

**Testimony of the New York City Department of Education
On Foster Care Students in NYC Public Schools
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education**

April 20, 2022

Introduction

Good morning, Chair Joseph and the members of the Education Committee here today. My name is Dr. Jawana Johnson and I am the Chief of School Culture, Climate, and Well-Being at the Department of Education. I lead New York City Public School's efforts to support our students' social emotional development and wellness, including specialized assistance for some of our most vulnerable students. Those include our students in foster care, who we know face many challenges outside of school and require help dedicated to their needs in school. We share the Council's commitment to ensuring that students in foster care receive all the support they need to succeed, and we thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue. Joining me today from our partners at the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) is Deputy Commissioner Julie Farber, as well as other leaders from DOE.

Before I begin my testimony, I would like to thank Chair Joseph and the City Council for your leadership on behalf of children in foster care. I would also like to thank the many advocates, nonprofits, and city agency partners that continue to support our foster care students. We are looking forward to continuing to collaborate with you to best serve these students.

I am a lifelong educator, having served proudly as a teacher and school leader in both DOE and charter schools, and am now honored to be leading the following New York City Public School offices:

- Safety and Youth Development
- School Wellness Programs
- The Public Schools Athletic League, and
- Community Schools

We are committed to offering an ecosystem of care for the whole child that prioritizes student well-being, ensures physical and emotional safety, and supports students in reaching their full potential. We understand the elevated needs of vulnerable students, including students in foster care, and are redoubling our efforts to ensure that we are meeting the social-emotional and academic needs of these and other vulnerable student populations in each of our schools. My team oversees the work of four offices dedicated to uplifting and advancing this vision for better meeting the needs of the whole child and we are eager to move forward with creating a new foster care team under my leadership. These offices may seem to have vast and varying portfolios, but at their core is a commitment to whole child wellness. This means we work to support both the physical and mental well-being of all our students, nurturing healthy bodies and minds.

Chancellor's Vision

Chancellor David Banks has articulated a dynamic vision for transforming the Department of Education to lay the foundation for bright starts and bold futures for all NYC public school students. As the Chancellor has made clear, our students need to leave our schools with the knowledge and skills that will propel them towards successful careers and enable them to be engaged members of their communities.

The trauma and instability students in foster care have experienced in many instances has led to lower attendance and graduation rates among this group that we must work hard to significantly improve. Children in foster care are highly talented and resilient scholars who need our support. We fully recognize that there is much work to be done in collaboration with our agency partners and nonprofit providers to not only improve academic outcomes but the overall well-being of these students.

Background on Students in Foster Care

When a child has been abused or neglected, to protect their safety and best interests, a Family Court Judge can order that the child be removed from his or her home and be placed in foster care. The New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) manages the City's foster care system. There are currently just over 7,000 children in foster care, down from nearly 13,000 a decade ago and from over 40,000 twenty-five years ago. More than half of children who enter foster care today are placed with kin, meaning relatives or close family friends. The remaining children mostly live in family foster homes with caring New Yorkers, with about 600 youth living in residential foster care facilities.

Children in foster care live throughout the five boroughs. Almost every one of our 1,600 schools has at least a small number of enrolled students in foster care, and a few of our schools, including our Transfer Schools, serve significant numbers of these students. We collaborate in deep partnership with our colleagues at ACS and in the foster care agencies. We trust our colleagues in ACS and foster care agencies to make decisions in the best interest of these students. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 mandates that local educational agencies like the New York City DOE and child welfare agencies collaborate to support educational stability for children in foster care and provide these students with the opportunity to achieve at the same levels as their peers.

While each of these students faces unique challenges, every student in foster care has the right to:

- Receive a free public education
- Stay in their current school or choose to attend a new school
- Enroll immediately in a new school if it is determined that it is not in their best interest to stay at their original school
- Receive transportation services to and from school
- Access comparable educational services

In order to ensure these rights are enforced, every school currently has a Designated Liaison for Foster Care students who serves as a point person for serving these students. The Designated Liaison facilitates interagency communication and the sharing of student information among the school, ACS, and the foster care agency. Designated Liaisons participate every year in trainings on foster care and meeting the needs

of these students that includes instruction on providing information to foster care agencies, ensuring that students receive programs they are eligible for, tracking credit for previous work, and understanding the rights of parents to be involved. When a child enters foster care, the foster care agency and/or ACS notifies the child's school-based Designated Liaison within 24 hours.

Using a "best interests" standard, the child welfare system makes the final determination about whether a child should stay at the school of origin before entering foster care or move to another one. If a transfer is deemed necessary, the DOE works with ACS to facilitate the transfer and secure transportation services to their new school, if needed. The overwhelming majority of children entering foster care (86% in school year 2020-2021) remain in their original schools.

When a student in foster care transfers schools, the Designated Liaison also works to ensure that the student receives all necessary services and programs the child is entitled to, and that the student's grades/credits are transferred over.

Additionally, for students in foster care who are in grades K through 8, schools must designate someone to monitor their attendance. If a child in foster care missed a day of school without an adequately explained absence, the attendance monitor conducts the necessary follow-up action regarding family outreach, escalating concerns to the foster care agency or ACS, and reporting the absence in the DOE records system.

Our schools do a good job of ensuring these rights are met, but we need to go beyond what these children are legally entitled to give them what they rightly deserve. Pursuing the Chancellor's vision, we want to boldly re-envision what we can do in service of our children in foster care.

Transportation services are critical to ensuring students in foster care are able to get to school. While there are some challenges, DOE provides busing or comparable alternative transportation for all students in foster care who are in grades K-6 and placed within the 5 boroughs, as well as those with IEPs for busing. If we are unable to find a bus route initially, we provide public transportation or transportation reimbursement until we can find a bus route. Fortunately, we are able to provide busing to the vast majority of students in foster care. DOE works collaboratively with ACS and foster care agencies to address transportation needs. We welcome the opportunity work collaboratively to further strengthen transportation options for students in foster care.

Across our school system, we continue to invest deeply in the mental health and well-being of our students and school communities. With the Council's leadership and partnership, we have worked to ensure that every school has access to a social worker and mental health support services. Every school benefits from these resources, including our students in foster care who now have greater access to mental health and social-emotional assistance at school than they ever have before.

