Foster Students in Indiana 2020

Executive Summary

Indiana is home to nearly 31,000 children in foster care and has the fourth highest rate of youth in foster care in the nation. The state's nearly 17,000 school-age foster youth are spread across schools of all sizes and in communities of all types, but about 10 percent of public school corporations educate about half of Indiana's foster students.

Foster youth tend to be in vulnerable situations and often experience trauma, homelessness, and instability at rates far higher than their non-foster peers. The results of these experiences are borne out in disproportionately high rates of grade-level retention and discipline, and disproportionately low rates of academic achievement, persistence, and graduation. When foster students do graduate, their diplomas tend to be lower quality, restricting college and career opportunities and further perpetuating cycles of limited economic opportunity.

This study builds on a September 2019 report by Foster Success and Indiana Youth Institute that, for the first time, examined educational disparity among foster youth. It provides a deeper look at foster student performance compared to peers within various subgroups and examines data at the school district level to find that gaps in educational outcomes for foster youth persist and are present statewide. Significant additional support is needed at all age levels, and across all types of schools, to close achievement gaps and guarantee foster youth can succeed at the same levels as their peers.

Among the key findings:

- Youth of all race/ethnicity groups are in foster care in Indiana, but they are disproportionately Black or Multiracial and very young, and they are overrepresented in special education.
- Foster youth experience high rates of mobility in care, housing instability, and justice system involvement.
- Young adults who experienced foster care are less likely to have a high school diploma and less likely to be employed than the general population.
- Foster students performed worse than Hoosier students overall, and in nearly all subgroups, in all educational outcomes examined: grade retention, discipline rates, performance on standardized assessments, graduation rates, and diploma earning.
- While urban counties tended to have larger numbers of foster students, rural counties typically had higher ratios. However, there were no identifiable achievement patterns (positive or negative) for foster students based on county or school corporation characteristics. In other words, gaps in foster student achievement were present across the state, regardless of school corporation type, size, or urban/rural location.

Foster Care in Indiana

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS), 30,693 Indiana children were in foster care in 2018. Indiana's rate of children in care - 12 per 1,000 children 17 and under – is higher than all but three states in the United States.

Indiana children in foster care are disproportionately Black or African American (17 percent of children in care as compared to 11 percent of the state's population under 21) and Multiracial (nine percent of children in care compared to three percent of the state's under-21 population). Hoosier children in foster care also are disproportionately younger – 45 percent of Hoosier foster children in care on the last day of FY2018 were five or under, compared to just 27 percent of the under 21 population in the state.

Indiana children in foster care frequently experience disruptions and issues that impact educational achievement, including mobility while in care (just under half of Hoosier children exiting care in 2018 had at least three placements); housing instability (15 percent transitioning out of care reported experiencing homelessness by age 17); and justice involvement (39 percent transitioning out reported having been incarcerated by age 17).

Young adults who have experienced foster care face barriers to achieving positive educational and economic outcomes. Only 82 percent of Hoosier young adults who experienced foster care reported earning a high school diploma or higher by age 21, compared to 89 percent of the state's general population, and just 51 percent were employed, compared to 63 percent of the state's population.

Foster Student School Enrollment

The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) and Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) identified nearly 16,900 foster youth enrolled in grades K-12 in academic year (AY) 2019, with just over 16,080 enrolled in public schools,[1]

Foster students were twice as likely to be in special education; nearly one-third of foster students were in special education (32 percent), compared to 16 percent of all students. Though the majority (65 percent) of foster students enrolled in AY2019 were White, students who were Black or African American and Multiracial were overrepresented in the foster student population. While 12 percent of all Indiana school enrollment in AY2019 was Black or African American, these students represented 17 percent of foster enrollment. Multiracial students represented eight percent of foster student enrollment, compared to five percent of overall.

Half of the foster students enrolled in public schools were in 40 school corporations[2] across the state (about 10 percent of total public school corporations). Comparatively, these

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[1] Traditional public, public charter, turnaround, university, and state-run schools.
[2] The term "school corporation" is used generally to mean traditional public school corporations, charter schools, turnaround schools, university schools, and state-run schools.

corporations made up only 37 percent of all public enrollment. The ten corporations with the highest foster student enrollment are in seven cities – Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, Evansville, Terre Haute, Muncie, South Bend, and Anderson. Marion County school corporations enrolled about 18 percent of foster students in public schools, followed by Lake and Allen counties (each enrolling six percent). While urban counties tended to have larger numbers of foster students, rural counties typically had higher ratios (foster students / all students). Half of Indiana's rural counties had foster student enrollment ratios of two percent or more, compared to only one-quarter of urban counties.

Foster Student Educational Performance and Outcomes

In all education-related measures examined, foster students performed worse than Hoosier students overall. This includes grade retention, discipline rates, academic performance on standardized assessments, and graduation rates and diploma earning. These patterns also held when examining foster student subgroup performance as compared to all students within the same subgroup (e.g., comparing White foster students to all White students), for all racial/ethnic categories, gender, socioeconomic status, and for special education/general education and English Language Learner (ELL)/non-ELL status.

There were no identifiable achievement patterns (positive or negative) for foster students as compared to all students based on county or school corporation characteristics. In other words, gaps in foster student achievement were present across the state, regardless of school corporation type, size, or urban/rural location.

Grade Retention

Foster students were three times more likely to be retained in grade compared to all students; roughly three percent of foster students, compared with one percent of all students, were retained (held back) in AY2019. Foster students were held back at higher rates than all students in all but one subcategory analyzed (the clustered Asian/Native Am. or Am. Ind./Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander category). Within-group disparities were greatest for White foster students and female foster students.

Discipline

Foster students were both suspended and expelled at rates far higher than their peers, at the state level and for all subgroups analyzed. Foster students had suspension rates more than 2.5 times higher than all students (23 percent of foster students compared to nine percent of all students), as well as expulsion rates more than four times higher (1.1 percent of foster students compared to 0.25 percent of all students).

Suspension

Among subgroups, Black or African American foster students had disproportionately higher suspension rates compared to all Black or African American students (35 percent for Black foster students compared to 21 percent of all Black students). Further, suspension rates for Black foster students were five times higher than those of all White students (35 percent

versus seven percent). Male foster students (29 percent, compared to 12 percent of all male students) and foster students in special education (29 percent, compared to 15 percent of all students in special education and eight percent of all students in general education) also had substantially higher suspension rates compared to peer groups.

Expulsion
Black or African American and Multiracial foster students were expelled at the highest rates among racial/ethnic subgroups (1.3 and 1.4 percent, respectively), rates three or more times higher than peers within the same racial/ethnic subgroups, and seven times higher than all White students. White foster students were expelled at rates nearly 5.5 times higher than all White students.

Expulsion rates for male foster students and those in general education (both 1.3 percent) also were high among subcategories. While the rate for female foster students was comparatively lower (0.8 percent), female foster students were expelled at a rate 5.5 times higher than all female students.

Academic Performance

Foster students passed the Math or English/Language Arts portions of the ILEARN (grades 3-8) and ISTEP+ (grade 10), as well as the IREAD-3 assessment, at rates far lower than all students, at each grade level and within nearly all examined subgroups.

IREAD-3
While 77 percent of foster students passed IREAD-3, this was still 10 percentage points lower than all students. IREAD-3 passing rates were lower for all foster students subgroups compared to all students within those subgroups except one (ELL students). Only 61 percent of Black or African American students passed, compared to 74 percent of all Black students and 92 percent of all White students. Just half of foster students in special education passed the assessment, compared to 61 percent of all students in special education, and under three-quarters (73 percent) of male foster students passed the assessment, compared to 85 percent of all male students.

ILEARN English/Language Arts and Math
Foster students were half as likely as all students to pass the ILEARN E/LA portion (23 percent of foster students compared to 47 percent overall). While passing rates for all students generally increased as grade levels went up (46 percent passing in Grade 3 to 50 percent in Grade 8), the opposite happened to foster students, moving from 25 percent passing in Grade 3 to 22 percent in Grade 8.

While ILEARN E/LA gaps existed within each subgroup, they were particularly prevalent for Black or African American students and students clustered into the Asian/Native Am. or Am. Indian/Native Hawaiian or Pac. Isl. combined group. Only 11 percent of students in each of these subgroups passed – Black foster students were more than two times less likely to pass than all Black students, and students in the clustered group were, on average, five

times less likely to pass than all students who were Asian/Native Am. or Am. Ind./Native Hawaiian or Pac. Isl.

Though foster students passed the ILEARN Math portion at slightly higher rates than E/LA, they still were nearly half as likely to pass as all students (24 percent compared to 47 percent). Foster student passing rates declined by more than three times as grade levels went up (from 39 percent passing in Grade 3 to just 12 percent passing in Grade 8). Though the trend of passing decline as grade levels increased also happened for all students, students in foster care went from 58 percent passing in Grade 3 to 37 percent passing in Grade 8, so gaps between foster and all students grew as grade levels increased, to the point that foster students in Grade 8 were more than three times less likely to pass ILEARN Math compared to all students.

Like E/LA, gaps existed in all subcategories for ILEARN Math. Just 13 percent of Black or African American foster students and 21 percent each of Hispanic/Latinx and students clustered in the Asian/Native Am. or Am. Ind./Native Hawaiian or Pac. Isl group passed the ILEARN Math portion, compared to 22 percent of all Black students; 34 percent of all Hispanic students; and 65 percent of all students in the clustered category (with pass rates ranging from 42 percent to 67 percent for racial/ethnic groups within the clustered category).

ISTEP+ English/Language Arts and Math
Foster students were less than half as likely to pass ISTEP+ E/LA compared to all students (29 percent compared to 62 percent), and the passing rate for ISTEP+ Math was five times lower for foster students (seven percent compared to 35 percent). Performance gaps were present between foster students and their peers within every subcategory examined for both E/LA and Math.

Just 20 percent of Black or African American foster students passed ISTEP+ E/LA, compared to 37 percent of all Black students and 68 percent of all White students. Only five percent of foster students who were English Language Learners (ELL) passed ISTEP+ E/LA, compared to 11 percent of all ELL. Just 10 percent of foster students in special education passed ISTEP+ E/LA, compared to 20 percent of special education overall.

Pass rates in ISTEP+ Math were under 10 percent for all foster subgroups, with the exception of Hispanic/Latinx (12 percent, but still lower than the 20 percent passing rate for all Hispanic/Latinx students) and general education (10 percent, far lower than the 39 percent passing rate for all general education students). Less than two percent of Multiracial foster students passed Math ISTEP+, compared to 29.5 percent of all Multiracial students and 41 percent of all White students. Only three percent of Black or African American foster students passed the Math portion of ISTEP+, compared to 12 percent of all Black students.

Graduation and Graduates

Foster students graduated at much lower rates than all students (55 percent compared to 87 percent of all students). Further, foster students who did graduate were far more likely to receive diploma waivers (36 percent vs. 12 percent of all students) and to earn General diplomas (23 percent of foster graduates compared to 10 percent of all graduates), both of which are associated with lower rates of postsecondary enrollment and colleges readiness.

Four-Year Graduation Rates

Just over half of foster students graduated in four years (55 percent), compared to 87 percent of all students. Graduation rates for foster students lagged their peers in all subgroups. Only 54 percent of Black or African American and Hispanic/Latinx foster students graduated in four years, compared to 78 percent for all Black students, 85 percent for all Hispanic students, and 89 percent for all White students. Under half of foster students in special education and males (each 49 percent) graduated in four years, compared to 71 percent of all students in special education and 85 percent of all males.

Diploma Waivers and Diploma Type

Foster graduates received diploma waivers at rates three times higher than all students (36 percent compared to 12 percent), including half of all Hispanic/Latinx foster graduates and 46 percent of Black or African American foster graduates (compared to 17 percent of all Hispanic, 24.5 percent of all Black, and nine percent of all White students). Over half of foster students in special education (54 percent) received waivers, compared to 35 percent of all students in special education. Female foster students received waivers at rates three times higher than their female peers (38 percent vs. 13 percent).

Foster students were 3.5 times less likely than all students to earn Honors diplomas and far more likely to earn General diplomas than all students (23 percent versus 10 percent). Nearly one-third of Hispanic/Latinx foster students earned General diplomas, compared to 11 percent of all Hispanic students, and nearly one-quarter of Black or African American foster students (24 percent) earned General Diplomas, compared to 12 percent of all Black students. More than four in ten foster students in special education (42 percent) received General diplomas, compared to 32 percent of all students in special education. Female foster students received General diplomas at rates three times higher than all female students (23 percent compared to seven percent).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Success in K-12 education can be a critical factor for future educational and economic outcomes. Unfortunately, foster students in Indiana have worse outcomes than their peers at the state level and within nearly all racial/ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and programmatic subgroups for all educational components and outcomes analyzed in this report. As such, more attention needs to be placed on ensuring that students in foster care have the academic, emotional, and social support to be successful in education. Further,

additional data analysis and studies on other K-12 related educational factors that may contribute to outcomes may be useful, as well as further analysis on outcomes for foster students after K-12, including postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment, as well as employment status and wage earning as compared to peers.

The following recommendations outline areas for practice, policy, and research that may be beneficial in better supporting educational success for children in foster care.

Practice

- Implement real-time information sharing processes so that school administrators know within 24 hours if a child in their school has entered foster care or if a new child enrolling in their school has experienced foster care.

- Provide per pupil funding for school corporations based on the number of students in foster care they are educating. Funds could be used for additional professional development and direct support services and programs for students in foster care.

- Implement regular, ongoing professional development for school administrators, social workers, counselors and teachers to ensure that they better understand the unique experiences and needs of children in foster care.

- For any K-12 student in foster care, ensure that a representative from the child's current school is part of all Family Case Manager Team meetings.

- Create more intentional programs for high school students in foster care allowing them to explore education and career pathways that better align with their educational experiences and aspirations.

Policy

- Create additional data sharing agreements with state agencies that have information on postsecondary enrollment and completion, as well as workforce outcomes, for foster students and their peers including the Management Performance Hub, Indiana Department of Workforce Development, and Indiana Commission for Higher Education. Utilizing more longitudinal data to identify characteristics and contributing factors for foster students that continue into postsecondary education and/or obtain meaningful employment could help inform programming designed for students in foster care to explore education and career pathways that align with their goals.

- Better define "best interest of child" policy regarding school placements; strengthen funding opportunities for transportation for students in foster care.

Research

- Continue to work with state agencies such as the Department of Education and Department of Child Services to obtain and analyze more data on K-12 educational components that may also contribute to outcomes, including attendance, dropout rates, and inter- and intra-district mobility. Further, support for even more robust studies that allow for analysis at the student level, to identify the extent to which

various factors (including number of placements and time of entry into foster care) contribute to gaps in foster student outcomes, could lead to stronger and more conclusive recommendations.

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Foster Children in Indiana

According to federal data, 30,693 children in Indiana were in foster care during 2018. Point-in-time counts are lower; as of the last day of FY2018, 18,560 children were in foster care.[3] The most common placement for foster children in Indiana in 2018 was a foster home (30 percent of placements), followed by a relative's home (28 percent). The average length of stay for those exiting care in 2018 was 526 days.[4]

Compared to other states, Indiana has high rates of children in foster care. In 2018, Indiana's rate of children 17 and under in foster care was 12 per 1,000, a rate higher than all other states except Alaska (15), Montana (17), and West Virginia (19).[5] Indiana's rate far exceeds that of neighboring states; Indiana's rate is double that of Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio.

