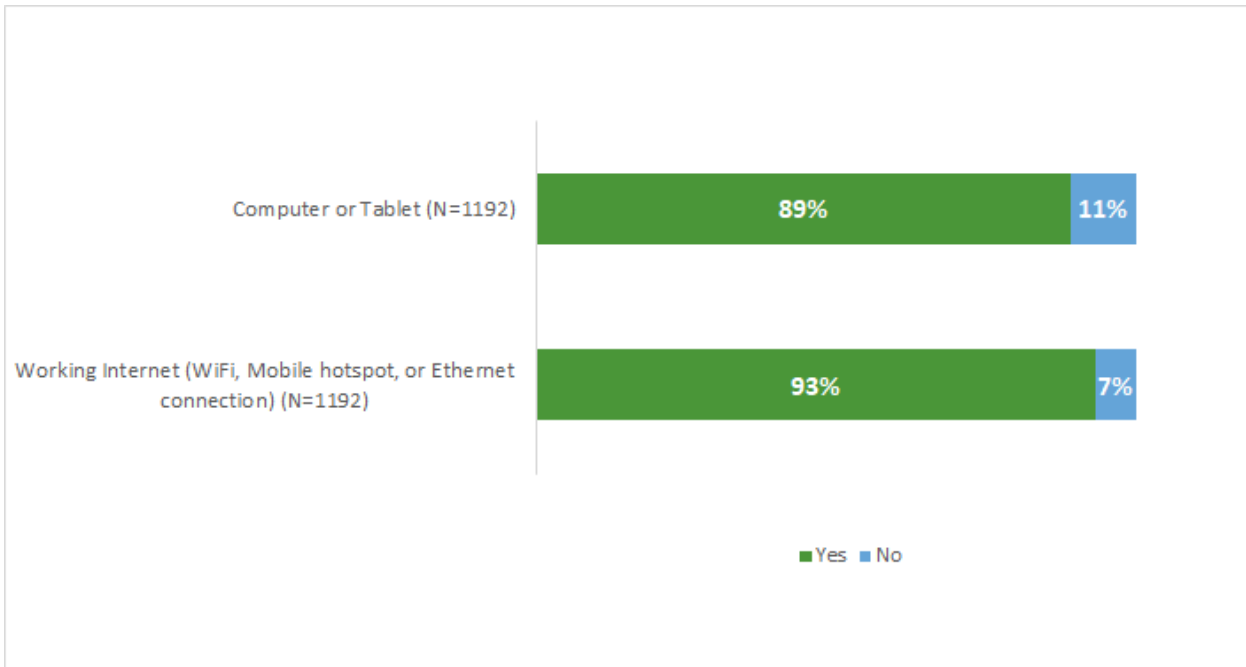
“Received service” was calculated as youth who say “Yes, I am getting what I need” divided by the sum of youth who said either “Yes, I am getting what I need” or “No, I am not getting what I need.”

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

A.4 Do youth currently have what they need for remote learning?

Remote learning needs. Almost all youth indicated that they had either a computer or tablet (89%) and working internet (93%) for remote learning. For youth that indicated that they did not have a working computer/tablet or working internet, ACS followed up with their case planning agency and worked with the Department of Education Special Education office to address these needs.

Figure 9. Remote Learning Equipment Needs

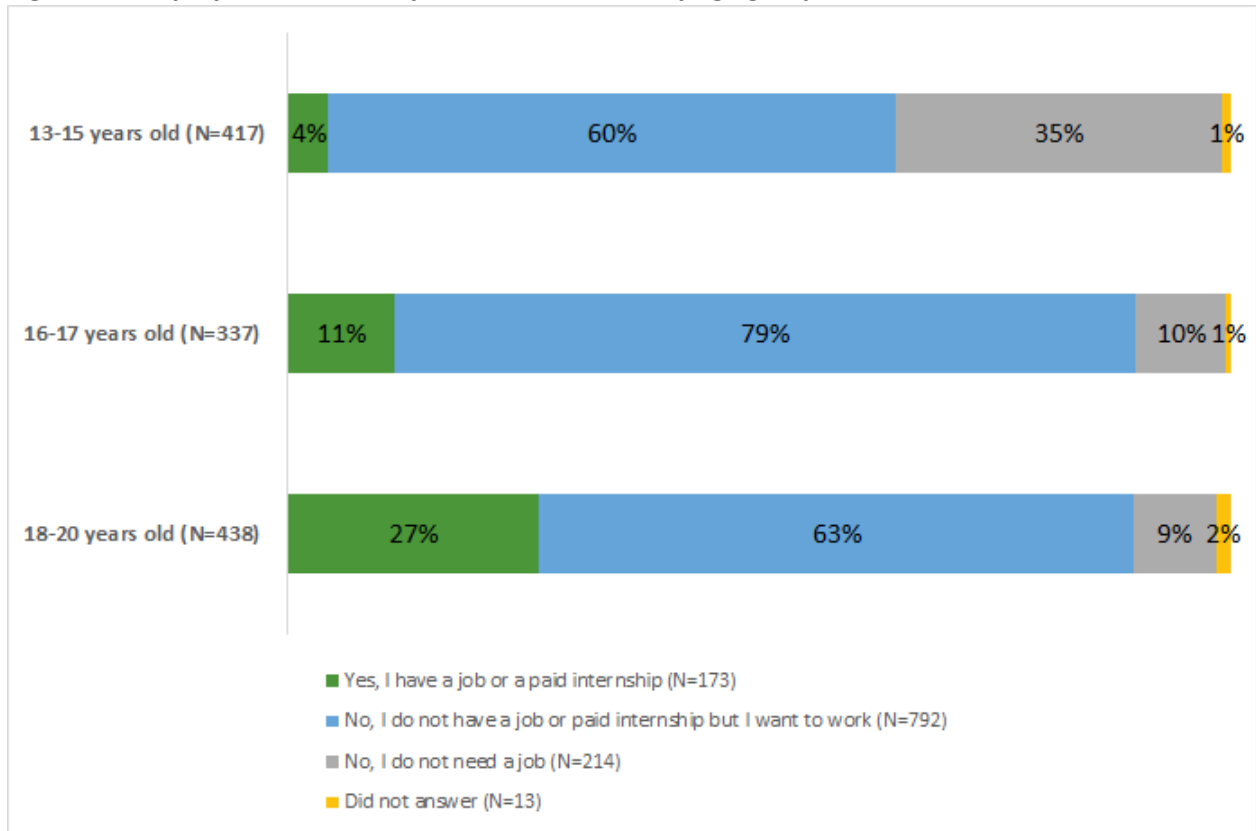


B. Help with Employment

B.1 What is the employment status of youth in foster care?

Figure 10 shows the distribution of youth in foster care who are actively employed or would like to be employed. A total of 173 youth (15%) reported that they have a job or paid internship which was a decline from the previous year FY20 where 26% of youth reported having a job or paid internship. An additional 792 youth (66%) said they did not have a job or paid internship but wanted to work. The remaining 214 youth (18%) said they did not need a job. A little over 1% of the youth did not answer.