Students in foster care also receive additional help from ACS and its foster care providers, along with the support and guidance of the Fair Futures Coalition, Youth Board, and funders, through the Fair Futures program. Through Fair Futures, thousands of young people in foster care ages 11 to 21 receive coaching,

tutoring, educational advocacy, and employment and housing assistance. The goal of Fair Futures is to help prepare students for major transitions, including from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school, as well as the transition from high school to college, vocational training, and/or careers. Successfully navigating these crucial passages puts these students on a path to success after they leave foster care.

We, as a city, need to ensure that every student in our Child Welfare System has access to:

- Caring adults in the school building,
- A trauma-responsive school setting, where teachers are well informed about demands that foster care places on children and families,
- Mental health support services, and
- Whole-child wellness assistance.

We have made significant strides in bringing these support systems to schools for all of our students and are now making investments to more holistically lift up our foster care students.

Foster Care Office

For the first time, the Department of Education is creating an office exclusively dedicated to supporting the needs of students in foster care. The Office of Foster Care will seek to meet the complex needs of students in foster care by developing innovative policies to support schools. This office is a subset of our current Students in Temporary Housing team under the Office of Community Schools, which is a natural fit because it will draw from existing knowledge, resources, and capacity, and is best positioned to make substantial and positive impacts on students in foster care. We are in the process of hiring four individuals who will lay the foundations for this new foster care team.

This office will have the ability to:

- Develop policy changes to better support students in foster care
- Create school-based professional learning opportunities and guidance, so that the schools our students in foster care attend feel well-equipped to support and advocate for these students
- Deepen partnerships with other city agencies and nonprofit providers so that high quality youth services are provided to all our foster care students, and
- Build stronger connections with advocacy groups

I am confident we will find the right caring, thoughtful people to work on this team and greatly appreciate the resources that have already been provided.

I know that our nation's largest school system can do better for our foster care students, who each have had their own distinctive traumatic experiences. I shared earlier, we have a vision for a school system where every school values each student's family situation while providing structure, stability, and whole-child wellness support, removing the major barriers that impede learning. We are continuing to invest in support systems throughout our schools that will benefit all students, including those in foster care, focusing on academics, mental health, college and career readiness, and more. Along with our new Office

of Foster Care, these investments will cultivate more enriching experiences and better outcomes for our foster care students.

Conclusion

I want to thank the Council for your support and attention to the needs of our students, particularly when it comes to their overall well-being. Thanks to the City Council, we are making incredible strides in increasing mental health and social emotional learning support services for all students. We have successfully hired a historic number of social workers across the system and implemented SEL screeners this fall, and we will have our second screening this spring. This has allowed schools to more successfully address the complex needs of all students, especially more than two years after the COVID-19 pandemic caused so much disruption and heartache.

There is much more work to be done. With this new foster care office we are beginning the process, in collaboration with our city agency partners, of reimagining what we can do to ensure our students in foster care get all the support they need. I am sincerely grateful for your leadership and collaboration in these efforts. We are happy to take your questions.



Advocates for Children of New York

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Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Education

Re: Students in Foster Care in the DOE System

April 20, 2022

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Thank you for this opportunity to testify and for holding this important hearing on the education of students in foster care. My name is Erika Palmer. I am a Supervising Attorney at Advocates for Children of New York and direct our foster care project, called Project Achieve. For 50 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. We speak out for students whose needs are often overlooked, such as students with disabilities, students from immigrant families, students who are homeless, students with mental health needs, court-involved youth, and students in foster care.

There are currently over 7,000 children and youth in foster care in New York City. Students in foster care, who are disproportionately Black and come from the City's poorest communities, are among the most likely to repeat a grade, be chronically absent, or leave high school without a diploma. They were also impacted particularly hard by the closure of schools. In fact, last year only 43% of students in foster care graduated from high school in four years – almost 40 percentage points below the city average of 81%. Unfortunately, many young people struggle when they leave foster care, experiencing homelessness, unemployment, and criminal legal system involvement at rates far exceeding their peers.

In recent years, the City has slowly begun to recognize the unique needs of youth in foster care. I want to recognize the strides the City has made in developing resources for students in foster care through the Fair Futures initiative. With the strong backing of the Council, funding for Fair Futures has enabled foster care agencies to hire staff to support students' education and employment goals, and I've seen firsthand the difference they can make in a young person's life. However, we need to see an equal commitment on the part of the Department of Education ("DOE"). **To fully address the needs of students in foster care, the DOE must guarantee transportation for students in care and move forward with its plans to hire the full team it promised for students in foster care.**

For students who have been separated from their families and placed in foster care, school has the potential to be an important stabilizing factor in their lives. Recognizing the importance of school stability, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 and



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New York State Education Law § 3244 give students in foster care the right to transportation to their school of origin, unless it is in their best interest to transfer to a different school. Specifically, the school district of attendance must provide transportation “to and from the child’s foster care placement location and the school of origin,” regardless of whether the student’s foster care placement is located within the same school district.

Despite its legal obligation, the DOE does not guarantee bus service or comparable transportation to students in foster care. The DOE allows students in foster care who do not meet other criteria to apply for busing using an “exceptions request form” and will provide bus service if a student can be added easily to an existing route. However, foster care agencies are finding that it can take anywhere from one to three months from the time they submit an exceptions request for a student to be placed on a bus, if a route exists at all.

While students in foster care are waiting for the DOE to determine if they have a bus for the student, as well as in cases where there is no bus available, the DOE will provide a MetroCard or reimburse foster care agencies for the cost of car service. For students who cannot travel alone, these alternatives require an adult to accompany the child, and that’s where the system breaks down. Foster parents who have a job or other children in the home simply cannot commit to spending four hours or more each day transporting their child to and from school, at least not long-term. Just the other day I learned of a student who had to change schools because of their foster parent’s work schedule. The student’s new school did not have the services on their Individualized Education Program (“IEP”), and the student was suspended after attending the new school for only one day. Case planners at foster care agencies have full-time jobs focused on reunifying families and keeping children safe; they cannot fulfill their other responsibilities if they must spend hours each day escorting children to school. Like other nonprofits, many foster care agencies are also struggling with chronic turnover and understaffing as a result of the pandemic and simply don’t have the personnel to serve in this capacity. Finally, although the DOE will reimburse foster care agencies for the cost of car service, they will not reimburse agencies for chaperones to accompany students.