Table 1: Children 17 and Under in Foster Care (as of September 30, 2018)

State	Number	Rate per 1,000
Indiana	**18,232**	**12**
Illinois	15,039	5
Kentucky	9,347	9
Michigan	11,905	5
Ohio	15,344	6

Compared to Indiana's population under 21, children in foster care were disproportionately Black or African American and Multiracial. In 2018, 17 percent of foster youth were Black or African American and 9 percent were Multiracial,[6] compared to 11 percent and three percent, respectively, of the state's population under 21.[7] Children in foster care also tended to be disproportionately younger – about 45 percent of Hoosier foster children were five or under[8], compared to just 27 percent[9] of the state population under 21. Just over half of

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[3] Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System. Numbers of Children in Foster Care on September 30th, by State.

[4] Indiana Youth Institute. (2020). *2020 Indiana KIDS COUNT Data Book: A profile of Hoosier youth.*

[5] Kids Count Data Center. *Children 0 to 17 in foster care in the United States.* https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6242-children-0-to-17-in-foster-care?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/2-53/false/37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38/any/12985,20455

[6] Kids Count Data Center. *Children in foster care by race and Hispanic origin in the United States.* https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6246-children-in-foster-care-by-race-and-hispanic-origin?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/16/false/37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38/2638,2601,2600,2598,2603,2597,2602,1353/12992,12993

[7] U.S. Census Bureau. 2010 DEC Summary File 1. Sex by age by race (tables PCT12H-PCT12O).

[8] Kids Count Data Center. *Children in foster care by age group in the United States.* https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6244-children-in-foster-care-by-age-group?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/15-16,19,24,37/false/37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38/1889,2616,2617,2618,2619,122/12988,12989

[9] U.S. Census Bureau. 2010 DEC Summary File 1.

foster youth were male (51.5 percent), and 48.5 percent were female[10], which mirrors the overall population under 21.[11]

Figure 1: Demographics of Children in Foster Care Compared to Population Under 21
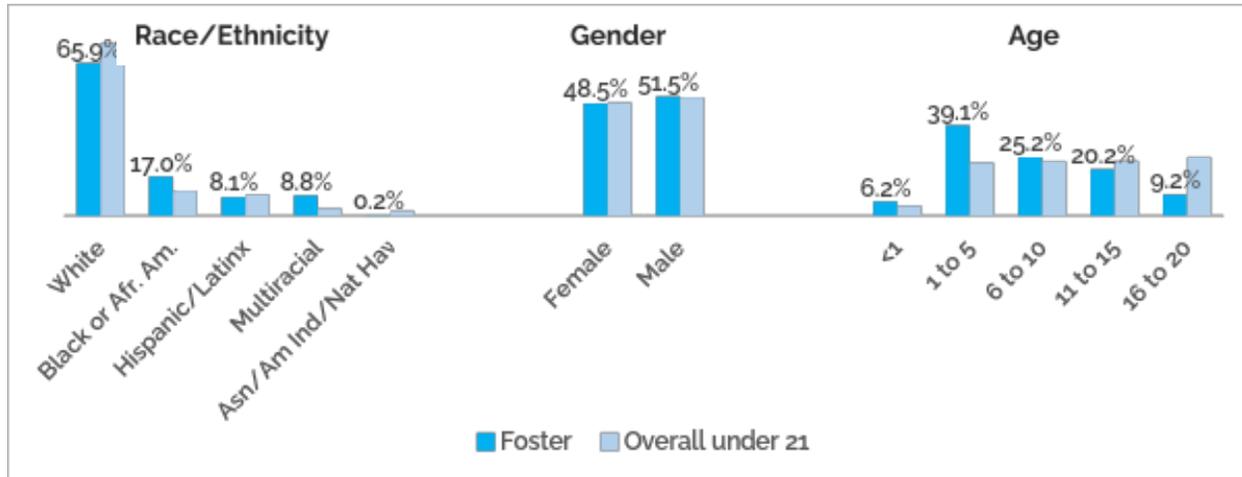
Foster Student Education

Children in foster care frequently experience challenges that can negatively impact educational success and attainment, including mobility while in care (just under half of Hoosier children exiting care in 2018 had at least three placements while in foster care)[12] and housing instability (15 percent of youth transitioning out of foster care in Indiana reported experiencing homelessness at some point by age 17).[13] Those who have been in foster care also are more likely to have been justice involved – nearly four in ten Indiana youth transitioning out of care (39 percent) reported ever having been incarcerated by age 17.[14]

These challenges can contribute to difficulty achieving positive educational and economic outcomes. Only 82 percent of young adults who experienced foster care have earned a high school diploma/equivalent or higher by age 21, compared to 89 percent of the state's general population, and only 51 percent are employed, compared to 63 percent of the state's general population.[15]

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[10] Kids Count Data Center. *Children in foster care by gender.*
https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6245-children-in-foster-care-by-gender?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/2-53/false/37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38/14,15,112/12990,12991

[11] US Census Bureau. 2020 DEC Summary File 1.

[12] Indiana Youth Institute (2020).

[13] Kids Count Data Center. *Youth transitioning out of foster care: Ever experienced homelessness by age 17 in Indiana.*
https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10200-youth-transitioning-out-of-foster-care-ever-experienced-homelessness-by-age-17?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/16/false/1690/6259,6260,6261,6262/19736,19737
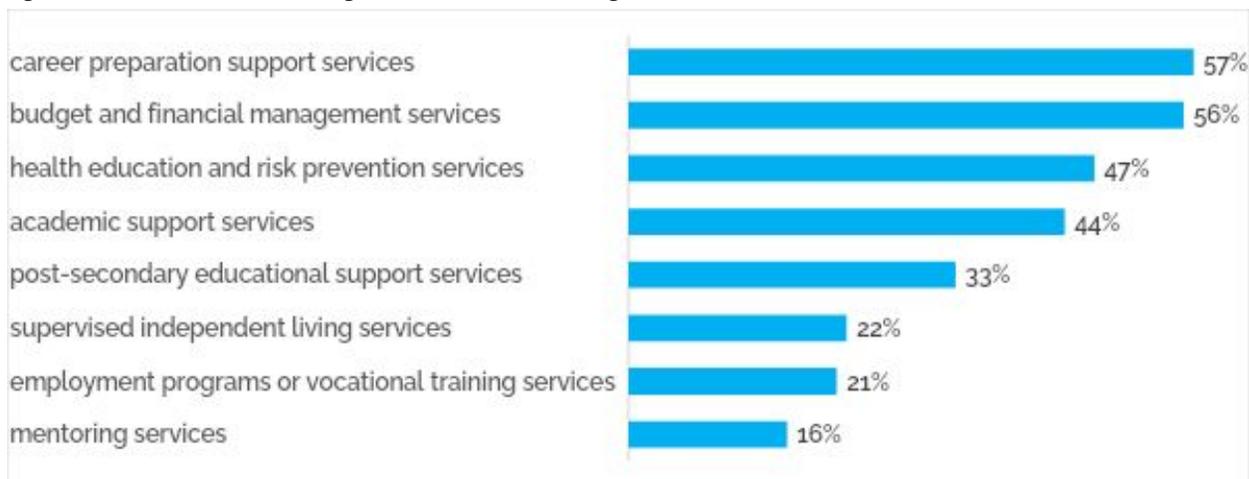
[14] Kids Count Data Center. *Youth transitioning out of foster care: Ever incarcerated by age 17 in Indiana.*
https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10211-youth-transitioning-out-of-foster-care-ever-incarcerated-by-age-17?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/16/false/1690/6259,6260,6261,6262/19756,19757

Research and data show that education, including obtaining a high school diploma (rather than a high school equivalency only) and especially higher educational attainment, can be a strong contributor to later economic success, including higher earnings, lower poverty levels, and lower likelihood of unemployment.[16] Policies such as ensuring stability in K-12 educational placement may contribute to educational success, and educators and schools can be powerful assets in supporting children in foster care, particularly through mentoring and tutoring, and life skills preparation, such as employability and independent living skills, can help children who have experienced foster care be successful later in life.[17] However, while over half of Indiana youth exiting foster care in FY2015 reported having received career preparation support services (57 percent) and budget and financial management services (56 percent), only 44 percent reported having received academic support services; only 33 percent, postsecondary educational support services; and less than one-quarter had received employment programs or vocational training services (21 percent) or mentoring services (16 percent).

Figure 2: Indiana Youth Exiting Foster Care Receiving Various Services[18]

Service	Percentage
career preparation support services	57%
budget and financial management services	56%
health education and risk prevention services	47%
academic support services	44%
post-secondary educational support services	33%
supervised independent living services	22%
employment programs or vocational training services	21%
mentoring services	16%

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[15] Foster Success (2018). *2018 Indiana Profile: Transition-Age Youth in Foster Care.* https://fostersuccess.org/download/2018-indiana-profile-transition-age-youth-in-foster-care/

[16] Indiana Commission for Higher Education (2020). *Indiana college value report 2020.* https://www.in.gov/che/files/2020_College_Value_Report_04_01_2020_pages.pdf; Zimmer, T. (2017). Which Hoosiers are successfully navigating the unemployment system? *Indiana Business Review, Fall 2017 92*(3). http://www.ibrc.indiana.edu/ibr/2017/fall/article1.html

[17] Moyer, A.M. & Goldberg, A.E. (2019). Foster youth's educational challenges and supports: Perspectives of teachers, foster parents, and former foster youth. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* (37), pp. 123-136; Pecora, P.J. (2012). Maximizing educational achievement of youth in foster care and alumni: Factors associated with success. *Children and Youth Services Review 34 (2012)* pp. 1121-1129.

[18] Kids Count Data Center. *Youth transitioning out of foster care (custom report using various indicators by race/ethnicity, FY2015). https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/customreports/16/10221-10228/compared*
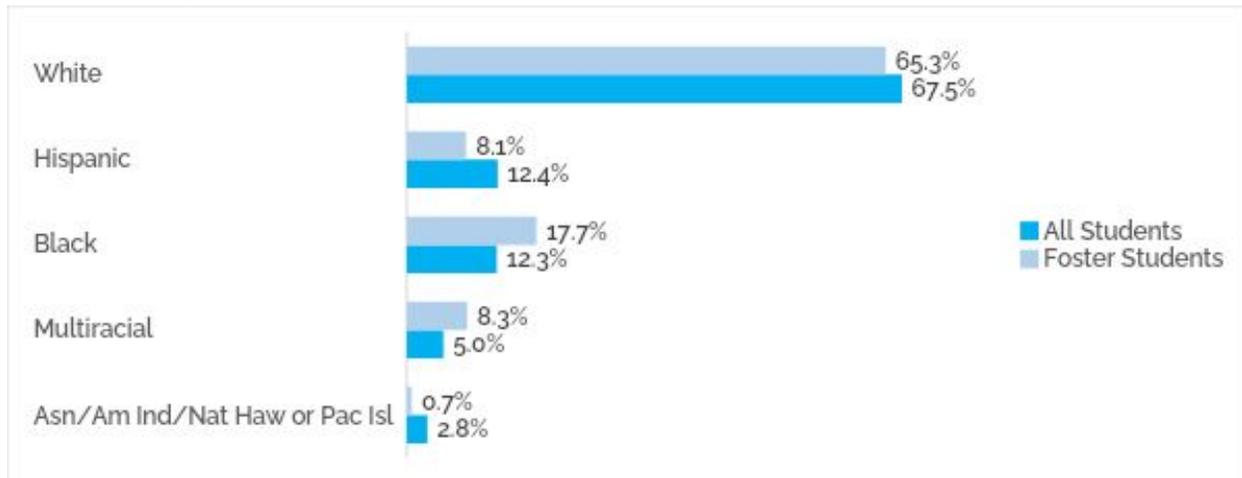
Foster Student Enrollment

The 2020 Foster Care Youth Annual Report, written by the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) and the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS), identified 16,894 school-age foster youth, including 94 children in the pre-kindergarten pilot program. Just over half (52 percent) of the identified foster students were in elementary grades, K-5.[19]

Student Demographic Composition[20]

As with the overall racial/ethnic breakdown of foster children in Indiana, Black and Multiracial students are overrepresented in the foster care student population. Based on academic year (AY) 2018-19 enrollment data, while 18 percent of Indiana foster students were Black or African American and eight percent Multiracial, only 12 percent and five percent, respectively, of all students were Black or African American and Multiracial. In contrast, White (65 percent vs. 68 percent of all students); Hispanic or Latinx (eight percent compared to 12 percent of all); and students in the clustered Asian/American Indian or Nat. Am./Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander group (0.7 percent compared to 3 percent of all students) all were underrepresented in enrollment as compared to the overall student population. Within the clustered category, Asian students made up most of the underrepresentation (0.3 percent of foster students were Asian, compared to 2.5 percent of all students. Comparatively, 0.3 percent of foster students were Am. Indian or Native Am. versus 0.2 percent of the overall population, and 0.04 percent of foster students were Native Hawaiian/Pac. Isl. compared to 0.1 percent of the overall student population).

Figure 3: Demographics by Race/Ethnicity

White: 65.3% / 67.5%
Hispanic: 8.1% / 12.4%
Black: 17.7% / 12.3%
Multiracial: 8.3% / 5.0%
Asn/Am Ind/Nat Haw or Pac Isl: 0.7% / 2.8%

All Students
Foster Students

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[19] Indiana Department of Education and Department of Child Services (2020). *HEA 1314 Foster Care Annual Youth Report.* Retrieved June 29, 2020 from https://www.in.gov/sboe/files/HEA%201314-Foster%20Care%20Youth%20Annual%20Report%20from%20SBOE%20Draft%205.12.20_Redacted.pdf

[20] Except where specifically noted, the remainder of analyses in this report source data obtained through a data request to the IDOE. As such, numbers and percentages reported within may not exactly match numbers or percentages reported in the DOE/DCS report, due to differing methodology.

Foster students were slightly more likely to be male (53 percent) than the overall population of students (51 percent). Nearly nine in ten (88 percent) of foster students received free or reduced lunch, compared to 47 percent of all students. Foster students are categorically eligible for free meal benefits, regardless of household income.[21][22] Only two percent of foster students were English Language Learners, compared to six percent statewide.

The rate of foster students in special education was twice as high as that of the overall student population; nearly one-third of foster students were in special education (32 percent) in AY2019, compared to just 16 percent of all students.

Figure 4: Demographics by Other Student Characteristics
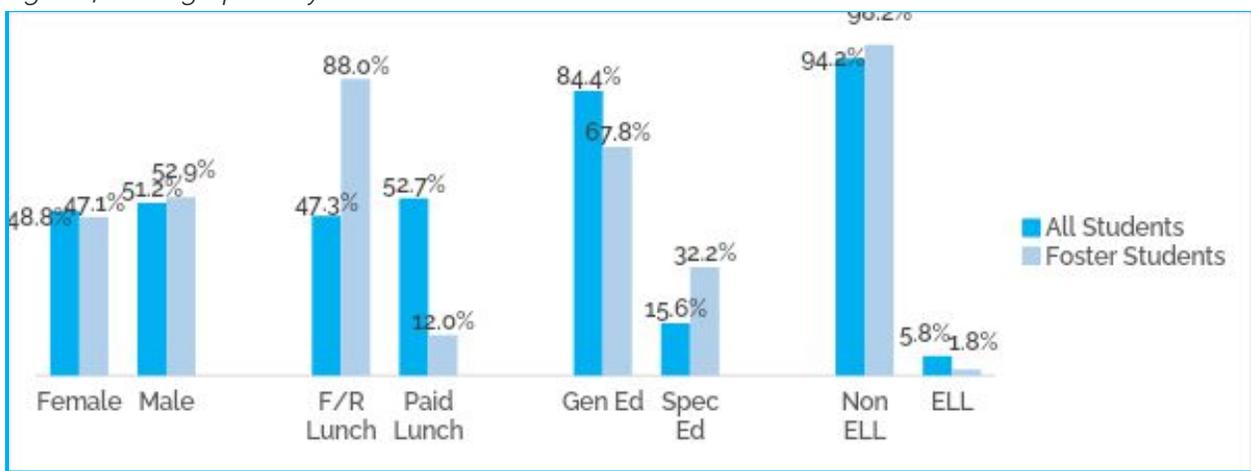
District- and County-Level Enrollment[23]

Close to 16,100 foster students were enrolled in public school corporations - traditional public, charter public, turnaround, university, and state-run - in AY2019. Foster student enrollment in these schools was relatively concentrated, compared to overall public enrollment. Half of foster student enrollment in public schools was represented by 40 corporations across the state (about 10 percent of all public school corporations).

