



Revisiting California's Invisible Achievement Gap

**Trends in Education Outcomes of
Students in Foster Care in the
Context of the Local Control
Funding Formula**

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Contents

Executive summary	i
Introduction	1
Students in foster care by the numbers	5
Key findings about changes in the characteristics of students in foster care and the schools they attend	8
Key findings about changes in the education outcomes of students in foster care	18
Key findings about districts' LCAP funding plans for programs and services for students in foster care	30
References	39
Appendix A. Methodology	41
Appendix B. Additional Data and Frequency Tables	49

List of Exhibits

Exhibit 1. Number of California students in foster care, Census Day and cumulative enrollment, 2014–15 through 2022–23	6
Exhibit 2. Distribution of California school districts by the number of students in foster care, 2016–17 through 2022–23	7
Exhibit 3. Percentage of California students with at least one disability, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23	9
Exhibit 4. Percentage of California students who attended a high-poverty school and who attended a low-performing school, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23	13
Exhibit 5. Percentage of California students who attended an alternative school, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23	14
Exhibit 6. Percentage of California students who attended just one school each year, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2017–18 through 2022–23	16
Exhibit 7. Percentage of California students who were chronically absent, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23	19
Exhibit 8. Percentage of California students who were suspended, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23	20
Exhibit 9. Percentage of California students who met grade-level standards for English language arts/literacy and mathematics, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23	23
Exhibit 10. High school cohort dropout rates, for students in foster care and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23	26
Exhibit 11. Four-year cohort graduation rate, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23	26
Exhibit 12. Percentage of California students who met University of California or California State University admission requirements, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23	28
Exhibit 13. Percentage of California high school completers who enrolled in college within one year, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2020–21	29
Exhibit 14. The 10 California school districts with the highest enrollments of students in foster care, 2022–23	32
Exhibit 15. Distribution of LCAP actions across the 10 districts by student groups intended to be served, 2022–23	34

Exhibit 16. Spending categories included in LCAPs' planned actions referencing students in foster care, 2022–23	36
Exhibit 17. Distribution of LCAP funds across the 10 districts by student groups, 2022–23	37

Executive summary

A little over a decade ago, with the 2013 release of the breakthrough report *The Invisible Achievement Gap: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in California's Public Schools* (Barrat & Berliner, 2013), students in California's foster care system (students in foster care) were formally recognized as a group trailing behind their peers in academic achievement and in need of additional support and resources to succeed in school.

Over the ensuing years, much changed in the state's education landscape pertaining to students in foster care. These changes included the regular matching of education and foster care data, an overhauled school finance system to ensure additional funds to serve high-need student groups, and an accountability system to serve schools and districts with high-need student groups struggling to succeed. Further, the global COVID-19 pandemic that upended public education for all students during this time was especially impactful for students in foster care. Together, these changes and major events beg reexamination of the educational outcomes of students in foster care across the last decade.

In response to this need, the study underlying this new report, *Revisiting California's Invisible Achievement Gap*, examined trends in the state's publicly available education data for school years 2014–15 through 2022–23, described 10 state-required local control and accountability plans (LCAPs) for school year 2022–23, and incorporated context for these findings by interviewing an array of professionals close to the issues as well as former students who were in foster care themselves while attending school. In some instances, those interviewed also suggested future direction for policy and practice. Indeed, the purpose of this report is both to inform and to inspire action.

The report first describes changes in the number of California students in foster care across the years. Trends are then examined in the characteristics of students in foster care and the schools they attend, as well as in their education outcomes. Finally, an in-depth examination of the LCAP funding plans for the 10 school districts with the highest numbers of students in foster care is provided, describing these districts' planned allotment of funds toward programs and services for students in foster care.

A brief summary of the study findings follows.

Students in foster care by the numbers.

Along with a declining general enrollment, the number of California students in foster care decreased over the last decade. Between 2014–15 and 2022–23, the number of students in foster care enrolled on Census Day (the first Wednesday in October) dropped by over 13,000. In 2022–23, there were 31,722 students in foster care enrolled on Census Day.

Also, in 2022–23, one in six California school districts reported enrolling no students in foster care and the majority of districts reported having between 1 and 49 students in

foster care. In fact, nearly two thirds of California students in foster care were enrolled in just a small number of districts, those enrolling at least 100 students in foster care.

Key findings about changes in the characteristics of students in foster care and the schools they attend.

Findings revealed some notable disparities and trends in the characteristics of and schools attended by students in foster care across the decade. First, the percentage of students in foster care identified as having at least one disability increased steadily across the decade. Further, although students in foster care remained as likely as students in other high-need groups to attend a high-poverty school, they were consistently more likely than other high-need student groups to attend a low-performing school. The percentage of students in foster care attending an alternative school decreased steadily but, similarly, remained high compared to students in other high-need groups. Finally, school stability, or enrollment at only one school per school year, increased across time for students in foster care but remained lower for them than for students in other high-need groups.

Key findings about changes in the education outcomes of students in foster care.

As was shown in the original report, students in foster care frequently had the poorest education outcomes compared to students in other high-need student groups. This was apparent for outcomes including chronic absence, suspension, dropout, graduation, and college admission requirements. However, some progress was observed in graduation rates and dropout rates. In other cases, initial signs of progress were upended by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, academic achievement improved before the pandemic but decreased afterward. Other outcome indicators showed no progress or worsened for students in foster care, including chronic absence, suspension, achievement of admission requirements for state universities, and enrollment in college within one year of completing high school.

Key findings about districts' LCAP funding plans for programs and services for students in foster care.

One quarter of the 31,722 California students in foster care enrolled on Census Day were enrolled across the state's 10 school districts with the most students in foster care. This report examined the LCAPs from these 10 consequential districts for the 2022–23 school year. Findings revealed that, among the LCAPs' planned actions that referenced students in foster care, very few were unique to students in foster care. Rather, nearly all actions were for the three high-need student groups combined: students in foster care, students who are English learners, and low-income students. An even smaller fraction of planned funds was unique to students in foster care.

Introduction

“I would say what helps a student in foster care succeed in school is having a supportive adult. One of the biggest challenges is not having that same parental unit checking up on you, making sure you’re getting through your classes. You have to create those adult supports in your own way, and it’s a lot of informal stuff. Maybe you have a great teacher or great coach, but they’re not following you throughout your educational journey. One of the big challenges is just [gaining] that sense of independence needed to survive and get through things on your own.”

—Student in Foster Care

In California, efforts to close academic achievement gaps for racial/ethnic minority students, students who are English learners, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty have been underway for many years. But it was just a little more than a decade ago that students in California’s foster care system (students in foster care) were also recognized as a group trailing behind in academic achievement and in need of additional support and resources to succeed in school.

This particular gap in education outcomes remained largely unrecognized by educators, child welfare professionals, and policymakers alike until 2013 with the publication of the breakthrough report *The Invisible Achievement Gap: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in California’s Public Schools* (Barrat & Berliner, 2013). The study linked, for the first time, data from the state’s education system and child welfare system to provide an education snapshot of K–12 students in foster care. Findings showed that students in foster care were a subgroup distinct from low-income students and that these students consistently struggled compared to their peers in terms of academics, school stability, and graduation, among other outcomes. Other point-in-time snapshots of this group’s education outcomes followed, but what has been missing is a sweeping look at how well these students have fared academically since that initial study put them on California’s radar—during a period marked by policy shifts and by a global pandemic that upended public schooling and exacerbated education inequities.

Much changed in the state’s education landscape during this period, with a lot of that change having direct implications for students in foster care. For example, by matching education enrollment data to child welfare data, the state now provides schools with up-to-date information about which of their students are in the foster care system, whereas, previously, education administrators and practitioners may or may not have been aware of students’ foster-care status. The state also overhauled its school finance system during this period, ensuring that schools receive additional funds to support students from high-need student groups, including those in foster care. A new statewide accountability system and a restructured system of student support offer differentiated assistance for schools and

districts to meet the needs of identified high-need student groups, as indicated by a group's performance on multiple state and local measures reported on data dashboards.

Further, as trauma and its effects on learning and behavior have become better understood, programs or services for students in foster care increasingly acknowledge that safety, healing, and stability are essential for school engagement. This understanding has been especially critical in light of the pandemic and the resulting school closures, largely in school years 2019–20 and 2020–21, which took an especially heavy toll on students living in unstable situations, such as those in foster care. As a group, these students were at greater risk of falling behind academically, as many lacked the access to technology and other supports needed to participate in online learning (Blake et al., 2020).

What have these changes meant for students in foster care? Understanding the education outcomes of this student group and the context in which these outcomes occur, including how specific supports are planned and funded, is critical to shaping future programs, services, and policies this group needs for success. To that end, the study underlying this new report, *Revisiting California's Invisible Achievement Gap*, drew on a first-of-its-kind compilation of publicly available data to examine trends in the characteristics and academic outcomes for students in foster care over a nine-year period, from school years 2014–15 through 2022–23.¹ To advance understanding of how California school districts allocate funds to support these students, the study also developed an in-depth description of the state-required local control and accountability plans (LCAPs) from school year 2022–23 for the 10 school districts serving the largest number of students in foster care.

Finally, the researchers sought context for their findings by interviewing individuals closest to the issues: former students who were in foster care while attending school and professionals who work with or on behalf of students in foster care, either in education or child welfare agencies or in advocacy or funding organizations. In some instances, those interviewed also suggested future direction for policy and practice. Indeed, the purpose of this report is both to inform and to inspire action.

One constant since conclusion of the first achievement gap study has been that each year tens of thousands of California students are living—and attending school—under the oversight of the state's child welfare system. These are children and youth who have been removed from their parents' custody after it was determined that they were subject to or at high risk for maltreatment (i.e., abuse, neglect, or both). If, after investigation, the validity of maltreatment allegations is affirmed by the state (an action officially known as *substantiation*), such cases may go in one of two directions, depending on the circumstances: If it is considered safe, children and youth may remain at home with services and monitoring intended to resolve the problems that led to maltreatment allegations; alternatively, they may be placed in a foster care setting (Petek, 2024) until

¹ This study examines data from school years 2014–15 through 2022–23. However, for various reasons, including some related to the COVID-19 pandemic, some student data were not available for all years. Some outcomes using cumulative enrollment data, for example, have been publicly available only since 2016–17 (see Study Data and Populations).

they can be placed in a safe, permanent home. In either situation, the state assumes legal responsibility for the well-being of these children and youth.

For school-age students in the foster care system, the state's charge includes responsibility for their education success. California's public schools, which play a critical role in the successful development of all students, have an especially important role for students in foster care. Schools have the potential to offer refuge and stability during uncertain times in the personal lives of these students and to provide them with social and learning opportunities that can chart a positive course for their future. And yet, as this study reveals, for students in foster care on the whole, academic success remains elusive.

Taken together, the study findings reported here reveal a mixed picture for students in foster care over the last nine years. On the positive side, there is evidence of some improvement in multiple areas for this group (e.g., graduation rates). Although these gains are small, growth in the percentages of students in foster care who find success on a given outcome measure translates into real students with improved prospects for the future. But the study also identified areas where initial progress in closing the achievement gap appears to have stagnated (e.g., suspension rates). The negative effects of the pandemic on students in foster care are striking, revealing the need for greater attention to learning recovery efforts and underscoring the ongoing need for tailored supports for this group of students.

Study Data and Populations

Data sources for student characteristics and outcomes. Data were obtained from three publicly available administrative sources from the California Department of Education (CDE): the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), CDE school directory, and California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP).

The study was intended to cover, as much as possible, the nine-year period from school years 2014–15 through 2022–23. However, data for some outcomes were publicly available only for school years 2016–17 onward. In addition, some data were unavailable for the two school years at the height of the pandemic: 2019–20 and 2020–21.

Data were obtained and analyzed for four student groups as provided in CALPADS:

- the *general student population*, comprising all K–12 students enrolled in California public schools;
- *students in foster care*, comprising students in foster placement or family maintenance;
- *low-income students*, which includes students with at least one of eight characteristics of socioeconomic disadvantage (e.g., eligible for the Free or Reduced-Price Meal program or neither parent having graduated from high school); and
- *English learners*, comprising students with a language in the home other than English and who lack the English language skills necessary for school success, as indicated during state assessment.

Low-income and English learner students were included as comparison groups for this study because these two subgroups, like students in foster care, constitute the high-need student groups to determine supplemental funding for California school districts under the Local Control Funding Formula (CDE, 2024).

Data sources for district funding plans to serve students in foster care. Information was derived from the 2022–23 Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) for the 10 California school districts with the highest enrollments of students in foster care. Collectively, these districts account for nearly one quarter of the statewide population of this group (see appendix B for the full list). The 10 LCAPs each contain detailed information about their district's full set of planned actions and expenditures for all students.

Reflections and insights from former students in foster care and from professionals with knowledge of and/or direct experience with this student group and the systems intended to serve them. Former students who were in foster care while attending school were selected based on their willingness to reflect on their lived experiences as students in the state's K–12 public schools. Additionally, policymakers, practitioners, advocates, and funders were selected to capture a wide range of perspectives based on their relevant expertise in the state's education policy landscape and experience working with or on behalf of students in foster care. The study's first-person information was collected through individual and small-group interviews conducted virtually in summer and fall 2024.

Details about the study methodology are presented in Appendix A: Methodology.

Students in foster care by the numbers

Ascertaining the number of California students in foster care is critical to any conversation about how to meet that population's need for resources in the education system. State counts of student enrollment in general can vary widely based on measurement approach, but especially for populations with greater mobility throughout the school year, such as students in foster care. The California Department of Education (CDE) uses both Census Day and cumulative counts to measure student enrollment.

Census Day, or point-in-time, enrollment measures the number of students in each student group, including those in foster care,² enrolled on the first Wednesday of October. Census Day numbers are commonly lower than those captured using cumulative enrollment, which totals the number of unduplicated enrollments throughout the year. In 2022–23, for example, the Census Day count found about 38,000 students in the foster care system, whereas the cumulative enrollment count found that more than 42,000 unique students had foster involvement during the school year (exhibit 1). Although the number of students in foster care has dropped over the last decade, this cumulative enrollment count corresponded to a rate of about one of every 150 students spending a period of time in the foster care system (appendix B), similar to the rate published a decade ago (Barrat & Berliner, 2013).

The number of California students in foster care decreased over nearly a decade.

The total general enrollment in California public schools declined notably across the nine years of this study. This was true regardless of how enrollment was measured. Within this overall declining enrollment, the number of students in foster care also declined across the nine years of this study (exhibit 1). From 2014–15 through 2022–23, the number of students in foster care enrolled on Census Day dropped by over 13,000 students, with a similar pattern observed for cumulative enrollment.

With the efforts more geared towards preventing children from entering the foster care system, the acuity of the population is increasing. Those that maybe previously would have been put into foster care, where the situation was less severe, are being successfully maintained at home instead.