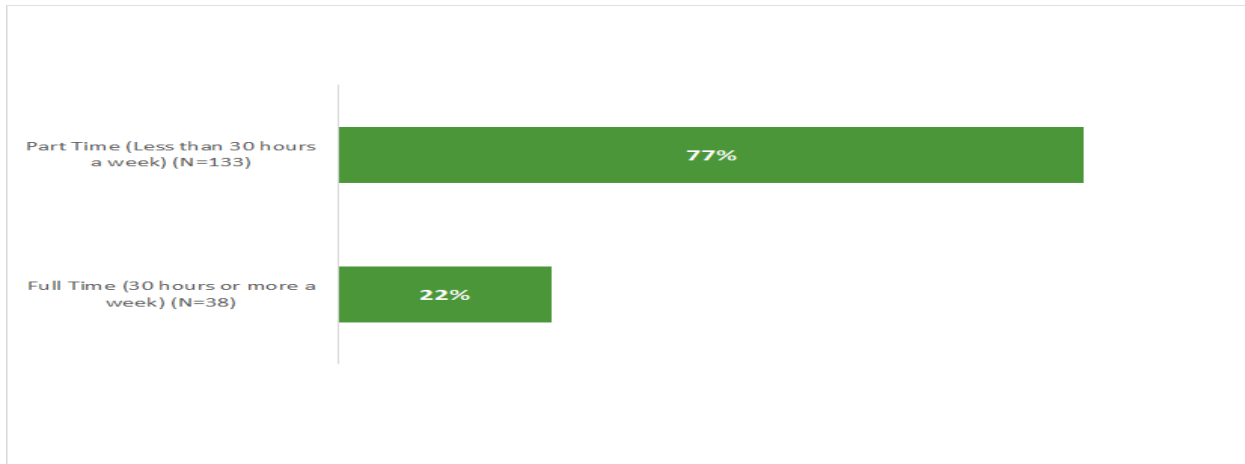
Figure 10. Employment status of youth in foster care, by age group



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

The survey asked youth who were employed to indicate the number of hours worked per week (Figure 11). Of the 173 youth actively working, 77% of youth were working part time (less than 30 hours a week) and 22% of youth were working full time (30 hours or more a week). Between 1 and 5 youth did not answer how many hours a week they work.

Figure 11. Youth reporting whether their job or internship is full time or part time week (N = 173)



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. Between 1 and 5 youth did not answer this question.

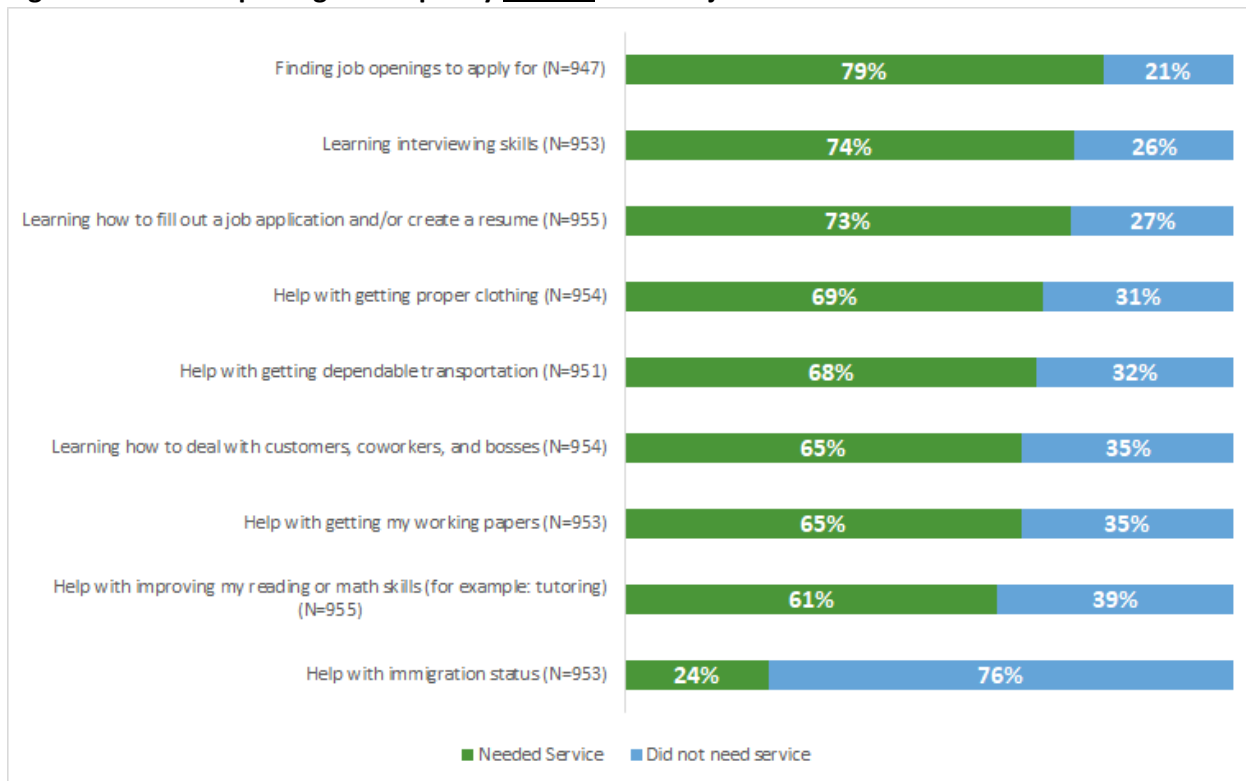
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

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: finding job openings to apply for (745 youth), learning interviewing skills (705 youth), learning how to fill out a job application and/or create a resume (701 youth), help with getting proper clothing (656 youth), and help with getting dependable transportation (644 youth). Sixty-five percent of respondents also said they needed assistance learning how to deal with customers, coworkers, and bosses and help with getting my working papers. Approximately one in four respondents said they need help with immigration status. See Figure 10 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.

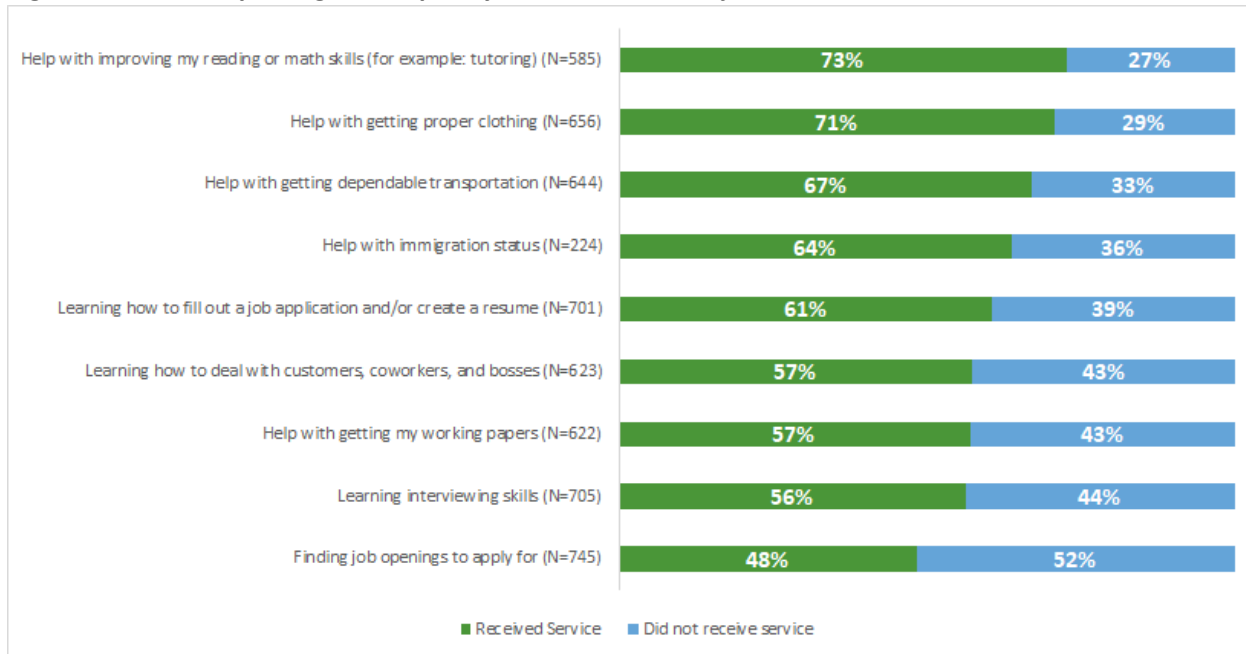
Figure 12. Youth reporting the help they needed to find a job



NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
 SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

Help received in finding a job. For every type of job support, the majority of youth who needed a specific job support received it (Figure 13). By percentage, the best met need was for help with improving reading or math skills; 73% of youth said they were getting their needs met in this area. This was followed by help getting proper clothing (71%), and help getting dependable transportation (67%). The areas where the largest percentage of youth reporting unmet needs were help finding places that are hiring (48% received, 52% unmet need) and help learning interviewing skills (56% received, 44% unmet need). Compared to the response from last year, youth receiving help with getting working papers dropped 12 percentage points (from 69% in FY20 to 57% in FY21); learning how to deal with customers, coworkers, and bosses dropped 10 percentage points (from 67% in FY20 to 57% in FY21); and learning what jobs to apply for dropped 9 percentage points (from 57% in FY20 to 48% in FY21).

Figure 13. Youth reporting the help they received to find a job

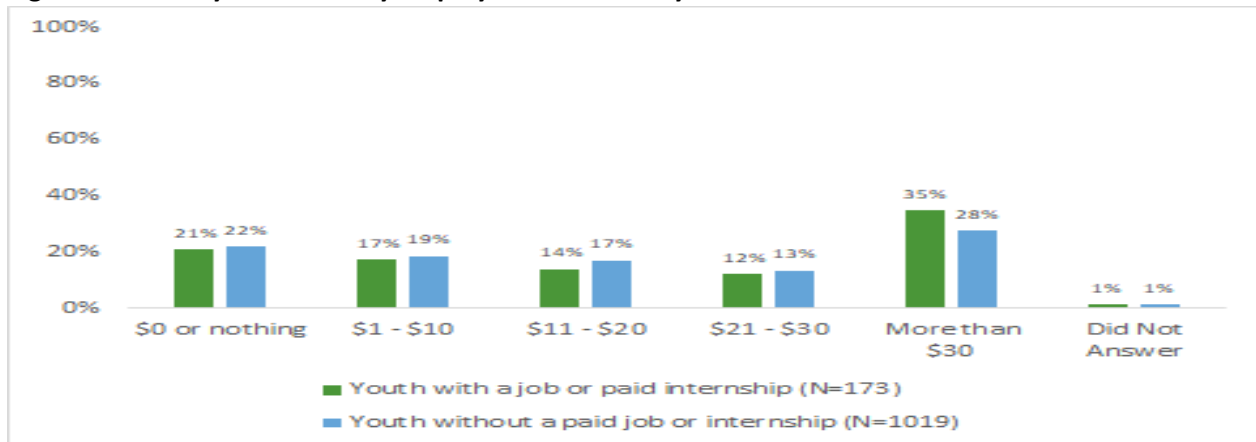


NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
 SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

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 80% of youth reported receiving an allowance. Figure 14 shows the amount of allowance for all youth, youth reporting they had a job or paid internship, and those without a job or paid internship.

Figure 14. Weekly allowance by employment status of youth in foster care



NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
 SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

Among the 1176¹² youth who provided information on the amount of weekly allowance they received; the data showed 35% of youth with a job (N=173) received more than \$30 a week compared to 28% of youth without a job (N=1019).¹³

The FY21 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 (53%) stated that they have a bank account, while only 23% of youth between the ages of 16-17 and 16% 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 | Not Sure |
|-----------------------------|-----|-----|----------|
| 13-15 years old (N=417) | 16% | 75% | 9% |
| 16-17 years old (N=337) | 23% | 69% | 7% |
| 18-20 years old (N=438) | 53% | 44% | 3% |

NOTE: A total of 1192 youth were asked this question; Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Between 1 and 5 youth did not answer this question. SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

C. Support from Family and Friends

C1. 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. Specifically, youth in foster or kinship homes were asked if they felt supported by their foster parents. Of the 943 youth responding, over two thirds (70%) said they felt “very supported,” and another 23% felt “somewhat supported.”

¹² Of the 1192 youth only 16 youth did not answer this question.

¹³ The answer choices for the Allowance question slightly differed in this year’s survey. In FY20, the answer choices were provided in \$5 increments. In FY21, the answer choices were provided in \$10 increments. Exact comparisons could not be made, but comparisons based on the following groups were made: \$0, \$1-\$20, \$21-\$30, and More than \$30. None of the differences were larger than 10 percentage points. Youth with a job getting more than \$30 allowance increased by 5 percentage points.

Youth in residential care and group homes were asked if they felt supported by program staff, and the majority said yes; 51% felt “very supported” and 35% felt “somewhat supported.” The remaining 12% of youth in residential care did not feel supported by staff (Table 7).

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

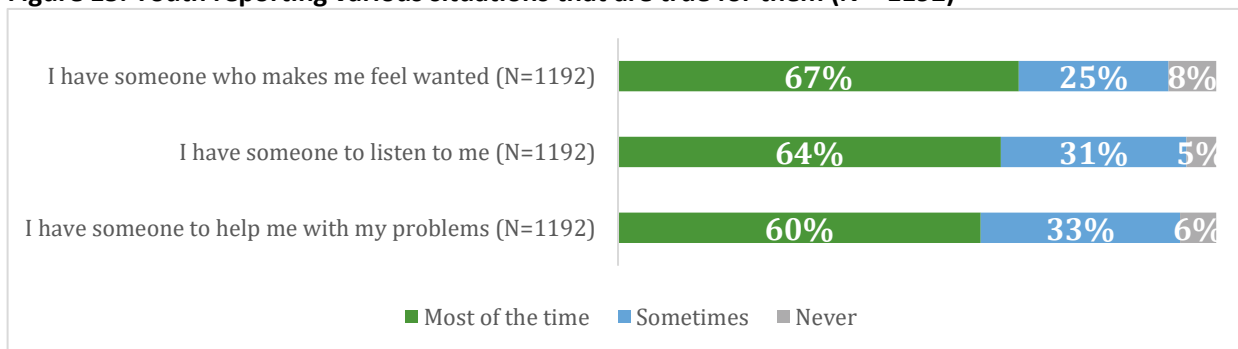
| In general, do you feel supported by your foster parents or residential facility staff? (Total N = 1192) | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| | Foster or Kinship Home (N=943) | Residential (N=249) |
| Yes, very supported | 70% | 51% |
| Yes, somewhat supported | 23% | 35% |
| No, not very supported | 4% | 9% |
| No, not supported at all | 3% | 3% |
| Did not answer | 1% | 2% |

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

C.2 To what extent do youth receive emotional support?