While the DOE has made some progress, such as adding a transportation liaison to process busing requests for students in temporary housing and students in foster care, these changes ultimately do not help students unless they are promptly provided with



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busing following their placement in foster care. **The DOE must provide bus service or other door-to-door transportation to students in foster care who need it to maintain school stability.**

I would like to spend the rest of my time telling you about a middle school student whom I'll call Daniel. Daniel came into foster care during the pandemic. Like many young people in care, he struggled adjusting to his new home and was moved several times before he clicked with his third foster parent. Luckily, Daniel's foster care agency worked with his foster parents to maintain Daniel's school placement. Academically, Daniel was an average student, but he sometimes had behavioral outbursts at school, likely because of the trauma he had experienced. He has ADHD and an IEP for a Learning Disability.

This past winter, Daniel was reunified with his mother on a trial basis. Daniel's mother struggles with mental health needs that became worse when he got home. Ultimately, Daniel had to come back into foster care when his mother threatened him with a knife. Shortly after that incident, Daniel received a superintendent's suspension from his school. We tried to explain Daniel's situation to his principal, but the principal refused to listen – in fact, he hung up the phone before we could explain the details of Daniel's story. Daniel was reinstated in school soon after the suspension hearing, but at that point, the damage had been done. Daniel began refusing to go to school, his attendance decreased dramatically, and he started staying out after curfew, to the point where his foster parent became concerned for his safety.

What difference could a DOE team for students in foster care make for students like Daniel? Such a team could analyze suspension data for students in foster care, identify schools that need training on how best to support youth in care, and identify schools that need monitoring to change their practices. A team could also propose a policy change requiring schools to take a child's foster care status into account when determining their disciplinary response. If a school refused to do so, parents, foster care agencies, and advocates would have somewhere to go for help.

Nearly every week, I hear about another student like Daniel. If we want to improve attendance rates for students in foster care – and make progress on those distressing graduation rates – we need to ensure that school is a place where students in foster care feel safe and supported, rather than another place where they feel unsafe, unwanted, or let down. This will not happen without dedicated staff; the DOE needs people whose



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job it is to make it happen. I am heartened to hear that the DOE is moving forward with hiring at least two of the previously envisioned foster care positions, but we want to ensure that ***all the promised positions*** – seven focused on students in foster care and four serving students in temporary housing and students in foster care – ***move forward***.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

NYC City Council General Education Committee Testimony

Good Afternoon,

Thank you Chair Person Rita Joseph and the Committee on Education committee members, I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Lorraine Sanchez, and I am the Chief Operating Officer of NYC Child Welfare Programs at Cayuga Centers. We are an evidence-based provider caring for NYC youth in foster care.

Throughout my eight-year tenure at the agency, I have seen firsthand the impact that mentorship can offer foster youth. As a pilot partner of Fair Futures, we have experienced the support it provides to youth in and beyond their time in foster care. This includes mentoring youth and preparing them to be ready for their next step beyond high school whether it be college, technical school or career. Youth that have faced disruption in their family structure are more likely to struggle in school and have low high school graduation rates. Fair Futures is a program that provides a valuable resource to help prepare and support youth as they cross that bridge to adulthood - job seeking, finding housing, college applications, etc. These supports positively impact a foster youth's trajectory in life.

Another challenge foster care students face within the education system is access to transportation to school. We urge the Department of Education to improve the coordination and funding of transportation to school for foster youth. We have experienced significant wait times when establishing busing for youth and would like to find a way to resolve further delays related to when a youth moves to a different home. We also find challenges with the limited number of bus routes available to foster youth.

We look forward to continuing to work together and being a part of the solution and working with the City to support foster youth. Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti
Policy and Advocacy Associate
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York**

**Submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Education
Oversight Hearings – Students in Foster Care in the DOE System
April 20th, 2022**

Since 1944, CCC has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce. We document the facts, engage, and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for New York City's children.

I would like to thank Chair Joseph and all the members of the Committee on Education for holding this hearing on the experiences of students in foster care in the Department of Education (DOE) system. Every child deserves a high-quality education, and we urge City leaders to ensure that students in foster care receive the educational supports they need and are entitled to.

Support students in foster care through hiring a dedicated staff to increase efficiency and clarify any issues that arise regarding educational attainment and schooling

CCC urges the DOE to prioritize the needs of students in foster care, specifically by creating a specialized team to support these students and their families, as well as by ensuring simple and accessible transportation.

In part due to the trauma of their lives being uprooted due to the child welfare system, students in foster care are more likely to be chronically absent or leave high school without a diploma. In fact, 20% of students in foster care repeat a grade compared to only 6% of all DOE students. Students in foster care were also impacted particularly hard by the closure of schools during the pandemic: in 2021 only 43% of students in foster care graduated from high school in four years, 38 percentage points lower than students not in foster care.¹ Addressing the needs of students in foster care is fundamentally an issue of equity, particularly given the disproportionate representation of Black and Brown students in the foster care system.

It is evident there is severe need for devoted staff to help support coordination, policy development, transparency, and overall increased efficiency and support for students in foster care and their families. This past fall, the DOE finally announced that it would hire a small team of staff to focus on students in foster care. Due to the DOE's hiring freeze, however, none of the positions have been filled. We are pleased that the DOE has now stated that it will move forward with hiring, but we want to ensure that all the promised positions – 7 focused on students in foster care and 4 serving students in temporary housing and students in foster care – move forward. Furthermore, the DOE has received an increase in state and federal funding, meaning there is no reason to impose or slow hiring for positions designed to support one of the most

marginalized groups of students. The Administration's desire to find cost-savings and efficiencies should not come on the backs of students in foster care. **We urge you to ensure the DOE hires its first-ever team focused on students in foster care as expediently as possible.**

Additionally, though data is limited, we know that a disproportionate number of students in foster care receive suspensions. A nationwide study found that students in foster care face disproportionate disciplinary challenges in school, and these challenges increase if the child in foster care is older, not white, male, and either has a disability or is classified by the school as having a disability.² The Legal Center for Foster Care & Education reported in 2014 that children in the child welfare system are disproportionately suspended, expelled, and placed in separate discipline schools and programs.³ At the hearing on Wednesday April 20th, a panelist reported that foster care students receive 8.5% of superintendent suspensions, even though they make up a marginal amount of all DOE students. However, a severe lack of collected data on disciplinary measures prevents us from having an accurate picture of how students in foster care experience school discipline in New York. **Therefore, we urge the City to collect and share more accurate data on the disciplinary experiences of students in foster care. Furthermore, it is essential that schools share this data so that legal service organizations can assign support for the young person attending suspension hearings.** This issue could be overseen and moderated through the creation of the DOE Foster Care Team.