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[21] Indiana Department of Education. https://www.doe.in.gov/news/indiana-department-education-announces-income-eligibility-guidelines-free-and-reduced-price-0#:~:text=Foster%20children%20are%20eligible%20for,for%20help%20with%20the%20application.

[22] Because foster students are categorically eligible for free lunch, the 12 percent of foster students not flagged as receiving free or reduced lunch may be a timing issue, as free/reduced lunch status from DOE reporting is based on October 1 while DCS reporting on foster status is year-round.

[23] All district/school-level analysis in this report excludes nonpublic schools, because foster data was not available at the district or school-level for nonpublic schools. County-level analyses are based on the county in which the school district or charter school is physically located. County-level totals exclude university schools, virtual charters, and state-run schools that may be physically located in these counties, because these typically serve students statewide. While other traditional public and charter schools may serve students outside of their counties of physical location, it is more likely that the majority of students served reside in that county.

Comparatively, these districts made up only 37 percent of total public enrollment. The ten districts with the largest numbers of foster students represented about one-quarter of total public foster student enrollment but only about 16 percent of overall public enrollment.

Table 1: Foster Student and Total Enrollment: Top Ten Sch. Corps. by Number of Foster Students

School Corp.	% of Total Foster Students	% of All Public Students
Indianapolis Public Schools	5.0 (812)	2.5 (26,410)
Fort Wayne Community Schools	4.1 (658)	2.8 (29,404)
Evansville-Vanderburgh Sch. Corp.	3.9 (624)	2.1 (22,601)
Vigo County Sch. Corp.	2.0 (324)	1.4 (14,722)
Muncie Community Schools	2.0 (317)	0.5 (5,264)
MSD Wayne Township	1.8 (287)	1.6 (16,484)
South Bend Com. Sch. Corp.	1.8 (284)	1.6 (17,225)
MSD Warren Township	1.6 (264)	1.2 (12,188)
Anderson Com. Sch. Corp.	1.5 (248)	0.7 (6,874)
MSD Lawrence Township	1.3 (216)	1.5 (16,035)

Ten primarily urban[24] counties represented nearly half (49 percent) of foster student public enrollment, while representing only 44 percent of overall public enrollment. Marion County schools in particular had an overrepresentation of foster students as compared to the percentage of total students – 18 percent of public foster student enrollment was in Marion County schools, compared to 14.5 percent of overall public enrollment.

Table 2: Foster Student and Total Enrollment: Top Ten Counties by Number of Foster Students

County	% of Total Foster Students	% of All Public Students
Marion	18.0 (2,903)	14.3 (151,235)
Lake	6.4 (1,031)	7.6 (80,491)
Allen	5.9 (950)	5.2 (55,112)
Vanderburgh	3.9 (627)	2.2 (23,191)
St. Joseph	3.3 (537)	3.7 (38,902)
Delaware	2.8 (457)	1.4 (14,869)
Madison	2.5 (403)	1.8 (18,636)
Vigo	2.0 (324)	1.4 (14,722)
Elkhart	1.9 (305)	3.4 (36,244)
Johnson	1.8 (293)	2.6 (27,225)

Going beyond sheer numbers, some school corporations had higher ratios of foster students (foster students as a percentage of the school's overall enrollment). While some with the highest ratios of foster students enrolled relatively small numbers of foster students, their overall enrollments also were low. About 19 percent of school corporations (81) had foster student ratios of three percent or higher, and three percent (14) had ratios of five percent or higher. Of the 14 with ratios five percent or higher, nine were charter schools; three were traditional public; and one each was a turnaround or state-run school.

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[24] Each county has a Rural-Urban Continuum Code rating of 1, 2, or 3 on a scale of 1 (most urban) to 9 (most rural). Counties rated 1-3 are located in metro areas of sizes ranging from less than 250K to more than 1M.

Table 3: Foster Student Ratio: Sch. Corps. with Ratios 5 Percent or Higher

School Corp.	Number of Foster Students	Number of Total Students	Ratio of Foster Students
Damar Charter Academy	92	194	47.4%
Marion Academy	40	172	23.3%
Hope Academy	5	25	20.0%
IN Dept. of Correction (statewide)	48	382	12.6%
MSD Wabash County Schools	135	2,116	6.4%
Muncie Community Schools	317	5,264	6.0%
pilotED schools	5	85	5.9%
Urban ACT Academy	20	345	5.8%
Scott County Sch. Dist. 1	69	1,222	5.6%
Indpls. Metropolitan High School	13	240	5.4%
Allegiant Preparatory Academy	2	37	5.4%
Dr. Robert H. Faulkner Academy	5	93	5.4%
Vanguard Collegiate of Indy	3	57	5.3%
CSUSA Howe	29	577	5.0%

While total numbers of foster students tended to be concentrated in more urban counties, rural counties tended to have higher ratios of foster students. Sixteen counties had foster student enrollment ratios of 2.5 percent or more, and seven of these were more highly rural[25], including Crawford, Fayette, Jay, Jennings, Orange, Perry, and Wabash. In fact, rural counties typically had higher ratios of foster students enrolled than urban counties – half of the rural counties had foster student enrollment ratios of two percent or more, compared to only one-quarter of urban counties.

Table 4: Counties with Foster Student Enrollment Ratios of 2.5 Percent or More

County	Number of Foster Students	Number of Total Students	Ratio of Foster Students
Scott	164	3,856	4.3%
Wabash	206	5,326	3.9%
Crawford	56	1,511	3.7%
Orange	104	3,078	3.4%
Delaware	457	14,869	3.1%
Fayette	106	3,498	3.0%
Knox	155	5,323	2.9%
Posey	95	3,444	2.8%
Sullivan	87	3,154	2.8%
Owen	68	2,503	2.7%
Vanderburgh	627	23,191	2.7%
Jennings	113	4,187	2.7%
Perry	78	2,971	2.6%
Grant	237	9,192	2.6%
Brown	48	1,904	2.5%
Jay	79	3,167	2.5%

[25] Rural-Urban Continuum Code ratings of 6-8 on a scale of 1 (most urban) to 9 (most rural). Counties rated 6-8 are in non-metro areas with populations of 2,500-19,999 (adjacent or non-adjacent to a metro area) or populations of less than 2,500.

Foster Student School Performance and Outcomes

Students experiencing foster care have challenges that may create additional barriers to academic success. However, school success is a strong contributor to later positive outcomes for children who have experienced foster care. Nationally, youth who have experienced foster care tend to have higher grade retention rates and rates of disciplinary activities (such as suspension/expulsion), as well as higher rates of school dropout and substantially lower high school graduation and college-going rates.[26] Indiana appears to mirror these trends, as described in this section of the report.

Grade Retention Rates

Overall, about three percent of foster students in grades K-11 were retained in grade from AY2019 to AY2020, a rate three times higher than that of all students (one percent).

At least 2.5 percent of foster students were held back across all subgroups (racial/ethnic, gender, socioeconomic status[27], and programmatic), except the clustered Asian/Am. Indian or Native Am./Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander racial/ethnic subgroup. Comparatively, no subgroup of the overall student population had a grade retention rate of over two percent, with the exception of special education (2.01 percent).

Among racial/ethnic subcategories, White foster students were retained at rates more than three times higher than all White students, and Hispanic/Latinx foster students were retained at rates more than 2.5 times higher than all Hispanic students.

*Figure 5: Retention Rates (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)*

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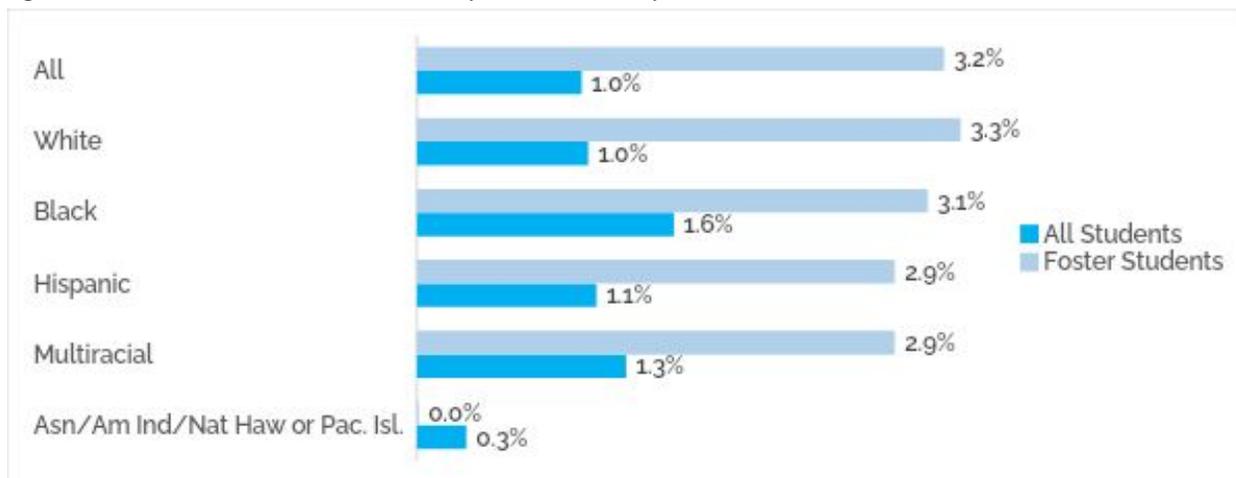
[26] National Foster Youth Institute (2020). https://www.nfyi.org/issues/education/; Pecora, P.J. (2012).

[27] Note that 12 percent of students identified as in the foster system during AY2019 were flagged as paid lunch (not free or reduced lunch). However, because foster students are categorically eligible for free lunch, the paid lunch status is more likely to be a timing issue around flagged eligibility. As such, subgroups of foster students flagged as paid lunch and all students flagged as paid lunch were determined not to be comparable, and only students receiving free or reduced lunch are compared to within subgroup peers.

Foster students in special education had the highest retention rates of all other subgroups (3.8 percent compared to 2.0 percent for all special education students). Female foster students and those in general education were retained at rates more than three times higher than within-subgroup peers.
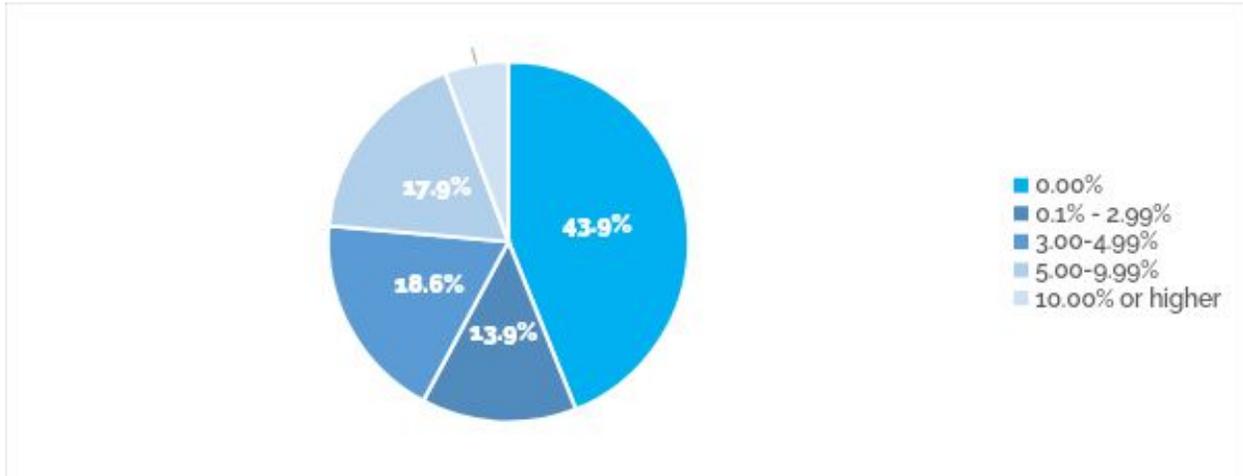
Figure 6: Retention Rates by Selected Student Characteristics
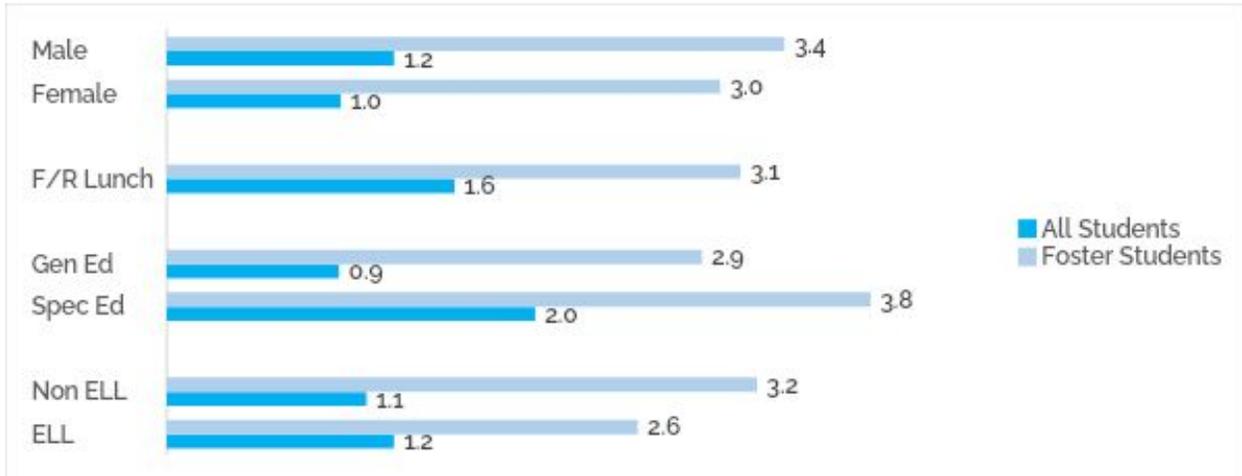
Despite comparatively high levels of overall grade retention, at the district level, of the school corporations (280) that had at least 10 foster students enrolled in AY2019 and had retention rates reported, slightly under half (44 percent) retained zero foster students from AY2019 to AY2020. However, about 24 percent retained five percent or more of their foster students, and six percent retained ten percent or more. The 24 percent of school corporations with retention rates of five percent or more (66) represented 225 total retained foster students, over half of all public foster students retained. Of those corporations, 62 were traditional public corporations (about 21 percent of the total number of traditional public corporations with foster retention cohorts); 21 were charter schools (about 27 percent of charters); and one was a turnaround school (25 percent of turnaround schools). Only 16 of the 84 school corporations with foster retention rates of five percent or more had retention rates of five percent or more for all students as well.

Figure 7: Foster Student Retention Rates by Percentage of Sch. Corps.