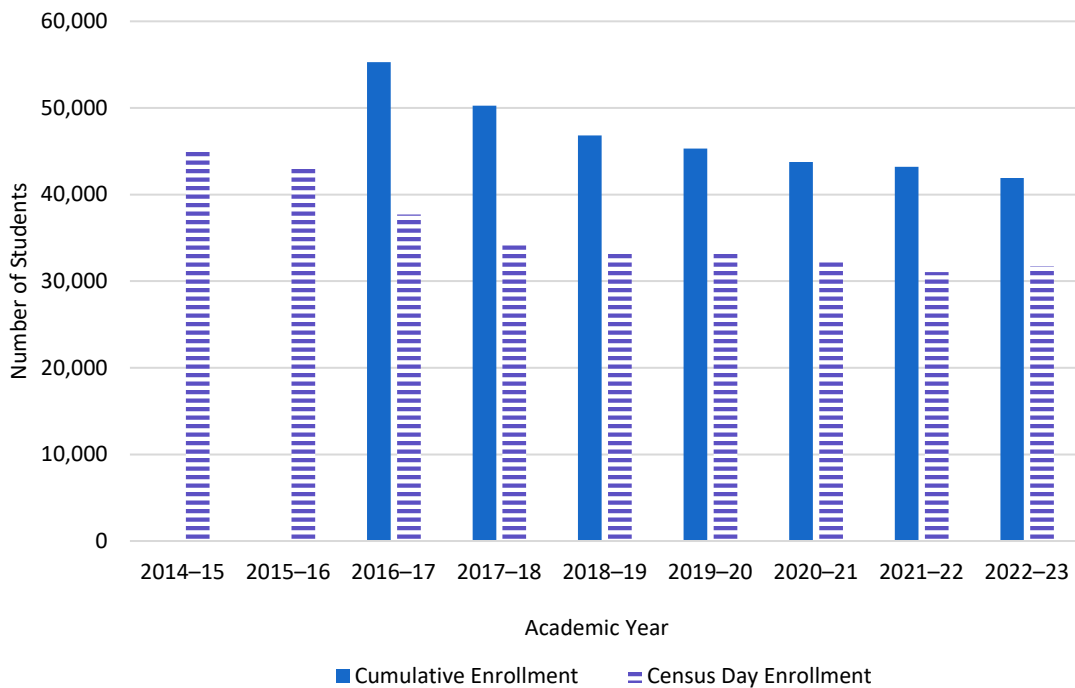
—Child Welfare/Education
Professional

Although this decline reflects the general decline in enrollment for all students in the state, the professionals interviewed for this study suggested that the decrease in the number of students in foster care may also reflect changes in child welfare policies and practice over the past decade related to the handling of referrals to child protective services—changes that were intended to mitigate ethnic and racial disproportionalities

² See appendix A for CDE's complete definition of students in foster care.

and disparities in child-welfare intervention and outcomes. Those interviewed suggested that one result of such changes may be that fewer children and youth are brought into the foster care system; however, those whose cases are substantiated may have more difficult circumstances and more urgent needs compared to substantiated cases in prior years.

Exhibit 1. Number of California students in foster care, Census Day and cumulative enrollment, 2014–15 through 2022–23



Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2014–15 through 2022–23.
 Note. Cumulative enrollment data were not publicly available prior to 2016–17.

The percentage of districts enrolling no students in foster care increased over the past seven years and the majority of California students in foster care were enrolled in just a small number of districts.

The decrease in the number of California students in foster care corresponded to an increase in the percentage of districts that had no students in foster care enrolled at any time in the school year. Between 2016–17 and 2022–23, the percentage of districts with no students in foster care grew from 14 percent to 17 percent, with just over one sixth of districts having no students in foster care during school year 2022–23. During this same period, the majority of school districts (between 59 percent and 62 percent) consistently had between one and 50 students in foster care, and another 10 percent of school districts served between 50 and 99 students in foster care. The percentage of school districts

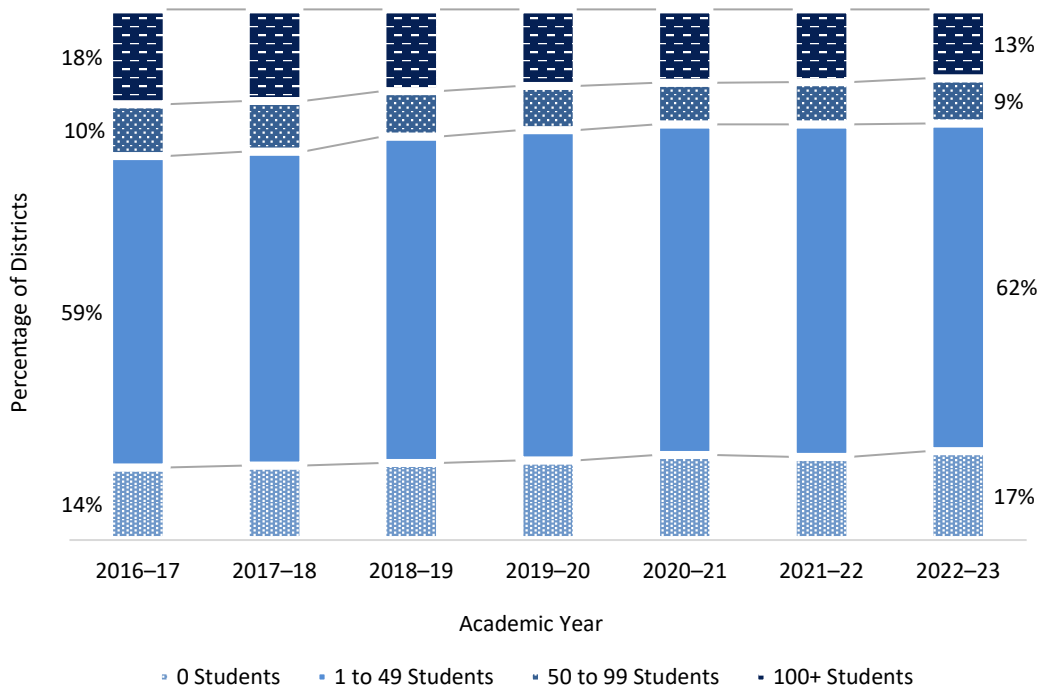
...serving 100 or more students in foster care decreased from 18 percent to 13 percent, corresponding to 132 school districts in 2022–23 (exhibit 2). However, these districts enrolled nearly 60 percent of students in foster care in the state, with the 10 districts with the most students in foster care serving one quarter of this particular student population (see appendix B and exhibit 16).³

We know how to serve our kids really well. Foster services countywide programs are good at that. But it's hard for a small school district, with maybe 50 students in foster care [despite] serving thousands of students, to provide the specific, targeted services these kids need—whether that's remediation or acceleration.

—Child Welfare/Education Professional

The professionals interviewed for this study noted that districts with no or a small number of students in foster care may feel torn about investing in the programs and services needed to best serve these students—a high-need group—when, at least for now, none are enrolled. A district's challenge, of course, is that it has no way of anticipating if or when any of its current or future students might become students in foster care, and it must be ready to serve them.

Exhibit 2. Distribution of California school districts by the number of students in foster care, 2016–17 through 2022–23



Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2016–17 through 2022–23.

³ These estimates used enrollment of students in foster care by district using Census Day enrollment.

Key findings about changes in the characteristics of students in foster care and the schools they attend

Findings

1. The percentage of students in foster care identified as having a disability increased over nearly a decade.
2. Although students in foster care remained as likely as other high-need student groups to attend a high-poverty school, they were consistently more likely than other high-need student groups to attend a low-performing school.
3. The percentage of students in foster care attending an alternative school decreased steadily but remained high compared to other high-need student groups.
4. School stability for students in foster care increased but remained lower than for other high-need student groups.

Compared with the state’s low-income students as a group, students in foster care remained more likely to be African American and less likely to be Hispanic.

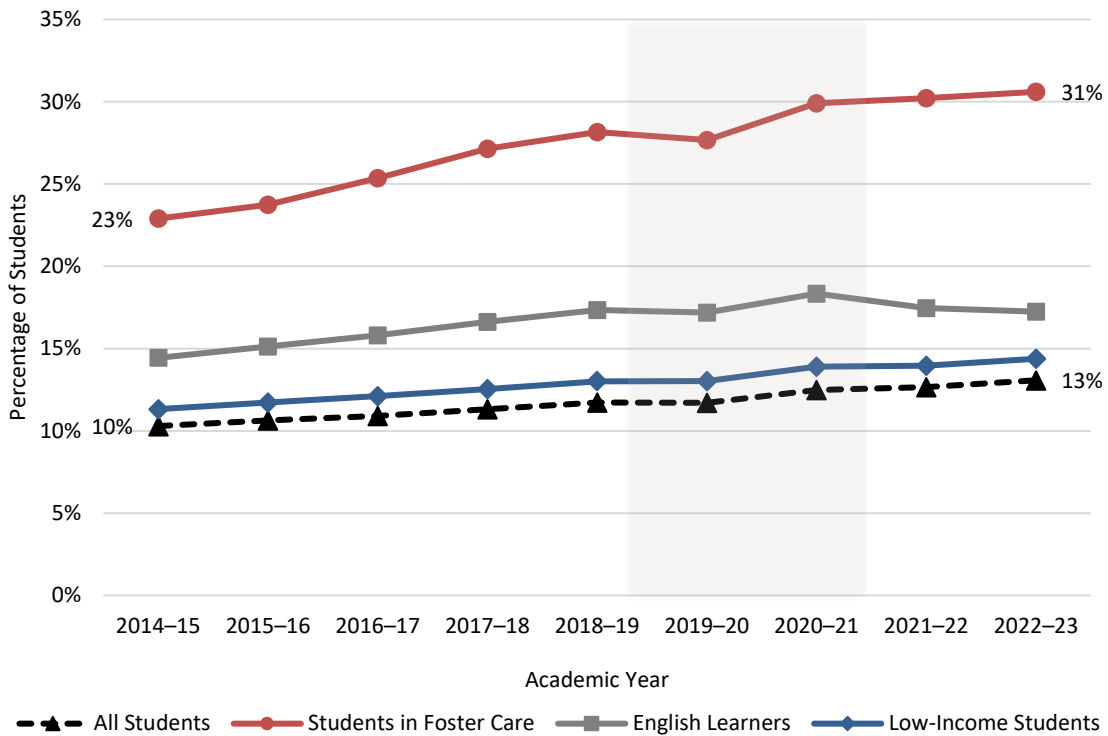
Despite recent changes in the number of students in foster care, the racial and ethnic composition of this student group was relatively stable (appendix B). Even so, some persisting disproportionalities were observed when the racial and ethnic composition of students in foster care was compared with that of low-income students.

Specifically, across school years, there was an underrepresentation of Hispanic students and an overrepresentation of African American students in the foster care system. The comparatively large proportion of African American students in the foster care system, which is not unique to California, is the subject of an ongoing national conversation about potential contributing factors, both internal and external to the child welfare system, including systemic and institutional racism (Dettlaff et al., 2021).

Students in foster care were more likely to be identified with a disability than students in other high-need groups, a gap that widened over time, with almost one third of students in foster care in 2022–23 identified with one or more disabilities.

The percentage of students with at least one disability grew steadily for all student groups for nearly a decade (exhibit 3). However, for students in foster care, a group that in 2014–15 was already more than twice as likely as all students to include students identified with a disability, growth in the identification rate was even more pronounced: By 2022–23, students in foster care were nearly three times more likely to be identified with a disability compared to all students. By this time, nearly one in three students in foster care was identified with at least one disability, a rate that far exceeds the identification rates for low-income students and students who are English learners.

Exhibit 3. Percentage of California students with at least one disability, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23



Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2014–15 through 2022–23.

Note. Shaded regions indicate peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data on the disability categories for students in foster care were not publicly available for the years covered in this study. However, using student-level data, previous studies have reported that students in foster care had by far the highest rate among all students with disabilities of *emotional disturbance* (Barrat & Berliner, 2013), one characterized by interpersonal difficulty, inappropriate behaviors, and depression and that is linked with poor school performance (Reddy, 2001). Some of the professionals interviewed for this study attributed the reported

prevalence of disabilities among students in foster care to the trauma these students have experienced, observing that their behaviors in school are consistent with emotional disturbance. Still, they questioned whether the increase in disability identification has led to any tangible improvements in supports for students in foster care.

Most of our kids are exhibiting trauma responses. We address it through IDEA [Individuals With Disabilities Education Act] as emotional disturbance because that's the only way to get them services—and now, the only way to get mental health services in school. It's an upside-down, inside-out, backward system. These kids don't really deserve that label 90 percent of the time. What they need is a trauma-responsive, connected, empathetic place to feel safe so they can learn.

—Child Welfare/Education
Professional

California's High-Poverty, Low-Performing, and Alternative Schools

High-poverty schools. The percentage of enrolled students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch was used in this study as a proxy for school poverty. As used previously by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2024; Snyder & Musu-Gillette, 2015), high-poverty schools were identified as those in which more than 75 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in a given academic year. In 2023–24, California students were eligible for free lunch if their family of four earned \$39,000 or less and were eligible for reduced-price lunch if their family of four earned \$55,500 or less.

Low-performing schools. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as a commitment to ensuring equal opportunity for all students. ESSA requires accountability and action to support the nation's lowest-performing schools, those in which students do not make adequate progress and graduation rates are consistently low. In accordance with ESSA, California schools are eligible for Comprehensive Support and Improvement if (a) they have a low graduation rate, meaning that they have a three-year graduation rate below 68 percent, or (b) they are low performing, meaning that they received Title 1 funding and are among the lowest performing in academics (English language arts/literacy, mathematics), behavior (suspension, chronic absenteeism), and readiness (graduation, college/career readiness) based on dashboard data. Schools are eligible for Additional Targeted Support and Improvement if they have one or more student groups that meet thresholds for the lowest performing 5 percent of Title I-funded schools.

Alternative schools. These nontraditional schools offer specialized education settings, curricula, and support systems aimed to ensure that all students have access to an academic program in which they can be successful. Alternative schools are often high schools, and their students have typically been unsuccessful in a traditional school. Examples of such schools are Alternative Schools of Choice, Continuation Schools, Community Day Schools, County Community Schools, and Juvenile Court Schools.

Complete definitions of school types are presented in Appendix A. Methodology.

Students in foster care remained as likely as students in other high-need groups to attend a high-poverty school but were consistently more likely to attend a low-performing school.

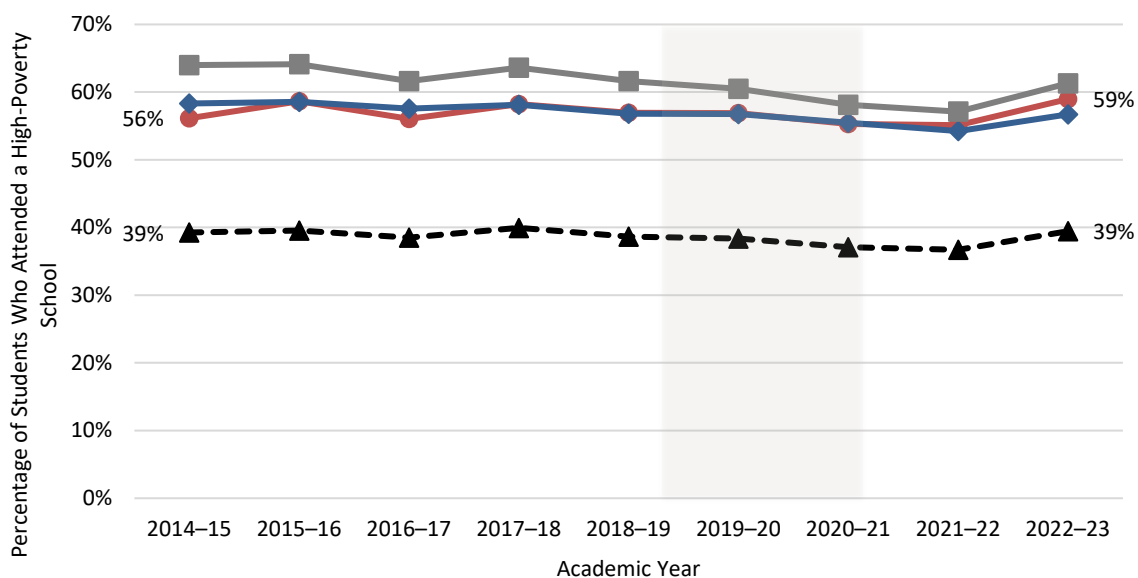
Rates of attendance at high-poverty schools were relatively stable across nearly a decade for all student groups, and students from high-need groups were consistently about 50 percent more likely to attend one of these schools as compared to all students (exhibit 4). At an average rate of nearly three in five students, the percentage of students in foster care who attended a high-poverty school in any given year was similar to that of all low-income students and only slightly lower than that of students who are English learners.