Support students in foster care by ensuring safe and accessible transportation

While both federal and state law require the City to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can remain in their original schools, the DOE currently does not guarantee any form of transportation to these students. This is causing deeply harmful disruptions for students in foster care, including by forcing them to transfer schools or foster homes in order to access an education.

Being in foster care is disruptive enough for a young person; the DOE must do everything in its power to ensure that students in foster care are supported and, at the bare minimum, can get to school. During the 2019-20 school year, one in five NYC students had to change schools upon their initial placement in foster care. This disruption of students' lives and education is unacceptable and unjust. **We ask the City Council to ensure that the budget includes \$5 million for the DOE to provide bus service or other door-to-door transportation to the relatively small number of students in foster care who need it to maintain school stability.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

What is coaching for me? Whenever I talk about the coaching experience I receive through Fair Futures and the Future Focus Coaching Program at Good Shepherd Services I always say that Coach Crosby is my life coach. Mainly because that's the most apt way of describing how she guides me. She connects me with great opportunities that help me to expand my skills and prepare me for my adulthood. I am grateful for her guidance and her support in my final years of care in the foster system.

How do you feel about aging out of care? As someone who has lived in New York all my life, my greatest fear was homelessness. My years in foster care have lessened my fear, however I am occasionally anxious that once I do have a place to live; it will not last long. While I am anxious, I don't doubt that the experiences I've had, and the resources I've been given will ensure a bright future for myself.

**Testimony for New York City Council
Committee on Education**

Re: Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 21, 2022

Thank you Chair Joseph and members of the Committee on Education for the opportunity to share my written testimony with you today. My name is Kinia Gonzalez, and I am Director of Leadership Education and Achievement Pathways at JCCA.

JCCA is a child and family services agency that works with more than 17,000 children and families each year across New York State. These are New York's most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families, served by foster and residential care, educational assistance and remediation, and behavioral health support. JCCA is one of the largest and most respected foster care agencies in New York City, and was selected as one of five agencies to work with the City on the Child Success NYC pilot program. Our dedicated staff consists of social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, nurse practitioners, and case managers, all working in the best interests of the child and family. The staff is diverse and has been trained to be culturally curious in order to best serve our clients.

The City has long overlooked the educational needs of students in foster care. To address their needs, the City must lift the hiring freeze so the DOE can move forward with plans to hire a small team focused on students in foster care and include funding in the budget to guarantee transportation for students in foster care. For the past nine years we have been working with the NYC Department of Education system so that the educational needs of our most vulnerable youth are met.

JCCA, have asked for a Foster Care Office within the DOE system to help our youth with their Social Emotional needs. This office would help staff understand trauma and the impact it has on learning and youth behavior. Since, returning back to in person learning, I have seen firsthand how much important this support has become. Our children have gone from two years in a remote world to in-person school, and the transition has not been easy. Our children are having adjustment issues that are addressed with suspensions, as opposed to a Social Emotional Learning setting where our kids thrive. If the Foster Care Office was in place, we would see less punitive punishment and more strength-based community partnership. Honestly, strength-based community work is something we all need after the pandemic.

JCCA are hoping that the hiring freeze is lifted so that DOE can move forward with hiring a team that would bridge that gap between foster care and DOE. This office would help build equity for our youth in care.

Students in foster care, who are disproportionately Black and come from the City's poorest communities, are among the most likely to repeat a grade, be chronically absent, or leave high school without a diploma. They were also impacted particularly hard by the closure of

schools. In fact, last year only 43% of students in foster care graduated from high school in four years – by far the lowest rate of any student group in the city, and almost 40 percentage points below the city average of 81%. Despite the obvious need, currently, there is not a single person at the DOE focused full time on meeting the needs of students in foster care. The result is that barriers to education for this population often remain unaddressed and opportunities for successful troubleshooting, interagency coordination, and policy change are wasted. This fall, the DOE finally announced that it would hire a small team of staff to focus on students in foster care. Due to the DOE’s hiring freeze, however, none of the positions have been filled. Particularly at a time when the DOE is receiving increased state and federal funding, there is no reason to impose a hiring freeze on positions designed to support one of the most marginalized groups of students—leaving students in foster care with no DOE staff dedicated full time to meeting their unique needs. The Administration’s desire to find cost-savings and efficiencies should not come on the backs of students in foster care. JCCA urge you to ensure the DOE can hire its first-ever team focused on students in foster care.

The school stability act allows youth in foster care to remain in their school of origin in order to continue a sense of normalcy for that young person. However, NYC Department of Education does not always make a school of origin accessible due to lack of bus routes. I have seen students take 3 to 6 weeks to become adjusted to a new school setting, which set them behind their classmates. This adjustment time further adds to the disparity that already exists between a youth in foster versus a youth who is at home. We are asking that Bussing services become more accessible for youth in care.

JCCA asks the City Council to ensure that the budget includes \$5 million for the DOE to provide bus service or other door-to-door transportation to the relatively small number of students in foster care who need it to maintain school stability.



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Testimony for New York City Council Committee on Education

Re: Students in Foster Care in the DOE System

April 20, 2022

Thank you for holding this important hearing on the education of students in foster care and allowing for the submission of written statements. My name is Laura Daly, and I am the Director of the Education Advocacy Project and a Supervising Attorney at Lawyers for Children, Inc., which represents children living in foster care in New York City.

The City has long overlooked the educational needs of students in foster care. To address their needs, the DOE must move forward with plans to hire the full team it promised to focus on students in foster care and guarantee transportation for students in foster care.

Lawyers for Children's legal and social work staff regularly receive calls from DOE staff asking for guidance on how to handle any number of situations for their students who are involved with the child welfare system. Schools do not know who is allowed to consent for special education services between foster and birth/adoptive parents, teachers do not know who they should be calling and what information can be shared between foster and birth/adoptive parents, and there are constant difficulties surrounding the transportation of children in foster care so that they may remain in their school of origin as is required by federal and state law. Maintaining a child's school of origin at the time of foster care placement, or during subsequent foster home moves while in care, is absolutely critical for children who are already experiencing severe upheaval and trauma in their lives from family court involvement.