Over two thirds of the youth responding had someone who makes them feel wanted “most of the time” (67%), 25% of youth felt that they had someone who makes them feel wanted “some of the time”, and 8% reported that they have someone who makes them feel wanted “never”. Sixty-four percent of youth felt that they had someone to listen to them and 60% of youth indicated that they have someone to help them with their problems most of the time (Figure 15). ACS followed up with the youth who reported “Never” for all three items to see what additional support and resources they needed.

Figure 15. Youth reporting various situations that are true for them (N = 1192)



This question was mandatory, so all 1192 youth answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

D. Youth Reporting of Feeling Down, Depressed or Hopeless

This year a new question was added to the Youth Experience Survey asking youth in foster care: *how often have you been bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless over the past two weeks?* This question was mandatory, so all 1192 youth answered it.

Youth reported the following frequency of feeling down, depressed or hopeless within the last two weeks (Figure 16):

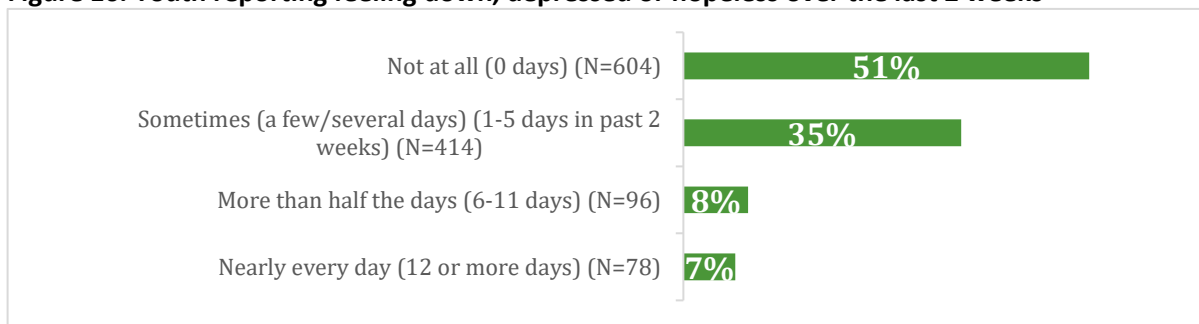
- 51% “Not at all” (0 days)
- 35% “Sometimes” (1-5 days)
- 8% “More than half of the days” (6-11 days)
- 7% “Nearly every day” (12 or more days)

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.

Of the 510 youth who were asked if they would like someone from ACS to reach out to them, 13% indicated that they would like follow up. There were 147 distinct youth who were contacted by ACS senior staff for depression-related follow-up. Results of the follow up are such:

- 48% were already getting their needs met
- 33% are now getting their needs met after the survey
- 9% don’t have any concerns
- 10% other outcomes ¹⁴

Figure 16. Youth reporting feeling down, depressed or hopeless over the last 2 weeks



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

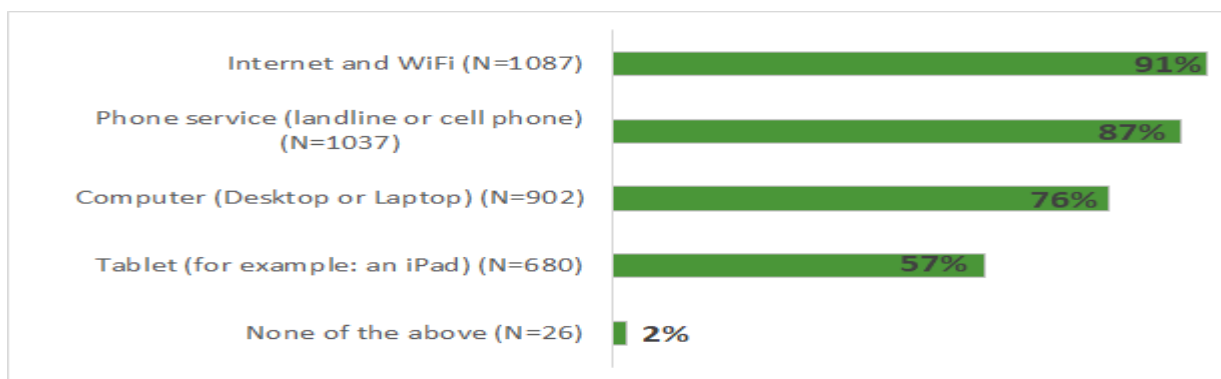
¹⁴ Other outcomes include: refusal for follow-up, discharge from care, temporarily felt depressed but no longer feeling depressed, agency to follow-up to determine needs, receiving mental health services but wanting additional support, and youth declining mental health services.

E. Social Interaction and Communication

E.1 Do youth have access to communication technologies?

Most foster care youth reported they have access to internet and phone service (91% and 87%, respectively) (Figure 17). In addition, most youth (76%) reported they have access to a computer (desktop or laptop), and more than half of youth (57%) indicated that they have access to a tablet. There was a 14 percentage point increase in the share of youth with internet access. In FY20, 77% of youth reported having internet access at home while in FY21, 91% of youth had it.

Figure 17. Youth access to communication technology (N=1192)