Compared to students in other high-need groups, students in foster care were also consistently more likely to attend a low-performing school; that is, one eligible for Comprehensive Support and Improvement or for Additional Targeted Support and Improvement assistance under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (exhibit 4). Specifically, across the years of available data (i.e., 2018–19 through 2022–23), students in foster care were more likely than students in other high-need groups to attend schools that had the lowest graduation rates or that CDE had identified as having the poorest performance.⁴ However, rates of those attending a low-performing school decreased both for students in foster care and for all students (though not for low-income students or for students who are English learners); as of 2021–22, fewer than one in four students in foster care attended a low-performing school. Even so, the percentage of students in foster care attending a low-performing school remained higher than for any other group in the study.

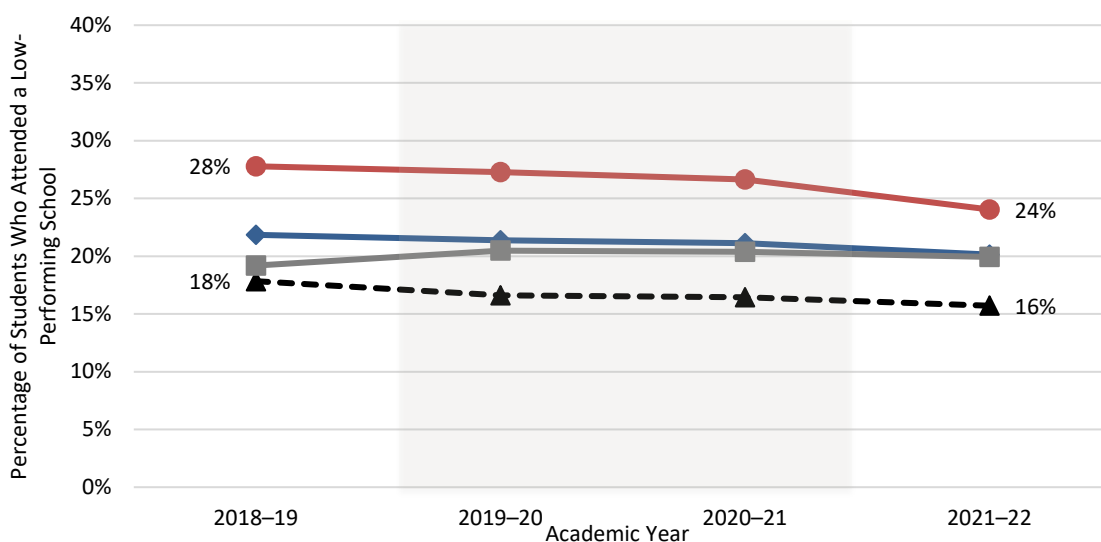
The professionals interviewed for the study emphasized that being enrolled in high-poverty and/or low-performing schools does not necessarily result in poor student performance. Indeed, many of them underscored the higher priority of school stability, even when students were originally enrolled in a high-poverty and/or low-performing school, because staying connected to a familiar environment can be more beneficial for students than transferring to a better school. In addition, they noted that higher enrollment of students in foster care in alternative high schools could help to explain the group's higher enrollment in low-performing schools. This is because many alternative high schools were classified as low-performing due to low graduation rates.

⁴ See *California's High-Poverty, Low-Performing, and Alternative Schools* on previous page. A complete description of how CDE determines school eligibility for Comprehensive Support and Improvement under ESSA is available at [CDE's Comprehensive Support and Improvement webpage](#).

Exhibit 4. Percentage of California students who attended a high-poverty school and who attended a low-performing school, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23



▲ All Students
 ● Students in Foster Care
 ◆ Low-Income Students
 ■ English Learners



▲ All Students
 ● Students in Foster Care
 ◆ Low-Income Students
 ■ English Learners

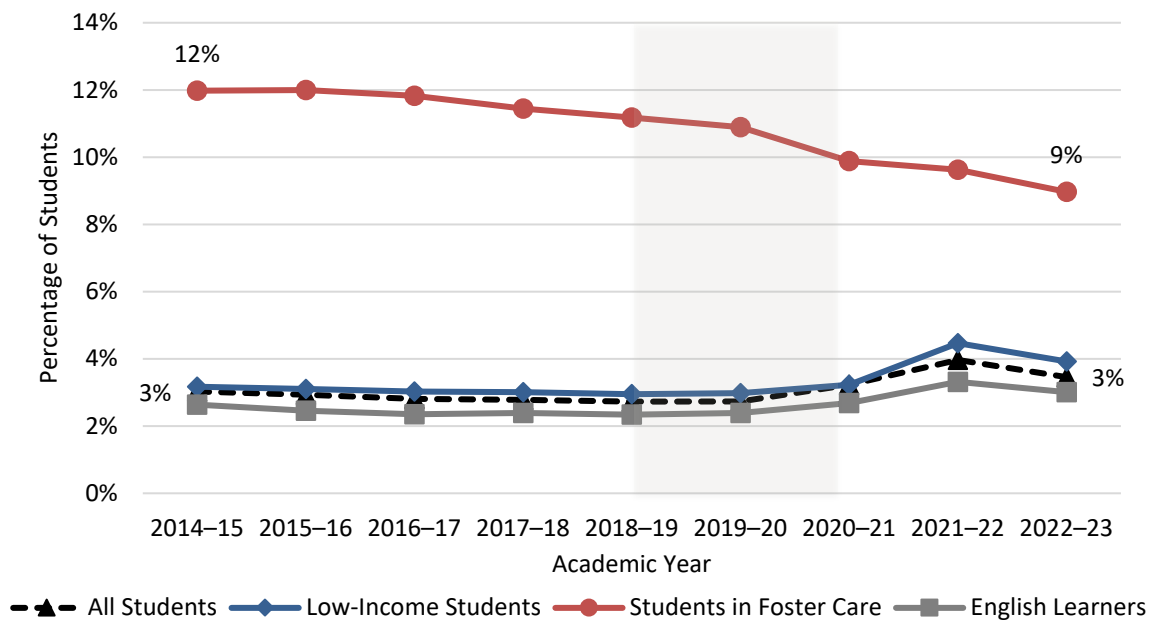
Source. Authors' analysis CDE CALPADS data and ESSA Assistance Status Data Files (low-performing schools), 2014–15 through 2022–23.

Note. High-poverty schools are those in which more than 75 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch on Census Day. Low-performing schools are schools eligible for support under ESSA on Census Day. Shaded regions indicate peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The percentage of students in foster care attending an alternative school decreased but remained high compared to students in other high-need groups.

Across nearly a decade, students in foster care were consistently more likely than students in other high-need groups to attend a nontraditional (“alternative”) school (exhibit 5). However, this gap appears to be narrowing. An observed nine percentage-point difference in alternative school attendance rates between students in foster care and other students in 2014–15 dropped to a roughly five percentage-point difference in 2022–23. In addition, because most enrollment in alternative schools is during the high school grades, and the data reported encompass grades K–12, all numbers are likely to be much lower for students in the elementary and middle grades and higher for students in high school.

Exhibit 5. Percentage of California students who attended an alternative school, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23



Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data and CDE school directory, 2014–15 through 2022–23.
 Note. Presents the percentage of students enrolled in an alternative school on Census Day. Shaded regions indicate peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Still, even with a decreasing disparity in alternative-school enrollment rates between students in foster care and students in other high-need groups across this period, nearly one in 10 students in foster care was enrolled in an alternative school in 2022–23. For the roughly 10 percent of students in foster care who attend these schools, prior research suggests there may be implications for equitable opportunities to access college preparation courses and extracurricular resources (Cobb et al., 2023). However, some of the professionals interviewed for the study speculated that the decrease in alternative school enrollment might be related to an increase in effective advocacy to keep students

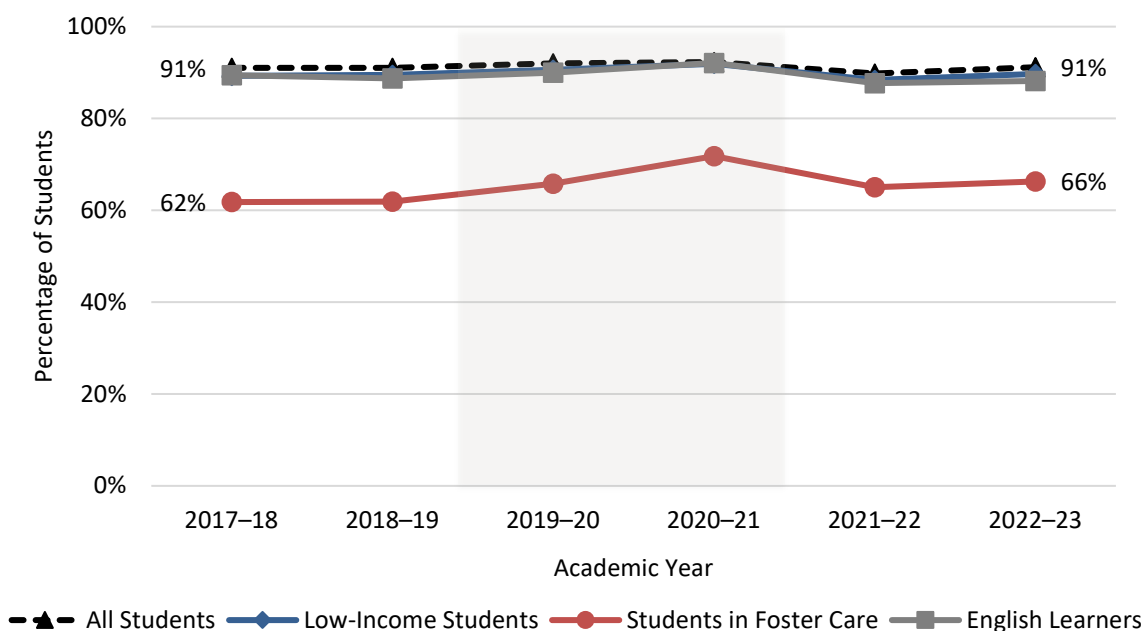
in their school of origin. In addition, some also observed that alternative schools can provide the personalized, targeted support that many students need.

The percentage of students in foster care who attended only one school each year increased but remained lower than for other high-need student groups.

The stability rate reflects the percentage of students who consistently attend just one school in a school year. Over the six-year period ending in 2022–23, the average stability rate for all students, low-income students, and English learners remained at about 90 percent, indicating that most of these students consistently ended each school year at the same school where they started the year (exhibit 6). The stability rate for students in foster care remained largely lower than for other students despite some mild improvement from 62 percent in 2016–17 to 66 percent in 2022–23, leaving roughly one in three students in foster care attending two or more schools in the same school year. In addition to consequences of academic learning loss (Rumberger, 2015), changing schools, especially more than once, may be accompanied by significant interpersonal instability (Langenkamp, 2016)—a notable detriment for a student group already in need of social support.

I had to take two buses to get to school, and sometimes I was just like, “I’m not going today.” It was a struggle to make it there, and I wasn’t getting the help I needed.
—Student in Foster Care

Exhibit 6. Percentage of California students who attended just one school each year, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2017–18 through 2022–23



Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2017–18 through 2022–23.

Note. Shaded regions indicate peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both federal law and California law give students in foster care the right to remain in their school of origin if doing so is in a student's best interest and if, for a student under age 18, their *educational rights holder* (i.e., an adult legally authorized to make education decisions for a student in foster care) makes the best interest determination (BID) in coordination with the student, an education liaison designated by the local education agency, and the placing agency (California Department of Education, 2021).⁵

⁵ All students in foster care under age 18 have an educational rights holder, which may be a parent or legal guardian, a caregiver, or another person chosen by the court. The educational rights holder cannot be the student's social worker or probation officer, an attorney, or group home or school staff members. For more information about the BID process, see [Educational Stability and Best Interest Determination](#).

The more schools that students move to, they're missing out on all that developmental progress. ... Gaps keep getting bigger and bigger because they're moving multiple schools every year. Those gaps are just going to get bigger and bigger by the time they get to 6th and 8th grade, and they've had 10 school placements.

—Child Welfare/Education Professional

Professionals interviewed for the study agreed that reducing school mobility is essential to improving education outcomes for students in foster care. However, some mentioned that there is a general lack of information about the prevalence and structure of BID meetings and about school information that is available to inform those who must make decisions about school placement for these students. They pointed to the value of having information about schools' dual enrollment offerings, extracurricular activities, dedicated personnel to support high-need student groups, discipline policies, and other features that might inform school placement decisions for students in foster care.

In addition, they identified transportation as a persistent challenge in trying to ensure that a student remain in their school of origin. Although legislation under ESSA⁶ addresses transportation by creating agreements between child welfare agencies and school districts to promote school of origin continuation, they noted that implementation has been inconsistent, and this continues to affect students' school stability.

When a student enters school, best interest determinations should be done, they should have immediate enrollment, their records should transfer right away, they should be assessed for the right courses and linked with counselors. It's really about making sure practices are in place across districts.

—Child Welfare/Education Professional

⁶ See [Frequently Asked Questions: Every Student Succeeds Act Transportation for Students in Foster Care and Identification of a Local Educational Agency Point of Contact](#).

Key findings about changes in the education outcomes of students in foster care

Findings

1. Students in foster care frequently had the poorest education outcomes compared to other high-need student groups for chronic absence, suspension, dropout, graduation, and college admission requirements.
2. Progress was observed in graduation rates and dropout rates.
3. Some signs of progress were upended by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, academic achievement improved before the pandemic, but decreased afterward.
4. Some outcome indicators showed no progress or worsened, including chronic absence, suspension, achievement of admission requirements for state universities, and enrollment in college within one year of completing high school.

Chronic absence substantially worsened after the pandemic, a devastating turn for students in foster care who, years prior, were already twice as likely to be chronically absent than students in other high-need groups.

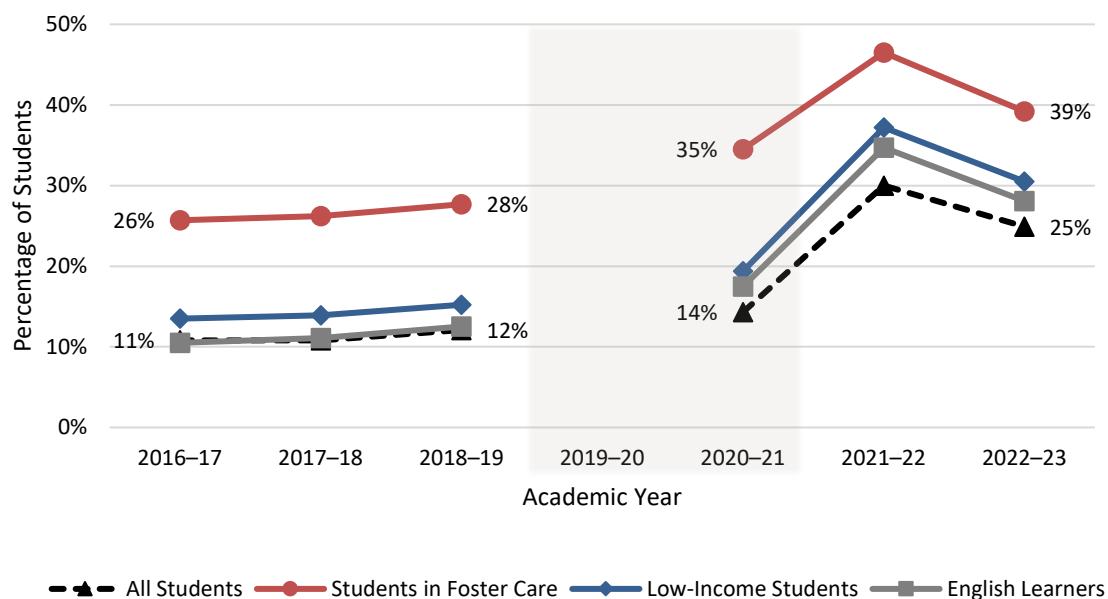
Chronic absence, defined as missing 10 percent or more of expected attendance days, peaked for all student groups following the pandemic and remained high in 2022–23, with important repercussions for learning recovery. Though this trend was similar for all student groups, students in foster care, who were struggling with attendance even prior to the pandemic, remained much more likely to be chronically absent compared to students in other high-need groups. In 2021–22, nearly half of students in foster care were chronically absent (exhibit 7).