Please lift the hiring freeze so the DOE can move forward with plans to fully staff a team focused on students in foster care: Students in foster care, who are disproportionately Black and come from the City's poorest communities, are among the most likely to repeat a grade, be chronically absent, or leave high school without a diploma. They were also impacted particularly hard by the closure of schools. In fact, last year only 43% of students in foster care graduated from high school in four years – almost 40 percentage points below the city average of 81%. Despite the obvious need, currently, there is not a single person at the DOE focused full time on meeting the needs of students in foster care. The result is

that barriers to education for this population often remain unaddressed and opportunities for successful troubleshooting, interagency coordination, and policy change are wasted. This fall, the DOE finally announced that it would hire a small team of staff to focus on students in foster care. Due to the DOE's hiring freeze, however, none of the positions have been filled. We are pleased that the DOE has now stated that it will move forward with hiring, but we want to ensure that *all the promised positions* – 7 focused on students in foster care and 4 serving students in temporary housing and students in foster care – *move forward*.

It's important that the DOE move quickly to hire and fully staff its first-ever team focused on students in foster care.

Guarantee bus service or comparable transportation to students in foster care: In addition, the DOE must ensure that every student in foster care can get to school. Federal and state law require the City to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can stay in their original school, unless it is in their best interest to transfer schools. However, the DOE has refused to guarantee bus service or another comparable mode of transportation to these students. As a result, students who cannot travel to school on their own have been forced to transfer schools, or even transfer foster homes, even though it is not in their best interest.

During the 2019-20 school year, one in five NYC students had to change schools upon their initial placement in foster care.

The DOE must provide bus service or other door-to-door transportation to the relatively small number of students in foster care who need it to maintain school stability.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue, and I am happy to answer any questions you have.

Sincerely,



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TESTIMONY
The Legal Aid Society
to
The New York City Council
Committee on Education
April 20, 2022

The Legal Aid Society
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The Legal Aid Society submits this testimony and thanks the Education Committee for holding this hearing focusing on students in foster care at the New York City Department of Education.

The Legal Aid Society is the nation's largest and oldest provider of legal services to low-income families and individuals. From offices in all five boroughs, the Society annually provides legal assistance to low-income families and individuals in some 300,000 legal matters encompassing three practice areas: the Criminal Defense Practice (CDP), the Civil Practice (CP), and the Juvenile Rights Practice (JRP).

The Juvenile Rights Practice provides comprehensive representation as attorneys for children who appear before the New York City Family Court in abuse, neglect, juvenile delinquency, and other proceedings affecting children's rights and welfare. Typically, our Juvenile Rights staff represents more than 33,000 children in the Family Courts each year and approximately 90% of New York City's foster care population. In addition to representing these children each year in trial and appellate courts, we also pursue impact litigation and other law reform initiatives on behalf of our clients.

The Kathryn A. McDonald Education Advocacy Project provides representation to JRP clients in their educational matters, including special education advocacy and advocacy in disciplinary proceedings with the Department of Education.

Our perspective comes from our daily contacts with children, adolescents, and their families, and also from our frequent interactions with the courts, social service providers, and city agencies including the NYC Department of Education (DOE), NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and the Administration for Children's Services (ACS).

Students in the Child Welfare System

In the 2020-21 school year, 7,416 New York City public school students were in foster care.¹ Nearly 94% were children of color.² Children in foster care face unique challenges in accessing education including high rates of student mobility, trauma and disabilities, and this makes them an especially vulnerable group of learners. Nationally between 35% and 47% of children and youth in foster care have been identified as students with disabilities who require special education services.³ Seventeen- and eighteen-year-old students in foster care have an average 7th grade reading level.⁴ Attendance rates for students in foster care in New York City are significantly below average. The average attendance rate for 11-15 year-olds in foster care is only 85%, meaning that they miss more than five weeks of school per year.⁵ The average attendance rate for students 16-20 years old plummets to 58%, a clear indication that the DOE has failed to engage these students in a meaningful way.⁶ In New York City only 43% of students in foster care

¹ New York City Administration for Children's Services Division of Policy, Planning and Measurement, Office of Research and Analysis: High School Graduation Rates of Youth in Foster Care (2021) <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2021/HSFosterCareAnnualReport2021.pdf>

² Nationally approximately 12% of black children living in the United States will spend some time in out of home placements before they reach the age of 18. Berger, Lawrence, et al., "Children's Academic Achievement and Foster Care," *Pediatrics* (2015), 135 (1): e109–e116. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2014-2448> ; Citing Wildeman C, Emanuel N. "Cumulative risks of foster care placement by age 18 for U.S. children," 2000-2011. *PLoS One*. 2014; 9(3):e92785).

ACS reports reveal that 50.3 % of students living in foster care in New York City in the 2020-2021 school year were African American, 36% were Latinx. 2/5% were Asian, and 4.7% were identified as Other/Unknown. New York City Administration for Children's Services Division of Policy, Planning and Measurement, Office of Research and Analysis: High School Graduation Rates of Youth in Foster Care (2021) <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2021/HSFosterCareAnnualReport2021.pdf>

³ National Working Group on Foster Care and Education "Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care" April 2018 <http://fosteringchamps.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/NationalEducationDatashet2018-2.pdf>; Courtney, M.E., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2004). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Conditions of youth preparing to leave state care. P 40 Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

⁴ *Id.* at 2.

⁵ New York City Administration for Children's Services, School Attendance Rates of Children While in Foster Care, School Year 2020-2021. Available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2021/LL142SY20202021.pdf>.

⁶ *Id.*

graduated on time in 2021, the lowest graduation rate of any student group and 38 percentage points lower than the rate for students not in foster care.⁷

In addition, students in foster care suffer disproportionate rates of exclusionary school discipline, often for behaviors which are the result of disabilities or of trauma. New York City does not currently report on the numbers of suspensions and expulsions for students in foster care. However, a 2007 study found that nationally 24% of children and youth in foster care had been either suspended or expelled from school while the national average for all children is 7%.⁸ The disproportionate application of exclusionary discipline pushes students in foster care into the school to prison pipeline.

It is imperative that the City invest in children in the custody of ACS to ensure that they are able to engage in school and to obtain the educational services to which they are entitled and which will support successful outcomes of higher education and employment. We therefore ask that the City Council provide funding and oversight to support the DOE in 1) prioritizing staffing of the team for students in foster care, 2) the provision of school bus transportation to all children in foster care in grades K – 6, and 3) a system to ensure that parents and foster care agencies are informed before exclusionary discipline is imposed on children in foster care.