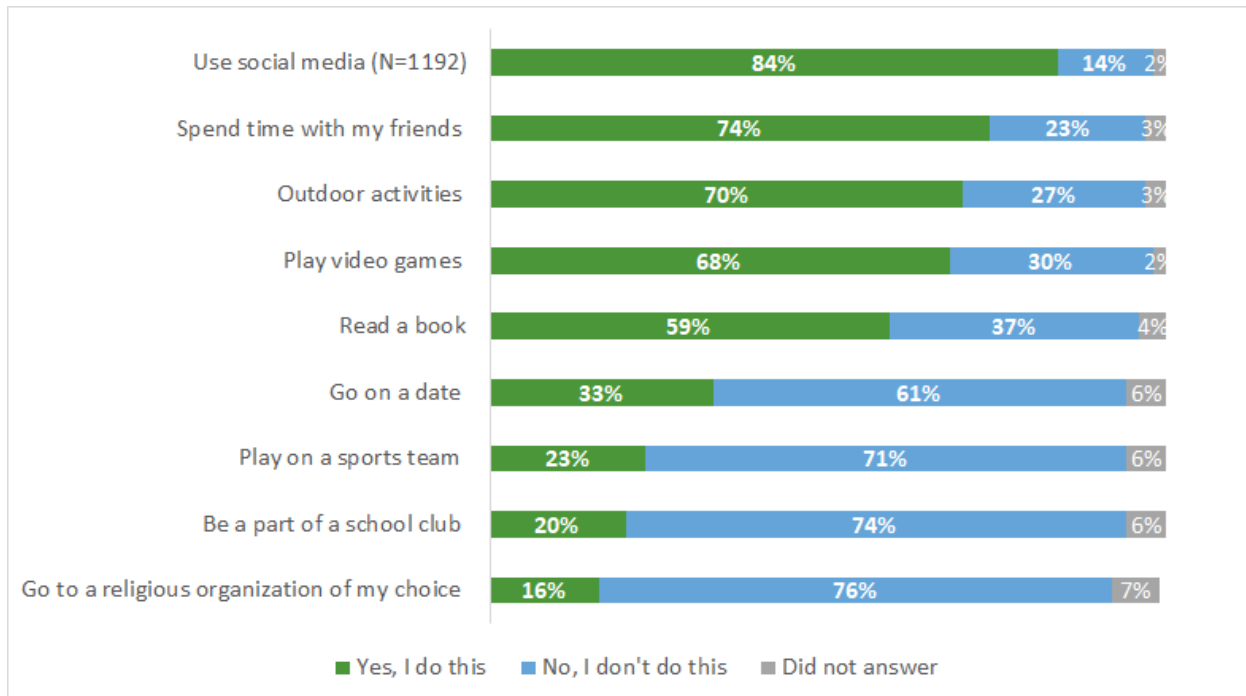


SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21.

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 18). Other activities youth frequently reported participating in were outdoor activities, reading books and playing video games. Thirty-three percent of the youth stated that they go on dates. The least common activities were being part of a school club (20%) and going to a religious organization (16%). Figure 18 shows additional details regarding the activities that youth engage in during their free time. In comparison to the FY20 survey, the largest declines were youth who went on dates (decline of 15 percentage points, from 50% in FY20 to 35% in FY21), were part of a school club (decline of 11 percentage points, from 32% in FY20 to 21% in FY21), and played on a sports team (decline from 35% in FY20 to 24% in FY21).

Figure 18. Youth reporting the activities in which they participated during their free time



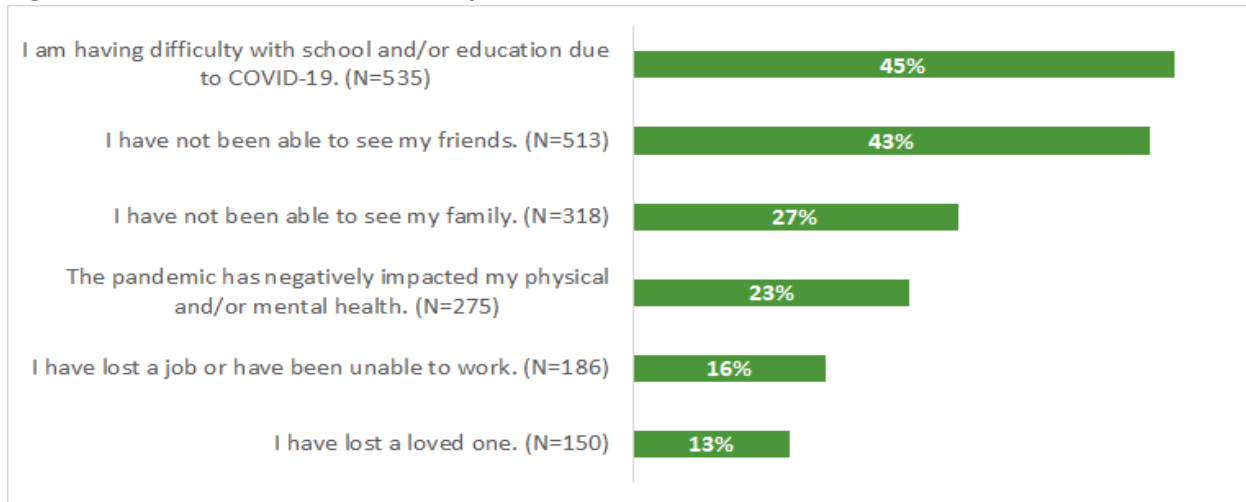
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

NOTE: All 1192 youth were asked this question; percentages may not add to 100% as some youth did not respond

F. Impact from Covid-19

This year’s 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. Forty-five percent of youth stated that they are having difficulty with school and/or education due to Covid-19 (Figure 19). Forty-three percent of youth reported not being able to see friends. Twenty-seven percent of youth reported that they have been unable to see their family (immediate and/or extended). ACS had issued and continually updated visiting guidance to foster care agencies during the pandemic with the goal of ensuring frequent parent child contact in person whenever possible and safe, and otherwise virtually. Twenty-three percent reported that the pandemic negatively impacted their physical and/or mental health. Sixteen percent of youth have lost a job or have been unable to work due to the pandemic. Sadly, 13% of youth have lost a loved one due to Covid-19.

Figure 19. How Covid-19 has affected youth



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

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.

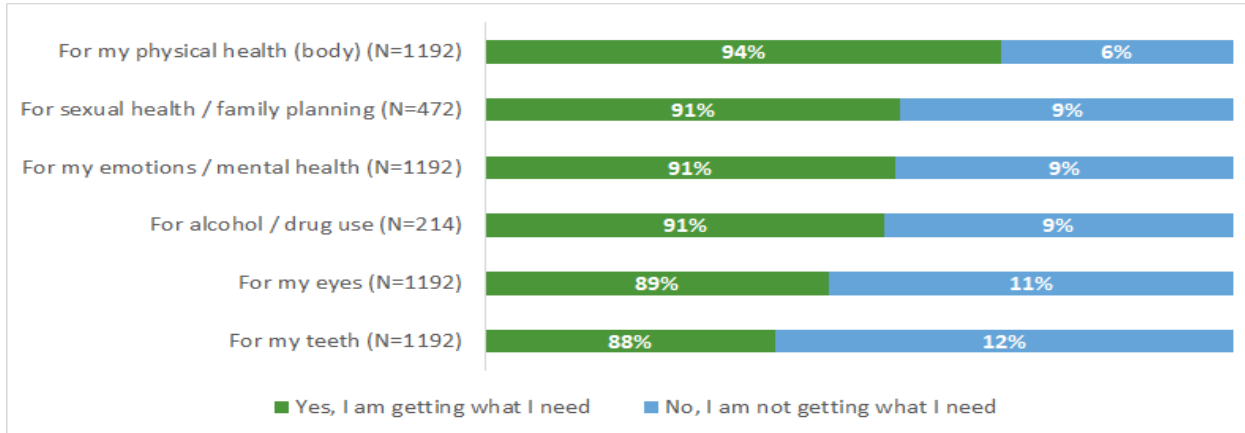
The information presented in Figure 20 reflects the extent to which health care services were received in six health areas. Almost all youth (94%) reported having their physical health care needs met. Ninety-one percent reported having their needs met regarding sexual health/family planning, mental health, and alcohol/ drug use.¹⁵ (Mental health was described in the survey as care “for my emotions/mental health.”) Of the 1192 youth who said they needed care for eye and dental, 89% of youth are getting needed vision care and 88% of youth are getting needed dental care. Of the 214 youth needing health care for drug/alcohol use, 91% said their 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 529 follow-up items around Health Care (Drugs, Emotional, Eyes, Physical, Sexual, and Teeth), the follow-up conversations indicated that the need had already been met 26% of the time. For 52% of the identified needs, ACS contacted

¹⁵ In the FY21 survey, all youth were assumed to need physical health care, mental health care, eye and dental care. Youth were asked if they needed care for sexual health/family planning and for alcohol/drug use.

the foster care agency to address the concern. Seventeen percent of discussions indicated youth did not have concerns. One percent of youth had been discharged from care. 4% of youth had other reasons¹⁶.