Pie chart:
- 43.9% — 0.00%
- 13.9% — 0.1% - 2.99%
- 18.6% — 3.00-4.99%
- 17.9% — 5.00-9.99%
- (remaining) — 10.00% or higher

Legend:
- 0.00%
- 0.1% - 2.99%
- 3.00-4.99%
- 5.00-9.99%
- 10.00% or higher

Discipline

Students in foster care were suspended and expelled at higher rates than all students, and the rates were particularly high among certain subgroups. In AY2019, foster students were suspended at a rate more than 2.5 times higher than all students – over 23 percent of foster students, compared to just nine percent of all students.[28]

More than one-third (35 percent) of Black or African American foster students were suspended, compared to 21 percent of all Black or African American students and just seven percent of all White students. In other words, Black or African American foster students were suspended at a rate more than 1.5 times higher than all Black or African American students and nearly 5.5 times higher than all White students. All foster student racial/ethnic subgroups had suspension rates of over 20 percent, with the exception of the clustered race/ethnicity category of Asian/American Indian or Native American/Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

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[28] Suspension rates are based on taking unduplicated count of suspensions / total enrollment. However, because enrollment is based on an October 1 date and suspension counts represent the entire academic year, it is possible that suspension rates are over or underrepresented.
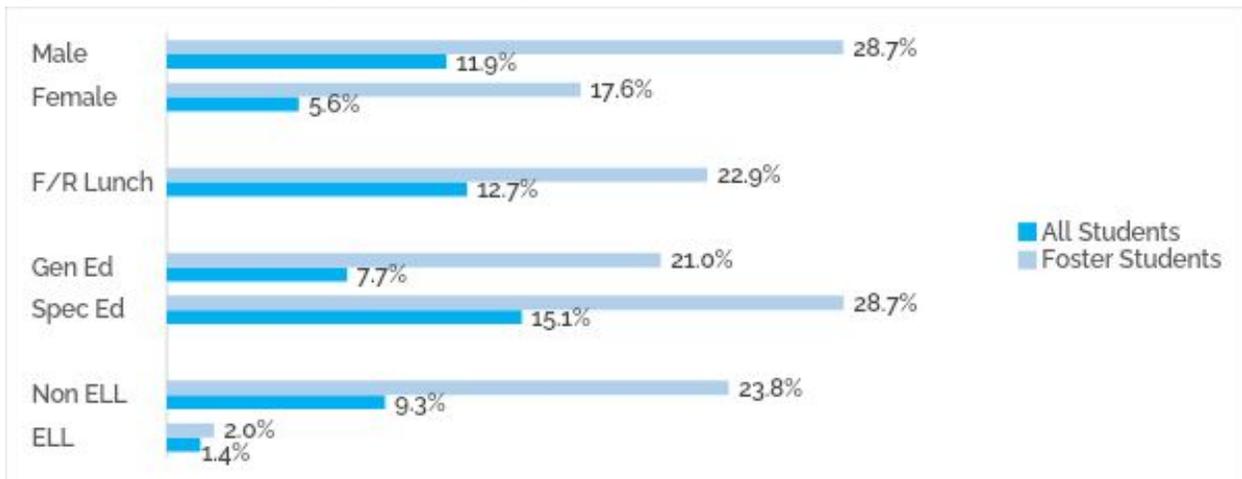
Figure 8: Foster Student Suspension Rates (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)
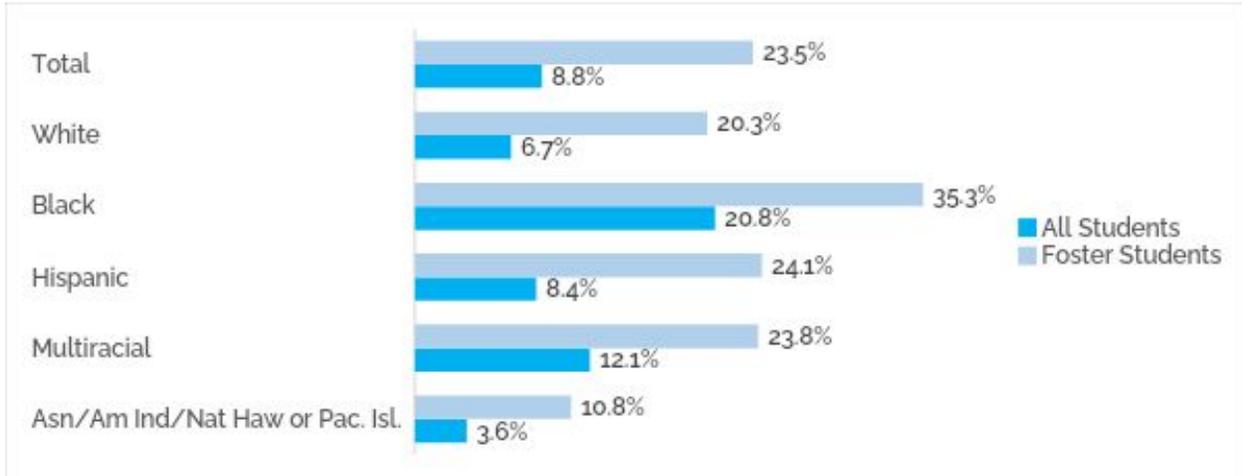
Male foster students and those in special education had the highest suspension rates within other student characteristics. Nearly three in ten foster students in special education and male foster students (29 percent each) were suspended, compared to 15 percent of all students in special education and just 12 percent of all male students. This means that foster students in special education were nearly twice as likely to be suspended as their peers in special education, and male foster students were nearly 2.5 times more likely to be suspended than their peers.

Figure 9: Foster Student Suspension Rates by Selected Student Characteristics

At the district level, for school corporations that enrolled at least 10 foster students in AY2019 (285), 88 percent had suspension rates for foster students that exceeded those of all students in the district. Four in 10 corporations (41 percent) had suspension rates of 25 percent or more for foster students, and 17 corporations had rates of 50 percent or more.

Figure 10: Foster Student Suspension Rates by Percentage of Sch. Corps.
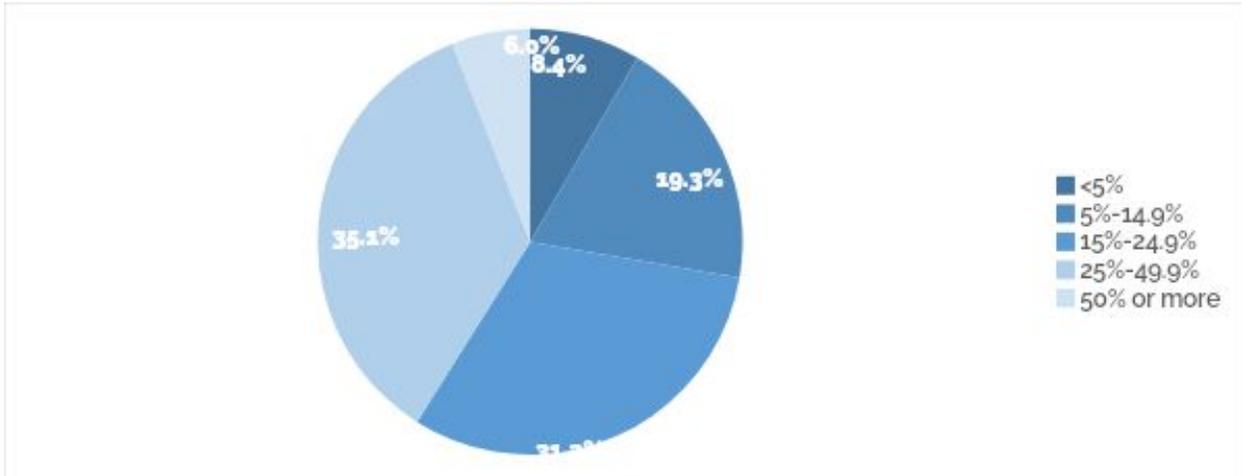
Just over one percent of foster students were expelled in AY2019. While that is a relatively low ratio, it is more than four times higher the expulsion rate for all students (0.25 percent). Black and Multiracial foster students had the highest rates of expulsion (expelled at rates seven to eight times, respectively, higher than all White students). The largest within-subgroup gaps were for White foster students (expelled at rates about five times higher than all White students). However, other subgroups also had higher rates compared to all students – Multiracial foster students had expulsion rates nearly four times higher than all Multiracial students, and Hispanic/Latinx and Black or African American students had expulsion rates about three times higher than all students in their respective subgroups.

Figure 11: Foster Student Expulsion Rates (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)
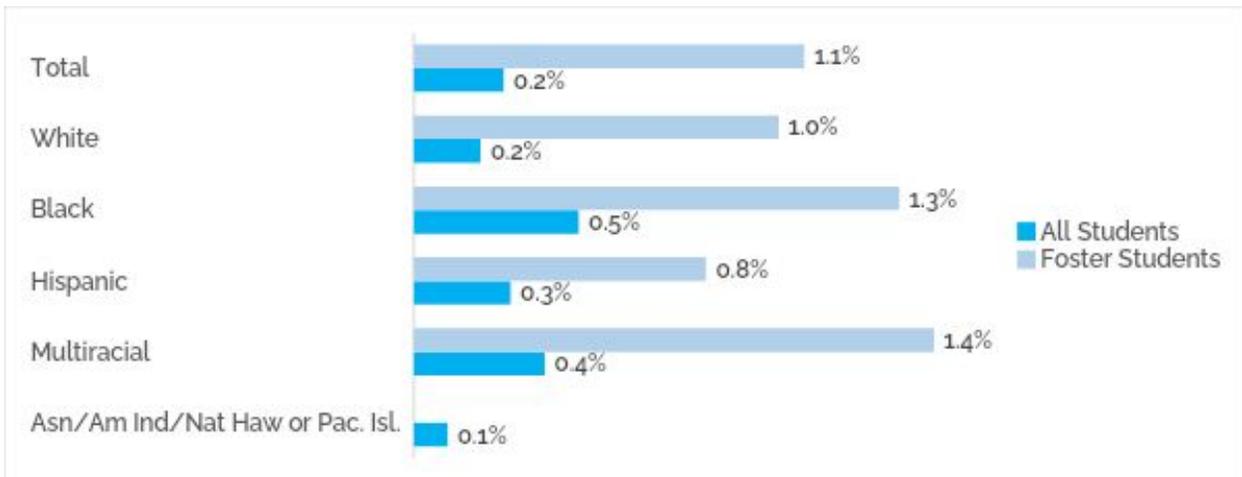
Within other student subcategories, the expulsion rate for foster students in general education was 1.3 percent, nearly six times higher than the 0.2 percent rate for all general education students. Although the expulsion rate for female foster students was below one percent (0.8 percent), the rate still was 5.5 times higher than all female students.

Figure 12: Foster Student Expulsion Rates by Selected Student Characteristics
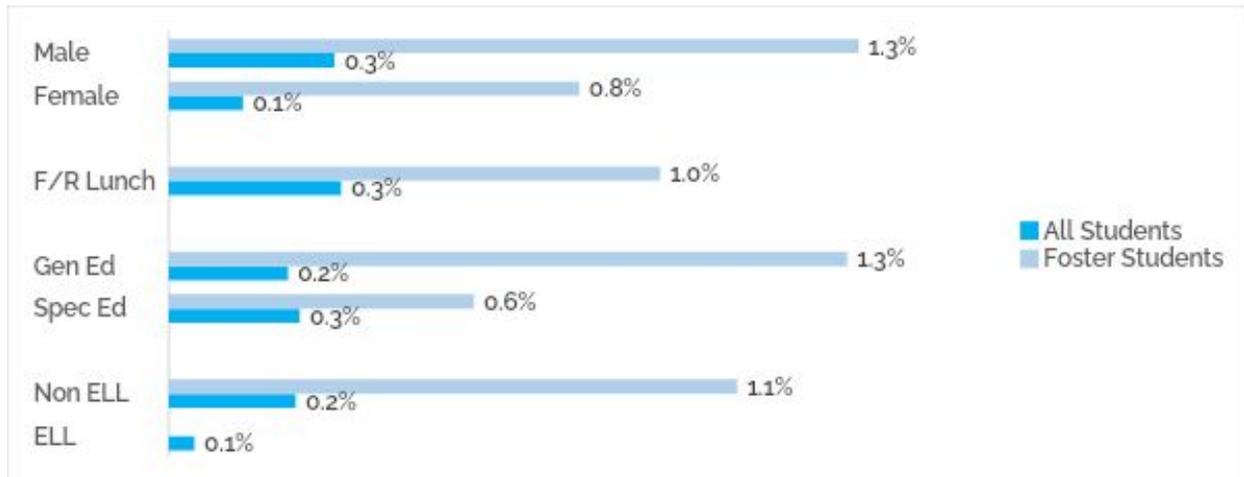
At the district level, of the 285 corporations enrolling at least 10 foster students in AY2019, just over 70 percent expelled zero foster students; however, 18 percent had expulsion rates of 2.5 percent or more for foster students, and 12 percent expelled four percent or more, In comparison, only one of the 285 school corporations had an expulsion rate higher than two percent for all students.

Figure 13: Foster Student Expulsion Rates by Percentage of Sch. Corps.
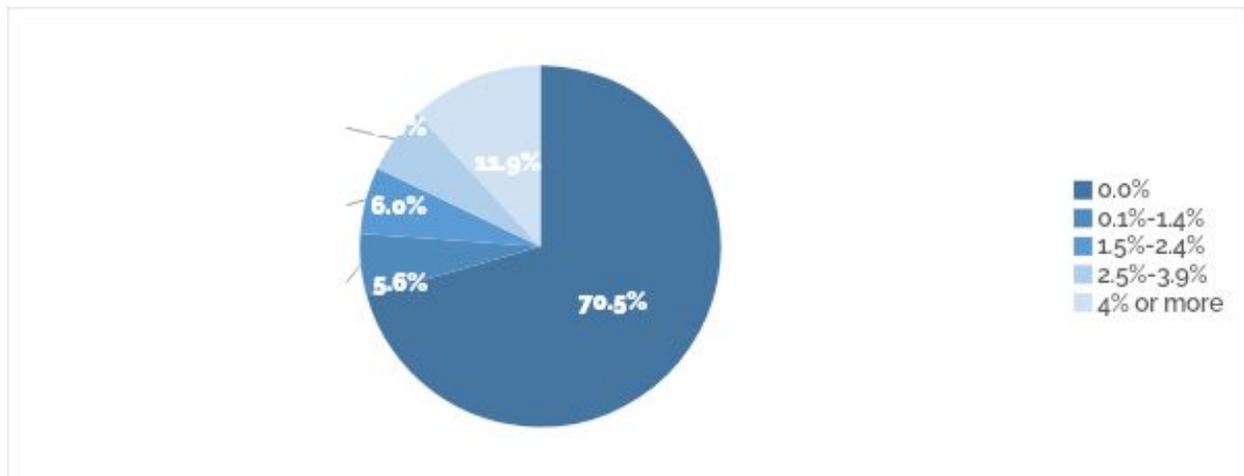
Academic Proficiency

In AY2019, academic proficiency was measured by three statewide assessments: ILEARN, administered to students in grades 3-8; ISTEP+, administered to students in grade 10; and IREAD-3, administered to students in grade 3. In all tested grades and subjects, Indiana's foster students passed all three of these assessments at rates far lower than all students; in most cases, passing rates for foster students were at least two or more times lower than all

students. For ISTEP+ Grade 10 Math, foster students passed at a rate five times lower than all students, the largest gap across assessments.