1. DOE Office for Children in Foster Care

In March 2018, the City’s Interagency Foster Care Task Force, whose membership included the Commissioner of the Administration for Children’s Services and the DOE Chief

⁷ See New York State Education Department, NYC Public Schools Graduation Rate Data (4 Year Outcome as of August 2021) Available at <https://data.nysed.gov/gradrate.php?year=2021&instid=7889678368>

⁸ *Maximizing Academic Success for Foster Care Students: A Trauma Informed Approach*, Anna Berardi and Brenda M. Morton, *The Journal of At-Risk Issues*, Vol. 20, Num. 1, p. 11. Available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1148240.pdf>; Citing Scherr, T. G. (2007). *Educational experiences of children in foster care: Meta-analyses of special education, retention and discipline rates*. *School Psychology International*, 28(4), 419–436.

Operating Officer, recommended that the DOE establish an office to focus on the needs of students in foster care, similar to the DOE Office of Student's in Temporary Housing.⁹ In May 2021 Advocates for Children and the Legal Aid Society released a joint report outlining the need for such an office.¹⁰

Currently, responsibility for children in foster care rests with a wide range of different DOE staff members and offices: enrollment, transportation, special education, guidance, office of legal services, and academic policy, to name a few. There is no central DOE resource that schools, foster care agencies or families can turn to when they have questions about students in foster care. There is also no central resource to assist in setting policies relating to school stability, transportation, parental rights and involvement, access to records, consent for special education evaluations and services, court orders, data sharing and analysis, or credit transfers for students in foster care who change schools. No one within the DOE is currently developing training for school staff in how to serve this population and there are many improvements that could be made. For example, the DOE has had a Surrogate Parent Guide drafted, but under review for years. That guide needs to be finalized and provided to schools, along with trainings to ensure that school based support teams know how to ensure that students in foster care have an educational decision maker for purposes of special education services. Students in foster care often need extra help and support with applying to middle school, high school, or specialized programs (such as specialized high schools or gifted and talented programs), but few receive it. In high profile cases, we have seen schools hold “welcome meetings” when a student entered or changed foster care placements, where they discussed school services,

⁹See Report of the Interagency Foster Care Task Force, March 2018
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/testimony/2018/TaskForceReport.pdf>

¹⁰ See Building a Network of Support: The Case for a DOE Office for Students in Foster Care, May 2021.
<https://legalaidnyc.org/news/doe-support-students-foster-care/>

supports, and the availability of at-risk services with parents, foster care agency staff and foster parents, but that is extremely rare. Every student in foster care should get that support, but no one is teaching schools how to provide it.

At the time the joint report was released in 2021, more than 30 organizations, including foster care agencies, groups of educators, and organizations representing children and parents in Family Court joined together in calling for a DOE team to focus on this group of students so that schools could be equipped with the knowledge and resources they need to serve students in foster care and their families effectively. In December 2021, the City announced that it had appropriated funding to support the creation of a team including nine staff members dedicated to serving the unique needs of students in foster care within the Office of Students in Temporary Housing, however today those positions remain unfilled.

In his public address on March 2nd, Chancellor Banks expressed a commitment to reaching students who have been poorly served by the DOE in the past. Youth in foster care fall squarely within this group. A large portion of them are not proficient in reading or math, need access to meaningful academic experiences and career pathways, and need services to support their social-emotional well-being, but instead they are being ignored, or worse, subjected to exclusionary disciplinary policies that lead to school disengagement, drop outs and the school to prison pipeline. In order to improve outcomes for this vulnerable group, the DOE must engage in an intensive, sustained effort to analyze and address their needs.

During his testimony before this committee on March 21, 2021, Chancellor Banks stated that hiring would begin for some of the positions on the team for Students in Foster Care. This was an important first step and we applaud the Administration for its attention to this vulnerable population of students. However, to date, only two dedicated positions for students

in foster care have been posted. Two staff members are not sufficient to adequately address the needs of Students in Foster Care. We therefore call upon the City Council, Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks to prioritize hiring the entire team for Students in Foster Care.

2. Bus Service for Students in Foster Care

The DOE must ensure that every child in foster care is able to get to their school, including to the expanded Summer Rising program announced by Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks on March 11, 2022. More than just being the right thing to do for children in foster care, New York City has a legal obligation to ensure that children in foster care are able to get to school. The federal Fostering Connections to Success Act of 2008 and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 require school districts and child welfare systems to collaborate in preserving school stability for children in foster care and in providing adequate transportation.

NYS Education Law § 3244, provides that the school district where the child attends school must provide transportation to and from the foster care placement and the child's school of origin. Despite these federal and state requirements, transportation remains a significant barrier to preserving school stability for students in foster care in New York City. In 2019 and 2020 the Administration agreed to use existing resources to ensure busing for students in foster care.¹¹ However, the de Blasio Administration did not achieve this goal. Furthermore, the DOE is aware that Chancellor's Regulation A-801, which regulates pupil transportation in New York City, has not been updated for twenty-two years. It is woefully out-of-date, and does not reflect the federal and state requirements regarding transportation for students in foster care. The Legal Aid Society and other organizations have provided the

¹¹ See FY 2020 Adopted Expense Budget Adjustment Summary, June 2019, available at <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/12/Fiscal-2020-Schedule-C-Final-Merge.pdf>

DOE with a proposed mark-up of the regulation, but to date, the DOE has neglected to bring those regulations into compliance with the law. The DOE's outdated regulation creates considerable confusion for parents, foster parents and child welfare workers who are trying to exercise children's rights to school stability and transportation services.

Currently, the DOE permits students in foster care in preschool through 6th grade to submit an Emergency Evaluation Request for busing. The DOE approves such requests if, and only if, the foster child can easily be added to an existing route. The DOE will not create a new route or significantly alter an existing route to accommodate a child in foster care. Data provided by the DOE pursuant to Local Law 34 shows that during the period from January 2021 to June 2021, only 65% of students in foster care grades K-6 who applied for transportation received DOE bus service.¹² Thirty five percent (including 33% of kindergarteners) received a MetroCard instead, which is entirely inadequate for this age group. Young children are unable to safely and comfortably travel alone on public transportation using a MetroCard. Foster parents often have other obligations, including employment and the care of other children that prevent them from accompanying a foster child during a long commute. Foster care case workers are also unable to accompany children to and from school due to their primary job responsibilities.

When DOE denies busing, ACS tries to piece together a transportation plan, which typically involves the use of expensive taxis, car services and paid chaperones. These ad hoc transportation arrangements are difficult to manage and costly to taxpayers.