Figure 20. Youth in foster care reporting whether they received various types of health care



This question was mandatory, so all 1192 youth answered it.
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

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 | 72% | 857 |
| No, I am not getting what I need | 3% | 37 |
| I don't need this | 25% | 298 |
| Total | 100% | 1192 |

This question was mandatory, so all 1192 youth answered it.
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

¹⁶Other 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 37 youth who reported an unmet need, the survey asked if they would like ACS to contact them regarding information on self-care and hygiene. Seventeen youth said yes and were contacted; 20 youth said no. An additional two youth were contacted who wanted ACS follow up but selected that they were getting what they needed. Results of the follow up are such for the nineteen youth who were contacted:

- 6 youth indicated their needs already met
- 4 youth; ACS/ provider agency is now addressing the concern
- 9 youth reported no concerns

G.3 Can youth practice their religion where they live?

To assess if youth are able to stay connected to their faith traditions, the survey asked if youth could practice their religion where they live. Thirty-nine percent responded yes; 4% responded no; 21% stated that they have a religion but do not practice (new answer choice in FY21) and 36% said that they do not have a religion (Table 9). For the FY21 survey, all youth who answered that they were not able to practice their religion where they lived were asked if they would like someone from ACS to follow up with them. Twenty-two percent of youth stated that they would like someone to follow up with them and 78% responded “No.” There were 12 youth who ACS conducted follow-up with regarding their responses to the religion question. Responses to follow up for the 12 youth were as such:

- 2 youth indicated their needs are already being met
- 4 youth; their provider agency now addressing this concern
- 5 youth reported no concern
- 1 youth did not want to discuss

Table 9. Youth responses regarding ability to practice their religion where they live right now (N=1192)

| Response | Percent | Total |
|---------------------------------------|---------|-------|
| Yes | 39% | 470 |
| No | 4% | 45 |
| I have a religion but do not practice | 21% | 250 |
| I do not have a religion | 36% | 427 |
| Total | 100% | 1192 |

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

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-seven percent¹⁷ 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 21). Youth who stated that they received inadequate food were asked a follow-up question to clarify the reason for this. Among the 33 youth reporting that they had fewer than three meals per day, the most commonly reported reasons were: they skip a meal due to lack of time or interest (16); they have to cook their own meals (12), or other reasons (10). Youth could select multiple reasons. ACS followed up on each of these instances and when Other was selected.

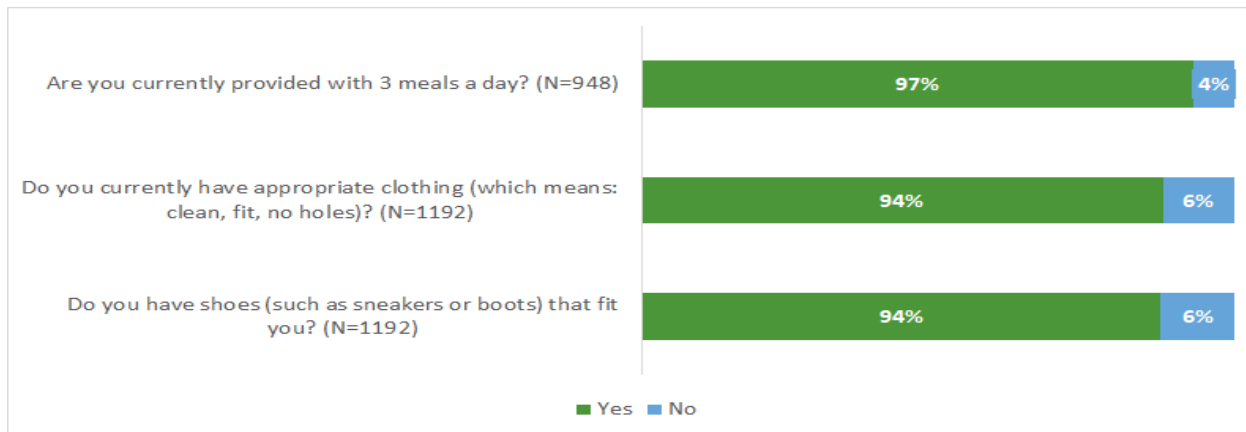
Below are the results from the follow up with the youth:

- Meals: 18 youth indicated concerns about receiving 3 meals a day, the follow up conversations indicated:
 - 11% of youth already had their needs met
 - 33% of youth; their provider agency is addressing the concern
 - 50% of youth indicated no concerns
 - 6% other^{18*}
- Clothing: 73 youth indicated concerns around clothing, the follow up conversations indicated:
 - 18% of youth stated that needs already met
 - 53% of youth; their provider agency is addressing the concern
 - 22% of youth indicated no concerns
 - 1% of youth were discharged from foster care
 - 5% other*
- Shoes: 76 youth indicated concerns around shoes, the follow up conversations indicated:
 - 17% of youth had their needs met
 - 51% of youth; their provider agency is addressing the concern
 - 24% of youth indicated no concern
 - 1% of youth were discharged from care
 - 7% other*

¹⁷ In FY21, the survey did not include this question for youth in residential care.

¹⁸ * 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 21. Youth reporting provision of basic needs



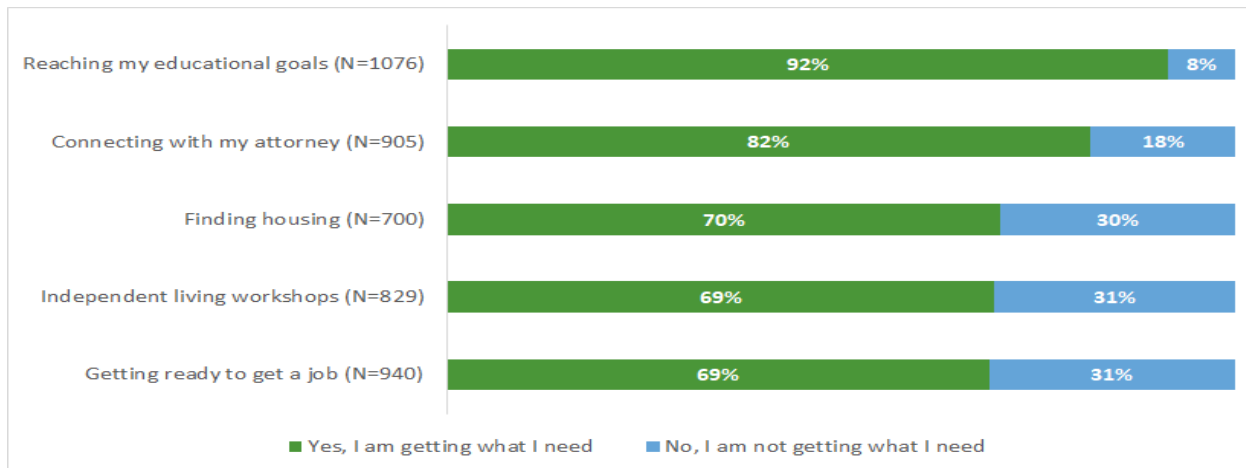
This question was mandatory, so all 1192 youth answered it.
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

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 22 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 desired and most often received type of support was to help youth reach educational goals; of 1076 youth stating they needed this, 92% received it. The next most commonly received support was help connecting with attorneys, followed by finding housing. The least well met needs were getting ready to get a job and independent living workshops; 69% of youth stating that they received this service for each type of support.