Figure 14: Assessment Passing Rates (Overall and Foster Students).
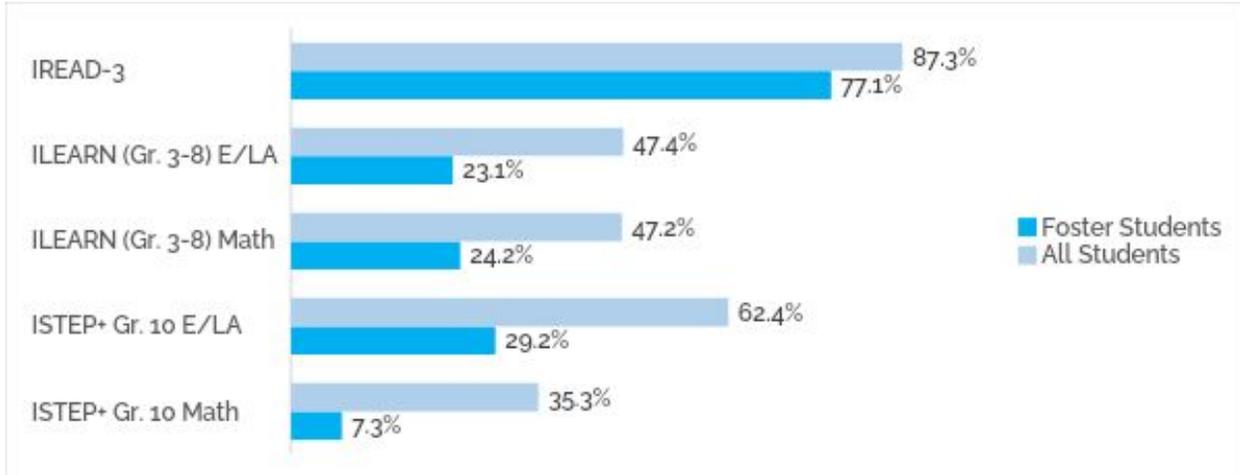
IREAD-3

Foster students fared better on the IREAD-3 third grade reading assessment than other assessments, although they still trailed passing rates of all students. Just over three-quarters of foster students passed IREAD-3, compared to 87 percent of all students, a gap of ten percentage points. Only 61 percent of Black or African American foster students passed the assessment, compared to 74 percent of all Black or African American students, a gap of 14 percentage points and 31 percentage points compared to all White students.

Figure 15: IREAD-3 Passing Rates (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)[29]

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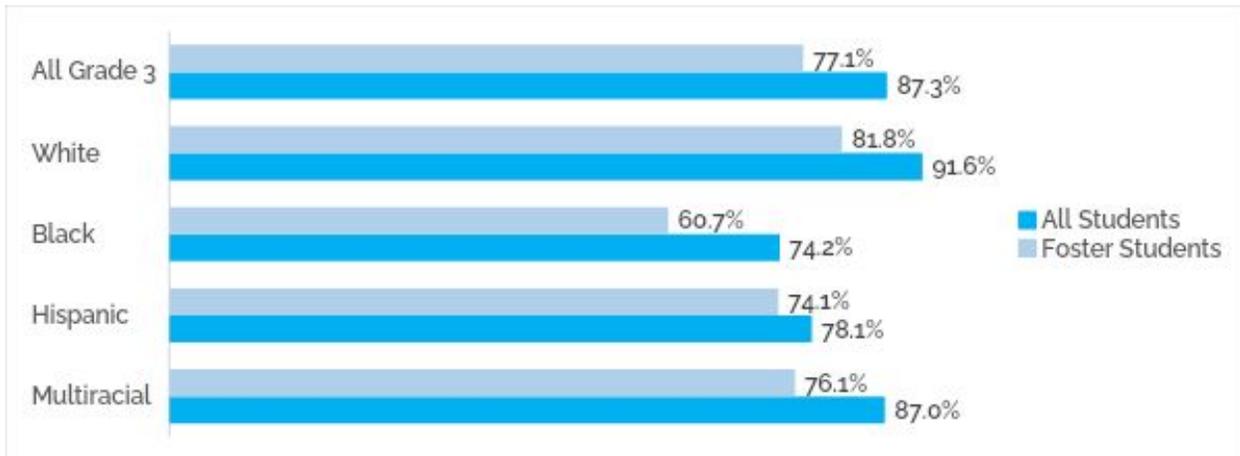
[29] Students in the clustered race group (Asian/Am. Ind. or Nat. Am./Nat. Haw. or Pac. Isl.) are excluded from the analysis from privacy reasons, as fewer than 10 foster students were tested.

Foster students who were ELL actually outperformed all ELL students on IREAD-3 (83 percent of foster students passing compared to 73 percent of all ELL students). Foster students in special education had the lowest passing rate (50 percent). Male foster students and students who were not ELL had the largest percentage point gaps with peers (12 percentage points for each).

Figure 16: IREAD-3 Passing Rates by Selected Student Characteristics
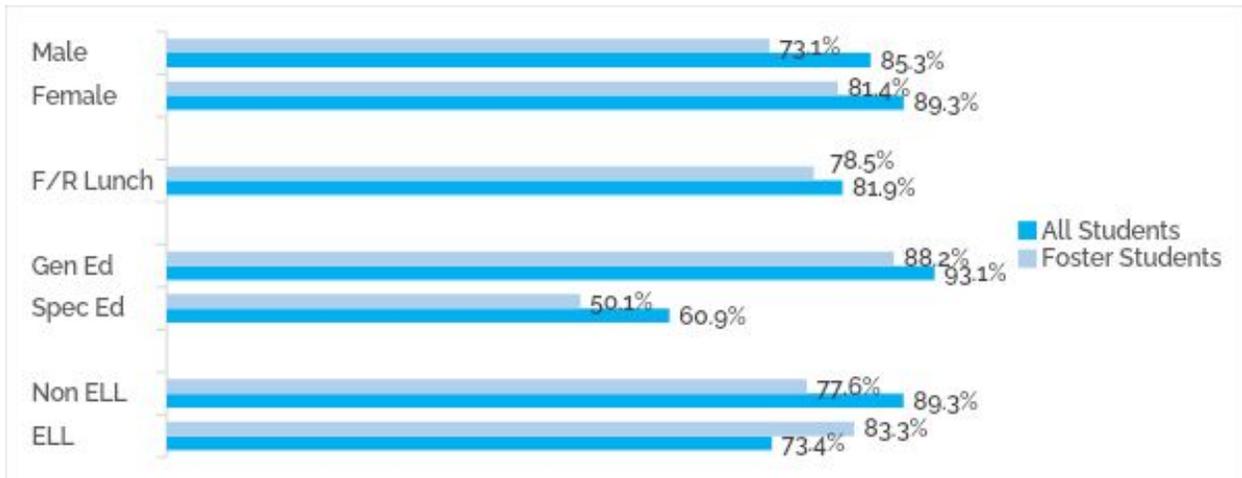
Of the 26 school corporations that tested 10 or more foster students on the IREAD-3. the highest passing rate was 100 percent, and the lowest was 36 percent (this was the only district with less than half of its tested foster students passing). The largest passing rate gap was 32 percent (the district with 36 percent of foster students passing had 68.5 percent of all students passing). Foster students at six of the 26 school corporations outperformed all students, and the passing rate gap was less than two percentage points at three others.

*Figure 17: IREAD-3 Passing Rates by Percentage of School Corps. Testing 10+ Foster Students*
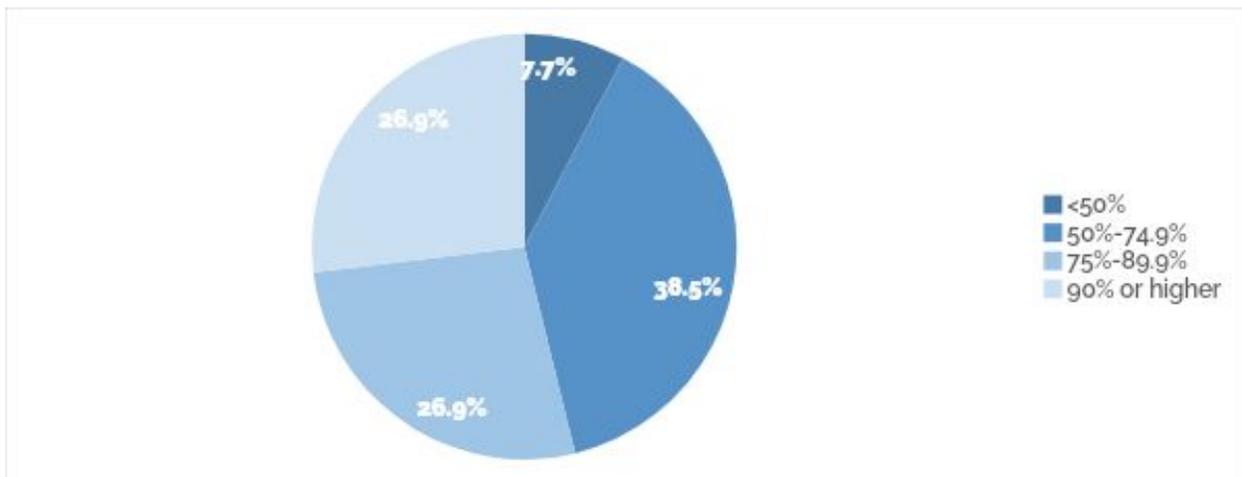
ILEARN Grades 3-8 English/Language Arts

Less than one-quarter of all tested foster students passed the ILEARN E/LA assessment in AY2019, a passing rate more than twice as low as that of all students. Foster students in Grade 3 fared the best, with a passing rate of 25 percent; however, all third graders in Indiana had a passing rate nearly 21 percentage points higher. In fact, while passing rates for all students generally increased as grade levels increased, passing rates for foster students did the opposite, going from a 25 percent passing rate in Grade 3 to a 20 percent passing rate in Grade 7, with a slight uptick to 22 percent in Grade 8. As such, gaps in passing rates between foster students and their peers grew from about 21 percentage points in Grade 3 to 28 percentage points in Grade 8.

Figure 18: ILEARN E/LA Passing Rates by Grade
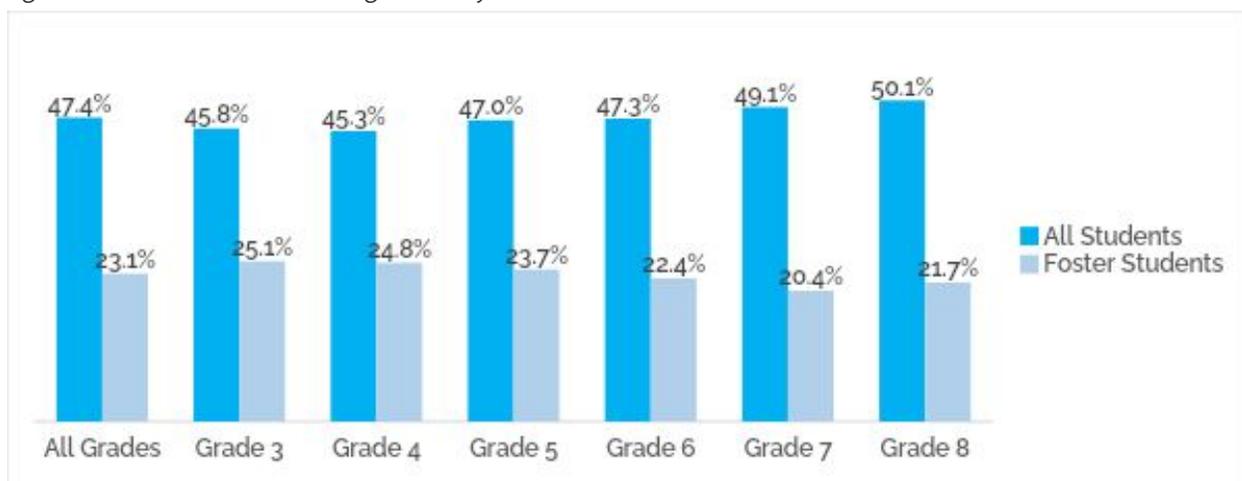
When examining subgroups, gaps in passing rates are even more profound. The largest gaps within racial/ethnic categories were for Black or African American students and students in the clustered Asian/Am. Ind. or Native Am./Native Hawaiian or Pac. Isl. group, although gaps existed within every racial/ethnic subgroup. Only 11 percent of Black or African American foster students passed ILEARN E/LA, compared to 24 percent of all Black or African American students and 54 percent of all White students. Just 11.5 percent of students within the clustered Asian/Am. Ind. or Native Am./Native Hawaiian or Pac. Isl. group passed E/LA, compared to 61 percent of all students in this group (with passing rates for all students in racial/ethnic groups included in the cluster ranging from 41 percent to 63 percent, compared to zero percent to 23.5 percent for foster students).

Figure 19: ILEARN E/LA Passing Rates by Race/Ethnicity
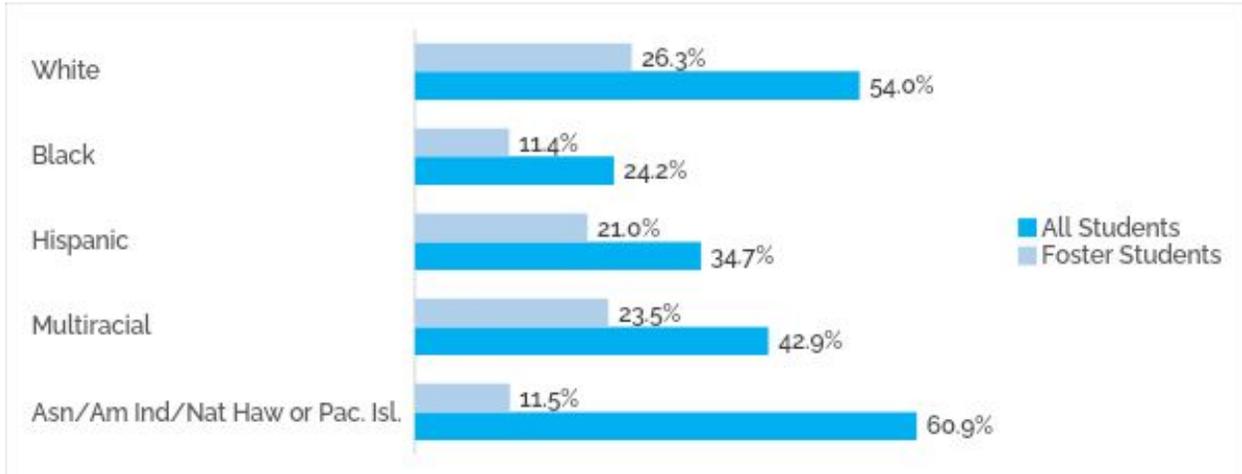
Passing rates for other subgroups also were low for foster students. Foster students who were English Language Learners and those in special education had the lowest passing rates, with just three and seven percent passing, respectively. Only 19 percent of male foster students passed ILEARN E/LA, compared to 43 percent of all male students (a gap of 23 percentage points). While more female foster students passed ILEARN E/LA (27 percent), 52 percent of all female students passed, representing a gap of 25 percentage points. The largest percentage point gap was for foster students who were not English language learners (a passing rate of 24 percent compared to 50 percent for all students, a gap of 26 percentage points and a passing rate about five times lower).

*Figure 20: ILEARN E/LA Passing Rates by Selected Student Characteristics*
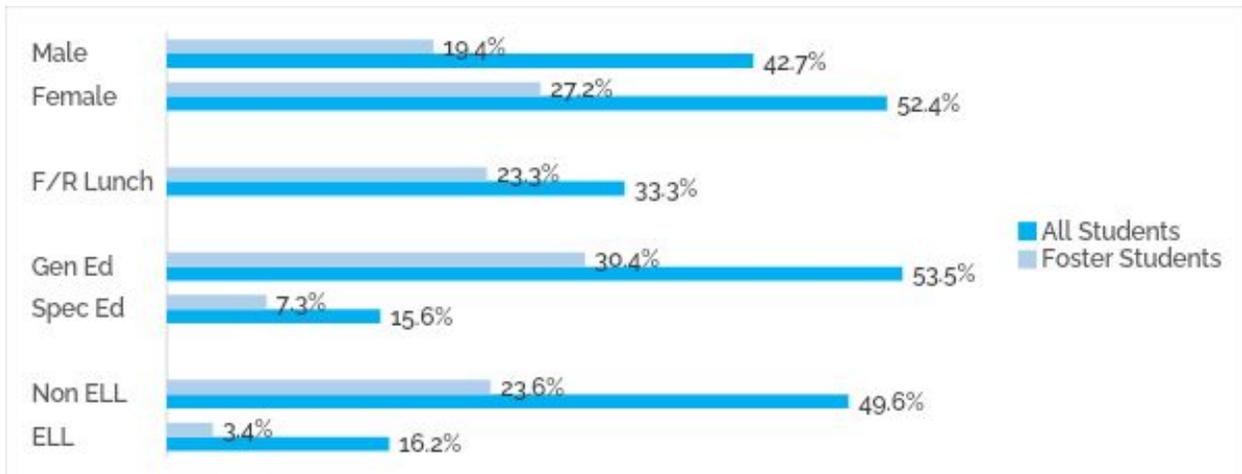
For school corporations that tested at least 10 foster students (176 total), passing rates ranged from a low of zero percent to a high of 64 percent. The highest gap in passing rates was 56 percentage points at one district (19 percent of foster students passing E/LA

compared to 75 percent of all students). There were 13 corporations where foster students outperformed all students, with E/LA passing rates ranging from nine percent (compared to just under nine percent for all students) to 58 percent (compared to 45 percent for all students). In just under half (48 percent) of school corporations that tested at least 10 foster students, foster students ILEARN E/LA pass rates were less than 25 percent. Comparatively, only six percent of these school corporations had passing rates of less than 25 percent for all students.