A similar disparity between students in foster care and all students was observed in the average number of days students were absent (appendix B). When absences peaked in 2021–22, the average number of days absent for all students with at least one absence was 17 days, compared to 24 for students in foster care. This finding indicates that the students in foster care who had any absences missed an average of seven more days of school per year compared to students overall who had at least one absence.

If you don't have a sense of belonging in that school or in that environment, I don't think that you feel more prone to be like, "Hey, let me make it to school."

—Student in Foster Care

Exhibit 7. Percentage of California students who were chronically absent, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23



Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2016–17 through 2022–23.

Note. Chronic absentees are students that were absent for 10 percent or more of the days they were expected to attend. Shaded regions indicate peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were unavailable for 2019–20.

Courts, therapists, and social workers run on an 8-to-5 schedule, which is also during our educational requirement by law, so that doesn't make sense.
—Student in Foster Care

Many professionals interviewed about this issue related the chronic absenteeism of students in foster care to the instability in students' living situations and frequent school changes. They noted that delays in unenrollment in a student's school of origin, lack of reliable transportation, and lengthy school commutes can all contribute to absences. Students in foster care interviewed for the study identified some additional factors

that they see as contributing to absences for students like them, including mandatory court dates and medical appointments scheduled during school hours. Students in foster care further noted that students who feel disconnected or isolated within the school environment may be less motivated to attend regularly. These factors may have complicated what research shows was already increased disengagement from school experienced by many students following the pandemic (Swiderski et al., 2024).

Students in foster care were over three times more likely than students in other high-need groups to be suspended in a given year; their suspension rates dropped during pandemic-related remote learning, but rates reverted to pre-pandemic levels once schools reopened.

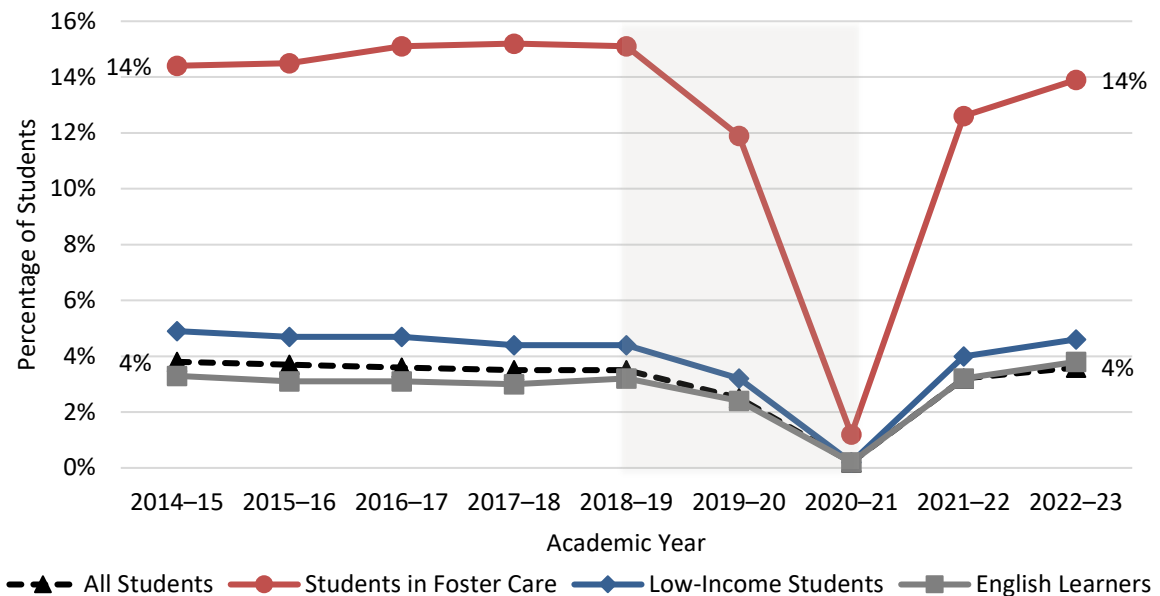
I think that there's a lot of work to try to find those ways that we can reduce those [suspensions], make sure there's connections to other resources and not just sending kids home for their behaviors.

—Child Welfare/Education Professional

In addition to lost learning time resulting from higher rates of chronic absence, students in foster care were consistently more likely than students in other high-need groups to lose learning time due to suspension. Over the last decade, with an exception during remote learning at the height of the pandemic, roughly 4 percent of all California students were suspended annually (exhibit 8). During this time, students in foster care were consistently three times more likely to be suspended than all other student groups, meaning that an average of about one in seven students in foster care

received exclusionary discipline that limited their learning time. Although all student groups, including students in foster care, experienced a decrease in suspension rates during the height of the pandemic, rates had reverted to pre-pandemic levels by 2022–23.

Exhibit 8. Percentage of California students who were suspended, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23



Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2014–15 through 2022–23.
 Note. Shaded regions indicate peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The professionals interviewed emphasized the need for more trauma-informed approaches in education, lauding California Senate Bill 274, for example, which took effect on July 1, 2024.⁷ This new law prohibits suspensions based on lower-level behavioral offenses of “willful defiance,” which tend to be disproportionately administered to some high-need and minority student groups, including students in foster care (Flores & Losen, 2023). They noted that changes like this can help remind school staff of the unique experiences and challenges faced by students in foster care and, in so doing, can encourage greater use of trauma-informed behavioral supports before escalating any disciplinary action to suspension.

The percentage of students in foster care who met grade-level standards in English language arts and mathematics increased slightly before the pandemic but decreased again post-pandemic.

Despite having made some pre-pandemic progress on standardized academic assessments, students in foster care persistently struggled compared to all students and to low-income students. Over the course of nine years, between 44 percent and 51 percent of all students met or exceeded grade-level standards for English language arts/literacy on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) (exhibit 9). In contrast, students in foster care never made it to 25 percent. They had started in 2014–15 at 19 percent and made small, yet steady improvements leading up to the pandemic; in 2018–19, 24 percent of this group met or exceeded standards for English language arts/literacy. But in the post-pandemic years, the group lost all the ground it had gained. Even at its best performance level, in the year prior to school closures, students in foster care were about half as likely to meet grade-level standards as all students, with less than one quarter of students in foster care meeting standards. In school year 2022–23, only 19 percent met standards, compared to 47 percent of all students and 35 percent of low-income students. Students in foster care outperformed only students who are English learners.

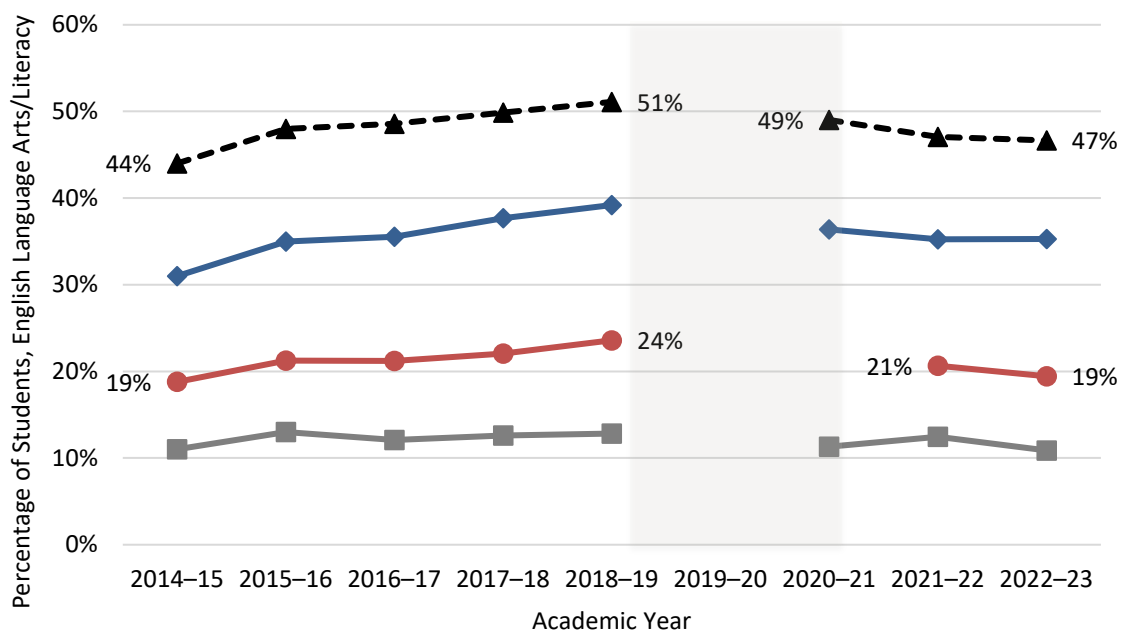
California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress

The CAASPP is California's statewide annual standardized assessment system used to measure student academic performance for the primary and secondary grades. Established in 2014, the system encompasses multiple types of assessments. This report describes test scores by student groups for grades 3–8 and grade 11 from the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments for English language arts/literacy and mathematics. Test results for California's assessments are publicly available at <https://caaspp-elpac.ets.org/caaspp/>.

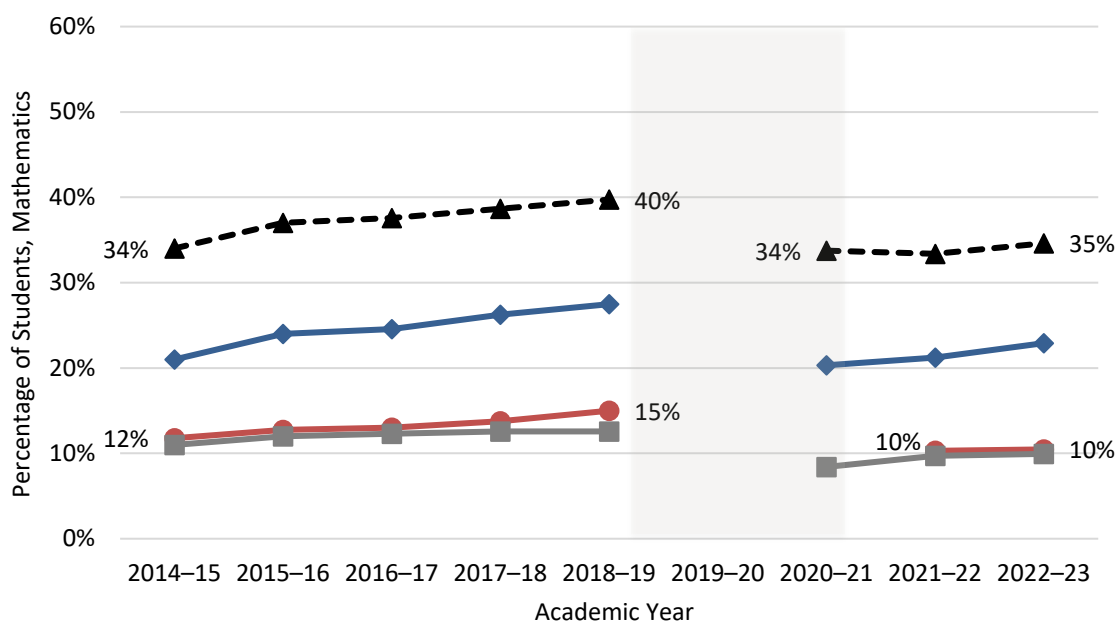
⁷ See [New Law Effectively Ends “Willful Defiance” School Suspensions for All Grades](#).

Performance disparities between students in foster care and all students were even more pronounced on the state mathematics assessment. Over the past nine years, between 34 percent and 40 percent of all students met or exceeded grade-level standards for mathematics on the CAASPP (exhibit 9). Further, rates of students who met or exceeded standards for mathematics had been improving for all groups prior to the pandemic; however, the performance of all student groups sharply decreased following the pandemic. For students in foster care, 12 percent met or exceeded these grade-level standards in 2014–15 and 15 percent met or exceeded them in 2018–19; but by 2022–23 that had dropped to 10 percent. The trends on this metric for all groups highlight the need for investments in learning recovery efforts in mathematics.

Exhibit 9. Percentage of California students who met grade-level standards for English language arts/literacy and mathematics, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23



--▲ All Students
 ● Students in Foster Care
 ◆ Low-Income Students
 ■ English Learners



--▲ All Students
 ● Students in Foster Care
 ◆ Low-Income Students
 ■ English Learners

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CAASPP data, 2014–15 through 2022–23.

Note. Data were unavailable in 2019–20 for all student groups and in 2020–21 for students in foster care due to the pandemic. Shaded regions indicate peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Professionals interviewed about students' academic performance acknowledged the struggle to maintain and improve achievement for students in foster care, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, despite efforts to increase engagement and support. They related the academic difficulties of these students to students' trauma histories and school instability.

[The academic achievement of students in foster care] is again a reflection on school instability and interruptions to students' academic instruction time.

—Child Welfare/Education Professional

They also voiced concerns that frequent school changes negatively affect the academic achievement of students in foster care by disrupting the learning process. One practitioner noted what they saw as the potential benefit of one-on-one tutoring in the midst of repeated home and school transitions, especially when tutors were able to physically travel to meet students and offer support in person.

Cohort Dropout and Graduation Rates

CDE (2024) defines a four-year cohort as the number of students who enter grade 9 for the first time, adjusted by adding into the cohort any student who transfers in later during grade 9 or during the next three years and subtracting any student who transfers out, emigrates to another country, transfers to a prison or juvenile facility, or dies during that same period.

- The **high school dropout rate** is the percentage of adjusted cohort students who do not graduate with a regular high school diploma, do not complete high school, and are not still enrolled as a "fifth-year senior."
- The **four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate** is the percentage of students who graduate from high school in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class.

See appendix A for CDE's complete definitions of cohort dropout and graduation rates.

Over the period of the study, cohort dropout rates for students in foster care decreased and their high school graduation rates increased; even so, students in foster care had worse outcomes on these metrics compared to all other high-need student groups.

The high school dropout rate for a cohort of students reports the percentage of students who dropped out within four years of starting grade 9. For students in foster care, this rate declined across the study years but remained higher compared to other high-need student groups. From 2016–17 through 2022–23, the cohort dropout rates for all students and for

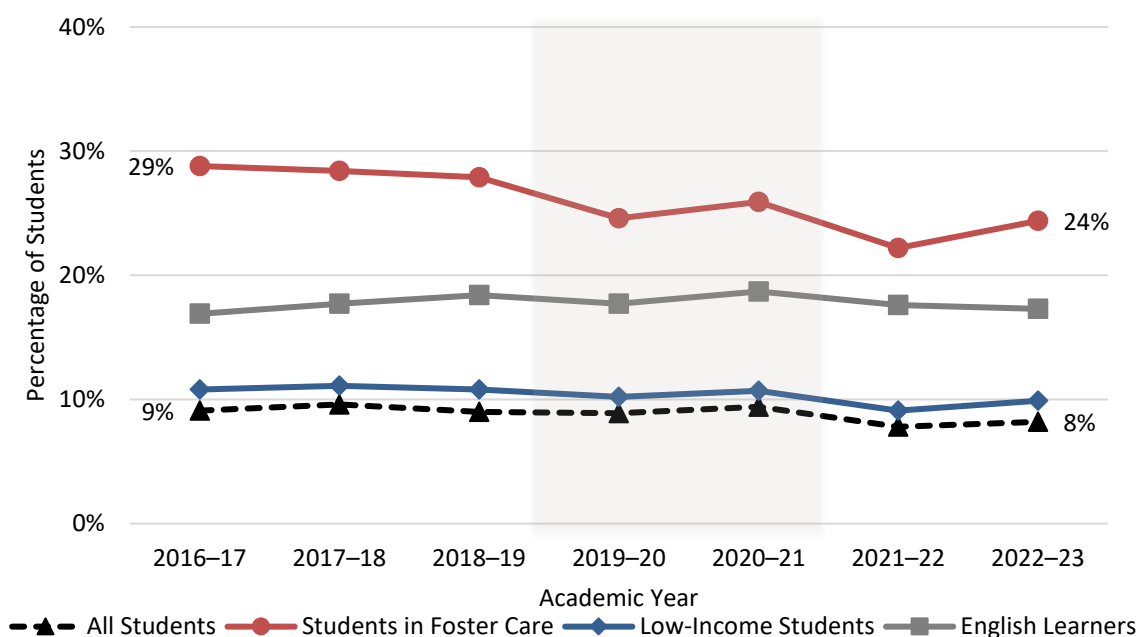
low-income students remained relatively stable, at or just below one in 10 students (exhibit 10). Although dropout rates for students in foster care were consistently higher over these years, the data showed a notable improvement for this student group, with dropout rates decreasing from 29 percent to 24 percent across the seven-year period. In 2022–23, roughly one of every four students in foster care who enrolled in high school eventually dropped out.