Figure 22. Youth reporting types of support they receive from foster care agencies

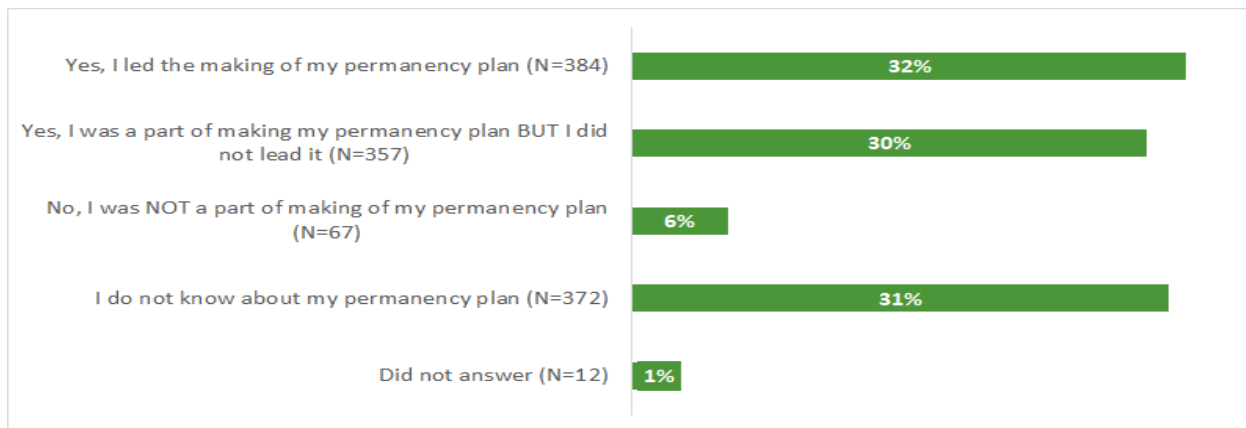


SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

H.2 To what extent are youth involved in permanency planning?

Figure 23 shows the distribution for various levels of youth involvement in their permanency planning. The largest group of youth, 32%, reported that they led the making of their permanency plan. Another 30% were involved in planning. However, 31% said they did not know about their permanency plan and 6% of youth had not been a part of creating it.

Figure 23. Youth reporting on their involvement in their permanency plan



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

H.3 Who supports the youth in their permanency planning?

The 808 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

| Individual | Percentage | N |
|--|------------|-----|
| Case worker at my foster care agency | 77% | 620 |
| Foster parent | 71% | 423 |
| Residential staff | 64% | 210 |
| My lawyer | 44% | 355 |
| Parent | 29% | 237 |
| Friend | 23% | 185 |
| Teacher | 10% | 79 |
| No one supports me in my permanency planning | 4% | 36 |

NOTE: The total N (number of people asked) was 808 for most items, 598 for foster parents, and 210 for residential staff). Table 11 does not include youth who reported “I do not know about my permanency plan.”

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY21

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. While the survey reflects that many youth are progressing well in terms of their educational achievements and social connections, more work has to 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 to bring youth and adult leaders together to work in partnership on youth-related areas of policy**

and practice. The ACS Youth Leadership Council launched in March 2019. Members include youth currently and previously in foster care and juvenile and youth with experience in the juvenile justice system. The goals of the Youth 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.

Improving Permanency Outcomes

ACS continues to work aggressively to improve permanency outcomes for youth in foster care. **In FY20, the number of New York City children in foster care reached a historic low of 7,800 down 6% from FY19.** Length of stay in foster care has also decreased; the number of children in care for two years or more dropped by 3%% from FY 2019 and down 25% from FY 2017 - FY 2020. As outlined in the [Foster Care Strategic Blueprint Progress Report FY 2020](#) , ACS is implementing several initiatives to improve reunification, adoption, and kinship guardianship outcomes for children and youth in foster care. These include use of the evidence-based Wendy’s Wonderful Kids model and increased resources for Family Time (a.k.a. visiting) and to support kinship care, among other initiatives. ACS also continues to leverage the amended NYS KinGAP legislation to achieve permanency for youth in foster care. This includes exploring KinGAP as an option for families and youth who may meet the criteria for the program based on the expanded definition of “relative” – now included are adults who have a positive relationship with youth prior to their entry into care, such as a godparent or teacher; and, offering the kinship program subsidy as financial support to guardians up until the youth is age 21, regardless of their age when guardianship was granted.

High Quality Placements for Youth

ACS’s Home Away from Home (HAFH) initiative has been highly successful in increasing foster home recruitment while simultaneously improving kinship placement and support for caregivers. 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 2020, ACS and its foster care agency partners increased the proportion of children in foster care placed with kin from 31% to 42%. In the same two-year timeframe, ACS increased the number of newly certified foster homes by 50%, turning around a previous six-year decline in the number of new foster homes recruited. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of recruited homes decreased to 486 in FY 2020. In addition to significant ACS resources, this initiative has received major support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation as well as Casey Family Programs and a collaborative of five foundations -- New York Community Trust, Redlich Horwitz Foundation, Ira W. DeCamp Foundation, Joseph Leroy & Ann C. Warner Fund and Tiger Foundation.

Health Services for Youth

The launch of CANOPY. The NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH), and the New York State Office for Children and Family Services (OCFS) announced in February 2021 a new collaborative approach called CANOPY (**CreAtiNg OPportunities for Youth**). The goal of CANOPY is to improve outcomes for New York City youth ages 14+ in foster care who have the most complex needs, including youth who have been involved in multiple systems, youth with mental health and behavioral health issues, and youth who also have experience in the juvenile or criminal justice systems. The four agency Commissioners have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that establishes a cross-agency team, as well as protocols for implementing this initiative.

CANOPY will build on young people's strengths and provide needed services that will:

- improve their safety, well-being, education and employment outcomes;
- reduce the need for residential services and help youth return home safely to their families or achieve a permanent family through adoption or kinship guardianship; and
- reduce risk of incarceration and other poor outcomes.

The NY State Office of Mental Health (OMH) has agreed to grant ACS access to PSYCKES, a web-based application designed to support quality improvement, care planning, and clinical decision making for the Medicaid Behavioral Health population. PSYCKES includes information such as diagnosis, medications, medical and behavioral health outpatient and inpatient services and health home care coordination for children on Medicaid, including children in foster care. Phase one of the PSYCKES access view for ACS was launched in November 2020, allowing ACS to look up a client and view their clinical summary. Phase two where clients are automatically linked to ACS' view is in the process of being complete. PSYCKES is currently doing testing in the month of April and plans to release enhancements at the end of May 2021.