Figure 21: ILEARN E/LA Passing Rates by Percentage of School Corps. Testing 10+ Foster Students
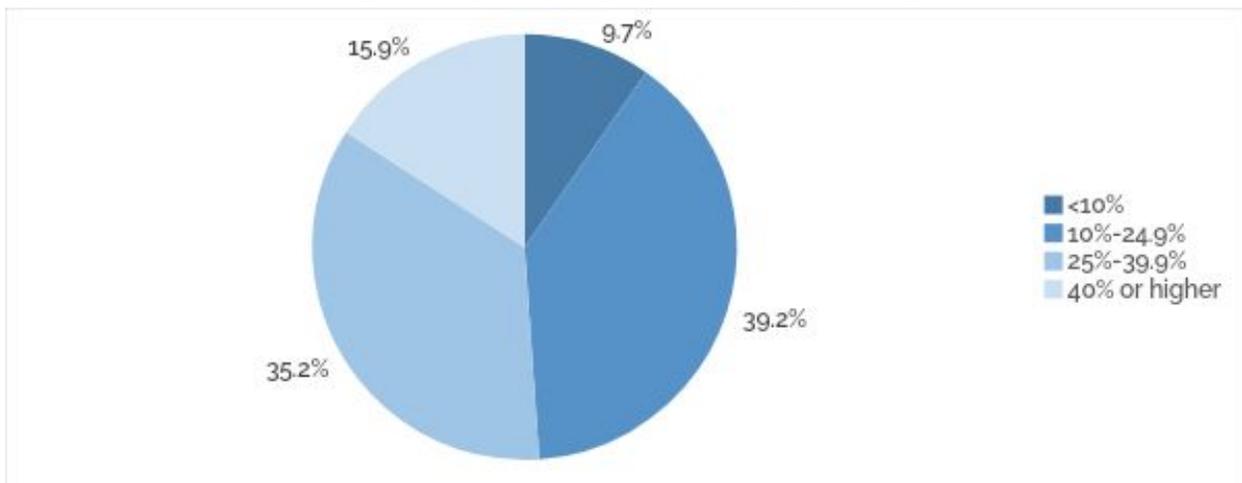

ILEARN Grades 3-8 Math

Slightly more foster students passed the Math portion of ILEARN (24 percent) than E/LA (23 percent), although the gap between foster students and all students still was 23 percentage points. As with E/LA, foster students in Grade 3 had the highest passing rates (39 percent) and the smallest gap with all students (19 percentage points). However, passing rates got progressively worse as grade levels increased, culminating with a low of 12 percent of foster students in Grade 8 passing Math, compared to 37 percent of all students (a gap of 25 percentage points, or more than three times lower). Although 8th grade foster students had the lowest passing rate, the largest grade level gap was in Grade 7, with 15 percent of foster students passing, compared to 41 percent of all students (a gap of 27 percentage points, over three times lower).

Figure 22: ILEARN Math Passing Rates by Grade
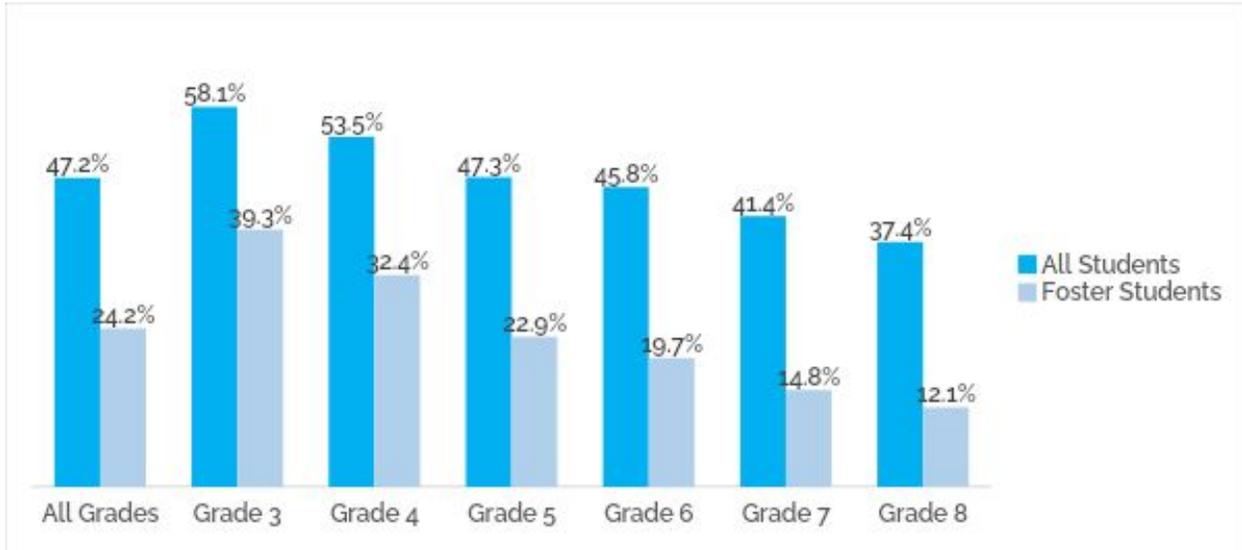
Students within the clustered race group (Asian/Am. Ind. or Native Am./Native Hawaiian or Pac. Isl.) had the largest gap in passing percentage (21 percent of foster students passing Math compared to 65 percent of all students within this group, a massive gap of 44 percentage points and a rate more than three times lower). Pass rates for foster students within the clustered racial/ethnic group ranged from 17 percent to 29 percent, compared to 42 percent to 67 percent for all students within the clustered group. Just 13 percent of Black or African American foster students passed ILEARN Math. This represented a nine percentage point gap compared to all Black or African American students (more than 1.5 times lower), and a 42 percentage point gap from the passing rate of all White students (more than four times lower).

Figure 23: ILEARN Math Passing Rates by Race/Ethnicity
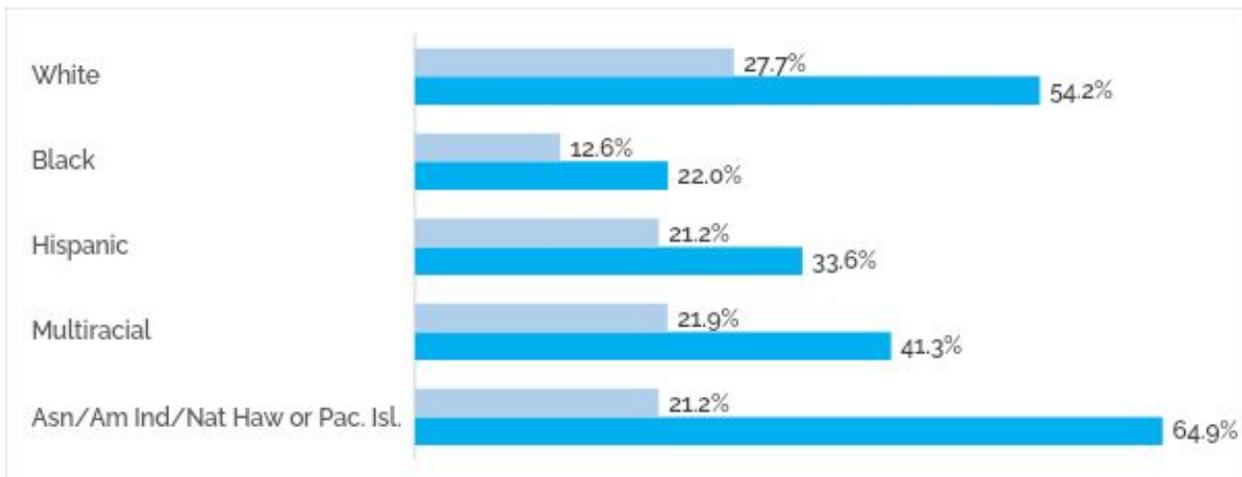
Only 10 percent of foster students in special education passed the Math portion of ILEARN, compared to 18 percent of all students in special education. Male foster students and foster students who were not English Language Learners had relatively large gaps in pass rates compared to their peers within subgroup (24 percentage points, nearly two times lower).

Figure 24: ILEARN Math Passing Rates by Selected Student Characteristics
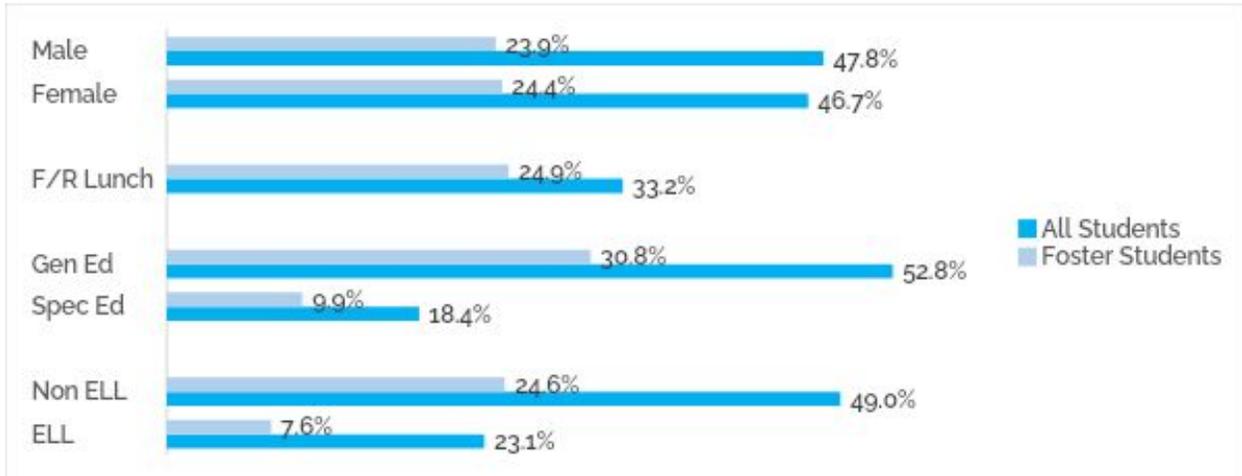
Of the school corporations that tested at least 10 foster students in Math (176), 41 percent had passing rates less than 25 percent for foster students, while only seven percent of these districts had passing rates of less than 25 percent for all students. Math passing rates for foster students ranged from zero percent (four school corporations) to 61.5 percent. The largest gap was 48 percent at one school corporation (17 percent of foster students passing Math compared to 65 percent of all students). There were 14 school corporations where foster students outperformed all students, with passing rates ranging from eight percent for foster students (compared to 4.5 percent for all students) to 61.5 percent for foster students compared to 50 percent for all students. Four of these school corporations also saw foster students outperform all students in E/LA.
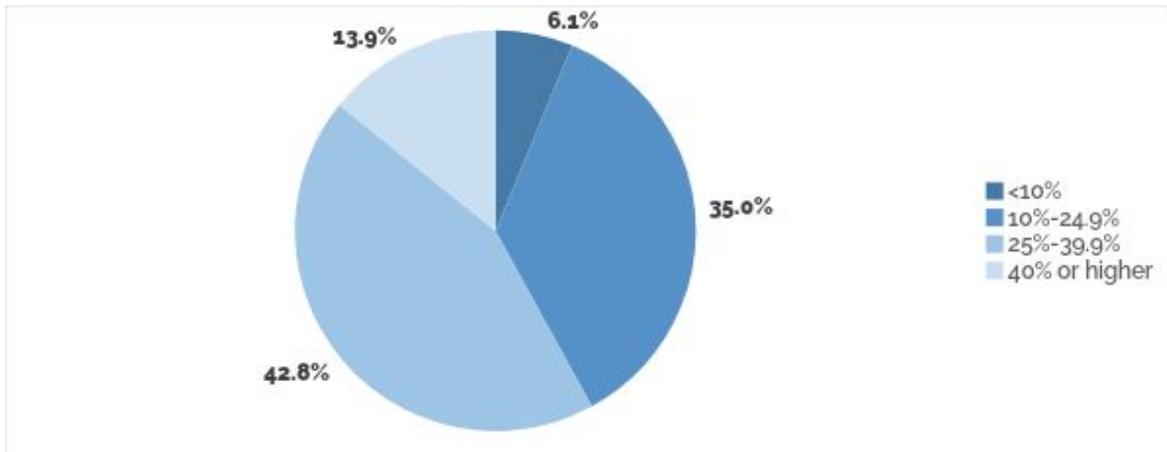
ISTEP+ Grade 10 English/Language Arts (E/LA)

Less than 30 percent of foster students passed the Grade 10 E/LA exam, compared to 62 percent of all students, a gap of 33 percentage points, or more than two times lower. Black or African American foster students had the lowest passing rates (20 percent), a gap of 17 percentage points compared with all Black or African American students (more than 1.5 times lower) and an astounding 48 percentage point gap with all White students (more than three times lower). White foster students had the largest passing gap within subgroups, 37 percentage points lower than all White students (more than two times lower).

Figure 26: ISTEP+ Grade 10 E/LA Passing Rates (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)
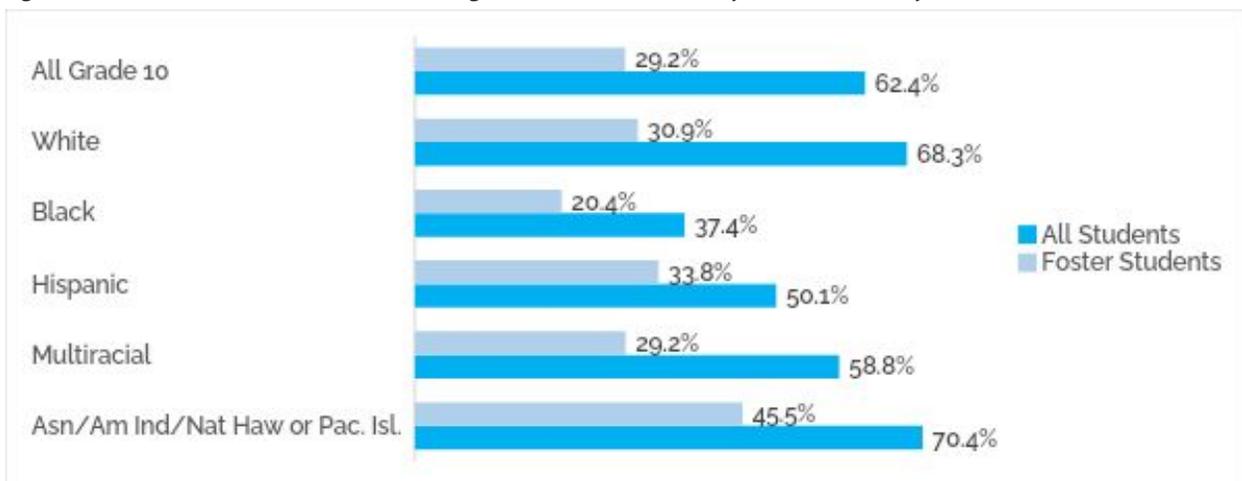

Only five percent of foster students who were English Language Learners passed ISTEP+ E/LA, compared to 11 percent of all ELL students (a rate two times lower). Both female and male foster students had large gaps in passing compared to their peers – 33 percentage points for male foster students (23 percent passing compared to 56 percent of all male

students, about 2.5 times lower) and 34 percentage points for female students (35 percent passing compared to 69 percent of all female students, about two times lower).