Across the same period, cohort graduation rates indicated that about 85 percent of all students graduated with a regular high school diploma in four years (exhibit 11). These rates were closely trailed by low-income students. In contrast, students in foster care were less likely to graduate with a regular diploma across this same period, with rates lower than both other high-need student groups and at least 25 percentage points lower than their peers in the general student body. Thus, students in foster care were less likely to experience this important education milestone toward opportunities for advancement in adulthood. That being said, this gap appears to be narrowing. Although graduation rates increased slightly for all students and other high-need student groups, this improvement was especially pronounced for students in foster care, corresponding to a 10-percentage-point increase over the seven-year period. As of 2022–23, three of every five students in foster care had earned a regular high school diploma.

In reflecting on these improvements, professionals who were interviewed for the study noted the value of implementing such policies such as those reflected in Assembly Bill 216, which allows students in foster care who transfer schools after two years of high school to graduate by completing the state’s minimum graduation requirements rather than those required by their school district.⁸ Some expressed the opinion that in its recognition of the challenges that school instability poses to students in foster care, this law has played a primary role in improving dropout rates by offering struggling students alternative pathways for continuation. They commented that policies like these may have encouraged students who were falling behind on credits to pursue a diploma. Others reflected that the extension of foster care to age 21 may be a contributing factor to this growing percentage of diploma-earning students in foster care, suggesting that the age extension has provided students with more stability and support during their secondary education, enabling them to achieve better outcomes.

⁸ See CDE’s [Foster Youth Education Rights webpage](#).

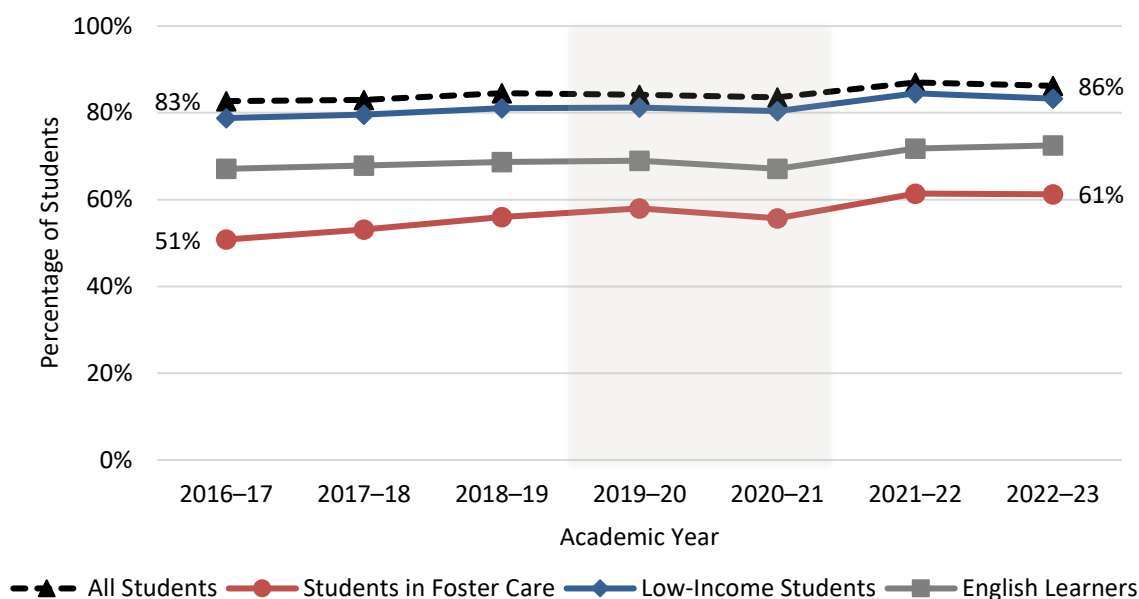
Exhibit 10. High school cohort dropout rates, for students in foster care and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23



Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2016–17 through 2022–23.

Note. Presents the percentage of cohort students who do not graduate with a regular high school diploma, do not complete high school, and are not still enrolled as a "fifth-year senior." Shaded regions indicate peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Exhibit 11. Four-year cohort graduation rate, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23



Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2016–17 through 2022–23.

Note. Presents the percentage of cohort students who received the standard high school diploma within four years. Shaded regions indicate peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The percentage of graduating students in foster care who meet admission requirements for California’s public universities virtually stagnated, rising by only 1 percentage point and remaining lower than for other high-need student groups.

Students in foster care who graduated from high school in four years were less likely than graduates in other high-need student groups to meet admission requirements for the state’s universities.

For each year of the study, among graduating students who entered grade 9 together, less than 45 percent of low-income students and around 35 percent of students who are English learners met all requirements for admission to a University of California or California State University campus (exhibit 12).

We’ve done a better job getting more youth graduated from high school, but then they’re not always prepared for college as a result. ... Maybe they just don’t go on to college, but they’re still going to do better with that diploma.

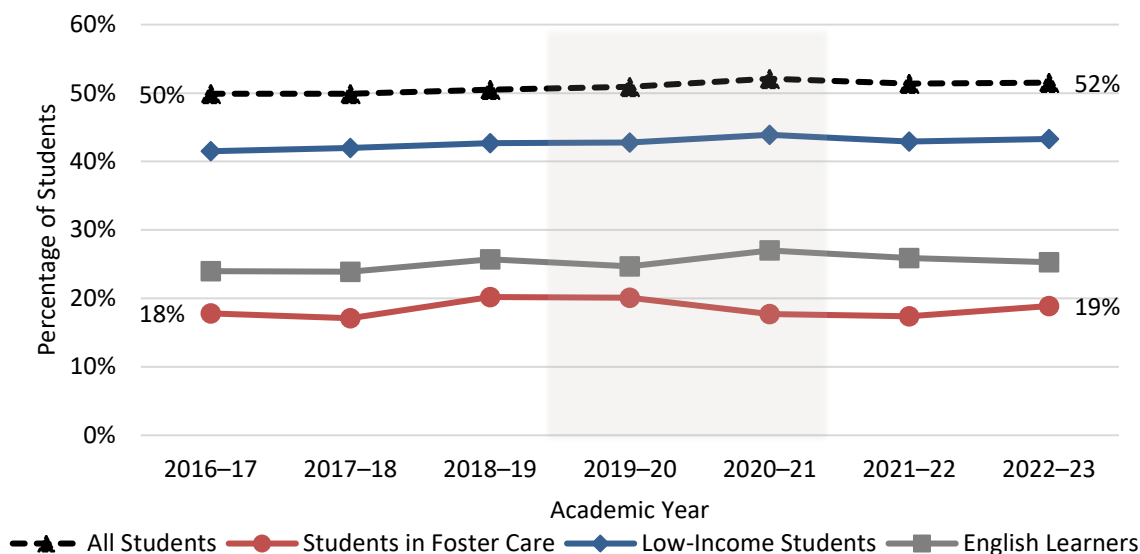
—Child Welfare/Education Professional

In contrast, less than 20 percent of graduating students who entered grade 9 together and who were in foster care at some point during high school met these requirements. This means that fewer than one in five graduating students who had been in foster care successfully completed the state’s a-g college preparatory course requirements for admission to California’s four-year public universities, effectively limiting their postsecondary opportunities.⁹

Professionals interviewed about this issue suggested that although the increase in graduation rates for students in foster care (exhibit 11) looks positive on the surface, concerns remain about the long-term outcomes for these students, especially when many graduate under the less rigorous state minimum standards.

⁹ For more information about courses required for California State University and University of California admission (a-g courses), see CDE’s [Courses Required for California Public University webpage](#).

Exhibit 12. Percentage of California students who met University of California or California State University admission requirements, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23



Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2016–17 through 2022–23.

Note. Shaded regions indicate peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The percentage of students in foster care enrolling in college within one year of high school completion did not improve across an eight-year period.

The term *high school completers* encompasses both those who graduate with a regular high school diploma and those who finish high school as a non-graduate completer, a group that includes, for example, those who take and pass the California High School Proficiency Exam.¹⁰ In 2014–15, roughly 59 percent of low-income high school completers enrolled in higher education within one year of completing high school, a rate that decreased over the next eight years, falling to 50 percent in 2021–22 (exhibit 13). For students in foster care who were high school completers, the rate of those who enrolled in postsecondary education within one year of high school was lower than that of their low-income peers in 2014–15, at 53 percent. By the end of 2021–22, the rate had decreased, ending at roughly 49 percent.

Rate disparities between student groups may be even more pronounced when considering all students in foster care because many did not complete high school.

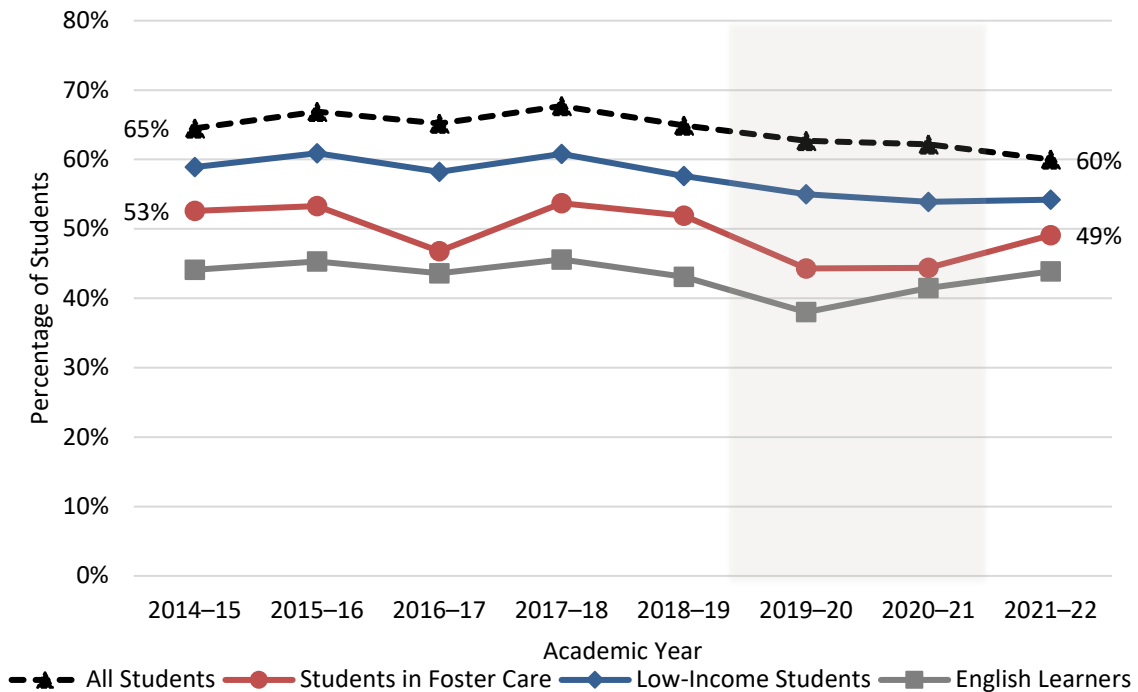
¹⁰ Other non-graduate completers include California High School Proficiency Exam completers, General Education Development completers, and adult education high school diploma graduates, but not Special Education Certificates of Completion. See more at CDE's [Information about the College-Going Rate webpage](#).

Many students in foster care still perceive college as financially out of reach, and they feel like they have to work full time. The fear of becoming homeless overrides everything, which is totally understandable. They feel like their only option is to work full time, and if they go to college, it has to be on top of working full time, not in place of it. I think that continues to be a challenge. They're not getting the information, and they're not getting the preparation.

—Child Welfare/Education Professional

Overall, these data show that for those students in foster care who overcome the numerous obstacles to high school completion, fewer than half go on to pursue college within one year, possibly limiting career development opportunities and earning potential. Professionals interviewed about this issue specifically pointed to economic challenges faced by many students in foster care, noting that it can lead these students to prioritize work over continuing their education in college. They also expressed the concern that some students in foster care may not be aware of or fully understand the financial and housing support available to them in college, a factor that can also contribute to lower enrollment rates.

Exhibit 13. Percentage of California high school completers who enrolled in college within one year, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2020–21



Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2014–15 through 2020–21.

Note. Shaded regions indicate peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key findings about districts' LCAP funding plans for programs and services for students in foster care

Findings

1. One quarter of all of California's students in foster care were enrolled across the 10 school districts with the most students in foster care.
2. Among the LCAPs' planned actions that referenced students in foster care in those districts, very few were unique to students in foster care. Rather, nearly all actions were for the three high-need student groups combined: students in foster care, students who are English learners, and low-income students.
3. An even smaller fraction of planned funds was unique to students in foster care.

In 2013, California enacted the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), an ambitious overhaul of the state's school funding system. The law aims to make the distribution of funding more equitable and to increase local control, flexibility, and accountability over budgeting and decision-making. By design, it redistributes resources so that local education agencies with higher percentages of "unduplicated" high-need students—students in foster care, students who are English learners, and low-income students—receive additional funds to increase or improve programs or services to address their education needs.

Before LCFF, the state determined how districts spent their funds through multiple funding streams, including revenue limits that were calculated differently for each district, general purpose block grants, and restricted categorical programs. With LCFF, most of these funding streams were combined into a guaranteed multiyear commitment and redistributed using a standardized formula.

Under LCFF, districts are now entitled to an annual base grant for each student, adjusted by the average number of students in class each day of the school year (average daily attendance) and grade span (for example, the base grant ranged from \$9,304 to \$11,391 per student in 2022–23 [Legislative Analyst's Office, 2023]). LCFF recognizes that students in foster care, those who are English learners, and low-income students typically have greater education needs than other students and, thus, require additional supports and resources to meet grade-level standards. To that end, the funding system provides districts with a supplemental grant of 20 percent of the base grant for each unduplicated high-need student. On top of that, districts with a high proportion of unduplicated students are entitled to a concentration grant of 65 percent of the base grant for each unduplicated

student above a 55 percent threshold. Districts may also receive funding from different sources, such as other state, local, and federal funds.

Under LCFF, students in foster care are also considered to be low-income students, but in the funding formula they are counted only once (unduplicated) and do not necessarily generate additional funds as a distinct high-need student

group. However, districts can opt to spend LCFF funds on students in foster care only or in combination with the other high-need student groups.

These efforts are required to be described in each district's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). Every year since 2014, California districts have had to prepare a three-year LCAP that describes the goals, actions, services, and expenditures that are intended to help all students succeed, including efforts that target the three student groups identified in the funding formula as being high need. LCAPs are designed to address state and local education improvement priorities and are created as part of a district's budget process.

There are no statewide data available for monitoring LCFF funding planned for students in foster care. The examination of LCAPs in this current study is intended to partially fill that gap. The researchers have systematically analyzed the planned actions (programs or services) and expenditures (funds committed for each action) laid out in the LCAP of each of the state's 10 districts with the largest enrollments of students in foster care. Adding to a growing body of research on LCFF (e.g., Johnson, 2023), this information offers a first look at the planned uses of LCFF funds in these districts—and the amount of funds districts have allocated—to improve education outcomes for students in foster care.