When children in foster care are denied DOE busing, they are often effectively forced to change schools. No student in foster care should be forced to change schools or foster home placements due to lack of transportation – students in foster care are entitled to stable foster

¹² See SY 2020-2-January-June Local Law 34 Report on School Bus Transportation Services, available at https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Education/School-Bus-Report-October_2021_21-993/jbtw-tj3x

homes and stable school placements. We urge City Council to hold the DOE accountable for providing yellow bus transportation to all children in foster care from preschool through 6th grade. We ask the City Council to include sufficient funding in the budget (approximately \$5 million) to ensure that the DOE provides legally mandated bus service for students in foster care.

3. Exclusionary Discipline of Students in Foster Care

Students in foster care are at risk of disproportionate rates of exclusionary school discipline. New York City does not currently report on the numbers of suspensions and expulsions for students in foster care. However, a 2007 study found that nationally 24% of children and youth in foster care had been either suspended or expelled from school while the national average for all children is 7%.¹³ In many of these cases, the DOE notifies neither the child's parent nor the foster care agency. Often the DOE's data system captures only one contact for a student, which means *either* the foster parent or the birth parent gets notice of a suspension, when both need to be informed. Often foster care agencies are not informed unless one of these parties tell them. This lack of communication deprives the child of needed support and advocacy. Moreover, all New York City children in foster care have attorneys assigned to them by the Family Court. When proper notices are not given, children are deprived of the opportunity to have legal representation at suspension hearings to ensure that their rights are protected.

When it comes to exclusionary disciplinary practices we also see an intersection with the rights of students with disabilities. Nearly half of New York City students in foster care are

¹³ *Maximizing Academic Success for Foster Care Students: A Trauma Informed Approach*, Anna Berardi and Brenda M. Morton, *The Journal of At-Risk Issues*, Vol. 20, Num. 1, p. 11. Available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1148240.pdf>; Citing Scherr, T. G. (2007). *Educational experiences of children in foster care: Meta-analyses of special education, retention and discipline rates*. *School Psychology International*, 28(4), 419–436.

identified as having a disability. Before excluding a special education student from school for more than ten days, the DOE is required to hold a formal review to determine whether the behavior in question was a manifestation of their disability (MDR). However, parents, foster care agencies and professionals working with students in foster care are rarely informed of these proceedings. This lack of notice prevents parents and professionals working with students in foster care from meaningful participation in these review meetings.

The disproportionate application of exclusionary discipline pushes students in foster care out of school and into the school to prison pipeline. The DOE must increase the capacity of their data system, to cross-match data more frequently with ACS, and to ensure that all relevant parties are informed about possible suspensions and expulsions of students in foster care before exclusionary discipline is imposed. We ask City Council to consider introducing a reporting bill that would require the DOE to report on the numbers of students in foster care being suspended, and whether the parent, foster parent and/or foster care agency received written notice of the suspension hearing and disposition.

Conclusion

Students in foster care (who are overwhelmingly students of color, and who have high rates of special education needs) are amongst the most vulnerable of New York City residents. Mayor Adams, Chancellor Banks and the City Council have a unique opportunity to create a lasting change for these students by ensuring that that they are being provided with the educational services that they need and are entitled to. The place to start is by ensuring that students in foster care have reliable school busing, a dedicated team within the DOE that is able to support their schools, and by ensuring that all the adults involved in the student's life are informed before a student is subjected to exclusionary disciplinary procedures.

Many thanks for the opportunity to provide testimony. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

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**Testimony of Joni Rivera
Assistant Vice President of Educational Services
The New York Foundling**

**To the New York City Council
City Council Hearing - Dedicated DOE Office and Transportation Services**

April 20, 2022

Good afternoon. My name is Joni Rivera, and I am Assistant Vice President of Educational Services for The New York Foundling. The Foundling is one of New York City's oldest and largest nonprofit providers of human services, and with support from the City, our education programs provide tutoring and educational advocacy services to students involved with the child welfare system.

At The Foundling, we have made a major commitment to education and believe it is one of the primary components of a child's wellbeing. Without an adequate education, our children cannot thrive and suffer increased risk of mental health issues, poverty, homelessness, and encounters with the criminal justice system.

Funding for education in the foster care system is a critical need, one that has become even more apparent during the current global pandemic. COVID-19 is creating new obstacles for students in foster care, with routines disrupted and foster parents, often lacking technology and resources like a working internet connection, struggling to juggle their own jobs with their children's schoolwork.

Students in foster care experience specific hardships and challenges related to being in the system that the general public does not. This prevents equity of opportunity and access as compared to their peers. For these reasons, their educational outcomes suffer in relation to their peers. They experience significantly lower high school graduation rates, college enrollment and persistence rates, as well as college graduation rates, resulting in exponentially lower earned income throughout their lives. Currently, only approximately 20% of children in foster care in New York City are graduating from high school and only about 3% are graduating from college. This can lead to an increased dependence on the social services system as well as increased incidences of homelessness, mental health issues, and experience with the criminal justice system.

Our students are also forced to navigate the school system without proper support and resources. Approximately 50% of students in foster care have Individualized Education Plans and disabilities. Without proper support, these challenges often fly under the radar and our students do not receive the services that they need to be successful in the classroom. The current global pandemic has also exacerbated these already dismal academic outcomes for students in foster care. Students in care are going to emerge from the COVID crisis further behind academically than ever. Graduating high school and going to college is going to be a lot more challenging.

Having a dedicated office at the Department of Education for students in foster care is imperative to improving educational outcomes for our students. A dedicated office and knowledgeable staff can assist in closing this achievement gap by providing students in foster care with the support and resources they need to be successful. Education staff with training in trauma-informed practices, foster care policies and practices, as well as the rights of students and families in foster care is integral to properly support students in the DOE. These resources would provide students and

families with access to special education supports in a timely manner, minimize educational disruptions and transitions, and bolster confidence and trust within the education system for families experiencing child welfare involvement.

Transportation is another significant need for students in foster care. Students experience a multitude of transitions and moves during time spent in care. Educational disruptions can result in months of lost learning, gaps in special education services, and increased trauma already experienced by entering into foster care. With so much in transition, it is imperative to keep students stable in their school environment with teachers and staff that they trust, services that they need to be successful, and friendships that they rely on to thrive. Consequently, our students need improved transportation services to ensure that they are able to remain in their school of origin and minimize disruptions so days are not lost waiting for busing or managing car service for a family with multiple children. These issues weigh heavily on our foster parents who are often working full time and caring for multiple children, all while trying to provide the best care for their children.