DOHMH and ACS have collaborated to facilitate access to the Nurse-Family Partnership

DOHMH and ACS are implementing strategies to increase the utilization of the Nurse-Family Partnership Program by expectant and parenting youth, children and families involved in the child welfare systems. These include partnering to conduct 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 Fair Futures Initiative aims to enhance and improve outcomes for foster care youth ages 11-21 in the areas of education, employment, housing, and permanency. Launched in 2019, Fair Futures is the result of a partnership among the Mayor’s Office, City Council, ACS, the City’s 26 contracted foster care agencies, and the Fair Futures Coalition (a consortium of foster care agencies, foundations, advocates, and others). Through Fair Futures, foster care agencies have hired coaches, tutors, and other staff who have supported thousands of youth in building life skills, setting academic and career goals, and planning for successful transitions from foster care.

All DOE 7th graders, including those in foster care, can participate in Middle School College Access for All, which supports their post-secondary planning trajectory through college visits, student workshops, caregiver events, and staff professional development. This initiative continues to provide college access opportunities for 7th graders across NYC.

In consultation with ACS, DOE is providing additional support for youth in foster care. Highly mobile youth, including students in foster care, are connected to a range of supportive services by school-based Community Coordinators. Since the shift to remote learning, ACS has continued to provide training to school based Community Coordinators on the academic and social service needs of child welfare-involved youth. In addition, ACS has worked closely with the DOE to ensure that students in foster care are equipped with remote learning technology. Through its Office of Community Schools, the DOE has also been linking foster care youth to Success Mentors, caring adults who identify the underlying causes of chronic student absenteeism and address barriers to attendance to ensure that students reach their academic potential.

DOE has also enhanced service coordination and oversight to support students in foster care. Since releasing its comprehensive Foster Care Guidance, DOE has continued to train borough and school-based staff on its content and to direct stakeholders to the foster care resource hub on its public-facing website.

The First Star College of Staten Island (CSI) Academy, in partnership with ACS, is a long-term college-prep program for high school youth in foster care. It includes four immersive residential summer programs on a university campus and monthly weekend sessions during the school year. During the residential sessions, youth are supported by professional staff and youth coaches who were foster care involved. Throughout all four years, Academy staff provide long-term case management to the youth and their families to assist

youth in focusing on academics, life skills and engagement. During the summer, students live on the college campus and after the summer, students visit the CSI campus one Saturday a month during the academic year. The First Star Academy is a collaborative that includes ACS, the College of Staten Island and First Star, Inc. The program is supported by ACS, CUNY, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, and New Yorkers for Children. The program serves 25 youth in foster care.

Launched in 2016, the **Fostering College Success Initiative** (FCSI, also known as the “Dorm Project”) is a partnership among ACS, the City University of New York (CUNY) and New York Foundling. FCSI participants, who attend CUNY and other colleges in New York State, benefit from tutoring, coaching, career advising, and related support services. Those who are CUNY students may also receive full tuition, room, and board, including year-round housing at dorm sites on the Queens College and Hunter College campuses. FCSI has grown from serving 50 students at its inception to nearly 140 students in 2020.

The **Fostering College Success Stipend Program** (FCS), also launched in 2016, offers financial assistance to youth in foster care who are attending CUNY, SUNY, and private colleges. This program provides a \$31 per-day stipend to participants full-time enrolled in college who reside on-campus or in approved off-campus housing. In exceptional cases, this program also allows students who wish to study abroad in other countries to fulfill their course load while receiving these funds. Participants can use stipend funds for education and personal expenses.

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 pilot 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. First launched in NYC in April 2018, the program will serve 350 young people over three years with the goals of improving

education, employment, and housing outcomes. In 2020, 165 youth were served in collaboration with Children’s Aid, New York Foundling, and SCO Family of Services. In addition, Good Shepherd Services recently began offering LifeSet to their youth in foster care.

ACS continues its partnership with The Workplace Center at Columbia University to provide technical assistance to a total of 10 foster care provider agencies via 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. YA WORC builds the capacity of agency staff to use different age-appropriate strategies to prepare youth in foster care for meaningful careers. Since the program’s inception in FY18, ACS has served over 400 youth and trained 200 staff through YA WORC.

ACS has partnered with DYCD to administer a revamped paid internship program for young adults ages 16-24 with foster care experience who are not in school and not working. Called **Advance and Earn Plus** and building on the former YAIP+ initiative, the new 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 with positive short-term outcomes as well as the skills and tools necessary to achieve long-term career success. Services and supports that are offered include literacy and math instruction, HSE test preparation, work readiness training, college and career exploration, paid work experience, advanced occupational training and industry credential attainment supported by case management and wrap-around services. The program launched in February 2020 and has served 60 youth in foster care, which will scale up to a total of 136 youth over three years.

ACS partners with DYCD to support the City’s **Summer Youth Employment Program**, known in summer 2020 as SYEP Summer Bridge. During summer 2020, ACS and foster care agencies referred more than 800 youth to SYEP, enabling them to participate in virtual career exploration and skill-building activities while receiving a stipend.

At the same time, ACS received funding from the Robin Hood Foundation to launch the **Virtual Internship Program** during the summer that served 100 college students in foster care. Placed in internship assignments with ACS, foster care agencies, and nonprofits, participants benefited from a one-to-one supervision model that focused on career and educational planning, vocational training, professional networking, and career pathway work experience. Youth had the option to enroll in 30-hour OSHA training, Security Guard Training for the 8- and 16-hour certification and a Peer Educator certification training. All interns received a stipend for 120 hours of work experience. This program was so successful

that Robin Hood funded a fall internship program that ACS delivered for 100 youth in the fall of FY 2021. The fall program served youth in college as well as younger youth who were involved with the foster care or juvenile justice systems.

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) 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 400 youth.

In FY20, ACS, in collaboration with Google, Hopeland, and New Yorkers For Children--launched **TechLink**. TechLink is a program offering high school youth in foster care exposure to tech activities including coding, design, and tech leadership training. The program is supported with additional career readiness activities focused on career and college planning, coaching, and mentoring. TechLink participants are a part of Google's Code Next community of over 150 youth engaged in tech programming.

In April 2020, launched the first of a series of **Virtual Career Fairs**. The purpose of the fairs is to offer youth an opportunity to connect to jobs with career pathways and a safe, supportive work environment. In total, 150 youth attended the first fair. Five employers (including UPS, Universal, and Securitas) participated, and 70 youth gained employment or enrolled into ACS internship programs as a result of the fair.

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

As previously noted, ACS has multiple initiatives specifically geared towards improving the safety, permanency and well-being of foster care youth that align closely with the ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint. The Foster Care Strategic Blueprint consists of the following critical system priorities:

1. **Improving Permanency Outcomes**
2. **Improving Foster Care Placements to Enhance the Well-Being of children**
3. **Improving Health and Mental Health Services for Children and Youth in Foster Care**
4. **Improving Outcomes for Youth**
5. **Building Systematic Capacity**
6. **Partnering with Youth**

In addition to the Foster Care Strategic Blueprint, ACS released the [Interagency Foster Care Task Force Final Report](#) in 2020. The report reflects significant progress made over the past two years including, but not limited to expanding education, employment, and other supportive services programs for youth.

The FY21 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 will 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, ACS will also provide agency specific reports with de-identified responses to each foster care provider to support targeted strategy as well as system level findings. These findings are reviewed with provider agency leaders and other stakeholders to strategically align efforts that support the well-being of older youth.