The following review offers a window into the state's current education funding context for students in foster care and may signal how well the equity intent of LCFF for these students is realized locally.

Local Control and Accountability Plan

District LCAPs document and describe the planned actions and expenditures intended to improve specific outcomes for students.

Actions are the planned programs or services districts intend to carry out to meet their goals.

Expenditures are the planned funds for carrying out each planned action.

The 10 districts with the highest enrollments of students in foster care represent a quarter of the K–12 students in foster care who are enrolled in California public schools.

For nearly a decade, 10 of the state’s more than 1,000 districts have accounted for 24 percent of California’s students in foster care, totaling 31,722 students in foster care on Census Day 2022–23 (exhibit 14).

Exhibit 14. The 10 California school districts with the highest enrollments of students in foster care, 2022–23

School district name	Number of Students in Foster Care	Percentage of State’s Students in Foster Care
Los Angeles Unified	3,787	12
Fresno Unified	780	3
Lancaster Elementary	525	2
Long Beach Unified	508	2
Antelope Valley Union High	491	2
Palmdale Elementary	480	2
San Bernardino City Unified	476	2
Moreno Valley Unified	355	1
Kern High	348	1
Hesperia Unified	341	1
Total for 10 Districts	7,750	24
Total Statewide	31,722	100

Source. Authors’ analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2022–23.

Note. Due to rounding, the percentage of the state’s students in foster care accounted for by each district may not sum to the total for all 10 districts listed.

Among the LCAPs' planned actions that referenced students in foster care, nearly all were intended for the three high-need student groups combined. Very few were unique to students in foster care.

The 10 LCAPs, collectively, included 482 actions (i.e., planned programs or services that districts intended to carry out to improve student outcomes) (exhibit 15). Of these, 22 percent were schoolwide or districtwide efforts to serve all students; 57 percent were

targeted to specific groups that included students in foster care; and 21 percent were for specific student groups other than students in foster care.

LCAP was originally intended to focus on services, supports, resources, and targeted funding for kids who really need it, with an emphasis on being trauma responsive. But over time, it became about providing services for all vulnerable kids. All vulnerable groups get the same thing, and as a result, a lot of kids aren't getting much at all.

—Child Welfare/Education Professional

Among the 276 actions that referenced students in foster care, nearly all (264) were intended for the three high-need student groups combined (students in foster care, students who are English learners, and low-income students). Ten actions were unique to students in foster care, and two actions were for students in foster care *and* for students experiencing homelessness.

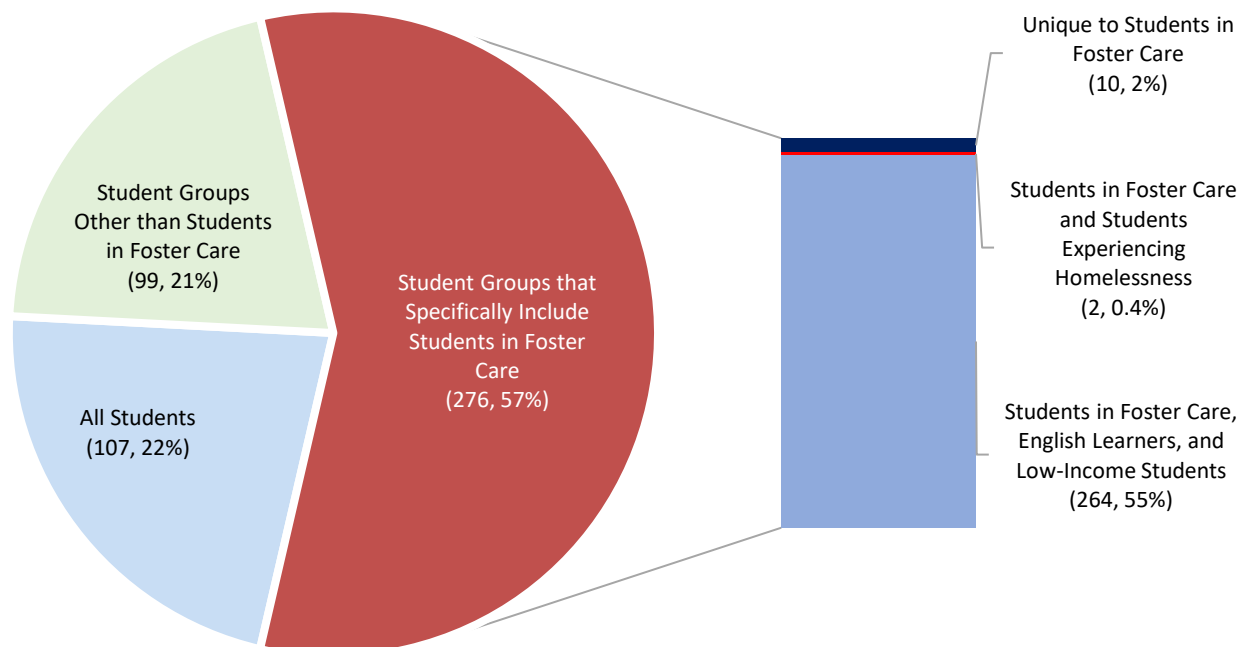
Among the 10 districts, only seven provided at least one action uniquely for students in foster care, despite recent CDE requirements

that districts with numerically significant populations of students in foster care include specific information about the services and supports they are providing to this population.¹¹ It is noteworthy that among the three districts that did not provide a specific action solely for students in foster care, one did include an action addressing both students in foster care and those experiencing homelessness.

The professionals interviewed about this issue shared that some districts may have significant efforts underway to support students in foster care, but the work is not reflected in their LCAP because there is a disconnect between administrators who author the LCAPs and staff who implement the programs. As a result, they noted, effective programs may go unrecognized and unrewarded. They also suggested that some districts may choose not to include all their plans in the LCAP—including those intended to support students in foster care—because the LCAP has annual reporting requirements that some may consider overly burdensome.

¹¹ School districts, county offices of education, and charter schools that have a numerically significant subgroup of students in foster care are encouraged to include specific actions in the LCAP designed to meet needs specific to students in foster care (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/lc/templateinstructions.asp>).

Exhibit 15. Number and Percentage of LCAP actions across the 10 districts by student groups intended to be served, 2022–23



Source. Author's analysis of the 2022–23 LCAP for each of California's 10 school districts with the highest enrollments of students in foster care. Decimals are provided for percentages less than 1. Percentages may not sum due to rounding.

Note. The first number in each parenthesis is the number of actions; the total number of LCAP actions is 482.

LCAP actions referencing students in foster care, whether uniquely or in conjunction with other high-need student groups, were mostly for social-emotional, mental health, and academic support.

Each individual LCAP action represents a specific plan for a program or service, accompanied by a planned expenditure to fund the effort. Notably, a single planned action may require funding from multiple spending categories, which are not mutually exclusive. For example, a planned program or service to improve academic outcomes might include expenditures for hiring and training staff, purchasing instructional materials, and providing various types of direct student supports—each representing a distinct spending category. A list of 17 spending categories was developed for the analysis of these planned actions (appendix A). (See exhibit 16 for a full list of LCAP spending categories used for this study.) Note that because

[Students in foster care constitute] a special population that has specific needs that are different than any other subgroup of students.

—Child Welfare/Education Professional

one planned action can require funding from multiple spending categories, the percentages presented in the following paragraph add to more than 100.

Among the 276 actions that referenced students in foster care across the 10 district LCAPs, the most common planned spending categories included allocations for social-emotional support services (to fund some portion of 34% of all actions) and for academic support services (33% of all actions) (exhibit 16). Planned actions that included social-emotional support services corresponded, for example, to district plans for mental health counseling, case management of student health and emotional well-being, drug and alcohol prevention efforts, and social-emotional learning activities. Academic support services planned actions included, for example, basic skills development and other academic recovery interventions not tied to a particular subject matter. A quarter of the actions that referenced students in foster care, either uniquely or in conjunction with other high-need groups, included planned expenditures in professional development and staffing, for hiring new staff or retaining staff. About a fifth of the actions that referenced students in foster care included college and career readiness and family engagement planned expenditures. The other actions were related to spending categories reported less frequently in the LCAPs.

The 10 actions planned solely for students in foster care were more heavily focused on social-emotional learning and mental health support (six of 10 actions) and academic support (six of 10 actions)—all tailored to the needs of this particular student group. Examples of social-emotional learning and mental health support tailored for students in foster care were counseling, case management, and trauma-informed services. Examples of academic support to help improve academic achievement specifically for students in foster care included tracking academic performance, tutoring, and tailored academic interventions. Three of the 10 actions fell under the targeted staffing category (defined in exhibit 16), which included hiring additional staff, such as social workers and counselors, specifically to support students in foster care in both social-emotional and academic areas.

Exhibit 16. Spending categories included in LCAPs' planned actions referencing students in foster care, 2022–23

Spending Categories	Definition	Percentage of Planned Actions that Include Spending Category
Support Services: Social-Emotional	Programs or services that provide students with social and emotional learning and mental health supports	34
Support Services: Academic	Programs or services that help students improve academic achievement but not related to subject-specific interventions	33
Staffing: Targeted	Planned expenditures related to new staff or staff retention that is targeted to specific programs or services, including class-size reduction	25
Professional Development Services	Programs or services that provide a variety of professional learning opportunities for educators and administrators, such as trainings and coaching	25
Family Engagement Services	Efforts to promote the engagement of families in school improvement efforts and increasing student achievement	19
College and Career Readiness Services	Programs or services that prepare students to enter college and the workforce	19
Subject-Specific Services	Programs or services that help students improve subject-specific academic achievement	17
Extended Learning Services	Programs or services that offer students learning opportunities outside regular school hours (e.g., before or after school hours, summer or intersessions)	15
Materials: Instructional	Planned expenditures for instructional materials such as curriculum, textbooks, supplemental reading materials, and multimedia products	13
Staffing: General	Planned expenditures related to hiring new staff or staff retention with no mention of specific programs or services	11
Technology	Planned expenditures for technology such as database or intranet system improvements, software, and hardware (e.g., laptops)	8
Materials: Non-Instructional	Planned expenditures for non-instructional materials such as attendance incentives, Advanced Placement fees, health care supplies, and counseling materials	8
Support Services: Transportation	Programs or services that provide students with transportation, including to a school of origin	3
Support Services: Early Childhood Education	Programs or services that promote early childhood development of preschool students to increase school readiness	2
Other	Planned expenditures that did not fit the other spending categories	1
Special Education Services	Programs or services for students identified with a disability	1
English Learner Services	Programs or services for students identified as English learners	0

Source. Author's analysis of the 2022–23 LCAP for each of California's 10 school districts with the highest enrollments of students in foster care.

Note. Appendix A describes the development of these 17 spending categories. The total number of actions that referenced students in foster care, either uniquely or in conjunction with other high-need student groups, is 276. Percentages sum to more than 100 because each planned action in an LCAP can draw from multiple spending categories.

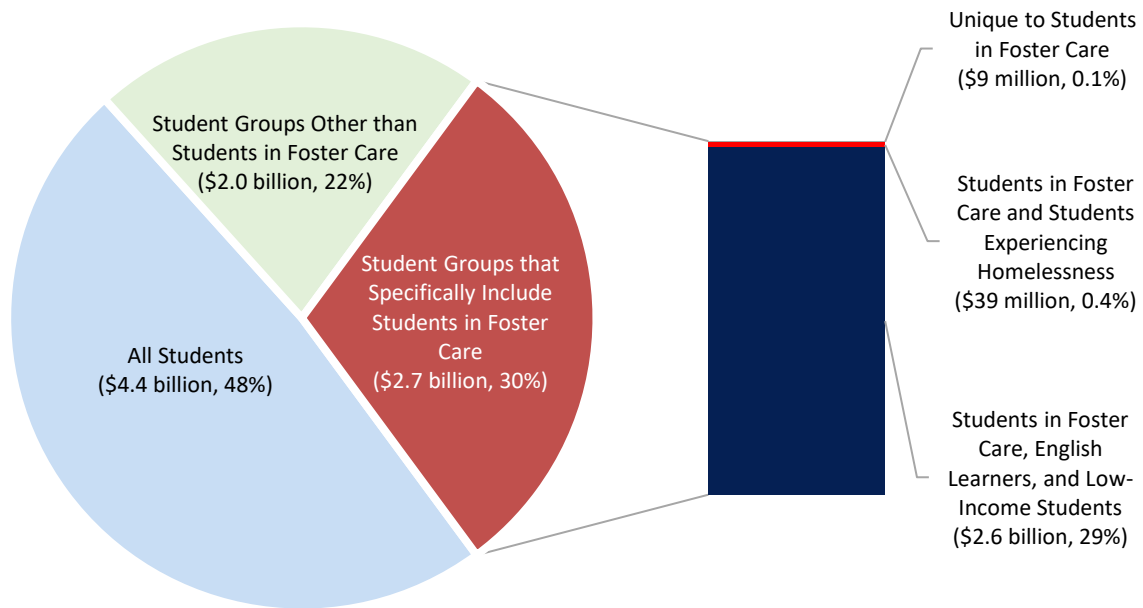
Compared to planned actions, an even smaller fraction of planned expenditures (0.1%) was solely for students in foster care.

The promise was that higher-need students would get more funding and that funding would be spent doing things specific to their needs. I think the promise is still there. ... All the things that make students in foster care have all the worst outcomes across the board—their instability, their trauma, et cetera—means that they need more of the interventions than everyone else, and they need different interventions based on their unique needs.

—Child Welfare/Education Professional

Across the 10 LCAPs examined, the funding amounts for a single action ranged from a low of \$2,548 to a high of \$1.65 billion. Altogether, the LCAPs included a total of \$9.0 billion in planned expenditures in 2022–23 (exhibit 17). Roughly half of the total funds were for schoolwide or districtwide actions for all students; 22 percent of the planned funding was for specific groups other than students in foster care; and about 30 percent was intended for specific student groups that included students in foster care. Among these planned expenditures, most of the funding was allocated to programs and services targeted to the three high-need student groups combined. Actions planned uniquely for students in foster care corresponded to planned funding of \$9.0 million or 0.1 percent of the total planned funds. It is unclear as to whether this dedicated funding was sufficient to support these actions.

Exhibit 17. Distribution of LCAP funds across the 10 districts by student groups, 2022–23



Source. Author's analysis of the 2022–23 LCAP for each of California's 10 school districts with the highest enrollments of students in foster care. Decimals are provided for percentages less than 1. Percentages may not sum due to rounding.

Note. Total amount of planned expenditures for all actions across the 10 districts was \$8,992,358,743.

Reflecting on these findings, the professionals who were interviewed acknowledged that the relatively small number of students in foster care compared to other high-need student groups had led them to expect that most districts would allocate only a small portion of their planned supplemental and concentration funds to programs and services specific for this student group. However, they commented that one result of districts' being permitted to spend supplemental and concentration funds on general programs was that students in foster care may end up receiving equal, but not necessarily adequate, support. They argued that due to the unique situations and challenges for students in foster care, they require more tailored interventions, yet, in practice, they often receive the same interventions as all students or even other high-need student groups, which might not fully address their specific needs. The interviewees emphasized the need for revised requirements, guidance, and accountability at the state level to ensure that funds are spent directly on meeting the distinct needs of students in foster care, rather than being absorbed into general education budgets. They agreed that including more actions specific to students in foster care and supporting those actions with appropriate funding would enable districts to better serve the unique education challenges of these students.

I don't think it's about services; it's about ensuring access. Things like afterschool programs, there's an access issue, and it's different for a young person in foster care than for those in other student groups. You have to think differently about access barriers. To me, it's about implementation. Grouping students together [in planned action and spending is okay] as long as we have proper implementation pathways.