We hope that the Council will also consider our request for additional funding for our Road to Success tutoring programs. These programs have maintained consistent success in improving the high school graduation rate for students in care. Despite their achievements, funding from New York City at its current level does not cover the costs of supporting students in foster care with intensive, trauma-informed tutoring to support their educational goals, and we look to the Council to strengthen our capacity to provide this support to our students.

I want to close by thanking the City Council for its support of many of our programs but we need to do more. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the City Council to prevent students in foster care from falling through the cracks. Thank you for your time.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and for holding this important hearing on the education of students in foster care. My name is Anastasia Humphrey. Being now that I am in 12th grade I will soon be graduating in the summer of 2022. I have been in foster care for two years with MercyFirst. I would say that my educational journey has been a roller coaster. While entering foster care it did greatly impact my education. I felt alone and lost, and my grades reflected that. I had just started 11th grade although I was doing online learning for all my classes due to the pandemic I was still learning how to deal with this new transition. With time and help it became a bit easier to adjust.

Relocating to my foster home meant that I had to change schools. As you can imagine I was very upset. I did not wish to change schools in the 12th grade. I would miss all my friends and would have to learn how to adapt to a new school district. I feel like the DOE should provide transportation for foster kids that do not wish to change schools. It is hard for many kids to readjust to a different environment. Especially kids that already have so much going on within their personal lives. Schools can make it easier for kids in foster care systems by showing a lot of support and letting us know that our current situation does not define who we are. The world is our oyster, and we can become anything we want to be as long as we work hard to get there. With the support of our teachers and others I think this will make a great impact and push us to keep on moving forward.

Starting off I would like to say that foster care has been supporting me throughout my journey and has been taking good care of me since I was little. Although I am 15 there has been a lot of advantages and disadvantages. Some of the disadvantages are being late or being absent in school due to switching homes. Another disadvantage is when I was eleven years old, I was living in Lakewood, N.J. but going to school in Brooklyn. The traveling to and from was a lot to manage along with school. I personally prefer living closer to my school as it makes it easier to focus on my education.

I have a lot of advantages such as, being smart and I'm also into my work in class. I have a great personality and I have a lot of staff and teachers at my school who care about the quality of my education. Finally, I have the people in foster care that care about me so much that they supply me and my family with whatever it is I need. If I were not in foster care, I wouldn't be in the school that I am currently enrolled in and would not be getting the services I am getting now.

Hey, my name is Kimberly Rosado, I am 16 and currently in the 11th grade. My education journey has been a rocky road so far. I have had ups and downs on this journey especially being in foster care. Being in foster care has affected my education because it has affected my mental health. I feel like foster kids should have more emotional support at school. Sometimes it is hard for me to focus on school because of things that are going on in my personal life. At school we do have a guidance counselor, but they are busy doing other things and can't sit and talk to me all of the time. It would be nice to have someone to talk to when I'm feeling low at school.

Schools could make it easier for students in care to succeed by giving them more emotional support. Also, by giving them more tutoring. For me personally, sometimes I can't really focus on class entirely because of what's going on in my life and fall behind. Extra help at school will help other kids in care, and I be able to succeed in school. In addition, schools can make it easier for kids in care to succeed by giving activities as in arts and crafts, sports, cooking classes, etc. this will give them a chance to be able to do things they enjoy and possibly pick up a new hobby. It will also help us be more motivated to go to school because we are doing things we like.

That's all. Thanks for reading.

Hello, my name is Sasha Maharaj, and I am 14 and a freshman in high school. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about my experience being in foster care while in school. Guaranteed bus service is ideal for students in foster care because it can give them a great opportunity to get their education no matter what the circumstances are. Education is important no matter what age you are, I can relate to this because before I lived with my foster mother, I had to commute by car 45 minutes every day to and from school. By the time I reached school I was tired from the long ride and after school I had to stay in an after-school program for 2 hours until my dad could pick me up after work. If I had a bus to transport me from Queens to my home in Long Island I would get home faster and have more time to do my homework and study every day. I would be so tired staying after school until 6 pm every day and by the time I got home to my foster mother I was ready to go to sleep. I was doing poorly in school during the time but fast forward to now I am happy where I am living, and I get home quickly after school and have much more time to study and do my homework which is why I have 90s and above in all my classes.

If all students are able to receive the right transportation to get to school and back home every day in a timely fashion, I definitely think it can be beneficial to students and their education. While transportation is just one issue, I also think that counseling should be a priority in public schools. This could be very beneficial to students especially those in foster care who may need the extra support if they are going through personal things at home. I have gotten the care I needed from the foster care system as workers have come to check up on me and make sure I am okay and doing well in school. I am thankful that there are great team members in the foster care system that allow me to be my best no matter what struggles I have been through.

Hey, my name is Yasin and I'm 14 years old, my experience in school while being in the system was overall affected by foster care. For starters, I had to transfer schools a lot due to home placements

Especially when I was younger. But after elementary school I refused to change schools, which is another story I'll get into. Elementary school while in the system was tough for me because of what I was going through at home, and because the schools eventually know you're a foster child, teachers would try to use that against me. I had anger issues and a lot of kid isn't like me.

I had fights at that time, so stuff happened. At the time my foster mother had me on 5 medications, so it was stressful. They always thought I needed extra help, but I refused. Caseworkers and other workers would always come to my school which is type embarrassing even as a high school student. When I entered middle school, I was living with my mom's but after a month in she lost us due to something happening at home, so I went from living in Harlem to queens, and my school was in Harlem. We had no trains near the house, and I wasn't changing my school, so we had to get a uber service to take us and pick us up from school every day. Queens to Harlem is a huge trip, I would have to wake up so early for school. When I would get to school, I was always tired, not just one day but majority of days. I didn't talk too much in 6th grade I was quiet, I always hated going outside and getting in the same car with the same lady. And the end of my 6th grade year I was failing and was going to summer school due to the amount of sleeping I've done in class, but I took a special test and passed. 7th grade year was harder, but I was living back with my mom's so that wasn't a problem. In my class not everyone was so cool with me, so I had some issues with people. Unlike from the previous year I got into trouble not for sleeping but for fights, class incidents or doing stupid things. It effected a lot on my mom, my attendance and lateness also affected on her. When school shut down in March 2020 we had to go online. I chose not to log on and ACS was called on my mom. They took us away again, I finished the seventh and eighth grade I did remote, so it wasn't hard, then in December I went with family, so I was good. High school everything changed for me, but in mostly good ways.