Figure 27: ISTEP+ Grade 10 E/LA Passing Rates by Selected Student Characteristics
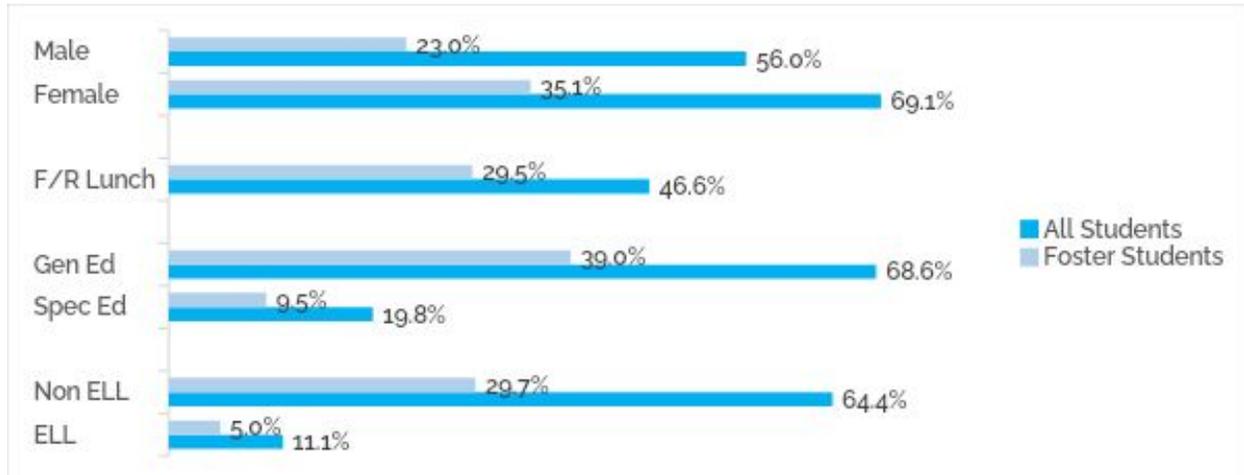
Only 20 school corporations tested 10 or more foster students for ISTEP+ E/LA. For those districts, passing rates for foster students ranged from 0 percent (four school corporations) to 44 percent. The highest passing rate gap was 70 percentage points (zero percent of foster students passing compared to 70 percent of all students). At one school corporation, foster students slightly outperformed all students (44 percent passing compared to 42 percent of all students). 45 percent of school corporations testing 10 or more foster students had passing rates of less than 25 percent, while just one school corporation had a rate of less than 25 percent for all students.

Figure 28: ISTEP+ E/LA Passing Rates by Percentage of School Corps. Testing 10+ Foster Students
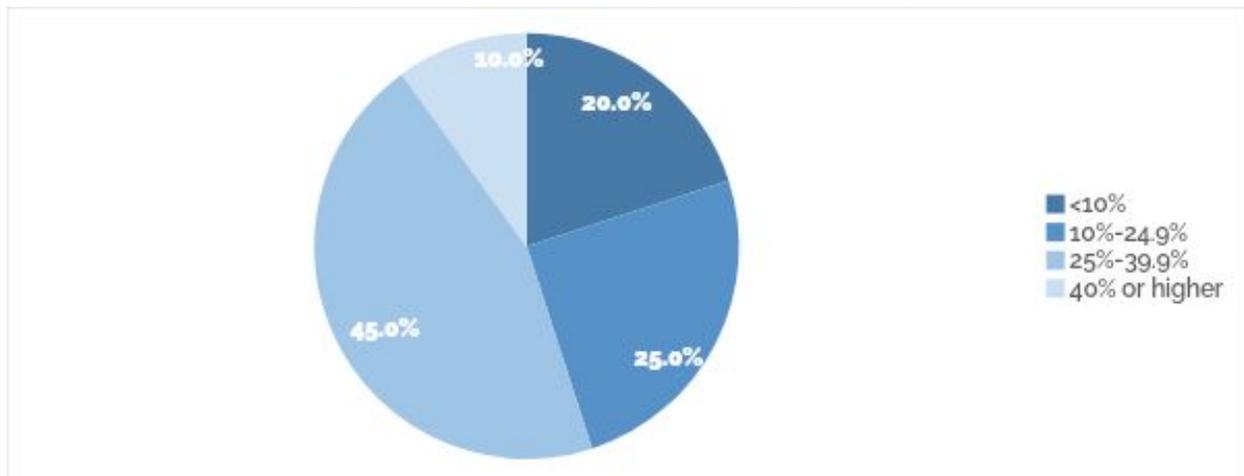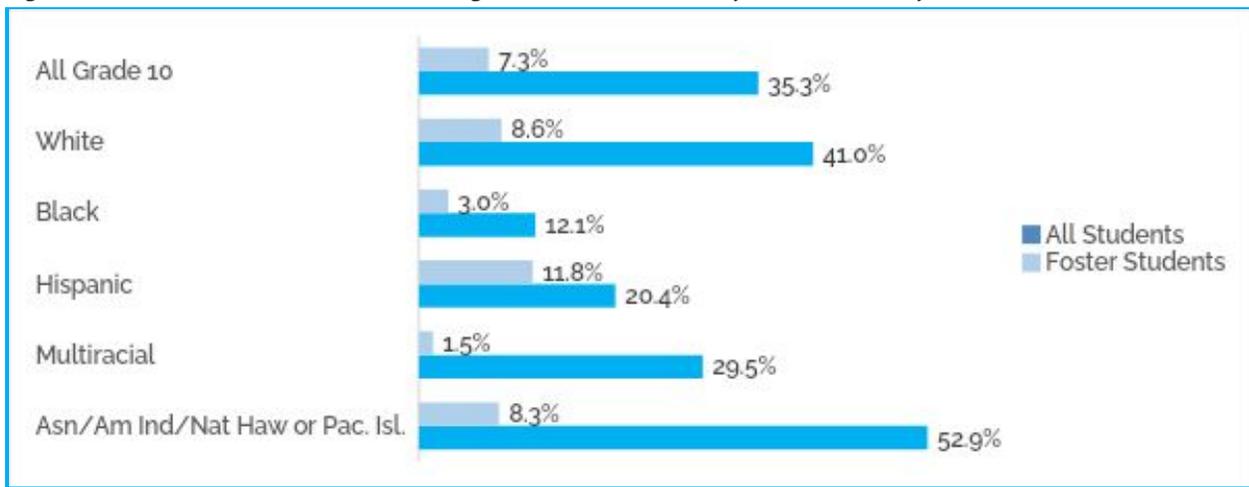
ISTEP+ Grade 10 Math

Math passing rates for foster students were lower than E/LA passing rates – just seven percent of foster students passed Math, compared to 35 percent of all students, for a gap of 28 percentage points, or a rate five times lower. Only 1.5 percent of Multiracial foster students and three percent of Black or African American foster students passed Math, compared to 29.5 percent of all multiracial students and 12 percent of all Black students, as well as 41 percent of all White students. Students within the clustered race group had the largest percentage point passing gap with peers – 45 percentage points, passing rates nearly six times lower than peers in the racial/ethnic groups within the cluster.

Figure 29: ISTEP+ Grade 10 Math Passing Rates (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)

No foster students who were English Language Learners passed ISTEP+ Grade 10 Math, and only one percent of foster students in special education passed. Male foster students and foster students who were not English Language Learners trailed their peers by large margins – 28 percentage points and 29 percentage points, respectively, meaning these students passed at rates about five times lower than peers.

Figure 30: ISTEP+ Grade 10 Math Passing Rates by Selected Student Characteristics
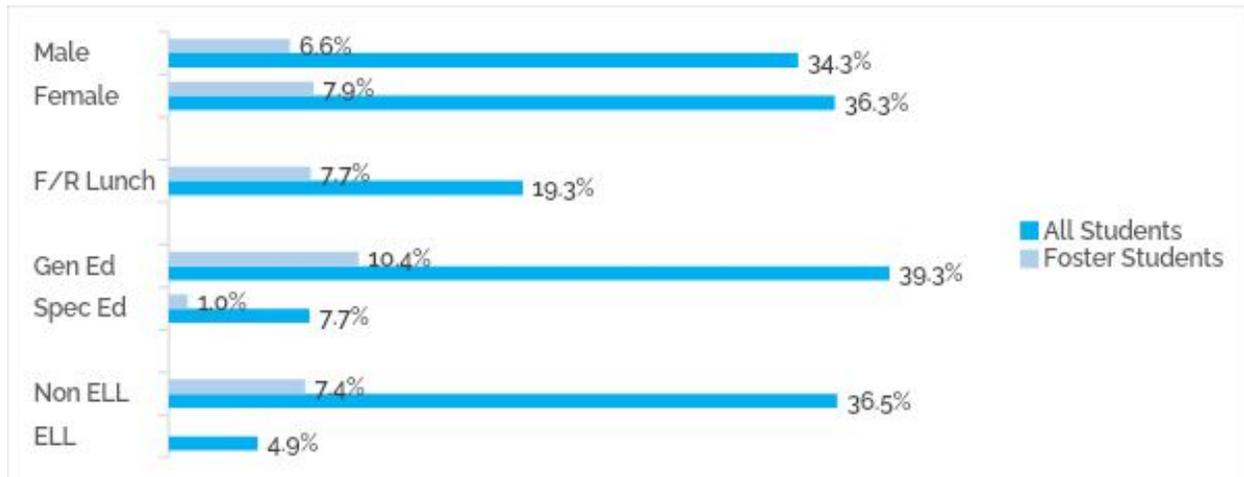
Only 19 school corporations tested at least 10 foster students in Math. Passing rates for foster students were very low for all corporations, with 68 percent (13 of 19) having no foster students pass Math. All had passing rates for foster students at or below 11 percent. Comparatively, only two of these corporations had pass rates of less than 12 percent for all students, and just one had zero percent of all students pass. The largest gap was 56 percentage points (zero percent of foster students passing compared to 56 percent of all students). Foster students did not outperform all students at any of the corporations.

Graduation and Graduates[30]

As shown throughout this report, children in foster care typically experience higher levels of grade retention and discipline, as well as lower levels of academic achievement, as measured by statewide standardized assessments in grades 3-8 and grade 10. These challenges culminate in a far lower likelihood to complete high school, particularly on time (as part of the four-year graduation cohort).

Four-Year Graduation Rate

In AY2019, while the state-reported four-year graduation rate for all students was 87 percent, just over half of children in foster care (55 percent) graduated on time, a difference of 32 percentage points. Graduation rates for foster students were lower than their peers across all subgroups. Black or African American and Hispanic/Latinx foster care students had the lowest graduation rate across racial/ethnic subgroups. Just 54 percent of Black and Hispanic foster students graduated, compared to 78 percent of all Black students; 85 percent of all Hispanic students; and 89 percent of all White students. The largest gap within racial/ethnic subgroups was for White foster students, who had a 55 percent graduation rate, compared to 89 percent for all White students.

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[30] Graduation Rate and other graduate data points are not reported at the corporation level because only 11 corporations had at least 10 students in their graduation cohorts, and only five of those corporations had at least 10 foster graduates.

Figure 31: Graduation Rates (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)[31]
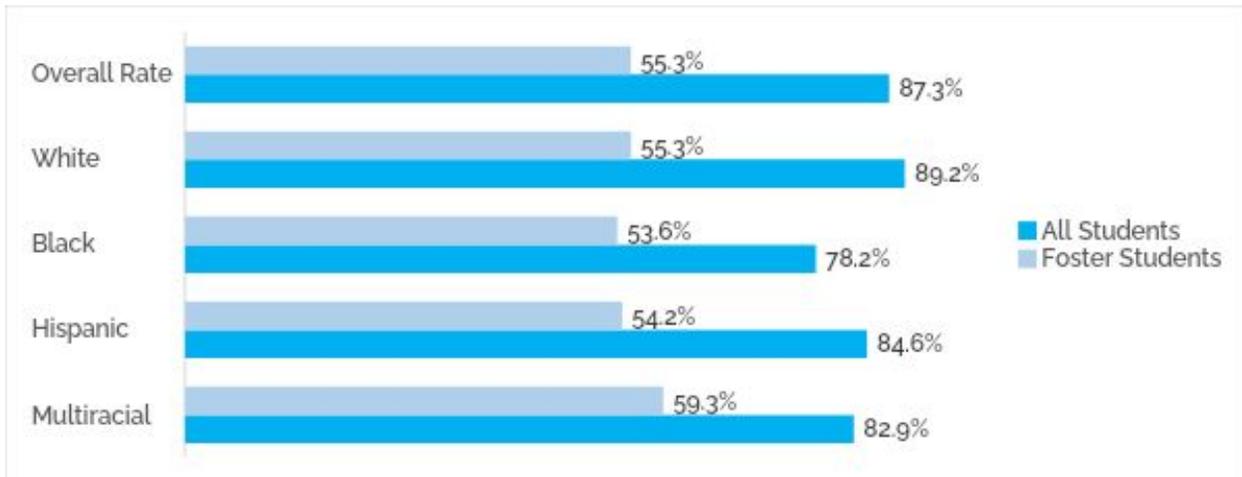
Within other student characteristics, graduation rates were particularly low for foster students in special education and male foster students (both 49 percent). Male foster students had a 36 percentage point gap (more than 1.5 times lower) in graduation rate as compared to all male students (85 percent), the largest across subgroups.

Figure 32: Graduation Rates by Selected Student Characteristics[32]
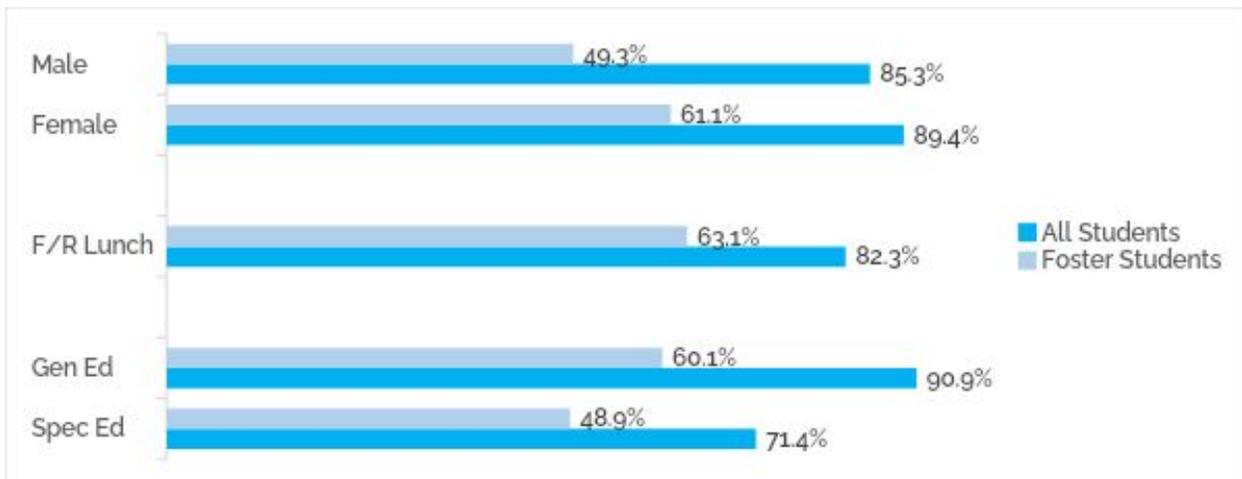
Diploma Status

Not only are foster students less likely to graduate within four years, they are also more likely than all students to receive a waiver diploma (meaning they did not meet state-defined graduation requirements and earned their diplomas with a waiver of those

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[31] Students in the clustered race group (Asian/Am. Ind. or Nat. Am./Nat. Haw or Pac. Isl.) are excluded from the analysis for privacy reasons as fewer than 10 total foster students were in the clustered graduation cohorts.
[32] English Language Learners (and non-ELL) are excluded due to small cohort and graduate numbers.

requirements) and are less likely to earn rigorous diplomas like Honors and International Baccalaureate or even the state default diploma, the Core 40.