**- Child Welfare/Education
Professional**

In addition, professionals noted that if students in foster care are to fully benefit from investments directed toward all and high-need student groups, districts must ensure that students in foster care have access to these resources. They observed that this group's higher rates of chronic absence and school mobility might pose specific access problems for students in foster care. Districts with actions and funding dedicated uniquely to students in foster care may be better equipped to respond to such challenges and to facilitate student access to districtwide and school-level programs and services.

Beginning with the 2024–25 school year, districts must ensure that their LCAPs include specific actions to address the low performance of each student group with a “red” status level, that is, the lowest performance level on the California School Dashboard. Because students in foster care are often struggling more than their peers, this new requirement might promote an increase in the planned actions and funding dedicated to improving their education outcomes. Without more detailed and disaggregated data specific to students in foster care, it remains an open question as to whether, or to what extent, LCFF provides districts with sufficient guidance and equitable resources for addressing the long-standing achievement gap of students in foster care.

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Appendix A. Methodology

Data sources

This report used publicly available data maintained by the California Department of Education (CDE). Quantitative analyses were performed using data from several CDE sources for 2014-15 through 2022-23, as data were available, including the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Assistance Status Data Files, and the CDE school directory. Qualitative analyses were performed using Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) from the 10 California school districts with the most students in foster care for 2022-23.

CALPADS

A longitudinal data system, CALPADS is used to maintain individual-level data including student demographics, course data, discipline, assessments, staff assignments, and other data for state and federal reporting. Educational data for students in grades K-12 enrolled in a California public school were obtained for academic years 2014-15 through 2022-23, as available.

CAASPP

A statewide system of tests, the CAASPP measures student skills in English language arts, mathematics, and science (CAASPP, 2024). Academic performance data from the English language arts/literacy and mathematics Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments were obtained for students in grades 3-8 and 11.

ESSA Assistance Status Data Files

Information about the ESSA assistance status of California's public schools was obtained from the ESSA Assistance Status Data Files. These files included information about schools' eligibility for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI), Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

LCAPs

Local education agencies (LEAs) submit LCAPs annually to describe planned use of funds for the upcoming school year. Qualitative analysis was conducted on the LCAPs of the 10 school districts with the highest enrollments of students in foster care in 2022-23. These districts were, in order of descending numbers of students in care: Los Angeles Unified School District, Fresno Unified School District, Lancaster Elementary School District, Long Beach Unified School District, Antelope Valley Union High School District, Palmdale Elementary School District, San Bernardino City Unified School District, Moreno Valley Unified School District, Kern High School District, and Hesperia Unified School District.

Quantitative analysis variables

The following variables were used to describe the demographic characteristics, schools attended, and educational outcomes for California K-12 public school students enrolled between school years 2014-15 and 2022-23.

Enrollment

Two types of student enrollment counts from CALPADS were used:

- **Census Day enrollment:** This enrollment count, captured on Census Day, the first Wednesday in October, offers a snapshot of the number of students enrolled on that specific day across California’s schools. The data can be accessed at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesenrcensus.asp>.
- **Cumulative enrollment:** This enrollment count, captured at the end of the school year, offers an unduplicated count of students with an open enrollment at any time during the academic year. The data can be accessed at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesenrcum.asp>.

High-need student group membership

For data retrieved from CALPADS, membership in high-need student groups was defined by CALPADS (CDE, 2024a). Student group membership was not mutually exclusive; some students may have been represented in more than one student group.

- **Students in foster care:** Students in foster care were defined as those designated “foster youth” in CALPADS. In CALPADS, foster youth included those identified by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Foster Youth Data Matching Process as being in foster care (Foster Placement or Foster Family Maintenance). The full definition of foster youth for purposes of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF; CDE, 2024c) as specified in CALPADS can be retrieved from <https://documentation.calpads.org/Glossary/GeneralData/FosterYouth/>.
- **Low-income students:** Low-income students were defined as those meeting requirements for the “socioeconomically disadvantaged” subgroup in CALPADS. The full definition can be retrieved from <https://documentation.calpads.org/Glossary/AccountabilitySubgroupData/Socio-EconomicallyDisadvantagedSubgroup/>.
- **Students who were English learners:** English learners were defined as those meeting requirements for this subgroup in CALPADS. The full definition can be retrieved from <https://documentation.calpads.org/Glossary/EnglishLanguageAcquisitionData/EnglishLearner/>.

For data retrieved from CAASPP, membership in high-need student groups was defined by CAASPP (2024). A list of CAASPP reporting student groups can be retrieved from <https://caaspp-elpac.ets.org/caaspp/AboutCAASPP#caasppRptStdGrps>.

Student race/ethnicity

Student race/ethnicity data were retrieved from CALPADS. The race/ethnicity categories reported in CALPADS included African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Filipino, Hispanic or Latino, Pacific Islander, White, Two or More Races, and Not Reported. This report summarized student race/ethnicity by student group over time for only the four most populous races/ethnicities representing more than 5% of the student

body in any given year: African American, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, and White. The data can be accessed at <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

Student disability

Student disability data were retrieved from CALPADS. Prior to 2019-20, students were identified as having at least one disability if they had a Student Program Education Program Code of 144 (Special Education) and an Education Program Membership Code of either 1 (Eligible) or 3 (Participating). Beginning in 2019-20, students were identified if they had an active SPED Education Plan Type of 100 (Individual Education Program [IEP]/IFP), 150 (Individualized Family Service Plan [IFSP]), or 200 (Instructional Services Plan [ISP]). The data can be accessed at <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

High-poverty schools

Data used to determine rates in high-poverty schools were retrieved from CALPADS. Based on prior work by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2024; Snyder & Musu-Gillette, 2015), high-poverty schools were operationalized for this study as schools in which 75 percent of students or greater were eligible for free- or reduced-price meals on Census Day (retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filespp.asp>). Specifically, for each school, a percentage was calculated by dividing the unduplicated count of students eligible for free- or reduced-price meals by the total number of enrolled students.

Low-performing schools

Data used to determine rates in low-performing schools were retrieved from CALPADS and the ESSA Assistance Status Data Files. For the purposes of this report, low-performing schools were operationalized as those with those eligible for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) under ESSA. The CDE notes that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, California received a federal accountability waiver of all 2020 Dashboard reporting requirements, and therefore, schools designated as eligible for CSI or ATSI in 2019-20 were also identified this way in 2020-21 (CDE, 2024b). The data can be accessed at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/ti/essaassistdatafiles.asp>.

Alternative schools

Data used to determine rates in alternative schools were retrieved from CALPADS and the CDE school directory. For this report, alternative schools were operationalized as those with an educational option type of anything other than traditional as documented in the directory (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/schooldirectory/>). This meant that the following educational option types were considered alternative:

- Alternative school of choice
- Community day school
- Continuation school
- County community school
- District special education consortia school
- Home and hospital
- Juvenile court school
- Opportunity school
- Special education school

Nonpublic, nonsectarian schools and district offices were also considered alternative.

School stability

School stability data were retrieved from CALPADS. Students were determined to have a “stable” enrollment during the academic year if the enrollment record was a minimum of 245 consecutive calendar days at the same school without a disqualifying exit. The stability rate was calculated by dividing the stability count by the adjusted cumulative enrollment, that is, enrolled students with an enrollment start date on or after July 1 and on or before June 30. The data can be accessed at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesr.asp>.

Chronic absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism data were retrieved from CALPADS. Students were determined to be chronically absent if they were eligible to be considered chronically absent during the academic year and they were absent for 10 percent or more of the days they were expected to attend. The chronic absenteeism rate was determined by dividing the chronic absenteeism count by the total number of cumulatively enrolled students who were eligible to be considered chronically absent. The data can be accessed at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/chronicdatafiles.asp>.

Suspension

Suspension data were retrieved from CALPADS. Suspension rates were determined by dividing the unduplicated count of students suspended by the total number of students using cumulative enrollment. The data can be accessed at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesd.asp>.

Grade-level standards for English language arts/literacy and mathematics

Student achievement data were retrieved from CAASPP. Scores from the English language arts/literacy and mathematics exams from the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments were used. The tests were available for students in grades 3-8 and 11. Student group definitions as determined by CAASPP were used. Percentages were calculated by dividing the number of students who earned a score of “Standard Met” (Level 3) or “Standard Exceeded” (Level 4) by the number of tests with valid scores. The data can be accessed at <https://caaspp-elpac.ets.org/caaspp/>.

High school dropout and graduation

High school dropout and graduation data were retrieved from CALPADS. Information about the Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) is available at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/acgrinfo.asp>. The dropout rate is the number of students who dropped out within four years divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort. The data for both dropout and graduation can be accessed at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/gdtop.asp>.

University of California or California State University admission requirements

California State University/University of California (CSU/UC) admission requirements data were retrieved from CALPADS. The rate of cohort graduates meeting the CSU/UC requirements is defined as the percentage of cohort graduates who met all a-g admission requirements for a California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) school. The data can be accessed at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/fsacgr.asp>.

College enrollment within one year of high school completion

College enrollment data were retrieved from CALPADS. The college-going rate is defined by dividing the number of high school completers who enrolled in a postsecondary institution of higher education (e.g., college or university) within 12 months of completing high school by the total number of completers. The data can be accessed at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/files/cgr12.asp>.

Qualitative analysis

This report focused on the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) spending allocations for LCAP actions directed specifically for students in foster care. LCAP actions are the individual funded activities that are intended to achieve the district's goals as stated in their plans. These actions were the unit of analysis for documenting the amount of funds directed at students in foster care and the types of actions planned to be funded.

Analysis process

For the process of coding, analysis, and reanalysis of the LCAP spending allocation data, the research team engaged in a multi-step process that included the following steps:

- 1. Developing a coding scheme for listed actions:** The initial foundation of the coding scheme was a list of 12 spending categories identified in a recent analysis by the Public Policy Institute of California of LCFF spending in all California school districts (Lafortune et al., 2023). This analysis included targeted high-need students specified in the LCFF (i.e., students in foster care, low-income students, and English learners) but that did not examine spending allocations by any specific student group.

Two members of the research team initially applied this a priori scheme to separately code three LCAP reports from school year 2022-23. They then compared their coded data and discussed the fit of the coding rationale. Based on this inductive coding process, the list of a priori codes were revised and refined to align with the LCFF spending allocations on actions that were for students in foster care as a student group or for students in foster in combination with other high-risk student groups. The final list included 17 spending categories (table A1).

Exhibit A1. The final codebook used for coding LCAP spending allocations in the 10 California school districts with the highest enrollments of students in foster care

Spending categories	Definition
College and career readiness	Programs or services that prepare students to enter college and the workforce. Examples include, but are not limited to, those that facilitate the completion of A-G courses, career technical education pathways, and college and financial aid applications.
Support services	<p>Programs or services that provide students with social and emotional learning, mental and health supports. Examples include, but are not limited to, counseling, behavior and social and emotional skill-building interventions, SEL mentoring, and health services.</p> <p>Programs or services that help students in grades Transitional/Kindergarten-12 improve academic achievement but not related to subject-specific interventions. Examples include, but are not limited to, class-size reduction, tutoring and academic mentoring.</p> <p>Programs or services that promote early childhood development of preschool students to increase school readiness. Examples include, but are not limited to, Transitional Kindergarten.</p> <p>Programs or services that provide students with transportation, including to a school of origin. Examples include, but are not limited to, contracting with transportation companies, creating new bus routes, adding stops to existing bus routes, and reimbursing LEAs that use buses for their excess costs.</p>
Extended learning	Programs or services that offer students learning opportunities outside of regular school hours (before and after school hours, summer and intersessions). Examples include, but are not limited to, after-school programs, clubs and teams, field trips, and summer enrichment programs.
Special education services	Programs or services for students identified with a disability. Examples include, but are not limited to, efforts to meet the needs of students with disabilities, including physical, mental, emotional, and processing disorders.
English Learner services	Programs or services for students identified as English learners. Examples include, but are not limited to, dual-language immersion, developmental, and structured-English immersion programs and newcomer student supports.
Family engagement	Efforts to promote the engagement of families in school improvement efforts and increasing student achievement. Examples include, but are not limited to, family input on the needs, priorities, and spending allocations on actions in LCAPs; contributing to district strategic planning and decision-making; and participating in school activities and the academic learning of their students.
Technology	Planned spending for technology such as database or intranet system improvements, software, and hardware (e.g., laptops).
Materials	<p>Planned spending for instructional materials such as curriculum, textbooks, supplemental reading materials, and multimedia products.</p> <p>Planned spending for non-instructional materials such as attendance incentives, AP fees, health care supplies, and counseling materials.</p>
Professional development	Services that provide a variety of professional learning opportunities for educators and administrators.
Staffing	<p>Planned spending related to hiring new staff or staff retention with no mention of specific programs or services.</p> <p>Planned spending related to new staff or staff retention that is targeted to specific programs or services, including class-size reduction.</p>
Subject-specific actions	Programs or services that help students in grades Transitional/Kindergarten-12 improve subject-specific academic achievement. Examples include, but are not limited to, literacy and mathematics.
Others	Planned spending that did not fit the other spending categories.

Note: Adapted by the authors from Lafortune and colleagues (2023).

2. **Establishing interrater reliability:** To ensure consistency in coding, the same two members of the research team coded two LCAP reports separately using the final coding scheme. They then reconciled differences in their coding and re-coded a subset of the data. After two rounds of independent coding and reconciliation of results, agreement rates of 96 and 97 percent were reached for the two reports, respectively.
3. **Coding and analysis:** Using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, one of the two team members who did the reliability testing then coded all of the 482 actions across the 10 districts' 2022-23 LCAPs that were directed specifically for students in foster care. The results were then synthesized through qualitative content analysis procedures, including theme categorization and synthesis of the findings.

Study limitations

The inclusion of data from multiple school years impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic is both a strength and a limitation. On one hand, understanding student outcomes across the pandemic is critical to support learning recovery, especially for high-need student groups like students in foster care. On the other hand, the unique circumstance of the pandemic limits the generalizability of findings across years.

Further, due to the pandemic and other data collection circumstances beyond the control of the present study, this study is limited by the fact that multiple outcomes have missing years of data.

Finally, by definition, the three high-need student groups examined in this study were not mutually exclusive. For example, students could qualify for inclusion in the low-income student group by means of being foster program eligible.

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Appendix B. Additional Data and Frequency Tables

Exhibit B1. Number and percentage of California students in foster care, Census Day and cumulative enrollment, 2014–15 through 2022–23

Year	All Students	Students in Foster Care		Low-Income Students		English Learners		
	Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
2014–15	6,235,520	44,977	0.7	3,764,433	60	1,392,279	22	
2015–16	6,226,737	43,356	0.7	3,768,815	61	1,373,724	22	
2016–17	6,228,235	37,715	0.6	3,723,178	60	1,332,405	21	
2017–18	6,220,413	34,426	0.6	3,827,352	62	1,271,150	20	
2018–19	6,186,278	33,563	0.5	3,766,007	61	1,195,988	19	
2019–20	6,163,001	33,340	0.5	3,741,775	61	1,148,024	19	
2020–21	6,002,523	32,359	0.5	3,621,547	60	1,062,290	18	
2021–22	5,892,240	31,060	0.5	3,513,409	60	1,127,648	19	
2022–23	5,852,544	31,722	0.5	3,597,503	61	1,112,535	19	
Cumulative	2016–17	6,405,168	55,282	0.9	3,922,727	61	1,404,523	22
	2017–18	6,384,919	50,247	0.8	4,037,882	63	1,336,145	21
	2018–19	6,329,883	46,810	0.7	3,956,293	63	1,287,006	20
	2019–20	6,306,934	45,307	0.7	3,902,592	62	1,214,236	19
	2020–21	6,147,253	43,766	0.7	3,781,457	62	1,166,986	19
	2021–22	6,064,658	43,191	0.7	3,760,878	62	1,215,972	20
	2022–23	6,019,551	41,901	0.7	3,792,922	63	1,210,441	20

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data 2014–15 through 2022–23.

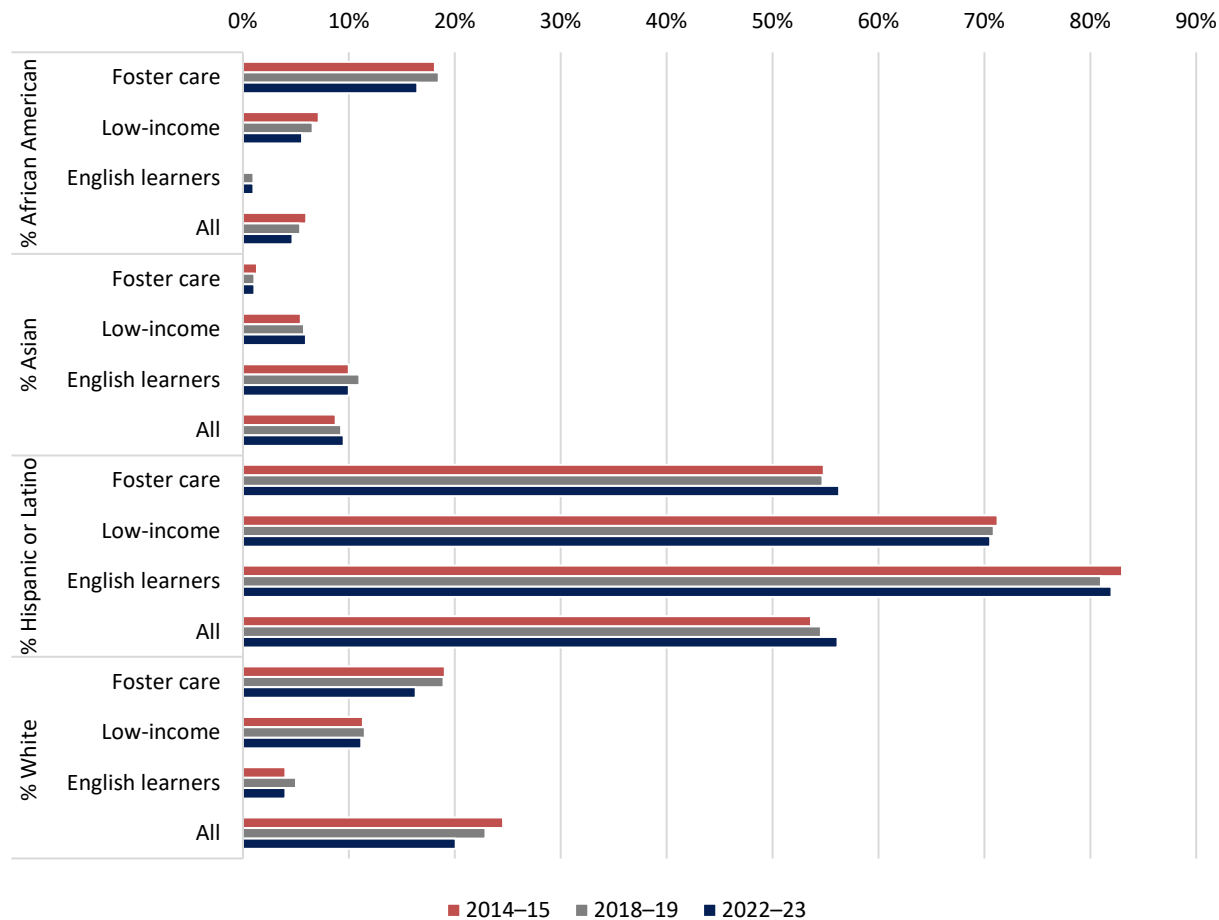
Note. Cumulative enrollment data were not publicly available prior to 2016–17.

Exhibit B2. Number and percentage of California school districts by the number of students in foster care, 2016–17 through 2022–23

Year	All Districts	Districts with No Students in Foster Care		Districts with 1 to 49 Students in Foster Care		Districts with 50 to 99 Students in Foster Care		Districts with 100+ Students in Foster Care	
	Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2016–17	1024	140	14	601	59	100	10	183	18
2017–18	1027	144	14	608	59	98	10	177	17
2018–19	1031	150	15	634	61	88	9	159	15
2019–20	1033	155	15	643	62	86	8	149	14
2020–21	1029	165	16	641	62	81	8	142	14
2021–22	1020	160	16	639	63	81	8	140	14
2022–23	1019	171	17	629	62	87	9	132	13

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data 2016–17 through 2022–23.

Exhibit B3. Distribution of student race/ethnicity for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15, 2018–19, and 2022–23



Race/Ethnicity	All Students		Students in Foster Care		Low-income Students		English Learners		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
2014–15	African American	373,280	6	8,156	18	269,009	7	6080	0
	Asian	545,720	9	590	1	205,404	6	139723	10
	Hispanic or Latino	3,344,431	54	24,662	55	2,682,387	71	1158371	83
	White	1,531,088	25	8,571	19	426,858	11	51536	4
2018–19	African American	334,652	5	6,203	19	248,191	7	5949	1
	Asian	573,925	9	359	1	216,746	6	128270	11
	Hispanic or Latino	3,374,921	55	18,368	55	2,670,048	71	971784	81
2022–23	White	1,417,055	23	6,361	19	433,764	12	55310	5
	African American	273,148	5	5,222	17	200,566	6	5121	1
	Asian	557,190	10	346	1	213,735	6	114058	10
	Hispanic or Latino	3,284,788	56	17,861	56	2,538,427	71	911080	82
White	1,175,911	20	5,173	16	401,573	11	48923	4	

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data 2014–15, 2018–19, and 2022–23.

Note. For clarity, a subset of available data is presented in this chart. Only the four most populous racial/ethnic groups are presented; no other racial/ethnic groups comprised more than 5% of the student body in any given year. Only data from 2014-15, 2018-19, and 2022-23 are presented to offer historical, pre-pandemic, and post-pandemic references, respectively.

Exhibit B4. Number and percentage of California students with at least one disability, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2014–15	641,798	10	10,300	23	426,158	11	200,995	14
2015–16	661,572	11	10,293	24	441,745	12	207,779	15
2016–17	679,525	11	9,561	25	451,229	12	210,517	16
2017–18	703,977	11	9,344	27	479,635	13	211,229	17
2018–19	725,412	12	9,449	28	489,954	13	207,441	17
2019–20	721,198	12	9,225	28	487,610	13	197,408	17
2020–21	749,295	12	9,677	30	503,361	14	194,828	18
2021–22	745,513	13	9,389	30	490,684	14	196,908	17
2022–23	765,169	13	9,708	31	517,370	14	191,965	17

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data 2014–15 through 2022–23.

Exhibit B5. Number and percentage of California students who attended a high-poverty school, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2014–15	2,448,012	39	25,252	56	2,195,867	58	890,621	64
2015–16	2,462,223	40	25,427	59	2,207,140	59	880,839	64
2016–17	2,397,807	38	21,147	56	2,142,482	58	821,428	62
2017–18	2,484,950	40	20,049	58	2,224,407	58	808,641	64
2018–19	2,391,007	39	19,110	57	2,139,078	57	737,009	62
2019–20	2,365,305	38	18,977	57	2,123,310	57	694,256	60
2020–21	2,226,137	37	17,890	55	2,010,074	56	617,643	58
2021–22	2,162,884	37	17,120	55	1,905,704	54	644,046	57
2022–23	2,310,194	39	18,705	59	2,039,787	57	681,822	61

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2014–15 through 2022–23.

Exhibit B6. Number and percentage of California students who attended a low-performing school, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2018–19 through 2021–22

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2018–19	1,103,194	18	9,325	28	822,784	22	229,514	19
2019–20	1,023,280	17	9,095	27	799,805	21	235,103	20
2020–21	986,958	16	8,620	27	765,472	21	216,452	20
2021–22	925,726	16	7,468	24	707,545	20	224,655	20

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data and ESSA Assistance Data Files, 2018–19 through 2021–22.

Exhibit B7. Number and percentage of California students who attended an alternative school, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2014–15	188,679	3	5,386	12	119,320	3	36,763	3
2015–16	182,605	3	5,202	12	116,894	3	33,700	2
2016–17	175,250	3	4,461	12	112,732	3	31,335	2
2017–18	173,009	3	3,939	11	115,347	3	30,385	2
2018–19	168,736	3	3,750	11	111,057	3	27,989	2
2019–20	168,164	3	3,632	11	111,682	3	27,442	2
2020–21	194,017	3	3,198	10	117,050	3	28,513	3
2021–22	233,753	4	2,991	10	156,938	4	37,392	3
2022–23	202,405	3	2,845	9	141,267	4	33,441	3

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data and CDE school directory, 2014–15 through 2022–23.

Exhibit B8. Number and percentage of California students who attended just one school each year, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2017–18 through 2022–23

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2017–18	5,806,750	91	31,024	62	3,604,109	89	1,193,819	89
2018–19	5,757,257	91	28,953	62	3,539,544	90	1,141,005	89
2019–20	5,796,450	92	29,773	66	3,533,200	91	1,091,939	90
2020–21	5,670,177	92	31,395	72	3,473,499	92	1,074,125	92
2021–22	5,445,407	90	28,069	65	3,324,202	88	1,066,294	88
2022–23	5,489,166	91	27,774	66	3,401,830	90	1,067,493	88

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2017–18 through 2022–23.

Exhibit B9. Number and percentage of California students who were chronically absent, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2016–17	684,261	11	13,696	26	525,005	14	145,972	11
2017–18	700,980	11	12,693	26	556,057	14	146,691	11
2018–19	757,320	12	12,518	28	595,785	15	158,745	13
2019–20	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2020–21	868,355	14	14,566	35	726,550	19	202,133	18
2021–22	1,798,620	30	19,510	47	1,385,324	37	417,247	35
2022–23	1,483,763	25	15,973	39	1,147,017	31	336,517	28

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2016–17 through 2022–23.

Note. Chronic absentees are students that were absent for 10 percent or more of the days they were expected to attend. Data were unavailable for 2019–20.

Exhibit B10. Number of California students who were absent for at least one school day and, among those students, the average number of days absent, 2017-18 to 2022-23.

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Average	Number	Average	Number	Average	Number	Average
2017-18	5,490,265	9	45,302	15	3,513,568	10	1,157,212	9
2018-19	5,521,652	10	42,509	15	3,506,514	11	1,132,079	10
2019-20	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2020-21	4,234,221	13	36,729	23	2,814,484	16	880,083	14
2021-22	5,544,046	17	40,483	24	3,505,178	19	1,139,598	18
2022-23	5,536,799	15	39,131	21	3,532,608	17	1,135,635	15

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2017–18 through 2022–23.

Note. 'Number' refers to the number of students who were absent for at least one day during the school year.

'Average' refers to the average number of days absent among those students who were absent for at least one day. Data were unavailable for 2019-20.

Exhibit B11. Number and percentage of California students who were suspended, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2014–15	243,591	4	9,466	14	194,912	5	47,979	3
2015–16	237,059	4	9,077	15	186,515	5	44,651	3
2016–17	230,586	4	8,348	15	184,368	5	43,540	3
2017–18	223,472	4	7,638	15	177,667	4	40,084	3
2018–19	221,546	4	7,068	15	174,077	4	41,184	3
2019–20	157,673	3	5,392	12	124,883	3	29,142	2
2020–21	12,295	0	525	1	7,563	0	2,334	0
2021–22	194,069	3	5,442	13	150,435	4	38,911	3
2022–23	216,704	4	5,824	14	174,474	5	45,997	4

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2014–15 through 2022–23.

Exhibit B12. Number and percentage of California students who met grade-level standards for English language arts/literacy and mathematics, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2022–23

	Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Eng. Language Arts/Literacy	2014–15	1,621,039	44	5,011	19	679,933	31	75,004	11
	2015–16	1,534,377	48	5,548	21	692,677	35	76,813	13
	2016–17	1,557,104	49	4,910	21	687,714	36	68,835	12
	2017–18	1,584,897	50	4,640	22	735,528	38	66,988	13
	2018–19	1,616,247	51	4,664	24	756,148	39	65,471	13
	2019–20	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	2020–21	360,808	49	--	--	148,636	36	12,834	11
	2021–22	1,395,527	47	2,217	21	625,059	35	65,808	12
	2022–23	1,379,965	47	2,128	19	654,160	35	54,419	11
Mathematics	2014–15	1,252,621	34	3,129	12	460,600	21	75,004	11
	2015–16	1,185,784	37	3,313	13	476,255	24	72,202	12
	2016–17	1,208,721	38	2,993	13	477,342	25	71,840	12
	2017–18	1,230,894	39	2,875	14	513,422	26	68,054	13
	2018–19	1,259,827	40	2,944	15	531,477	27	65,862	13
	2019–20	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	2020–21	251,340	34	--	--	83,881	20	9,731	8
	2021–22	991,332	33	1,099	10	376,983	21	52,408	10
	2022–23	1,028,025	35	1,145	10	426,190	23	51,387	10

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CAASPP data, 2014–15 through 2022–23.

Note. Data were unavailable in 2019–20 for all student groups and in 2020–21 for students in foster care due to the pandemic.

Exhibit B13. High school cohort dropout numbers and rates, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2016–17	44,935	9	2,080	29	36,303	11	12,267	17
2017–18	48,391	10	2,188	28	38,300	11	13,255	18
2018–19	44,490	9	2,134	28	36,818	11	13,416	18
2019–20	43,768	9	1,994	25	34,731	10	12,466	18
2020–21	47,017	9	1,549	26	36,739	11	12,626	19
2021–22	38,835	8	1,242	22	31,580	9	12,386	18
2022–23	40,630	8	1,358	24	35,035	10	12,545	17

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2016–17 through 2022–23.

Exhibit B14. Four-year cohort graduation numbers and rate, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2016–17	408,368	83	3,669	51	264,878	79	48,703	67
2017–18	418,381	83	4,090	53	274,658	80	50,848	68
2018–19	417,715	85	4,282	56	276,478	81	50,091	69
2019–20	414,073	84	4,702	58	276,487	81	48,597	69
2020–21	418,150	84	3,331	56	276,056	80	45,305	67
2021–22	433,159	87	3,435	61	293,240	85	50,530	72
2022–23	427,114	86	3,405	61	294,788	83	52,572	73

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2016–17 through 2022–23.

Exhibit B15. Number and percentage of California students who met University of California or California State University admission requirements, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2016–17 through 2022–23

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2016–17	203,654	50	653	18	109,948	42	11,697	24
2017–18	208,684	50	700	17	115,341	42	12,152	24
2018–19	210,835	51	864	20	117,997	43	12,878	26
2019–20	210,824	51	946	20	118,277	43	12,007	25
2020–21	217,736	52	589	18	121,146	44	12,233	27
2021–22	222,736	51	598	17	125,870	43	13,086	26
2022–23	220,029	52	644	19	127,718	43	13,309	25

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2016–17 through 2022–23.

Exhibit B16. Number and percentage of California high school completers who enrolled in college within one year, for all students, students in foster care, and other high-need student groups, 2014–15 through 2020–21

Year	All students		Foster care		Low-income		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2014–15	277,799	65	1,627	53	141,260	59	16,780	44
2015–16	289,280	67	1,715	53	148,797	61	15,484	45
2016–17	281,477	65	1,359	47	140,153	58	14,720	44
2017–18	298,229	68	1,508	54	156,787	61	16,400	46
2018–19	285,755	65	1,391	52	148,522	58	13,667	43
2019–20	274,234	63	1,115	44	141,266	55	13,433	38
2020–21	270,696	62	1,137	44	144,814	54	12,462	42

Source. Authors' analysis of CDE CALPADS data, 2016–17 through 2022–23.

Note. Presents the percentage of cohort students who do not graduate with a regular high school diploma, do not complete high school, and are not still enrolled as a "fifth-year senior."