This hinders actions that may contribute to better economic outcomes, such as enrolling in postsecondary education. According to the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, Indiana students who earned Honors diplomas were far more likely to enroll in postsecondary immediately after high school than those earning only a General diploma (91 percent of Honors recipients compared to just 15 percent of General diploma recipients). Further, only 22 percent of students graduating with waivers enrolled in postsecondary immediately after high school, compared to 65 percent of those who did not graduate with waivers.[33] Lack of postsecondary opportunities can contribute to lower lifetime wages – the Commission reports that even completing some college, but no degree, is related to more than $150K in additional lifetime earnings compared to those holding only a high school diploma, and completing a Bachelor's degree can result in more than $1M in additional lifetime earnings.[34]
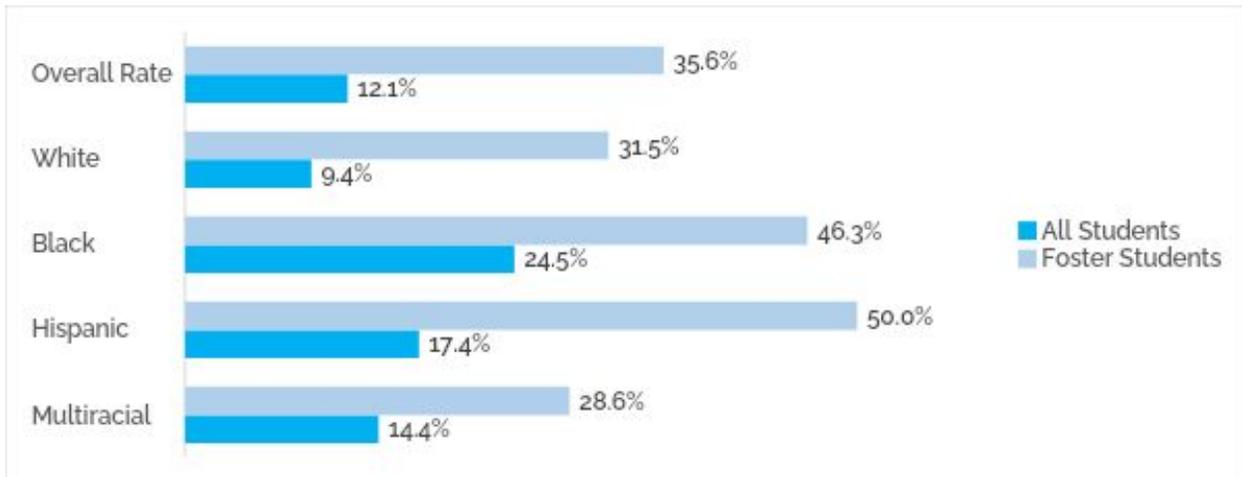
Waiver Diplomas

Overall, more than one third (36 percent) of foster graduates received a diploma waiver, compared to just 12 percent of all students, meaning that foster graduates were three times more likely to receive a waiver than all students. Half of all Hispanic/Latinx foster graduates and 46 percent of Black or African American foster graduates received diploma waivers, compared to 17 percent of all Hispanic graduates, 24.5 percent of all Black graduates, and just nine percent of all White graduates. In other words, Black and Hispanic foster graduates received waiver diplomas at rates five times higher than all White students. Although White foster students had the second lowest waiver rate of each racial/ethnic subgroup, they were nearly 3.5 times more likely to receive waivers than all White students.

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[33] Indiana Commission for Higher Education (2020). *Indiana college readiness report 2020.* https://www.in.gov/che/files/2020_Statewide_College_Readiness_Report_05_08_2020_pgs.pdf
[34] Indiana Commission for Higher Education (2020). *Indiana college value report 2020.*

Figure 33: Percentage of Graduates Receiving Waivers (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)[35]

Over half of foster students in special education (54 percent) received waiver diplomas, compared to 35 percent of all special education students. Nearly four in ten female foster students (38 percent) received waiver diplomas, a rate three times higher than all female students (13 percent). More than one third of foster students receiving free or reduced lunch received waivers (36 percent), compared to 19 percent of all students receiving free or reduced lunch, a rate nearly two times higher.

Figure 34: Percentage of Graduates Receiving Waivers by Selected Student Characteristics[36]

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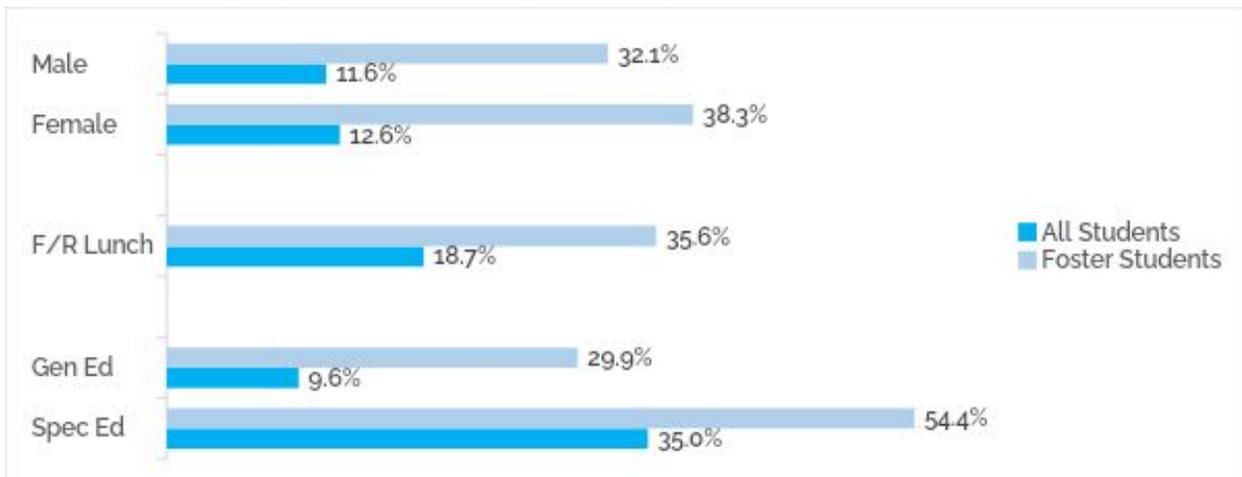
[35] Students in the clustered race group (Asian/Am. Ind. or Nat. Am./Nat. Haw or Pac. Isl.) are excluded from the analysis for privacy reasons as fewer than 10 foster graduates in the cluster.

[36] English Language Learners (and non-ELL) are excluded due to small cohort and graduate numbers.

Diploma Type

Diploma earning for foster students is starkly different than that of all students. Nine in ten of the overall class of 2019 received Core 40 (50.5 percent) or Honors[37] (40 percent) diplomas. Within each racial/ethnic subgroup, at or above 90 percent of all students earned a Core 40 diploma or higher, ranging from 88 percent of all Black or African American students (69 percent Core 40 and 19.5 percent Honors) to 91 percent for all White students (47 percent Core 40 and 44 percent Honors). In contrast, just 77 percent of all foster students earned Core 40 or Honors diplomas, with only 11 percent earning Honors diplomas, meaning that foster students were more than 3.5 times less likely than all students to earn Honors diplomas, and disparities were even more significant within racial/ethnic subgroups.

Within racial/ethnic subgroups, while 11 percent of all Hispanic/Latinx students earned General diplomas, close to one-third of foster students (31 percent) did, and almost one-quarter of Black or African American foster students (24 percent) earned General diplomas, compared to 12 percent of all Black students. Just nine percent of all White students earned General diplomas, compared to nearly 23 percent of White foster students.

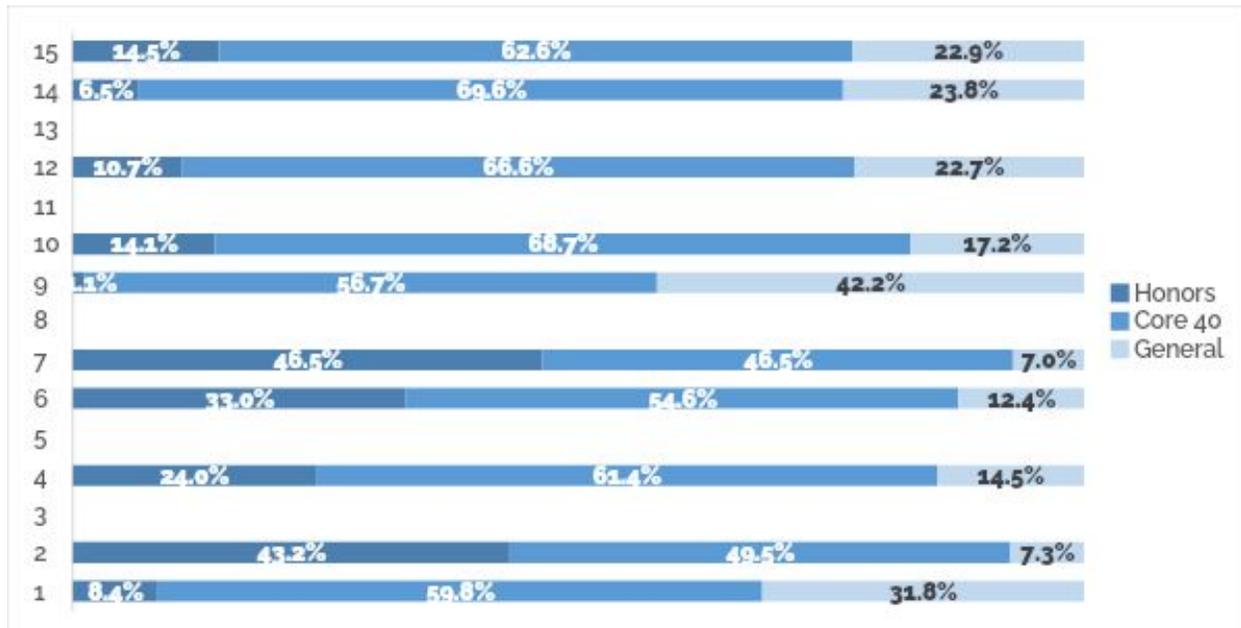*Figure 35: Diploma Type (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)[38]*
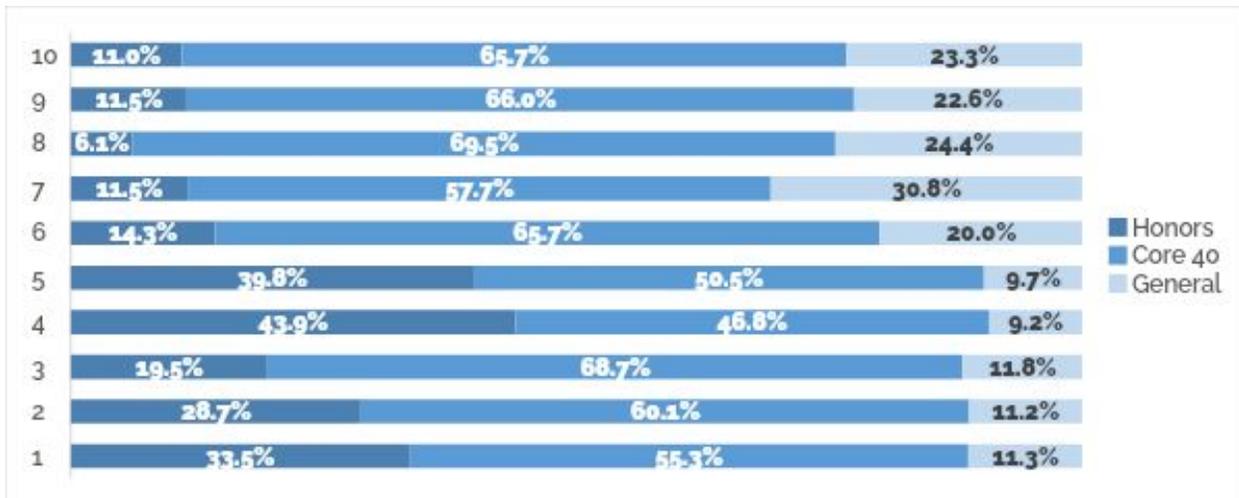
Foster students in special education had the highest rates of General diplomas (42 percent), compared to 32 percent of all students in special education. Female foster students received General diplomas at rates more than three times higher than all female students.

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[37] Includes Core 40 with Academic Honors, Core 40 with Technical Honors, Core 40 with Academic and Technical Honors, and International Baccalaureate.

[38] Students in the clustered race group (Asian/Am. Ind. or Nat. Am./Nat. Haw or Pac. Isl.) are excluded from the analysis for privacy reasons as fewer than 10 foster graduates in the cluster.

Figure 36: Diploma Type by Selected Student Characteristics[39]

Conclusions and Recommendations

Success in K-12 education can be a critical factor for future educational and economic outcomes. Unfortunately, foster students in Indiana have worse outcomes than their peers at the state level and within nearly all racial/ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and programmatic subgroups for all educational components and outcomes analyzed in this report. As such, more attention needs to be placed on ensuring that students in foster care have the academic, emotional, and social support to be successful in education. Further, additional data analysis and studies on other K-12 related educational factors that may contribute to outcomes may be useful, as well as further analysis on outcomes for foster students after K-12, including postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment, as well as employment status and wage earning as compared to peers.

The following recommendations outline areas for practice, policy, and research that may be beneficial in better supporting educational success for children in foster care.

Practice
- Implement real-time information sharing processes so that school administrators know within 24 hours if a child in their school has entered foster care or if a new child enrolling in their school has experienced foster care.

- Provide per pupil funding for school corporations based on the number of students in foster care they are educating. Funds could be used for additional professional development and direct support services and programs for students in foster care.

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[39] English Language Learners (and non-ELL) are excluded due to small cohort and graduate numbers.

- Implement regular, ongoing professional development for school administrators, social workers, counselors and teachers to ensure that they better understand the unique experiences and needs of children in foster care.
- For any K-12 student in foster care, ensure that a representative from the child's current school is part of all Family Case Manager Team meetings.
- Create more intentional programs for high school students in foster care allowing them to explore education and career pathways that better align with their educational experiences and aspirations.

Policy
- Create additional data sharing agreements with state agencies that have information on postsecondary enrollment and completion, as well as workforce outcomes, for foster students and their peers including the Management Performance Hub, Indiana Department of Workforce Development, and Indiana Commission for Higher Education. Utilizing more longitudinal data to identify characteristics and contributing factors for foster students that continue into postsecondary education and/or obtain meaningful employment could help inform programming designed for students in foster care to explore education and career pathways that align with their goals.
- Better define "best interest of child" policy regarding school placements; strengthen funding opportunities for transportation for students in foster care.

Research
- Continue to work with state agencies such as the Department of Education and Department of Child Services to obtain and analyze more data on K-12 educational components that may also contribute to outcomes, including attendance, dropout rates, and inter- and intra-district mobility. Further, support for even more robust studies that allow for analysis at the student level, to identify the extent to which various factors (including number of placements and time of entry into foster care) contribute to gaps in foster student outcomes, could lead to stronger and more conclusive recommendations.